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“Vertue and Decency”:
The Gendering of Character in Eighteenth-Century
English Epistolary Fiction

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A thesis submitted in fulfillment of the requirements of the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy

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Authorship Attribution Statement

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As supervisor for the candidature upon which this thesis is based, I can confirm that the authorship attribution statements above are correct.

Nicola Parsons

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Abstract

What constitutes an authentic epistolary character? Reading epistolary fiction's generic conventions to assess the development of novelistic characterisation allows for a critical re-evaluation of the letter-narrative's centrality to the long eighteenth-century English novel. By examining the generic limitations of the epistolary mode, and reading a selection of epistolary fictions for their interests in gender, conjugality, identity, and a politicised account of virtue, this thesis explores the emergence of character as a central element of the English novel.

Amatory narratives within epistolary fictions resist the representation of the mature woman, focusing instead upon the vulnerable, marginal, and marriageable figure of the 'girl' in order to realise the ossification of a conjugal dyad of husband/wife as the centre of the household and societal unit. Closely analysing the conventions of characterisation within the epistolary mode allows for a new understanding of how these generic markers contributed to formal representations of psychological subjects. Taking as its case studies Mary Davys's *Love and Friendship* (1718), Samuel Richardson's *Pamela* (1740) and *Clarissa* (1747–48), Jane Austen's 'Sir Charles Grandison or the happy man. A comedy' (c.1800) and Frances Burney's *Evelina* (1778), this thesis reads across the intersection of gender and genre in the eighteenth-century novel-in-letters to interpret this intersection as constitutive of the gradual realisation of modern, realist, and autonomous representations of character.

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Introduction: 'Vertue and Decency' in Eighteenth-Century English Epistolary Fictions

'Tis needless to make out the Usefulness of Performances of this nature. Tho'
 Amorous Intrigues are commonly charg'd with Vanity and Folly; yet, when
 they are calculated according to the measures of Vertue and Decency, they
 are equally Instructive and Diverting. To expose Vice, and disappoint
 Vanity; to reward Vertue and crown Constancy with Success, is no
 disserviceable Aim.

Preface to *The Lover's Secretary: Or, the Adventures of Lindamira, a Lady
 of Quality*.¹

The preface to the 1713 second edition of *The Adventures of Lindamira*, published under the title *The Lover's Secretary* and attributing corrections to "Mr Tho. Brown" posits a moral purpose to the novel: "To expose Vice, and disappoint Vanity; to reward Vertue and crown Constancy with Success" (sig. A1^v). "To reward Vertue" sounds like an aphoristic moral, yet this declaration implicates this letter-narrative within socially constructivist developments of the English eighteenth century.² "Vertue and Decency" demand attention to acts of personal propriety produced by virtuous performance of identity, particularly within a household

¹ *The Lover's Secretary: Or, the Adventures of Lindamira, a Lady of Quality*, (London: Printed for R. Wellington, 1713), sig. A1^v. Further references are to this edition and are cited in text.

² Remarking in a review of Benjamin Boyce's 1949 edition of *Lindamira*, James Kinsley declares there is "too much morality and too little wit to carry the reader on to the end of the story without tedium". This rather critical reading emphasises the "insipid" style of the text over and above its historical interest; *Lindamira* perhaps may also be known today for its influence on an epistolary narrative fragment developed by Lady Mary Wortley Montagu as "Indamora to Lindamira: Her Life Writ in 5 Letters". See James Kinsley, "Review of *The Adventures of Lindamira*," *The Review of English Studies* 2, no. 7 (1951): 285-86; Mary Wortley Montagu, "Indamora to Lindamira," in *Romance Writings*, ed. Isobel Grundy (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 1-15.

primarily constituted through mutual choice of a marital unit of husband and wife, rather than through unions designed to protect inherited status.³ Nancy Armstrong suggests conjugal contact within the novel form more broadly represents an “idea of the social contract”, empowering the capacities of the mind as central to an individual’s autonomy and identity.⁴ The novel, that is, draws attention not only to the marital ties which produce individual propriety, but also heightens a fixation upon the individual themselves as both a person and an ideological category.⁵ While virtue, this thesis will argue, primarily concerned behaviour, particularly within the amatory context, decency reflects the stylistics and rhetoric of *how* correspondence is carried out between different figures, understood as characters. That the individuals represented by epistolary fictions as characters correspond with one another in the letters of which these novels are composed furthermore renders these performances of selfhood as an artefact of text: as Eve Tavor Bannet makes clear, the iterative act of letter-writing in fiction relies on assumptions about the shared interests and concerns of its writer and addressee.⁶ ‘Decent’ letter-writing figured class and culture-specific approaches to encouraging, or examining, virtuous conduct. These assumptions are further shaped by the characteristic manner in which epistolary interlocutors write: resembling, as Bannet further articulates, the idiomatic spoken word.⁷ Epistolary novels encourage attention to the new

³ As Michael McKeon suggests, the household emerged as the “primary seat of socialisation” as absolutist power waned. Performing “family” virtuously necessitates attention to personal propriety: see Michael McKeon, *The Secret History of Domesticity: Public, Private, and the Division of Knowledge* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2005), 10-11.

⁴ Nancy Armstrong, *Desire and Domestic Fiction: A Political History of the Novel* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987), 30.

⁵ Armstrong suggests that it is the class- and culture-specific narratives of the bourgeois novel form which embolden, or in fact, constitute, the history of the modern subject. See Nancy Armstrong, *How Novels Think: the Limits of British Individualism from 1719-1900* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2005), 3-4.

⁶ Eve Tavor Bannet, *The Letters in the Story: Narrative-Epistolary Fiction from Aphra Behn to the Victorians* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2022), 3.

⁷ Bannet, *The Letters in the Story*, 4.

category of the individual, characterised by their iterative writing. Most importantly, as *Lindamira*'s preface makes clear, this new category of the individual is tested by the novel in their capacity for moral activity, held to codified strictures of behaviour against "Vanity and Folly".

That characters conducting a correspondence serve to test the charges of virtue and decency indicates the revolutionary potential of the novel-in-letters as a fictive mode. It is, nevertheless, a particular kind of correspondence the author of *Lindamira* imagines this epistolary novel invigorating: "Amorous Intrigues".⁸ Foregrounding sexual and romantic contact between these correspondents necessitates an attention to sexual identity, and its performance. For "Amorous Intrigues" to "reward Vertue" suggests a normative framework in which amorous contact might be regulated. If the key to the "Usefulness of Performances of this nature" is the resistance against "Vanity and Folly", *Lindamira* is positioned to participate in the development of a modern subjectivity which might fully satisfy "Vertue and Decency" through a narrative mode which is both "equally Instructive and Diverting".⁹ In the preface, *Lindamira* represents a novel deliberately structured as an ethical, yet entertaining, intervention in the sexual mores of a class of persons concerned with both decency and

⁸ John Richetti suggests the amatory is defined in English fiction less by the French heroic Romance, but rather by "melodramatic" libertine sexualities: producing a continuum thus between narrative and quotidian reality. Ros Ballaster distinguishes between the "procreative" and "anatomical" drive of androcentric pornography and the rise of "didactic love fiction" authored by or for women which "revive moral vigour" even while centring a feminised experience of romantic love. These two definitions emphasise the sexualised connotations of "amatory" fictions while furthermore drawing attention to their moralistic sentiments. See Ros Ballaster, *Seductive Forms: Women's Amatory Fiction from 1684 to 1740* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 32; John Richetti, *The English Novel in History 1700-1780* (London: Taylor & Francis, 1998), 20.

⁹ Epistolary narratives of ruin voyeuristically "harnessed identification", as Linda C. Mitchell argues, with the wounded party to encourage probity while developing literarily recognisable themes which transferred across both letter-writing manuals and the novel in letters. See Linda C. Mitchell, "Entertainment and Instruction: Women's Roles in the English Epistolary Tradition," *The Huntington Library Quarterly* 66, no. 3/4 (2003): 344-45.

virtue, and the heightened narrative interest romantic plots invest. Character not only functions as a representation of individual psychologies at places and times, but as an ideological intervention.

While epistolary fictions took on a wide range of shapes, this thesis is explicitly interested in the amatory plots contained within a sequence of novels. Using the case studies of *Love and Friendship* (1718), *Pamela* (1740), *Clarissa* (1747–48), *The History of Sir Charles Grandison* (1753–54) and its dramatic adaptation by Jane Austen (c.1800), and *Evelina* (1778), this thesis advances the claim that interests in amatory relationships, virtue, and character coalesce into a broad sub-generic attempt at reifying a particular ideological position: the centrality of a gendered dyad of husband and wife. The centrality of this ideological formation is clear in texts within this survey, but furthermore remains a cornerstone of the genre of epistolary narratives and the novel in letters more broadly. As early as examples within the miscellany compiled by Isabella Whitney, *Copy of a Letter, Lately Written in Meeter, by a Younge Gentilwoman* (c.1567), what Toni Bowers describes as the miscellany's focus upon "love-complaint" forms a centrepiece in experiments in narrating personal identity through the epistolary form.¹⁰ Within the miscellany, the poem "A Loveletter, or an earnest persuasion of a Lover" evokes the generic conventions which came to govern the later development of the epistolary novel:

Not vouching once to speak [with] him
 whose hart thou hast in hold:
 Sith likeing fame hath graunted grace
 should love so soone be cold.

¹⁰ Toni Bowers, "Epistolary Fiction," in *The Oxford History of the Novel in English*, ed. Thomas Keymer (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), 402.

Consider these my letters well,
 And answer them agenne.¹¹

The complaint is silence: first, in the spoken word which the lover has neglected, but second, in the absence of an answer to the letter. A lack of immediate contact represents a threat to the poem's love-plot, in which silence serves to separate the lovers and breed hostility. That love could "so soone be cold" in turn suggests the time-bound nature of epistolary amatory plots, their emphasis on diurnal cycles of letter-writing and reading, and demand for consistent (or constant) contact. The letter serves as a poor stand-in for "the fruits of friendship showne" in intimate contact, yet it offers a unique opportunity for the "mind" of the spurned lover to be represented in his anguish.¹² From this early example, the ways in which epistolarity connects psychological states of distress to a realist depiction of these states can begin to be seen. As a miscellany, rather than a novel, no central plot drives the series of poems. Yet, like the epistolary love plots of the eighteenth century, the collection positions itself as an exemplar of virtuous conduct, encouraging the reader's emulation of the lover's discourse presented as the miscellany, as Susan Wiseman notes.¹³ The poem innovates in a tradition evident, furthermore, from far earlier, classical epistolary texts such as Ovid's *Heroides*. Helen's reply to Paris, forming book 17 of the *Heroides*, opens by addressing her inner anguish at his attempts at seduction:

Now that your letter to me has defiled my eyes,
 I feel there's little glory to be won from not replying.

¹¹ W. G, "A Loveletter, or an earnest persuasion of a Lover," ed. Isabella Whitney, *The Copy Of a Letter, Lately Written In Meeter, By a Yonge Gentilwoman* (London: Printed for R. Johnes, 1567). Lines 97-102.

¹² G, "A Loveletter, or an earnest persuasion of a Lover," lines 58-59.

¹³ See Susan Wiseman, "Labour's loves? Isabella Whitney, Leonard Wheatcroft and the love miscellany," *Textual practice* 33, no. 8 (2019): 1369, <https://doi.org/10.1080/0950236X.2019.1648105>.

You came here and dared to violate the sacred laws of hospitality
 And to incite a lawfully wedded wife to infidelity!
 Of course, the land of Sparta received you in its harbour
 After your voyage across the windy waves
 And our palace didn't keep its doors closed to you,
 Even though you came from a different race,
 So you could wrong us to repay such great kindness!¹⁴

Helen initially rejects Paris's advances yet is finally willing to continue the liaison in secret through her handmaidens. Describing Paris's actions as incitement codifies his culpability for her behaviour, shifting the blame from a passive victim of seduction onto the ruinous male actor. Yet the image is altogether more complex than this. Even as Helen poses her resistance to Paris's suit, she cannot help but recognise his "body is better suited to loving than fighting" (17.253). It is, furthermore, her "secret feelings" she confides throughout her letter—indeed, confides "to this letter" (17.265).¹⁵ Much like "A Loveletter", Ovid's epistolary fragment presupposes our awareness of the mores and codes of propriety which both preclude, or limit, correspondence while simultaneously emphasising the secret, inner desire that must be spoken.¹⁶ The centrality of the love plot to the form of the letter narrative

¹⁴ Ovid, "Helen to Paris," in *Ovid's Heroides: A New Translation and Critical Essays*, ed. Paul Murgatroyd, Bridget Reeves, and Sarah Parker (London: Routledge, 2017), 17.1-9. All further citations refer to this edition and are given in-text.

¹⁵ Grant Showerman's translation of the *Heroides* alternatively translates line 265, "arcanum furtivae conscia mentis/littera iam lasso pollice sistat opus" as "let the writing that shares the secret of my heart now stay its furtive task": in both translations, the emphasis remains upon the capacity for text, *littera*, to perform as the *arcanum*, the secret. While Showerman's translation utilises the generic form "writing" rather than "letter", the context of the missive cues suggest that the form of the epistle is front and centre of Helen's mind. See Ovid, George Patrick Goold, and Grant Showerman, "The Heroides XVII: Helen to Paris," in *Heroides. Amores* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1914), 17.265.

¹⁶ Sarah H. Lindheim suggests the failure of epistolarity to perform actual conversation within the *Heroides* both "underscores" the "helplessness" of Ovid's heroines while

thus intersects with its interest in a heightened narrative mode which might plausibly represent individual consciousness at particular places and times. Concluding the letter with a promise to meet through her “allies” rather than epistolary interlocution forecloses further writing, encouraging a reading of the transitional status of correspondence as a form of mediation (17.267–268). For the love-plot to compel, the hint of a future union is seeded in the final lines of the epistle.

Applying close reading to the amatory plots of these letter-narratives contributes to understandings of the development of novelistic character. It is this thesis’s central contention that the epistolary novel of the long eighteenth century remained, as in the two earlier examples briefly considered above, consistently shaped by the heightened mode of the ‘amorous intrigue’. Epistolary narratives continued to focus interest upon the marriageable figure of the ‘girl’, rather than the mature woman, investing in conjugality as the central narrative by which identity, particularly a carefully regulated subset of feminine identities, became apparent and clarified. By analysing character within epistolary fictions of the period, this thesis argues for the centrality of both reification of and resistance to a normative amatory framework as a key to understanding the novel-in-letters. This situates the epistolary novel as a unique literary mode. Firstly, as Ruth Perry argues, the narratives of identity in epistolary fiction do not reflect a process of maturation, but instead an “unpleasant sequence” of events, “testing and defining” character.¹⁷ To Perry, then, the epistolary novel is distinct from other early realist modes such as *bildungsroman* in its refusal to represent its characters growing over time. As Joe Bray demonstrates, early examples of the epistolary novel, such as

simultaneously this very failure operates to kindle desire for them; at the same time, this manoeuvre reveals these women’s latent power over their texts. See Sara H. Lindheim, *Mail and Female: Epistolary Narrative and Desire in Ovid's Heroides*, Wisconsin Studies in Classics, (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2003), 178.

¹⁷ Ruth Perry, *Women, Letters, and the Novel* (New York: AMS Press, 1980), 95.

Les Lettres portugaises (1669) and Aphra Behn's *Love-Letters Between a Nobleman and His Sister* (1684) made obvious their ostensible veracity through rhetorical craft and carefully shaped expressions of distress.¹⁸ By representing "psychological crisis", the letter form appears an expedient mechanism for rendering "an ever-changing version of [a character's] past thoughts and feelings[...] a powerful early demonstration of the letter's complex probing of subjectivity."¹⁹ Anguish and distress allow for the development of rhetorical strategies for representing interiority. These psychologised crises emerge from the fact that, as Warren Chernaik observes, eros operates within these two early texts with an anti-institutional focus.²⁰ Where virtue and amatory contact conform to rigid norms of propriety, plot simply cannot take hold: the distress caused by friction against social norms or mores calls attention to itself, emerging as the complex interlocking plots of letter-narratives such as *Love-Letters*. Further, as Donald R. Wehrs argues, plot emerges from the "liberation of will from the symbolic order created by language" within *Love-Letters*.²¹ Mirroring, and substantiating, political conflicts shaping the text, this struggle against subjugation and for self-expression amounts to an early theory of novelistic person: if desire is upheld as the central organising principle, this makes the love plots of *Love-Letters* or *Lettres portugaises* not only functional, but shapes within their heightened representations of 'amorous intrigue' the space necessary

¹⁸ Joe Bray, *The Epistolary Novel: Representation of Consciousness*, Routledge studies in eighteenth-century literature, (London: Routledge, 2003), 29-30.

¹⁹ Bray, *The Epistolary Novel: Representation of Consciousness*, 33.

²⁰ Warren Chernaik, "Unguarded Hearts: Transgression and Epistolary Form in Aphra Behn's *Love-Letters* and the *Portuguese Letters*," *The Journal of English and Germanic Philology* 97, no. 1 (1998): 14.

²¹ Donald R. Wehrs, "Eros, Ethics, Identity: Royalist Feminism and the Politics of Desire in Aphra Behn's *Love Letters*," *Studies in English Literature, 1500-1900* 32, no. 3 (1992): 463, <https://doi.org/10.2307/450916>.

for a modern subjectivity imagined by the institutions of marriage and gendered identity these texts initially seem so intent on querying.²²

Other traditions within epistolary narratives are worth considering. Delarivier Manley's *The Unknown Lady's Pacquet of Letters* utilises a form approaching a miscellany: a series of unconnected letters which together form a political critique.²³ Manley's citation of classical figures in the *Pacquet* suggests an attempt, as Rachel Carnell observes, "to demonstrate a cultivated mind", a "desire to be taken seriously as a liberally educated author."²⁴ The lack of narrative thrust across the text emphasises its differentiation from the epistolary novels surveyed in this thesis. Yet, even within this alternative form of epistolary narration, the focus on the amatory is heightened in individual examples: Letter X, a "young gay Lady's Account of her several Lovers" toys with the Lady's unscrupulous maintenance of a variety of encounters while providing intimate details of her coquettish lifestyle. Declaring it "true that I would marry, but not yet", the Lady references the addressee of the epistle's counsel that she is in "danger of losing my Reputation by these freedoms".²⁵ Offering the varying men small tokens of appreciation—"one a favourable Look, another a Smile, a third my Hand to Kiss"—Manley's Lady takes pleasure in seeing a "Beau cringe and Screw his Body into an hundred Shapes in hopes to make himself appear amiable" to her,

²² Wehrs, "Eros, Ethics, Identity: Royalist Feminism and the Politics of Desire in Aphra Behn's *Love Letters*," 464-65.

²³ Rachel Carnell describes the work as "anecdotes about well-known public figures": Manley weaponises her prior autobiographical epistolary form to incisively satirise political figures. See Rachel Carnell, *A Political Biography of Delarivier Manley* (London: Routledge, 2016), 137. The *Pacquet* resembles, in essence, Charles Gildon's relatively contemporaneous *The Post-boy robb'd of his mail* (1706), yet gains a political inflection in Manley's variant of the 'misplaced letters' format.

²⁴ Carnell, *A Political Biography of Delarivier Manley*, 141.

²⁵ Delarivier Manley, "The Unknown Lady's Pacquet of Letters," in *Memoirs of the Court of England* (London: Printed for B. Bragg, 1707), 567. All further citations refer to this edition and are in-text.

evocatively working with established norms in representations of desire, much like Ovid's Helen and her appreciation of Paris's form as a lover (568). Again like Helen, the Lady is aware of the precarious position in which these flirtations leave her, yet, unlike the corpus examined in this thesis, pays little regard to the demands of virtue: "if there be any maids of Honour comparable to me", the Lady opines, the men whose "passion" she depends upon would be married (569). In the absence of a narrative thrust, Manley's epistles rely on instantaneous identification with either their subjects—in the case of Letter I, the well-known "Beau Wilson"—or their predicaments (522).²⁶ By declaring these the found letters from a variety of known sources, the fictional letters allege verisimilitude and thus gain a sense of authenticity even divorced from contextualizing information which might deepen their plots. Yet, even so, Manley's Lady in Letter X takes care to imagine both the addressee's prior communiqué and situates the letter within a continuum of action: she is retiring to the country, leaving her city (and coquettish) lifestyle behind (567). Most importantly, each of the letters contain discernible touches of realism. Letter XVI commencing with the rushed warning that it is written as "the post is going out" presage the contents as plausible, providing data which aids in the letter's reading (576). The lack of staunch partisanship in these gossipy anecdotes, Carnell suggests, works to convey the sense that beneath the political surface deception and ignominy is rife: that things are "not always as they seem".²⁷ Using heightened examples from the lives of fictive or actual society figures, Manley invests in their lives a capacity for plot. While the loose structure lacks overall impetus, the

²⁶ Beau Wilson was the subject of an entirely separate epistolary secret history in 1723: *Love-letters between a certain late nobleman and the famous Mr. Wilson*. This early example of a homosexual narrative within epistolary fiction emphasises the flexibility the mode entailed; yet as with the *Pacquet*, the interests are more explicitly political than narrative. Michael S. Kimmel lays out many of these issues in his introduction to the 1990 edition of the *Love-letters*; see Michael S. Kimmel, *Love letters between a certain late nobleman and the famous Mr. Wilson* (New York: Harrington Park Press, 1990).

²⁷ Carnell, *A Political Biography of Delarivier Manley*, 154.

individual example of Letter X analysed above conforms to a form of amatory narrative structure and demonstrates how the common thread of amorous intrigue shaped epistolary fictions, including within important non-novelistic exemplars.

Even as the representation of authenticity through attention to heightened psychological states accentuates a need for addressing character within the epistolary tradition, the common scenes of distress found within the corpus call attention to the body of the letter-writer. Elizabeth Heckendorn Cook importantly refers to epistolary characters as themselves a problematic “corporealization” of the letter, suggesting that the shadow of the letter-writing scene supersedes the content of the letters themselves, the “traces of an authentic body” composing each letter haunting the “transparent medium of print”.²⁸ This spectrality is common across the mode; through the detainment, distress, and anguish of these fictive letter writers, furthermore, the body of the correspondent is realised as a vulnerable form. The heightening necessary to produce supposedly authentic accounts of psychology requires these scenes of distress. This relies on, as Bannet suggests, assumed knowledge of the circumstances in which a letter is composed and in which it is read.²⁹ Presupposing an awareness of the situation of both addressor and addressee means each individual letter within a novel performs a variety of functions. If the letter-narrative mode is to both instruct and divert, it does so through this unique doubled appeal to authenticity: the psychological and spectrally embodied realism of epistolary novels requires the heightening of circumstance alongside the plausible and carefully constructed realization of these heightened circumstances themselves.

²⁸ Elizabeth Heckendorn Cook, *Epistolary Bodies: Gender and Genre in the Eighteenth-Century Republic of Letters* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1996), 32.

²⁹ Bannet, *The Letters in the Story*, 8.

This thesis suggests that the common purpose of rewarding virtue and punishing iniquity remains relatively static across the eighteenth-century history of the epistolary novel. Richardson subtitles his *Pamela* as “Virtue Rewarded”; Mary Davys proposes in her early theory of the novel presented in the 1725 *Works of Mrs. Davys* a similar construction of “rewarded Virtue, and punish’d Vice.”³⁰ While ‘decency’ is quickly sidelined as the interest in regulating female behaviour becomes ever clearer, the in/appropriateness of epistolary contact and correspondence figures large in these constellations. In one example of action superseding rhetoric, Manley’s character of the Lady discussed above is pointedly aware of the ill effects of her flirtations upon her reputation, even if she is unwilling to reform in response. Later in the century, Frances Burney would declare that one purpose of *Evelina* (1778) was to “avoid what is common, without adopting what is unnatural”: redeploying a similar positivist binary of exposure and celebration serves to reify the “artless” heroine Evelina against the iniquitous mass.³¹ Evelina’s own special status as a subject—her capacity to perform as a novelistic protagonist—is confirmed by her unique natural virtue, contrasted against the mundanity of the ‘common’. Heightening requires special kinds of characters: to make amatory plots interesting, rather than mundane, necessitates a thinking-subject differentiated from, and desirable among, the non-thinking textual figurations by whom they are surrounded. Amanda Anderson similarly suggests in the ruminative form novels came to

³⁰ Mary Davys, *The Works of Mrs. Davys*, 2 vols., vol. 1 (London: Printed for H. Woodfall, 1725), V. J. A Downie has analysed this preface’s significance in challenging the androcentric account of the novel’s rise: complicating Ian Watt’s assertion of “formal realism” as the “lowest common denominator” of the novel form, Downie resituates Davys as an early innovator in a tradition predating Watt’s period of survey. See J. A. Downie, “Mary Davys’s ‘Probable Feign’d Stories’ and Critical Shibboleths about ‘The Rise of the Novel’.” *Eighteenth-Century Fiction* 12, no. 2/3 (2000): 310-11.

³¹ Frances Burney, *Evelina*, ed. Edward A. Bloom, Oxford World Classics, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1778: 2008), 10.

take on their unique capacity for representing sustained human thought over time.³² This act of ruminative thinking differentiates ‘character’ as a novelistic figure. As John Frow has demonstrated in a reading of Goethe’s *Elective Affinities* (1809), novelistic character relies on a “reduction of human relationships to formal patterning.”³³ These patterns associate recognizable semantic clusters of human-like description with the movement of plot: to Frow, characters gain ‘person-like-status’ through attributions formed in-text.³⁴ For character to have virtues rewarded or vices exposed and punished requires significant narrative investment in these figures, elevating them beyond schematic outlines of a ‘self’ and attributing to them the capacity for moral activity. Thus the heightened realisms of amatory plots prove an effective “narrative ground”, as Frow formulates the concept: here, this thesis takes the stylistic tropes and development of the ‘amorous intrigue’ within novels-in-letters as the grounding upon and within which seeds of experimentation in character take root in the epistolary novel’s form.³⁵

As Heather Keenleyside has examined in the case of personification within the eighteenth-century poem, the “duplicitous[...] ontological uncertainty” personification implies suggests that “we may not know what a person is”.³⁶ Personate status, in the case of personification, is associated with the performance of humanness: within the eighteenth century, Samuel Johnson’s dictionary defines “personify” as an act that “change[s something]

³² Amanda Anderson, “Thinking With Character,” in *Character: Three Inquiries in Literary Studies*, ed. Amanda Anderson, Rita Felski, and Toril Moi (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2019), 133.

³³ John Frow, *Character and Person* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 6, <https://doi.org/10.1093/acprof:oso/9780198704515.003.0001>.

³⁴ Frow, *Character and Person*, 25.

³⁵ Frow, *Character and Person*, 25.

³⁶ Heather Keenleyside, *Animals and Other People: Literary Forms and Living Beings in the Long Eighteenth Century* (United States: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2016), 27.

from a thing to a person”.³⁷ Yet novels do the opposite, converting a (fictive) person to a thing: text. The epistolary mode demands explicit attention to this problem, given the supposed intimacy of the letter form to the individual letter-writer. Taking Keenleyside’s provocation seriously, personhood within the novel appears a mere allegory, a device which calls attention to its resistance to particularization. If character and person correlate, it is within the semiotic systems unique to a given novel. As Jonathan Lamb demonstrates, a divorce between the two is possible in the ‘public’ meaning of ‘character’ as opposed to the privacy of the ‘person’: ‘person’ remains “an inaccessible particularity” to the eighteenth-century novel.³⁸ The common purpose of reifying virtue and decrying vice, therefore, intersects with an interest in developing kinds of characters that satisfy the charges of full humanness while simultaneously operating as ‘public’ didactic allegories, as figures that might have pedagogic import. The psychological crises necessitated by the ‘amorous intrigue’ and its confrontation with sexual normativity allow for this publicity.

This overlap between the individual desirability of a particular subject or character and the interest in representing virtue calls attention, further, to gender difference. The connotations of virtue, closely associated, particularly for women and girls, with the notion of virginity, necessarily highlights a calculus of merit composed with a view to the marriage market, upon which virginity was one among many important marketable attributes.³⁹

Virginity and virtue share a further important relationship: knowability and epistemic

³⁷ Samuel Johnson, “personify, v.a.,” in *A Dictionary of the English Language*, ed. Beth Rapp Young et al. (1755, 1773).

³⁸ Jonathan Lamb, ““Lay Aside My Character”: The Personate Novel and Beyond,” *The Eighteenth Century* 52, no. 3/4 (2011): 272, <https://doi.org/10.1353/ecy.2011.0023>.

³⁹ Corrinne Harol suggests virginity confirmed the patrilineal succession of the family: “virgins help patriarchy reproduce itself”. The consolidation of family power through virginity helped maintain its centrality to eighteenth-century literature. See Corrinne Harol, *Enlightened Virginity in Eighteenth-Century Literature*, ed. Corrinne Harol (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006), 3.

grounding, particularly for virginity in a (supposed) embodied reality, the hymen.⁴⁰ One axis, then, upon which virtuous behaviour turned was the embodied facts of an individual. Other axes, however, relied on self-reflection and articulation to come into being: as Tim Hitchcock claims in an expansion of Foucault, the emergence of “amorphous sexual categories” of “sinner[s]” alongside the strict naturalization of heterosexuality equally contributed to the development of a regimen of self-reflection among individuals regarding their capacity for transgression.⁴¹ Foucault famously links these new interests in sexual discourse to the confessional: the new requirement for “telling oneself and another, as often as possible, everything” relevant to sexual “pleasures, sensations, and thoughts”.⁴² Desire, for Foucault, impels speech: desire compels the individual to announce themselves as a desiring subject, to themselves, and to others. This discursive practice in Foucault explicitly mirrors the meditations and prayers of the penitent sinner, the conversion of sexual desire into erotogenic pleasure located not only within the body, but also within the act of speaking.⁴³ For amatory narratives within epistolary fictions this could not be of higher importance. The conversion of amorphous sexualities to discourse suggests the letter-form’s own abstraction of consciousness, desire, and subjectivity in a material text. As Joe Bray notes, in the 1721 novel published as *Letters from a Lady of Quality to a Chevalier*, the balance struck between “increasingly frantic” letters to the Chevalier, and the Lady’s desire to avoid the scrutiny of the wider community, suggests that the tension between desire as communicability, or discourse, and desire as an inner state shaped the development of the tropes and styles of the

⁴⁰ For a discussion of the epistemology of the hymen and changes in understanding of its relationship to virginity over the period, see Harol, *Enlightened Virginity*, 59-62.

⁴¹ Tim Hitchcock, *English Sexualities, 1700-1800* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1997), 4-6.

⁴² Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality: Volume 1: An Introduction*, trans. Robert Hurley (New York: Pantheon Books, 1978), 20.

⁴³ Foucault, *The History of Sexuality: Volume 1: An Introduction*, 23-24.

epistolary mode.⁴⁴ Indeed, the ability to represent consciousness, or subjectivity, pivots upon the representation of desire: the two are coextensive within epistolary fictions focused on amatory plots.

Evolving bourgeois conceptions of marriage that shape the love-plots of these novels are nevertheless rooted in a nihilism, a negation of the possibility of other life-narratives against, beyond, or even within the matrices of power which impel coordination towards a dyadic binary of husband and wife.⁴⁵ While at the outset of the century, marriage represented a formal civic and religious attachment between two persons, the 1753 Clandestine Marriages Act in England brought new state attention to the institution, bringing it under the arbitration not only of a local parish but a visible legal apparatus: authorizing, that is, state investment in marriage.⁴⁶ Legal historian Rebecca Probert suggests the statute, enacted in 1754, effectively provided prior canon law with “teeth”, enforcing norms within “pre-statutory formalities”.⁴⁷ Probert records three kinds of eighteenth century marriage: ‘regular marriages’ formally recognised by canon law (and, later, the statute); ‘clandestine marriages’ celebrated by a

⁴⁴ Bray, *The Epistolary Novel: Representation of Consciousness*, 49-51. The text originally appeared attributed to Edme Boursault in 1698, published in French as ‘Sept Lettres Amoureuses d’une Dame à un Cavalier’, as Bray further notes.

⁴⁵ The close relationship between marriage as ideology and Christianity no doubt influenced its force: as Lisa O’Connell argues, marriage plots figure changing relationships to the Anglican Church at the centre. To O’Connell, the interest in centring Anglican *ritual* of marriage resonated with wider public interest in an emergent national English civil, and legal, class-bound culture. See Lisa O’Connell, *The Origins of the English Marriage Plot: Literature, Politics and Religion in the Eighteenth Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019), 3-5. <https://doi.org/10.1017/9781108757706..>

⁴⁶ As David Lemmings details, this change was impossibly controversial: the passage of the law was “bitterly opposed” on all possible grounds, dividing even the government of the day, and resulting in a pamphleteering crusade lasting from 1753 to 1755. See David Lemmings, “Marriage and the Law in the Eighteenth Century: Hardwicke’s Marriage Act of 1753,” *The Historical Journal* 39, no. 2 (1996): 340, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0018246X00020276>.

⁴⁷ Rebecca Probert, “Control over Marriage in England and Wales, 1753–1823: The Clandestine Marriages Act of 1753 in Context,” *Law and History Review* 27, no. 2 (2009): 418, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0738248000002054>.

priest yet not in accordance with regular formalities; and ‘contract marriage’ which negated the role of the priest altogether, yet otherwise conformed to the same principles (an exchange of promises or vows and consent to be married).⁴⁸ The complexity of marriage lay precisely in its stipulation through verbal agreement between parties and subsequent, or simultaneous, solemnization. The verbal, revisable status of these contracts draw attention once more to the power relations between the individuals of whom a marriage compact was composed.⁴⁹ Thus marriage abstracted a particular form of virtuous, religiously sanctioned gendered union as a form of speech act: promises or vows.⁵⁰ In so doing, marriage as ideology confirmed in an abstracted and statutory fashion a pairing of sexed roles in relation to one another. That this centre of domestic life was confirmed by both church and state suggests its essentialization as the normative framework for narrating eighteenth-century amatory relationships. Offering sexual relations, in all their strange, awkward, or unknowable particularities an abstracted normalization, marriage adheres desire to a narrative of heterosexual exclusivity, domesticity, and regulates an otherwise potentially unfettered discourse of desire. Epistolary fiction, this thesis argues, turned to marriage as a site of gendered conflict, leaning into the interplay of discursive forces—religion, law, and personal proclivity—and uses such as a testing ground for the individuation of the subject, carefully narrating experiences of marriage plots through

⁴⁸ Rebecca Probert, “The Impact of the Marriage Act of 1753: Was It Really “A Most Cruel Law for the Fair Sex”?,” *Eighteenth-Century Studies* 38, no. 2 (2005): 249, <https://doi.org/10.1353/ecs.2005.0015>.

⁴⁹ Probert suggests couples may have simply disappeared from the canon register by refusing to solemnise their marriage agreements: there is no way of knowing how many marital relations existed in these informal capacities. See Probert, “The Impact of the Marriage Act of 1753: Was It Really “A Most Cruel Law for the Fair Sex”?,” 250.

⁵⁰ For a discussion of the relationship between the private formation of such vows and their public implication as a legal and religious record, see Melissa J. Ganz, *Public Vows: Fictions of Marriage in the English Enlightenment* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2019), 5-9.

the form of the letter narrative to clarify its overwhelming impact upon the new conception of the psyche.

Interests in the differentiation of genders run deeper than a desire to realise the marriageability of particular girls over and above others, instead turning to gender difference as an important site which itself authenticates the narratives of epistolary fictions. Discussing *Clarissa*, Christine Roulston argues that:

Sentimental writing's drive to produce an authentic narrative form as well as a representation of authentic selfhood ultimately leads to a confrontation with the question of gender difference. The authentic subject was seen as universal, but the articulation of this universality varied when it came to the question of men and women. One of the difficulties of representing the universal subject is the gaze; authenticity is closely linked to visibility, in the sense of the self being revealed and laid bare. However, in these texts the male and the female subject do not have an equivalent relationship to the gaze. In *Clarissa*, for example, metaphors of light proliferate as a way of foregrounding *Clarissa*'s visibility as a virtuous subject. Unlike *Lovelace*, who is all subterfuge and masks, *Clarissa* shines because she has no secret, hidden self. However, it is precisely *Clarissa*'s brightness that attracts *Lovelace*'s predatory gaze and turns her visibility into a radical struggle for power and possession.⁵¹

The drive for authentic representation necessitated realizing difference between male and female subjects as a starting point to producing the forms of sentimental writing Roulston

⁵¹ Christine Roulston, *Virtue, Gender, and the Authentic Self in Eighteenth-Century Fiction: Richardson, Rousseau, and Laclos* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 1998), XVII.

identifies in *Clarissa*. To Roulston, this point of difference is at once corporeal and metaphoric, describing femininity as a transparent, luminescent, epistemically sound, and authenticated surface. Clarissa is virtuous for the same reason she is permeable; her “visibility” invites narration and the interlocution of a contrastingly male, coy, and “mask[ed]” figure—Lovelace. The ‘amorous intrigue’ within this narrative is thus, in a deft manoeuvre, both the excoriation of male duplicity constellated as depth and the authentication of femininity posited as a readable surface. If virtue is to be rewarded, its narrative legibility and crystal-clear representation is necessary. If, furthermore, this virtue is to be authentic, it requires not only legibility but grounding: knowability, and secure epistemic terrain recognizable to both reader and rewarder.

The figure of the male predator-interlocutor introduces another key part of the moral logic of these letter narratives. In order to best test, define, and regulate the limits of acceptably performed feminine behaviour, writers experimenting within the genre consistently turn to representations of masculine violence, predation, rape, and abuse of women and girls as a means to authenticate subjective (feminine) experience through its contact with the objective (male) world.⁵² Across the novels and texts surveyed in this thesis, perhaps the most consistent figuration is of feminine vulnerability and violability cast against male neglect and violence. If epistolary fiction represents an effort towards realism, it is an elevated one: a genre as invested in epic pathos and sentiment as it is in the diurnal practices

⁵² Sexual violence and its relationship to the eighteenth-century novel has long been explored and debated by critics. For a foundational account of the relationship between rape and the novel, see Frances Ferguson, “Rape and the Rise of the Novel,” *Representations* 20, no. 20 (1987), <https://doi.org/10.2307/2928503>. For an important account of the relationship between violence and gender identity in the period, see Anne Greenfield, “Introduction,” in *Interpreting Sexual Violence, 1660-1800*, ed. Anne Greenfield (London: Pickering & Chatto Publishers, 2013). For an influential account on the relationship between gender, trauma, and the English novel, see Helene Moglen, *The Trauma of Gender: A Feminist Theory of the English Novel* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001).

of letter writing and the in/consistency of character over narrative time. Mirroring the motion from typification to particularity, the resistance to normative scripts embedded in unique, individualised characters in turn resists the reification of normative life-narratives: instead, the particularities of an individual as she traverses her world governed by conjugality are given credence as worthy subjects for investigation and exploration. The very insistence upon atypical experience as the centre of the epistolary novel demands an accounting for.

Deidre Lynch's *The Economy of Character* addresses the nexus of historical and literary forces at the crux of the development of modern realist character: the philosophical intervention of individuality, the modernizing economy, and the necessity to balance plausibility and morality are taken up by Lynch across a large corpus in order to interpret the rise of novelistic persons, who operated in a market in which uniqueness overran typicality as a saleable attribute.⁵³ Epistolarity capitalised on this transition towards unique figurations, trading on the new interest Perry identifies in "first person writing": "personally verifiable documents[... as] a symptom of the moral uncertainty of the period."⁵⁴ The public taste Perry describes for "moral dilemmas" documented in a realist manner necessitated new figurations who could reflect the "values and interests" of an emergent middle class readership.⁵⁵ Of these, the epistolary character, the problematized letter-writer behind the personally inflected text of the letter-narrative, proved one of the most effective and flexible forms of fictive person for exploring, narrativizing, and reifying the economic position of women: their new dependence on the marriage market, as Perry suggests.⁵⁶ Indeed, as Perry further argues, he peculiarity of particular women thus became doubly important: stratifying marriageable

⁵³ Deidre Lynch, *The Economy of Character: Novels, Market Culture, and the Business of Inner Meaning* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998), 55.

⁵⁴ Perry, *Women, Letters, and the Novel*, xi.

⁵⁵ Perry, *Women, Letters, and the Novel*, 15.

⁵⁶ Perry, *Women, Letters, and the Novel*, 35.

prospects and encoding behaviours as ‘marriageable’ or ‘virtuous’ intersected with new literary interests in diversifying representation. To Lynch, the needs of diversifying representation over and against traditions of typification resulted in newly self- and class-aware figurations closely approximating modern characters.⁵⁷

Recently, however, Stephanie Insley Hershnow has emphasised the static form, rather than flexibility, some early realist characters came to take on, suggesting that a recognizable (nearly, a type) figure of the “novice”—a young woman upon her entrance to society—becomes both a potent thematization of early realism’s concerns with morality and moderation while simultaneously unstitching from this particular character the effects of what Sara Ahmed has described as the “sticky” nature of experience.⁵⁸ By producing characters who cannot learn, early realism is capable of representing virtue trumping experience every time, and negative affect most suggestibly fulfils its role of testing and defining, rather than breaking, characters. Epistolary fictions toyed with such static characterizations, as this thesis maintains, to fulfil their aims of rewarding virtue and punishing vice while presenting an apparently realistic narrative mode.

⁵⁷ Lynch, *The Economy of Character*, 126. David Oakleaf demonstrates that novelistic character was predominantly understood in the irreconcilability of private and social identities: the “struggle” between a social inscription of codes of “birth and rank”, “class and gender” against the “autonomous authority inscribing identity from within”: see David Oakleaf, “Marks, Stamps, and Representations: Character in Eighteenth-Century Fiction,” *Studies in the Novel* 23, no. 3 (1991): 296-97.

⁵⁸ See Stephanie Insley Hershnow, *Born Yesterday: Inexperience and the Early Realist Novel* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2019), 3-4. In *The Cultural Politics of Emotion*, Ahmed argues for the ‘sticky’ affective nature of certain objects: their ability to become “saturated with affect”. By suggesting that experience of objects produces feeling, through circulation and the production of boundaries of the self, Ahmed may disentangle the bodily experiences of affect from an introverted account of these experiences as simply epiphenomena of the mind. See Sara Ahmed, *The Cultural Politics of Emotion* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2014), 10-11.

Situating the narratives of epistolary fictions within plausibly realised relationships allowed writers to ground their novels and provide a secure epistemic footing from which to explore their concerns. The opening letter of *Lindamira*, addressed to her friend Indamora, describes the text as a gesture of “sincere Friendship”, further describing the text as the “Narrative of my Adventures, being so unfit to pen a History, altho’ my own” (1). While Lindamira may not ostensibly be suitable as a narrator, within the context of friendship and address to Indamora, an account of herself may be justified.⁵⁹ This problem of “History” furthermore identifies a generic distinction between this accounting-for-oneself and other prose genres. If the authorization to speak is dependent on the mundane relationship between two early eighteenth-century English women, it might be anticipated that the “Adventures” both the novel’s title and the letter’s text refer to are equally of this grounded sphere.⁶⁰ Thus, by rejecting the fantastic in favour of the local, relational context in which the letter is both composed and read, Lindamira might present her account of herself as belonging to (or within) a kind of realism governed by laws of plausibility recognised by its reader—firstly Indamora, the direct addressee, and then, by extension, the novel’s reader over her shoulder—and therefore be meaningfully described as an authentic kind of novelistic self or person. This authenticating process, embedded in distinct relationships and dependent on the familiarity or intimacy of two or more correspondents, marks the realist impulse of the novel-in-letters more clearly than any other single defining features.

⁵⁹ Montagu parodies this move in the drama of her reworking of Indamora’s own history: opening with acknowledgement of Lindamira’s life-narrative, Indamora proceeds to detail her adventures from her “16 year”; the plot is spurred by an incestuous match made between Indamora and her step-brother by a conniving maternal figure, Eurinoe. See Montagu, “Indamora to Lindamira,” 2-3.

⁶⁰ In his introduction to the 1949 edition of *Lindamira*, Boyce suggests the description of the text as “not “feigned”” invites its reader to consider it within their own experiences of London: see Benjamin Boyce, “Introduction,” in *The Adventures of Lindamira: a Lady of Quality*, ed. Benjamin Boyce (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1949), vi.

Prior scholarship on epistolary narrative has reached for and through a variety of frameworks to describe this principal relationship between addressor and addressee. The boundaries of epistolary fiction as a genre are famously difficult to define, as Robert Adams Day suggests.⁶¹ To Day, the form has precedents in translations of French romance and the “Ovidian wooing-story”, the *Heroides* discussed earlier in this introduction; yet as Day argues, the mere “use of letters” as a narrative device does not define the novel-in-letters.⁶² Nevertheless, Day struggles to offer a satisfactory definition that might encompass “any *Clarissas*, *Humphrey Clinkers*, or *Evelinas*”: the focus on “imaginary letters [figuring] in various quantities” erases internal generic distinctions within and between the triad of novels listed and, furthermore, flattens perhaps contradictory tendencies which (less than superficially) complicate the relationship between each item on this list.⁶³ Particularly

⁶¹ Robert Adams Day, *Told in Letters: Epistolary Fiction Before Richardson* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1966), 5.

⁶² Day, *Told in Letters*, 10-11. In addressing the separation between novel and romance, Dieter Schulz similarly argues that earlier writers including Congreve attempted to exploit the dissimilarity between their work, “realistic, often short [and] satirical” and the “heroic romance” of the French *roman*, even if by the mid-century writers such as Defoe, Richardson, and Fielding conflated the “novel” and the “romance” as equally suspect forms of literature. To Northrop Frye, “romance” is “proletarian” in that it reflects the anxieties of “guardians of taste and learning”; its focus on sexual union as the titillating element of narrative is critical to the form’s historic success. Scott Black has more recently argued that the romance shadows the “history of the novel like a bad dream”, divorced from the novel through romance’s fabulism and the novel’s realism. To Katarzyna Bartoszyńska, the romance represents a “world” literature beyond the history of the English novel, alongside Gothic fiction and the Oriental tale, ultimately suggesting that distinctions between romance and realism may in fact be untenable. Thus, the distinction between the two forms is less than secure, even given Richardson’s own distaste of the “heighten’d” scenes of the romance. See Katarzyna Bartoszyńska, *Estranging the Novel: Poland, Ireland, and Theories of World Literature*. (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2021), 2-3; Scott Black, *Without the Novel: Romance and the History of Prose Fiction*, (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2019) 1-2; Northrop Frye, “The Secular Scripture”, in *The Secular Scripture and Other Writings on Critical Theory, 1976-1991*, eds. Joseph Adamson, and Jean Wilson, (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2006), 19-20, <https://doi.org/10.3138/9781442627550>; Dieter Schulz, ““Novel,” “Romance,” and Popular Fiction in the First Half of the Eighteenth Century,” *Studies in Philology* 70, no. 1 (1973): 79-80,

⁶³ Day, *Told in Letters*, 5-6.

Evelina and *Clarissa*, and perhaps the genre of the letter-narrative itself, may nevertheless emerge from what Perry has evocatively termed the “sexual fencing” of the emergent middle-class woman, but both of these examples experiment with this bounding in markedly different manners—as Chapters Three and Five address.⁶⁴ Perry articulates the “standard plots of epistolary novels” as responses to the transformation of property relations, the division of labour, a “capitalised economy”, and, perhaps most importantly, a “preoccupation with love and marriage” coextensive with the emergent “nuclear family”.⁶⁵ Within this milieu, critical ingredients of the epistolary novel—its love plots, scenes of seduction and rape, and interest in the marital economy—might be distilled into a recognizable form.

Day’s definitional struggle, meanwhile, intersects with broader questions regarding the status of the epistolary novel: particularly, how did the letter-narrative respond to other forms of first-person narrative that pre-dated, anticipated, or moved around it? English Showalter, in a survey of the eighteenth-century French novel, suggests the form arises alongside other first-person narrational structures, particularly memoir, and the *Ich-Roman*, but is discernible through its documentary impulse.⁶⁶ This documentary characteristic has been described more thoroughly by Rachel Scarborough King as a “bridge” between genres: a mechanism to facilitate writerly paths through “shifting media landscapes.”⁶⁷ King cites the example of *Clarissa* with its myriad of internal genres including meditations, prayers, and recollected first-person narrative held together by its letter mode which allows these multiple

⁶⁴ Perry, *Women, Letters, and the Novel*, 15.

⁶⁵ Perry, *Women, Letters, and the Novel*, 27.

⁶⁶ English Showalter, *The Evolution of the French Novel 1641-1782*, Princeton Legacy Library, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1972: 2015), 74.

⁶⁷ Rachael Scarborough King, *Writing to the World: Letters and the Origins of Modern Print Genres* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2018), 2.

fragmented forms to converge from manuscripts into print.⁶⁸ To Showalter, it appears that the letter mode is less a distinct genre, but rather a “classification”, a system descriptive of a particular feature of a variety of print works published across the long eighteenth century.⁶⁹ Taking this classification as a genre, however, begins to make sense of the close relationship between a formal device, the letter mode, and an interest in gender and amatory narrative. While the letter form is without doubt crucial to this definition, the intersecting interests of gender and genre within the novel-in-letters more substantially force a reckoning with its position as a popular transmedia form of fiction which explored pressing and urgent questions relating to personal identities, particularly within amatory relationships and marriage.

This thesis pays particular attention to the hybridization of forms novels in letters represented. This is necessary in response to Linda Kauffman’s argument that the epistolary form’s operability across and between genres is itself of importance to letter-narratives: that the myriad of potential styles, modes, and transgressions of generic boundary embodied by the novel-in-letters is complicated by its routine expression of a discourse of desire.⁷⁰ Like Day, Kauffman cites Ovid as an early innovator within this tradition, and by beginning with an analysis of the *Heroides*, Kauffman suggests that there may be an “Ovidian rhetorical ideal” underlying the development of epistolary fictions: an “antimimetic” and political approach to discourse which emphasises “word play, masks, and poses” in recognition of the

⁶⁸ King, *Writing to the World*, 89. These scraps might traverse back *from* print to manuscript: as Montagu’s reworking of *Lindamira* suggests, to Isobel Grundy, local communities of readers would reimagine the texts within their own sociality. Whether ‘Indamora to Lindamira’ was explicitly written for publication remains unclear, but the circulation of the manuscript suggests a small readership of women. See Isobel Grundy, “Introduction,” in *Romance Writings*, ed. Isobel Grundy (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), X-XI.

⁶⁹ Showalter, *The Evolution of the French Novel 1641-1782*, 74-75.

⁷⁰ Linda Kauffman, *Discourses of Desire: Gender, Genre, and Epistolary Fictions* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1986: 2019), 23.

role of artifice in constructing desire.⁷¹ “Word play”, however, may only go so far in describing the complex literary operations of the fictional correspondents supposedly composing the letters constituting an epistolary text. As J.L Austin has foundationally suggested, certain forms of expression—to Austin, “performatives”—perform, rather than report or describe, a particular act by a person at a place and time.⁷² Critically, to Austin, these “performative” statements draw attention not only to the action completed or in-progress in its utterance, but rather emphasise the identity of the person performing the uttering.⁷³ Bannet articulates the centrality of the performative to the basic framing of epistolary narratives: a single narrative epistle contains the record of both the letter’s writing and reception, looking back (across time) at the events spurring its composition and forward to the acts necessitated by its reading.⁷⁴ Letters, to Bannet, spur action, either modelled by their reception by a fictive interlocutor or in the shaping of the relationship between figures separated by distance.⁷⁵ Thus, in an important sense, letters *do something* in the letter narrative: like Austin’s “performatives”, the utterances which take the form of the letter not

⁷¹ Kauffman, *Discourse of Desire*, 21. Interestingly, Dror Wahrman discusses the capacity of masks—in the context of the masquerade—as a perceived across the century: the masquerade revealed, rather than obscured, the status of identity as a performed, rather than intrinsic status. See Dror Wahrman, *The Making of the Modern Self: Identity and Culture in Eighteenth-Century England* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2004), 167.

⁷² J. L. Austin, *How To Do Things With Words: The William James Lectures delivered at Harvard University in 1955* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1975), 5. Interestingly, a key example of Austin’s is the marriage vow; a “performative speech act” of critical importance to this thesis.

⁷³ Austin, *How To Do Things With Words*, 8-9.

⁷⁴ Bannet, *The Letters in the Story*, 1-2. In *Lindamira*, texts routinely traverse the borders between novel and speech, shaping and forming opinions and rhetoric which in turn, rather circularly, shape the plot of the novel. In one instance, Philander, whose “intolerable Foppery” partially owes to the “Incoherent Fragments out of Plays, Novels and Romances” from which his dialogue is composed, becomes a figure of “Aversion” from Lindamira’s perspective. See *The Adventures of Lindamira*, 11.

⁷⁵ Bannet, *The Letters in the Story*, 3.

only enact “word play” but actively participate in the construction of their correspondents’ worlds.

“Masks”, the second element of Kauffman’s Ovidian style, likewise represents a complex literary problem. The fictional corresponding persons whose writings to one another form the text of an epistolary narrative represent a complex dialectic for the reader, formed through the relationship between address, addressee, and reader, a relationship Janet Gurkin Altman describes as the “fundamental problem” of epistolary narratives.⁷⁶ This very complexity is fertile critical ground. The problematic interplay between selves of different kinds—a letter writer, a recipient, and finally, the novel’s reader themselves—demands attention to the identities of each participant in the production of novelistic meaning within the letter-narrative tradition. This thesis pays close attention to the emerging constellations of identity which governed the figuration of the addressor-addressee binary, providing a new account of character within the epistolary form.

That these identities represented a new form of personhood is an important consideration. It is widely accepted among scholars of British intellectual history that the long eighteenth-century’s transformation of political economy birthed an emergent, modern, conception of the individual ‘self’. To Charles Taylor, as absolutist politics waned in the wake of administrative expansion, regulation of a burgeoning market economy, and the dawn of the bourgeois state, a newly understood “ideal” of a “human agent” capable of remaking themselves according to “disciplined action” appeared as an intellectual corollary to the newly instrumentalised systems of society.⁷⁷ McKeon summarises his own view

⁷⁶ Janet Gurkin Altman, *Epistolarity: Approaches to a Form* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1982), 210.

⁷⁷ Charles Taylor, *Sources of the Self: the Making of the Modern Identity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 159.

similarly: within the eighteenth century, the new visibility of the state clarified a coalescing notion of individual property rights, elaborated interior religious conscience, and allowed for the conception of a “private” realm divorced from the absolute ordinance of the monarch which, nevertheless, replicated absolutism through the tyranny of patriarchal marriage.⁷⁸ Armstrong influentially links this new understanding of an individual conscience to the re-organization of the household, the domestic woman, and a “modern political state” formed in England through “cultural hegemony”, resulting in an empowered middle class “through the dissemination of a new female ideal.”⁷⁹ To return to *Lindamira*’s preface, if epistolary novels are “equally Instructive and Diverting”, this instructive component appears to, partially, educate the reader as to their proper participation in the individualist community emerging around them. Thus, while Armstrong claims that the novel more broadly maps the rise of a modernised conception of the individual self this thesis demonstrates the moral role of the epistolary novel in particular: instructing, and entertainingly modelling, through narratives of and formed of individuals acting together, the new modes of collectivity personal identities necessitate.⁸⁰

In the work of English philosopher John Locke, the substance of identity lies in the capacity for “reason and reflection”: the possibility for the human animal to “consider its self

⁷⁸ McKeon, *The Secret History of Domesticity*, 110-11. The chaotic English stock markets of the 1710s and 1720s necessitated, to Sheehan and Wahrman, regulation to a system of causality which could adequately explain, on the one hand, disordered human behaviour and, on the other, this disorderliness irregular. The self emerged as a theoretical explanation for the ungovernability of a chaotic market, power no longer invested in the central figure of the monarch but rather in the plurality of interests governing the exchange of commercial value. See Jonathan Sheehan and Dror Wahrman, *Invisible Hands: Self-Organization and the Eighteenth Century* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2015), 99-105.

⁷⁹ Armstrong, *Desire and Domestic Fiction*, 8-9.

⁸⁰ For more on the impetus towards collectivity, see Sheehan and Wahrman, *Invisible Hands: Self-Organization and the Eighteenth Century*, 270-75.

as its self” relies on the performance of reasoned and sustained perception.⁸¹ These matters of perception are themselves local to specific moments, iterative acts, and environments.

Alterations in the composition of the individual considering themselves do not result in an altered personal identity. Locke identifies “consciousness”, the capacity for reflective and reasoned perception, as the thread unifying personal identity over time, across contexts, and in different actions.⁸² Locke’s theory of consciousness remains attractive in interpreting the relationship between experience and identity. If a self is identifiable as a conscious thing across a variety of substantive alterations, this very fixity encourages novelistic literature’s interest in the characterization of unique, separate individuals performing plotted activities.⁸³ Locke’s definition of consciousness implies the abstraction of corporeal experience as the matters of the mind.⁸⁴ Yet, the fictive correspondents of epistolary fictions are notable in their resistance to abstraction: the emphatic specificities of embodied experiences—so often of vulnerability or violation—invites a reading of the genre which pays due attention to the

⁸¹ John Locke, *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, ed. Pauline Phemister (1698: Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 208. Consciousness and self-perception in Locke is a complex and difficult problem: for a discussion of the relationship between perception and consciousness as the “awareness of thinking”, see Ruth Boeker, *Locke on Persons and Personal Identity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2021), 79-81. For a reading of the reflexivity of mind in Lockean consciousness, see Galen Strawson, *Locke on Personal Identity: Consciousness and Concernment* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2011), 31-33.

⁸² Locke, *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, 213.

⁸³ To Ian Watt, the philosophically revolutionary system of consciousness developed by Locke necessitated not only the refiguration of novelistic plot, but also of the “actors” within literature: “the plot had to be acted out by particular people in particular circumstances... rather than... by general human types against a background primarily determined by the appropriate literary convention.” Novels accentuate the *situating* process of individuation. See Ian Watt, *The Rise of the Novel: Studies in Defoe, Richardson and Fielding* (1957: Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001), 15.

⁸⁴ Strawson suggests consciousness in the Lockean system extends to the “material parts” of the body only indirectly—the body imprinting on the mind experientially. Strawson stresses that these bodies are united to the conscious performance of the person—the self. See Strawson, *Locke on Personal Identity: Consciousness and Concernment*, 32-33, 59-60.

phenomenological significance of body within the epistolary tradition. The gender differences productive of “Amorous Intrigue” are not only those of the interiorised concept of consciousness and subjectivity, but differences of bodies.

Chapter One begins the thesis with a reading of Mary Davys’s pseudonymously published *Love and Friendship* (1718) alongside her later re-publication of the text within her collected *Works* in 1725 as *Familiar Letters Betwixt a Gentleman and a Lady*, to ascertain the role of reactions against Tory antifeminist motifs in shaping the early epistolary novel. By arguing for Davys’s interplay between self, pseudonym, and text as constitutive of a new critical paratext in interpreting this novel, this chapter stresses her repudiation of androcentric seduction narratives in favour of the expression of mutual desire as the core of her amatory plot.

Chapter Two reads Samuel Richardson’s *Pamela; or, Virtue Rewarded* (1740). This chapter reflects upon a shift in efforts at characterization: a move away from attempts at realizing autonomous individuals and towards ideological expediency. This chapter focuses its reading on Pamela’s objectification: her conversion from subject to thing by Richardson’s plot. Using this as a starting point, and by comparing Pamela to the commodified objects of “it-narratives” rather than emphasizing her proximity to a psychological subject, this chapter advances an original reading of the novel which emphasises its attention to the intersection between class-status and gendered identity. By paying close attention to a recurrent “fall” motif within the novel, chapter two re-reads Pamela’s own alienation and alienability as disposable property.

Chapter Three in turn approaches the figure of Robert Lovelace in Richardson’s second novel, *Clarissa, or the History of a Young Lady* (1747–48). Arguing that Lovelace’s instrumentalization of the phallus in his own aggrandised self-image is ultimately found

wanting by the complex text, this chapter reads across the novel's problems of embodiment and agency. In so doing, this chapter reckons with Lovelace's mythologised capacity for bodily self-governance and contributes a substantial reading of his failures, thus, to attain a human form.

Chapter Four reads Jane Austen's playlet 'Sir Charles Grandison: or, The Happy Man, A Comedy' (c.1800) alongside Richardson's *The History of Sir Charles Grandison* (1753–54) to build on this understanding of character as a site of political and moral contestation, rather than the realization of humanist representation. By focusing particularly on Austen's re-interpretation of the figure of Charlotte Grandison within her dramatic adaptation, this chapter expands existing knowledge of the play by contributing a novel reading of its bowdlerizing attempts at staging Richardson's novel. In turn, furthermore, this chapter addresses the problem of the body in the difficulty of adapting epistolarity's critical elements from novel to stage.

Finally, Chapter Five approaches Frances Burney's *Evelina* (1778) as a foreclosure of the possibilities for contestation opened by the mid-century epistolary novel, reading its ossification of specific and essentialist interpretations of a male/female dyad. Focusing on the problem of masculinity within the text, this chapter develops an approach, in conversation with existing scholarship, to reading the regulatory apparatus of gender within *Evelina* through reinterpreting its depiction of prevalent masculinist violence as systemic.

Reading these epistolary fictions across the course of the eighteenth century enables a better understanding of how these "Amorous Intrigues" intersected with the development of modern personal identities corresponding to new investments in a stabilised, class-specific conjugal dyad of male and female

Chapter 1. “I think your Sex is fatal to me”: Resisting the Amatory in Mary Davys’s *Love and Friendship* (1718)

Mary Davys’s first and only epistolary novel, *Love and Friendship* (1718), initially attributed to “Little Dick Fisher”, represents a significant break with the traditions of the epistolary love complaint surveyed in the introduction to this thesis. *Love and Friendship* was later republished as *Familiar Letters* within Davys’s *Works* of 1725 and is better known under that title. As this chapter argues, the text hinges on the separation between an amatory plot and alternative possibilities which refute the normative centrality of conjugality. The novel’s protagonists, Berina, a Whiggish young woman, and Artander, a Tory man, commence the epistolary exchange by trading barbs in their ongoing disputes regarding the politics of succession, the relationship between church and state, and the division between friendship and romance. Yet Berina’s introductory letter of November 5th begins to indicate how she also questions the androcentric politics of early eighteenth-century polite circles:

Last night I accidentally fell into the Company of one of those modern Creatures call’d a Prude, who seem’d extreamly fond of the instructive Part of Conversation, and being the oldest Lady in the Room, took upon her to read us Lectures of Behaviour: Among several Heads upon that Subject, she told us, writing to any Man, except a Husband, a Father, a Brother, or some very near Relation, was an unpardonable Crime and cou’d not be answer’d to Modesty. Upon which I was going to write Artander one excusive Letter, and desire him to expect no more. But I began to consider, a Friend is not worth calling so, who dares not run the Risque of so trifling a Censure, to maintain so noble a Character; and therefore, bravely scorning all dull reflection, I

have taken my Pen in Hand with a Design to fight my Way thro' all
Difficulties, and make good my friendship in Spight of all Opposition.¹

The figure of the Prude, rather than characterised with the autonomy or depth Berina and Artander enjoy, represents a kind of surface figuration; Deidre Lynch influentially regards these non-personal surface representations as Theophrastan types, a flattening of features into a caricature rather than character.² In so doing, Lynch effectively articulates how a “fine line” can separate the individualisation of a figure from the exaggeration of parody.³ In this case, the potential dehumanisation of the Prude as a “Creature” is important to Berina’s delegitimizing project, and her suggestion of the priority of women’s discourse. Social expectations of the demure, complicit, and perhaps, silent woman contrast clearly with the text’s interest in emboldening women’s discourses beyond a misogynistic demand of propriety: the fact of Berina’s writing to Artander is suggested by Berina to represent her “scorning all dull Reflection”, as she describes the Prude’s strict rejection of women’s epistolary writing, even as the text makes such strictures connected to femininity seem more ephemeral than they may ordinarily appear. Berina parodies and ironizes the politics of virtue, in favour of feminine possibility.

It is a particular form of women’s writing which is queried by Berina in this opening epistle: letter writing. The Prude’s “Modesty” would not only preclude Berina from writing to Artander; it would also prevent the simple plot of *Love and Friendship* from ever taking place. Berina is thus impelled to resist not only by her rejection of these strict codifications of feminine behaviour, but also by the necessities of the genre in which she exists as a character.

¹ Dick Fisher, *Love and Friendship Inseparable Betwixt Different Sexes* (Lodon: Printed for J. Roberts, 1718), 6-7. All further citations refer to this edition and are given in-text.

² Deidre Lynch, *The Economy of Character: Novels, Market Culture, and the Business of Inner Meaning* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998), 49.

³ Lynch, *The Economy of Character*, 64.

Indeed, by contrast with the Prude's Theophrastan figuration, throughout the novel, the reader is given a great deal of detail which presents Berina as a more personate figure. Her witty vivacity is suggested by the sarcastic declaration of the "Opposition" she faces as a correspondent with Artander. Berina is granted a personality and individuation the Prude cannot, for narrative reasons, obtain: perhaps key to this is Berina's disruptive rejection of strictures of feminine behaviour which would preclude her participation in the novel from the outset.

To demonstrate the close relationship between character and genre, this chapter takes as its case Davys's *Love and Friendship*. Reading the novel's investment in character as a disruptive and troubling site, it begins to address the question of character within the epistolary tradition and highlight how the flexibility, early in the century, of a new genre—the novel-in-letters—in a new marketplace demanded specific kinds of figurations. This chapter identifies epistolary fiction as a critical milestone in the development of novelistic character. Chiefly, *Love and Friendship* demonstrates that, to invert a slogan, the political *is* the personal: positing oppositional poles of a Tory man and a Whig woman as a test of the limits of decent contact between sexes, the text remains valuable to critics in its reaction against a particular Tory antifeminist motif. Investing heavily in narrative proof of the shared capacity across sexes for reason, Davys's novel exercises the same debates the characters rehearse, and it is through this dialogue that the individual characters come to take on rounded form.

Using internal evidence, Martha Bowden has demonstrated *Familiar Letters* was likely written around 1718, drawing on local references to fleeting political events and

controversies surrounding that year within the text.⁴ The edition printed for J. Roberts in 1718 under the title *Love and Friendship* associates the novel not with Davys's successful publications following her relocation to Cambridge and rather with her obstinately partisan years as a Whig writer based in London. *Love and Friendship* has escaped notice of Davys scholarship for some time, and, thus, represents a new lens and context for reading *Familiar Letters*.⁵ Importantly, while only minor variations in punctuation, pagination, and spelling persist between the two editions, the substantive preface printed only in the known copy of *Love and Friendship* may potentially adjust horizons of interpretation within the text of the novel itself.

Love and Friendship survives in one known copy held at the William Andrews Clark Memorial Library, UCLA. Tracing the provenance of the work provides limited information. Notes on UCLA's library database record that the copy was purchased from bookseller and antiquarian Arnold Muirhead in 1955 yet consulting period-relevant purchase and sales

⁴ Martha Bowden, "Introduction," in *The Reform'd Coquet; or, Memoirs of Amoranda; Familiar letters Betwixt a Gentleman and a Lady; and, The Accomplish'd Rake, or, Modern Fine Gentleman*, ed. Martha F. Bowden (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1999), XXXIII. Bowden argues for this dating through the work's references to contemporary controversies which quickly lost investives, including those involving astronomer John Flamsteed (1649–1719) as well as an allusion to the reduction of the light horse scandal of 1717.

⁵ The English Short Title Catalogue (ESTC) records Fisher's copy under N4677. Interestingly, a note recorded on the ESTC record of the copy records that "Dick Fisher is probably a pseudonym". The connection to Davys has likely been missed historically due to her relative marginalisation within the 'rise of the novel' narrative. While early efforts from William McBurney attempted to situate her writing within this systematisation, her relegation to the margins of literary history continue clearly until feminist interventions began to reintegrate women's writing within the novel's 'rise'. For this early account see William McBurney, "Mrs. Mary Davys: Forerunner of Fielding," *PMLA* 74 (1959): 348-55. For a discussion of the integration of Davys and the teleology of the novel's "rise", see J. A. Downie, "Mary Davys's 'Probable Feign'd Stories' and Critical Shibboleths about 'The Rise of the Novel'." *Eighteenth-Century Fiction* 12, no. 2/3 (2000).

correspondence pertaining to Muirhead in the UCLA archive reveals no further information.⁶ An advertisement in *The Post-Man and the Historical Account* records the price at 1 shilling, providing further evidence for the 1718 publication date.⁷ *Love and Friendship* was reprinted for Hugh Meere, advertisements in the *London Journal* in 1722 indicate, but it is unclear if any copies of this edition have survived, foreclosing another line of enquiry.⁸ This chapter's interest lies in the substantive differences in authorial pose taken by Davys in the 1718 and 1725 editions of her work respectively. The complexity of the reconciliation of plural discourses Foucault identifies in conceptualising "oeuvre" necessitates this rethinking of questions of authorship and textual production, and opens the possibility of an account of the novel which can more accurately describe the complex and overlapping intersections of self and text of eighteenth-century British woman writers and their work.⁹ Foucault's recognition of the author as a function of discourse, rather than an entity productive of it, suggests the kind of porousness between pseudonym, writer, and text Davys's practice evokes.¹⁰

It is helpful first to describe how the plot of *Love and Friendship* resists amatory conventions. Preceding Artander's letter of November 21st, the text is constituted by political

⁶ Library Record for *Love and Friendship Inseparable Betwixt Different Sexes*, UCLA Library Catalogue, https://search.library.ucla.edu/permalink/01UCS_LAL/17p22dp/alma9913162743606533; correspondence from Arnold Muirhead, 1952-1957, UCLA University Archives Record Series 402, Library Acquisitions Department Administrative Subject Files 1941-1957. Box 54, 62, 69, 85. I am grateful to the librarians at the UCLA University Archive, Maxwell Zupke, Julianna Jenkins, and Neil, for their assistance in providing these records remotely in a timely manner.

⁷ "Advertisement for J. Roberts," *The Post-Man and the Historical Account*, 22 February 1718, Gale.

⁸ "Advertisement for H. Meere," *The London Journal*, November 24 1722.

⁹ Michel Foucault, *Archaeology of Knowledge*, 2nd ed. (London: Taylor and Francis, 2013), 26-28.

¹⁰ Michel Foucault, "What is an Author?," in *Language, Counter-Memory, Practice: Selected Essays and Interviews*, ed. Donald F. Bouchard (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2021), 123.

and historical debate between its two protagonists. The letter of the 21st marks a bifurcation as, in the letters that follow, Artander attempts to court Berina. This process begins in earnest following Artander's turn to a "philosophick strain" leaving him "resolv'd to visit Nature in its most private Recesses" (28). He turns to a "Hollow of an adjacent Rock" to accomplish this project (28). After detailing his exploration of the cave, Artander is challenged by his discovery of virtue in a young girl left there by her highwayman father:

The nearer we approach'd, the louder the Dog yelp'd; the Sound of which led us to a melancholy Mansion, inhabited only by the aforesaid animal, and a half-starv'd Female. She look'd wild and frighten'd, but seem'd very tractable, and answer'd us directly to every Question we ask'd her[...] She said, her Father brought her there when she was but two Years old[...] he was a Highway-Man who had been condemn'd to die, but made his escape[...] The poor Girl seems to have a better Notion of Virtue than could be expected from her Education, which makes me conclude Virtue is an innate Qualification, born with, and inseparable from some People. (29–30)

Artander's narrative parodically echoes his interest in feminine behaviour by locating the virtue he elsewhere identifies in his correspondent, Berina, in a highwayman's daughter. Virtue is here innate yet not class-bound: despite her informal education by the highwayman and, as is later learned, his companions, the girl retains a clear innocence. This virtue, inseparable from her, impresses Artander, to the point that he takes her to his mother, who in turn we learn has "taken her for one of her Servants" (30). While class hierarchies might be troubled by the innate nature of virtue, these are ultimately reinforced by the low position to which the girl is applied as a servant. The account is located at a pivotal moment in the text, following Artander's declaration he will no longer pursue partisan debate with Berina as her temper is "ruffl'd with Politicks" (28). By pursuing an alternate form of correspondence of

which this anecdote is constitutive, Artander tries to reorganise his relationship along more stable, and clearly moralised, lines. The letter separates the argumentative relationship of the earlier epistles from the amatory plot which begins to develop, heightening as the novel progresses and reaching a zenith as Artander finally leaves his home to pursue Berina's hand in marriage in London (87).

As Artander details his adventure, he makes it clear that there is an intended function to the narrative. Indeed, Artander concludes the letter by addressing its purpose:

This, Berina, is the true Account of my Adventure into the Rock; which, I hope, will not only amuse you, but serve for innocent Chat over the Tea-Table, and be a Reprieve, one Day, for the Faults of the Absent. For tho' I know you have a Soul above Scandal, I will not speak for the rest of your Sex. (30–31)

Artander self-consciously declares one potential purpose for the letter: an “amuse[ment]” in “Chat over the Tea-Table.” Referencing his own “Absent” relation to Berina emphasises a basic convention of epistolary fiction—by holding the figures at distance to produce the text of their relating in the form of written correspondence, the novel can produce an account of their relationship in a textual, rather than verbal, form. The self-awareness, however, of how Artander's letter may enter dialogue reflects Davys's focus on questions of social performance. Artander's separation of Berina from the category of scandalous women reaffirms his trust of her as a conversational participant and her elevation within his esteem above other women, identifying virtue in both his “innocent” conversational partner and the girl in the cave, indicating his focus upon the virtuous states (or otherwise) of the women around him. Yet Artander's interest in virtue is not precisely conjugal, as later in the very same letter he can scarce imagine himself as a husband to the daughter of a local gentleman:

“the very Name makes me tremble!” (31). Artander seeks to arouse Berina’s desire (and, perhaps, jealousy) by recounting his dalliance with a nearby Gentleman’s daughter in a separate amatory plot:

I am now going to be very vain, and tell you, a Gentleman has been with me
to bespeak me for his Daughter; how to bring my self off with good
Manners, I hardly knew; but was at last forc’d to tell him, I found an inward
Decay, which put a stop to all Thoughts of that Kind, and wish’d the Lady a
more suitable Husband (31).

Provocatively, Artander indicates his own desirability by narrativizing his appearance on the marriage market in another context. His refusal of the suit, and the Gentleman, owes to the ostensible lack of virtue in his daughter identified by Artander: the “inward Decay” conjures through its connotations of rottenness and decrepitude an image of moral and social unpalatability which does not sit comfortably, especially in contrast with the Highwayman’s daughter. The spatial manoeuvres of these twinned narratives--which move within the cave and Artander’s own “inward” spaces that prevent him being a “suitable Husband” -- echo each other. In this echo, Artander appears to account for his own gazing and self reflection as a penetrative act, and thus suggests the androcentric privilege of shaping both the female body in general, and the bodies of particular women and girls, as passive receptacles of a legitimating and authorising male reading. Most importantly, by pairing virtue with the penetrable interior of the woman but not his own inward male space this letter articulates Artander’s introversion, his incapacity to think beyond these myths of sexual difference even as his own early equivocation on meeting fully the demands of a seduction plot suggests his own yearning for the nonsexual relation of correspondents he and Berina had thus far modelled.

Yet this attempt to reorganise the plot of *Love and Friendship* as an amatory fiction is of little interest to the narrative's other key participant—Berina, for her part, has no interest in this phallogocentric reorganisation of her plot:

If *Artander's* Heart were not as hard as the Rock he has been scrutinising into, he wou'd never have laid such strict Injunctions on my Pen, and robb'd me of my darling Pleasure; but to let you see how ready I am to relinquish every Thing that gives you Uneasiness, I have, in Compliance to my Friendship, laid by the Subject you dislike, and will, for the future, entertain you with something else. (32).

Berina describes Artander's heart as the interior space which is available for reading. Rejecting the phallogocentric account of Artander's own gaze, she rejects the notion of introversion altogether—replacing it with the nonsexual hardening of a surface—the “hard” exterior of the rock and the heart resist, rather than invite. This is mirrored in her evocative description of Artander's request for non-political discourse as an “Injunction”, one which has “robb'd me of my darling Pleasure”. Treating Artander's demand as a refutation of her capacity for pleasure paired with the suggestion of a legalistic claim made upon her pen allows Berina to make obvious her depoliticization as a submissive act. Her careful diction avoids any suggestion of the kind of desire Artander's own letter evokes, and the narrative with which she follows presents the nonsexual kin figure of her “Unkle”, resisting Artander's shift towards narratives of sexuality and courtship (31). Both Berina and Artander seem aware of what this transition away from political debate entails—and, at this stage, feel out the boundaries of the “Friendship”, as Berina puts it, that they are left with. That these are correspondences, rather than verbal acts, demands this negotiation: the distance or separation of the two protagonists invites their carefully written letters which are rich in suggestion and implication though rarely blunt with the expression of desires and drives which nearness and

presence might encourage. With merely the “Pen in Hand”, as Artander writes in the following letter, to become her “Champion”, Artander is left with an instrument which Berina too possesses: their shared capacity for producing text demands a relationship grounded in equality (39).

Artander’s apparent early discomfort with seduction thus complicates readings of the text as a straightforward love plot. Berina later remarks that he has the capacity to “*Proteus* like, turn your self into every shape. I confess you are a good Mimick, and act a Lover’s Part much better than I expected” (72). Calling Artander a “Mimick” emphasises his performative participation in a role. Berina draws attention to Artander’s failure to perform the conventions of the amatory fictions J. Roberts, *Love and Friendship*’s publisher, was known for.¹¹ While Roberts only printed thirty-one works of fiction, Leah Orr identifies him as the most prolific printer of novels, describing him, furthermore, as a specialist in “romantic tales” over the course of his career, 1690–1730.¹² Furthermore, as Eleanor F. Shevlin argues, the economic boon association with the Whig movement offered the Warwick Lane booksellers and printers necessitated a political approach to publication.¹³ Davys’s novel thus harnesses the intrigues of romantic fiction to rehearse what Shevlin identifies in other texts as “standard

¹¹ James, or, possibly, John, Roberts, (1668 or 1669–1754) was a prominent printer and publisher associated with the Warwick Lane network of booksellers and printers. Historian of publishing John Feather describes the “imprint” of “J. Roberts in Warwick-Lane” as one of an “eminently-respectable” master printer, adopted in the case of politically risky or potentially amoral material. For more, see John Feather, “Business Models in the Eighteenth-Century London Book Trade,” *Publishing History* 78 (2018): 68. For an analysis of the role of the Warwick Lane network in the development of the early eighteenth-century novel, see Eleanor F. Shevlin, “The Warwick Lane Network and the Refashioning of ‘Atalantis’ as a Titular Keyword,” in *Producing the Eighteenth-Century Book*, ed. Laura Runge and Pat Rogers (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 2009), 163–92.

¹² Leah Orr, *Novel Ventures: Fiction and Print Culture in England, 1690–1730* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2017), 43.

¹³ Shevlin, “The Warwick Lane Network and the Refashioning of ‘Atalantis’ as a Titular Keyword,” 182.

Whig views about foreign policy, toleration for religious dissenters, parliament's relationship to the crown, and the contractual nature of government".¹⁴ Roberts's labour as printer and bookseller of *Love and Friendship* helps situate the text within a tradition of amatory novels while drawing greater attention to the ostensibly Whiggish text as the product of and for the early eighteenth-century book marketplace, in which, notably, booksellers operated as a principal intermediary between author and reader.¹⁵

The model of romantic fiction popularised by publishers including Roberts is one basis for *Love and Friendship*, which takes the conventions of such a genre as a target for satire. Lindy Riley argues that *Familiar Letters* may be read as a repudiation of the glamorisation of the romantic feminine subject, yet both the 1718 and 1725 editions of the text not only complicate but also participate in and construct the "dangerous" ideology of such a subject embedded within amatory fiction.¹⁶ This ideology structures the narrative: Artander and Berina begin by foreswearing love, and the plot ends with Artander pursuing Berina, increasingly taking on the role of a suitor. The work's conclusion resists easy

¹⁴ Shevlin, "The Warwick Lane Network and the Refashioning of 'Atalantis' as a Titular Keyword," 182. Shevlin is most interested in the professionalisation of the book trades in this sense; the strong Whig ties of the network led to a series of publications making "adamant claims to the political" through titling inspired by Delarivier Manley's *The New Atalantis* (1709); despite apparently foregoing politicisation in the contents of the novels themselves, such deliberate strategies evidence the complex interrelationship between a professionalising discipline and the personal (or political) proclivities of its key members.

¹⁵ Booksellers, professionals responsible for a variety of tasks under the ambiguous "umbrella" term, occasionally also worked as writers: Paula McDowell notes this is particularly pertinent in considering women's writing of the period. Elizabeth Boyd, Laetitia Pilkington, and Eliza Haywood all supplemented writing careers with bookselling at various points, as McDowell describes. This close relationship between the conceptual labour of writing and the more tangible work of printing, distributing, and administering the copyright of a given book highlights the centrality of the bookseller to the literary marketplace. See Paula McDowell, *The Women of Grub Street: Press, Politics, and Gender in the London Literary Marketplace, 1678-1730* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998), 51-52.

¹⁶ Lindy Riley, "Mary Davys's *Familiar Letters*," in *Cutting edges: postmodern critical essays on eighteenth-century satire*, ed. James E. Gill (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1995), 219-20.

interpretation, as when the narrative concludes with Artander leaving for London to sue for Berina's hand, he claims he will "die with Impatience for a Performance" (87). The open ending, with its absence of a response from Berina, may be interpreted either as an affirmation of their union, a rejection of Artander's romantic mode, or a resistance against such a confirmation one way or another, encouraging a reading of the text beyond its obvious amatory conventions. Nevertheless, Roberts's participation in its publication suggests such conventions may be both self-conscious and constitutive. While these publishing lists were themselves a kind of ephemera, shifting with changing tastes and business decisions, such as the sale of copies to other booksellers, the clearly satirical elements of *Love and Friendship* suggestively toy with the horizons of generic possibility within the amatory tradition.

Artander's reticence to fully occupy the role of the amatory suitor indicates an instability of the text that is explained, in part, by the facts of its publication: *Love and Friendship* is Davys's only epistolary novel, published pseudonymously initially and finally printed under her own name within her monumentalising subscription-funded *Works* of 1725. Situating the 1718 version within Davys's oeuvre illustrates her innovative literary practice while emphasising the unique status of this early edition. *Love and Friendship* and its publication strategy deliberately avoid trading on the reputation of Davys's prior publications, including the *Amours of Alcippus and Lucippe* (1704), *The Fugitive* (1705), or the better known, more successful play, *The Northern Heiress* (1716). Davys' later publication of *The Reform'd Coquet* (1724) describes itself in its initial titling as by "Mrs. Davys, author of the humours of York", the subtitle of *The Northern Heiress*. Given that Davys would later make use of this association with her own work, why, in 1718, would she eschew her later strategy?

The Reform'd Coquet, unlike *Love and Friendship*, was published by subscription. This was uncommon. As Orr notes, only four texts of the 1720s—two by Davys—were

published in this way.¹⁷ By 1724, Davys had secured support from 165 subscribers, sufficient to finance the print publication of *The Reform'd Coquet*, and the two-volumes of the *Works* shortly after, in 1725. Thus, while the *Works* and *The Reform'd Coquet* could trade on the reputation of their author through subscription publication, *Love and Friendship* more obviously had to integrate itself as a commercial property within the literary marketplace, much as Davys's initial works must have. Davys is, importantly, among only a small handful of writers to have a "Works" printed in the early eighteenth century, and one of the only women in the period to have one published within her lifetime.¹⁸ Thus, while *Love and Friendship* was strategically published to operate within a competitive literary marketplace, Davys's later republication of the work as *Familiar Letters* could trade on her recognisability as a successful author of fiction; a high-point in her career following *Reform'd Coquet*.

¹⁷ Orr, *Novel Ventures*, 37. Subscription publication may be so widely variable in its rare instances as to be difficult to generalise. In Davys's case, the presence of high-profile subscribers (Pope, for instance) helps to situate her success but cannot fully explicate it. Brean S. Hammond suggests subscription publication represents a "transitional" point towards the "impersonal market" of the bookseller; subscription lists themselves served as a kind of advertising. See Brean S. Hammond, *Professional Imaginative Writing in England, 1670-1740: 'Hackney for Bread'* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1997), 70. Alice Wakely points out that the subscription list carries equal proportions of Tories and Whigs, with influential (or infamous) figures on both sides represented; see Alice Wakely, "Mary Davys and the Politics of Epistolary Form," in *Cultures of Whiggism: New Essays on English Literature and Culture in the Long Eighteenth Century*, ed. David Womersley, Paddy Bullard, and Abigail Williams (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 2005), 61-62.

¹⁸ Collected works were uncommon partly due to economically impracticalities: Orr suggests collections were limited to the "upper end" of the market for purchases of fiction. Thus, Davys's works traded off both the success of *The Northern Heiress* and *The Reform'd Coquet* and the extensive list of influential subscribers. That the *Works* were printed in octavo suggests their "certain distinction": as Raven argues, this format carried a significance as it was more expensive to print, and bind, driving the price of books in that format upwards. In considering this act of monumentalising, Eliza Haywood is a notable contemporary, whose collections, *The Works of Mrs. Eliza Haywood* (1724) was perhaps as self-conscious as Davys's efforts. See Orr, *Novel Ventures*, 89, 94, and James Raven, "The Book Trades," in *Books And Their Readers In Eighteenth-Century England: New Essays*, ed. Isabel Rivers (London: Continuum, 2001), 24-25.

Davys's reclamation of the pseudonymous text within her monumentalising *Works* invites questions regarding the style of the early edition, particularly given the important distinctions between Davys's early and late career writing. Susan Paterson Glover makes this explicit in distinguishing between Davys's early "comic" mode and the "dark realism" of her later work.¹⁹ While Davys settled in London for some time following her migration from Ireland, the *Works* are not a product of Davys's early-career London years, but reflective instead of her relocation in 1718 to Cambridge, from which, Glover reminds critics, her most successful literary efforts were published: *The Reform'd Coquet* and, in 1727, *The Accomplish'd Rake*.²⁰ This period of increased literary success involved, in Glover's reading, a new focus on the abuse of "landed property" as power, in which the vulnerable status of women was figured in relation to land and ownership.²¹ Davys's late career involves, then, a change of focus: Glover notes the contractual language of *Familiar Letters*, but given its deliberate (and satirical) adoption of the generic conventions of a simple amatory epistolary fiction, *Love and Friendship* belongs to the London stage of Davys's oeuvre, distinct from the more developed novelistic modes of *The Reform'd Coquet* or *The Accomplish'd Rake*.

As the frontispiece describes, the *Works* of 1725 contained "Poems, Plays, Novels, and Familiar Letters": *Love and Friendship*, as "Familiar Letters", appears in its own unique category. Using "Familiar Letters" as a generic marker to describe the text, and indeed as its title, perhaps further separates the work from the category of "Novel" Davys proposes. Reticence to describe *Love and Friendship* as a novel makes sense when considering Davys's relatively conventional but specific usage of that terminology. As she suggests in the preface

¹⁹ Susan Glover, *Engendering Legitimacy: Law, Property, and Early Eighteenth-Century Fiction* (Lewisburg: Bucknell University Press, 2006), 81.

²⁰ Glover, *Engendering Legitimacy*, 85.

²¹ Glover, *Engendering Legitimacy*, 98.

to volume one of the *Works*, contrasting her “Probable Feign’d Stories” to the “offensive” or “insipid” narratives found in “History and Travels”, Davys suggests the novel form is distinct from other modes of popular text in its “Advantage of Invention.”²² In short, Davys presents a theory of the novel:

I have in every Novel propos’d one entire Scheme or Plot, and the other Adventures are only incident or collateral to it; which is the great Rule prescribed by the Criticks, not only in Tragedy, and other Heroick Poems, but in Comedy too. The Adventure[...] are wonderful and probable; and I have[...] rewarded Virtue, and punish’d Vice.²³

While at once elevating the form of the novel by mere association with the high forms of tragedy and heroic epic, yet is separate from both through negating the prior portion of the sentence with “but”. Davys more closely aligns her work with “Comedy”. While *Love and Friendship* is not a tragedy, it does not appear to fit the schema of “rewarded Virtue, and punish’d Vice” Davys here identifies in her comedy. With its open ending, it is unclear it would satisfy the criteria of any category she proposes. The work’s deliberate ambiguities, that is, refute Davys’s own categorisations, challenging the reader and inviting a variety of

²² Mary Davys, *The Works of Mrs. Davys*, 2 vols., vol. 1 (London: Printed for H. Woodfall, 1725), III, IV.

²³ Davys, *Works*, 1, V. Downie uses this same passage to explore Davys’s theory of the novel in a paper arguing for the repudiation of Watt’s *The Rise of the Novel* (1957) and its teleological problems; suggesting the “popular taste for prose fiction” differentiated between romances on the one hand, and novels on the other. Most importantly, Downie argues that the novel may be a “convention” early in the eighteenth century, suggests serious cause for reconsidering Watt. Downie, “Mary Davys’s “Probable Feign’d Stories” and Critical Shibboleths about ‘The Rise of the Novel’.” 313-15, 18.

interpretative approaches to the text beyond its moral conclusions of “rewarded Virtue, and punish’d Vice”.²⁴

These moral conclusions are important. While Riley suggests Davys interrogates “antifeminist” motifs of women’s association with ungoverned passion and men’s with reason through the female Whig protagonist, Berina, in a separate analysis Alice Wakely emphasises the appropriation of the epistolary form, most clearly associated with Tory poetics, for a Whig political agenda.²⁵ These two accounts characterise *Familiar Letters* as an intervention in the mode of an amatory fiction. As Ros Ballaster has argued, the ideology and conflicts of gender difference are themselves constitutive of the early prose novel, particularly amatory fictions.²⁶ In rejecting the ‘masculinist’ account of the rise of the novel, Ballaster suggests the instrumentality of both women’s fiction and its disruption of form to the “novel’s formation”.²⁷ This instrumental disruptiveness is evident in Davys’s approach to pseudonymity: the development of a clear and robust pseudonymous identity in the form of the novel’s nominal author, Dick Fisher.

This nominal author appears not only on the title page of the text, but presents a full preface from his own perspective. While women writers throughout the eighteenth century often published under names other than their own, most commonlyonyms such as “a Lady”, it does not appear to have been common to construct a fictional identity, such as

²⁴ This question of “rewarded Virtue” evokes the mid-century example of Samuel Richardson’s *Pamela* (1740) in particular: the focus on moral activity as the core of the novel form reaches an ideological zenith in Richardson’s first epistolary novel. For a more thorough discussion of this, see Chapter Two of this thesis.

²⁵ Wakely, “Mary Davys and the Politics of Epistolary Form,” 262-63; Riley, “Mary Davys’s *Familiar Letters*,” 209-10.

²⁶ Ros Ballaster, *Seductive Forms: Women’s Amatory Fiction from 1684 to 1740* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 11.

²⁷ Ballaster, *Seductive Forms*, 14.

Fisher, and certainly appears to be a unique instance in Davys's practice. Important comparisons, such as Jane Barker's 'Galesia', the ostensible author and narrator of *Love Intrigues* (1713), suggests the complex figuration of Fisher is not without precedent. Yet, the consistency with which Barker revisited and indeed revised the 'Galesia' identity can be contrasted against Fisher's singular appearance, indicating his close affinity to the work he nominally authors, relevant only to the publication of that text.²⁸ Further, Barker's text is identifiably not only that of Galesia herself, as the dedication to the countess of Exeter in *Love Intrigues*, the text in which Barker first deploys the Galesia identity, is signed "J.B", suggesting a complex or shared corporate responsibility for the text.²⁹ Mary Hearne's 1718 *The Lover's Week*, another anonymised work "by a Young Lady", also printed for Edmund Curll, similarly features a dedication signed with initials: here, "M.H", that stamps an authorial claim upon the text.³⁰ In a point of difference, Davys's 1705 novel *The Fugitive* features an entirely anonymous dedication, unsigned, offering in its overview of how the text came to be one prototype of the personae developed into Fisher: a personal narrative, or metanarrative of the composition of that text is attached in dedicatory form, revised, as

²⁸ Carol Shiner Wilson suggests that Galesia went through a variety of revisions, *Love Intrigues* in 1713 evidencing Barker's play with the form and content of the Tory amatory tradition. Further, Wilson notes that "Galesia" functions as a feminised form of "Galaesus", the son of Apollo, indicating the authority of the pseudonym as a poetic voice. See Carol Shiner Wilson, "Jane Barker (1652–1732): From Galesia to Mrs Goodwife," in *Women and Poetry, 1660-1750*, ed. Sarah Prescott and David E. Shuttleton (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), 41, 44-45.

²⁹ Wilson notes that *Love Intrigues* was later republished within the *Entertaining Novels of Mrs Jane Barker* (1718), indicating a similar authorial claim to the text as Davys would come to exercise upon *Love and Friendship*. Galesia would come to get her first of two sequels to *Love Intrigues*, *A Patchwork Screen for the Ladies*, in 1723; the second was published in 1726. See Wilson, "Jane Barker (1652–1732): From Galesia to Mrs Goodwife," 43.

³⁰ Mary Hearne, *The Lover's Week: or, the Six Days Adventures of Philander and Amaryllis* (London: Printed for E. Curll, 1718), sig A1^r.

Bowden details, in her later novel *The Merry Wanderer* (1725).³¹ *The Reform'd Coquet* (1724) adopts the identity of the witty if perhaps stern “Mrs. Mary Davys”, signing as “Ma: Davys” in a corrective address admonishing the “Ladies of Great Britain”.³²

As Orr’s quantitative analysis suggests, some sixty-five new volumes of fiction published between 1690–1730 feature a pseudonym, or tagline, rather than the author’s name or simply no name at all, accounting for twenty-four percent of volumes of new fiction published in that period.³³ The 1718 edition of *Love and Friendship*, meanwhile, presents a complete dedication given by the pseudonym, suggesting he is more than a name, but a fictive persona, or character. This dedication, detailed and entirely fictional, represents a more robust attempt at developing a pseudonymous identity than any of Davys’s other publications. Given that the relatively common use of easily accepted pseudonyms and anonyms such as Davys’s “Lady” proved anonymous enough, Davys’s laborious development of the Fisher persona demands further attention.

The material that prefaces the 1718 edition of *Love and Friendship* appears to hint at the authenticity of the text it prefaces, but certain textual features emphasise the fact of its artificial construction, and indeed, the construction of its ostensible author, Fisher. The preface, titled “The Dedication to all Politicians, Poets, Gamesters, Friends, and Lovers”,

³¹ Martha Bowden, “Mary Davys: Self-Presentation and the Woman Writer's Reputation in the Early Eighteenth Century,” *Women's Writing* 3, no. 1 (1996/01/01 1996): 20-22, <https://doi.org/10.1080/0969908960030102>.

³² Mary Davys, *The Reform'd Coquet* (London: Printed for H. Woodfall, 1724), III, VIII.

³³ Orr, *Novel Ventures*, 77. Orr’s data suggests that 51% of works featured no name on the title page, 24% a “tagline or pseudonym” and only 17% featured a “name.” Mark Vareschi notes that in the 1710s, documents recording “anonymous” as a discrete term in any location within the document form 2.4% of the entire ECCO 1 and 2 corpus, suggestive of the privilege of anonyms, taglines, and pseudonyms over the names of authors: to Vareschi, it is not until the 1790s that interest in the “biographical writing subject” of the author invested new weight in the name, biography, and supposedly objective historicity of the author. See Mark Vareschi, *Everywhere and Nowhere: Anonymity and Mediation in Eighteenth-Century Britain* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2018), 37-38.

introduces this complex figure. “Dick Fisher” itself is a pun, the name of a type of score in a game of dice found in a gambling manual contemporary to the publication.³⁴ Like Barker’s Galesia, Fisher’s name appropriates from existing discourse to indicate his position. Fisher’s title reveals his relationship to a vice—“a Noble Student in the Art of Gambling” is far removed from Barker’s pseudonym’s proximity to the Latin god of poetry.³⁵ Unlike the figure of Galesia in Barker’s *Love Intrigues* Fisher does not appear in the text of *Love and Friendship* beyond its prefatory material, but still serves an important role through the dedication’s work in structuring potential readings of the text.

Yet, despite this critical position, the dedication underlines his inability to operate as a trustworthy intermediary between epistolary exchange of the novel and the reader. Fisher’s dedication claims he:

was once a *Tory*, but for Want of Arguments to Support my Principles, was forc’d to let them drop, and turn *Whig*: Then I had so much to say, that like a second Painting, laid on before the first is dry, my Arguments ran into one another, and confounded both themselves and me; upon which I resolv’d to leave them too, and turn Poet. But the cruel Bookseller, after I had run my self in Debt for a Quire of Paper, and fill’d it to the very Edges with sheer Wit, wou’d not give me as much for it as wou’d pay for’t (sig. A2^r).

The ambiguity of Fisher’s politics connotes a kind of pessimistic apoliticism. He is unsuccessful as a Whig, Tory, or poet. Rather than emphasising his extraordinary achievements, trustworthiness, or political knowledge, Fisher’s dedication draws more

³⁴ Charles Cotton, *The Compleat Gamester* (London: Printed for Charles Brome, 1710), 124.

³⁵ Carol Shiner Wilson, “Introduction,” in *The Galesia Trilogy and Selected Manuscript Poems of Jane Barker*, ed. Carol Shiner Wilson (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), xxxvii. As above, the connection between Galesia and Apollo is well established, and lends authority to Barker’s pseudonym.

attention to his failings and, likewise, his ambiguities. The unreliability of Fisher as an author is important to Davys' realisation of the instability of the early novel. It is crucial to reckon with the untrustworthiness of the novel's paratext, without which the text might fall into more obvious and popular literary categories—secret history, or amatory fiction. Instead, by refusing to suggest a clear, factual basis for the work's composition, Davys and Fisher participate in the founding of a novelistic tradition even if neither are conscious of it: the emphasis or acceptance of fictionality as potentially meritorious in-and-of-itself.³⁶ For the novel-in-letters, this cleaves a divergent path from its antecedents in either secret history or amatory fiction, while borrowing heavily from both genres. The ambiguity of Fisher deviates from traditional emphases of value, morality, and worth in literary efforts as fixed concepts, gesturing at the possibility of a broader, more inclusive literary tradition open to less obviously moral actors. Drawing attention to such ambiguities in particular conversation with Fisher's political allegiance serves to, further, complicate narratives of value by repositioning the political as transitory, ephemeral, or irrelevant.

As Wakely suggests, the work's "political bias" may be called into question: reading *Love and Friendship*, or *Familiar Letters*, as Wakely argues, through the lens of Davys's professed Whiggism may be less productive than relying on the evidence of the work itself.³⁷ Davys's novel seems to insist on its potential divorce from politics. In the letter of November

³⁶ To Catherine Gallagher, fictionality and the novel are mutually constitutive; yet, the novel's efforts towards verisimilitude and insistence on referentiality mask this origin. As fictional writing accelerated, it was separated from deception as a category. To James Phelan, Gallagher's argument articulates how eighteenth-century readers focused their attention to character in accounting for their own selfhood by comparison to the fictive persons of novels. See Catherine Gallagher, "The Rise of Fictionality," in *The Novel*, ed. Franco Moretti (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006), 337-39; James Phelan, "Fictionality, Audiences, and Character: A Rhetorical Alternative to Catherine Gallagher's 'Rise of Fictionality,'" *Poetics Today* 39, no. 1 (2018): 114-15, <https://doi.org/10.1215/03335372-4265095>.

³⁷ Wakely, "Mary Davys and the Politics of Epistolary Form," 262.

21st around which the text splits, Artander, pursuing “Consideration” and “Friendship,” demands he and Berina abandon their politicised “Disputes” and avoid “Misunderstanding” (27). This moment demarcates the shift towards the amatory plot of the second half of the novel. The paratextual dedication which prefaces the novel highlights this dynamic. The very flight from politics produces the text of *Love and Friendship*—it is the “Copy of all the letters” written by his “old Friend” who has “fallen in love” and the mistress that friend writes to (sig. A4^v). The amatory narrative is thus embedded in the dedication, as Fisher highlights this generic aspect of the text over and above its political material.

This reading would support Wakely and Riley’s interpretations of *Familiar Letters* as a genteel satire on amatory fiction. That is, Fisher’s straight reading of the volume he claims to have collated and edited, is one mirrored by and attractive to critical readings due to its sophisticated explanation for a variety of textual features: the epistolary mode of the novel, the love intrigues, and the faux-Latin diction of the character’s names all point towards its relatively normative participation within a particular genre. Even so, the bifurcation following Artander’s desire to avoid “Misunderstanding” in turn suggests a difficulty in reading *Love and Friendship* as a simplistic amatory plot. The presence of the complex political conversation preceding this switch suggests an awareness of, participation within, and challenge to patriarchal attitudes which precluded women’s participation in politics. Berina’s headstrong Whiggism may not only serve to emphasise her intellectual independence or potential for political participation, but further provide a rationale for the text’s strange narrative incoherence: inserting a figure as romantically divested as a staunch Whig woman into a plot governed by Tory romantic tropes indicates more is going on than a re-articulation of those tropes, but that their inversion may, perhaps, be more partial or understated than prior scholarship has suggested. The Fisher dedication provides a direction

for reading which undermines the reading of the text as a Whiggish satire. Yet, even given Fisher's important position, his representation is decidedly playful:

You may believe me, Ladies, when I tell you I am a Man of much Good-nature and much good Manners; the later I bestow upon your Sex, the former upon my own; and it is to oblige both, that I have undertaken to publish the following Sheets. But methinks I see two or three politick Gentlemen looking with very judicious Faces, and whispering to each other, that every rascally Scribler shou'd not be suffer'd to invade their Rights, and pretend to meddle with what they do not understand. (sig. A3^r)

Fisher's ambiguous position between the "Ladies" and the "politick Gentlemen" hints at the apoliticism of the text. The copy suggests explicitly Fisher's possession of both "good Manners" and "Good-nature", holding him in tension between two differently gendered alignments of behaviour. That Fisher, to the Gentlemen, fails to understand politics and his writing represents an imposition, an invasion of "their Rights", further highlights this "rascally" role the "Scribler" takes on. Politics is figured as a masculine demesne, yet one in which the "judicious Faces" of its participants are open to parody and exaggeration; unlike the type figures of the Gentlemen, and in his parodic description of them, Fisher's failures to attain political organisation suggest his uniqueness as a subject over and against these characterological sketches and authorise his publication of *Love and Friendship* as a product of a discrete, individuated self.

Furthermore, this manoeuvre itself highlights the novel's own flight from politics: insisting on the arbitrary status of political performance by rendering its participants comic type figures, Fisher himself parodies the excesses of political organising and instead figures a gendered state and its corollary, good manners, and good nature, as key to his figuration.

Moreover, in his possession of both, Fisher accentuates the binary status of these two attributes while suggesting his flexibility in this attainment. Given Davys's own tendency for manipulating, as Tiffany Potter puts it, the "prescriptive" assumptions of her cultural moment, there is a certain aptness to the disruptive Fisher as an analogue for her own experiences as an author.³⁸ Potter argues that libertinism occupies a principal place in Davys's imaginary, the ambiguities of which reject the "culture of virtue", and the demands of modesty, in pursuit of the deconstruction of entrenched privileges of masculinity.³⁹ Such a reading draws on Davys's insistent emphases on libertine figures like Fisher, whose gendered ambivalence cannot be wholly resolved to strict standards appropriate to genteel men. Fisher the libertine, then, abandons some of his privilege to model the kind of male participant in culture, a participant Davys emboldens. Davys's presence is a guiding one: suggesting Fisher's own weaknesses or insufficiencies, which, paradoxically, produce a more robust, and feminised, footing for the project overall.

The spectral traces of Davys's femininity may be identified in the relative power of Berina to literarily produce an accounting of, or for, her own sense of self. In an example of this literariness, Berina presents in one of her letters the narrative of an "old Batchelor" recently married (50). This letter emphasises the position of the man as the agent of choice within marriage. Presented with a choice between "a Woman of tolerable Sense, a good Face and Humour, the other a mere *Miss Hoiden*", the man first chooses the former (50). The reference to John Vanbrugh's *The Relapse* (1696) identified by Martha F. Bowden invokes a

³⁸ Tiffany Potter, "'Decorous Disruption': The Cultural Voice of Mary Davys," *Eighteenth-Century Women* 1 (2001): 64.

³⁹ Potter, "Decorous Disruption," 65, 91. As Potter argues elsewhere, "libertinism" serves as a demarcating separator from openly didactic text, even if the "surprisingly flattering" depiction of the libertine complicates the "moralist" readings of these texts themselves. See Tiffany Potter, "Genre and Cultural Disruption: Libertinism and the Early English Novel," *English Studies in Canada* 29, no. 1 (2003): 184, <https://doi.org/10.1353/esc.2003.0013>.

directly negative comparison (43n). Vanbrugh's Miss Hoyden is anything but "of tolerable Sense". To quote from her in *The Relapse* itself:

Sure, never nobody was used as I am. I know well enough what other girls do, for all they think to make a fool of me. It's well I have a husband a coming, or, eod, I'd marry the baker, I would so! Nobody can knock at the gate, but presently I must be locked up; and here's the young grey-hound bitch can run loose about the house all day long, she can; 'tis very well.⁴⁰

Vanbrugh invites the rather misogynistic comparison between the "grey-hound bitch" and Miss Hoyden to emphasise the equal undesirability of both. The implication, inflected with the contrast between the two figures, is the existence of a wanton female sexuality, and one that is highly suspect. While the dog is free to roam, Miss Hoyden's sexual proclivities are quite literally contained, against her overabundance of desire which would lead to her seeking union with the lower-status baker. The connection between women's sexuality and an animalistic urge in Vanbrugh's play, and in turn Davys's allusion to the same representation, suggests in the contrast between the two women, it is sense that fetters an otherwise uncontrollable, wild desire. Yet, in the comic *Relapse*, the unlikely Miss Hoyden, detained in her home due to her artlessness and lack of refinement, is the zone for a struggle between the aptly named Lord Foppington and his brother, Young Fashion, warring over her hand. This unlikeliness of Miss Hoyden as a marriage prospect produces the comic effects of Vanbrugh's play.

Here, however, Davys inverts the dynamic. Rather than presenting two men competing for marriage to her Miss Hoiden, she represents the marriage market as

⁴⁰ John Vanbrugh, *The Relapse, or, Virtue in danger*, ed. Bernard Harris (London: A. & C. Black, 1986), 71.

prejudicially favouring male choice, with the one gentleman weighing up the merits of two potential spouses. In a satiric twist, the choice between Miss Hoiden and the woman of sense is reduced to an economic one. Berina writes that after making his proposal to the woman of sense, the gentleman “found a Brass Half-Crown, which with some earnestness he return’d to her Father, and desir’d that it might be chang’d.” (51) Finding her father unwilling to exchange the coin, a fraudulent piece of currency, for the real thing, he “gather’d up his Stick and Gloves... and so they parted.” The merits of sense, to the marriage-minded man, are less important than the fact that Miss Hoiden’s money proves “all *Sterling*”, or genuine and legitimate currency. That a Miss Hoiden on the marriage market might be valued more highly than a woman of sense for purely economic reasons suggests Davys’s scepticism towards the operations of such a market, if a market is to operate on economic grounds and above the personal qualities of its participants. Even as Lisa O’Connell suggests that English fiction turned to marriage far later than Davys’s text in order to interrogate the growing political rifts between the Anglican establishment, the state apparatus, and the market, by 1718 marriageability looms as a spectre rooted in the affairs not of the heart, but of economy.⁴¹

After Miss Hoiden and the gentleman are “link’d”, or married, Berina asserts that “before the Honey-Moon be half over, she will fret him to Death, or he will beat her to Mummy,” the last part an idiomatic expression for marital violence, and explicitly remarking in the line that follows that older bachelors possess an “ill-nature” (52). This brief line suggests, firstly, Berina’s cognizance of the errors of a match made for money over mutual respect and sense, and secondly her awareness of the intrinsic dangers of the marriage market to women possessed only of material value.⁴²

⁴¹ Lisa O’Connell, *The Origins of the English Marriage Plot: Literature, Politics and Religion in the Eighteenth Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019), 3. <https://doi.org/10.1017/9781108757706..>

⁴² See Ruth Perry, *Women, Letters, and the Novel* (New York: AMS Press, 1980), 32.

Upon the marriage market, women represent a kind of commodity as Berina herself articulates through the reference. Even if a particular woman is particularly desirable upon the market, the attributes which confirm this desirability are interchangeable, erasing particularisation. Such an interchangeability is invoked when Berina demands she “chuse a Wife for you, one who will not abuse Artander’s Good-nature, but mix every Action with Love and Prudence, a Woman of unlimited Goodness, and one who will make you happy, since nothing but a Wife can do it” (79). There is an immediate differentiation between women, individually, and the “Woman of unlimited Goodness” whose absence of particularities confirms both her desirability and her capacity to perform a role that none “but a Wife can”. If every woman is imperfect in her own way, the “Woman” is not; the “soft-hearted Ladies that are imprest like Wax” are characters in an important sense, that is, operate in a representative and fictive capacity, magnifying common facets of identity, in this case their femininity, to the point where identifiable particularities are elided, smoothed over, or simply not represented (66).⁴³ “Wax” both emphasises the mimetic capacity of such “Ladies” to, quite literally, serve as the surface for inscription, but simultaneously invokes the rather infinite revisability of such an identity, a semi-viscous substance which may be reformed and reshaped in a variety of ways. Artander himself articulates the precise opposite, when he remarks that “Our Faults are laid in our Way as mortifying Blocks,” suggesting a solidity to particularities in the connection between “Faults” and “Blocks” which opposes the smooth

⁴³ Amelia Dale draws on the philosophical importance of wax as a revisable, yet impressible surface in Plato, Aristotle, Descartes, and Freud to argue for its recurrence as a motif of “impression” where “matter and spirit meet”. To Dale, impression and wax serve as a synecdoche of the process of marking consciousness, and ideas, upon the self. This is reflected further, as Dale notes, in Locke, for whom the metaphor of ideas being “stamped” upon the mind radically orients the reader against the ideal of an “innate principle”. See Amelia Dale, *The Printed Reader: Gender, Quixotism, and Textual Bodies in Eighteenth-Century Britain* (Lewisburg, PA: Bucknell University Press, 2019), 1-7; John Locke, *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, ed. Pauline Phemister (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1689: 2008), 17.

revisability of wax (70). A duality is established not, or not only, between the masculine and the feminine, but between the alterable and the permanent, the revisable and the obstinate.

Yet Berina is stubbornly particularised. This in turn proves to encourage Artander's pursuit of her as a unique figure of romantic intrigue. Indeed, her continued resistance to Artander's attempts at seduction invites and toys with his desire:

But then the dismal Effects of not loving, to be call'd Ill-natur'd, and an Old Maid, who wou'd not rather choose to be undone, than lye under such scandalous Eipthets. I have dwelt a little longer upon this Subject than I shou'd have done, because I think and fear *Artander* seem'd in his last Letter to lean a little that Way. When we approve of a Thing, we implicitly act it; and if you be brought to think a Man happy in a fine Wife, the next work will be to get one your self; which, if you do, poor *Berina* may say she had a Friend; for *Artander* is lost past Recovery. I desire, in your next, you will either make a generous Confession, or give me some Assurance my Thoughts are Ill grounded (66–67).

Coyly, Berina teases out of Artander the confession of his romantic feeling for her by suggesting her fearful apprehension of the very same. Again, with the enforcement of distance, Berina can only encourage or dissuade Artander's suit through the rhetorical craft of the epistle: here, she ironizes her own hesitation by invoking its negative effects upon her reputation. Like Fisher, Berina skirts the boundaries of acceptable behaviour: criticising Artander's suit even as she teases these borders to her own advantage. As she puts it further down the same page, "Women always talk more than they write, as Men always write more than they think", subtly inviting verbal contact and its demands of presence (67). It is possible, if not likely, that Berina's resistance to Artander's suit partly confirms her own

libertine, or at least, coquettish status, iteratively forcing his hand towards his declaration of amatory feeling—and, thus, investing her with the power to acquiesce, negotiate, or reject his suit. By asking Artander to present the very thing she fears from him, Berina perhaps intends to control the trajectory of the relationship, and the terms upon which the epistolary becomes the actual.

This relationship is principally embedded through the text's dualism, a torsion between two perspectives that are held in symmetry yet ultimately subsumed by the *Love and Friendship*'s generic horizons. As Wakely identifies, the distinctions between Whig and Tory in *Familiar Letters* may be identified in the separate approaches to the “oppositional political debate” of succession politics, stemming from alternative positions over the Hanoverian accession yet debating (and, thus, implicating) various key moments in English cultural history.⁴⁴ The early letters of the novel situate Berina as a Whig protestant—ostensibly shocked by the “Objects of Cruelty presented to my View” in “Queen *Mary*'s Reign”, and the Catholic “*Irish* Rebellion, where I saw more than a hundred thousand Souls murder'd in cold Blood” when Artander directs her to the history of England for a “Cure of Whiggism” (14–15). Artander's own politics are less clearly conveyed, perhaps owing to Davys's own Whig allegiance—yet, more constitutively form the commanding perspective of his character: Wakely identifies Artander's leanings as a kind of absolutist Toryism, a strand of the text which partially resolves the tension between form and subject of *Love and Friendship*.⁴⁵ Wakely, importantly, describes *Familiar Letters* as a discontinuity: the amatory epistolary mode belongs to Tory poetics; the Whig elements of the text appear almost “incongruous”

⁴⁴ Wakely, “Mary Davys and the Politics of Epistolary Form,” 260-61.

⁴⁵ Wakely, “Mary Davys and the Politics of Epistolary Form,” 260.

with its formal structure.⁴⁶ Coupled with Riley's influential reading of *Familiar Letters*'s feminism, Artander's rather extreme political Toryism helps situate both the feminisation of the form of the epistolary novel *and* its re-signification as an emblem not only *for* but *of* a dualism.

Artander collapses the soteriological and the dynastic, demonstrating a loyalty to Stuart absolutism which precludes alternative viewpoints. Decrying the Whigs, he suggests that the execution of Charles I at the outset of the Civil War saw "the best of Men, the best of Kings, made a Sacrifice to the Malice of Knaves and fools" and identifies a tendency within the Whig movement which persists in the form of "persecut'd Clergy, your defac'd and demolish'd Churches, your whole Religion become abominable" with "nothing but Canting and Hypocrisy left" (11–12). The Stuart succession represents not only a particular political formation but a divine or sacred order, linked to the preservation of the church. For Artander, the divine order and the questions of monarchic legitimacy are explicitly linked. Artander later describes rebelling against the Stuart monarchy as "Atheism and Damnation", an implicit rejection of the "Word of God" through an invocation of the Christian adage to "give Cesar his Due" (19, 20). Implicit in such statements is a theological claim, the direct intervention of God in human affairs, and an assertion of a particular hierarchy. The suggestion of an interventionist god indicates Artander's suspicion of the human capacity to manage our own affairs, emphasising instead the theoretical advantages of absolutism proper: the abdication of personal responsibility, and, thus, a degree of agency, in favour of the protection offered by the god, or monarch, in question. Artander's Toryism can be read as a

⁴⁶ Wakely, "Mary Davys and the Politics of Epistolary Form," 257. Wakely argues that Davys's work represents an "exception" to the "Toryish" trends of epistolary fiction—to the extent of ironizing both Tory conventions and sarcastically reproducing similar scenes to those of Behn or L'Estrange. See also Toni Bowers, "Seduction Narratives and Tory Experience In Augustan England," *The Eighteenth Century* 40, no. 2 (1999): 149–50.

patrarichalism: a seventeenth-century ideological formation described by William James Booth as a “panoply” of hierarchy, confirming first the absolute position of the father, and the husband, as the divine and rightful authority, coextensive with man’s nature as a creature of bondage—born into subjection to the father, and to the Christian god.⁴⁷ Personal agency, the kinds of which lead to the emergence of modern selves or characters, simply does not figure in such a neat conclusion.

Yet Artander seems to have a vivacity of character; perhaps one reason for this is that his politics are, ultimately, perfunctory. Laughably so—it is part of the satirical structure of the text. His positions are outmoded, if not antiquated: where Artander directs Berina to historical documents, in one instance the monarchically sanctioned “English Annals” for guidance, Berina points towards contemporary events, or crises, in evidence for her claims (11). In one early instance Berina refers to the 1717 “Acclamations of Joy for the birth of a young Prince,” an ephemeral political moment soured by the death of the child in February 1718, but nevertheless truly contemporary in contrast with the historic death of Charles (8).⁴⁸ Likewise, Berina dwells not on the “Martyrdom of King *Charles*” but on the “Men whose Mercies are Cruelty.... Now lurking in secret Places for an Opportunity to devour us” (17–18). Turning not to the past, but to the immediate moment, produces for Berina a presentist bias, though one that does not totally occlude the historicization of the present.

⁴⁷ William James Booth, *Households: On the Moral Architecture of the Economy* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2018), 98..

⁴⁸ As Toni Bowers argues, the “terror of anarchy” or of the Civil War figured large in the imaginary of post-Revolution Britain: the legitimacy of the Hanoverian accession (and, indeed, succession) was complicated by historic animosities and suspicions that had only been deepened by the Exclusion Crisis. While by 1718 these debates may seem historical, the visceral provocations of the two protagonists emphasise the centrality of succession politics following the Civil War to partisan identity. See Bowers, “Seduction Narratives and Tory Experience In Augustan England,” 131, 49.

Such a bias is also formally embedded: Artander remarks in his first letter of the novel that “Time, that us’d to fly, goes only a Foot-pace” (1–2). Throughout the work, references to environments of decay, stillness, or decrepitude appear to reinforce the motif of an “eternal Friendship” (2). This is counterposed by Artander’s demand for a “speedy Answer to every Letter” which modulates these tableaux of decay with images of immediacy. In one instance, the “Tea-Kettle boys”, forcing Berina to conclude her letter (38). Likewise, Artander becomes “seas’d with a Fit of Chagreen”, thus bringing a letter to a premature end in “Haste” (43). Not only do these moments serve as touches of realism, extending the narrative world beyond the text of the letters to include their composition, but like the punctual dates of each of the twenty-two letters of the correspondence, this contrast between the ephemeral and the eternal echoes the torsions of *Love and Friendship* as a pseudonymous work—a text drawing attention to its own artificiality, and thus the discursivity of any conception of its authorship. Further, the belatedness of Artander’s politics positions his beliefs as ultimately antiquated, emphasising his absolutist Toryism’s divorce from the contemporary, and feminised, Whig politics of Berina.

Late in the novel, after Artander makes clear his romantic attitude towards Berina, she replies that he is “guilty of Breach of Promise”, using his “own first Letter” as a “Testimony”: the legalistic language embeds both a legitimate form of authority in Berina’s voice as it also distances her further from the compliant subjects of amatory plots (116). Rehearsing, as Glover puts it, Whig claims to the primacy of contractual thinking, the “contingency” of both parties acquiescing to given roles is necessary for any constellation of relationship, whether a friendship or a marriage.⁴⁹ Yet early eighteenth-century understandings of marriage emphasised not the mutuality Berina seems to ardently desire and

⁴⁹ Glover, *Engendering Legitimacy*, 84.

pursue in her friendship, but more often than not privileged male headship and paternal power, whether as an explicit ideological formation or not. Amanda Vickery describes how matrimony risked “bondage to misery” for women, even as it was commonly held that “mutual love” might serve to protect the interests of both parties.⁵⁰ Reticence to accept the risk of marriage, on Berina’s part, is emphatically centred on the idea of poor male headship:

I do assure you, the Promise you make of inverting the God of Nature’s
Rules, and being all Obedience, is no Inducement to me to become a Wife: I
shou’d despise a Husband as much as a King who wou’d give up his own
Prerogative, or unman himself to make his Wife the Head. (117)

Berina attempts to deploy Artander’s patriarchalist logic against him. The effective centring of male power in the tandem positions of “Husband” and “King” invokes a common constellation of such patriarchal ordinance: from the (male) God is issued a hierarchy of “Nature” which can be flexibly expanded or contracted to cement the position of specific men in relation to each other, and particularly in relation to the unmanned. That “unman” represents both a state, the non-male, and the process of becoming such, brings emphasis to the fluidity or transferability of male power within such a system. Berina literally refuses to “[...]man” herself, to become the “Head”. Collapsing the signification of masculinity and power, “Head” contains both the signifying weight or force of patriarchal order and a resonance with a masculinised concept of reason. Riley describes such efforts by Berina as an attempt to render Artander’s lovesickness ridiculous, thus “unworthy”.⁵¹ If Artander’s unworthiness as a masculine suitor is evident to Berina, rejection of the “deceptive, seductive claims” made by amatory discourses requires an *externality* to such a discourse, a vantage

⁵⁰ Amanda Vickery, *The Gentleman's Daughter: Women's Lives in Georgian England* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003), 39.

⁵¹ Riley, “Mary Davys's *Familiar Letters*,” 217.

point from which it may be in view.⁵² Thus, if epistolary fiction represents a kind of access to an “interior” of selfhood and of subjectivity, it provides such through representing the boundaries, limits, or exteriors which girds the subject. In *Love and Friendship*, gender identity and romance appear to constitute the interior, beyond which is a mechanistic and rational externality which coordinates or impels its constitution.

Artander’s positions not only makes the Whig allegiance of the text clear, but furthermore emphasise the discontinuity of the text from the Tory tradition of the epistolary novel—Davys, in the text’s bifurcation of perspective, surpasses “one entire Scheme or Plot”, presenting instead two characters and their competing accounts of themselves within a simplistic premise of separation by distance.⁵³ Thus, the significance of *Love and Friendship* is partially in its abandoning of Tory poetics alongside Tory politics. A contractual politics, a shared cross-gender capacity for reason, and a practice of polyphonic representation requires subjects, Berina and Artander, who can meaningfully represent, carry forward, or perform the activities of these competing conscious characters. Davys’s innovation was not solely her pseudonymous publication: it was the reintegration of a politically alien tradition within that of her oeuvre. Building upon pre-existing accounts of Davys’s authorship, politics, and feminisation of the epistolary form, it is possible to see how an authorial gender dissipated into the revised feminist epistolary narrative, even as it remains a clear biographical fact of Davys’s life. Ultimately, by dissolving the two participants of the text into discursive parrots of alternating political positions, Davys radically re-orientes the epistolary novel to consider the mental activities of its characters. This timely intervention, rendering the political as personal, anticipates mid-century examples of the novel’s efforts at centring the body. Organising her plot around the political interests of its characters while emphasising the

⁵² Riley, “Mary Davys’s *Familiar Letters*,” 216.

⁵³ Davys, *Works*, 1, V.

pertinent question of desirability in marriage allows Davys to presage later examples and their extraordinary focus on the body as the key site of moral and affective activity.

Chapter 2. “My Prudence and Modesty”: Narratives of Alienation and the Politics of Virtue
in Samuel Richardson’s *Pamela; or, Virtue Rewarded* (1740)

By reading Samuel Richardson’s *Pamela; Or, Virtue Rewarded* (1740) this chapter interrogates the intersection between the body and the novel-in-letters’s characters—how these intertwine, or fail to, or how they cohere with other pressing questions of agency, personhood, and the nature of the self.¹ Particularly, through a close reading of the novel, it becomes apparent that agency is not located within the central ‘characters’ of Pamela, or Mr. B, but rather remains located in nonpersonal forces of ‘providence’ which effect, rather than augment, Pamela’s transition from maidservant to mistress, and finally, wife. Arguing that, in this novel, character functions as an ideological rather than psychological site, this chapter addresses intersections of text and self to build a more robust understanding of the epistolary novel’s focus upon the construction of textual agents in their individuated form in participation with, and in reference to, the wider emergence of the modern ‘self’ located within the long-eighteenth century. By returning to the body as the key site of subjectivity, a new emphasis upon the nexus of physical and affective experience a body may participate in over and above the psychic experiences of mind might be explored. Furthermore, by situating

¹ This chapter draws on the 1740 first edition of Richardson’s novel, with its linguistic emphasis on Pamela and Mr B’s class disparity, in order to most clearly argue for the fixity of certain kinds of status within the text. While the 2011 Cambridge Edition of Richardson’s *Pamela* is more recent and more squarely oriented to an expert reader, it is based on the 1741 second edition. As T. C Duncan Eaves and Ben D. Kimpel note, this subsequent edition incorporates Richardson’s revisions that erase Pamela’s “timidity” and deference, by replacing her use of the word “Master” following her marriage to Mr. B. This second edition also silently corrects many of Pamela’s errors in expression and articulation, as Eaves and Kimpel also note. However, given this second edition’s efforts at recuperating Pamela’s gentility; in order to unearth the class disparity and objectification of Pamela Richardson’s revised editions attempted to ameliorate, this chapter relies on the 1740 edition; thus the Oxford 2008 reprint is cited in all instances. See fn. 15 for full bibliographic information. For more, see T. C. Duncan Eaves and Ben D. Kimpel, “Richardson’s Revisions of *Pamela*.” *Studies in Bibliography* 20 (1967), 64-65.

the body as an enacted object, one performed upon by the nonpersonal agents of Richardson's novel, this chapter resists the teleological conclusion of *Pamela*; that its protagonist is inevitably the victim or wife of Mr. B. Instead close attention to the novel's unwieldy disempowerment of its supposedly agential figures opens an alternative possibility that shows 'character' to be a site of ideological, rather than personal, conflict.

In centering the body, the self may become commodified: there are theoretical advantages to this in approaching *Pamela*. As Barbara Johnson suggests, the structure of capitalism converts the person into the thing, centering commodities as the organizing subject of the community.² *Pamela* can be read alongside the transformation of selves and labours into a system of individuals isolated and yet—contradictorily—unified by their class statuses. Character emerges through the epistolary novel's intersection with a capitalistic modernity as a way of understanding those novelistic agents that forward the plots of their texts. In contrast to the competing subjectivities identified in Chapter One, the mid-century epistolary form's new attention was to narrative exploration of minutiae which might imitate, mimic, and produce the so-called mental states of its characters. Simultaneously, Richardson's novel consistently draws attention to its own constructed nature through its emphases on a dyad of in/authenticity, and the commodification of the human form as an actor of labours.

² Barbara Johnson, *Persons and Things* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2008), 22. Early capitalism is no doubt different from Johnson's survey, yet the structural impact of economics upon personal identity cannot be disregarded. In an important instance, Dror Wahrman and Jonathan Sheehan address how pre-Smithian self-interested class-bound acts within the middle of the eighteenth century (1752) were converted into public and communal identities: arguing for an increased attention upon the necessity of regulation evidenced by the so-called "poor laws", the suggestion of an actor beyond human capacities—in their case study, "providence"—points to an early association between economics and an idealised view of the economy's governing power over the community. "Providence", to Wahrman and Sheehan, is one actor which might convert individual acts of class-based self-interest into the "public good". See Jonathan Sheehan and Dror Wahrman, *Invisible Hands: Self-Organization and the Eighteenth Century* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2015), 238.

As Deidre Lynch has argued one foundational intersection of ‘character’ and commodity’s regulation through capital comes in the Theophrastan forms of the portrait caricature, the ‘type’.³ The ‘type’ figure—easily reproducible and limited in its agency—reflects a materialist association between the thinking and feeling subject and their physiognomy, physicality, or figuration. The multiple meanings of ‘character’ over the course of the long eighteenth century are suggestive of this connection. A lack of fixity in meaning suggested by plural usage—a workplace reference, a sketch of an individual, a theatrical person—necessitates attention to the kind of fictive persons understood as ‘characters’ in our modern sense. It is well worth asking whether the modern term ‘character’ is indeed applicable to the figurative persons of eighteenth-century English epistolary fictions; re-reading *Pamela* beyond the presumption of early realist representations of agential individual actors reintegrates the fictive self within the boundaries of established generic conventions.

This chapter therefore suggests that in more sophisticated representations of ‘character’, the surface representations of Theophrastus persist as a device which governs the limits of agency and autonomy of a particular figuration. The subordination of the particular to the interests of narrative—or, more accurately, the particularization of a generality—would suggest, as Michael McKeon argues, the coordinating centrality of abstraction, into commodity or labour, and its careful counterposing against the emerging, individualised, personal identities of eighteenth-century British capitalism’s constituents.⁴ The body’s role in this individuation is, however, mystified by its seeming dissipation into text. Centering bodies and embodiment in relation to the epistolary mode may help gesture towards the

³ Deidre Lynch, *The Economy of Character: Novels, Market Culture, and the Business of Inner Meaning* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998), 39-40.

⁴ Michael McKeon, *The Secret History of Domesticity: Public, Private, and the Division of Knowledge* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2005), XXII. McKeon gestures particularly towards “the family, women, the individual” as the constitutive elements of a new “structural opposition between the public and the private”.

theoretical possibility of its reintegration in accounts of eighteenth-century English literature and culture more broadly.

Even given its theoretical abstraction, the body, Nancy Armstrong suggests, gained a new significance by the middle of the eighteenth century as it presented the “capacity for sympathy” of individual actors. As Armstrong argues, “transforming the body” from a mark of rank, status, or class into a “container of unique subjectivity” required the emergence of new rhetorical possibilities in the form of characters that could be easily understood as discrete, subjective individuals.⁵ In so doing, forms like epistolary fiction particularly provide a representative tool for these new possibilities, demanding of these novel’s correspondents a literacy which, to Armstrong, highlights their new status as subject. In individuating the modern subject, Armstrong then asserts that Richardson presents “literacy alone” as the transformative agent from object of forcible possession to subject, capable of consent.⁶ The body might have a historicization and an agency hitherto only circumspectly explored in accounts of epistolary fiction, occluded as it is by the letter’s privileged position as a seeming missive of an intentional, agential, sentimental self.

But surely the body must retain a special importance in the creation of the individuated subject of an economy. Bodies—unlike selves—perform labours, reproduce, and carry the economic burdens of their communities in corporealized ways that the psychological agent can only mirror, represent, or present as a metaphor.⁷ Thus, the quite

⁵ Nancy Armstrong, *How Novels Think: the Limits of British Individualism from 1719-1900* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2005), 4.

⁶ Armstrong, *How Novels Think*, 5.

⁷ The living body is actively implicated in its materiality by its status of labouring, and communing: to queer theorist Judith Butler, materialisation represents a symptom of power, within an economy of discursive intelligibility. Resisting intelligibility in turn dematerialises the body as merely discourse. On this view, the active participation in economy is one stringent dissimilarity between the conceptual and the actual, the body and the self—

literal violence acted upon bodies in Richardson's first foray into writing an epistolary novel, *Pamela*, becomes metaphoric—and thereby textual—not in such violence's enacting, nor in its writing, but only at the stage of its reading. Investing in violence as a metaphor, rather than the embodied activity of one (fictive) person against another mystifies the corporeality of bodies, their particularities and specificities, and the resistance of the body to abstraction. As this chapter argues, the fleshy, precarious act of writing invites attention to nuance, precarity, and vulnerability.

At stake in reading Richardson's *Pamela*, then, is a complex intersection of questions of gender, performance, and authenticity. Armstrong suggests that the novel explores “not only what made a female desirable, but also what made her female in the first place.”⁸ Armstrong's formulation hints at an instability of the term ‘female’ in its making, and by attributing to a gender a genealogy invokes its historicization. Given Pamela's constant motion, transport, and circulation through the novel, it is hard to image her character in the static terms that could cement her position as either the naïve servant girl or indeed the wife of Mr. B. Indeed, her mobility between such positions is metonymized by the movement of her letters themselves. That this mobility seems nearly teleological—a foregone conclusion—suggests Richardson's plot acts *upon* its characters, rather than its characters enacting plot.

following Irigaray, Butler is able to distinguish between the “phallogocentric” signification of body *as* power and read corporealization *against* this economy of signs. It is worth noting—Pamela is, after all, a servant, and a body implicated by her reproductivity within the marriage market: this corporeal nature resists the easy reduction to text alone. See Judith Butler, *Bodies that Matter: on the Discursive Limits of “Sex”* (Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge, 2011), 11-12. For a complex reading of Pamela's status as a servant and its implications for her embodiment, see Scarlett Bowen, “‘A sawce-box and boldface indeed’: refiguring the female servant in the Pamela-Antipamela debate,” *Studies in Eighteenth-Century Culture* 28, no. 1 (1999): 257-85. <https://doi.org/10.1353/sec.2010.0234>.

⁸ Nancy Armstrong, *Desire and Domestic Fiction: a Political History of the Novel* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987), 117.

As Julie Park describes, the assimilation of Richardson's *Pamela* into the genre of the "domestic novel" is not without problems.⁹ Using the category of "domestic novel" to describe a generic cluster of conventions of psychological realism identified within novels that take place in predominantly domestic spaces may, in fact, draw attention away from the complication of movement within, around, or with spaces that are generally represented as immovable or stationary. Importantly, Park problematises the relationship of interiority to the novel through attention to the material culture of eighteenth-century England, particularly the portable interiors of the novel—the "mental homes" or spaces of interiority "deeply embedded" in both novels and architectural environments— which bring the interior into active movement, with motions of "commercial exchange, vehicular transport, and social mobility" driving the text.¹⁰ Richardson's investment in an architecture of intimate spaces traversed by the novel's characters draws attention, as Danielle Bobker makes clear, to a fatalism: the novel starts and ends from the foregone conclusion that the dead Lady B's servant will marry her son, drawn as Pamela (already) is into the aristocratic caste from her proximity to these intimate zones at the novel's outset.¹¹ In essence, Pamela is moving from bedside to bed. Even despite consistent efforts by Pamela at deferring such exchanges as take place in the novel, centred around its transition, as Hannah Chaskin describes, between two narratives—one of Pamela's resistance to Mr. B and the other a conduct book consonant with her new station as Mr. B's wife—Pamela is repeatedly removed further and further from her

⁹ Julie Park, "Detachable Pockets and Letter Folds: Spatial Formalism and the Portable Interiors of the Eighteenth-Century Novel," *Novel: a Forum on Fiction* 50, no. 1 (2017): 9, <https://doi.org/10.1215/00295132-3854251>.

¹⁰ Park, "Detachable Pockets and Letter Folds: Spatial Formalism and the Portable Interiors of the Eighteenth-Century Novel," 8, 14.

¹¹ Danielle Bobker, *The Closet: The Eighteenth-Century Architecture of Intimacy* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2020), 74.

original, naïve, virginal state.¹² This chapter proposes that such movement away from comfort and security directly brings Pamela *out* from subjective humanization and *in* to the exchangeability of alienable property, even as such a duality is itself troubled by the text.

As Terry Castle explains, the “inner life” of Pamela has enjoyed a great degree of critical interest, not in the least as the detailing of her “erotic experience” bring it to attention within the novel.¹³ Castle describes *Pamela* as a “sexual myth”: the text is organised around Pamela’s discovery of sexual difference, within which Mr. B serves as a catalyst for a self-discovery of the “archaic enigma” allusive of the catastrophe of sexual differentiation.¹⁴ Very early in the novel, Pamela indicates her unawareness of the visibility into which she is being thrust:

[Mrs. Jervis] heard one of our Men, *Harry*[...] speak freely to me; I think he call’d me his pretty *Pamela*, and took hold of me, as if he would have kiss’d me; for which you may be sure I was very angry; and she took him to Task, and was angry at him as could be, and told me she was very well pleas’d to see my Prudence and Modesty, and that I kept all the Fellows at a Distance.¹⁵

Harry’s predation is woven into the text by Richardson early enough to suggest Pamela’s willingly incongruous “Prudence and Modesty” against a predatory masculinist sexual mode of which Mr. B is but one performer. Mrs. Jervis’s intervention here forestalls Pamela’s own

¹² See Hannah Chaskin, ““Precise, Perverse, Unseasonable”: Queer Form and Genre Trouble in Richardson’s *Pamela*,” *Modern Philology* 117, no. 1 (2019): 80-81, <https://doi.org/10.1086/703702>.

¹³ Terry J. J. Castle, “P/B: *Pamela* as Sexual Fiction,” *Studies in English literature, 1500-1900*. 22, no. 3 (1982): 470.

¹⁴ Castle, “P/B: *Pamela* as Sexual Fiction,” 470-72.

¹⁵ Samuel Richardson, *Pamela; Or, Virtue Rewarded*, ed. Thomas Keymer and Alice Wakely, Oxford World’s Classics, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 17. Further citations refer to this edition and are given in-text.

realization of her primordial sexuality, retaining the prematurity which renders her desirable to Harry—Mrs. Jervis’s taking “him to Task” alongside Pamela’s own anger suggest a reluctance to be cast as the objects of a male narrative of sexual conquest.¹⁶ Pamela’s own reluctance to enter what Castle terms the “sexual dialectic” heightens the attention to the sexual proposition from Harry through her remark, shortly following this extract, that she is “quite fearless of any Danger now” (17). Mrs. Jervis’s capacity to forestall the advances of Harry is one thing: if she is, as Pamela suggests immediately prior, making “my Master’s Interest her own”, the “Danger” Pamela fails to anticipate is the collapse of a maternal protector in the face of a more insidious male predator.¹⁷ This maternal governance begins to wither in the face of the far more potent force of amatory plotting, in this novel personified by the force of the Master, Mr. B, predating on a vulnerable servant. Describing this experience as “erotic” draws attention to its deeply embodied affective core—the brief image of Harry holding Pamela and forcibly attempting to kiss her demands attention to its physicality, thus implicating the body in the experience of distress—in turn heightening an association between negative affect and physical act.

For Pamela, then, the inner life Castle describes is visible, predominantly, through those moments of the text where behaviour and affect appear to correlate, indicating a relationship between these minutiae and Pamela herself as the recorder and archivist of her

¹⁶ Mrs Jervis, to Ann Campbell, operates as a “surrogate mother” for Pamela: the “depths” of their loyalty to one another is one motivation for Mr. B’s separation of the pair by the removal of Pamela to Lincolnshire. See Ann Campbell, *Families of the Heart: Surrogate Relations in the Eighteenth-Century British Novel* (Lewisburg: Bucknell University Press, 2023), 42. <https://doi.org/10.36019/9781684484270>.

¹⁷ John Dussinger draws attention to Mrs Jervis’s failures as a maternal figure: her bad advice and essential neglect leave Pamela “hardly more than a child blinking awkwardly at her new situation”, inhibited by “Mrs. Jervis’s myopic counsel”. Mrs. Jervis’s failure to articulate the threat Mr. B faces to Pamela—or, perhaps, to see this threat—limits both her and Pamela’s potentials for resisting it. See John Dussinger, *The Discourse of the Mind in Eighteenth-Century Fiction* (Berlin, Boston: De Gruyter Mouton, 1974), 56-57. <https://doi.org/10.1515/9783110880793>.

own dissonant experiences of embodied harm. As David Rosen and Aaron Santesso demonstrate, Richardson's reliance on the empiricist claim that "persistent observations of surface behaviour" rendered the "person's real, inner self" visible while nevertheless presenting personal identity as a sequence of acts suggests the novel's attempt to synthesise the "real, inner self" with the moral values Richardson viewed his work as enforcing was complicated by its own implausibility: Pamela cannot fully cohere with the standards to which she is held.¹⁸ This implausibility originates in Richardson's attempts to imbue, as Park describes, the quotidian diurnal practices of letter and journal writing by a fifteen year old servant girl with the moral structures the novel was intended to confirm, thus requiring Pamela to be literary and intellectually adept, once more bringing into question the kinds of modesty she is supposedly embodying.¹⁹ Therefore, this chapter argues that the narrative of the novel is, in fact, one in which Pamela's authenticity is at stake as she is thrust violently, and prematurely, into circulation and exchange, impelling the development of strategic, performative and visible surface identities for survival.

By paying attention to those elements of motion or transport within the text, the intersection between the public world of commerce, exchange, and capital, with the nominally private world of the domestic interior complicates the assertion that the novel embodies, particularly, one or the other environment. With an emphasis on the permeability of porous borders which encourage rather than prohibit movement, a neglected aspect of the

¹⁸ David Rosen and Aaron Santesso, "The Panopticon Reviewed: Sentimentalism and Eighteenth-Century Interiority," *ELH* 77, no. 4 (2010): 1045-46.

¹⁹ Park, "Detachable Pockets and Letter Folds: Spatial Formalism and the Portable Interiors of the Eighteenth-Century Novel," 9. Improving the "mind" of servants may have served a similar function to material practices of dress and mannerism described in Bowen's paper: the better educated, dressed, and polite a servant, the better this reflected upon their master—prominence of a given household could be directly correlated to the (perceived) status of its domestic staff. For a discussion of the material effects of this, see Bowen, "'A sawce-box and boldface indeed': refiguring the female servant in the Pamela-Antipamela debate," 260-61.

novel may be brought to light. This chapter will demonstrate both the traversal across borders of class, gender, and station by Pamela's letters, and their own consistent rejection of simplistic boundaries between the domestic sphere and the public realm through demanding a public, ideological solution to a private act. Pamela, and *Pamela*, demand attention to and amelioration of the harm resulting from the sexually aggressive Mr. B. This is suggestive of other important yet permeable boundaries between public and private, and other and self, that the novel sketches. The complexity of these traversals indicate a difficulty in both literary-critical and theoretical approaches to the notion of the interior in eighteenth-century English epistolary fiction.

Where Pamela is in view, so too is a class relation which perverts or limits her capacity for authenticity and subjectivity. If early in the novel, under threat of sexual harm from Mr. B, Pamela's direct, exasperated cry is that she "would have given my Life for a Farthing," not only does Richardson invite a monetarised, commercial calculus of value in assessing Pamela, but he furthermore privileges quickly in the text the *lack* of value she believes herself to possess in the face of sexual harm (23). While the expression has an idiomatic element, connecting her life and the farthing in this way brings into association notions of value and embodiment, self and worth, even as it rather emphatically situates the protagonist at the lowest rung of the social hierarchy. If in an earlier letter, a year of Pamela's service is valued at "Four golden Guineas", her body—the very thing which performs such service—falls in value significantly through the letters with which Richardson's novel begins (12).²⁰

²⁰ Catherine Ingrassia notes that Pamela chides her parents for storing, rather than spending, the guineas; to Ingrassia this reveals Pamela's own economic acumen, her capability in seeing material goods as "future profits": a "domestic stock-jobber". As her value transforms from that of the servant to the wife, Pamela's interests or credits likewise are transformed from the material to the ephemeral (virtue), obscuring her body—the thing which has

Pamela's monetarised sense of her own worth collapses rapidly in the early letters of the novel. In the first, even in the wake of the death of her former Lady, Pamela's expertise "at my Needle, and other Qualifications above my degree" confirms her worth, the latter evaluation indicates the instability of her position (11).²¹ If in the space of ten letters, she has become reducible to a "Farthing", she has fallen significantly in net worth. Such a fall is emblematic of the text, in which the embodied, pretty, erotically potent reading of Pamela threatens to drag a valuable servant from "good Girl" to "Hussy" (12, 23). Reading this fall allows the critic to begin situating Pamela's crumbling status, emphasizing the facets of her character which grow in meaning—namely, her body—at the expense of those which do not.

Pamela's financial value engages with other kinds of value. The image of Pamela's identity as modest, prudent, and secure presented so early in the novel is clearly porous, rather than as rigid or fixed. This is itself to identify a problem with the text. Morris Golden argues that the issue is how Pamela might be "sweet and complaisant" and yet not "slavish": how simultaneously restraint from, and action towards, desire inexpressible by the subject experiencing it constitutes the fictive person of Pamela.²² That her behaviour is structured, or

performed the labour—in favour of, ostensibly, her valuation upon non-material metrics. See Catherine Ingrassia, "'I Am Become A Mere Usurer': *Pamela* And Domestic Stock-Jobbing," *Studies in the Novel* 30, no. 3 (1998): 303.

²¹ Christopher Flint notes that these qualifications remove Pamela from her biological family—separating her class interests from theirs—resulting in the distressing experience of displacement which her identity must come to synthesise. See Christopher Flint, "The Anxiety of Affluence: Family and Class (Dis)order in *Pamela: Or, Virtue Rewarded*," *Studies in English Literature, 1500-1900* 29, no. 3 (1989): 490, <https://doi.org/10.2307/450652>.

²² Morris Golden, *Richardson's Characters* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1963), 59-60. Pamela's possibly "slavish" nature stabilises her capacity to perform as a figure for emulation; as Katrina Booker points out, emulation for a servant is unidirectionally linear—from the employer class down. For Pamela to resist Mr. B suggests her rejection of this linearity in pursuit of equality, contributing to the complex characterisation described by Golden. See Kristina Booker, "Richardson's *Pamela*, Defoe's *Roxana*, and Emulation Anxiety in Eighteenth-Century Britain," *Journal for Early Modern Cultural Studies* 14, no. 2 (2014): 44.

curtailed, by a system of rules which may be manipulated to her advantage suggests to Golden that Pamela's world is one which is "malleable" to the needs of the protagonist, even if its hostility requires reform.²³ Yet these rules also govern or curtail the limits of Pamela's triumph. For this to be a novel of reconciliation suggests the disparateness of Mr. B. and Pamela at the outset. To hold in tension both the motif of reconciliation and the perhaps rather blatant way Richardson represents this reconciliation—to Golden, "her virtue and his depravity"—is to ask of this novel how the alienated state might become, at least ostensibly, "domestic triumph".²⁴

To this end, this chapter reads falling, both metaphoric and literal, as a recurrent motion in the novel. Pamela, several times, "[falls] down on her knees," "[falls] to writing" a letter, falls "crying," or "weeping" (35, 36, 43, 58). These most obvious "falls" all take place prior to Pamela's transport to the Lincolnshire estate, where the most important fall of the novel takes place. Connecting these physical moments of frailty, collapse, or motion to the movement of Pamela from servant-girl to victim, and finally wife, allows for a new reading which articulates the limits of 'character' as a interpretive category in relation to Richardson's novel. Given that Richardson himself embeds such a movement alongside the moral instability of the eighteenth-century domicile, it is possible to reconcile the actual and the theoretical. As the novel maps the descent and redemption, or "Rewarded" "Virtue" of its protagonists, the physicality of downwards motion explicitly literalises this movement even as it invokes other concepts of fragility, subordination, and lowliness. Thus, Richardson, with Pamela's many falls, can be easily contrasted to other consequential fall narratives, particularly the Garden of Eden. Yet, here, falling serves not to reinforce the eschatological logic of redemption: Pamela's alienation may not be from the presence of God, but is

²³ Golden, *Richardson's Characters*, 63.

²⁴ Golden, *Richardson's Characters*, 62.

constructed along other lines. Indeed, as Corrinne Harol has noted, it is precisely Pamela's proximity to God which transforms the rapacious Mr. B from the admiring but predatory rake into an "acolyte" of her virtue.²⁵ It would follow, then, that these falls do not express her descent into sin. Thus, the vertical movement of falling necessitates a closer examination of the positions regarded as static, or immovable, within the text. This falling motion represents the movement of Pamela from private, individual subject into a 'thing' in view, her status as an alienable object of property emphasised by the references to her financial value.

In one early iteration of the falling motif, Pamela's emotional confusion demands of her an extreme response, resulting in the expression, "I fell a crying most sadly" (35). Before her collapse into tears, Pamela details her aggrieved response to Mr. B's likening her to Lucretia, a figure of classical Roman pseudohistory raped by the prince Tarquin.²⁶ Lucretia's subsequent suicide has remained resonant in the canon of rape narratives as a paradigmatic literary type of virtue cast against male violence.²⁷ Pamela's awareness of Lucretia as a type figure or canonical model of rape is apparent:

²⁵ Corrinne Harol, "Faking It: Female Virginité and Pamela's Virtue," *Eighteenth Century Fiction* 16, no. 2 (2004): 197.

²⁶ Lucretia stands in, as Anna Livia Frassetto argues, for the brutal exercise of arbitrary power just as she does "woman and family, woman and violence, woman and death". See Anna Livia Frassetto, *The Metamorphoses of Lucretia: Three Eighteenth-Century Reinterpretations of the Myth: Carlo Goldoni, Samuel Richardson and Gotthold Ephraim Lessing* (Bern: Peter Lang AG, Internationaler Verlag der Wissenschaften, 2017), 1-6.

²⁷ Shakespeare's *The Rape of Lucrece* (1594) perhaps typifies this representation: the extreme and traumatic nature of Lucrece's experience, Harvey Wiltshire suggests, is figured as a struggle between silence and expressivity—the rape's silencing effect "foregrounds the relationship between experience and language". Lucretia's refusal to be consoled, meanwhile, as Amanda K. Ruud suggests, prepares for her suicide: producing her as an "absent figure of poetry, unable to speak for herself". In both these readings of Shakespeare's Lucretia, Tarquin's violence against her serves as a narrative device for testing the absolute limits of language. See Amanda K. Ruud, "Refusing Consolation in Shakespeare's *Lucrece*," *Philological Quarterly* 99, no. 3 (2020): 270; Harvey Wiltshire, "'So Much Grief and not a Tongue': Trauma and Intertextuality in Shakespeare's *The Rape of Lucrece*," *English (London)* 69, no. 265 (2020): 136-37, <https://doi.org/10.1093/english/efaa004>.

[Mrs Jervis] was a little too much frightened, as she owned afterwards, at his Sternness, and said, Indeed she told me you only pulled her on your Knee, and kissed her.

Then I plucked up my Spirit a little. *Only!* Mrs. *Jervis*, said I, was not that enough to shew me what I had to fear! When a Master of his Honour's Degree demeans himself to be so free as that to such a poor Servant as me, what is the next to be expected?—But your Honour went further, so you did; and threaten'd what you would do, and talk'd of *Lucretia*, and her hard Fate.—Your Honour knows you went too far for a Master to a Servant, or even to his Equal; and I cannot bear it! So I fell a crying most sadly. (35)

Pamela draws attention to the status of Mr. B, suggesting Mr. B “demeans” his own position of superiority by his sexual advances. Her position as a “poor Servant” is complicated by this demonstration of her literariness, evident in her knowledge of *Lucretia*, even as she emphasises the hierarchical distance between “Master to a Servant” in defence of her aggrieved responses.²⁸ That such a distance may encourage, rather than prohibit, the kind of sexual contact Pamela seeks to evade simply does not occur to her.²⁹ As Kristina Straub suggests, Pamela's gender and status as a servant both render her property of Mr. B, and as such, contractually consensual sexual relations between the pair are impossible.³⁰ Pamela's

²⁸ To Booker, Pamela's “emulation” of the superior “persecuted but virtuous” heroine *Lucretia* draws attention to a central anxiety of the novel: the capacity for Pamela herself to transcend class boundaries and become the subject of a genteel love plot. The “emulative motive” itself was questionable within the eighteenth-century, Booker suggests, and the performance of “upward mobility” a threat to genteel authority. By drawing attention to this problem, Booker explores a central problem of the novel: how class interferes with Richardson's amatory plot. See Booker, “Richardson's *Pamela*, Defoe's *Roxana*, and Emulation Anxiety in Eighteenth-Century Britain,” 44-46.

²⁹ John A. Dussinger remarks that *Pamela*'s politics of virtue sought to reinforce the position of the hereditary aristocrat as a figure *for* the “public good”: including their dependants within their country estates. For Mr. B to act against this “public” necessity in the privacy of his mother's closet suggests Richardson's interest in using the novel's reformatory arc to settle his “wrongdoing” as an estate manager and confirm the genteel association between hereditary status and the “good”. See John A. Dussinger, ““Ciceronian Eloquence”: The Politics of Virtue in Richardson's *Pamela*,” in *Passion and Virtue*, ed. David Blewett (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2016), 48.

³⁰ Kristina Straub, *Domestic Affairs: Intimacy, Eroticism, and Violence Between Servants and Masters in Eighteenth-Century Britain* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2009), 55.

status as a servant coupled with her eroticization makes her, perhaps, a more likely target for Mr. B than an “Equal” may have been. Straub argues that the division between what belonged to a master and to a servant was both deliberately and “disturbingly vague.”³¹ If Pamela is to be a sexualised subject, it will be along lines of possession and subordination, rather than consensual mutuality.

This is further complicated by the context of the dialogue. Mrs. Jervis’s diminishing of Pamela’s account suggests that Pamela is attempting to reinstate some control over the narratives about her, or impressions of her character, early in the novel’s trajectory. Her strategy, drawing attention to her status as a suppliant towards, and dependent upon Mr. B as his servant, emphasises the state of comfort which has immediately preceded the novel’s beginning. Pamela’s transformation into a sexualised, erotic site relies upon the substitution of one (dead, female) Mistress for a (living, male) Master: it is not her own behaviour or intervention in any way which calls for the transformation from one kind of subject to another.³²

The allusion to Lucretia bodes ill for Pamela, imbuing both her own victimhood and Mr. B’s predatory characteristics with a mythic facet. A constellation of value placed upon

³¹ Straub, *Domestic Affairs*, 53. Bowen concurs; Pamela may well be aware of the “pervasiveness” of sexual contact between masters and their servants, demonstrating her affiliation (indeed, solidarity) with the class of labouring women imperilled by such heightened relations. To Bridget Hill, the “loss of identity” Pamela experiences as a servant girl within B’s house leaves her particularly, even if the narrative complicates contextual realities of the commonality of sexual exploitation in the eighteenth-century domestic home. See Bowen, “‘A sawce-box and boldface indeed’: refiguring the female servant in the Pamela-Antipamela debate,” 266-67; Bridget Hill, *Servants: English Domesticity in the Eighteenth Century* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), 214-16, 20, 24. <https://doi.org/10.1093/acprof:oso/9780198206217.003.0011>.

³² As Hill details, transferral from the command of her Mistress to her Master is a danger to Pamela. If a servant were to be dismissed without an appropriate character, “it may well prove impossible to find another place.” See Hill, *Servants: English Domesticity in the Eighteenth Century*, 218.

chastity produces for both Lucretia and Pamela a dimension of publicness to their subjugation.³³ Another's act of violence brings the character of its object into view, even if in so doing the role of the perpetrator is diminished or vanishes altogether. Indeed, as she remarks in an earlier letter, Mr B's attempts at seduction and rape materialise in a reconfiguration of Pamela's visible social identity. Mr B intervenes to curtail, furthermore, Pamela's writing and thus her capacity to account for herself:

But he has order'd Mrs. *Jervis* to bid me not spend so much time in writing; which is a poor Matter for such a Gentleman as he to take notice of, as I am not idle otherways, if he did not resent what he thought I wrote upon. And this has no very good Look.

But I am a good deal easier since I lie with Mrs. *Jervis*; tho' after all, the Fears I live in on one side, and his Frowning and Displeasure at what I do on the other, makes me more miserable than enough.

O that I had never left my Rags nor my Poverty, to be thus expos'd to Temptations on the one hand, or Disgusts on the other! How happy was I a-while ago! How miserable now! (26–27)

The plenitude of Bedfordshire under her former Mistress is directly contrasted with the authoritarianism of Mr. B. His attention to her writing and critical reaction against it suggests his intimate meddling in affairs of Pamela's that do not concern the organization of the

³³ Despite this, as Robert A. Donovan points out, Mr. B may see rape as “beneath him”: Richardson establishes “a set of rules” to the courtship plot between him and Pamela whereby her virtue might remain textually intact—even if the threat of force, to Pamela herself, is deeply felt and not as “illusory” as it might appear to a critical reader. Donovan's provocation, essentially, that “Mr. B will always stop short of rape” is borne out by the text; the “suspense” in which the reader is held functions not along the lines of his impending threats, but rather the class conflict (and reconciliation) of the novel. See Robert A. Donovan, “The Problem of Pamela, or, Virtue Unrewarded,” *Studies in English Literature, 1500-1900* 3, no. 3 (1963): 383-84, <https://doi.org/10.2307/449352>.

domestic home, but rather her individuation and capacity for self-articulation. Immediately preceding this quote, Pamela is alarmed to find a letter missing from the “late Lady’s Dressing-room”, which she and Mrs. Jervis presume to be stolen by Mr. B (26). His distrust of her expressions are suggestive of his lack of regard for her intentions towards her body: his desire to superimpose a framework of his own desire over and above her autonomy both tempts and frightens Pamela. She imagines an alterity—particularly, a prior state—in which she had not “left my Rags nor my Poverty” to attend the Mistress at Bedfordshire. Yet this status of poverty is itself illusionary, if not outright imagined, in its fundamental alterity to the actually-happening narrative of the text. Her fall from a seeming plenitude of happiness is mapped against an ironic reversal of economic status. Poverty and rags are desirable over temptation and disgust. Falling *into* the risk of harm conjures an imagined precipice from which this fall must have taken place.

This fall therefore intervenes in the progression of seemingly linear narrative time. Producing in her letter a historical moment at which her happiness was secure introduces a problem: Pamela’s happiness has never been fixed, and neither, perhaps, has her economic status. The text opens with the death of her former Mistress, an occasion which leaves her wondering if she will become “destitute” (11). Thus, Pamela’s position at the beginning of the novel is already in motion; her falls merely accentuate a movement that was already potentiate. The image here of “Rags”, “Poverty”, and becoming “destitute” juxtaposed with the supposed wealth, purity, or goodness embodied by a chastity defended suggests that Richardson is conjuring Pamela’s body in direct relation to her status. “Rags” gestures towards a kind of materiality, an image of a status in the same way that chastity slips between a material fact and the social realm.

That chastity or virginity was regarded itself as a material state is without question. Yet, chastity must be precarious: Pamela’s parents suggest to her that her “Temptations are

very great; for you have Riches, Youth, and a fine Gentleman, as the World reckons him, to withstand; but how great will be your Honour to withstand them!” (27). Once more the public aspect of the problem is emphasised, the “World” invoking the panopticon of social opinion. As Booker has demonstrated, *Pamela* introduces and represents an anxiety around emulation, or the performative troubling of class boundaries: mid-eighteenth-century concerns around imitation of one’s social superiors in a “degenerate” mimicry are called into question by a text that emphasises Pamela’s own emulation of virtuous or religious iconographic figures, including Lucretia, in constructing her identity.³⁴ Her identity is insecure, in motion, propelled by the threat of harm as it falls ever more publicly into view.

Pamela explicitly calls attention to the public status of her virginal identity later in the novel, addressing Mr. B directly, stating “My Honesty (I am poor and lowly, and am not intitled to call it *Honour*) was in Danger” (217). The differentiation between “Honour” and “Honesty” lies in the calculations of status by which one might be visible, while the other mistakable or ignored. That is, the peril in which Pamela finds her “Honesty” is not analogous to that of Lucretia: their differing positions within their social hierarchies, and Pamela’s low-status as a servant, confirm that her honesty might be imputed even if she cannot attain the full status of honour.

This insecurity suggests an identity and status already in flux—connected, as Chaskin makes clear, to her adolescence. Chaskin’s incorporation of Jack Halberstam’s theory of queer time begins to explicate this problem; as Chaskin puts it, the “normative subject” is composed through the “ideology of life stages,” consonant with both Pamela’s youth and

³⁴ Booker, “Richardson’s *Pamela*, Defoe’s *Roxana*, and Emulation Anxiety in Eighteenth-Century Britain,” 42-43.

Halberstam's rejection of the "pathologized mode of living" of the modern western subject.³⁵ Castle indicates a similar view in the assertion that *Pamela* is a "stereotypical fiction of sexuality", "a myth of female sexual development."³⁶ Such a myth holds the locus of development for the feminine subject in their sexuality. If the "dramatic tension" of the novel is Pamela's discovery of her sexuality, Castle argues that "retrenchment, equivocation, and anxious withdrawal" imply the peril of movement towards an identity governed by sexuality.³⁷ Suggesting these stages of life not as a linear progression, but rather as a vertical alignment, infers that the point from which Pamela begins her fall is simultaneously her most adolescent and her most secure. Mr. B is intervening in the individuation and development of Pamela as a normative subject by producing, violently, an account of her sexuality. Mr. B's violence and predation upon Pamela quite literally removes her from the ordinary developmental progress she might have enjoyed under her prior Mistress, metonymized by her transport to the Lincolnshire Estate—which physically isolates her from the naivete of youth, and the matronly guardian, Mrs. Jervis.

It is at the Lincolnshire Estate that the central falls of the novel take place, disjoining Pamela from the supposedly ordinary linearity of adolescence. After Pamela is transported to Lincolnshire by Mr. B, she begins to plan to escape. Seizing an opportunity when Mrs. Jewkes, Mr. B's accomplice and a key antagonist of the Lincolnshire journal, is drunk, Pamela attempts to effect her escape from the estate over a high wall, after discovering the

³⁵ Chaskin, "'Precise, Perverse, Unseasonable': Queer Form and Genre Trouble in Richardson's *Pamela*," 75; Jack Halberstam, *In a Queer Time and Place: Transgender Bodies, Subcultural Lives* (New York: New York University Press, 2005), 4.

³⁶ Castle, "P/B: *Pamela* as Sexual Fiction," 471.

³⁷ Castle, "P/B: *Pamela* as Sexual Fiction," 477.

lock to another exit she had relied upon had been changed (170–71).³⁸ She is unsuccessful, falls, and the wall collapses: in the journal account that follows, she describes both her fall, and the falling bricks that may have nearly killed her:

Nothing but ill Luck!—no Escape for poor *Pamela*! The Wall being old, the Bricks I held by, gave way, just as I was taking a Spring to get up, and down came I, and received such a Blow upon my Head, with one of the Bricks, that it quite stunn'd me; and I broke my Shins and my Ankle besides, and beat of the Heel of one of my Shoes.

In this dreadful way, flat upon the Ground, lay poor I, for I believe five or Six Minutes; and when I would have got up, I could hardly stand (171)

Two important problems of falling and embodiment are identifiable in this sequence. Firstly, the metaphor of falling is explicated and rendered material; it imperils not Pamela's status, but her body. This is referenced in her stunned head, her broken shins and ankle.³⁹ The effect of being stunned, furthermore, distorts her perception of time to the point where she is unsure as to the duration of her laying "flat upon the Ground."⁴⁰ Thus, secondly, this passage may be regarded as embedding a relationship not only between falling and the material, but also linking the falling act to death. Here, falling severs Pamela's relationship to the world

³⁸ Dussinger notes that these "stylised" features call attention to both "the mind's entrapment in the body as well as her hysterical awareness of this fact": using the "gestures of romance" rather than naturalism heightens the moment and invests an epic pathos in the description of suicidality that follows. To Castle, the changing of the lock interrupts Pamela's fantasy of escape, forcing a dangerous reckoning with the "socialization" Mrs Jewkes is thrusting upon her. See Castle, "P/B: Pamela as Sexual Fiction," 483; Dussinger, *The Discourse of the Mind in Eighteenth-Century Fiction*, 61-62.

³⁹ Alicia Kerfoot reads the breaking of Pamela's slipper in this scene as a potent moment of doubling: taking the brokenness of the shoe-heel and Pamela's shins and ankles as part of the narrative's "reform project", the "fetishistic and sexual connotations of the ankle" link Pamela's injury to her threatened chastity. See Alicia Kerfoot, "Virtuous Footwear: Pamela's Shoe Heel and Cinderella's 'Little Glass Slipper'," *Eighteenth-Century Fiction* 31, no. 2 (2019): 355, <https://doi.org/10.3138/ecf.31.2.343>.

⁴⁰ Castle notes that the maiming of Pamela mirrors her "enwomaning" in the subsequent attempted rape: in both scenes, violence and unconsciousness are interlinked as Pamela is forced to confront the inevitability of her fate—to become Mrs. B. See Castle, "P/B: Pamela as Sexual Fiction," 483-84.

through removing her from it—leaving her nonconscious. In other words, the threat of falling is precisely in its ability to kill not just the social Pamela but the embodied one, too.

Richardson deepens this association with the following moments, in which Pamela considers suicide as an alternative to her “Griefs” (171). The description of the method of suicide—a “dreadful Leap”—invokes the verticality of the fall, “rising” to “throw [herself] in” to the pond (172–73). In the long passage depicting this inner turmoil, the “slopy banks” of the pond envisage the kind of vertiginousness associated more commonly with a precipice; indeed, what this whole sequence reinforces is less Pamela’s refutation of suicide, but the inherent danger of her position. Invoking material death suggests Richardson’s attention to the physical complements his metaphysics and emphasises the fluidity with which Pamela slips from a status or identity to a physical person.

Yet it is only a symbolic death that Pamela dies in this sequence. Prior to either her fall or suicidal ideation, she produces her own simulated corpse: by leaving her “Upper-coat, as I had design’d, and my Neck-handkerchief, and a round-ear’d Cap, with a Knot” in the pond, Pamela is able to effectively simulate a body—her body—drowned in the pond (170). Following this, she is injured in the fall and by the falling bricks. This is followed by the discussion of Pamela’s potential suicide. This ordering suggests the permeability between the merely figural simulation and the actual body. Importantly, the sequence emphasises the persistence not of Pamela’s affect, but of her body. While Richardson’s novel pays close attention to detailing the psychological turmoil Pamela experiences at the side of the pond, such experiences are easily addressed to forces external to Pamela: whether “wicked Men”, “the Face of the Almighty”, “Divine Will”, and an “Ingrateful World”, all personify various facets of her “extremest Degrees of Disappointment” even as they bring such facets out from

the psychological self as actors upon Pamela, not within her (174). Thus, the central object of the passage remains the endangered body, and its doppelganger in the pond.⁴¹

The effect is convincing—upon “finding my Cloaths,” the Lincolnshire staff “doubted not I was at the Bottom” of the pond (176). It is, in both the passage describing Pamela’s plot and that of its discovery, her clothing that effectively simulates her death. As Carey McIntosh has noted, clothing functions as a marker of significance in *Pamela*.⁴² Clothing, to McIntosh, relates social position to sex, the leitmotif of undressing in particular calling “attention to its own meaningfulness.”⁴³ Drawing on this account, then, the leitmotif of undressing is redeployed by Pamela, who without reference to the sexual content of the metaphor manages to transform a motif of seduction into one of grave peril that itself mocks the human form. In this mimicking of death, Pamela’s social death becomes material for a moment—just a moment—and serves to separate the stages of her peril, directly preceding if not anticipating an undressing of a totally different kind mere days later. In this brief

⁴¹ Flint regards Pamela’s consideration (and rejection) of suicide as the “pivotal moment of her moral development”: separated from her parents and seemingly from her belief in god, Pamela momentarily becomes an autonomous secular subject only momentarily before reintegrating within her novel’s plot: see Flint, “The Anxiety of Affluence: Family and Class (Dis)order in *Pamela: Or, Virtue Rewarded*,” 499.

⁴² Carey McIntosh, “Pamela’s Clothes,” *ELH* 35, no. 1 (1968): 78, <https://doi.org/10.2307/2872337>. Chloe Wigston-Smith similarly argues that *Pamela* “exploits the symbolic meaning” of clothing: Pamela herself redeploys the meaning of the clothes she wears as an effort at defining her relation to others. Drawing particularly on Pamela’s efforts to stitch her letters into her clothing at Lincolnshire, Wigston-Smith suggests Pamela relies on clothing as a “material resource” which nevertheless traverses class boundaries. Pamela’s awareness of dress suggests to Wigston-Smith an “analogy” between words and clothes which emphasises their shared capacity for meaning. Jennie Batchelor meanwhile suggests clothes emphasise Pamela’s traversal of class boundaries: the “erotic symbolism of the stockings” Pamela is earlier granted by Mr. B suggests his desire for her while simultaneously relating this desire to her changing class status within the novel. See Jennie Batchelor, *Dress, distress and desire : clothing and the female body in eighteenth-century literature* (Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), 27-28; Chloe Wigston Smith, *Women, Work, and Clothes in the Eighteenth-Century Novel* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 38-41.

⁴³ McIntosh, “Pamela’s Clothes,” 79-80.

recursion to the material, it is as though the *symbolic* Pamela has, here, totally fallen, alienated from her prior happiness to the point of death, abandoned with the clothing in the pond.⁴⁴

Indeed, the motif of a symbolic death is reiterated shortly after Pamela's fall in another central moment of the text, the most violent of the attempted rapes as described in the Lincolnshire journal (198–205). Beginning with thick description of Pamela's vulnerable positioning, over the course of the sequence Richardson begins to move towards a less intimate description of the moment through a careful abstraction:

Mrs. *Jewkes*, by this time, was got to-bed, on the further side[...] And I said, Where are they keys? tho', Said I, I am not so much afraid to-night. Here, said the wicked Woman, put your Arm under mine, and you shall find them about my Wrist, as they used to be. So I did; and the abominable Designer held my Hand with her Right-hand, as my Right-arm was under her Left.

(202)

Initiating the account of this attempted rape, Richardson renders the vulnerable body of Pamela visible to the reader. The intense tactility of Mrs. Jewkes's restraining Pamela is carefully detailed, producing a clear tableau. By beginning with accounting for Pamela's limbs, Richardson carefully stipulates the totality of Pamela's vulnerability: an accounting-for of all Pamela's potential sites of resistance demystifies the attempt at rape. There is no nuance—emphasizing Pamela's powerlessness through this attentive description of her

⁴⁴ Stuart Wilson suggests, provocatively, that it is by the pondside that Pamela finds “peace with God”: describing the suicide scene as the “spiritual and emotional nadir of her experience”, Wilson suggests Pamela's *true* prison is the “abnormally severe chastity” in which she is held. By surviving the pond, Pamela must exchange a “literal death for a metaphoric one in the arms of Mr. B”. See Stuart Wilson, “Richardson's *Pamela*: An Interpretation,” *PMLA* 88, no. 1 (1973): 86, <https://doi.org/10.2307/461328>.

body's positioning and constraint allows for the full, and forceful, articulation of Pamela's distress while grounding it in the corporeal.⁴⁵ The body is conjured here through its vulnerability.

This corporeal fixation is deepened shortly after in the passage, even as language falters in the face of the body's primacy:

What Words shall I find, my dear Mother, (for my Father should not see this shocking Part) to describe the rest, and my Confusion, when the guilty Wretch took my Left-arm, and laid it under his Neck, as the vile Procuress held my Right; and then he clasp'd me round my Waist! (203)

Words fail where bodily experience speaks for itself. Pamela's description of Mr. B's actions is relatively unadorned, its straightforwardness resembling, nearly, stage direction rather than prose narrative. She herself highlights this problem. The failure of language to fully encapsulate a lived, embodied experience is addressed particularly to her mother, suggestive of shared inferences of meaning from the simple description which rely on common, and here feminised, experiences of vulnerability.⁴⁶ Pamela's simple description allows her imagined interlocutor to fill in the blanks. The bodies and gestures of Mr. B, Pamela, and Mrs. Jewkes speak for and of themselves, their roles in the attempted rape clarified by even the simplest

⁴⁵ Jessica L. Leiman describes how Richardson would go on to revise Mr. B's relationship to Pamela in the novel's sequels and continuations, continuing the original's "whitewashing" of his sexual aggression with "substitution" of verbal motives for lascivious ones. See Jessica L. Leiman, "'Booby's fruitless operations': The Crisis of Male Authority in Richardson's *Pamela*," *Eighteenth-Century Fiction* 22, no. 2 (2010): 227-28.

⁴⁶ Tassie Gwilliam notes, further, that in the quoted text above, Pamela envisages a "female audience", moreover a maternal one, which "paradoxically" echoes and rearranges the subsequent explosion of paternal signification in Pamela's later plea to God. See Tassie Gwilliam, "Pamela and the duplicitous body of femininity," *Representations* 34, no. 1 (1991): 125, <https://doi.org/10.1525/rep.1991.34.1.99p00502>.

articulation.⁴⁷ Describing the moment as “shocking”, Pamela calls attention to the bodily harm and wrongdoing being perpetrated against her while mediating the same attentiveness through the larger narrative of her exploitation, confinement, and abuse. Famously, the rape is interrupted: Pamela faints, suddenly, causing Mr. B to falter (204). The body quite literally speaks for itself where the mind is muted or limited in its capacity for linguistic expression.⁴⁸

The fainting serves as another instance of a kind of symbolic death. However, here, symbolic death serves a rather different function. In her “deplorable State of Death”, Pamela’s fragile, or vulnerable, physical form is fortified by its own “disabling” of “Faculties” (204–5). The proximity of the fitful Pamela to a dead one is close enough that the two are capable of being literarily enmeshed. Yet such a moment once more emphasises the precarious position of Pamela: Richardson brings attention to the physicality of Pamela throughout this passage. The direct description of action in the journal represents an effort at emphasizing Pamela’s persistent body, the thing that is imperilled here. If Pamela’s body is persistent, it also forecloses the kind of sexual desire her letters, an expression of her subjectivity, seem to encourage from Mr. B, in its blunt opposition to subjectification; in a sense, her prayer directly prior that God “strike me dead this Moment” is partially answered

⁴⁷ Castle notes how Richardson’s repeated insistence upon “triangular” relations preserves a sexual dichotomy—“the willing bawd”, Mrs. Jewkes, replaces the earlier Mrs. Jervis: the “hermaphroditic” figure of Mrs. Jewkes enables the clarification of male and female, finally, in the attempted rape, when Mr. B throws off his disguise. Wilson, meanwhile, counterposes Mrs. Jewkes against Colbrand—two phantasms of “raw sexuality, one feminine, the other masculine”: Mrs. Jewkes uninhibited approach to sex contrasts against Pamela’s careful “self-denial”. In either case, Mrs. Jewkes’s role in the scene clarifies Pamela’s sexuality in contrast to that of her assailant and his assistant. See Castle, “P/B: *Pamela* as Sexual Fiction,” 480-84; Wilson, “Richardson’s *Pamela*: An Interpretation,” 84-85.

⁴⁸ To Castle, the fit reflects Pamela’s suppression of the knowledge of gender difference encapsulated by the sight of the phallus; to Christopher Flint, the fainting voids the operability of language and thus Mr. B’s real aim: a “bid for power” dependent on transforming Pamela’s own self-expressions. See Castle, “P/B: *Pamela* as Sexual Fiction,” 484; Flint, “The Anxiety of Affluence: Family and Class (Dis)order in *Pamela: Or, Virtue Rewarded*,” 498.

(203). Even so, the prone and unconscious body cannot register its own vulnerability, introducing another kind of anxiety. As Pamela puts it, “I hope, as he assures me, he was not guilty of Indecency,” suggesting the lack of total knowledge over what transpired in her unconsciousness unsettles her sense of security (205).⁴⁹ Thus, as the material and the symbolic intertwine, both serve to further emphasise Pamela’s vulnerable position.

Such a motion between the symbolic and the material is mirrored in the movement of the material objects of which the novel is composed: in the transports of Pamela’s letters and journals, we can also trace the movement or falling of Pamela through a variety of hands. In this sense, both Pamela and her letters are not dissimilar from the objects of it-narratives. While Bonnie Blackwell distinguishes between *Pamela*, among other “novel[s] of interiority” and the it-novel through the “uniqueness” of the subject of the former, and the cheapness or availability of subjects of the latter, this analysis suggests that a resonance between the two forms might be established.⁵⁰ Establishing what may be termed the ‘it-ness’ of Pamela does not diminish her subjectivity or the dimensions of her interior, but rather explicates the close relationship between her self and the letters within the novel. Armstrong has already argued that Pamela becomes a “creature of words”: her transformation from an ostensibly human subject into a literary figure is an important part of the argument of *Desire and Domestic Fiction*.⁵¹ Charlotte Sussman notes this as a point of convergence between both Michael McKeon’s approach in *The Origins of the English Novel* (1987) and Armstrong’s analysis, as

⁴⁹ To Leiman, Pamela might only “transcribe” Mr. B’s own vow of nonviolence and repeat her desire that “his narrative is accurate”: Mr. B’s own prominence as the narrator of the scene reflects his sole agency over its performance; Leiman, ““Booby’s fruitless operations”: The Crisis of Male Authority in Richardson’s *Pamela*,” 230-31.

⁵⁰ Bonnie Blackwell, “Corkscrews and Courtesans: Sex and Death in Circulation Novels,” in *The Secret Life of Things Animals, Objects, and It-Narratives in Eighteenth-Century England*, ed. Mark Blackwell (Lewisburg: Bucknell University Press, 2007), 275.

⁵¹ Armstrong, *Desire and Domestic Fiction*, 3.

both privilege the “discursive” capacity of Pamela over and above her other facets.⁵² Yet, as Sussman rightly notes, it is not Pamela’s discursive body which is imperilled by Mr. B, but rather the threat of rape is a literally physical phenomena—the female body “persists” in a capacity for vulnerability even where it has been restructured as a signification of chastity, virtue, or discourse.⁵³ Thus, an important distinction exists between reading Pamela as “discourse” and reading her as a physical, but not necessarily entirely subjective, “it”. Attributing such an it-ness to Pamela helps begin to make sense of the embedded inauthenticity in her character by demonstrating the limits of subjectivity within Richardson’s novel, and how these limits are deployed for what can read as an artificial effect—the separation of Pamela from her self objectifies her, even as it pushes her narrative into circulation.

Gwilliam influentially regards the dichotomy between mind and body epitomised in ideas about the surface and depths of femininity as an “artificial[...] surface” itself.⁵⁴ Gwilliam reads Pamela’s rejection of Mr. B’s offers of clothing as an act of self-definition, but nevertheless one which moves her closer to becoming “Mrs. B.”⁵⁵ The expression of identity is closely entwined with materiality: the body of Pamela is identified with her

⁵² Charlotte Sussman, ““I Wonder Whether Poor Miss Sally Godfrey Be Living or Dead”: The Married Woman and the Rise of the Novel,” *Diacritics* 20, no. 1 (1990): 93, <https://doi.org/10.2307/465230>. To McKeon, Pamela (and *Pamela*) possesses interest for its reformulation of plot as “documentary history”: as the “subject of a narrative”, Pamela’s empowerment as she is converted from individual to paragon comes from her power of “creating value”, transitioning from a commodity on the market to the manipulator of market economies (a household) through her rewriting of her (own) life narrative as an epistolary fiction. See Michael McKeon, *The Origins of the English novel, 1600-1740*, (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2002), 357, 77-78.

⁵³ Sussman, ““I Wonder Whether Poor Miss Sally Godfrey Be Living or Dead”: The Married Woman and the Rise of the Novel,” 95.

⁵⁴ Tassie Gwilliam, *Samuel Richardson's Fictions of Gender* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1993), 17.

⁵⁵ Gwilliam, *Samuel Richardson's Fictions of Gender*, 33.

clothes, even, in the pond, mistakable for them. The surface that is observable is therefore an objected thing, one which is interchangeable or exchangeable, destructible, or able to be taken off. The artificiality of considering femininity a mere surface is matched by the artificial surfaces which ostensibly compose Pamela's femininity itself. The only way the reader may ostensibly be assured of Pamela's interior is through her letters, themselves potentially artificial surfaces.

The claim that *Pamela* is a novel of the interior may be only one among a range of important critical possibilities. Beyond the reading directions encouraged by Richardson lie a variety of alternate possibilities, which instead of emphasising what might be the directness or immediacy of epistolarity, read Pamela's epistolary body as less concretely associated with comprehensive (or, indeed, any) insights into her possible psychologies. In one reading, Maria K. Bachman complicates straightforward conceptions of epistolarity by regarding Pamela's letters as confessions, interpreting her letters as evidence of a split between the objective fact of Pamela's virginal state and the subjective experience of her desire.⁵⁶ As Bachman rightly points out, for Pamela to reconcile her desire and effectively cohere would necessarily be to break the rules of virtuous obedience to her father: Mr B.'s intervention, for Bachman, is in separating Pamela from her confessor by preventing her writing, thus breaking the chain of signification which imbues her letters with meaning.⁵⁷ Taken collectively, letters as confessions reveals their function as iterative acts of performances that construct a legible surface. In turn, this surface is both feminised and limited in its autonomy. Calling into question Pamela's own autonomy in constructing her 'self', concentrating power

⁵⁶ Maria K. Bachman, "The Confessions of Pamela: "A Strange Medley of inconsistency",," *Literature and Psychology* 47, no. 1/2 (2001): 13.

⁵⁷ Bachman, "The Confessions of Pamela: "A Strange Medley of inconsistency",," 14-15.

in the hands of the patriarchal figures of father, seducer, and husband, highlights Pamela's problematic embodiment.

Consonant with this focus on performance and nonautonomy, in an important early scene of the novel, Pamela is displayed before a group of Mr. B's friends.⁵⁸ Describing her as "pretty" and a "Paragon" in conversation with Mr. B, the tone soon shifts upon a group of women's collective inspection of Pamela (51). Lady Towers, who Pamela describes as a "Wit", is the most consequential of the observers at this moment (52). Describing Pamela as an "image", Lady Towers asks if she can speak: first identifying Pamela as a static picture and then demanding of that picture voice: "Says Lady *Towers*, Can the pretty Image speak, Mrs. *Jervis*? I vow she has speaking Eyes! O you little Rogue, says she, and tapt me on the Cheek, you seem born to undo, or to be undone!" (53). This demand reveals important facets of how Lady Towers thinks of Pamela. Johnson suggests that the statuesque, or thingly self that is reflected in the mirror embodies the idealised, formal, and aesthetic aspirations of "form" to which the individual subject is held.⁵⁹ By describing Pamela as an "image", Lady Towers identifies her perfection. Such a perfection is "[an] idealization. A fiction. An object," incapable of reflecting the "definition" Johnson offers of "person": the failure to attain such perfection in the first place.⁶⁰ By identifying Pamela's image-like qualities, Lady Towers effectively depersonalises her, even as she continues to demand of her a uniquely personate act, speech. In Lady Towers's quip seems embedded the answer to her own

⁵⁸ The scene traverses from the dining-hall of B's manor, a quasi-public locale of a kind McKeon identifies with the ritualised and "graded hierarchy of social distinctions"—and ends in the quotidian space of Mrs. Jervis's quarters. This move from a site of consumption to one of production mirrors the reading I advance in which Pamela's status is iteratively integrated in the former, no longer befitting the servant quarters. See McKeon, *The Secret History of Domesticity*, 242.

⁵⁹ Johnson, *Persons and Things*, 57.

⁶⁰ Johnson, *Persons and Things*, 57-59.

question. Explicitly, she asks not ‘will’ the “pretty Image speak,” but moreover if it “can” (53). If Pamela is identified with a form, not as a self, her capacity for subjectivity is called into question. In fact, when she does speak, the remarks immediately following reveal how Pamela’s perfection effectively depersonalises her:

I then went away, with one of my best Curchees; and Lady *Towers* said, as I
 went out, Prettily said, I vow!—and Lady *Brooks* said, See that Shape! I
 never saw such a Face and Shape in my Life; why she must be better
 descended than you have told me! (53)

Pamela’s gesture, the curtsy, explicitly draws attention to her body’s form, particularly her “Shape”. Furthermore, the facts of Pamela’s perfection, her face and shape, are directly connected to a speculative genealogy, deliberately invoking class status. Given Pamela’s position as a domestic servant, to figure her in a “better” descent means the transference of the aesthetic form she enjoys to a person of a more fitting status. The erotic form of Pamela is one of the constitutive elements of her transformation from domestic servant to wife.

Returning to Johnson, the flight into it-ness, to “escape one’s pursuer by turning into a thing oneself” remains a resonant motif across canonical Western literature.⁶¹ Retreating into the recesses of her “Face” and “Shape” with her “best Curchee” allows Pamela to mitigate one risk, that she might be misidentified as the erotic subject such a body should belong to. Even so, fleeing to the safety of a thing nevertheless emphasises those thingly qualities which threaten to de-person her totally. As above, in a part of Lady Towers’ quip, she claims to Pamela that she “seem born to undo, or to be undone” (53). This statement should not be glossed over: Lady Towers seems to perceive not only Pamela’s precarious chastity but furthermore how her perfection—the prettiness of both bodily form and speech she remarks

⁶¹ Johnson, *Persons and Things*, 75.

upon throughout—is itself resonant with this precarious state. These two things are collapsed, such that in this statement Pamela’s perfection invites her vulnerability.

Placing her aesthetic idealization and vulnerability in association with each other reveals how both belong to a system of sociality reliant less on the physical facts of Pamela’s appearance, but, rather, upon power. That Pamela seems “born to undo” suggests that, in Lady Towers’ imaginary, she is the thing acting upon Mr. B. The social consensus of her image-like construction ratifies not only Mr. B’s behaviour towards Pamela, but suggests this consensus acts outside of both: his agency is diminished, while her culpability is raised, but above both is the materiality of her physical form acting upon them. This nonpersonal force, even if it is ostensibly located in the person of Pamela, ‘its’ her, reducing her from agential actor to an enacted object. Thus, perhaps, the body of Pamela expresses a “disjointedness between consciousness and embodied sex,” as Kathleen Lubey reads one possibility in interpreting eighteenth-century sexualities.⁶² “Bodies might make use of one another”, Lubey continues, yet individual minds might not be particularly invested in the sexual act.⁶³ That is, that the non-inertness of Pamela’s body, its persistent rendering as an object with a specific teleology, bespeaks the impossibility of its total separateness from conceptions of intention, mind, self. If the body and the self are mutually constitutive in this novel, not only does the exterior force of her eroticization as a body act upon a physical form, but that form itself precisely *is* the subject, Pamela.

⁶² Kathleen Lubey, “Sexual Intention in Pornography,” *Studies in Eighteenth-Century Culture* 47, no. 1 (2018): 241, <https://doi.org/10.1353/sec.2018.0021>. Lubey explores this further in her recent book: sexual scenes do not only present the erotic, but rather, “tally the human cost” of social institutions which constitute sexuality, separating out intention (desire) from action (penetration) as barely interrelated phenomena. See Kathleen Lubey, *What Pornography Knows: Sex and Social Protest since the Eighteenth Century* (Nashville: Stanford University Press, 2022), 31.

⁶³ Lubey, “Sexual Intention in Pornography,” 242.

The power relations of these extra-personal or nonpersonal forces is, furthermore, not one directional. As Katherine Nadeau suggests, the power dynamics of the novel are expressed not only in the relationship between Mr. B and Pamela, but between Pamela and a variety of figures, particularly in her capacity for inculcating sympathy among her fellow servants.⁶⁴ As Nadeau explores, the capacity for sympathy to subvert ordinary hierarchy, or exert an omnidirectional responsibility for care, is one which Mr. B takes note of, as does Mrs Jewkes.⁶⁵ Yet such sympathy does not convert the body of Pamela into a plausibly individuated subject: it is potentially a more complex site of her it-ness, or objectification, than of her humanisation.

Pamela's capacity to elicit sympathy relies on her circulation, analogous to the circulatory objects of it-narratives. Her relationships with Mr. B as well as with the fellow servants are governed by the reading of her letters. Pamela's letters serve as the main locus of the recuperative or redemptive arc for Mr. B. It is by reading her writing that Mr. B finds "that Mrs. *Jewkes* carry'd her Orders a little too far," taking "Notice of it, because you have not complain'd to me of her Behaviour" (300–1). This dialogue particularly emphasises how the verbal Pamela is replaced by the literary *Pamela*: Mr. B's reading of a text supplants an oral relationship and the conversation portrayed exists simply to acknowledge the written reality. Her father expresses this idea explicitly, begging Pamela to "write to your Mother, that this wondrous Story be perfect, and we, your Friends, may read and admire you more and more" (301). Pamela's record, veridical or not, has an intentionally public facet—a readership. The circulation of Pamela's narrative, thus, through a variety of hands both serves

⁶⁴ Katherine Nadeau, "Minor Characters and Sympathetic Service in Samuel Richardson's *Pamela*," *Eighteenth-Century Fiction* 33, no. 1 (2020): 80-81, <https://doi.org/10.3138/ecf.33.1.77>.

⁶⁵ Nadeau, "Minor Characters and Sympathetic Service in Samuel Richardson's *Pamela*," 81-82.

as a symbol of her it-ness while simultaneously accounting for the sympathetic responses she receives. Reading Pamela within the novel seems to have little to do with assessing her interior, and is more strongly associated with forming a judgement based upon the letters that stand in replacement of her oral speech. That is, if Pamela is accounted for by these letters, then the question of the “interior” is a misapprehension: *Pamela* evinces a process of accounting which focuses primarily on legibility, modelled through the act of reading. Indeed, as Rosen and Santesso suggest, the interior and the surface may themselves be interchangeable: social role is the principal site of a person’s “self”.⁶⁶ If this accounting for is performed upon another material surface, a sheet of paper covered with text, reading offers as good an account of that subject as any other potential system of access.

Power in the novel, therefore, is the power to circulate these accounts. If the responses are so transformative, then the authenticity of a particular account (by Pamela or by another) may be superseded by its relative authority. As John B. Pierce discusses, both Pamela and *Pamela* react to a tradition of legitimating certain forms of writing as epistemically sound against the charge of “romance,” associated most clearly with its “idealizing impulse.”⁶⁷ Invoking the motif of “sympathy and judgement”, Pierce alludes to the motif of Pamela as being “objectifiable” as her text.⁶⁸ While Pierce reads Pamela’s authoritative account through her capacity to transform others sympathies and judgements, particularly Mr. B’s, the force of her text is not always so clear. Further, belying Jacob Littleton’s assertion that Pamela’s conflict with Mr. B is driven by his having “stolen her words” is his assumption of these

⁶⁶ Rosen and Santesso, “The Panopticon Reviewed: Sentimentalism and Eighteenth-Century Interiority,” 1046.

⁶⁷ John B. Pierce, “Pamela’s Textual Authority,” *Eighteenth-Century Fiction* 7, no. 2 (1995): 132, <https://doi.org/10.1353/ecf.1995.0026>.

⁶⁸ Pierce, “Pamela’s Textual Authority,” 133.

words' superimposition of power upon their (ostensibly) disempowered writer, Pamela.⁶⁹

What, however, *gives* these words power? If, as Littleton suggests it is not necessarily their direct veracity, then even Pierce's assertion of epistemic struggle may be complicated. More precisely: who gives them their power?

Reading Pamela's words as a form of power is, perhaps, to lend credence to the same argument Lady Towers makes—that Pamela is, inevitably, to be undone, or to undo, again realizing the disembodied, threatening capacity of Pamela's perfectness to transform, or even upend, ordinary social relations. It is, furthermore, to take Mr. B at face value early in the novel, when he censures Pamela's letter-writing as a threat to his own public, social image. If Pamela can make “a Party of the whole House in her favour against” Mr. B, it is not only the activity of her writing which accomplishes this, but rather her being read (65). Circulation is not only a threat to Pamela, but can be weaponised, to her advantage.

An important example of this is the journal Pamela produces at the Lincolnshire estate. Particularly, her reworked psalm has been identified by Pierce as a potent instance of textual power.⁷⁰ The rendition of Psalm 137 begins with the depiction of Lincolnshire as “Babylon,” and the clearly theological elements work along rather straightforward lines (140). Psalm 137 memorialises the Israelite city of Jerusalem's fall, with the inhabitants removed by their captors to Babylon.⁷¹ The transposition of this narrative to Pamela's context is accomplished relatively simply, yet, particularly, stanzas III and V are interesting in how Pamela characterises her acts of speech:

⁶⁹ Jacob Littleton, ““My Treacherous Heart’: Non-Rhetorical Registers of Truth in Pamela's Ascent,” *Eighteenth-Century Fiction* 10, no. 3 (1998): 289, <https://doi.org/10.1353/ecf.1998.0037>.

⁷⁰ Pierce, “Pamela's Textual Authority,” 137.

⁷¹ See Psalm 137:1-9, KJV.

Then she to whom I Prisoner was,
 Said to me tauntingly,
 Now Chear your Heart, and sing a Song,
 And tune your Mind to Joy
 [...]
 And let my Tongue within my Mouth
 Be lock'd for ever fast,
 If I rejoice, before I see
 My full Deliv'rance past. (141)

The emphasis in this section of the “psalm” upon the act of vocalization is matched by the immediately preceding description, in which, after Mrs. Jewkes requests her to sing at the spinet, Pamela claims she “could hardly speak” as her “Spirits were so low” due to her confinement at Lincolnshire (140). For Pamela, as for her readers, the written word supplants the oral; speech is made concrete by its record, which secures a particular instance of speech as powerful and resonant beyond its immediate to-the-moment expression.

Here, the clearly Christianised motif of “Deliv'rance” accounts only partially for liberty in the most obvious sense: indeed, this presentation of the psalm inverts the dynamic of the biblical text. Psalm 137 refers explicitly to the “daughter of Babylon” who is to be “destroyed” while here it is the (albeit perverted) maternal figure of Mrs. Jewkes who is damned, and the “daughter” looks forward to her “Deliv'rance”.⁷² Moving, thus, from the religiously inflected narrative to the actuality of her peril draws attention to Pamela’s specific plight even as it mythologises it. Furthermore, the psalm becomes a readerly object. Mr. Williams and Mr. B, indeed, “read” it, until Pamela intervenes to prevent her negative representation of Mrs. Jewkes coming to light (317–19). In the circulation of the reworked psalm, the meaning is—at least somewhat—lost: to Mr. B, it is only in “believing Mrs.

⁷² See Psalm 137:8, KJV.

Jewkes had a Design against her Honour” that Pamela might depict her as her “Gaoler” (317). The literal, or factual, reality of Mrs. Jewkes’s complicity in Mr. B’s attempted seductions and rape, is elided in favour of a sanitised reading, prompting the aesthetic response from listeners that it is “very pretty” (317).

This focus on the aesthetics of a plaintive cry suggests how Pamela’s subjectivity is reframed as an eroticised potentiality. Ironically, Mr. B claims he “should get no Credit by shewing” the psalm, yet he does gain standing when the “blessed[...] Man” who has “save[d]” Pamela from “Evil” is identified as him (321). If Pamela cannot see the “Excellence” in the “Lines,” effacing her responsibility for “what is borrow’d from the *Psalmist*”, the reader surely may, in noting how the “pretty” psalm has, apparently, managed to redeem both Pamela from her confinement and, indeed, Mr. B from his libertinism (321). The language has power in its transposition from the biblical text. If, as Littleton has described, Mr. B steals Pamela’s words, she in turn appropriates the words of the bible. In so doing, Pamela lifts not only language from the psalm, but authority too, by rearticulating her plight as a scriptural, indeed theological, drama.

Thus, whether God or the aestheticizing impulse of the erotic, the forces that enact the novel are not those of psychological subjects. While Pamela’s accounts of herself compose an identity, that this identity is deliberately tailored towards, or oriented by, her needs for survival, escape, or at the least the mitigation of harm, calls into question the notion that the Pamela present in her textual form is an authentic self-representation. Further, if Pamela’s body is a textual one, it is also a patchwork of appropriations and borrowings: her repurposing of Psalm 137 evinces the way Pamela reuses or recycles textual performances and redeploys, or reiterates, their textual features. Her disconnection is not from a prior authentic identity, but rather Pamela’s reiterative performances reveal her as a copy with no original. Troubling a simplistic dyad of in/authentic femininity, then, it is furthermore how

Pamela's performance strategically depends upon such reiterations to avoid harm, particularly rape. The success of the psalm, like being mistaken for her clothes, shows Pamela to be an active and witting agent in the construction of an identity which is impervious to violence, and capable of repurposing the violent attitudes or poses surrounding her into ones of care. That this Pamela, the Pamela who can redeem Mr. B, feels so disjointed from the Pamela of the early scenes, suggests less a character progression or growth embedded in the text but rather a discontinuity between the textual Pamela and the imperilled girl encountered early in those opening letters.

Towards the novel's conclusion, directly following the wedding scene, the closet which has often been a site of confinement throughout the novel becomes a space in which Pamela might be "refuged" (348). Indeed, as the "naughty Assailer of [Pamela's] Innocence, by a blessed Turn of Providence, is become the kind, the generous Protector and Rewarder of it", the refuge of the closet is an escape not from violence per se, but from the logical conclusions of the amatory plot (345). The resonance between Mr. B as the "Rewarder" of Pamela's innocence and the subtitle of the novel indicates that the precise reward for her steadfastness in the face of his attempts at rape is, first, the whitewashing of those attempts, no longer a peril but merely the prior "naughty" acts of a "dear good Gentleman", and, second, the re-interpretation of sexual contact as not a peril, but a "Reward". The logic of conjugality is atemporal as it may be able to not only alter the present circumstances (and, thus, the future) but also reshape perceptions of the past. Yet the exact word "refuged" suggests that the power of marriage still, in some sense, imperils Pamela. When Pamela finds her "Room in Order for a Guest, that however welcome, as now my Duty teaches me to say," she still considers the prospect "Dreadful", leading to the moment she finds herself "refuged" in the closet (347–48). Even if the marriage can transform her "Prison" into a "Palace", Pamela remains unable to rationalise her "unaccountable Passion" (349). If this is

Richardson's attempt to represent the erotic trepidation of the ingenue on the verge of sexual contact, it is an almost pornographic attention to a state of mind most characterised by submission in the consistent references to "Duty", and anxiety about the conclusion of such a submission.

Indeed, the publicness and explication of Pamela's sexual contact—whether, here, in marriage or elsewhere in the attempted rapes—resonates with Frances Ferguson's argument that pornographic representation is, itself, an explication: a bringing of sexuality into public view, where it may be categorised, as any other performance, along utilitarian lines.⁷³ To Ferguson, the "sexiness of sex" encapsulated by pornographic representations is located within its own "self-enclosure" or generic restraint.⁷⁴ Thus, where *Pamela* attempts to replicate the "innocence" of its heroine through an anxious response to the prospect of sexual contact, the novel not only reproduces but rather *produces* the context under which such context necessitates anxiety: the twinned concepts of anxiety and duty, that is, create a form of sexual coercion which is not-quite-the-same as Mr. B's former acts as a "naughty Assailer", but even if the intention is the consummation of marriage, rather than rape, Pamela's hesitancy suggests that such intentions (or, inner mental states) are unimportant or invisible beyond the surface, the essential interchangeability in *action* between what may be an act of consensual sex and what may be an act of rape. As Ferguson has foundationally argued prior, the formal problem of identifying and describing the differing "mental states" which would characterise the intentions behind a behaviour as rape or as sex is constitutive of the early novel, particularly Richardson's later work in *Clarissa*.⁷⁵

⁷³ Frances Ferguson, *Pornography, the Theory: What Utilitarianism Did to Action* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004), 21.

⁷⁴ Ferguson, *Pornography, the Theory: What Utilitarianism Did to Action*, 21-22.

⁷⁵ See Frances Ferguson, "Rape and the Rise of the Novel," *Representations* 20, no. 20 (1987), <https://doi.org/10.2307/2928503>.

Once again, of course, it is a nonpersonal force which has converted the “naughty Assailer” to the “Rewarder”: “Providence.” That character’s behaviours, or intentions behind behaviours, matter at all in this text is questionable: if the non-characteristic forces of providential fate might direct or conform performances to its own ends, then this is achievable despite the efforts of the characters of the text. “Providence” signifies behaviour, in this case as a movement towards a theory of salvation. The theodicy of *Pamela* lies in its capacity to render autonomy a threat towards, rather than a benefit of or necessity for, personal salvation or transformation. For Pamela, or even Mr. B, to have agency would, in fact, limit the capacity of “Providence” and necessitate the structuring of more plausible psychologies governed less by the narratological logic of the restoration of the alienated subject, and more by the observable surfaces of the psychological interior in motion. If it is accurate to claim that these are absent, as this chapter does, then to do so is to take Pamela’s own claim merely at face-value: that the nonpersonal actors of the text impute meaning and signification beyond the capacity of the personalised characters who perform, act, or carry out such meanings. That is, to take these performances seriously requires their conformity to a schema in which personhood is sublimated by the alienated drive for restoration. If this works along theological lines, it also works as a sketch of the authorial interventions of Richardson in directing seemingly incoherently personal characters towards the end-goal: the reification or enforcement of coercive amatory norms. These in turn transform the act of rape to one of consenting sex through erasing the distinction between the non/consenting girl and the dutiful, erotically available wife.⁷⁶ It is precisely in the interchangeable significance of

⁷⁶ As Helene Moglen argues, through resisting both her own and Mr B’s desires until marriage, Pamela succeeds in achieving playing the “good girl” while receiving the same sexualised results as the “bad girl”: her body becomes currency far more valuable for its virtue than it would have been without it, and Mr B stands to “profit equally” from the exchange. See Helene Moglen, *The Trauma of Gender: A Feminist Theory of the English Novel* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001), 58.

status, girl, or wife, that the actor of sexual harm(s) may be a “Rewarder” or an “Assailer”.

This status, it seems, has little to do with the interior state of the woman or girl in question,.

Whose virtue is rewarded if this is the reward? It seems it cannot necessarily be Pamela, who is thrust from her initial, private identity into public circulation, that very publicness imperilling her to the point of symbolic or metaphoric death by the pond, whose reward is the conclusion of a rape deferred until its coercive capacity has transformed her once again from girl, to victim, to “Bride” (348). Rather, her virtue becomes the reward. As a nonpersonal “it” for whom a visible surface identity is consistently in flux, the persistent feminization of Pamela beyond merely a discursive element constituting (or of) the text is evident in her consistent bodily peril. Epistolary fiction pretends to a kind of subjectivity that if presupposed as an accurate measure of character depth still cannot fully explicate the motion of Pamela as she falls into circulation.

Chapter 3. “More potent than Ithuriel’s spear”: Phallic Personhood in Samuel Richardson’s

Clarissa (1747–48)

The unsatisfactory embodied moralism of *Pamela* (1740) surveyed in Chapter Two contrasts to the more sophisticated efforts at deploying a kind of body in Samuel Richardson’s second novel, *Clarissa, or the History of a Young Lady* (1747–48). Richardson’s first novel propels the objectified servant girl, Pamela, into public view as a potentially erotic site through the circulation of accounts of her; through the (carefully embodied) detailing of attempts at rape by Mr. B; and finally, through the insistence on non-personal forces acting beyond Pamela’s control—or even that of Mr. B—which coordinate their respective selves into an amatory plot. *Clarissa*, meanwhile, takes this project of mapping the body against its social legibility in a different direction. Focusing on the authoritarian constraints structured by the mid-century patriarchal home, Richardson disrupts the linearity of Clarissa Harlowe’s sexual and social adolescence through her relationship to the pernicious rapist Robert Lovelace.¹ This

¹ The rape of Clarissa by Lovelace serves as the central juncture in the novel, and has been examined critically by scholars for many decades, perhaps among the most paradigmatic and canonical episodes of eighteenth-century fiction. Helene Moglen argues that Lovelace collapses desire and violence, with “humiliation” the chief form of sexual pleasure: “relationships involve manipulation and exploitation instead of mutuality”. Foundationally, Frances Ferguson uses *Clarissa* as an exemplar of the problematic of stipulated forms—consent, nonconsent, person, nonperson, and so on—which allocate to the act of consenting or nonconsenting their specific legal or social meanings, noting that, historically, rape law advocates a clear superiority of physical evidence over and above any form of testimony, to solve such a problem. The rape produces pathos, encouraging identification with Clarissa herself, according to John Frow, through the minutely detailed passages elaborating her responses to her predicament. Stephanie Insley Hershinow, more recently, has articulated the centrality of Clarissa’s conjectural history of humanity to her figuration, arguing that the rape serves to separate Clarissa from the social realm, severing her from ordinary subjecthood and upholding her as a unique kind of novitiate figure. See Frances Ferguson, “Rape and the Rise of the Novel,” *Representations* 20, no. 20 (1987): 90, <https://doi.org/10.2307/2928503>; John Frow, *Character and Person* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 62; Stephanie Insley Hershinow, *Born Yesterday: Inexperience and the Early Realist Novel* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2019), 38–41; Helene Moglen, *The Trauma of Gender: A Feminist Theory of the English Novel* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001), 59–60.

bulky novel, as Melinda Alliker Rabb argues, is radically underplotted: the narrative functions as an accessory to the novel's interest in character.² Lovelace's single-minded pursuit of Clarissa's body necessitates his production of a world in which rape *is* sex: in which violence and the erotic correlate closely enough to signify—if only to Lovelace himself—that borders between predation and seduction are permeable.³ Lovelace's figuration allows Richardson to query and critique both the amatory logic underlying Lovelace's plotting and, simultaneously, articulate the limits of masculinist dominion over women and girls, demanding an account of sexual contact which centres conscious participation and reciprocity.⁴ In turn, this thematic interest in reciprocity structures the interplay of self-representations between Clarissa and Lovelace, governing the expansion of the epistolary mode beyond Pamela's unidirectional account to reintegrate similar polyphonic experimentations to those explored in Chapter One, in pursuit of mutuality within conjugality. This chapter will read the figure of Lovelace to re-assess the constitution of the gendered body within Richardson's second novel.

² Melinda Alliker Rabb, "Underplotting, Overplotting, and Correspondence in *Clarissa*," *Modern Language Studies* 11, no. 3 (1981): 61, <https://doi.org/10.2307/3194380>.

³ To Judith Wilt, it is Clarissa's "feminised" drive for a relationship which might restore her virtue and reinstate the authority of Lovelace within the normative patrilineal structure of the household which Lovelace is motivated against: by discarding, rather than marrying, the raped Clarissa, Lovelace reveals himself as—substantially—beyond redemption; a creature of a wholly different caste and ideological formation to Clarissa. See Judith Wilt, "He Could Go No Farther: A Modest Proposal about Lovelace and Clarissa," *PMLA* 92, no. 1 (1977): 22, <https://doi.org/10.2307/461411>.

⁴ It is well-worth noting that this masculinist demesne is represented as constituted not only by the predatory Lovelace, but by the Harlowe family themselves; Ruth Perry's important reading of *Clarissa* suggests Clarissa herself is forced to act as a "propitiatory offering", preventing conflict between two "individual male representatives", James Harlowe and Lovelace, whose conflict only tangentially involves Clarissa herself, but is borne out and revenged upon her. See Ruth Perry, *Novel Relations: the Transformation of Kinship in English Literature and Culture, 1748-1818* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 66-68.

The figure of Lovelace represents a complex attempt at figuring a kind of agency associated primarily with bodies. Making sense of Lovelace demands attention to various stratified forms of agency which correspond to differing paradigms of interpretation. In an important reading of the novel, Sandra Macpherson importantly situates the problem of agency in *Clarissa* as one of instrumentality.⁵ Agency, and thereby, in a legal sense, culpability, may be diffuse between actors both intentionally and unintentionally complicit in an activity. As Macpherson argues, Clarissa's committal to her blamelessness in the light of the rape is only possible given Lovelace's "complex perfidy": it is only through the actions of others, including Clarissa herself, that intentions ascribed to him are carried out.⁶ Lovelace's principal aim throughout the novel remains the satisfaction of his desire for Clarissa's body, regardless of her own intentions. That this pursuit is constituted not only through force or violence, but most powerfully through a range of discursive strategies, forms Lovelace's unique narrative presence. A misogynistic inheritor of the libertine tradition, Lovelace's conflation of rape and sex, text and body, violence and desire echoes the Restoration rake even as it illustrates his untimeliness. This deliberate and perhaps superfluous textuality is suggestive of how the written intersects with the sexual: these two categories involve questions of intentionality and agency that are not easily resolved.

Collapsing the category of writing and sex, Julie Park has demonstrated how the prosthetics of pen and dildo relate, indicating both the prosthetic capacity of each, but, furthermore, their shared lack of agency: the "manual imitation" required of the pen, or the dildo, is itself a simulation.⁷ Importantly, a penis is not a dildo: the motif of the permanently

⁵ Sandra Macpherson, *Harm's Way: Tragic Responsibility and the Novel Form* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2010), 82.

⁶ Macpherson, *Harm's Way: Tragic Responsibility and the Novel Form*, 84.

⁷ Julie Park, "Writing with Pen and Dildo: Libertine Techniques of Eighteenth-Century Narrative," *Journal of Narrative Theory* 50, no. 1 (2020): 32.

erect sexual toy can be contrasted easily against the, most often, flaccid, and vulnerable penis. Indeed, as Peter Boxall has recently argued, the prosthetic limb can “exhibit a kind of natural grace that is unavailable to the human”: the prosthetic supersedes the organic through its representative capacity.⁸ Modifying Boxall’s claim with attention to the phallus rather than the limb, it is possible to see how the twinned instruments of dildo and pen mark simulation’s victory over the fragility of the human form: the instrumentation of the erect penis marks the absent vulnerability of the flaccid one.⁹ Likewise, the pen and the dildo can only correlate insofar as the pen’s permanent erection is not called into question. The pen’s failures, its simulative capacity as a tool for representing rather than the object of representation itself, requires of it a kind of flaccidity which, like the penis, limits its capacity to perform an aggrandised phallic function.¹⁰ Yet considering either pen or penis flaccid is to disempower, to render weak or vulnerable, and to challenge their relationship to the phallus as a synecdoche of power. Initially privileging these themes, Richardson’s preface to the 1748 edition of *Clarissa* situates Lovelace thus:

And yet that other, although in unbosoming himself to a select friend he discovers wickedness enough to entitle himself to a general hatred, preserves a decency, as well in his images as in his language, which is not always to be

⁸ Peter Boxall, *The Prosthetic Imagination: A History of the Novel as Artificial Life*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020), 124.

⁹ To Helene Moglen impotence represents a “forbidden” corollary to Lovelace’s own regressive, “solipsistic” fantasy. As his “primal, psychic past” is primordially constituted, its perpetuation is read by Moglen as a recurrence, rather than mastery, of the fear of impotence and castration. See Moglen, *The Trauma of Gender: A Feminist Theory of the English Novel*, 60.

¹⁰ Frow notes that within *Clarissa* itself, the unreliability of representations of affect is clear to Clarissa’s brother and sister. Clarissa is accused, as Frow describes, of having rhetorical talents herself which in turn crystallises the antagonism between “sentimental” and cynical interpretations of her character. The pen, as a synecdoche of discourse, inherits these problematic talents. See Frow, *Character and Person*, 61.

found in some of the works of the most celebrated modern writers, whose subjects and characters have less warranted the liberties they have taken.¹¹

Richardson's pointed description of Lovelace's "decency" is notable, suggesting his deliberate pains to evoke, rhetorically and stylistically the class position Lovelace enjoyed. The rather conventional image of Lovelace's bosom as an affective seat brings a corporealised description to bear upon the practice of Lovelace's nearly diurnal writing to Belford.¹² This bosom materialises the sentimental motif of the heart, locating feeling and affect squarely in the body rather than abstracting it as the epiphenomena of the mind. In this early connection between the heart as an affective site and the diurnal narratives of which *Clarissa* is composed, this novel emphasises a tension between the body and the experiential, psychologised unit of the self. This invites a theoretical rereading attentive to the problematic corporealization of identity. Elizabeth Napier's reading of *Clarissa's* embodiments argues that Richardson's novel asks how, if at all, desire can be enacted—whether the agential acts of a self might be superseded by the body.¹³ Yet this itself invites the question: whose desire is enacted? Whose body? How might desire constitute the selves and bodies enacted by, for, or of it? If Lovelace is incapable of flaccidity, his single-minded pursuit of Clarissa's body follows a logic of phallic power, demanding the subjection of female bodily autonomy to male sexual power. To query the text's phallic coordination is to query its loci of power and its articulation of subjectivity. For Barbara Johnson, instrumentality is set in opposition to

¹¹ Samuel Richardson, *Clarissa; or The History of a Young Lady*, ed. Angus Ross (London: Penguin, 2004), 35. All further citations refer to this edition and are cited in text.

¹² Belford—for his part—enables Lovelace's phallic fictions: Murray L. Brown persuasively argues for a resituating of Belford as a key figure in interpreting the novel, as it is ultimately his receptions of both Lovelace's and Clarissa's intertwining narratives which shape the reader's pose. See Murray L. Brown, "Authorship and Generic Exploitation: why Lovelace must Fear *Clarissa*," *Studies in the Novel* 30 (1998): 247-48.

¹³ Elizabeth R. Napier, *Falling into Matter: Problems of Embodiment in English Fictions* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2017), xiv.

humanity: the subject's inferiority in the face of its fictive wholeness produces a self.¹⁴ It is precisely the gap between the flaccid penis and the erect phallus in which the masculine subject can come into being. This may be brought to bear on the text fruitfully through interpreting Lovelace's self-image.

Mid-way through the novel, Lovelace curiously figures himself as an actor within a text of his own construction. In letter 232, he writes that he imagines himself in a "narrative of the dramatic kind", subtitling a section of the letter, "ACT II. Scene, Hampstead Heath Continued" and inserting the stage direction beneath, "*Enter my Rascal*" (764). Drawing attention to the performance of a role within his plot to rape Clarissa, Lovelace emphasises his duplicitous nature through directly inferring the performative form of theatre. He deepens this association in the text of the letter:

When I came, my person and dress having answered Will's description, the people were ready to worship me. I now and then sighed, now and then put on a lighter air; which, however, I designed should show more of vexation ill-disguised, than of real cheerfulness. And they told Will it was a thousand pities so fine a lady should have such *skittish tricks*; adding, that she might expose herself to great dangers by them; for that there were rakes everywhere (*Lovelaces in every corner, Jack!*). (765)

Assuming the role of a husband searching for his wife, Lovelace performs the character in dress, mood, and expression. Having sent Will ahead to prepare the audience, Lovelace is able to enter the scene at Hampstead Heath with a willing and waiting crowd "ready to worship me"; his concocted affect clearly resonating with its intended readers. Carefully modulating his speech and expressions, sighing, and expressing "vexation ill-disguised",

¹⁴ Barbara Johnson, *Persons and Things* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2008), 59.

Lovelace is consciously producing a pose in which his pursuit of Clarissa is apparent to the surrounding townsfolk, yet not legible for what it really is. In a duplicitous manoeuvre, Clarissa is positioned as the wife fleeing “so fine a gentleman” as him—at the risk of her being “estrang[e]d” from his affections (765). Re-articulating the rape plot as the desperate search for a missing spouse that aims at reconciliation masks Lovelace’s true intentions by presenting a different account of his self. This conscious performing has layers of perfidy within it: the “ill-disguised” concern of Lovelace’s performance as the husband suggests his capacity to modulate his physiognomy with aplomb. But it is not only Lovelace who plays a role in this myth of the escapee wife; the interventions by Will, Lovelace’s manservant, also manages how Clarissa’s own performances are understood by the intended audience—the townspeople of Hampstead Heath:

Will told them, before I came, ‘That this lady was but lately married to one of the finest gentlemen in the world. But that, he being very gay and lively, she was *mortal* jealous of him; and in a fit of that sort, had eloped from him. For although she loved him dearly, and he doted upon her (as well he might, since, as they had seen, she was the finest creature *that ever the sun shone upon*), yet she was apt to be very wilful and sullen...she had three or four times played his master such tricks; but with all the virtue and innocence in the world (764–65).

The capability Lovelace exhibits for restructuring himself extends to the world surrounding him, and its denizens. Clarissa is not immune from being cast within his “dramatic narrative”, reconfiguring her “virtue and innocence” as an affect not of her person, but of her marriage to him. Lovelace consciously produces a universe in which his pursuit of Clarissa is morally sound: in which the “finest gentleman” is spurned by the “wilful and sullen” wife, “*mortal* jealous” of his “gay and lively” attitude. In so doing, Lovelace avoids the legal implications

of his predation, and situates his pursuit as itself virtuous and innocent. By drawing in empirically observable facts—Lovelace’s “gay and lively” libertine nature, Clarissa’s renowned beauty as the “finest creature” the “sun shone upon”—this alternative to reality is persuasively grounded in the plausible. Lovelace’s counterfactual spin relies on both his performance, and a misreading of Clarissa’s. By figuring this as a “dramatic narrative”, he can present his (warped) account of Clarissa’s resistance to his plots as signifying her own participation within his amatory theatrical fiction.¹⁵

Lovelace deepens the association between his plots and theatre, interspersing his text in letter 232 with stage directions emphasising performance, such as “Enter my Rascal”, or “Exit landlord. Re-enter with two great-coats” (764–65). Most interestingly, he refers to himself in the abstracted sense, suggesting in parentheses that he may find “Lovelaces in every corner” (765). In this aside, Lovelace connects his own nature, as a rake, to the idealised position he occupies as no longer fully human—but, rather, an instrumentalization of his own nature. The possibility of there being “Lovelaces in every corner” reflects the non-unique, and nonpersonal, status he obtains. Casting himself as a character, one performable by multiple persons, suggests a cognizance of his own figuration, a type rather than a fully formed person: his own participation in text as an embodied textual agent, a theatrical figure.

These efforts at theatricalizing throughout this extended scene lend themselves to the grandiose vision of Lovelace, describing himself as like “the devil in Milton” (772). Yet, in so doing, he forecasts his own failure to attain Clarissa:

¹⁵ To William J. Palmer, Lovelace dominates Richardson’s fiction and demands “drama”: the “dramatic tension” upheld by the novel until its “climax”, his rape of Clarissa. Repeated expressions of his need for artistic control mirror his desire to control, rape, and revenge himself upon Clarissa even as these expressions “write the scripts” of the novel itself. See William J. Palmer, “Two Dramatists: Lovelace and Richardson in *Clarissa*,” *Studies in the Novel* 5, no. 1 (1973): 8.

She started, and looked at me with terror[...]

I saw it was impossible to conceal myself from her, any more than (from the violent impulses of my passion) to forbear manifesting myself. I unbuttoned therefore my cape, I pulled off my flapped, slouched hat; I threw open my great-coat and, like the devil in Milton (an odd comparison though!),

I started up in my own form divine,

Touched by the beam of her celestial eye,

More potent than Ithuriel's spear! (772)

Richardson suggestively works with Lovelace's figuration as an arch-villain to ground his performance in legible, literarily accessible material. Yet Richardson deliberately revises Milton's text. First and foremost, unlike Milton's Lucifer returned violently to his initial likeness by Ithuriel and his spear, the discarding of the disguise by Lovelace invites Clarissa's "terror" rather than emphasizing her power. Even so, her "celestial eye" possesses a unique phallic potency, a "beam", associated with the spear of Ithuriel by the simile. This comparison suggests Lovelace is conscious of Clarissa's gaze, and particularly of its potential power. Lovelace's reference to Milton further accentuates his desire—if not desperation—to cast himself as the mythic aggressor, a literary role he can only ever partially embody.¹⁶

¹⁶ Lovelace's failure to fully convert himself from person to literary text is most evident in his mortality: the novel concludes following his death. Lovelace's efforts at recasting himself at the centre of the drama are thus frustrated by his essential suicidality: the "gentlemanly code of honour" which enables the duel in which Lovelace dies is called into question by Lovelace's flippant attitude towards his own risk of harm—Rachel Sulich argues that Richardson's representation of Lovelace centres a suicidal orientation, an awareness of and deliberate invitation of his mortal state. Jolene Zigarovich invokes Lovelace's obsession with the "beautiful corpse" as one acting principle behind his motivation for death; a fascination, moreover, Clarissa herself shares. See Rachel Sulich, "Lovelace's 'Gloomy Scheme of Death': Suffering, Dueling, and Suicide in Richardson's *Clarissa*," *Eighteenth-Century Life* 46, no. 2 (2022): 90, <https://doi.org/10.1215/00982601-9664423>; Jolene Zigarovich, "Courting Death: Necrophilia in Samuel Richardson's *Clarissa*," *Studies in the Novel* 32, no. 2 (2000): 114.

In Milton's epic, Ithuriel, one of the angels guarding Adam and Eve in Eden, touches Satan's disguise with the "celestial temper" with which his weapon is imbued.¹⁷ Returned "of force" to his own "likeness", Satan is represented disempowered by being "discovered and surprised", and a few lines later is "accosted" by Ithuriel and Zephon (IV:814–23). Satan's exclamation at the discovery, "know ye not me", works with his frustration at a lack of recognition, power, and authority over the heavenly realm, rather than demonstrating his triumph (IV:828). For Satan, discovery delays his plot to claim authority over Eve, and, thus, Eden. The poetic fragment inserted in Richardson's text thus invests a certain textual power in Clarissa. It is "*her* celestial eye" which operates as "Ithuriel's spear" in the novel, one which is "more potent" than the angelic weapon in Milton, suggesting her proximity to the divine and potency as a result (772, emphasis mine).

In this sense, Richardson, and Lovelace, complicate an important script associated with sexual touching. To Lovelace, the female Clarissa is imbued with the phallic spear, the weapon granting her access to his real form. Her gaze is more "potent" than the phallic symbol—stripping away layers of disguise and forcing the perfidious figure to reveal his true nature, even if his own form is "divine". Clarissa perceives beneath the great-coat and slouched hat the touchable and, here, erotogenic, body of Lovelace. For a moment, the power to do things with bodies is invested not in the masculine, but rather by clarifying Clarissa's relationship to the divine, instead in the powerful "beam" of the "celestial" feminine eye. It is Lovelace's form which is revealed through this act of touching, his body mapped by the (literal) exploratory gaze. Associating Clarissa's gaze with Ithuriel's weapon in Milton grants her access to a symbolic phallus, contact with which is epistemically grounding. Clarissa, momentarily, possesses in Lovelace's imaginary the one thing he never can: total

¹⁷ John Milton, *Paradise Lost*, (IV:813). All further citations are given in-text.

coordination into the dildo-like fully erect (and unearthly, angelic) penetrative apparatus, signifying her position of textual power. His flaccidity is found wanting.¹⁸

Yet Lovelace quickly recovers and works the situation to his apparent advantage. While he is knowable to Clarissa, his seemingly bodily mastery and near-total control of his surroundings allows him to manipulate the environment. When a gentleman and his sister burst into the room to confront him, Lovelace defuses the tension with his rhetorical acuity:

I beg pardon sir: *If* the lady is your wife, I have no business here. *But*, sir, by her concern at seeing you—

Pray, sir, none of your *if*'s, and *but*'s, I beseech you: nor *your* concern about the *lady's* concern. You are a very qualified judge in this cause; and I beg of you, sir, to oblige me with your absence[...]

'Tis well he made not another word: for I found my choler begin to rise. I could not bear that the finest neck, and arms, and foot, in the world, should be exposed to the eyes of any man living but mine. (773)

Continuing his performance of the concerned and spurned husband, Lovelace draws in the surrounding figures to his plot. Deidre Lynch argues Lovelace's "talent" for composition in his letters offers him a capacity to "rescript" the figures surrounding him, construing, and

¹⁸ Lovelace sees himself not only in the role of Satan: ironically, in his death, he sees himself as a kind of Christ-figure, too. Refusing "ghostly attendance, and the sacraments in the Catholic way", his final words—"LET THIS EXPIATE"—suggest a desire for his death to perform the role of propitiation, ironized by the grandeur of his centring himself as a divine arbiter, impiously echoing and rearranging the cry of the crucified Jesus in the gospel of John, 19:29-31: "it is finished" (1488). The refusal of Lovelace to take a Catholic sacrament suggests his belief in his sufficiency to perform the propitiate role of Christ in the theological drama of his own death. As Napier describes, in this sense the cry for expiation is "sacrilegious," suggesting the "pious gloss" offers Lovelace no "reparation" and Clarissa no "justice". See Napier, *Falling into Matter*, 62.

bringing them into his fiction through his writing.¹⁹ The gentleman present—despite his concern initially for Clarissa’s wellbeing—becomes an accessory to Lovelace’s efforts at predation. Lovelace’s linguistic mastery relies here on a form of flattery which insinuates the appropriate behaviour of his interlocutor, judging the case before the gentleman, and invites the correct conclusion, the gentleman’s absence. Spinning the complex narrative web in which his efforts at rape are legitimated re-colours his attempted rape of Clarissa as sex. His belief in his possession of the body of Clarissa—her “finest neck, and arms, and foot” and jealous protection of these assets, concerned that they are visible to “any man living” other than himself—darkly mirrors the exclusivity of a marriage contract, parodying conjugal monogamy through its (apparent) falsity. The lie that they are married refigures this jealous possession; just as in Will’s prior dialogue, Clarissa is transformed from being quite literally angelic to a “wilful and sullen” eloper (764). Fixing these narratives in the letter form allows Lovelace to record for posterity a counterfactual realm in which his (actual) pursuit and rape of Clarissa is figured as one among a range of rhetorical possibilities. By deepening in each letter the concentric circles of amatory fictions which mask, disguise, or make legible this central plot, Lovelace commands his writing to operate power(s) he *cannot* have over Clarissa.

Lynch’s argument further suggests the fixity of the letter in fact disqualifies its capacity for authentic expression of the self.²⁰ This may indicate a self-consciousness to Lovelace’s performances, cognizance of their status as performance in their conversion from activity to text. Describing his “own form divine” in comparison to the “afflicted” form of the disguise suggests the centrality of Lovelace’s embodied performances to narratives of

¹⁹ Deidre Lynch, *The Economy of Character: Novels, Market Culture, and the Business of Inner Meaning* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998), 44.

²⁰ Lynch, *The Economy of Character*, 45.

superiority (767, 772). For Lovelace to put on the role of the inferior with such success calls into question, however, the authenticity of either body, both constructed knowingly into forms which benefit his plot. Douglas Murray argues that such references to Milton help situate Lovelace as a tempter, drawing on the archetypal representation of Satan in the Genesis myth.²¹ To function as a tempter, Lovelace is figured with a degree of attractiveness for his wit, insight, and rhetorical brilliance to serve as temptations.

John Carroll has formulated such a problem: Lovelace's "vitality" and "exuberance" ingratiate, serving to "attract and amuse" the reader.²² If, as Anna Howe implies in letter 10, Lovelace and his text—his letters or correspondence—are interchangeable, then such literariness and wit is not only characteristic of his prose but constitutive of whatever self he possesses, and, correlatively, suggests his characterisation *as* witty, intellectual, superior, vital, exuberant (71). Janet Altman suggests that such a letter writing practice may form a "metonymic" letter; where the "letter itself" physically "stands for the lover".²³ Yet, importantly, letter-writing rarely serves as a stand-in for contact in *Clarissa*; very few of the letters of which the novel is composed are sent from Clarissa to Lovelace to the other. Rather, the text is composed predominantly of their epistles to other characters such as Belford, in Lovelace's instance, or in Clarissa's case, Anna. Thus as Altman suggests, letters shroud the "immediacy" of "direct contact": rhetoric intervenes as each character attempts to have their case heard by others.²⁴ Yet, while maintaining such a boundary between "rhetoric" and "direct contact" may make sense of the novel's convoluted and often indirect approach to

²¹ Douglas Murray, "Classical Myth in Richardson's *Clarissa*: Ovid Revised," *Eighteenth-Century Fiction* 3, no. 2 (1991): 113.

²² John Carroll, "Lovelace as Tragic Hero," *University of Toronto quarterly* 42, no. 1 (1972): 17, <https://doi.org/10.3138/utq.42.1.14>.

²³ Janet Gurkin Altman, *Epistolarity: Approaches to a Form* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1982), 19.

²⁴ Altman, *Epistolarity: Approaches to a Form*, 23-24.

action, it does not provide a compelling basis for neglecting how the conjuring of Lovelace's body is achieved through his discursive efforts.

The rhetorical grandeur that comprises Lovelace's text is constitutive of whatever "self" he may be said to be or possess. Read in this way, Lovelace appears less a personal agent, and, rather, a textual intervention. His failure to attain personhood, his perfected phallus superseding the flaccid penis, suggests he imagines his own status heightened to an elevated, mythic genre in which his priapism is not only possible, but desirable. If *Clarissa* is a novel—a form which psychologises, individuates, or subjectivises—then such a heroic self cannot coexist with its diegesis or its form. Lovelace is out of place. As Elaine McGirr suggests, Richardson's reaction against the "heroic mode", in favour of developing an appropriate linguistic and literary community of and for Georgian London, involves questioning both the "incendiary" character of the stage and emphasising the performative power of language itself.²⁵ In the view of Jeremy Webster, a central tension in Restoration libertinism lay in the space between public performance and private pleasure, a dominant figure of the Restoration yet one with a complex relationship to prescriptive authorities.²⁶ Most importantly, as Webster examines, graphic depictions of sexuality within libertine literature coexisted with a critique of autocracy: "transgressive sexual practices" themselves embodied and carried forward these critiques.²⁷ As James Grantham Turner argues, by the

²⁵ Elaine McGirr, "Why Lovelace Must Die," *Novel: a Forum on Fiction* 37, no. 1-2 (2003): 5-6, <https://doi.org/10.1215/ddnov.037010005>. McGirr elsewhere argues that Richardson's novel refutes the "heroic mode—wholesale, responding to the Jacobite uprising of 1745. Seeking to instate the "practical, reasonable, plausible" over spectacle requires the abjection of Stuart and Jacobite heroics; see Elaine M. McGirr, *Heroic Mode and Political Crisis, 1660-1745* (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 2009), 205-06.

²⁶ Jeremy W. Webster, *Performing Libertinism in Charles II's Court: Politics, Drama, Sexuality* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), 2.

²⁷ Webster, *Performing Libertinism in Charles II's Court: Politics, Drama, Sexuality*, 171-72. Webster cites the example of the attribution to John Wilmot, Earl of Rochester of the play

eighteenth century, the libertine had become recognisable in a range of literary formations, identifiable to contemporary critics as a “prurient alamode”, metaphoric language centred upon the genitalia of both men and women, stylistically and sexually suspect for its simultaneous deference to and breaking of conventions of decency.²⁸ To Erin Mackie, the libertine and rake flirt with these transgressive borders in their association with criminality; rakish figures like Lovelace require a defence of their behaviour as either simply performative and thus inconsequential, a celebration of their erotic and stylish accomplishments as aesthetic objects of entertainment, or appeals to the “irresistible” and “innate” nature of their libertine tendencies.²⁹ Yet, by the time of Richardson’s novel, Lovelace’s tyranny is not only no longer erotically appealing, it is outmoded and seemingly inconsistent with the narrative investment in plausible, grounded scenarios detailed by fastidious, first-hand accounts. Crucially, even Lovelace seems aware that his life does not resemble the heightened narratives of theatre, but instead operates as a mundane reality:

How can it be? I imagined for a long while that we were born to make each other happy: but, quite the contrary; we really seem to be sent to plague one another.

I will write a comedy, I think. I have a title read; and that’s half the work.

The Quarrelsome Lovers. ‘Twill do. There’s something new and striking in it. Yet, more or less, all lovers quarrel. (571)

Sodom, published in 1684, an obscene depiction of the court. The synonymity for the readership of *Sodom* between Rochester’s sexual practices and his graphic texts allowed this attribution to make sense, even if it remained contested into the 1690s and beyond.

²⁸ James Grantham Turner, “Pope’s Libertine Self-Fashioning,” *The Eighteenth Century* 29, no. 2 (1988): 124-25, <http://www.jstor.org.ezproxy.library.sydney.edu.au/stable/41467735>.

²⁹ Erin Skye Mackie, *Rakes, Highwaymen, and Pirates: the Making of the Modern Gentleman in the Eighteenth Century* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2009), 36.

Lovelace's fantasy of a union with Clarissa is quickly disrupted by the mundane realisation that life does not cohere to the plotting of comedic theatre. Immediately prior, Lovelace describes Clarissa as "perverse", despite her reputation as "one of the sweetest-tempered creatures in the world" (571). Overleaf, he describes the experience of the dispute as rendering him a "common man" (572). Yet, Lovelace cannot escape his own ego: referencing an impending plot to marry Clarissa, he describes it as "my happy day": no acknowledgement of mutual consent appears necessary. If he is common, it is precisely in this capacity to re-imagine bland misogyny and tyranny as representative of superiority. The conjectural play's title appropriately echoes this imaginary, even as his admission that the titling serves as the most difficult aspect of textual composition suggests a self-aware, or even self-parodic, characterisation. Furthermore, Richardson here deepens an association between Lovelace and the stage, and in turn between his tyranny over Clarissa and his obsession with performance of role. Lovelace operates as a signification of the strong association drawn between theatricality and Stuart absolutism; a figure deployed in aim at querying the performances of power embedded in language through his theatricality. Richardson's reaction against this theatricality, as McGirr further suggests, is rooted strongly in both anti-Jacobite and anti-Stuart sentiment, serving to conflate absolutism and tyranny.³⁰

Thus, Anna's insightful comparison of Lovelace to "Herod" and Clarissa to "his Mariamne" in letter 229.2 can collapse two kinds of despotism: the patriarchy of classical history and the modern tyranny of Lovelace (749). The appeal to the classical serves to, furthermore, locate Lovelace in the tradition of the absolute sovereign, with Herod, king of Judea, and his murder of his wife, Mariamne the Hasmonean, recorded by Josephus, an episode absent from the biblical account. This emphasises the historical continuum of

³⁰ McGirr, "Why Lovelace Must Die," 8.

patriarchal power in the Richardsonian imaginary: the commonality of both Lovelace and Herod lies in their misogynistic practice, and positions of power derived from patriarchal privilege within given communities. Anna, in producing such a mirror for Lovelace, elevates him, placing him on equal footing to Herod through the metaphor and thus indicating his own textual sovereignty. Yet, such kingship is only ever partial. Herod is provincial, subjugated (in the classical account) to Rome, and—in the gospel narrative—arbitrary and paranoid: Herod may be best known for being so “troubled” by the birth of Jesus that he has the children of Bethlehem massacred.³¹ Thus, comparing the two figures provides an insight into the relative provincialism of the Richardsonian libertine, his waning power in the mid-century marked by their irreformability into the (genteel) subject of the emerging sentimental novel.

The repudiation of such a heroic sentiment, read as absolutism, in turn complicates Lovelace’s claims regarding Clarissa’s being “his goddess”. One incident is in letter 99, where Lovelace expands this description to focus on her “flood of brightness”, the vision leaving him stunned, claiming he “trod air, and hardly thought myself a mortal” (399). Over the course of the passage, the description deepens:

Her wax-like flesh (for, after all, of flesh and blood I think she is!) by its delicacy and firmness, answers for the soundness of her health. Thou hast often heard me launch out in praise of her complexion. I never in my life beheld a skin so *illustriously* fair. The lily and the driven snow it is nonsense to talk of her: her lawn and her laces one might, indeed, compare to those; but what a whited wall would a woman appear to be, who had a complexion which would justify such unnatural comparisons? But this lady is all alive,

³¹ See Matthew 2:1-18, KJV.

all glowing, all charming flesh and blood, yet so clear, that every meandering vein is to be seen in the lovely parts of her which custom permits to be visible. (399)

The rapid manoeuvre from a metaphor which may clearly refer to the body as an effigy or figure (“wax-like”) to the rejection of this metaphor in favour of abstracted imagery, whether the lily or the snow, is important. Problematising Lovelace’s conjuration of Clarissa the goddess is the question of flesh. Clarissa might simultaneously be “all alive, all glowing” and yet a “goddess”: further, the two natural metaphors rejected—the lily and the snow—become legible only in relation to the artificial lace she is dressed in. The artificial and the constructed are thus here supernatural: imposed upon the body yet accentuating its living features, participant in some way in the living of them. The lawn and the lace then become prosthetic, given life in their proximity to flesh. That these prostheses obscure those parts of her which custom does not “permit[...] to be visible” insinuates the prostheses’s role as an element of the body’s regulatory apparatus: “custom” suggests that the act of dressing is already implicated as a function of regulation. To Boxall, the novel’s counterposition against artificiality as an exploration of the ‘natural’ human mind, comes into conflict with the “mechanised” human form intuited by seventeenth- and eighteenth-century scientists: this very opposition produces the tension between the (still living) effigy of Clarissa and Lovelace’s failure to capture her as either “goddess” or “all alive”.³²

Lovelace’s mastery here is thus his perceptive attention to the sexing role of “custom” in producing a body that is both “all alive, all glowing” and wax-like. Wax implies a state of statuesque perfection and pallor at the same time. Chapter One of this thesis has already articulated the revisability of wax: its smoothness and resistance to obstinacy makes it an

³² Boxall, *The Prosthetic Imagination*, 120-122.

ideal sculptural tool, but furthermore one which imitates the body's own ever-changing state. Yet, in suggesting the sculptural qualities of the body through its waxy characteristics, Lovelace's metaphor has a capacious fluidity. Wax and the body are linked all too closely in eighteenth-century British culture: as historian Joanna Ebenstein suggests, the anatomical wax model presents itself in this period as a troublingly seductive form.³³ As Ebenstein argues, the anatomical model may be "neither-dead-nor-alive", uncannily offering an intimate simulation of the body.³⁴ As Stephanie Insley Hershino has argued, Clarissa's status as a living person within the text may be called into question: either "prematurely deceased" or "civilly dead", Clarissa does not perform as a fully living agent; rather, the long novel explores her states of "*being* dead."³⁵ Hershino's provocative reading—that Richardson's "heroine is dead"—plots Clarissa's failure to insist on her being both wax-like and alive.³⁶ Taking Ebenstein's suggestion of the supine model's seductive form as a provocation, it is possible that Clarissa's deadness does not preclude her desirability: rather, it is the basis of it.

Lovelace's conferral upon Clarissa of the noncorporeal status of goddess infers both an otherworldliness while holding in view dead embodiments such as the waxen figure. If Anna can declare to Clarissa in letter 10 "I am fitter for *this* world than you, you for the *next* than me," such a statement can be taken as illustrative of the broader problem of Clarissa's narrative "self": its perfection seems most evident where it is furthest removed from the fleshy, mortal plane and instead is placed with the ethereality of the divine (69). In "*this* world," by contrast, "wax-like" flesh, is rejected as an unnatural comparison to the perfection

³³ Joanna Ebenstein, "Ode to an Anatomical Venus," *Women's Studies Quarterly* 40, no. 3/4 (2012): 348-49.

³⁴ Ebenstein, "Ode to an Anatomical Venus," 349.

³⁵ Hershino, *Born Yesterday*, 56.

³⁶ Hershino, *Born Yesterday*, 58.

of Clarissa. To imagine himself the victor against such an alien presence requires Lovelace's coordination into the aggressors of myth: Satan, or Herod.

This mythic or heightened status is suggested, furthermore, in Clarissa's own writing. As Hershinow has suggested, Clarissa consistently looks for a deeper purpose beneath, before, or beyond the social, a prior foundation which supersedes (by its priority) the violent order of sexuality.³⁷ Thus may Clarissa envision herself "happy" beyond the unhappiness of her present suffering in a letter to Dr Lewin (1253):

I thought, till I received your affectionate and welcome letter, that I had neither father, uncle, brother left; nor hardly a friend among my former favourers of your sex[...]

I *was* to be unhappy—in order to *be* happy: that is my hope. Resigning therefore to that hope, I will without any further preamble write a few lines... in answer to the subject of your kind letter[...]

Little advantage *in a court*[...] would some of those please in my favour have been, which *out of court*, and to a *private* and *serious* audience, would have carried the greatest weight against him—Such, particularly, as the infamous methods to which he had recourse.

It would no doubt have been a ready retort from *every* mouth, that I ought not to have thrown myself into the power of such a man, and that I ought to take my pains to what had befallen me. (1252–53).

³⁷ Hershinow, *Born Yesterday*, 46.

Clarissa begins her reply to Dr Lewin's suggestion of trying Lovelace in court by making clear the familial circumstances which emboldened or even enabled his predation.³⁸ Her abandonment by the male world, particularly the paternally authorised protection of her father, figures large, privileged by its early position in the letter as a key element to her response. Clarissa cleverly transitions through genres within her letter: referencing the legalistic language of the preamble, she stages her own court trial of Lovelace within the text, testing various arguments rhetorically through their persuasiveness or otherwise to an imagined jury contrasted against the "*private* and *serious* audience" she imagines preferable for her case.³⁹ Indeed—the letter, by bringing the subject of the rape out of the private and into the public communicable realm—has its own jurisdiction, its own capacity to test Lovelace's "infamous methods". Yet in a pernicious echo of a public realm in which, too often, culpability for a sexual crime is renegotiated as the shared responsibility of both victim and assailant, Clarissa ultimately finds her own case wanting: if "*every*" mouth would judge her "pains" as, partially, deserved, justice for Clarissa can only exist at an intimate level.⁴⁰

³⁸ Lovelace himself elsewhere describes the failure of Clarissa's family to protect her (quite possibly from him) as her father's "heavy curse" (650); letter 59.3 of the novel, a brief note from Clarissa's Aunt Hervey, reflects this abrogation of responsibility: "Everyone is now convinced, that nothing is to be done with you by way of gentleness or persuasion. Your mamma will not let you stay in the house" (251). Clarissa is forced to choose between the sexual contract orchestrated with Mr. Solmes, or abandonment by her entire kin.

³⁹ Macpherson notes the separation of intentionality and blameworthiness in *Clarissa* as a key problem: as Macpherson suggests, "the realist novel is a project of blame not exculpation". The attention of the novel to unintentional consequences of actions perhaps is highlighted, here, by Clarissa's insistence upon the ideal juror for her speculative case and their need for "serious[ness]"; only careful analysis of her experiences will lead to the correct (and culpable) results. See Macpherson, *Harm's Way: Tragic Responsibility and the Novel Form*, 12-13.

⁴⁰ As Ferguson suggests, citing the New York Supreme Court opinion in *People v. Linzy* (1972), there is no "cogent reason" the customary standard of "innocent until proven guilty" must be "supplemented" by a doubled-assuredness of this standard in examinations of rape, and yet, in both legal practice and popular opinion, too often the question of a victim of rape's partial or even (supposedly) considerable culpability for the actions and intentions of another seems to invite a disquietude in administering justice rarely seen in other criminal

This rhetorical process of reasoning is a markedly different tenor from Clarissa's less formalised intimate letters, suggesting epistolary fiction's capacity to work across a variety of internal generic distinctions to produce narrative. In this interchange with Dr Lewin, the interests of "will", "fault", and blame once again arise, in a discussion regarding the merits or "advantage" of pursuing a court trial against Lovelace. Clarissa, in rejecting Dr Lewin's proposal, rejects the notion of Lovelace's rape as a success, describing her position of having capacity for forgiveness as itself a "triumph" (1254).

While such a motif owes much to the deeply Protestant moralism of the text, it also indicates an important rejection of the same moralism: rather than performing her forgiveness, Clarissa's decline and death suggests the (human) body's unwillingness to satisfy the (sacred) obligations of forgiveness. The distance between the divinely organised social sphere Clarissa imagines herself partaking in and the mundane, violently hierarchical order of eighteenth-century England mirrors this gap between Clarissa's aspirations to, and representations as, the perfect Christian subject, and her body's unwillingness to conform to such representations through its vulnerability and death. As Napier suggests, the body may operate independently of the spirit, a machine governed by laws of itself.⁴¹ Sexual difference is clarified by the dynamic power exchanges within the novel, whether rape or forgiveness, as a seat of discursive power itself. Yet, difference alone fails to perform its ordinary regulatory role of subordinating the feminine subject and upholding the masculine if Clarissa's belief in her own "triumph" may be taken at face-value.

acts. Clarissa's inability to perceive the violence against her as *separate* from her own actions—"thrown myself"—draws attention to this question of culpability. No small part, perhaps, of *Clarissa's* 'staying power' lies in its invocation of these difficult problems. See Ferguson, "Rape and the Rise of the Novel," 89.

⁴¹ Napier, *Falling into Matter*, 64.

Thus it would seem power is not solely regulated by the sexual organisation of bodies and genders, nor the discursive capacity to approbate or condemn. Rather, discursive power in this novel is coordinated by its fact of priority: a fatalist absolutism permeates the novel's moralising, irreconcilable to the notion of the agential subject. If this is the case, how might consent be figured or imagined without the agency of the subject? Ferguson's response to this precise problem formulated in 'Rape and the Rise of the Novel' is perhaps key to interpreting the power of sexual violence within *Clarissa* to totalise the larger textual questions of agency. *Clarissa*, Ferguson argues, is psychological in its insistence upon the contradictory relationship between intention and action, "between what one must mean and what one wants to mean."⁴² It is not clear in Ferguson's account, that is, that psychologization and agency are necessarily linked, or, even, mutually compatible. Rather, the "psychological" nature of the novel lies in its efforts to formally stipulate interior statuses which are ultimately irreducible to forms—Lovelace's acceptance of "formal" nonconsent in the form of Clarissa's mentally anguished disorderly or dysregulated letters, a key moment of the novel.⁴³ The failure of the letter to accommodate Clarissa's dysregulation, that is, requires in Ferguson's reading its formal disintegration, one which Marta Kvande equates to a "loss of self".⁴⁴ The interrelationship between self and formal expression is therefore clear: what is unclear is the potential for the epistolary novel to represent beyond the finite capacity of the letter. This finite nature of the novel-in-letter's efforts at representing psychology are ultimately upheld by its social dimension, being formed as it is of polyphonic correspondence, thus teasing out its dialogic or discursive construction in contrast with, as Ferguson argues, Lovelace's

⁴² Ferguson, "Rape and the Rise of the Novel," 109.

⁴³ Ferguson, "Rape and the Rise of the Novel," 106.

⁴⁴ Marta Kvande, "Printed in a Book: Negotiating Print and Manuscript Cultures in *Fantomina* and *Clarissa*," *Eighteenth-Century Studies* 46, no. 2 (2013): 244, <https://doi.org/10.1353/ecs.2013.0008>.

emphasis on seemingly pre-social foci of identity, those rendered fixative by a system of status.⁴⁵

Clarissa's Paper III, within the dysregulated series of notes, through its allegoric vision of bestiality clearly toys with Lovelace's own obsessive attention to fixity:

A LADY took a great fancy to a young lion, or a bear, I forget which—but a bear, or a tiger, I believe it was. It was made her a present of when a whelp. She fed it with her own hand: she nursed up the wicked cub with great tenderness; and would play with it, without fear or apprehension of danger: and it was obedient to all her commands: and its tameness, as she used to boast, increased with its growth; so that, like a lap-dog, it would follow her all over the house. But mind what followed. At last, somehow, neglecting to satisfy its hungry maw, or having otherwise disoblged it on some occasion, it resumed its nature; and on a sudden fell upon her, and tore her in pieces—And who was most to blame, I pray? The brute, or the lady? The lady, surely!—For what *she* did, was *out* of nature, *out* of character at least: what *it* did, was *in* its own nature (891).

The culpability of the lady for the actions of the brute against her posits the static nature of each. That the brute's violent nature becomes apparent in its violation of the lady reconciles its unchanging status to its violence. Violence is "*in* its own nature"; the "hungry maw" of the beast is likewise an effect of its pre-social position. Situated within this series of often obscure and rhetorically complex notes from Clarissa, an interest in the fixity of identities is made ever more obvious by the recurrent figuration of relationships. Paper II refers to Clarissa's father, ending with the assertion that she "*will* call you papa[...] whether you will

⁴⁵ Ferguson, "Rape and the Rise of the Novel," 104.

or not” (890). Like in Paper III, Clarissa attempts to understand and articulate the violence of Lovelace, her “heaviest griefs” in the first fragment, Paper I, through reintegrating her experiences within a sociality informed by the fixed positions of its participants (890). Clarissa’s dysregulated writing reflects the impossibility of formally confirming mutable psychologies. Her fragmented epistles instead utilise allegory, such as of the Lady and the brute. Her lack of precision—”a young lion, or a bear, I forget which—but a bear, or a tiger, I believe, it was”—in turn recognises the failure of epistolary communicability to account for, or stipulate, her mental state.

In the allegory, harm is figured as explicitly physical: the brute tears the lady to pieces. Yet, quite literally, in turning to the body’s vulnerability only allegorically, Clarissa privileges the psychic harm occasioned by Lovelace’s rape of her as the cornerstone of the offence. Furthermore, as the fragments continue, this harm restructures Clarissa’s sense of being: in Paper IV, she can no longer be “proud Clarissa Harlowe” after she is “humbled in the dust” (891). When in Paper X the formal typesetting collapses in an ekphrastic expression of Clarissa’s disordered state, this process reaches a zenith which, nevertheless, recentres the body as the site of psychologization itself:

Then down I laid my head
 Down on cold earth, and for a while was dead;
 And my freed soul to a strange somewhere fled!
 Ah! sottish soul! said I,
 When back to its cage again I saw it fly,
 Fool! to resume her broken chain,
 And row the galley here again!
 Fool! to that body to return,
 Where it condemn’d and destin’d is to *mourn*. (893)

In this stanza extracted from the poem presented as Paper X, Clarissa's exploration of the relationship between the body and the soul clarifies the complex status of this relationship. Beginning by suggesting their separability in the incorporeal elsewhere she envisages her soul departing for in death, the soul is nevertheless reintegrated as a bodily sensation even as its chain of connection to the corporeal is "broken". The soul is, in some sense, enslaved by the body: the repeated invocation of freedom is contrasted against the chain, the galley, and the limiting moves of condemnation and destiny. While Lovelace appears to master his body, Clarissa is ultimately mastered by hers: she quite literally mourns the fleshy status which has been thrust upon her. Like the bestial allegory above, Clarissa poetically produces an account of her embodying. In both instances, the conceit—the slave-status of the soul, the violence wrought by the animal—infer the centrality of the body over and above psychology. In both instances, it is apparent that the epistolary mode is superseded by other textual modes with which Richardson might intervene and direct readerly attention towards the symbolic, rather than actual. Indeed, in their abandoning of the diaristic mode or diurnal diaristic mannerisms of the bulk of Clarissa's letters to Anna, epistolarity as a form reaches a limit in exploring the embodied status of its correspondents.

Despite the focus of the novel upon rape and the obvious disparity in power between the unprotected and vulnerable Clarissa and the predatory Lovelace, Macpherson suggests that Richardson does not simply reproduce the idea that contractual relationships are impossible due to the intractable inequities between parties.⁴⁶ The problems of gender, class, and liable action are made salient by the rape, brought into focus even as they have been apparent throughout the text. In letter 7, Clarissa's "disgust, little short of affrightment" at the sight of her would-be husband, Mr. Solmes upon their first meeting, is suggestive of

⁴⁶ Sandra Macpherson, "Lovelace, Ltd," *ELH* 65, no. 1 (1998): 100, <https://doi.org/10.1353/elh.1998.0005>.

Richardson's interpretation of the extremely precarious position of young women within the mid-century marriage economy (61). The arbitrary power of her uncles and father to declare Solmes a "friend" and even her sister's efforts to have "*sir'd* him up" suggest a nexus of family power concentrated against individual autonomy (61). The involuntariness of Clarissa and her kin's physical responses—Clarissa "forced to turn my face from them" upon the cold reception on her return from staying with Anna, or her sister "lifting up her lip in contempt" against Clarissa—suggests again, forcefully, that the organisations of power in this novel do not merely direct action but are the cause of, and rationale for, the novel's embodiments (59–60). Clarissa's body is contorted by the arbitrary exercises of power exercised by others.

Describing his perfidious ensnarement as having "overcome" Clarissa, Lovelace posits that "*sweet are the joys that come with willingness*—but is it to be expected that a woman of education, and a lover of forms, will yield before she is attacked?" (556–57). For whom is willingness sweet? Lovelace seems to imply that the "yield[ing]" of Clarissa is explicitly for his benefit and preservation, further through the letter suggesting that a hunter may be injured by its quarry. The hunting metaphor itself, in a particularly egregious example, converts such a quarry into "venison"—Clarissa is, literally, transformed into meat (558):

Does not the keen foxhunter endanger his neck and his bones in pursuit for
vermin which, when killed, is neither fit food for men nor dogs?
Do not the hunters of the nobler game value the venison less than the sport?
Why then should I be reflected upon, and the sex affronted, for my
perseverance in the most noble of all chases; and for not being a poacher in
love, as thy question may be made to imply? (557–58)

The invocation of both foxhunting and game meat allows Richardson to reflect Lovelace's class status's function within his antifeminist worldview. Despite its modern connotations of aristocratic privilege, Lovelace shares with Henry Fielding a distaste for what the latter terms the "stinking nauseous Animal".⁴⁷ The suitable women for foxhunters, as Alexander Pope confirms in his *Several Ladies*, are marked by their capacity to "bear abundance of ruddy complexion'd children"—a nearly racialised suggestion of their low status.⁴⁸ Clarissa is a worthier prey. Firstly, she is white—her pallor, earlier discussed, resembling snow. Secondly, she belongs not to a caste of reproductively oriented women who might nauseate the refined palate of Lovelace, but like venison, is both a worthy opponent in the performance of the chase and, as the plurality of recipes for the meat in Eliza Smith's thirteenth edition of the enormously popular *The Compleat Housewife* (1746) suggest, a versatile and favoured dish.⁴⁹

Simultaneously, the figuring of Clarissa as a hind or quarry evokes early modern motifs of seduction in terms of prey and pursuit; Thomas Wyatt's 1557 poem 'Whoso list to hunt, I know where is an hind' toys with a similar figuration:

Yet may I by no means my wearied mind
 Draw from the deer, but as she fleeth afore
 Fainting I follow. I leave off therefore,
 Sithens in a net I seek to hold the wind.

⁴⁷ Henry Fielding, *The life of Mr. Jonathan Wild the great. To which is added, A journey from this world to the next.* (Dublin: Printed for W. Williamson, 1758), 393.

⁴⁸ Alexander Pope, *Letters of Mr. Pope, and Several Eminent Persons. In the Years 1705, &c. to 1717*, vol. 1 (London: Printed for J. Roberts, 1735), 188.

⁴⁹ Smith's collection features a calendar of recipes with which the genteel woman may plan her culinary year; included are recipes for "Hanch of Venison", "Vension Pastry", "Stewed venison in soop", and "Collared Venison with Ragoo", illustrating the versatility and popularity of the meat. Interestingly, Smith proposes eating venison in almost every calendar month, year-round; this suggests the meat's ready availability to genteel households as a product. See Eliza Smith, *The compleat housewife: or, accomplish'd gentlewoman's companion.*, 13th ed. (London: Printed for H. Pemberton, 1746), 15-18.

Who list her hunt, I put him out of doubt,
As well I may spend his time in vain.⁵⁰

Like Richardson, Wyatt imagines, through a speaker expressing Wyatt's own autobiographic desires, a pursuit in terms of poaching.⁵¹ The poetic conceit confirms the vulnerability of the woman being courted, while furthermore suggesting her active resistance; in the metaphor, the deer forces Wyatt's speaker to reposition himself to avoid his scent reaching her on the wind. The extended metaphor of Wyatt's poem bespeaks the imaginary privilege of game to outrun, outlast, or outmanoeuvre the hunter in much the same way as Lovelace suggests his chase as "nobler". Indeed, beyond the simple class connotations of the expression lie the clearly moral implications: for Lovelace and Wyatt's speaker, the capacity for female resistance confirms, rather than dissuades, the ethical possibility of the hunt. Yet Wyatt's poem issues from a remarkably different historical epoch. Written in adaptation of a Petrarchan sonnet and inheriting several of its formal features, including its iambic pentameter, the poem invites a shared appreciation of the hind through its address to the "Whoso" beyond its composition.⁵² Yet Wyatt's possessive desire mirrors Lovelace's lust for Clarissa: as he himself declares, he is not a "poacher", an indiscriminate criminal easily

⁵⁰ Thomas Wyatt. 'Whoso List To Hunt', lines 5-11.

⁵¹ The penultimate line of the poem, "*Noli me tangere*, for Caesar's I am" reflects the act's status as poaching, or stealing, rather than straightforward hunting: the hind's possession by Caesar confirms the illegal status of Wyatt's hunt, and is a detail that clearly links the hind, and coextensively, woman, to Anne Boleyn, second wife of Henry VIII and Queen from 1533 to 1536. This reading is canonical; recently, Stephanie Russo has forcefully demonstrated that it is practically "beyond dispute" that 'Whoso list to hunt' is "about Anne Boleyn, whatever the actual status of [her and Wyatt's] relationship or lack thereof." Russo's reading draws on the alterations Wyatt makes to an earlier Petrarchan sonnet to emphasise the particularity of the references to Boleyn in his poem. See Stephanie Russo, *The Afterlife of Anne Boleyn: Representations of Anne Boleyn in Fiction and on the Screen*, (Cham: Springer International Publishing, 2020), 30-31.

⁵² Russo details Wyatt's adaptation of Petrarch's *Rime* 190, "Una candida cerva", with minimal (but crucial) interpretative adjustments in reworking the poem in translation. See Russo, *The Afterlife of Anne Boleyn*, 29.

satisfied by any prey. His individuation—his very identity—relies on the uniqueness of his predatory relationship to Clarissa, suggested by the quasi-public address of Wyatt's sonnet as a private, internalised, and deeply felt relation.

A hateful misogyny permeates such a relation, even as the body figures as the principal site of Lovelace's interest, and the seat of his desire, his physical neck and bones engaged in pursuing his prey (557). In Lovelace's letters, hate and desire are so closely interrelated as to be dissoluble: Clarissa can be both the "admirable creature" and, by way of his metaphor, the hunted "vermin" (556–57). An object to be obtained or in the subsequent letter, 171, a "conquest" compared to "Don John of Austria" over "Lepanto", Lovelace repeatedly turns to images of the martial, the hunt, or subjugation to express his desire for Clarissa's "fall": her rape at his hands (558–59).⁵³

The possibility of a contractarian model of sexual consent requires a unity of intention, unambiguous across separate parties. Lovelace's construction as a being *of* hate limits his capacity to participate in a relationship other than one, as Napier notes, of domination and subordinate subjection.⁵⁴ The character of consent—which may only ever be partial, temporal, and, thus, contractual—does not belie such a subjection. Clarissa's body itself, in letter 102 from Lovelace to Belford, speaks to the necessity of his aggression:

⁵³ "Don John of Austria" refers to Johann of Austria, son of Holy Roman Emperor Charles V and a military icon for his short-lived victory over Turkish forces in the War of Cyprus (1570–73). The victory over "Lepanto" describes the decisive victory of the Venetian and allied forces over the Ottoman Empire in 1571; a victory which would, eventually, turn out to be pyrrhic, with Cyprus eventually ceded to Ottoman rule despite the successful siege. The battle remained a popular historical touchstone in a variety of mediums, including perhaps most pertinently the thousand-line epic poem, "The Lepanto", by James VI, King of Scotland from 1567 and later also King of England and Ireland (as James I) 1603–1625. For a detailed analysis of James VI/I's poem, see Robert Appelbaum, "War and Peace in "The Lepanto" of James VI and I," *Modern Philology* 97, no. 3 (2000).

⁵⁴ Napier, *Falling into Matter*, 67.

I begin to stagger in my resolutions. Ever averse as I was to the hymeneal shackles, how easily old prejudices recur!—Heaven give me the heart to be honest to her!—there’s a prayer, Jack!—If I should not be heard, what a sad thing would that be for the most admirable of women[...] Such triumph over the whole sex, if I can subdue this lady! (412–13)

Invoking the “hymeneal” suggests a supposed fact of the body, the prevalent belief in the capacity of the vagina’s hymen to record a status of virginity, or otherwise, while linking such a bodily fact to marriage.⁵⁵ While “hymeneal” refers directly to the Greek god of marriage, Hymen, the double-entendre suggests, rather crassly, the interplay between virginity, marriage, and purity in *Clarissa*. In the adjective form, describing “shackles” as “hymeneal” suggests the capacity for the body to retain, hold, or encircle, literalised in an image of entrapment.⁵⁶ Thus Lovelace confers the power in the case of rape onto the woman: as Tassie Gwilliam has suggested, throughout the novel Lovelace’s violence is given a feminine origin.⁵⁷ Elsewhere, Gwilliam argues for the hymen’s indication of women’s duplicitous power over men: even in cases of rape, “false virginity” and the counterfeit virgin indicate the “unknowableness of women” alongside emerging medicalised anatomical

⁵⁵ See Corrinne Harol, *Enlightened Virginity in Eighteenth-Century Literature*, ed. Corrinne Harol (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006), 63–66.

⁵⁶ In a more generous reading, Lovelace refers to a similar symptom of power feminist thinker Bini Adamczak describes (in Sophie Lewis’s translation) as “circlution” or “circumclution”: an antonym of penetration, Adamczak proposes circlution as a means of reorienting narratives of sexual power towards a theory of the “bottom”. Lovelace may recognise the inherent power of Clarissa as a potentially active sexual partner; mapping meaning against the penetrative apparatus (“a shaft”) and upon, instead, the circluding of the orifice. See Bini Adamczak and Sophie Lewis, “Six years (and counting) of circlution,” Ayesha Siddiqi ed. *The New Inquiry*, August 22, 2022, <https://thenewinquiry.com/six-years-and-counting-of-circlution/>.

⁵⁷ Tassie Gwilliam, *Samuel Richardson's Fictions of Gender* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1993), 64.

discourses.⁵⁸ Along these lines, Park argues that the hymen signifies the social strength, power, and honour of men, chastity formed into a commodity: “sensibility” among men is thus respondent to, and structured by, a homosocial obsession with female genitalia.⁵⁹ A preoccupation with the virginal status of women, coupled to such newly emergent ideologies of sentiment thus confers power to the body to restrain, or “shackle”, the social to itself, represented through its epistolary spectres.

The surface of the letter mimics the body’s contours, imitating its vulnerabilities. This is evident further through the letter:

One little piece of artifice I had recourse to[...] I made a request to her, upon a condition she could not refuse[...]

And what was this? But to promise what she had before promised: never to marry any other man while I am living, and single, unless I should give her cause for high disgust against me.

She consented and asked what security I expected?

Her word only.

She gave me her word: but I besought her excuse for sealing it: and in the same moment (since to have waited for consent would have been asking for a denial) saluted her. And, believe me or not, but, as I hope to live, it was the first time I had the courage to touch her charming lips with mine. And this I tell thee, Belford, that that single pressure (as modestly put too, as if I were as much a virgin as herself, that she might not be afraid of me another

⁵⁸ Tassie Gwilliam, “Female Fraud: Counterfeit Maidenheads in the Eighteenth Century,” *Journal of the History of Sexuality* 6, no. 4 (1996): 519.

⁵⁹ Julie Park, ““I Shall Enter Her Heart”: Fetishizing Feeling In *Clarissa*,” *Studies in the Novel* 37, no. 4 (2005): 376.

time) delighted me more than ever I was delighted by the *ultimatum* with any other woman—so precious does awe, reverence, and apprehended prohibition make a favour! (413)

Lovelace collapses Clarissa's "word only" into a kiss. That the action of "her word" is to "seal" finally in turn suggests language's capacity for configuring the body, shaping its pervious form into one which might deny penetration. These double meanings and erotic play in Lovelace's letters suggest his unconscious knowledge of language's coordinating power over the body; moreover, such slippages and plays are indicative of the epistolary mode's recurrent surfacing of the body as its apparent agent, superseding the notion of the intentional authorial mind. Lovelace's figuration resists easy interpretations of mind as a governing system. Rather, the static character of Lovelace defers mind for, firstly, "word[s]" and their relationship towards embodied acts, and, secondly, the power of the "word" to stipulate or coordinate such acts. The conditional logic of Lovelace's pursuit of consent is to preserve the embodied virginity of Clarissa, foregrounding her desirability within the social. If as Gwilliam suggests above, virginity is a matter of honour between *men*, it is here a matter between Lovelace and Belford, the addressee of the epistle. Letters, by participating in the power of "word[s]", conjure into a (social) reality the capacity of the body to be configured, estranged, or intimated into forms irrespective of the intentions of the mind. Here, consent as a discourse of conditional relations between bodies, supersedes mental intentions, overriding the will and, indeed, forcing Lovelace to reckon with his essential vulnerability external to his heightened sense of self. When he sees himself as "virgin", that is, for a moment, the capacity for rumination and humanism is clear. Yet, his knowledge of the "*ultimatum*" suggests, quite literally, Lovelace's embodied carnal knowledge cannot be reformed. In the rake's failed reformation is the clear power of the body's memory, its resistance to intention and its

perverse hostility to the affective realm—"awe, reverence"—and its power of reconfiguration.

To Gwilliam, the "leitmotif" of Lovelace testing Clarissa's personhood against the feminine figures of his rakish literary fantasies indicates Lovelace's belief in Clarissa's status as a simulacrum, rather than a full human being.⁶⁰ In her failure to conform to his narrative, and ultimately in her untimely death, Clarissa elides her sexing as totally female—at least, to Lovelace. As he suggests, his potential for "triumph over the whole sex" is linked closely to the exemplariness of the "most admirable of women", yet in turn, in Clarissa's own textual triumph over Lovelace through her very exemplariness she supersedes the corporeal category of woman through her denial of the capacity for the body, the "hymeneal", to "shackle" meaning. Lovelace's ineffectual "prayer" to "be honest to her" is curiously answered in total spite of his intentions, desires, and actions. Imitating for a moment the reformed rake of libertine literature, the role is quickly abandoned as a "prayer", an incorporeal design for providence, separate from the mundane of the body's intention of dishonesty. It seems that virginity, for Richardson, remains a fact of the woman's body while it can only ever be a discursive property, an aim, or a "prayer" of the man's. It is precisely this discursive, rather than embodied, property of virginity which calls Clarissa into being, and clarifies the textuality of Lovelace: as Park suggests, Clarissa is transformed by Lovelace's pursuit, revealed as the transcendental angelic "soul" which resists "transforming her body from chaste to sexualised[...] even when violated."⁶¹ While the relationship between text and flesh is complex, the transcendence of Clarissa's soul clearly intimates the failing of either text, or flesh, to fully cohere into a body of hers which may become nonvirgin. That is, just as above "her word" "seal[s]" her, even under Lovelace's "single pressure" the transformation is

⁶⁰ Gwilliam, *Samuel Richardson's Fictions of Gender*, 63.

⁶¹ Park, "'I Shall Enter Her Heart': Fetishizing Feeling In *Clarissa*," 373.

wholly upon him: he is converted, “as if I were as much a virgin as herself, that she might not be afraid of me another time,” suggesting a multilateral exertion of textual power which resists easy conclusions (413).

That the virginal body cannot secure meaning suggests intercourse’s structural power in coordinating the desirous capacity of the body to produce sexual meanings Clarissa is denied. If the capability for desire is relocated from the (male) subject to the (female) object, such a move would disturb the delicate balances of texts and selves which Richardson achieves through the epistolary mode’s spectral bodies. As Elizabeth Heckendorn Cook suggests, a possessiveness permeates both the diegetic text of *Clarissa* and Richardson’s approach to the novel itself.⁶² The “constant sense of pressure” from the “world outside the envelope” hybridises spaces, both conjugal and kin-oriented, into public-facing performances which themselves depend on the semi-public capacity of the letter to transcend borders of privacy and communicate over distance.⁶³ Yet, does such embodiment necessitate gender? That is, is it apparent that in conjuring her precarity, Lovelace also produces for Clarissa a clear, delineated, sexed body? The possessiveness of both Richardson and Lovelace over Clarissa might suggest a belief in her sexual nature, yet this does not necessitate a reading that directly aligns with Lovelace’s conscious practice of conflating femininity and a subjugated, ghettoised, and ultimately inert subjectivity. To Lovelace, it seems, women are, literally, penetrable objects.⁶⁴ Indeed, in critiquing Lovelace’s letters it is not immediately clear that *Clarissa*’s realisation of an essentialised, naturally female form is entirely effectual.

⁶² Elizabeth Heckendorn Cook, *Epistolary Bodies: Gender and Genre in the Eighteenth-Century Republic of Letters* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1996), 82.

⁶³ Cook, *Epistolary Bodies*, 91-92.

⁶⁴ Lovelace’s views of women as mere sexual trifles are, of course, not limited to Clarissa: Kathryn Blakely’s recent reading of his non-rape of a woman known only within the text as “Rosebud” calls attention to the omnidirectionality of Lovelace’s violent outlook. Treating

It is obvious that Lovelace never desires or attempts to obtain Clarissa's consent in a meaningful, horizontal, or contractarian sense. As he puts it in letter 248, her having "struggled not *much* against the freedom" and being "not *very* angry"—"a frown that had more distress in it than indignation"—is taken as a positive indication of her assent (851–52). Throughout this letter, even as Lovelace praises the "sublimely great" Clarissa, it is not necessarily reasonable to assume that he has any interest in the "God within her": the "superiority of her mind" declares, as Clarissa herself suggests, merely his "inferiority", his failure to complete his "self-acquittal" and reform (853). Explicitly describing the passage as a "soul-penetrating conversation", Lovelace invokes the language of intercourse to indicate its intimate nature. But, Lovelace's soul, it seems, is the one which is successfully penetrated, suggested by his performance of the contrite penitent hopeful for a "renewed" relating. Such a performance is feeble and ill suited: Lovelace's belief in its effectiveness is, perhaps, further evidence of Katherine Binhammer's important assertion of his untimely failings: Lovelace's belief in the inevitability of his victory over Clarissa indicates the reducibility of love to sex, pattern to moment, process to event.⁶⁵ As Hershinow suggests, such an account is further complicated by the epistolary novel's polyphonic perspective.⁶⁶ The lack of a commanding narrative outside of the (often, counterfactual) letters presented as the novel necessarily complicates Lovelace's belief in any one thing or person being "inexorable", even as such letters serve to bolster confidence in his plot (854). To return to the question of

his decision *not* to rape Rosebud as a "credit", Lovelace attempts to balance his crimes not with redressive action, but rather by pointing to his own inaction: his declining to rape, it would seem, is about as close as Lovelace gets to consensual activity. See Kathryn Blakely, "Reading Lovelace's 'Rosebud': Credits, Debits, and Character in Samuel Richardson's *Clarissa*," *Eighteenth-Century Fiction* 33, no. 3 (2021): 329–30, <https://doi.org/10.3138/ecf.33.3.329>.

⁶⁵ Katherine Binhammer, "Knowing Love: The Epistemology of *Clarissa*," *ELH* 74, no. 4 (2007): 864–65, <https://doi.org/10.1353/elh.2007.0034>.

⁶⁶ Hershinow, *Born Yesterday*, 48.

Clarissa's consent, as Ferguson puts it, for Lovelace, the process of forming identity is an acknowledgement and rearticulation of prior events; he strives to make Clarissa his wife, in doing so creating the conditions necessary to figure her as having consented.⁶⁷ But he does not require her consent. Rather, he requires the effects of it—the socially stabilising impact of having made things *right*.

Indeed, the plan for marriage suggests Lovelace can only imagine his desire as a form of possession or loss—declaring in letter 478 that he has “earned her dearly” despite their looming “eternal separation”: “Is not damnation likely to be the purchase to me, though a happy eternity will be hers?” (1358). While he continues to invest in a binary which, nearly literally, beatifies female victimhood, such a simple system makes less and less sense as the novel progresses. Letter 384 makes this clear: Miss Montague's efforts to make Clarissa a “kinswoman” with “admirers of [her] virtues” through marriage to Lovelace after the rape are fundamentally misguided, as Clarissa already sees herself in kin with “all the world” (1171, 62). Clarissa's insistence on an asexualised, familiar relating to the world as “kin” resists the logics of Lovelace's mythos through rejecting its binaries of male aggressor and acquiescent, or pliant, woman. From the very outset of the novel there is embedded in Clarissa's non-consent a kind of nonbinary fluidity; a fluidity resistant to the conditions of gender demanded by characterisation. If desire produces the sexing of the body, the unsexed external surface of kin relations is an important antinomy, a space which, in its conjectural nature, can be posited prior to the moment of gendering. That is, by demanding her relationships be based on kinship rather than desire, Clarissa models a negation of her objectification, demanding her own status prior to, or external to sexual desire while resisting its, if Lovelace is to be believed, inexorable pull. Yet, as this chapter has argued, Lovelace is not a god, and lacks the

⁶⁷ Ferguson, “Rape and the Rise of the Novel,” 104.

plotted agency necessary to successfully produce such an inevitability. His arrogance is perhaps surmised in such an assumption of inexorability, in his continuing faith in the inevitable victory over Clarissa. As Park suggests, part of Lovelace's figuration is the necessary denial of his desires.⁶⁸

The thwarting of Lovelace is partially constitutive of his character. Even given his aggrandised imagination in letter 35 of a "rape worthy of a Jupiter", Lovelace cannot wholly perform such a role (165). As he suggests in letter 153, his predation structures his own bodily experience, in an obviously negative fashion:

What makes my heart beat so strong? Why rises it to my throat in such half-choking flutters, when I think of what this removal [to London] may do for me?—I am hitherto resolved to be honest: and that increases my wonder at this involuntary commotions. 'Tis a plotting villain of a heart: it ever was; and ever will be, I doubt. Such a joy when any roguery is going forward!—I so little its master!—A head likewise so well turned to answer the triangular varlet's impulses[...] I will have one struggle with thee, old friend, and if I cannot overcome thee now, I never will again attempt to conquer thee. (520)

These "involuntary commotions" suggest, rather obviously, the conflicted embodiment of Lovelace. His "heart beat" and "half-choking flutters" direct attention to the body's experience of anxiety, trepidation, and worry: his anticipation of his own "villain of a heart" preventing the victory of an "honest" seduction suggests a consciousness of how his own "roguery" has "master[ed]" him. Once more, Lovelace fails to perform the mastery he is associated with—fails to conform his body to his intentions, and in so doing, master another. It is not clear, in other words, that the violent "roguery" of the rapacious "varlet" can ever

⁶⁸ Park, "'I Shall Enter Her Heart': Fetishizing Feeling In *Clarissa*," 381.

accomplish the subjection and subordination of another that is intended. Such violence structurally transforms the body of its perpetrator, insisting upon his self-perceived phallic status even as such incapacity for flaccidity divorces him from a true mastery of the self. Moreover, it is impossible to assert the existence of a self beyond the body: a governing impulse which might coordinate its interests.

As feminist theorist of embodiment Elizabeth Grosz suggests, the non-naturalisation of the body—its incisions, welts, marks, and scars being the signs of its historicization—constitute this kind of conversion from self to text, precisely self to map, Lovelace performs here.⁶⁹ As Lovelace moves through his “flutters”, his “heart beat”, his “throat”, he produces an erotogenic systematisation of his bodily self. The highly physically charged libidinal experience of breath and heartbeat are not simply rendered textual but rather are only interpretable from their vantage as text. In writing his body into being in a letter to Belford, he produces for Belford a sexed account of his own being, an erotic map of his “heart” and “throat” which makes his body not only legible—visible in its textual form to the reader—but also desirable. It is unclear there is a Lovelace separable from, prior to, or outside the constructing processes of his letters. Instead, taking these moments of visible construction allows for the possibility of reappraising him as “so little a master” of his self. Subordinated to plot and, in his final moments, the capricious vulnerability of the human form, Lovelace is (for a moment) correct to see himself subservient to his drives, desires, and that embodied pull he cannot “overcome”. “Impulses” and “involuntary commotions” hardly suggest the rational agent, but rather intone a kind of governing desire that is, itself, ungovernable. Yet its very ungovernability is itself a privilege reserved to the emerging rational masculine sexual subject, just as it earlier was the privilege of the libertine and the rake. Coupling

⁶⁹ Elizabeth Grosz, *Volatile Bodies: Toward a Corporeal Feminism* (St. Leonards: Allen & Unwin, 1994), 139.

involuntariness with roguery suggests that beyond such paradigms as voluntarism, consent, contract lies the amorphously masculine desiring that produces the necessity for bodily governance. More precisely, the involuntary rogue suggests there is no external surface to the process of sexing and gendering which this chapter has described: regardless of the intentional acts of the subject, their position within the libidinal systems of gender is governable.

The proximity between the epistolary mode and such failures and successes of bodily governance calls into question the status of the mind more generally. If Lovelace is not a god, what is he? Merely a desirous, rabid, phallic form, incapable of achieving the vulnerability, permeability, and perviousness associated in *Clarissa* with the fragile, yet valuable, human form. The novel in letters, refusing to produce an agent beyond diegetic text, accomplishes the triumph of annihilating intentionality without erasing culpability. Such an achievement produces the novel form of Lovelace, whose rapacious desire structures *Clarissa* and conjures into being its complex figurations of desire. The letter form, thus resisting the motif of its agential construction, might be finally understood in its prosthetic mode, the simulacrum not of intent or selfhood but most precisely of the impossibility of each. With due attention to the basic instrumentality of Lovelace, his failure to attain the flaccid form of the human, and the constructive power of language to shape the diegetic, and interpretative, world of *Clarissa*—whether the discursive counterfactual narratives of Lovelace or the gender-resistant body of Clarissa—it is evident that an approach to this novel which emphasises the problem of embodiment can produce new interpretative possibilities. With such attention to the body, new possibilities of reading *Clarissa* begin to emerge, begging different questions around the status of the relationships between self, gender, and body in eighteenth-century English fiction, gender, and culture more generally. If the letter may meaningfully be claimed to, textually, operate as a stand-in for the body, then it is a signifier

not of a self but of a form, a stipulation of a figure rather than of a mind. In this sense, the novel-in-letters resists its psychologisation, emphasising instead the embodied, fleshy, disconcerting realm of the mundane over and above the transcendental incorporeality of the mind: it is the direct material relationship between text and body which makes this novel in particular function.

Chapter 4. “What am I to do with my gratitude”: Gloomy Fits in Jane Austen’s ‘Sir Charles Grandison or the happy man. A comedy’ (c.1800)

MISS G: What is the matter, Harriet? What makes you so dull, child? I shall take care not to leave you by yourself again in an hurry, if on my return I am to find these gloomy fits have taken hold of you.

Jane Austen, ‘Sir Charles Grandison or the happy man. A comedy’.¹

Miss Charlotte Grandison’s (styled in-text as “Miss G”) interest in Harriet Byron’s wellbeing throughout Austen’s short playlet, ‘Sir Charles Grandison or the happy man. A comedy’, forms a central thrust of the allusive work. This sisterly concern supersedes the other interests of the plot: the spectres of marriage, conjugality, and reproductivity are deferred to focus organised on this horizontal relation. Sir Charles himself, the love-interest of Harriet, begins in Austen’s play as a kin-figure, regarding her as a “sister” (566). The play bowdlerises, rearranges, and echoes Samuel Richardson’s 1753–54 novel, *The History of Sir Charles Grandison*, even as it parodies that novel’s masculinist account of sociality, preferring to focus instead on the activities of women as the organizing impetus of its imagined community. By reimagining the quasi-kin-relation of Charlotte and Harriet, Austen integrates queer possibilities of diverging from the conjugal script into a more resilient heteronormative fiction. What makes Harriet “gloomy” is not only the remembered threat of forced marriage by her kidnapper, Hargrave Pollexfen: it is the illusory character of the freedoms Austen’s playscript takes, which threatens but never quite completely dismantles a patriarchalist conception of marriage as male headship. Inheriting from the epistolary form a unique

¹ Jane Austen, “Sir Charles Grandison, or, The Happy Man: A Comedy,” in *Jane Austen’s “Sir Charles Grandison”*, eds. Janet Todd and Linda Bree (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 565. All further citations refer to this edition and will be given in text.

attention to character, this playscript forms an important case study in understanding Austen's innovative literary practice.

Across both her juvenilia and mature works, *Grandison* is an important touchstone for Austen: Brian Southam suggests that the relationship between Austen and Richardson by way of *Grandison* is crucial to her oeuvre.² Southam persuasively argues that it is from *Grandison* that Austen honed her “personal style of social comedy”, through both imitation and a feminised repudiation of the domestic scenes and plots of Richardson's novel.³ Considered by Penny Gay a work of “family entertainment” that adapts a collectively favoured novel for the “home theatricals” enjoyed by Jane Austen's family, the playscript demands attention for its local systems of inferred, familial meanings, which emphasise the interpretative community in which it would have functioned.⁴ While the playscript itself has been critically side-lined, historically considered little more than an oddity and often at minimum partially attributed to Austen's seven-year-old niece, Anna Austen, this chapter argues its sophisticated reinterpretation of *Grandison* is worth reappraisal.⁵

² Brian Southam, “Introduction,” in *Jane Austen's “Sir Charles Grandison”*, ed. Brian Southam (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1980), 3. Barker asserts that without *Grandison*, “it is difficult to imagine... *Pride and Prejudice*”, arguing for the centrality of Richardson's novel to reading Austen: its “diffuse picture of domestic life, its loose, episodic structure, and its relatively simple narrative form” offered a stark contrast to the “unique intensity and multiple points of view” of *Clarissa*. See Gerard A. Barker, *Grandison's Heirs: The Paragon's Progress in the Late Eighteenth-Century English Novel* (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 1985), 13.

³ Southam, “Introduction,” 3-4.

⁴ Penny Gay, *Jane Austen and the Theatre* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 3.

⁵ Elaine Bander discusses the playscript, suggesting the dispute over its authorship may provide some rationale for its exclusion. Southam more thoroughly discusses such issues in an introduction to the 1980 edition, noting the unlikelihood of the family tradition holding Anna Austen as the author of the play dictated to the “aunts Jane and Cassandra” overseeing her care. Southam persuasively argues that the knowledge of the novel *Grandison* exhibited within the script exhausts the potential of a seven-year-old author, even if it is not a “masterpiece, not even a minor masterpiece.” This notwithstanding, the naivete of the script,

Throughout Austen's works references to Richardson's novel persist, evident in the broad array of allusions peppered throughout her writings and correspondence. Olivia Murphy notes the centrality of *Grandison* to "Jack and Alice", a short work composed between 1789 and 1791.⁶ Arguing that "Jack and Alice" is in part a parody of *Grandison*, Murphy gestures towards the character of Charles Adams as a "spoof" of Charles Grandison himself. Elaine Bander similarly suggests "Jack and Alice" as a "burlesque" of *Grandison*, noting, further, the references to Richardson's novel in *Northanger Abbey* (1817), in a crucial conversation between Catherine Morland and Isabella Thorpe regarding the nature of the novel.⁷ Austen consistently revisits *Grandison* in her work, including, in Murphy's analysis, *Persuasion*'s Charles Musgrove, a man of Grandisonian stature and elegance that is satirically coupled with an emphatic misogyny.⁸

Bander and Murphy's identification of Musgrove and 'Jack and Alice' as potentially "Grandisonian" is itself suggestive of the legacy of Richardson's novel and its critical role in shaping Austen's literary horizons. These rewritings and reappropriations, Murphy notes,

even in comparison to swathes of the *Juvenilia*, remains evident: as Southam describes, the manuscript's "untidiness". As Gay suggests, the play shows some awareness of contemporary trends in drama, particularly stylistic influences from Hannah Cowley. The length of the text, over 50 pages, its intertextuality, and its coordination of theatrical tropes suggest a mature author, and, thus, Jane Austen as more than a mere amanuensis. See Elaine Bander, "'O Leave Novels': Austen, Sir Charles Grandison, Sir Edward Denham, and Rob Mossgiel," *Persuasions: the Jane Austen Journal* 30 (2008): 205; Southam, "Introduction," 3-8; Gay, *Jane Austen and the Theatre*, 3.

⁶ Olivia Murphy, "From Pammydiddle to *Persuasion*: Jane Austen Rewriting Eighteenth-Century Literature," *Eighteenth-Century life* 32, no. 2 (2008): 30, <https://doi.org/10.1215/00982601-2008-004>.

⁷ Bander, "'O Leave Novels': Austen, Sir Charles Grandison, Sir Edward Denham, and Rob Mossgiel," 205. Morland chooses to read *Grandison* over Anne Radcliffe's *The Mysteries of Udolpho* (1794); initially described as a "horrid book", the contrast between the Gothic fiction and the genteel narrative situates Morland's moral arc. See Jane Austen, *Northanger Abbey*, eds. Barbara M. Benedict and Deirdre Le Faye (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 35.

⁸ Murphy, "From Pammydiddle to *Persuasion*: Jane Austen Rewriting Eighteenth-Century Literature," 31-33.

have an element of play—the “spoofing”—yet, further, are themselves “not particularly juvenile”: the revisiting of the nature of nursing, injury, and health in an inversion of Sir Charles Grandison’s antifeminist declarations of a female “sphere”, in both “Jack and Alice” and *Persuasion*, indicates Austen’s efforts at purposing such echoes towards a less misogynistic discourse.⁹ As both Murphy and Bander highlight, however, the identification of a unique relationship between Austen and *Grandison* is by no means new: indeed, Henry Austen notes *Grandison*’s importance in his 1817 “Biographical Notice of the Author” while James Austen-Leigh, in *A Memoir of Jane Austen*, suggests Austen conceived of the characters of Richardson’s novel as intimate friends, remembering “every circumstance narrated” in the novel in vivid detail.¹⁰ *Grandison*’s characters and scenes make appearances, too, in Austen’s private letters; “Like Harriot Byron I ask, what am I to do with my Gratitude” writes Austen in correspondence to her sister, Cassandra, in 1813, quoting from volume 1, letter XXXIII of Richardson’s novel.¹¹ The recurrence of *Grandison* as both an aesthetic and thematic influence upon Austen’s work suggests its particular, privileged afterlife in her contributions to the Regency novel. Richardson’s epistolary novel serves not only as Austen’s inspiration, but as an important touchpoint for interpreting her work. Beyond experiments with epistolary genre echoing Richardsonian conventions or straightforward parodies of the themes of *Grandison*, this chapter suggests the unique importance of Richardson’s novel to Austen’s oeuvre through a close reading of her most direct effort at

⁹ Murphy, “From Pammydiddle to *Persuasion*: Jane Austen Rewriting Eighteenth-Century Literature,” 33.

¹⁰ James Austen-Leigh, “A Memoir Of Jane Austen,” in *A Memoir of Jane Austen and Other Family Recollections*, ed. Kathryn Sutherland (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 71; Henry Austen, “Biographical Notice of the Author,” in *A Memoir of Jane Austen and Other Family Recollections*, ed. Kathryn Sutherland (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 141.

¹¹ Jane Austen, “Letter to Cassandra Austen, 11-12 Oct 1813,” in *Jane Austen's Letters*, ed. Deidre Le Faye (Oxford: Oxford University Press, Oxford Scholarly Editions Online, 2015), 244.

recuperating a fraught, moralistic work for a kin audience, ‘Sir Charles Grandison’. The playscript takes as its inspiration four brief episodes of Richardson’s novel, restaged as an elementary farce, with the addition of a wholly invented opening scene. These episodes exclusively focus on the English scenes of the novel, obscuring the entire Italian subplot featuring Sir Charles’s other love interest, Clementina. Particularly, Austen draws her scenes from Colnebrook, the home of Lord and Lady L, building the relationship between Harriet Byron and Charles Grandison over sketches of their courtship in this domesticated setting. These scenes lack the punctuality of the novel’s letters, rewriting Richardson’s novel nearly without the markers of the passage of time which the novel-in-letters, critically, utilises. The four episodes appear separated almost arbitrarily by rapid conclusions to each act, suggestive of the ad-hoc composition of the playlet while indicating the deliberate pains taken to emphasise a disorderliness inherent in *Grandison*’s complex plot.

Beginning with a brief opening, Austen introduces Harriet, Mrs. Reeves, and Mr. Reeves by way of their visit to a milliner, with Mr. Reeve’s expository dialogue characterizing the, apparently lively, Harriet:

MR R. So, for once in a way I have got the coast clear of dresses and bandboxes. And I hope my wife and Miss Byron will continue to keep their millinery in their own rooms, or anywhere so they are not in my way. Why, if I had not had a little spirit the other day, I should have had them in my own study! (559)

Mr. Reeve’s suggestion of abundance in Harriet and Mrs. Reeves’s purchases toys with the misogynistic trope of feminine materialism. Nevertheless, his bourgeois misogyny is repeatedly called into question by his ineffectiveness as the household’s head. The patriarchal ideal of the household as *his* demesne is undercut by its architectural divisibility into rooms

belonging to his wife and Harriet themselves, with the connotative suggestion of his muted authority, limited to only a study. Following Mr. Reeves's line, the text accelerates through nearly the entire first volume of Richardson's novel in its largest 'skip'. This first scene, totally invented by Austen and not adapted directly from the novel, serves solely to establish the raillery enjoyed by Harriet (as she is titled by the script, Miss B) without the slow orienting letters of Richardson's novel. Furthermore, by abandoning the early subplots of Harriet's various suitors, Austen also pivots towards a clear focus on the female characters. Arguably Richardson's reader learns more about Harriet from Greville's early letter and attempts at ingratiating himself with Lucy Selby, her friend, than from Harriet herself: his lengthy description of her "celebrated" "person"—"all human excellence"—in letter II of the novel suggests that her perfection is such that even the "greatest Sensualist on earth" must take note of her combination of virtue, beauty, and "mind".¹² Austen, instead, depicts Harriet at the milliner's, shopping. Refiguring Richardson's paragon as a participant in a simple and pointedly feminised activity grounds the text in its focus upon the mundane fabric of social reality, instead of the spectacle of Greville's intense admiration. In so doing, Austen refocuses the text upon its female figures and their experiences, while simultaneously untangling complex operations of desire which characterise their interactions with the novel's men.

The play continues with a gloss of Harriet Byron's abduction by the rake, Hargrave Pollexfen. The episodic structure of the playscript is reflected in its expository dialogue. The abduction itself occurs off-stage, referred to only in offhand commentary in the following dialogue. Following the abduction, in an exchange with John, Mr. Reeves exclaims, "she

¹² Samuel Richardson, *The History of Sir Charles Grandison*, eds. E. Derek Taylor, Melvyn New, Elizabeth Kraft (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2022), 11. Further references are to this edition and are given in text.

must be carried out into the country, I think. You go to Paddington and tell Thomas to go to Hampstead, and see if you can find her, and I will go to Clapham,” concluding the scene (560). Mr. Reeves’s chaotic direction of the servants echoes through the entirety of Act One, Scene Two: addressing a series of domestic employees in his “hurry”, Mr. Reeves awkwardly rushes through his instructions near breathlessly (560). Yet, what may have served as an extended gag or joke on Mr. Reeves’s ineptitude is interrupted by the abrupt conclusion to the act. This disorients the play’s reader, encouraging close attention to the bewildering speed of the text:

MR REEVES, entering in a great hurry at one door, and running out at the other, then calls from behind the scenery.

Mr. R. [offstage] John, run all over London and see if you can find the chairmen or chair that took Miss Byron. You know what number it was.

Thomas, run for Mr Smith directly.

He comes on-stage again, in great agitation. Enter BRIDGET.

BRID. My mistress is rather better sir, and begs you will send for Mr. Smith.

MR. R. I have, I have.

Exit BRIDGET and MR REEVES at different doors. MR REEVES calls from behind the scenery.

MR. R. [offstage] William, run to Mr Greville’s lodgings and if he is at home—Stop, William! Come in here! (560)

While the elements of the playscript cohere to emphasise Mr. Reeves’s desperation, Austen also seems to coordinate power to direct action within the play in unlikely places. Far from being under Mr. Reeves direction, the servants appear to direct him—Bridget, an invention of Austen who does not appear in Richardson’s novel, is invested with the capacity to subvert the authority of Mr. Reeves. The conclusion of the first act of Austen’s play disturbs the

hierarchies of servant and master, through the verbal intervention of a character with no speaking role throughout the remaining scenes. The apparently casual way in which Austen dispenses with hierarchies embedded not only within the imagined communities of Richardson's novel, but also in both her household and the polite circles in which she moved, quietly suggests the play's resistance to a concept of kin which emphasises hierarchy and centralised power.

This disorderliness is further emphasised by the lack of tension in moments of intense drama. The curtain next opens on Mrs. Awberry attempting to convince Harriet to marry Pollexfen, a transition that draws attention to the artificiality of the preceding scene's conclusion. Indeed, the pacing of the text consistently undermines its own drama: the threat of forced marriage hanging over Harriet is displaced by the repetitive nature of her attempted resistance. One moment that potentially commands a strong dramatic performance—Harriet fainting following the entrance of the clergyman in Act Two—is watered down again by a dialogue-focused script in which the tableaux of the collapsed, vulnerable girl becomes a simple set up for a joke centering on Sally Awberry taking too long to get a glass of water to revive her:

Sir H: Miss Awberry! You will be bridesmaid, if you please.

He takes a hold of MISS BYRON's hand. Enter DEBORAH AWBERRY.

Now, madam, all your purses will not save you.

The CLERGYMAN takes a book out of his pocket. MISS BYRON screams and faints away. MISS SALLY AWBERRY runs in.

DEB. Sally, Sally, bring a glass of water directly!

MRS AWBERRY takes out her salts and applies them to MISS BYRON's nose.

SIR H. I wish women were not quite so delicate, with all their faints and fits!

MISS BYRON revives. MISS SALLY returns with a glass of water and offers it to MISS BYRON, who drinks some.

MRS A. What a long time you have been, child! (561-62)

While the elements of a dramatic moment are present, they are nearly empty of the potent threat of forced marriage evoked by the presence of the clergyman. Hargrave Pollexfen's (SIR H) brief antifeminist quip on the fragility of women accentuates his basic misogyny. Both Sally and Deborah, and their mother, facilitate the attempted union, yet Sally's own lackadaisical untimeliness suggests her reticence to participate in the violent scene. Indeed, after she is attacked by her mother for her slow pace, she responds suggesting she would be "glad of it" to be replaced in the scene by her sister. The perversity of the family triad facilitating an attempted seduction by force is reflected moments later, when Mrs. Awberry declares that they have "lost the key of the closet where we keep our Prayer-books", following Harriet's successful destruction of the Clergyman's copy (562). The failure of the Awberry family to adequately maintain access to their prayerbooks, an important ritual item for the performance of their faith, punctuates their willingness to aid and abet what is, in essence, an attempt at perverting the supposedly sacral institution of marriage for the purpose of rape. Indeed, Hargrave himself suggests this sacrilege when he suggests to the Clergyman he will bribe him with "twenty more [prayerbooks], if you will do the business" (562). The Clergyman's moral standing—his capacity to enact a role as a mediator of religion—is called into question by his own principle's revisability in the face of material gain.

Yet Austen deliberately sanitises Hargrave's motives: rather than depicting his violence sexually, the only act of direct bodily harm he performs against Harriet is in an accident associated with his attempts to confine her:

[Harriet...] runs to the door, SIR HARGRAVE follows her. She gets half-way through the door and he, in shutting it, squeezes her. She screams and faints. He carries her away in his arms to a chair and rings the bell violently. (563)

Bowdlerizing his efforts at harm by treating them as accidental excess rather than intentional actions allows Austen to figure Hargrave as an object of comedy. Laughing at the predatory suitor, revelling in his failures, elides the real danger such figures pose within Richardsonian fictions even as it refuses to allow the threat of harm its regulatory potential. In the following moments, during which Harriet declares herself “killed[...] at last”, the Awberry siblings and mother perform a form of care that sits uncomfortably with their attempts at facilitating Hargrave’s efforts (563). The efforts at reviving and preserving Harriet’s health—fetching water, wrapping her in a “long cloak”—are presented as simple machinations in an effort at prolonging her suffering (563). Yet these moments of nursing are echoed throughout the play, in which Harriet’s slow recuperation from Hargrave’s injury upon her facilitates her integration within the Grandison kin network. Where here she refuses the Awberry’s assistances, and even “struggles” when offered the cloak, the dark parody of the care she will soon receive from the Grandison family serves to illuminate how Austen redeploys traditionally feminised motifs of nursing and assistance throughout her playlet to deepen an understanding of Harriet’s vulnerability. Dependent here upon the goodwill of Hargrave and the Awberry mother and sisters, Harriet’s situation bleakly suggests the centrality of such kin networks to Austen’s ‘Grandison’.

The focus on kin continues throughout the play. Among a variety of formally awkward transitions, a point of rough staging in Austen’s adaptation in Act Four draws attention to how the immediacy of the stage challenges the epistolary mode’s focus upon reflection, introspection, and associated positions which form an interiorised, post-phenomenal discourse. Harriet and Charlotte, in Colnebrook a short time after the kidnapping

and during Harriet's recuperation, perform a kind of sisterliness which is quickly subverted by Sir Charles's growing romantic investment in Harriet:

MISS G. [...] But I wonder, Sir Charles, you did not enquire after your
favourite sister before.

LORD L: I am sure, Miss Grandison, you cannot reproach your brother with
partiality[...]

SIR C. [...] Now, Charlotte, hold your tongue. I am sure some raillery is
coming out.

He rings the bell.

MISS G. I will not hold my tongue, Sir Charles.

SIR C. Then, Charlotte, if you speak, do not let us have any severity. (567)

Charlotte refers to Caroline, her older sister, her forward expression casting aspersions on Sir Charles's ability to notice the missing sibling. Her "severity" suggests, slyly, that Harriet has begun to replace Caroline in Sir Charles's notice, destabilising the kin bonds of sisterliness in favour of those of the conjugal union. Moreover, her insistence upon raillery mirrors Harriet's own characteristics, established in Austen's opening scene. The appeal against severe speech underscores Sir Charles's interest in politeness and decency—saleable attributes on the marriage market, for Charlotte, and critical to proving her worthiness for the polite sphere in which she operates. Yet Charlotte's insistence that she will refuse to silence herself in turn suggests her reticence to accept for herself the banal position of wife which she is supposed to embody one day. Moments later, Austen deepens the connection between these corporealizations of virtue and the phenomenological body. Charlotte declares Harriet unwell—"languid"—inviting an association between the experiences of the body and the social (567).

The declaration invites a variety of performed tableaux which exploit the immediacy of stage. Austen avoids stage-directions for Harriet in this moment—granting the actors full interpretative command of the scene. While this is a potential moment of weakness in the scripting, it also opens out Richardson’s novel beyond its obvious conclusions: rather than insisting upon the inevitability of Harriet and Sir Charles’s union, Austen’s play partially realises their courtship through the playlet’s limited stage directions, allowing for Sir Charles’s notice of Harriet as one among a variety of possible performative interpretations. Alongside this, the new emphasis on the sisterliness of Charlotte draws attention, even at this pivotal moment of ethical responsibility for Sir Charles, to kin bonds which appear both fixed and ephemeral. Yet, by skating past the possibility of reflection in the scene, moving rapidly towards a conclusion when Charlotte invites Harriet to have her broth “up in your own room” away from the gaze of Sir Charles, Austen’s play undermines the novel’s processual rumination and instead capitulates to its inconsistent rapidity as a formal device to avoid articulating the full extent of Sir Charles’s desire. This in turn reflects the known facts of the playlet’s composition, privileging kin above eroticised performances. Perhaps, most pointedly, this deferral suggests the role of Anna in the text’s shaping: the interests of familial virtue embedded above the courtship scripts orients the plot towards an almost childish naivete.

This disrupted flow also emphasises the ad-hoc construction of the play, consistent with an interest in involving a large cast, and draws attention to the artificial pacing. This pacing suggests the difficulty of reconciling the post-phenomenal status of the letter mode, and the immediate nature of staged theatre. That, furthermore, this pacing draws attention to the naivete of the playscript in its immature and perhaps formally inconsistent approach to reappropriating reflection as action highlights how the script invites rather than demands its own performing: the stage directions prior to Harriet’s exit—“[Sir Charles] rings the bell,”

“Enter Frederic with the sandwiches and the broth [...] Miss G takes the broth” (568)—invite a multiplicity of interpretative performances neither secured nor signified by the simple dialogue.

Austen deliberately invokes the generic distance between letter narrative and playscript to separate the concerns of her excerpted ‘Grandison’ and Richardson’s novel. A key marker of the novel in letters, Janet Altman suggests, is the “lag [...] between event and recording”, the hiatus and “spatial separation[s]” which govern the letter mode’s composition, address and addressee, a lacuna critical to understanding the form’s possibilities.¹³ The phenomenological immediacy of the theatrical stage dispenses with these gaps. Or, more precisely, it resolves them: by abandoning the specified address of epistolary fiction in favour of the stage’s more generalised addressee, an abstracted audience, Austen can renegotiate the temporalities of Richardson’s novel, and its consciousnesses. As Lisa A. Freeman describes, actress and playwright Elizabeth Inchbald’s *Remarks for the British Theatre* (1806) suggests the quick, irreversible, and immediate nature of audience judgements made within a theatre: an immediacy of reception and reciprocation alien to the novel.¹⁴ Given the rowdy coming-and-goings throughout dramatic performances at playhouses, as Francesca Saggini notes, theatrical performance and writing competed for attention among many audiences at once.¹⁵ Theatrical writing may therefore be insipid on the page, but, as Freeman notes in her reading of Inchbald, become inspired and arresting when performed.¹⁶

¹³ Janet Gurkin Altman, *Epistolarity: Approaches to a Form* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1982), 140.

¹⁴ Lisa A. Freeman, “On the Art of Dramatic Probability: Elizabeth Inchbald’s *Remarks for The British Theatre*,” *Theatre Survey* 62, no. 2 (2021): 168, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0040557421000053>.

¹⁵ Francesca Saggini, *Backstage in the Novel: Frances Burney and the Theater Arts* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2012), 70.

¹⁶ Freeman, “On the Art of Dramatic Probability: Elizabeth Inchbald’s *Remarks for The British Theatre*,” 164.

The connection to Inchbald is more than incidental: as Marcie Frank notes, both authors explored the “compulsory” nature of marriage for young women, despite differences in politics.¹⁷ Yet most importantly, both Austen and Inchbald exhibit the intermediate nature of text within their work, its intermediary status between “performance and print”; and it is Inchbald’s play, *Lover’s Vows*, which is exploited by Austen to great effect in her novel, *Mansfield Park* (1816).¹⁸ Austen’s ‘Grandison’ itself exists as an intermedia object, ostensibly written for performance by her kin and peers.¹⁹ To take Inchbald’s provocation at face value, the judgements we form reading ‘Grandison’ are missing a key step in its interpretation: the text takes flight *only* in reference to its intermediary status coding a performance. Yet, that this performance is inaccessible—most likely, only ever local, and private, if it was performed at all—produces a complex critical problem. That is, as a piece of private, rather than public, theatrical entertainment, care must be taken to refigure the stage considering the local, self-referential, closed community in which it would have been understood.²⁰

The practice of private theatricality itself emphasises an emerging conception of a privatised, rather than corporate or social, ‘self’ that was developing over the course of the

¹⁷ Marcie Frank, *The Novel Stage: Narrative Form from the Restoration to Jane Austen* (New Brunswick: Bucknell University Press, 2020), 126-27.

¹⁸ Frank, *The Novel Stage*, 127-28.

¹⁹ Large parts of ‘Grandison’ were likely composed in the early 1790s at Steventon, according to Southam, where the Austen family theatricals are known to have taken place; the manuscript’s “scrappiness and untidiness”, demonstrates its revision and recursion over a long period of drafting, with notes scrawled across pages and large sections of dialogue crossed-out and rewritten. See Southam, “Introduction,” 2-3.

²⁰ As Paula Byrne records, Austen family traditions of hosting private theatricals within a barn as a “temporary theatre” likely began in 1787, following Jane and Cassandra’s return from school in 1786. Byrne’s analysis of Austen family archives suggests that these theatricals took on a life of their own, spurred by Jane’s cousin, Eliza de Feuillide; Eliza may have imported aspects of the theatricals from her upbringing in France. See Paula Byrne, *Jane Austen and the Theatre* (London: Hambledon and London, 2002), 7-8.

long eighteenth century.²¹ The integration of the nominally public field of the stage as a private field of self-exploration and self-knowledge interiorises the act of performing. By locating the acting out of roles within the ordinary polite settings of the family home, the tension between privacy and public staging necessitates attention to individual conscience and new ‘personal’ identities as performances themselves, even those at the structural centre of English polite society.²² The self, its individuated performances, gestures, and rhetoric, seemingly surpasses essential norms or mores which harmonise the individual and the collective identities expected of late-eighteenth-century characters. This gradual shift becomes more important in Austen’s ongoing attention to the private stage, particularly in ‘Grandison’, and its capacity to figure identity in critical and lasting ways. Austen recognised how the private theatrical stage functioned in *Mansfield Park* as a space of flirtation and desire, restricted but not curtailed by the semiotics of theatre. Paula Byrne articulates the interplay between performance and desire in *Mansfield Park* as the Bertram family network rehearse Inchbald’s *Lover’s Vows*, suggesting the erotic potential of private performance is

²¹ Writing on *Pride and Prejudice* (1813), Michael McKeon remarks that family matters within Austen’s novel “rest on a sedimentation of less privatised norms”: “subjective interiority”, the separation between political and ethical consciousness, and the (non-absolute) “sanction” or preference of “individual choice” in matters of conjugal love. The state apparatus disappears into a myopic vision of conjugal domesticity as the centrepiece of Regency culture; internalizing the family romance as “inner worth” becomes apparent as a function of “primary socialization”. Private theatricality, the theatre of the home, emphasises these trends identified by McKeon within Austen’s writing, even as it perhaps more self-consciously draws attention to itself as a semi-public performance itself. See Michael McKeon, *The Secret History of Domesticity: Public, Private, and the Division of Knowledge* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2005), 692-95.

²² Dror Wahrman contrasts the *ancien regime* of identity and its celebration of typological diversity through collectivised typologies to the more essentially ‘modern’ system of harmonization: these typologies had allowed “individuals” to fall through the cracks of a conceptual framework without threatening its integrity. By the time of Austen’s ‘Grandison’, a more rigorous conforming appears at work: over-particularisation and the discrete performance of individuals measured against class- and gender-specific codes of propriety supplants “primarily [collective]” identity categories. See Dror Wahrman, *The Making of the Modern Self: Identity and Culture in Eighteenth-Century England* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2004), 183-85.

clearly visible to the “envious observer,” Fanny Price.²³ In Austen’s novel, the performance serves a critical function explicating the relationships between theatricality and propriety, performed role, and performing self. Indeed, Ellen Pollak suggests that private theatricality in *Mansfield Park* represents a critical point of resistance to the politics of honesty, an undermining of the paternal system of deference to the patriarch by the signifying the paternal and the erotic as the same thing; a signification, Pollak further suggests, influenced by Richardson’s *Grandison*.²⁴

Unlike the incorporation of ‘Lover’s Vows’ in *Mansfield Park*, however, the relationship between Richardson’s novel and Austen’s playscript is more complex than the appropriation of an existing theatrical work. Particularly, the reappropriation of the epistolary novel’s focus upon bodies upon the stage demands attention. This is emphasised by evidence of Harriet’s languor in Act Four, suggesting her body’s capacity for exhaustion (568). While the trope of the penwoman writing to-the-moment following her varying trials features within, and indeed heavily shapes, Richardson’s narratives, Austen rejects the motif in favour of a focus on the recuperative act of rest. The rushed pacing of *Grandison* is refigured through a rejection of the punctuality of the letter, emphasised by the Act’s opening stage description, inviting an imprecise and, perhaps, lackadaisical reading of the passage of time rather than emphasizing its specificity or particularity: “Colnebrook” is given in Austen’s manuscript as the sole scene instruction (566). The temporal markers of the letter form’s punctuality, its dating, invites a kind of plausibility yet, given the convoluted plots of Richardson’s novels, so often demands an antirealist and near implausible schedule of

²³ Byrne, *Jane Austen and the Theatre*, 13. Gay suggests the obvious emphasis within Inchbald’s play upon the “rules of the game of courtship” likely leads to this salience: through the “typecast[ing]” of Edmund Bertram and Mary Crawford in their roles, the urgency of the erotic potential is laid bare. See Gay, *Jane Austen and the Theatre*, 108-10.

²⁴ Ellen Pollak, *Incest and the English Novel, 1684-1814* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2003), 167.

composition. This punctuality is abandoned in favour of the untimeliness of Austen's play which, in turn, realises the *durée* of Richardson's plots marked not against clock-times or dates, but iterative, sociable, and familial tableaux. The non-specificity in Austen's stage description, the refusal to stage the play along the novel's schedule, deepens its interest in the nonurgency of desire. Sexual contact is deferred, partially or totally. This illustrates a reaction against *Grandison*'s investments in the conduct of courtship, privileging a feminised account of the mundane, even boring, nature of polite romance. Charlotte's refusal to perform at her "civillest", as Sir Charles demands, heightens this rejection of normative love plots and their constitutive need for propriety (567). Instead, like Harriet at the Milliner, Austen figures *her* Charlotte against plot itself: invested against the masculinist love plot, she recognises and resists the narrative's slow, and inevitable, march towards conjugality.

Indeed, at the beginning of Act Four, Charlotte actively antagonises the man who will become her own love interest, and eventually, her husband:

LORD G. I am afraid I have been making you wait, gentlemen.

MISS G. Well, you need not be afraid any longer, for you most certainly have.

SIR C. Fye Charlotte!—I do not think that was the civillest thing in the world to say.

LORD G. I hope I have not offended you, madam.

MISS G. Yes, you have, for making my dear brother wait.

SIR C. I will not be bribed into liking your wit, Charlotte. (567)

By the play's concluding double wedding, Charlotte and Lord G will be married. Here, however, Charlotte resists demands for civility and propriety and instead performs a reaction against the playlet's own plot. Lord G's subtle misogyny, addressing only Sir Charles and

Lord L on the stage in his greeting despite the presence of both Harriet and Charlotte in the scene, is reprimanded by her injunction of his untimeliness. Harriet's own reflection immediately prior—that it is “a different thing making a lady wait on a gentleman”—suggests that she and Charlotte are mere accessories to the sociality of Colnebrook's living-room, irrelevant to the meeting between Sir Charles and Lord G. Her capitulation to the plotting's latent anti-feminist investment in her alienability is mirrored by Lord G's own surprise at Charlotte's mild attack. Investments in a counternarrative to the process of conjugal courtship shock in their refutation of plot. Charlotte, it seems, is quite satisfied being Sir Charles's sister: her aspirations in this scene remain, solely, within her performance of a kin bond. Yet, perhaps it is the very strength of this kin bond which ultimately forces Charlotte to (reluctantly) adhere to the narratives of desire: by seeding her resistance to this narrative, Austen identifies her capacity for growth and transformation within the frame of the plot, in so doing granting Charlotte a kind of developmental autonomy.

The close conflation of desire and developmental capacities mirrors the epistolary form's own interest in iteratively enacting plot across diurnal cycles of letter-writing. But with attention to the semiotics of acting no doubt engaged by performing Austen's script, the systems of theatrical meaning allowed for the performance of desire with a theatrical kind of embodiment the epistolary form can only aspire to. The scripted body, with its privileges of gesture, tableau, and physicality, performs the intimate suggestions of the novel-in-letters even as it reveals the capacity of the letter form to evoke such a staging. As Frank suggests, an analysis which opposes novel and stage and diminishes the capacity of the theatrical to capture the “intimacy that print letters had produced” might fail to wholly articulate the affinities of the two mediums.²⁵ Further, as Emily Hodgson Anderson persuasively argues,

²⁵ Frank, *The Novel Stage*, 83.

Austen's *Mansfield Park* perceives theatre as less a performance put upon by a true 'self' of the actor, but rather as a means of revealing the actor's own proclivities, desires, and personality.²⁶

Yet, once again given Charlotte's interest in kin, it appears to be a sanitised variant of desire these figures enact. As Kathryn Sutherland suggests, the bowdlerised form of the abridgement is one crucial element to understanding Austen's 'Grandison'. To Sutherland, the "vacuously short" text parodies the popular form of abridged fiction through its satirical resistance to "schoolroom etiquette".²⁷ Janet Todd and Linda Bree likewise link Austen's 'Grandison' to the tradition of the abridgement, noting that several "relatively comprehensive" attempts at reducing the long text's complex plot to a short form both predate and coexist with Austen's playscript.²⁸ Southam agrees, suggesting the allusive comedy functions as an addendum to Richardson's novel even as it imitates, echoes, and rearranges.²⁹ Abridgements of Richardson were common, and often worked to "alter epistolarity" by restructuring first-person, present-tense texts of letters as "retrospective, impersonal" narratives external to the events they relate, as Leah Price explains.³⁰ Price

²⁶ Emily Hodgson Anderson, *Eighteenth-Century Authorship and the Play of Fiction: Novels and the Theater, Haywood to Austen* (London: Routledge, 2009), 133-35.

²⁷ Kathryn Sutherland, "Appendix 2. Sir Charles Grandison," in *Jane Austen's Fiction Manuscripts, Vol 5*, ed. Kathryn Sutherland (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019), 308.

²⁸ Todd and Bree note, in particular, *The History of Sir Charles Grandison and the Hon. Miss Byron, in which is included the Memoirs of a Noble Italian Family* (?1780), and *The History of Sir Charles Grandison* (1789, 10th ed)—at 87 and 142 pages, respectively. These two abridgements evince the practice of the abridgement: particularly, the distillation of plot, and, like Austen's play, the focus specifically on the Harriet-Grandison romance. See Janet Todd and Linda Bree, "Appendix C: 'Sir Charles Grandison'," in *Later Manuscripts*, ed. Janet Todd and Linda Bree, *The Cambridge Edition of the Works of Jane Austen* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 556.

²⁹ Southam, "Introduction," 17.

³⁰ Leah Price, "Reading (and Not Reading) Richardson, 1756-1868," *Studies in Eighteenth-Century Culture* 29, no. 1 (2000): 88, <https://doi.org/10.1353/sec.2010.0095>.

further suggests that Richardson attempted the first abridgements of his own text with the 1749 table of contents included in an edition of *Clarissa*, carefully offering a summary of the contents of each letter.³¹ Richardson's efforts at condensing the work did not end with such summaries. His later publication in 1755 of the *Collection of the Moral and Instructive Sentiments* provides further evidence of an effort towards distilling practical meaning from his lengthy novels. Further examples of attempts to reconcile the novelistic mode to its utilitarian, "instructive" value or mimetic capacity are evident in the range of excerpts emphasizing this facet of Richardson's novels: the focus of these bowdlerization's upon the signification of virtue in his texts became one easy target for Austen's satire.

The abridgements which Austen parodically undermines are perhaps more clearly those with the view to distilling the wholly moral purpose of Richardson's novels than a mere reduction in prolixity for the purpose of narrative expediency. A 1768 single-volume, 200-page abridged edition of *Pamela*, *Clarissa*, and *Grandison* teases out the moral value for an audience of its own work in its prefatory material:

Happy the youth, who, by reading this work, learns to shun the vices of a Mr. B., and *Lovelace*, and makes it his endeavour to imitate the noble virtues of the humane, the generous, and religious Sir *Charles Grandison*; and, like him, is the most dutiful of sons, the most affectionate of brothers, the most faithful of friends, and the best of husbands!

Happy the fair, who endeavours to transcribe into her mind, the artless simplicity and innocence of *Pamela*, with the steady virtue of a *Clarissa*! who, like the lovely Miss *Byron*, merits and obtains, from her relations and friends, the tenderest affection, and by despising every admirer, who wants

³¹ Price, "Reading (and Not Reading) Richardson, 1756-1868," 90.

the principal and only charms that ought to captivate a virtuous mind, at length obtains the happiness of being united to a man of sense, virtue, and religion.³²

The preface figures the reader's potential to learn through reading Richardson's abridged novels. Each is reduced to their moral components—"vices" and "virtues"—themselves divided across genders. The various figures or characters of the novels are in this brief preface given as models for behaviour, positive or negative. The abridgement's suggestion of "a *Clarissa*" indicates through its identification as one of "a" kind of "*Clarissa*" that these virtuous icons were understandable as types, as imprints of their values that were available for interpretation and rearticulation through performance by the reader. Inviting mimetic reading through the emphasis on performed, functional roles rather than a unique individual, this 1768 abridgement realises an ideal reading practice.

Importantly, the readings invited by this abridgement are deliberately curtailed by the mimetic role of text in forming virtuous manly "youths" and "fair" girls. Rather than opening Richardson's novels to interpretative possibility, this abridgement focuses upon the social role of the text in fashioning an interpretative community of model readers, catering towards prevalent ideals of mimetic readership and, potentially, attempting to forestall criticisms of the novels themselves. Furthermore, securing Richardson's texts as moral guides allows the 1768 abridgement to hybridise the novel with the aphoristic genre of the conduct book. This aphoristic quality is evident from the abridgement's preface's first line—"It is universally allowed by most moralists, that the most important part of education is implanting in the minds of youth, maxims of religion and virtue," a phraseology invested in an overt maximalism, the style of which was famously later echoed satirically by Austen in her own

³² Samuel Richardson, *The Paths of Virtue Delineated; Or, the History in Miniature of the Celebrated Pamela, Clarissa Harlowe, and Sir Charles Grandison* (London, 1768), viii.

Pride and Prejudice (1813). Austen's insistent and reflexive parody of such aphorisms condenses their essential meaning as instruments of governance for the marital marketplace. If, in 1768 moralists acknowledge "maxims of religion and virtue", then the marital or relational value of performing actively these maxims is made clear by Austen's satirical opening to *Pride and Prejudice*: the function of such maxims lies in their capacity to assist a "single man in possession of a good fortune" in finding "a wife", as Austen suggests in her novel of 1813.³³ In this way, the gradual clarification of the conduct book's aphoristic mode as a system intimately interconnected with the marriage economy is laid bare, opened up as a target for parody. This parodic textual work is anticipated and honed in Austen's 'Grandison', evidencing an ongoing literary commitment to challenging the stifling norms embodied, in her later *Pride and Prejudice*, by the censorious Mr. Collins, and his reading and direct recollection of Fordyce's sermons, with "monotonous solemnity".³⁴ The witty excoriation of Mr. Collins' insensible misogyny highlights that Austen persisted in deliberately challenging male power while balancing novelistic impulses of plausibility and a lively realism suggestive of a mature authorial practice.

The play, for all its interests, is not without some severe errors in construction. These structural problems are expressed in the varying quality of the transitions between scenes and acts. The most successful transition between acts, between Act Three and Act Four, suggests the maturity of Austen's staging. Rather than following the manner of the earlier farcical scenes, by Act Three Scene Three the attention has shifted from comic expediency and direct address from character to character, to a more nuanced attempt at representing individual mannerisms and characterization, through simple but rich dialogue:

³³ Jane Austen, *Pride and Prejudice*, ed. Pat Rogers (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 3.

³⁴ Austen, *Pride and Prejudice*, 76-77.

SIR C: So, my lord, you have heard of our new sister?

LORD L: Yes, Sir Charles, and Miss Grandison, by her description of her,
has made me long to see her.

Miss. G: [*holding some tea*] Frederic, take this to Sir Charles. (566)

Austen's dramatization succeeds through its willingness to construct the idealised tableau and, at the same time, call into question the silences of the same pose. Sir Charles and Lord L.'s dialogue, in reference to the recently rescued Harriet, situates the play's female protagonist as the object of Lord L's longing, framed by the shared, familial bond which insists on the nonsexual nature of such a description. As Christopher Flint suggests, even as the eighteenth-century refiguration of family ties produced the "conventional" household, "aberrant and heightened relations" were the product of such a dramatic shift towards the isolated, insular household unit.³⁵ This narrative of a "shift" has been complicated by the assertion of the incestuous construct of kin as such: calling to mind the problem of psychologization, the Freudian narrative of the oedipal home holds attractiveness as an explanatory apparatus resonant with these enormous social changes. Yet, importantly, as Pollak argues, the "fiction" of an "original" and incestuous kin organised along oedipal lines remains, itself, constructed anew in each familiar retelling.³⁶ Thus, calling into question the nature of the family through incest may itself insist on a harmonizing of a variety of conflicting and often contradictory trends in kin organisation. Ruth Perry's reading of the family and the novel suggests British concepts of kinship underwent "seismic" changes throughout the long eighteenth century, indicating the instability of the concept of the family

³⁵ Christopher Flint, *Family Fictions: Narrative and Domestic Relations in Britain, 1688-1798* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998), 2-3.

³⁶ Pollak, *Incest and the English Novel*, 16-17.

at the centre of the incest narrative.³⁷ Growing emphasis upon conjugal bonds over and above filiation replaced attention towards consanguineal blood lines, resulting in a new centrality of spousal relation at the centre of the emergent “nuclear family”.³⁸ Richardson’s *Grandison* itself reflects this gradualist transformation from a focus upon the consanguineal to the conjugal, and the interrogation of the position of male headship within the new, affectively organised kin hierarchies. Harriet suggests as much, writing to her friend Lucy Selby early in the novel regarding a minor character, her suitor Mr. Fowler, in Vol 1, letter VIII,

I cannot say he is disagreeable in his *person*. But he seems to want the *mind* I would have a man bless’d with to whom I am to vow love and honour. I purpose, whenever I marry, to make a very good and even a dutiful wife [Must I not vow obedience? And shall I break my marriage-vow?]: I would not, therefore, on any consideration, marry a man whose want of knowledge might make me stagger in the performance of my duty to him; and who would perhaps command from caprice or for want of understanding, what I should think unreasonable to be complied with. (32)

A specific concentration of male power, the patriarchalist conception of marriage as male headship, is under threat from the ever-evolving calculus of the marriage market to such an extent that in 1753 Richardson’s Harriet may imagine such headship as contingent upon the performance of reasonable maleness, here presented in its obverse as “unreasonable”. What Tassie Gwilliam identifies as the “consolidation and celebration” of a masculinity in *Grandison* is, in part, the result of this contingency: this coordination of male power into

³⁷ Ruth Perry, *Novel Relations: the Transformation of Kinship in English Literature and Culture, 1748-1818* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 1.

³⁸ Perry, *Novel Relations*, 2.

(increasingly) limited hands.³⁹ Harriet's willing diminution in marriage becomes conceivable as the valid response to male "knowledge" and "reason"; the "marriage vow" is contingent upon this performance. Here, Richardson invests a limited agency in Harriet: her capacity for appraisal of the reasonable performance of "mind" suggests her sensitivity to the male virtues which render a husband suitable. Furthermore, figuring her preferences of "mind" suggests Harriet's own virtuous desire: setting her in contradistinction to an imagined interlocutor in the paired rhetorical questions delivered as an aside, "must I not vow obedience? And shall I break my marriage vow?". The apparent answers to both questions confirm Harriet's virtue even as they suggest, once more, the contingent, partial, or transitory, rather than fixed, nature of such answers. Indeed, in a letter to Lucy composed only three days prior, Letter VI of Vol 1, Harriet declares the impossibility of "the *unbelieving husband* being converted by the *believing wife*": these repetitive forms of aphoristic, scriptural interjections suggest Richardson's narrative is shaped, rather than merely punctuated, by the concerns of virtuous representation (26). The coordination of these concerns into the structure and shape of the conjugal home in turn confirms the centrality of marriage to understandings of the moral self in *Grandison*, a self held in concert with the emerging kin hierarchies of conjugality over and above the prior consanguineal system.

Of course, Harriet, in both Richardson and Austen's *Grandison*, is an orphan, with only a limited claim to a consanguineal bloodline. Her own contingency within the martial economy reasserts the centrality of marriage to the lives of young women in the eighteenth century. Indeed, even as the patriarchalist conception of the family waned, new enforcements and entrenchments of male privileges limited possibilities of totally exploding the priorities of hierarchy which survived patriarchalism's subsumption into a more modernised, 'nuclear'

³⁹ Tassie Gwilliam, *Samuel Richardson's Fictions of Gender* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1993), 122.

system. Illustrating this, Perry's argument draws upon a complex analysis of literary, historical, and sociological data to demonstrate how "formulas" of literature began to cement such conjugal affinal bonds even as nostalgia for the earlier consanguineal models persisted.⁴⁰ As Perry further suggests, one of the curious results of such a transformation is the sexualization of kin; or, more accurately, the reinterpretation of incest *as* sexual. What power relations produce the possibility of an endogamic sexuality? Certainly, the coordination of male sexual power within an incestuously organised kin draws attention to the essentially androcentric construction of the conjugal home: in what meaningful sense a realm of (increased, and, increasing) risk for women might be described as a "female sphere" remains unclear. Like the "public", domestic spaces remained dangerous for women, to the advantage of men. If, as Perry suggests, incest, in fiction, then becomes endemic as a "symptom" of the transformation of marriage and kin relations, this is possible due the sexual power newly invested in the male head of the household.⁴¹

Austen's play highlights endogamic concentrations of power through the deliberate performance of acts of incestuous desire. Destabilizing the idealised tableau through emphasizing a familial affinal bond's production of, rather than restriction of desire, emphasises Austen's willingness to appropriate Richardson's novel while subverting its moral purism. This subversion is closely interrelated with Austen's efforts towards psychologization. The modern logic of the individual in Austen, Pollak notes, appeals to "incipient notions of desire" of which incest is the centre.⁴² The tableau Austen presents, that is, dramatizes a moment at which Harriet's body is invested with a capacity to both demand and prohibit its own sexualization: as an object of desire *as* a sister.

⁴⁰ Perry, *Novel Relations*, 373.

⁴¹ Perry, *Novel Relations*, 374.

⁴² Pollak, *Incest and the English Novel*, 163.

The bonds of sisterhood, Austen further suggests, may serve to embed patriarchal power rather than subvert it. At the end of Act Four, an interchange between Lord L., Lord G., and Sir Charles suggests the instrumentality of sisterly affinity within a conjugal paradigm:

LORD L. What an odd girl is Charlotte. But you must not despair, Lord G. I believe she likes you, though she won't own it. I hope Miss Byron, when she is recovered, will have a little influence over her.

SIR C. Indeed, I hope so too. Miss Byron is a charming young woman and I think, from what I have seen of her, her mind is as complete as her person. She is the happy medium between gravity and over-liveliness. She is lively or grave as the occasion requires.

LORD G. Indeed, she is a delightful young woman and only Miss Grandison can equal her[...] (569)

Sir Charles' desire to have Harriet "influence" Charlotte's romantic interest in Lord G. may itself be innocent enough yet may also suggest the orientation of familial bonds towards the matrices of romance within which such bonds gain their legibility. That Sir Charles may describe Harriet's mental completion further emphasises the apparency of supposedly interior traits or characteristics upon the body's surface. The mutual perfection of her "mind" and "person" cannot wholly evince a separation between the two. That, as he continues, it is her balancing social expectations of both vivacity and necessary seriousness which draws attention to these aspects, suggests that Austen is emphasizing less Harriet's mimetic virtues than her performed erotic appeal. It is through performing this eroticised function that Harriet might "influence" Charlotte: the pair are "equal[s]" in their shared capacity to reflect a male fantasy. Or, more precisely, a phantasm, the erotically available yet virtuous sister—an unspeakable desire.

That Austen appears to, rather presciently, allude to the erotic interrelationship between gazing and touching later described by Freud in Lord L.'s strong, longing desire to see Harriet, might suggest this psychologization of the sexual—and it is more importantly a rejection of the models of virtue which govern Richardson's novel.⁴³ Abandoning the interrelated problems of masculinity and heroism his earlier *Clarissa* found wanting, *Grandison* instead transitions away from the heightened focus on what Doody describes as the “noble warrior-hero” in order to “favour[...] the ideal of the benevolent gentleman”, more suited for “communal life”.⁴⁴ Richardson takes aim at patriarchal and paternal privileges which strengthen incestuous or endogamic organizations of power, in the process deconstructing the consanguineal systems which most actively preclude endogamy. Austen deepens and broadens this process of rejecting not only the “noble warrior-hero”. Furthermore by reducing the “benevolent gentleman” to a psychological sketch, a machine of desires and drives, her playscript can counteract the collapse of bloodline by effectively isolating the individual as a psychologised unit.

According to Flint, Perry, and Pollak's respective analyses of the family as an emerging site of separateness, isolation, and endogamy, kin, and individual mirror each other in the transition from systems of community status, title, or headship towards a new conception in which the ‘self’ takes precedence. The self, in this constellation, is moreover a psychological actor. In a sense, Austen presents an anti-ideological reappraisal of the self in starkly modern terms: as the principal and identifiable component of more complex networks such as kin and community. By presenting the psychologised, individuated unit, Austen

⁴³ See Sigmund Freud, “The Sexual Aberrations,” in *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality: The 1905 Edition*, ed. Philippe Van Haute and Herman Westerink (London: Verso, 1905: 2016), 18.

⁴⁴ Margaret Anne Doody, *A Natural Passion: A Study of the Novels of Samuel Richardson* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1974), 242.

anticipates and intervenes in the emergence of a narrative of selfhood which, in its evident modern predominance, persists. Psychologization—in this sense—supersedes the “perfunctory smoothness” Doody identifies in Grandison’s novelistic figuration.⁴⁵ In its place, the liveliness of the rapid, brief playscript embodies the “spontaneity” Doody rightly claims Richardson’s virtuous characterization can only describe. Austen therefore takes pains to signify Lord L., Lord G., and Charles’s relative humanization—their psychological functions as actors performing desire—above their “text-book correctness”.⁴⁶

Importantly, Sir Charles’ description of Harriet as the “new sister” when he asks Lord L., “so, my lord, you have heard of our new sister?” emphasises the constructed, evolving, and ephemeral nature of kinship ties even as it secures for Harriet a position of relative stability (566). The obvious reading of siblinghood and sisterliness is in its fixity, its capacity for conferring a continuing status, yet the uneasy adjective “new” resists the fixative of family proper. The declarative “so” beginning the line further invests textual power in Sir Charles. Grandison’s demand, for Lord L. to perceive Harriet, is given weight by its punctuating position as the opening line of the scene and, through the simple diction, Austen might effectively characterise his combined piety and desire by teasing the dual possibilities of kin terminology.

This double meaning is not confined to this scene. Rather, throughout the play, emphases on the slippery relationship desire and kinship share are evident in Austen’s articulation of incest’s centrality to the fantasy of family government. Charlotte’s relationship with her brother connotes an incestuous formation in which desire is enacted through a jovial intimacy. This is evident particularly towards the end of Act Three. Even after Sir Charles

⁴⁵ Doody, *A Natural Passion*, 254.

⁴⁶ Doody, *A Natural Passion*, 255.

situates Harriet as the “new sister” his attention is swiftly demanded by the “flatterer”, Charlotte (566). The scene’s conclusion emphasises Charlotte’s unorthodox relationships in her invitation to Lady L., Lord L., and Grandison to “take a walk in the garden” (566). In amatory fictions of the eighteenth century, gardens spatialise the erotic potential of a wild space defined by its bordering. Richardson’s earlier *Clarissa* and *Pamela* both make use of the garden as a motif resonant with sex, inheriting a tradition associating the garden locality with seduction.⁴⁷ It is in one such erotically charged space that, as Chapter Two explores, Pamela transforms from an ostensibly thinking subject to the naked (and dead) object of B’s desire: here, the grounds of Colnebrook invite a similar transformation for Harriet.

Yet, as Karen Lipsedge notes, the garden also intimates a topography of expansion, openness, and freedom in the latter-century turn towards a natural or wild space over and above the “formal garden” popular in the years prior.⁴⁸ Gardens draw attention to the liminality of character through their own ever-changing, seasonal, and ultimately transitory form, while simultaneously emphasizing how these transitional sites are themselves constructed, pruned, and weeded. Austen’s later *Emma* and its Box Hill sequence reckons with this tension between fixed and transitory identities, a moment of clarification for the title

⁴⁷ Gardens represent a complex space, but one which draws attention to both plot and sexuality. To April London, Richardson positions *Clarissa*’s inherited “Grove” or “Dairy House” and its “embourgeoisement” as an asset, one which radically alters her position within the Harlowe family and encourages Solmes’s suit, the elementary narrative thrust which enables the plot of *Clarissa*; the contest within the family over the “productive” isolates *Clarissa* and, simultaneously, confirms her sexuality. To Aaron Santesso, meanwhile, transitions in garden designs themselves reconfigured small, enclosed spaces, the Renaissance knot garden, as expansive “immersive garden experience[s]” mirroring the “immersive realism” of long-form prose fiction. This naturalism is nevertheless carefully heightened: both prose fiction and the garden draw attention to, and punctuate, their own artificiality through selection and cultivation. See April London, *Women and property in the eighteenth-century English novel* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 17-23; Aaron Santesso, “The Narrative Garden,” *Eighteenth-Century Life* 46, no. 1 (2022): 6-8, <https://doi.org/10.1215/00982601-9467178>.

⁴⁸ Karen Lipsedge, *Domestic Space in Eighteenth-Century British Novels* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), 129-30.

character and the key dramatic point of that novel: the freedom Emma takes in her address to Miss Bates and her admonishment by Mr Knightley suggest the uncultivated status of the wild, desirous space, embodied by the rakish Frank Churchill.⁴⁹ Inversely, it is Pemberley's grounds and gardens which confirm to *Pride and Prejudice*'s Elizabeth Bennet the refinement of Mr. Darcy—where nature is not interrupted by “awkward taste”.⁵⁰ This torsion between construction and natural inclination charges Austen's garden spaces with an erotic potential to transform identities into the desiring poses her love plots necessitate.

The charged invitation to “take a walk in the garden” suggests Charlotte's awareness of this transformational scene, and enacts her agency as a figure who *invites* such transformations through her rebelliousness against mores requiring her diminution. That it is her social superior, her brother Charles, who acquiesces to her invitation evokes the dangerous intimacy between them, a reversal of the patriarchalist absolutism which—through its implicit inheritance of all men's basic power in their descent from Adam—devolves from the strict hierarchy by granting Charlotte a perverse autonomy to lead her brother through the liminal, sexualised garden space. In contradistinction to the epistolary mode's fastidious attention to self-realization, the sociality of Charlotte's “walk” suggests the corporate nature of character as a site in Austen's playlet. Grounding the moment in an epistemic problem, Austen alludes to Lady L's ignorance regarding Harriet's origin immediately prior to the invitation:

Lady L. But Charlotte, how do we come by our new sister? I have not heard that yet.

Miss G. Well, we will go and take a walk in the garden and talk about it.

⁴⁹ Jane Austen, *Emma*, eds. Richard Cronin and Dorothy McMillan, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 399-409

⁵⁰ Austen, *Pride and Prejudice*, 271.

Frederic, you may take away.

Come, Caroline, make haste or the fit will be off.

Gentlemen, will you accompany us? 566)

Austen's deliberateness in situating the garden as a space of epistemic mediation, where Harriet's identity is clarified for Lady L. (without Harriet's presence) suggests the potency of the scene in figuring Charlotte's neglect of polite hierarchy while furthermore teasing out the characteristic difficulties of staging epistolary fiction. Translating a mode obsessed with the minutiae of experience and its immediate epistemic access to the performative space of the stage requires careful acknowledgement in Austen's play, particularly in its refiguration of epistolarity's possibilities. The disinclination to stage the garden scene, instead summarizing its contents through the dialogue immediately preceding it, in turn gestures towards the emergence of individuated knowledge. The individual role of a reasoning being, with perceptive capacities that incorporate new experiences into that reasoning, figures as the basis of self-knowledge which might produce Charlotte's performance. Knowing, and the confession of that knowledge in the garden, precludes the participation of Frederic, the servant and thus social inferior.

The conferral of knowledge regarding Harriet's origins, status, and kidnapping invests power in Charlotte as a mediator of middle-class hierarchies while, seemingly paradoxically, she parodies these hierarchies through her own disinvestment in the apparent social immobility of women. Directly addressing the "gentleman" allows Charlotte to step out from her embodied and performed roles as a woman by emphasizing her participation in the larger social arrangement of Colnebrook: fittingly, her invitation to the garden figures her as an active organiser of Colnebrook's sociability. Taking command of the social environment in this way allows Charlotte illustrates her crucial centrality, despite Harriet's obstinate position as protagonist: the circling-around of Harriet's status and worthiness as a match to Grandison

is insinuated through the necessity of establishing a clear narrative preceding her arrival at the estate. Without recourse to the epistolary mode's epistemic grounding in its fastidious details, Austen relies on brief glosses, rooted in performance, of important details of the plot to situate and suggest the marriageability of Harriet, the smooth perfection of her mind and person.

The script's efforts at broaching the incest taboo through locating desire in the relation of the "sister" is itself, however, immediately ironized by the staging. The presence of the literal, familial sister of Sir Charles, Charlotte, underlines the complexity of Austen's composition and its emphasis upon character. Charlotte exerts her power, even if it is limited. Her direction of the conversation and commanding presence in all that follows, alongside clear stage directions centering Charlotte's position, resists a Richardsonian feminine virtue and opens both play and novel to new readings. Thus interrupting the flow of dialogue with an explicit turn to the privileges of theatrical performance, Austen forestalls an easy reading and challenges her readers and viewers to engage with the narrative position of Charlotte. The literalised blood relations productive of incest's taboo status have been called into question for their capacity to instead invite desire immediately before this scene. Charlotte exerts, then, a carefully non-sexualised power which in turn rehearses the taboo by subordinating kin to gender. More precisely, while Sir Charles and Lord L. rehearse a masculinist performance of *desiring*, Charlotte displaces this performance through her careful performance of virtuous, familial domesticity, offering tea. The perfection of this performance is, itself, parodic, counterposed to Charlotte's refusal elsewhere to "hold [her] tongue", her "severity", and her capacity for offense towards her social superiors (567). She is, as Lord L. puts it mildly, "lively" (569).

While Harriet and Sir Charles are the ostensible protagonists of Austen's play, it is Charlotte who enjoys the most textual freedom to burlesque Richardson's thematic concerns.

The final scene of the play is the promise of a double wedding between Harriet and Sir Charles, and Charlotte and Lord G. Charlotte's comments to Sir Charles upon sighting Lord G reveal her characterization's resistance to piety quite clearly:

Miss G: Yes, that is my man, sure enough. I wish I had a better one to show you. But he is better than he was.

SIR C: Fye! Charlotte, I am sure you have nothing to complain of in Lord G. And if you will make a good wife, I will answer for it, he will a husband. And I hope you will be as happy as I promise myself Miss Byron and I shall be. And I hope she will have no reason to lament having chosen me for her husband.

The Curtain Falls. (572)

Austen's Charlotte, or Miss G, resists the imperative to perform an orthodox femininity, pliant and unresistant to male headship. Here, particularly, her hesitance is noted by Grandison, whose "Fye!" suggests both a frustration with this resistance, as well as an awareness of his failure to manage her performance. As Grandison observes, Charlotte's participation in marriage is conditional, rather than total: if she "will make a good wife", her efforts will be reciprocated by her husband, and conjugality is stabilised. The implicit inverse suggests that, to Austen's Grandison, effective family governance depends not only on the leadership of its male members, but further upon the subservience of its female participants. As Grandison concludes, if Miss Byron (that is, Harriet) is to "lament having chosen" him "for her husband", it is the failure to marshal the appropriate kin structure that produces the "lament". In this way, this short snippet gestures towards Austen's re-reading of Richardson's investment in male power: by troubling the concept of the conjugal home as a stable site governed by a man and revealing instead its conditionality, Austen emphasises the mutual participation necessary to construct what is essentially a fantasy of masculine authority. That

is, by emphasizing a woman's capacity to resist or fail to live up to the standards of eighteenth-century marriage, and drawing attention to the "lament[able]" results, Charlotte and Grandison's dialogue here indicates the capacity for Austen's adaptation to re-read and burlesque the subjects of Richardson's novel by inverting a masculinist paradigm. It is Charlotte's acquiescence, not Lord G's headship, that produces a successful marriage.

This rapid denouement is uneasy, yet, once again draws attention to Charlotte's vivacity and wit. Exiting the closed, endogamous circle of the kin functions here as the successful consummation of desire. Charlotte's dismissal of Lord G—"I wish I had a better one to show you"—accentuates her reticence to become sexual through her conversion from unattached sister to "a good wife": Sir Charles' encouragement is hardly affecting. "Nothing to complain of" does not suggest any depth of romantic feeling, instead returning to the conduct-book formality of the 1768 abridgement, emphasising virtuous performance of a role, wifeliness, over and above the positive affect and experiences Austen often associates with successful marriage—love, romance, companionship. Partly this owes to a development of the mature Austen: as Mary Jean Corbbet suggests, the capacities of her women protagonists to identify appropriate husbands is drawn from the ability to recognise the plots into which they are drawn.⁵¹ Troublingly, Austen seems to suggest, even as Charlotte has successfully observed and thus has some measure of agency within the mechanics of the plot in which she operates, she has at the same time alienated herself from her own capacity for desire, and concludes with the "hope" of achieving another's happiness by comparison, with herself "nothing to complain of".

⁵¹ Mary Jean Corbett, *Family Likeness: Sex, Marriage, and Incest from Jane Austen to Virginia Woolf* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2008), 32.

This moral logic persists despite the text's reimagination of *Grandison*. Stephanie Insley Hershinow has suggested novelistic ambivalence towards marriage results in the exaggerated closure of the incest plot where dramatically refigured conjugal bonds transformed into "mere consolidations" of prior family ties.⁵² Corbbet meanwhile argues that these consolidations are themselves presented as ambiguous, further suggesting that especially the model of "cousin marriage" represents disaster for, but not exclusively, women - even so, as Corbett acknowledges, incestuous unions mitigate other risks associated with intercourse with strangers.⁵³ Defiance of the "typical entropic effects on young women" of marriage is made possible by this endogamy, Hershinow argues, with the case of Emma Woodhouse's continued residence at her father's house in *Emma* after marriage particularly emblematic of Austen's ambiguous position on the status of marriage.⁵⁴ This ambivalence, it may be suggested, embeds a fatalism in the love-plots of Austen's oeuvre, one which has the potential to undermine their separation from the conduct-books which imagined sexuality within strict confines. Here however, in this direct adaptation, Austen's capitulation to the conduct-book logic is again a satirical assertion of her distance Richardson's concentration on virtue altogether.

Further, Charlotte's performances of fitful anxiety in front of Lord G, checking her watch and exclaiming at the time in Act Four as a prompt for the "*exeunt*" of the "*Ladies*", solidifies her command over the latter portions of the text as its principal agent even as it confirms the love plot of the play:

Miss J: Dear Miss Grandison, who plagues you? I am sure Lord G. does not.

⁵² Stephanie Insley Hershinow, "The Incest Plot: Marriage, Closure, and the Novel's Endogamy," *The Eighteenth Century* 61, no. 2 (2020): 150, <https://doi.org/10.1353/ECY.2020.0012>.

⁵³ Corbett, *Family Likeness*, 35.

⁵⁴ Hershinow, "The Incest Plot," 159.

Miss G: Emily, you do not know anything of the matter. You must hold your tongue till it is your turn to be called upon.

Miss J: Well, Miss Grandison, I think it is you who tease him. But he will certainly get the better of you at last. He did it once, you know.

And I do not know what you mean by its being my turn to be called upon.

Miss. G: Why, when it is your turn to be married. But you had better not get on Lord L.'s side; for you will be worsted certainly.

But come, is not it time to dress? [looks at her watch] Dear me! It is but four.

(568-69)

While the scene lacks the dramatic realisation of the final moments of the text, Austen captures two problems which make sense of the romantic plotting of her *Grandison*. The exclamatory “it is but four” concluding the dialogue suggests a listlessness to observing the passage of time—the urgency of the kidnapping has been utterly replaced by the relative ease, or even perhaps boredom, of the country estate. However, the jovial interactions between Miss J (that is, Emily Jervois, Charles’s ward) and Charlotte could not have higher stakes. The description of courtship as a “plague” in Emily’s first line of the passage brings attention to the potentially negative associations drawn between romantic affect and illness. The connotations of “plague” are far less erotic than they are troublesome: while the negating “I am sure Lord G. does not” indicates a softening of Emily’s language, the motif of the badgering, pursuant, would-be-paramour rejects the comfortably aphoristic conduct-book language of the play’s conclusion, instead drawing attention to Emily and Charlotte’s cognizance of their rather precarious position as unmarried young women. Yet rather than this precarity producing the kinds of demure performance associated with the conduct book, it instead inspires the witty exchange above, foregrounding the sisterly bonds of the two girls through their playful dialogue. While the looming occasion of marriage seems to close off

other possibilities—“get the better of you” and “worsted” each suggesting matrimony’s transformative capacity to alter the course of the girls’ lives—the leisurely passage of time indicated by Charlotte’s checking of the watch (“it is but four”) forestalls such an event, seemingly indefinitely. Rather than rushing towards the romantic conclusion of the plot, here, as in the final scene, only marriage’s spectre is present.

Richardson’s *Grandison* itself reckons with a similar problem. As Emily Friedman argues, the task of locating the exact end of the novel is fraught by its plurality of closures, the result of the need to “make both Harriet and Clementina perfectly happy” to achieve a “satisfying ending”.⁵⁵ Anticipating readerly resistance to the polygamous possibilities opened by Clementina’s remaining unmarried, particularly, the divided romantic and sexual attention implicit in Sir Charles attachment to both her and Harriet, Richardson’s disposal of her in a future union, explicit in the ‘Copy of a Letter to a Lady’ to the Count of Belvedere provided her “malady” does not return, highlights the text’s capitulation to the logic aligned with reproductive monogamy.⁵⁶ Austen’s counterfactual adaptation draws attention to this nexus of patriarchal power which determines the fates of women within marriage. Her play disrupts these futures through its limited references to the so-called Italian subplot. Clementina appears solely in an off-hand remark from Sir Charles to Uncle Selby in a conversation situating the complex relationship’s resolution (570). By relegating the desirability of *Grandison* outside of Colnebrook, the setting of all but the first two acts of the play, to a textual periphery, Austen focuses on the familial dynamics of the household, and its

⁵⁵ Emily Friedman, “The End(s) of Richardson’s “*Sir Charles Grandison*,”” *Studies in English literature, 1500-1900* 52, no. 3 (2012): 655, <https://doi.org/10.1353/sel.2012.0026>.

⁵⁶ Samuel Richardson, *Copy of a letter to a lady* (London: Printed by Samuel Richardson, 1754), 2.

structural (and structuring) relationship to the young women either resident among or inducted into the kin.

Moreover, incest plots reveal the essential sociability of familial spaces, troubling the borders between kin and public. Sir Charles own references to Harriet as his “new sister” sets up the incestuous possibilities of a union between them, through which Austen draws attention to a theatrical problem of her text. The interiorization of her ‘Grandison’ is accomplished through its transformation from letters, an already interiorised motif of communication, to the interior-but-public spaces of “Mr. Reeve’s house”, “Paddington,” the home of Mrs Awberry, and Colnebrook (558, 561, 563). Architecturally, Austen’s play invests in a network of privately owned, yet potentially public stages, mirroring the immediate social contexts of its composition and performance and furthermore drawing attention to the same potential hybridization of the private and public that McKeon identifies in the incest plot. Lipsedge argues for the socialization of spaces such as parlours and drawing rooms, drawing on Richardson’s own depictions of these spaces in *Pamela* and *Clarissa*.⁵⁷ These socialised spaces trouble the conception of privacy: even as Austen’s play toys with a spatial interiority, it continues to privilege the sociability of these interiors. The border between “kin” and other, between public and private, is complicated by these comings and goings in the drawing rooms of which Austen’s ‘Grandison’ is composed, Harriet situated first as an outsider—a “new sister”—while becoming slowly the core of the conjugally organised home as Sir Charles’ wife.

It is ultimately male sexual power which appears as the object of Austen’s nostalgic *Grandison*: the short burlesque repudiates the male sexual gaze by rendering it obvious. Such a repudiation of the male gaze is apparent particularly in Act Three, Scene One:

⁵⁷ Lipsedge, *Domestic Space in Eighteenth-Century British Novels*, 65-66.

MISS B. And where is this brother of yours, to whom I am so much indebted?

MISS G. Safe in St. James's Square, I hope. But why, my dear, will you continue to think yourself indebted to him, when he only did his duty?

MISS B. But what must he have thought of me in such a dress? Oh! these odious masquerades!

MISS G. La! my dear, what does it signify what he thinks? He will understand it all in time. Come, if your stomach pains you, you had better go to bed again. (564)

Charlotte's question—"what does it signify what he thinks?"—once more suggests her power as an agent resistant to the endogamic plotting of either Austen or Richardson's *Grandison*. By querying what Charles's thoughts may "signify", Charlotte does not suggest that they mean nothing, but subtly deflects readerly attention from the performance of virtuous "duty" and debt. Again, however, a curious doubling takes place. First, Charlotte rejects the materialistic or commercial view of Harriet's redemption as a debt to be rewarded or paid, emphasising instead Charles' duty, an ephemeral or incorporeal concept. Yet, Harriet's response returns bluntly to the material: referencing the dress, likely the wedding dress, in which she was rescued, she laments the transformative power of surface identities, or "masquerades", as "odious". Rather than once more draw Harriet into the immaterial, Charlotte *deepens* the association between affective experience and the physical, embodied, experiential world, highlighting Harriet's "stomach pains".

The body's referent is pain, located through the quasi-medicalised language of Charlotte in a specific organ or grouping of organs. In this way, quite rapidly, Austen moves from the incorporeal, "duty", through the duplicitous power of material signs and returns to the body. Unlike the masquerade, pain seems to call attention quite literally to its own

obvious experiential reality. Jason Farr reminds critics that Austen quite frequently gestured towards a woman's "healthy constitution" as one precondition for a successful marriage.⁵⁸ John Wiltshire similarly suggests that "health", in Austen, signifies a commodification of the female form: its conversion from the body of a self to the body of a patriarchal culture, and, thus, position within a field governed by the male gaze.⁵⁹ Drawing attention to what Wiltshire terms the "nebulous" or "indeterminate" character of illness, it is apparent that neither Harriet nor Charlotte possesses the necessary expertise to describe "pains" as disease or injury, or to authorise treatment.⁶⁰ In drawing attention to how the troublesome experience of pain underscores a power dynamic, Austen figures embodiment as itself a social relation: a symptom of power. The pain Harriet experiences draws her starkly into the phenomenological; figuring her as a body *capable* of the experience of such pain, and the drives of desire and appetite implicit in the double-meanings of "stomach". Indeed, as Ian Miller demonstrates, it was only within the eighteenth century that the displacement of humoral theory took place, resituating the mind, rather than the belly or stomach, as the seat of desire, drive, and affect.⁶¹ If Harriet has a fictive body capable of hunger it is a body which registers its capacity for desire, and for having desire frustrated or satisfied.

This is not the only moment of Charlotte's apparent interest in Harriet's body and its capacities. Her declaration of Harriet's "languid" state discussed earlier in this chapter suggests a similar intimation of the body as a site of query and one registering Charlotte's

⁵⁸ Jason S. Farr, *Novel Bodies: Disability and Sexuality in Eighteenth-Century British Literature* (Lewisburg, PA: Bucknell University Press, 2019), 165.

⁵⁹ John Wiltshire, *Jane Austen and the Body: "The Picture of Health"* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 9.

⁶⁰ Wiltshire, *Jane Austen and the Body*, 11.

⁶¹ Ian Miller, "Digesting in the Long Eighteenth Century," in *Bellies, Bowels, and Entrails in the Long Eighteenth Century*, ed. Rebecca Anne Barr, Sylvie Kleiman-Lafon, and Sophie Vasset (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2018), 63.

nascent desire for clarity and epistemic grounding (565). Here, Charlotte directly asks: “Harriet, what is the matter, child?” (567). Coupling a sisterly or even potentially maternal relationship to her new sibling with the questioning of Harriet’s bodily status defuses the erotic tension even as it further emphasises the incestuous possibilities of Charlotte’s seeming interest. When, later in the same scene, Charlotte declares to Lady L. that she “always send[s Harriet] away when she gapes”, the physiognomic performances of Harriet invite rejection, to be “safe in her own room”, suggesting an inappropriateness to her expressions (568). In both moments, Harriet’s body betrays itself, but the connotations of gaping—an opening, defenceless relation drawing attention to perviousness—are swiftly sanitised by Lady L.’s reply that she hopes Harriet “does not gape too often” (568). Emphasizing Harriet’s capacity for a pervious status, Lady L. implicitly suggests again Harriet’s body’s potential, and socially inappropriate, openness. Austen’s playscript invites a subtextual association between illness and vulnerability, while simultaneously regulating potentially erotic interest in these vulnerabilities as an intimate yet *normatively* female performance. Harriet’s withdrawal to “her room” on discovery of such an opening, in turn, figures self-knowledge of these vulnerabilities and their meanings apart from, rather than within, relations with other women.⁶² This enables Austen to relocate sexual knowledge and desire as an autonomous and individual judgement upon one’s own embodied experiences and minutiae.

Austen’s precise language describing Charlotte’s apparent interest in Harriet’s body, medicalises what is a potentially eroticised query. The attention to bodily capacity for pain

⁶² In this sense, the self-knowledge Harriet discovers mirrors an onanistic impulse: as McKeon argues, masturbation figures widely in accounts of sexual identity throughout the eighteenth century, identified predominantly for its dangerous “autonomy” and “secrecy”. This autonomy removes the necessity of a partner and parallels Protestant self-conscientiousness similarly continuing to shape the individual as an autonomous social unit. See McKeon, *The Secret History of Domesticity*, 286-91.

deepens Harriet's embodied presence but furthermore provides a polite, noncontroversial way to express Charlotte's interest in her sexual equal's physical form: Austen uses this interest to suggest the taboo of sisterly familiarity which might preclude sapphism through its scientific rendering of a female body. That is, in deflecting the possibility of a same-sex attachment between Charlotte and Harriet, Austen neatly forecloses queer possibility by naturalizing interest between women in each other's bodies as simply a function of the 'stomach'—of a drive or appetite that can be easily divorced from the erotic implications. Through referencing "pain", furthermore, the possible pleasures of liaison are held as the hidden obverse, though realigning female capacities for pleasure as the invisible reciprocal of the reproducing body's more polite, publicly salient registers of pain and discomfort.

Pain, however much it may anchor Harriet's experience to the strictly phenomenological, troubles the normal operations of a male gaze which, in this passage, is tied to the investigation only of appearances, or, "masquerade[s]". The failure of this gaze to perceive beneath the virtualised surface identity put on or performed by Harriet points to a wider problem in accounting for the supposed interior of embodied experiences. If the "stomach pains" may serve as a synecdoche for the body's varying capacities for pain, and, potentially pleasure, it is because such interpretations of the body rest upon its legible surfaces. Thus, in Austen's processual embodiment in 'Grandison', it is possible to ask whether the interior of the mind figures in the calculus of staging epistolary fiction. More precisely, it may be asked whether, through its dramatic re-articulation, Austen's emphases on body and tableaux in fact brings to light a central issue of epistolarity: its difficulty performing the activities associated with mind in a form so closely intimate with that of the corporeal body.

Austen's decision to draw on *Grandison* for this exploration of embodiment may not be merely the accident of preference or familial enjoyment of the novel either. Richardson's

text embeds queer possibilities in its approach to questions of the body, stratifying experience along nonbinary lines which include but do not limit a simplistic opposition of male and female as the central dyad. Richardson's text may have appeared particularly salient to Austen for its enabling of this imaginary. Co-ordinating oppositions between men and women as merely one among a variety of systems by which dyads of morally correct and incorrect, pure, and impure, surface and depth may signify, this thesis suggests in Chapter One, is a particular capacity of the early epistolary novel. That the mid-century works of Richardson, particularly *Clarissa*, could be read for their attempt to restabilise the centrality of a male-female dyad, complicates this perspective. Yet, Chapters Two and Three of this thesis outline an alternate reading of *Clarissa* and *Pamela* in which gender identity is one among a variety of stratifications through which individuals, or subjects, are granted or denied the autonomy or agency associated with "character". *Grandison* may have inspired Austen to call into question the male-female conjugal dyad through its own embedded queer narratives.

One problem of the legibility or visibility of nonnormative embodiments is directly, and rather importantly, addressed early in Richardson's novel. The sequence in which Harriet first meets Hargrave Pollexfen, contained within letter X of volume 1 and written again to her friend Lucy Selby, features the minor character of Miss Barnevelt, described as "of masculine features", with "contempt of her own sex" to the point where Harriet "almost wonders at her condescending to wear petticoats" (46). Miss Barnevelt occupies little space in the novel beyond this scene, yet serves an important function, clarifying Harriet's obvious femininity by contrast to what Richardson, in the "Historical and Characteristical Index" to *Grandison* describes as her "masculine airs" (1703). This short passage echoes Harriet's own descriptions of Miss Barnevelt, highlighting Richardson's attention to the latter figure's failure to conform to her expected gender role, and subversion of the limitations of female

identity. Harriet's hints at Miss Barnevelt's deviancy make it clear that such a failure is, in large part, expressed through the body:

No-body, it seems, thinks of an *husband* for Miss Barnevelt. She is sneeringly spoken of rather as a *young fellow*, than as a woman; and who will one day look out for a *wife* for herself. (47).

Miss Barnevelt's perceived sapphism is physiognomic, first, her "features" conferring a masculinity. This apparent manliness confirms a suspect sexuality, a rejection of conjugality in favour of openly (and embodied) queerness. Even so, the capacity of the female form to contain sapphic potentials is itself called into question by the gender dissonant gloss of Miss Barnevelt's identity as "*young fellow*". The capacity for a given gender to confer desire's unidirectional fixity upon difference is troubled: where difference is merely a matter of perception the obviousness of gender as a product of desire is problematised. If Miss Barnevelt transverses the categories of gender through her physiognomy, the uncertainty of gendered categories is highlighted. Harriet immediately downplays the potentially radical nature of Miss Barnevelt's nonbinary status through a deft dehumanisation, the "odd creature" compared to "Bats in the fable", "hardly owned by either, and laugh'd at by both", rendering Miss Barnevelt's gender nonbinariness explicit while simultaneously dismissing its importance (47). However, Miss Barnevelt's sexual indeterminacy and potentially disruptive manliness seems deployed by Richardson deliberately to trouble the more normative femininities the same letter explores.

The first of these feminine performances is Miss Cantillon, "very pretty; but visibly proud, affected, and conceited" (46). The second, Miss Clements, earns praise from Harriet for her smile—she looks "pleas'd, as if she enjoyed, good naturedly, a compliment made to one of the sex which she adorns by the goodness of her heart" (48). The "plain" Miss

Clements, later, “shone” for her “wisdom”: in a nearly axiomatic rhetorical question, Harriet asks what “advantages has folly in a pretty face, over even wisdom in a plain one?” (65). This triad of women appear peripheral to a debate between Hargrave Pollexfen, Harriet, and an Oxford scholar, Mr. Walden. The debate, over the relative merit of the Graeco-Roman canon as the foundation of learning, is interrupted and punctuated by the other women present, even as Harriet is repeatedly singled out by Walden as a target. The consistent focus upon Harriet seems to draw Miss Barnevelt’s attention:

She profess’d that I was able to bring *her own sex* into reputation with her.

Wisdom, as I call it, said she, notwithstanding what you have modestly
alleged to depreciate your own, proceeding thro’ teeth of ivory, and lips of
coral; give a grace to every word. And then clasping one of her mannish
arms round me, she kissed my cheek. (63)

The sexually-aggressive provocation by Miss Barnevelt encourages Pollexfen to pursue a similar liberty, deferred, at this stage, by Harriet’s intervention. The reference to Harriet’s “teeth of ivory” and “lips of coral” harks back to Mr. Greville’s description of Harriet’s mouth in letter II: “such rosy Lips, and such ivory and even Teeth, must give beauty to a mouth less charming than hers” declares the besotted Greville (14). “Rosy” may be a more overtly eroticised diction, yet that both the rakish or libertine Greville and the dubiously sapphic Barnevelt share the attraction to Harriet’s “ivory” teeth suggestively works with their status as markers of class, beauty, and health. That, furthermore, Miss Barnevelt’s kiss is upon Harriet’s “cheek”, where Greville has identified her “Carminish flush...[denoting] sound Health” once again figures her body’s capacity for healthiness and its erogeneity as one-and-the-same thing.

Yet “carmine” implicates a falsity, or constructed nature, to the cheek: associated with cochineal dye, the deep crimson may conjure vivacity but surely must also recall painterliness. If, in his exaggerated diction, Greville borders on inanely reproducing an image of perfection, Barnevelt’s rearticulation is not a queered desire for Harriet, but rather an appropriation of the privileged male state of the libertine. The exactness with which Richardson mirrors their physical longing for Harriet’s facial features directs attention to the “mannish” character of Miss Barnevelt’s desire, even if by doing so both characters are brought into disrepute by association. Given the insistence of Harriet’s Uncle Selby upon the danger of how “every living soul, man, woman, and child, that knows [Harriet], puffs [her] up”, both the immediacy and detailed exactingness of these two potential lovers’ descriptions of the object of their desire are clearly intended as a caution to the “celebrated Miss Byron” (32).

Austen’s adaptation does not feature the meeting of Harriet and Pollexfen of volume 1, letters X–XIV. As Gay suggests, Austen’s reinterpretation focuses more strongly on the roles of the women in the novel in a minutia which neglects the romantic plotting.⁶³ This occlusion erases the roles of Miss Barnevelt and Mr. Greville, too, opening, as it does, upon the Reeves’ drawing-room in Grosvenor Street—even though Greville is referred to in the first scene of Austen’s burlesque, he does not appear on stage. Austen appears to deliberately elide the queer potential of Miss Barnevelt’s figuration. Given the off-hand obfuscation of a queered reading of Harriet and Charlotte’s relationship, Austen appears to simultaneously invite and complicate queer approaches to Richardson’s novel: stabilising its moralistic content through the reassertion of amatory plots offset, but not totally occluded by, a new interest in their suitability for women characters’ participation. Austen’s ‘Grandison’ is in

⁶³ Gay, *Jane Austen and the Theatre*, 3.

this sense emblematic of a *resilient* amatory paradigm, one which might contain and appropriate the queer possibilities of its nominal inspiration through a flexibility, or perhaps, an identification of the possibilities queer divergences offer bourgeois conjugality. That is, if *Grandison* narrativizes the arrival of the man for whom the conjugal home is organised, and through whom such organization is possible in Sir Grandison himself, Austen's playlet introduces women for whom conjugality may be, at the same time, desirable and troublesome. The openly physiognomic lesbianism of Miss Barnevelt may be no longer visible in a constellation of Austenian heterosexuality in which, as Nancy Armstrong suggests, more nuanced differentiations of gender make themselves visible.⁶⁴ While Richardson participates in the production of a territory in which modern genders of 'male' and 'female' may take root, Austen, that is, is more interested in the variants *of* femininity which may or may not stabilise the conjugal dyad.

⁶⁴ Nancy Armstrong, *Desire and Domestic Fiction: a Political History of the Novel* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987), 134.

Chapter 5. Doubled Hauntings of Frances Burney's *Evelina* (1778) and the
Boundaries of the Epistolary Self

A doubling haunts Frances Burney's debut novel, *Evelina; Or The History of a Young Lady's Entrance into the World* (1778): against Evelina's own development is figured a series of static characters who insist upon their own fixed statuses, refusing to change. As Judith Lowder Newton and Susan Fraiman outline, Burney's novel has been read as both a challenge to and as a normative female bildungsroman.¹ By nuancing the notion of the text as a female bildungsroman through a reading of Burney's doppelgangers of development as an effort at interpreting the novel's interplay of static character and narrative thrust, this chapter focuses on how Burney's novel intervenes in the shape of the possibilities of novelistic storytelling by both stabilizing and rejecting certain prior generic conventions of the epistolary form. The naïve heroine and the threat of rape remain, the latter near omnipresent in Burney's bleak vision of the polite circles of London. Yet, Burney performs two key innovations which produce for *Evelina* a stark modernity: the plurality of men performing acts of masculinist violence, and the kinds of violence performed, are heightened by their seeming commonality to *all* men within the novel. Erin Mackie describes some of these violent figures as "stereotypes"—"the rake, the gentleman highwayman, the brutal

¹ Judith Lowder Newton foundationally describes *Evelina* as a form of "erbildungsroman"; this approach favours attention to the scenes of growth and transformation which offer an (albeit limited) agency to the title character herself, consonant with Newton's reading of *Evelina* as a complex site of inscription of patriarchal ideals. Susan Fraiman argues for complexifying this notion: challenging the "masculine" "notion of linear development", Fraiman instead holds the violence of the novel as a source of tension between courtship and "growing up". To Fraiman, Evelina "remains fundamentally a child" even if the text "approximates" female bildung. See Susan Fraiman, *Unbecoming Women*, British Women Writers and the Novel of Development, (Columbia University Press, 1993), 33-35. <https://doi.org/10.7312/frai94490>; Judith Lowder Newton, *Women, Power, and Subversion: Social Strategies in British Fiction, 1778-1860* (New York: Methuen, 1985), 42.

ship's captain"—identifiable by their literary familiarity, but that, importantly, relocate the harm occasioned by these men within a clearly femininized sphere.² Yet the commonality of these violent characteristics across class and status boundaries is troubling. Refusing the possibility of a man who does not participate in some way in the production of female distress, Burney's text augurs the emergence of a realism measured by its dismissal of eighteenth-century masculinity. This is the second major innovation of the text: by tearing the social fabric apart to reveal its underlying violence, *Evelina* attempts to undermine the Richardsonian paradigm of 'Virtue Rewarded', responding instead to the dramatic pluralization of identities emerging from the growth of empire and capitalism. Thus, this chapter argues, reducing these pluralities into a simple male-female binary mitigates the risks associated with pluralization, solidifying the forms of social organization, such as the conjugal home, upon which the new Britain depended.

Burney herself, as Claudia Johnson eloquently describes, "retreated" from oppositional political debates; despite a renaissance in Burney studies' efforts at painting her the "ideological sister" of proto-feminist Mary Wollstonecraft, her novels refuse to challenge the systems of power which produce their often convoluted, and at times outright outrageous, plots.³ If to Johnson it is apparent that Burney's rejection of the "political crises" of the 1790s in the later *Camilla* (1796) necessitates a re-reading of the novel's dramatic layers of ironized

² Erin Skye Mackie, *Rakes, Highwaymen, and Pirates: the Making of the Modern Gentleman in the Eighteenth Century* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2009), 149.

³ Claudia L. Johnson, *Equivocal Beings: Politics, Gender, and Sentimentality in the 1790s: Wollstonecraft, Radcliffe, Burney, Austen*, Women in culture and society, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995), 144. To Margaret Doody, Burney avoided political causes in her writing, refusing to write for the "right-wing" *Anti-Jacobin* in the 1790s, even as "liberty" forms a "desideratum" within her novels; her reluctance to "teach" positions her writing as distinct from that of Wollstonecraft or William Godwin, yet Doody is reluctant to posit Burney belonging to the same set as Hannah More or Maria Edgeworth. See Margaret Anne Doody, "Burney and Politics," in *The Cambridge Companion to Frances Burney*, ed. Peter Sabor (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 95-97.

representation, with an emphasis on her (albeit uncomfortable) rearticulation of conservative sentimentality.⁴ *Evelina*'s reification of, rather than challenges to, conservative mores relating to courtship and gender identity emergent in the late eighteenth century encourages this reading. It is precisely this confirmation which Helen Thompson refers to as the "critical cul-de-sac of *Evelina*", a text registering "contradictions" in a feminist reading regardless of attention to history or biography.⁵

Joanne Cutting-Gray describes *Evelina* as operating as a naïve ingenue within "a world of duplicity and evil".⁶ To Cutting-Gray, *Evelina*'s innocence is a calculated response to the threats she faces: as a "nameless, female minor" she occupies a dangerous position, emphasised by the consistent depictions of assaillment, violence, and exploitation within the novel.⁷ Lillian Lu has attempted to resolve the contradictions between this supposed artlessness and *Evelina*'s diegetic power to describe, and indeed satirise and address her risky environment—she "flips the paradigm of inexperience", instrumentalizing her orientation to the world by revealing its, rather than her own, static nature.⁸ In Lu's analysis, "earnest lack of understanding" is crucial to challenging the socially constructed (and powerfully embedded) structures which impel or coordinate gendered hierarchies subordinating women to a fraternity of men defined by their diegetic deceit and moral unworthiness.⁹ Martha J. Koehler, in distinguishing *Evelina* from Richardson's paragon, *Clarissa*, describes Burney's

⁴ Johnson, *Equivocal Beings*, 145.

⁵ Helen Thompson, "Evelina's Two Publics," *The Eighteenth Century* 39, no. 2 (1998): 147, <http://www.jstor.org.ezproxy.library.sydney.edu.au/stable/23596102>.

⁶ Joanne Cutting-Gray, "Writing Innocence: Fanny Burney's *Evelina*," *Tulsa Studies in Women's Literature* 9, no. 1 (1990): 43, <https://doi.org/10.2307/464180>.

⁷ Cutting-Gray, "Writing Innocence: Fanny Burney's *Evelina*," 44.

⁸ Lillian Lu, "Assuming Innocence: The Ingénue's Satire in Frances Burney's *Evelina*," *Eighteenth Century fiction* 33, no. 1 (2020): 59, <https://doi.org/10.3138/ecf.33.1.57>.

⁹ Lu, "Assuming Innocence: The Ingénue's Satire in Frances Burney's *Evelina*," 61.

protagonist as a departure from the “model self” through a Lacanian approach emphasizing Evelina’s entry in the symbolic order, and the mistaken premises upon which this takes place: namely, citing Žižek’s concept of the “logic of the error”, Koehler suggests that the novel reasserts partial concrete activity, rather than perfected abstraction, as the moral calculus governing the virtuous “self”.¹⁰ These three important analyses agree that a reading of *Evelina* must focus on the protagonist, however, and her orientation towards the world around her: as Lu suggests, it is Evelina’s own reactions to the “absurd rituals” of aristocratic society which form the letters of which the novel is composed.¹¹ Furthermore, this existing body of scholarship demonstrates the centrality of Evelina’s environment in understanding her character, emphasizing the sociability of Evelina’s appearance-in-the-world in response to the (dangerous) world she faces as a social inferior.

In accounts of the novel, attention to Evelina’s identity is positioned as a key facet of understanding her relationship to her world. As she signs her first letter of the novel to her guardian, Arthur Villars, she laments her lack of name, writing “I cannot to *you* sign *Anville*, and what other name may I claim?”¹² The signature, with dashes following her first name in place of a surname, suggests this problem. Evelina’s relationship to her guardian embodies a familial bond more akin to father-and-daughter than that which she shares at the novel’s outset with Sir John Belmont, her biological father. Burney carefully details in an early letter from Villars the rejection of her mother Evelyn Anville by Belmont, especially after Belmont burns the “certificate of their marriage”, precluding Evelina’s capacity to claim a naturalised

¹⁰ Martha J. Koehler, “‘Faultless Monsters’ and Monstrous Egos: the Disruption of Model Selves in Frances Burney’s *Evelina*,” *Eighteenth Century: Theory and Interpretation* 43, no. 1 (2002): 20-21.

¹¹ Lu, “Assuming Innocence: The Ingénue’s Satire in Frances Burney’s *Evelina*,” 63.

¹² Frances Burney, *Evelina*, ed. Edward A. Bloom, Oxford World Classics, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 26. Further references are cited in text.

kin-bond with him as his daughter (17). The implicit connection to Villars as her true patrimonial father is later echoed as Evelina signs herself “wholly your Evelina” in letter V of volume II, following Belmont’s rejection of an application made to recognise their bond (162). Amy J. Pawl suggests this move signifies Villar’s “possession” of her, suggesting Evelina’s relationship to the men in the novel is one akin to property, with her nameless self as a unique form of disposable property available for purchase through marriage.¹³ Indeed, it is finally in marriage that Samuel Choi identifies Evelina’s opportunity to “without being forced by threat or uncertain circumstance” claim the name “Evelina” as an identity unto itself.¹⁴ It is in the context of conjugality that Evelina’s self is clarified, suggestive of the position of marriage as a normative force which structures, reconstructs, and most importantly here, clarifies the relative positions of its participants’s social identities.¹⁵

If these social identities are defined or clarified by their positions within marriage, it must be asked whether identity exists in this novel external to this framework. The doubling, Irene Tucker suggests, of identity highlighted by the atemporal fixity of letter writers whose “fragmented” “discontinuity” seems totally aware of an inevitable marriage plot further emphasises these roles performative status over and above authenticity.¹⁶ As Tucker argues, the “contradictions” inherent in a protracted exchange between the patriarchal guardian, Villars, and Evelina herself require of her an insertion into the sociable and, markedly,

¹³ Amy J. Pawl, ““And What Other Name May I Claim?”: Names and Their Owners in Frances Burney’s *Evelina*,” *Eighteenth-Century Fiction* 3, no. 4 (1991): 285.

¹⁴ Samuel Choi, “Signing Evelina: Female Self-Inscription in the Discourse of Letters,” *Studies in the Novel* 31, no. 3 (1999): 261.

¹⁵ Eugenia Zuroski, “Evelina’s laughter: The novel’s queerer theories,” *The Eighteenth century (Lubbock)* 61, no. 2 (2020): 166, <https://doi.org/10.1353/ECY.2020.0013>. Zuroski suggests that despite the novel’s apparent centring of marriage, the excess of material which renders “baffling” and “silly” the marriage plot, marriage represents one among a continuity of queerer possibilities in *Evelina*.

¹⁶ Irene Tucker, “Writing Home: *Evelina*, the Epistolary Novel and the Paradox of Property,” *ELH* 60, no. 2 (1993): 423-24.

marriageable realm of the polite London circle.¹⁷ Developing this further, if, as in Lu's analysis, Evelina's status as an ingenue represents a strategic, rather than intrinsic, orientation to the world, it is not apparent that there is a self which is alienated from its representation in relation to others. If Evelina's namelessness is taken seriously as a motif, it is through the designated authority of others that a female identity for her comes into being, is clarified, and appears relevant to the novel's plot. While *Evelina* represents a significant move towards a realism dependent on the presumption of a psychological self, the flexibility of this concept and its interdependence on notions of performance, visibility, and legibility demonstrates a failure, rather than success, in the position of gender as a stringent codification of norms. This chapter therefore interrogates *Evelina*'s representation of its protagonist's identity as a response to her environment and asks: how does the self achieve primacy as the affective core of the late eighteenth-century novel-in-letters? Does the epistolary novel preclude the notion of an authentic individual subject, or participate in the production of it? Beyond Evelina herself, how are characters represented with more or less nuance as active agents in their own construction?

Violence is uniquely salient in *Evelina* as an interpersonal site of performance which clarifies the place of women in society, their capacity for expressivity, and the nature of feminine identity. While this thesis has argued alongside Ruth Perry for the primacy of violence as a key element of the novel-in-letters, *Evelina*'s constituent violence and violent acts are perhaps simultaneously less shocking and more deeply embedded in the social fabric of the protagonist's environment than earlier examples discussed in this thesis, such as *Clarissa* or *Pamela*.¹⁸ Nevertheless, as Elizabeth Napier argues, violence calls attention to the problem of the body: the violence wrought in *Clarissa* highlights the instability of the social

¹⁷ Tucker, "Writing Home: *Evelina*, the Epistolary Novel and the Paradox of Property," 424.

¹⁸ Ruth Perry, *Women, Letters, and the Novel* (New York: AMS Press, 1980), 22.

order, its failing to protect the material realm of which it is constituted.¹⁹ These slippages between the material and the spiritual, affectively organised, and consciously constructed paradigm of the community echo the conversion of a political concern to that of the private individual, even as interpersonal acts of violence threaten to upend the organisation of the political as the private concerns of discrete persons.²⁰ Indeed, in its capacity to direct attention to a political organization of bodies, violence in *Clarissa* serves to regulate the limits of the self—and demarcate an external territory which the eighteenth-century English processes of individuation had not yet breached. The close conflation, as Peter Degabriele notes, of the material sign of the letter and the material body of the letter writer in *Evelina* highlights how the “visceral, physical” realm of affect might have served as an intercession between the eighteenth-century emergent self and the (re)organization of these selves into coherent communities.²¹ If selfhood is the affective, introverted turn necessitated by this interplay of material and symbolic forces, violence clarifies the essential materiality of an authentic subjectivity beyond its legal, spiritual, or moral codification. It is noteworthy that Burney herself did not return to the epistolary novel throughout her career, turning attention to different forms of novel in her later works. Burney may have been, then, cognizant that the type of fiction *Evelina* embodied was best suited to the epistolary mode and its dialogic potential. Or, inversely, the dialogic mode of epistolarity may have proven unsuitable for the narratives Burney attempted in her later novels. Whichever the case may be, Burney’s abandoning of the epistolary fictive mode following *Evelina* suggests a unique relationship

¹⁹ Elizabeth R. Napier, *Falling into Matter: Problems of Embodiment in English Fiction from Defoe to Shelley* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2012), 64.

²⁰ Napier, *Falling into Matter*, 64-65.

²¹ Peter Degabriele, “The Legal Fiction and Epistolary Form: Frances Burney’s *Evelina*,” *Journal for Early Modern Cultural Studies* 14, no. 2 (2014): 23, <https://doi.org/10.1353/jem.2014.0017>.

between that novel's genre and its specific concerns with gender, the body, and how these bodies are policed or regulated by a violent environment.

Evelina thus points to an important point in the development of the problem of the alienated self. As a novel embedding an individuation stratified by interests in class, labour, and socially coded performances of status, Burney's text functions as a bellwether for the solidification of ideals of selfhood which require violent enforcement. If expressions of masculinist violence are read less as the isolated acts of certain individuals performing their proclivities and rather as communal efforts towards regulating the normative expression of girl- and womanhood within the novel, *Evelina*'s consistent, and potentially satirical, focus on harm and threats associated with the coming-of-age narrative becomes clear.²² Newton identifies these threats as constitutive of the novel's narrative, suggesting *Evelina* herself is reduced to "merchandise or prey" by her unpropertied status as a middle-class girl on her entrance to polite society, empowering the variety of (often sexualised) assaults and humiliations she suffers throughout the novel.²³ Her naivete leads her into association with dangerous figures of the novel including the tragically suicidal Mr. Macartney, the profligate libertine Sir Clement, and the vulgar Captain Mirvan. By first analysing *Evelina*'s relationship to each of these men through the lens of their enforcement of gender norms by violent means, a reading of *Evelina* may best assess how acts of violence reinforce or reify a specific idealised variant of feminine identity and limit agency for self-construction within the novel.

²² Johnson, *Equivocal Beings*, 141-42. Johnson describes Burney's novels as featuring a "masochistic edge": her heroines have a "passion for abjection" which clarifies and intensifies their relationships to social norms.

²³ Newton, *Women, Power and Subversion*, 29.

One of Evelina's most startling failures to remain safely alien to a man comes in the form of the "melodramatic, romantic poet" Mr. Macartney, introduced midway through the novel as a tragicomic figure teetering on the edge of financial ruin, disrepute, and suicide.²⁴ Described by Evelina's hosts at Snow Hill, the Branghtons, as the "*Scotch mope*", Mr. Macartney represents both a failure to organise a successful male performance of virility, strength, and poise as well as a threatening presence within Evelina's life (217). Burney introduces Macartney first through extracts of his poetry presented to Evelina in Letter XI of Volume II:

O LIFE! thou linger dream of grief, of pain,
 And every ill that nature can sustain,
 Strange, mutable, and wild!
 Now flattering with Hope most fair,
 Depressing now with fell Despair,
 The nurse of guilt, the slave of Pride,
 That, like a wayward child,
 Who, to himself a foe,
 Sees joy alone in what's denied,
 In what is granted, woe!

O thou poor, feeble, fleeting pow'r,
 By Vice seduc'd, by Folly woo'd,
 By Mis'ry, Shame, Remorse, pursu'd!
 And as thy toilsome steps proceed,

²⁴ Mackie, *Rakes, Highwaymen, and Pirates*, 151.

Seeming to Youth the fairest flow'r,
 Proving to age the rankest weed,
 A gilded, but a bitter pill,
 Of varied, great, and complicated ill! (178–179)

Evelina identifies in Macartney's poem an "internal wretchedness" which "affects" her: she is shocked by the illiberalism of the Branghtons's detestation of Macartney "for being a Scotchman" and decries the "unfeeling family" for their unworthy behaviour towards him (179). The servile imagery of the poem suggests its speaker's own unworthiness, however. "Seduc'd", "woo'd", "feeble", and "slave of Pride" each connote a systemic image of disempowerment unbecoming of even the most sentimental man. Both "seduc'd" and "woo'd" suggest a precisely feminised non-normativity, inviting Evelina's "pity" in her reading of the text: the position of the speaker as a "nurse" confirms a feminised role within the poem (179). The rhyme scheme emphasises these positions of disempowerment or feminization. The coupling of "pride" with "child" through the simplistic rhyme expands the image of the "nurse" to include both the mothering role and its object as items of pitiable contempt. However, the elevated and self-serious diction partially ironizes a straight reading of Macartney's text. If the "unfeeling" Branghtons are not appropriately moved by Macartney's affective work, it is partly as it operates in a mode foreign to their "style of gallantry" (178). Christina Davidson argues that the Branghtons's attempts to insert themselves, as members of the mercantile class, in London society fail partially due to their misplaced diction.²⁵

²⁵ Christina Davidson, "'To Speak As Others Speak': Privileged And 'Vulgar' Voices In *Evelina*, By Frances Burney," *Women's Writing* 23, no. 1 (2016): 42, <https://doi.org/10.1080/09699082.2015.11103999>.

Speaking in abbreviations, idiomatic expressions, concocted contractions and clumsy forms of the “ing” suffix suggesting common status, the Branghtons’s style of speech is markedly alien to that of the refined poetic voice of Mr Macartney, highlighting their class disparity while further emphasizing the unsuitability of the family as hosts for the titular protagonist—they may “resemble fashionable speakers” yet the “sincerity” of cultural capital as a marker of taste draws attention to an “incongruity” between their aspirations to status and their ability to fulfil them.²⁶ In these failings, Evelina implicitly connects the Branghtons’s friend Mr Smith, their guest Mr Macartney, and Sir Clement Willoughby, her would-be seducer, when she states rather clearly following the reading that Sir Clement’s “flowery” language “is always that of a gentleman”, “superior to those of the inhabitants of this house” (179). By contrast, Mr Smith is “low-bred”, “forward and disagreeable,” “indolent”, and his attempts at “sprightly” “gaiety” fail to register as appropriate (179, 180).

Like Sir Clement, perhaps, Mr Smith addresses himself to Evelina as an unsuitable paramour: suggesting, a little later in the novel, he would have no “fear” prevailing with Evelina in the dance-hall despite of her declaration not to dance (222). His arrogance and belief in a particular kind of privileged male status is clear, believing despite his own opposition to marriage he is entitled to marry Evelina regardless of her consent (223). This abrupt and forward approach to courtship—“extreme impertinence,” in Evelina’s view—renders what she terms his “ignorance” a kind of violent predation (225). Connecting his “low-bred” status, rather than aristocratic privilege, to these attempts to woo Evelina allows Burney to oppose him diametrically to Sir Clement, and the paradigmatically virtuous Lord Orville, the novel’s central love interest. Lacking the signification of material wealth which might engender his behaviour as permissible and by insisting upon his unknowing relation to

²⁶ Davidson, ““To Speak As Others Speak”: Privileged And “Vulgar” Voices In *Evelina*, By Frances Burney,” 42-44.

codes of courtship and romance, Burney posits his status as an outsider to the polite circle in which Evelina might herself become integrated through marriage.

Yet Sir Clement, nominally superior, is also unsuitable. The linking of Sir Clement's own "flowery" diction to the floral motifs of the final stanza of the poem is obvious. Macartney's poem effectively gestures inwards—towards the discomfort of its speaker—and outwards, at its audience's foibles and faults, and beyond into the even more nebulous realm of Evelina's reflections upon further away figures like Sir Clement. Koehler describes Sir Clement as a "direct descendant of Lovelace": in both his characteristic violence and fastidiously aristocratic diction, Burney's figure emerges from Richardson's villain's "facile linguistic powers" and manipulation of the "flow of conversation".²⁷ These echoes draw attention to the literary—rather than realist—connotations of his characterization. Koehler rightly describes his role as predictably familiar, emphasizing how the by now specific critical baggage associated with the libertine characterises his position within the text. Indeed, Evelina's capacity for recognizing in him the "flowery" poetic language which fails to register in the bourgeois context of the Branghtons's home suggests her own cognizance of his status as a type. Reinforcing a class barrier between the Branghtons and London society requires this rejection of their mutual intelligibility.

Similarly, within the poem, the "wayward child" and his "pride" as equally describes the speaker as it does the ignoble Mr. Smith, who for all his "elegant speech", is so entirely "superfluous" to the narrative that Evelina fails to record more than one line of his dialogue verbatim in that entire letter (180). That the poetic scrap is reproduced in its entirety while Mr. Smith is censoriously neglected in Evelina's letter suggests its prominence in

²⁷ Koehler, "'Faultless Monsters' and Monstrous Egos: the Disruption of Model Selves in Frances Burney's *Evelina*," 24.

understanding how she connects the textual world of the letter form, or writing in general, to the figures or persons to whom such writing relates. Macartney's speaker becomes, like Evelina, an observer, but furthermore, a participant guiding the narration's reception by its readers. Macartney's poem confirms Evelina's judgements of her hosts, even as it seems to justify the preconceptions of the Branghtons at this early stage of Evelina's residence at Snow Hill. That Evelina's letter might also refer further than Snow Hill, but encompass the London society figure of Sir Clement, reflects the aptitude of Evelina's sketches of the people surrounding her, suggesting her capacity for reflection and identification of fault, or risk, even when the signification of danger is buried within the figurative language of poetry. The harms associated with her world encourage Evelina's reading of the poem to be as extensive and broad as possible. As Susan Staves suggests, the London Evelina encounters is "pervasive" in its violence: "she is addressed with indelicate freedom, pursued, and usually grabbed" any time she becomes separated from her "protectors".²⁸

Thus, Evelina might identify in Mr. Macartney a potential kin figure: another observer-participant whose capacity to describe the dangers of association with others structures his being. Conscious of this likeness, Burney emphasises their similarity by, in a late twist of the novel in Volume III, letter XVI, revealing that Evelina and Mr. Macartney are the sibling offspring of John Belmont (362–363). Interestingly, Burney also utilises their kin status to heighten mounting tension between Evelina and Lord Orville, which reaches a climax at the moment of sibling reciprocity. Finding the pair hand in hand, Lord Orville's icy reaction to romantic betrayal he perceives is telling:

²⁸ Susan Staves, "Evelina or, Female Difficulties," *Modern Philology* 73, no. 4 (1976): 369, <https://doi.org/10.1086/390674>.

Lord Orville, rather coldly, bowed, but said nothing.

Again we were all silent, and then Mr. Macartney took leave.

‘I fancy,’ said Lord Orville, when he was gone, ‘I have shortened Mr. Macartney’s visit?’

‘No, my Lord, not at all.’

‘I had presumed,’ said he, with some hesitation, ‘I should have seen Miss Anville in the garden:—but I knew not she was so much better engaged.’

Before I could answer, a servant came to tell me the chaise was ready, and that Mrs. Selwyn was enquiring for me.

‘I will wait on her immediately,’ cried I, and away I was running; but Lord Orville, stopping me, said, with great emotion, ‘Is it thus, Miss Anville, you leave me?’

‘My Lord,’ cried I, ‘how can I help it?—perhaps, soon, some better opportunity may offer—’

‘Good Heaven!’ cried he, ‘do you indeed take me for a Stoic?’ (363–364)

The risk linked with association—here, the association with Mr. Macartney—is the impropriety of being found in what is clearly read by Lord Orville as a compromising tableau. Throughout the romantic plot, the sequence of potentially exposing or embarrassing situations in which Evelina is discovered by her paramour build. When Lord Orville first finds Macartney and Evelina together in the garden at Clifton, he accuses her of making an “appointment” with a “stranger”, and imputes she intends to continue a secret liaison with Mr. Macartney in the garden after discovering her attempting to return to her chamber (299, 304). In the extract above, these suspicions reach a fulcrum as Evelina is forced to expose her supposed predisposition towards Mr. Macartney while, simultaneously, defend her reputation

before her social superior. Lord Orville's "hesitation" reflects his greater standing in the community—just as does declaring Evelina's clandestine meetings "appointments".

Mackie identifies Orville's "authentic sensibility" and "refined, almost transparent social manners" as positing a revision of aristocratic privilege along sentimental lines.²⁹ His status as the novel's definitive and worthy suitor is confirmed by his "benevolence"—a facet not of honourable birth, but of manners: his perfection is performed.³⁰ In the affective organization not only of gender hierarchies but also of class, marriage serves to confirm its participants characteristic (and performed) attention to each other's sympathies. Lord Orville's failure to remain stoic suggests authentic feeling for Evelina, while correspondingly her distress indicates the depth (and sufficiency) of her own romantic affection towards him. Through gesturing towards a moment of incapacity, Burney indicates in Orville's passionate outburst, "Good Heaven!", the authenticity and reality of feeling which can actively coordinate and impel a positive relationship between the two. Furthermore, for his part, Lord Orville's reference to his incapacity for stoicism indicates the climactic position of this moment. Not only is Evelina's position as a desirable object of his gaze in jeopardy, but so too is Orville's own status as the novel's paragon, forgiving and patient of, as he earlier terms, Evelina's "unhackneyed" efforts to survive polite society (295).

The motif of Lord Orville's perception is rendered explicit when he later remarks on his having been "blindfold as I am" to the true nature of Evelina and Mr. Macartney's connection (319). The suggestion of finding her in "the garden" in the above extract emphasises Lord Orville's failure to accurately perceive Evelina's behaviour or motivations, recalling the earlier compromising moments with Mr. Macartney. Without proper sight, Lord

²⁹ Mackie, *Rakes, Highwaymen, and Pirates*, 153.

³⁰ Mackie, *Rakes, Highwaymen, and Pirates*, 153-54.

Orville lacks the capacity to adequately assess Evelina's status, worth, or value as a desirable thing. By paying attention only to the surfaces of her performance, without insight as to the interior mechanics, Burney suggests Lord Orville may mistakenly read Evelina's calculus of merit. This disappointment affects him to the point of "great emotion", suggesting his sensitivity towards his own failure to understand Evelina's performances and interpret them correctly. Lord Orville's reification of a specific feminine code of behaviour limits Evelina's capacity for articulation and action—specifically, action intended to benefit her kin member, Mr. Macartney.

In *Evelina*, the ability to safely move closer to others confers upon the subject a special orientation towards those others: an implicit, or explicit relationship which is built on regulations. These regulations, the above extract implies, are visible, obvious to external observers such as Lord Orville even if Evelina herself cannot perceive them. Her naivete is evident in her failure to adequately regulate her behaviour along lines which encourage probity, security, and govern the limits of intimacy with another, even when intimacy is meaningfully demanded by prior ties; here, Evelina and Mr. Macartney's status as kin. Moreover, these prior ties themselves may be unknowable: Evelina and Mr. Macartney are drawn together before the realization of their siblinghood. The process by which Evelina is oriented towards Mr. Macartney before the discovery of their status as siblings emphasises the limits of epistolary fiction as a mode which might represent, adequately, the inner psychic recesses of its participants. Instead, Burney emphasises the textual nature of the inculcation of sympathy. This is particularly evident not in Evelina's acceptance of her brother, Mr. Macartney, but her rejection of Mr. Smith. By contrasting her responses to two (potentially) dangerous and disruptive men in such a short textual space, Burney can juxtapose Evelina's descriptions of the two figures and thus indicate the textuality of her sympathetic connection

to Macartney. Evelina's reaction to Mr. Smith's declaration of being inundated by female suitors is telling:

'I assure you, Ma'am,' added he, 'there is not only Miss Biddy[...] I'm quite particular in keeping ladies' secrets,—but there are a great many other ladies that have been proposed to me,—but I never thought twice of any of them[...]

[...] the extreme vanity of this man makes me exert a spirit which I did not, till now, know that I possessed: but I cannot endure that he should think me at his disposal (225–226).

Mr. Smith makes explicit his rakish status, treating Evelina as one among several prospects—"a great many other ladies"—who benefit directly from his attentions. His self-aggrandizing belief in his proficiency as a lover, and declaration of his capacity to keep "ladies' secrets" suggests the scoundrelly nature of his liaisons, while intimating his unsuitability as a marriage-prospect for the protagonist herself. His prior attachment to Evelina's own cousin, Miss Biddy, directs attention towards his egotistical manipulation of the marriage market. Burney evokes Mr. Smith's antipathetic nature, through his crass, off-the-cuff, and unconsidered approach to romantic entanglements. Furthermore his gestures towards his proficiency take place in verbal, rather than written, form once more posits the primacy of epistolary communication as a mediatory apparatus which clarifies, rather than conceals, the true intentions of its writers. The directness of Mr. Smith's address is markedly distinct from the doubling, as Tucker describes, of the dual-addressee of Evelina's letters: to both her guardian and to her reader.³¹ Unlike Mr. Smith, Evelina records for posterity, considering and attentive to the readership of her textual activities. This space between speech-act and her

³¹ Tucker, "Writing Home: *Evelina*, the Epistolary Novel and the Paradox of Property," 427.

record allows her expression of the “spirit” she did not “know that I possessed”, her capacity to calculate and impose judgement upon the impositions of Mr. Smith. Despite the mismatch of form and intention between the texts of Mr. Smith and Evelina, her judgements do not wholly suggest a retreat into subjective psychic experience—her “spirit” is performed, an “exert[ion]” rather than a mental interior. By treating sympathetic relationality as an act of textual interpretation, Burney mirrors the desired pose of her readers in Evelina’s judgemental, yet ultimately textual, relationship to her own affective experiences.

This textuality is further evident in Mr. Macartney’s letter to Evelina contained within Letter XX of Volume II. Following Evelina’s interruption of an attempt at suicide by Mr. Macartney, he writes to her expressing his gratitude, newfound thirst for life, and desire to repay her:

You bid me, Madam, live: I have now, indeed, a motive for life, since I should not willingly quit the world, while I withhold from the needy and distressed any share of that charity which a disposition so noble would, otherwise, bestow upon them. (227)

Mr. Macartney’s letter situates his desire for life in the terms of debt, repayment, and “charity”. By situating his renewed existence within the frame of clearly moral activity, Mr. Macartney simultaneously softens an understanding of his suicidality as a personal weakness—one overcome through Evelina’s intervention—while also removing from the equation any sense of psychologization of his own distress. If suicide is understood along moral, rather than psychological, lines, “a motive for life” is the necessary predeterminate of a life-affirming sense of self which precludes death and self-harm. In Mr. Macartney’s narrative that follows in the letter, financial ruin and violence converge around the bleak story of his estrangement from his mother in Scotland, resulting in his lodging with Mr.

Branghton (232). Throughout, moral activity is described in terms which exaggeratedly draw attention away from psychology, thrusting it instead on the perceived status of the actors performing within the letter: the “much-regretted mother”, Mr. Macartney’s own “conflicting soul”, and indeed, Evelina “beheld[...] as an angel!” each suggest that ethically correct behaviour is determined less by an interiorised inclination or proclivity, and rather by fixed statuses associated with literary, poetic, or biblical types (232, 231). The logics of psychology which might, in the contemporary moment, describe Mr. Macartney’s suicidal state are simply absent from the description.

If a psychologised interpretation of suicide is alien to *Evelina*, this suggests Burney’s reticence to ascribe to her figurations the autonomy associated with modern humanness. Mr. Macartney remains a sketch of his drives, or “motives”, rather than a fully-fledged thinking thing capable of reflection upon the inner states of discomfort which have governed his outward behaviour. The surfaces of textual identity—literary type—supersede a focus on the inner activity of his mind, even when writing his own account of his distress. It is, indeed, unclear that a “mind” might be separated out clearly from this pre-psychological mode of representing the self as a system of “motives” and resulting behaviours. If Mr. Macartney is an observer participant akin to Evelina, linked to her through their shared capacity for perceptiveness, status as siblings, and proximity throughout the latter volumes of the novel, his capacity to observe is ultimately limited by his own inability to effectually account for a self of his own. Mr. Macartney’s letter appears only within a copy sent by Evelina to Villars, “inclose[d]” for his “perusal” as she begins to “rejoice that I was able to assist him” (226). As the novel focuses upon the relationship between Villars and Evelina as the central dialogue of which it is composed, Burney limits the diegetic space for Mr. Macartney’s development. This attention to a single, and highly specified, relationship between Villars and Evelina necessitates the foreclosure of possibility for the figures beyond its immediate interests: if

Mr. Macartney's failure to realise his own psychological autonomy is taken seriously, it is indicative of the limits of the epistolary form to fully embody persons beyond the immediate narrative frame.

The reduction from 'person' to 'type' has been a consistent theme in the readings presented in this thesis. If, as Toril Moi persuasively argues, there is no good reason to presuppose the unreality of character as a tenet of contemporary criticism, it follows that the deliberateness with which Burney reduces her figurations from human to something-not-quite-human is meaningful.³² John Frow similarly describes characters as "entities"—distinct from persons, yet conjured through words to produce a sense of their personate status.³³ To Jonathan Lamb, the fictive status of novelistic figures suggests the political fictions of subjecthood to the newly organised British state; fictionality of character draws attention to the fictive systems required of governance.³⁴ Lamb's survey indicates the tentative status of "character" in eighteenth-century fiction more broadly, as psychology may be only one facet of the personate identity materialised by fictional works: novels, as imaginative works, "constitute our sense of how things actually are."³⁵ Whether person or "entity", the personable status of "character" belongs to a humanistic interpretation of literature: Moi argues that the modernist turn in literary studies emboldened an approach which refused to recognise the 'human' facets of character, neglecting their textual reality as an aesthetically naïve humanist realism. "Hostility to realism" relegates the study of character to the critical margins; replacing it, Moi describes, with the pre-eminence in early criticism of the

³² Toril Moi, "Rethinking Character," in *Character: Three Inquiries in Literary Studies*, ed. Amanda Anderson, Rita Felski, and Toril Moi (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2019), 30.

³³ John Frow, *Character and Person* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 2.

³⁴ Jonathan Lamb, "'Lay Aside My Character': The Personate Novel and Beyond," *The Eighteenth Century* 52, no. 3/4 (2011): 276, <https://doi.org/10.1353/ecy.2011.0023>.

³⁵ Lamb, "'Lay Aside My Character': The Personate Novel and Beyond," 278.

modernist movements and their affective and literary potentials, particularly criticism of Joyce, Woolf, and D.H Lawrence.³⁶ Yet, this rejection of realism appears to have taken place far earlier than the modernism(s) of Joyce, Woolf, or Lawrence; “literariness” and the formal properties of character appear in *Evelina* as critically vital materials with which to understand its operation.³⁷

Even without presupposing ‘character’ as the “taboo” of the formalist critic, the systematic study of the individuals participating in fictional plots remains philosophically complex by virtue of its very conceptual unwieldiness.³⁸ Mr. Macartney’s reduction to a system of motives or drives suggests this precise unwieldy position: part way between the psychologically realistic rendering of a self demanded by humanistic modernity and the sketch offered within *Evelina*’s confessions to Villars, his vacillation between these two poles complicates the description of him as a ‘character’ *carte blanche*. As equivocations on his capacity for mental autonomy appear, so too do cracks in the reader’s experience of the text. Through these cracks, alternate possibilities emerge which trouble the axiomatic linking of character to humanness, mind to psychology, and untether the epistolary form from humanist modernity as such. This last facet may seem obvious: *Evelina*’s composition in the 1770s itself points towards its divorce from modernity, yet by troubling the seeming insistence upon character as a principle by which to read the novel-in-letters, it is possible to see how the self emerges as an interpretative tool for understanding matters of personal expression. If anything, *Evelina*’s own narrative suggests this shift: the emergence of the self, a modern concept describing a cluster of psychological activity, maps against *Evelina*’s production as a person capable of precisely that over the course of the novel. The “particular pressures” Lu

³⁶ Moi, “Rethinking Character,” 34.

³⁷ Moi, “Rethinking Character,” 30.

³⁸ Moi, “Rethinking Character,” 38-39.

identifies as facing the naïve heroine “as she enters the world” necessitate the formation of an intentional consciousness capable of escaping the “perpetual threat of sexual violence.”³⁹ The crucible of socialisation produces for Evelina a thinking, active, intentional self capable of survival.

Nowhere are these threats more evident, nor the transition towards an intentional being with agency more marked, than in Evelina’s relationship with the figure of Sir Clement Willoughby, a rakish would-be suitor of Evelina whose repeated (and violent) efforts at seduction again suggest the limits of Evelina’s figuration while deepening her psychologization. Sir Clement’s presence serves to simultaneously destabilise the normative development of Evelina, while furthering her advancement towards the kind of subjectivity required of her as a subject. Late in the novel, in letter XI of Volume III, Sir Clement attempts to win Evelina’s affections while distancing her from Lord Orville through publicly presenting her with a poem. Evelina’s initial consternation at accepting the “written paper” in public harks back to the consistent focus of the novel on surface appearances of behaviour, yet, forced by his insistence, she relents and takes the poem (332). The simple text of the poetry is telling as to Sir Clement’s role in the novel:

SEE last advance, with bashful grace,
Downcast eye, and blushing cheek,
Timid air, and beauteous face,
Anville,—whom the Graces seek.

Though ev’ry beauty is her own,
And though her mind each virtue fills,

³⁹ Lu, “Assuming Innocence: The Ingénue’s Satire in Frances Burney’s *Evelina*,” 67.

Anville, —to her power unknown,
 Artless, strikes, —unconscious, kills! (333)

The poem conflates physiognomic characteristics and inner states of virtue in its efforts towards explicating its speaker's infatuation with Evelina. Noting her "Downcast eye, and blushing cheek", the poem's transformation of Evelina's adopted name, "Anville", into a simple refrain repeated in the penultimate line of each of the two stanzas reflects its focus upon her person as its content. Describing it as a "panegyric", the poem has embodied consequences for Evelina with Mrs. Selwyn noting that it has turned her cheeks "rouge" (333). Separating after each refrain the results of Evelina's perfections with a dash, Sir Clement's poem demarcates between inner states of virtue, exterior states of beauty, and their effects upon her surroundings. These effects themselves are embodied. Drawing attention through the rhyme scheme, the association between "virtue fills" and "unconscious, kills!" suggests the speaker's reticence to ascribe motive to Evelina's potent behaviour despite the intimacy of these acts with both her "beauty" and "mind". Indeed, Evelina's very being-in-the-world appears to be her central activity within the poem, the non-agency of "unconscious" limits a reading which might emphasise intentional activity on her part. Yet Evelina is not "unconscious": Sir Clement's reading of her figure neglects her capacity to respond to the poem, rejecting her role in the dialectic of its meaning by thrusting the text upon her. His efforts at structuring a single, particular reading of the poem do not stop there: by engineering a reading pose which requires Evelina's polite acquiescence and diminishes her capacity for rejoinders through separating her from Lord Orville, demanding she account for herself, taking pains to disallow her to "preserve [her] silence" as well as repeatedly demanding she dance with him, he perseveres in demonstrating the very *lack* of agency he has identified (the "unconscious" state of Evelina) while attempting to force her into activities which would disprove this status (334).

The poem intuitively connects embodied states of “beauty” to interiorised depictions of the “mind” and its “virtue” to validate a mind-body organization which benefits Sir Clement. If Evelina is “unconscious”, an automata of “grace” and “timid air”, her capacity for resistance to his advances is diminished: it would be advantageous to Sir Clement’s suit were this the case. But by acknowledging this possibility, Sir Clement in fact thrusts Evelina further into the kinds of agency best capable of resisting his predatory reading of her figure. By demonstrating an obverse of Evelina’s capacity for conscious observation of her surroundings in the appeal to her “unconscious” merits, he effectively pushes the development of Evelina towards the kind of selfhood modernity necessitates. As Frances Ferguson has famously articulated, and Chapter Three argues, nonconsciousness, in *Clarissa*, highlights the lack of a “mental state” of the title character in the case of her rape by Lovelace.⁴⁰ In so doing, Ferguson argues, a lack of consciousness draws attention to the difficulty in “stipulating” a formal “mental state”, the “effect of consent” overriding the active consenting to the sexual act revealing how even in supposedly psychologically realist works, interior experience is superseded by the demand of representation.⁴¹ Here, Burney inverts this paradigm. Evelina’s very nonconsciousness demands attention to her mental state—her refusal to consent to Sir Clement’s suit—through the emphasis upon her “unconscious” status as metaphoric, rather than actual. By embedding Sir Clement’s belief in Evelina’s unknowingness within his poem, Burney draws attention to Sir Clement’s relationship to his literary predecessors (such as Lovelace) and his own fastidious obsession with interior mental states while ironizing his attempts at capturing, textually, the deeply felt and real convictions of Evelina, and her desire to avoid his efforts at seduction.

⁴⁰ Frances Ferguson, “Rape and the Rise of the Novel,” *Representations* 20, no. 20 (1987): 100, <https://doi.org/10.2307/2928503>.

⁴¹ Ferguson, “Rape and the Rise of the Novel,” 101-03.

If Lovelace seeks the “effect of consent,” Sir Clement too expands the demand made of his potential victim by pursuing not only Evelina’s body, but also her mind. Following the poem, Sir Clement makes an effort to seduce Evelina, detaining her in the arbour of the garden at Clifton by forcibly grabbing her hand (344). Burney carefully mirrors Evelina’s rejection of the same gesture earlier in the same letter to this moment, detailing how when Sir Clement first attempts to hold Evelina in the arbour, he “would have taken my hand, but I drew it back” (342). Describing her gesture as refusing “gratification”, Sir Clement conflates physical and interpersonal intimacy while consistently holding Evelina to “blame” for his rampant desire (343). The scene reaches a dramatic climax as he “flung himself at my feet to prevent” Evelina’s leaving the garden:

[...] exclaiming, in the most passionate manner, ‘Good God! Miss Anville, what do you say?—is it, can it be possible, that so unmoved, with such petrifying indifference, you can tear from me even the remotest hope?’

‘I know not Sir,’ said I, endeavouring to disengage myself from him, ‘what hope you mean, but I am sure that I never intended to give you any.’

‘You distract me!’ cried he, ‘I cannot endure such scorn;—I beseech you to have some moderation in your cruelty, lest you make me desperate:—say, then, that you pity me,—O fairest inexorable! loveliest tyrant!—say, tell me, at least, that you pity me!’ (344)

The appeal to Evelina’s “pity” repeatedly refers to her as having a position of power over him suggesting Sir Clement’s perception of the object of his desire as the architect of his distress. The particularly emphatic pairing of “inexorable” and “tyrant” draws attention to the literariness of this conception: as above, Sir Clement’s utilises florid language to situate himself as the inheritor of the libertine tradition, even if a partially moderated one. The exclamatory “O” similarly suggests his recurrence to romantic motif over affect, drawing less

on a realist depiction of prosaic speech and rather calling attention to the poetic construction of his voice. Likewise, the outdated “beseech” gestures towards Sir Clement’s out-of-placeness within the world of *Evelina*. Furthermore, as Evelina herself points out, the double-meaning of “hope” complicates a straightforward reading of his efforts at seduction. Deliberately vague, Sir Clement refuses to put into plain speech his desires for her: neither marriage proposal nor attempted rape, this moment of the text seems to suggest Sir Clement’s romantic desire for Evelina, even if his desire is concocted, inorganic, and predatory. That the scene represents an attempt at predation by him is immediately clarified in the continuation of the letter, in which Evelina reports an overheard conversation between Sir Clement and Lord Orville, who interrupts the tableau and allows for Evelina’s escape. Lord Orville declares Sir Clement’s impropriety quite clearly in a carefully considered speech appealing to their shared aristocratic position and the virtuous character of Evelina herself:

‘Pardon me, then, Sir Clement, if I speak to you with freedom. This young lady, though she seems alone, and, in some measure, unprotected, is not entirely without friends; she has been extremely well educated, and accustomed to good company; she has a natural love of virtue, and a mind that might adorn any station, however exalted: is such a young lady, Sir Clement, a proper object to trifle with?—for your principles, excuse me, Sir, are well known.’ (346)

The references to Evelina’s vulnerability, her being “alone” and “unprotected”, are made complex through their association to her “natural love of virtue”, proper education, and “mind that might adorn any station”. It is not the social network of value which impinges upon Sir Clement’s capacity to take advantage of the “young lady”, but rather the interior constellations of her merit which render her an improper “object to trifle with”. Indeed, Lord Orville’s recognition of the “merit of Miss Anville” throughout the following scene

narrativizes her very emergence as an independent person—as he puts it, Evelina is “not, indeed, like most modern young ladies, to be known in half an hour” (346–347). Recalling Amanda Anderson’s argument that it is the novel as a genre, and its sustained attention or rumination, which makes character visible, Lord Orville concurs with the premise that “time itself” orients, organises, and realises.⁴² The mulling-over process of Lord Orville evokes the “slow, reiterative quality of rumination, its consideration and reconsideration of experiences of moral shock and disturbance, of injury and loss.”⁴³ Lord Orville’s repeated discoveries of Evelina in compromising positions suggests this accretive process. Unlike the “artful, though so flighty” Sir Clement who must manufacture his desire for Evelina out of force and coercion, Lord Orville’s “noble” figuration confers a kind of moral thinking to his representation which is delicately balanced against his obvious desirability as a marriage prospect for Evelina (347). The speech quoted above indicates this balance between processual awareness of Evelina’s varying qualities and his reticence to (at least overtly) suggest such qualities entail a marriage suit—at least for him. By attacking Sir Clement’s attempt to “trifle” with her, however, he emphasises the due social processes of courtship, itself idealised as a kind of ruminative thinking, in opposition to seduction or rape.

The comparison between Sir Clement and Lord Orville could not be starker. Importantly, Evelina herself does not witness the exchange between them: she relies on the second-hand report of Mrs. Selwyn. The transformation of this report into novelistic prose suggests a generic problem with the epistolary tradition. Given Evelina’s failure to participate in or even witness the conversation, how is it possible for the text to be reproduced so faithfully? The adverbial descriptions of each section of the dialogue—“cried”, “drily”,

⁴² Amanda Anderson, “Thinking With Character,” in *Character: Three Inquiries in Literary Studies*, ed. Amanda Anderson, Rita Felski, and Toril Moi (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2019), 133.

⁴³ Anderson, “Thinking With Character,” 137.

“interrupted”—offer details unlikely in a second-hand report (345). Indeed, the focalization of the novel appears here to expand beyond the letters produced by Evelina in reflection upon her experiences. Rather, Burney begins to incorporate the markers of free indirect speech. It is unclear from the epistolary narration whether it is Evelina’s speech, Mrs. Selwyn’s, or a third party unattached to the text who describes this important conversation. The lack of first person pronouns in the narration—between Evelina’s exit of the scene and her reflections upon it which conclude the letter—lead to a de-realization of the epistolary form’s intimate narrative mode, slipping instead into a third-person narration which mirrors Evelina’s acute social observations but holds her at a distance from their occurrence. This tension between the narrating voice of the novel and its seeming separability from Evelina herself by her distance from the events being reported troubles the straightforwardness with which *Evelina* generally presents its action. For this to happen at such an important crux indicates the inability of the epistolary form to fully capture the ruminative process of Lord Orville’s thinking: epistolarity’s immediacy is, perhaps, unsuitable for the representation of this slow thought, this rejection of temporality in favour of gradual reflection and meditation. That Lord Orville himself refers to this atemporality in his expression of Evelina’s charms being unable to be known “in a half hour” centres duration over and above punctuality in his transformation from uninterested protector to paramour (347).

Expanding the narrative by including the second-hand reports of Mrs. Selwyn pushes the envelope of epistolary narration. By revealing an incapacity of epistolarity—its inability to represent the slow process of rumination over the reactive performance of libertine desire—Burney also gestures towards a generic problem. The acts of evaluation and judgement made by women of the male figures of the novels-in-letters surveyed in this thesis are, pointedly, performed with the intention of ascertaining danger: from the increasingly desperate Artander in *Love and Friendship* to violent Mr. B and Lovelace in *Pamela* and

Clarissa, judgements formed around the behaviour of men attempt to prevent or mitigate harm at the hands of these male figures. In these examples as Chapters One, Two, and Three have argued, evaluations of behaviour serve to mitigate the risks associated with intimacy. Yet—and importantly—these evaluations are performed based on the textual activity of these men: capacity for conforming to expected norms of expression and literariness. It is Lovelace's letters, standing in for himself, which the reader of *Clarissa* is invited to peruse and judge; likewise, the distance at which Berina and Artander are held in the earlier *Love and Friendship* necessitates judgements formed on textual activity alone. Burney explodes this tradition. Mrs. Selwyn's report of the dialogue functions as a kind of epistolary message, a recording to-the-moment of the details of the conversation that has passed, which Evelina is invited to read. By relocating the process of performance and judgement from within to beyond the epistolary diegesis of the novel, Burney gestures towards a central difficulty in the novel-in-letters: its limited focalization, both productive of and ultimately limiting its capacity for representing nuanced, realist character. To most capably represent the late-eighteenth-century courtship rituals which Evelina participates in, the letter mode is secondary to the events of the letters themselves.

Epistolarity, then, flexes and expands as necessary: as a discursive form, it offers unique potentials to examine in close detail the workings of specific characters, but in its weaknesses in ascertaining the true intentions of those beyond its immediate focalization, it requires, as a genre, a flexibility which enables third-person reporting of situations pertinent to the letter-writers interest. Here, at the climactic moment of the attempted seduction by Sir Clement and Evelina's rescue by Lord Orville, the epistolary mode fails as a narrative device, forcing Burney to innovate within the tradition by introducing secondary material which rounds out the experiential observations of Evelina with further data unavailable to her. In an important

sense, Burney confirms Sir Clement's suspicions: Evelina is, here, "unconscious", unable to fully participate in her environment and, thus, the production of her self (333).

Burney's text therefore invites questions about the nature of consciousness through the difficulty in reconciling the primary and secondary narration of Evelina. Particularly, *Evelina* asks whether the kinds of consciousness associated with the letter form remain suitable for the narration of its own narrative: by observing the limits of direct experience, the novel seems to suggest that these secondary accounts of others carry a similar weight in forming predispositions and judgements as direct exposure might.⁴⁴ This in turn gestures once again to the regulative apparatus of the text. Evelina's behaviour is regulated not solely through her exposure to difficult circumstances, growing and developing in response to her immediate social environment, but rather is shaped by the second-hand report of Mrs. Selwyn. This suggests that a verbal speech-act represents a document which enjoys the same veracity and import as the letter form. This represents a departure from the letter-narrative tradition: it is an innovation which draws greater attention to the embodied acts and speech of the figures within the letters than the letters themselves. Speech becomes salient over and above the written word, and the letter begins to fade into the background of the narrative, its timeless fixity replaced by the reiterative performance of speaking. Indeed, where the letter has previously been primary, here it becomes a secondary act: a mediatory object which

⁴⁴ Joe Bray suggests that the relationship between narration and experience within the novel is "fraught"; the link between strong feeling and narrative impression breaks down throughout the text. Elizabeth Macarthur suggests that the failure of epistolary fictions to present "reflection" upon narrative events, even as her analysis calls into question whether such a departure from normative nineteenth- and twentieth-century narrative structure is in fact a failing; in both Macarthur and Bray's account, the issue taken up is the dislocation of the epistolary mode as other styles of narrative became more popular (and, arguably, successful) for representing competing narrative consciousnesses. See Joe Bray, *The Epistolary Novel: Representation of Consciousness*, Routledge studies in eighteenth-century literature, (London: Routledge, 2003), 96-97; Elizabeth Jane MacArthur, *Extravagant Narratives: Closure and Dynamics in the Epistolary Form* (Princeton University Press, 1990), 13-15. <https://doi.org/10.1515/9781400860821>.

affords the opportunity for judgement upon the experiences of Evelina, rather than the substance of those experiences unto itself.

This is nowhere clearer than in the dialectical relationship between Evelina and Reverend Villars, her guardian at the novel's outset. The consistent punctuation of Villars's commentary on Evelina's activities in his careful responses to her letters shapes her sense of the experiential world by intervening in its construction. Yet, Villars must remain separate from the act of speaking itself. By privileging this truly epistolary relationship for the bulk of the text, Villars exhibits the dialogic mode of the correspondent while guiding the readerly pose adopted in approaching Evelina's own texts. Letter XXIV of Volume 1 betrays Villars's "anxiety" regarding Evelina's return to London, suggesting his "apprehensions" of the letters she has thus far written detailing her experiences of predation and violation have been "alarming" (116). The letter offers a microcosm of the relationship between the guardian and ward in Villars's efforts at dissuading an intimate connection with Sir Clement on the one hand, and suggesting the vanity of presupposing one with Lord Orville on the other:

But Sir Clement, though he seeks occasions to give real offence, contrives to avoid all appearances of intentional evil. He is far more dangerous, because more artful; but I am happy to observe, that he seems to have made no impression upon your heart[...]

Lord Orville appears to be of a better order of beings[...] he acted with a regard to real honour, that will always incline me to think it him[...] many men of this age, from a false and pretended delicacy to a friend, would have quietly pursued their own affairs, and thought it more honourable to leave an unsuspecting young creature to the mercy of a libertine, than to risk his displeasure by taking measures for her security. (117)

Sir Clement's "artful" performances throughout Volume 1 suggest to Villars his immediate danger to Evelina. Encapsulating Sir Clement's inability to leave "an impression upon your heart" indicates the moral fibre and worthiness of his ward, while subtly deprecating the power of libertines to seduce their targets. In avoiding the "appearance of intentional evil", Sir Clement is forced to resort to forms of seduction which rely on the "unsuspecting" character of the "young creature" pursued. In establishing a clear contrast between Lord Orville and Sir Clement, the former is described by Villars as superior in terms resembling hagiography. A member of a "better order of beings", Lord Orville is compared to the other "men of this age" by his "taking measures" for Evelina's security. If Villars takes pains to suggest the worthiness of Lord Orville, he simultaneously emphasises this worthiness in comparison to Evelina's own status. Further through the letter, it becomes clear that the "unsuspecting creature" is "unfit [...] for the thorny paths of the great and busy world", her "artlessness" unlike the town's "general harbour of fault and folly", emphasising the "obscurity of [her] birth and situation" (117). Offering the letter as he "rejoice[s]" at sending it to Howard Grove rather than London, Villars seems to imply the unsuitability of Evelina for polite society, yet emphasises the value of the noble elements of the aristocratic community where aptly performed (116). The notion of an "impression upon your heart" is recalled when he bemoans that Evelina's "youth and vivacity" may have found her "too much pleased with a life of dissipation" (117).

For Villars to make these broad comments on the behaviour of Sir Clement and Lord Orville suggests his unique capacity to perceive the nature of the figures described in Evelina's letters. His judgements and readings serve to bolster preconceptions—already obvious in the novel's text—of the oppositional relationship between Sir Clement and Lord Orville as alternative suitors of Evelina. By clarifying the moral worthiness of Lord Orville, Villars offers his (subtle) approval of his suit without making this approval explicit: rather

than encourage the vanity of his ward by suggesting the likelihood of a romantic entanglement with the aristocrat, his references to her “obscurity” instead works to preclude an honourable attachment to her social superior. Yet it is this obscurity, of which Villars is also critically aware, that makes Evelina a desirable property. If the “unsuspecting young creature” is the prey of the libertine, it is likewise the “youth and vivacity” of the “artless” Evelina which commends her to the interests of Lord Orville. There is a difficult balance struck in Villars’s description of Evelina between her status as an object of desire and his own refutation of (any) attempts to access her. By removing Evelina from the social scene of London it is possible to confirm her not being the kind of property which both Lord Orville, and Sir Clement, imagine she is—a young, naïve, and innocent girl whose “obscurity” of station both recommends her “artlessness” but further precludes a proper association. In an early letter of the novel, Letter IV of Vol 1, Villars declares Evelina to be “rustic, and know[...] nothing of the world”; her upbringing at Berry Hill leaving a “thousand deficiencies” in her capacity to engage with polite city society (21). The claim to Evelina’s epistemic failings—her lack of knowledge—is coupled to her incapacity to actively associate with “Dorchester”, the largest town near Berry Hill. To Villars, the relative retirement of Berry Hill prevents the development of social strategies for engaging with the “world” at large.

Evelina’s supposed “obscurity” is, however, somewhat complicated. As Jessica Volz has explored, the emphasis on Evelina’s visibility throughout the novel draws attention to her risky position; the “danger” of “female visibility” being the legitimization of “women as prey”.⁴⁵ It is the “voyeuristic” reader of the novel whose gaze the novel follows: the “impending visibility” of *Evelina*’s heroine invites the arousal of both sympathy and erotic

⁴⁵ Jessica A. Volz, *Visuality in the Novels of Austen, Radcliffe, Edgeworth and Burney* (London: Anthem Press, 2017), 189.

desire from her observers, her status conferred from viewer to, as Volz puts it, “woman-on-view”.⁴⁶ To Davidson, it is in this gaze that the body of Evelina “registers”, as it “blushes, shrinks, and faints” in the face of social pressures.⁴⁷ Describing Evelina’s “obscurity”, beyond its application by Villars in the novel, can be said to fail to extend to her embodiment. Her visibility as a desirable object apparent in both Davidson and Volz’s readings of the novel suggests the visible function of scrutiny, not invisibility. Evelina’s own transformation from retired Berry Hill girl to woman of the London social circle suggests the power of viewers to transform the objects of their view, shape their identities, and regulate their performances of gender. This transformation in turn indicates the potency of the gaze as such: looking at Evelina shapes her identity, her calculated responses to being viewed by others resulting in subtle shifts in performance, nuanced alterations to behaviour, and often, when these views are unfavourable, the embarrassment and shame that comes with a failed social performance.

It is indeed clear that shame becomes an important, if violent, weapon in the arsenal which is deployed carefully by the world surrounding Evelina to shape her figure according to its norms and mores. The “ill-breeding” of Captain Mirvan consistently makes Evelina “blush that I belonged” in his company (60). Early in the novel, Captain Mirvan serves as a comic foil contrasted against Lord Orville and Sir Clement. His own corrupted status is indicated in his foul language and poor conversational manner. When confronted by the French Madame Duval, Captain Mirvan’s poor acculturation is suggested by his capacity for offence and sacrilege; his lack of awareness of the fashions of the day indicated by his declaring hats the invention of “some wrinkled old hag” implicitly seeking sexual pleasure

⁴⁶ Volz, *Visuality in the Novels of Austen, Radcliffe, Edgeworth and Burney*, 189-90.

⁴⁷ Davidson, ““To Speak As Others Speak”: Privileged And “Vulgar” Voices In *Evelina*, By Frances Burney,” 41-42.

among the young (61). When Madame Duval retorts that age is treated gracefully in the circles of, as Mackie describes, “the greater refinement, gallantry, and politesse” of the French social elite, Sir Clement is quick to insinuate a position in her favour.⁴⁸ However, this is immediately counterposed by Captain Mirvan’s rough manner:

‘Would to Heaven,’ cried sir Clement, ‘that, for our own sakes, we Englishmen too were blest with so accommodating a blindness!’

‘Why the devil do you make such a prayer as that?’ demanded the Captain: ‘them are the first foolish words I’ve heard you speak; but I suppose you’re not much used to that sort of work. Did you ever make a prayer before, since you were a sniveler?’ (61)

Sir Clement’s sacrilegious plea for tolerance is grossly misjudged. Burney adverbially exaggerates his articulation to emphasise his status and genteel sensibilities, while undercutting the pose through the link between secular problems of desire and the religious. Captain Mirvan’s response misses the mark for communication in polite company. Querying Sir Clement’s relationship with the divine when Captain Mirvan asks whether he had “ever make a prayer before” followed by the insultingly infantilizing description of him as a “sniveler” reverses Sir Clement’s pious pose by revealing its own inadequacy. Yet, the poor grammar and enunciation of the Captain positions him as a brattish inferior to Sir Clement. The use of the plural “them” instead of the proper “they” figures the Captain’s “ill-breeding” in terms of his linguistic expression, as Evelina earlier notes. Furthermore, the reference to “the devil” in the Captain’s dialogue troubles the notion of his arbitration of what is and is not a proper prayer. The crassness of the reference to Satan reveals Captain Mirvan’s own

⁴⁸ Mackie, *Rakes, Highwaymen, and Pirates*, 155.

implicit uncouth villainy, alongside a hyperbolised variant of masculinity coordinated against sentiment: to Mackie, a “staunch, blunt, “Englishness””⁴⁹.

While Sir Clement can comfortably operate within a kind of normative masculine performance, Captain Mirvan fails to do so. Even given Sir Clement’s obvious impiety, the association between the Captain and “the devil” is only deepened as the text continues. His disregard for conversational and behavioural norms is structurally significant to Evelina’s own progress from girl-viewing to woman-in-view, her connection to him thrusting her into the censorious gaze of others. The Captain’s interactions with Mr. Lovel, a fop and early suitor of Evelina, are suggestive of a comic characterization troubled by his violent pose. Following a trip to the theatre, when Mr. Lovel asks “what was the play to-night?”, the Captain is quick to cut him down, exclaiming: “why, what the D—I? [...] do you come to the play, without knowing what it is?” (82). Burney’s decision to censor the Captain’s expletive in this usage highlights, rather than diminishes, its rude interruption of Mr. Love’s foppish dialogue. For the Captain to admonish Mr. Lovel so indicates his failure to register appropriate performance of the social order, removing him further from the fashionable norms that characterise late-eighteenth-century London. In this sense, Captain Mirvan represents the obverse of Evelina’s own unaware reactions against her environment. While Evelina satirises through her naïve, reverent confessions to Villars, Captain Mirvan directly (and satirically) confronts the excesses of polite society through uncouth means. The Captain’s inexperience of the social world, separated from it, as Lady Howard notes, for some seven years, inhibits his capacity to engage with it properly (24). In this doppelganger of Evelina’s own “air of inexperience and innocency” (23), as Lady Howard puts it, a failure

⁴⁹ Mackie, *Rakes, Highwaymen, and Pirates*, 155.

to account for one's own lack of knowledge of the world becomes a bludgeon with which to reshape it.

Thus, the novel produces a binary version of inexperience. While in *Evelina*, “innocency” becomes a saleable attribute on the marriage market, closely intimated with her virtue and virginity, for Captain Mirvan a removal from the social realm represents an individual failure, both indicative of and shaping his various faults. Describing the Captain as the obverse of *Evelina*'s own figuration suggests, furthermore, its capacity to bound or limit her own capacity for development. *Evelina*'s own awareness of the Captain's bounding is apparent, furthermore, in her writing itself. Her records of his dialogue, fastidious and pointed, suggest his power over her and her peers, despite his inexperience and unsuitability to wield such power:

‘What signifies asking them girls? Do you think they know their own minds yet? Ask ‘em after any thing that’s called a diversion, and you’re sure they’ll say it’s vastly fine;—they are a set of parrots, and speak by rote, for they all say the same thing: but ask ‘em how they like to make puddings and pies, and I’ll warrant you’ll pose ‘em[...] I charge you, as you value my favour, that you’ll never be so impertinent as to have a taste of your own before my face[...] if you’ve a mind to praise any thing, why you may praise a play, and welcome, for I like it myself.’

This reproof effectually silenced us both for the rest of the evening. Nay, indeed, for some minutes it seemed to silence every body else...(110)

Is it Captain Mirvan's censorious speech which “silenced[...] every body” or is it the emptiness of his declaration? Addressing the party following an opera, the Captain's reduction of the art form to a “diversion” directly indicates his unfashionable status; the

comparison between the two girls, his own daughter and Evelina, to “parrots” speaking “by rote” is both insulting and resonant with his apparent belief in the risks of polite entertainment. His insinuation of the proper roles of the girls—“how they like to make puddings and pies”—is coupled with a suggestion of both of their failing to conform to his expectations, arguing that the question will “pose ‘em”. That the threat to his daughter, “as you value my favour,” is linked to her possession of a “taste of your own” indicates his belief in the limited capacity of women and girls to articulate beliefs about entertainment which do not conform to his own outdated ones. Leya Landau has charted the influence of opera upon the sentimental structure of Burney’s later *Cecilia*, suggesting the “pathos” of the aria coordinates the kind of sensibility to injustice and pain which her heroines register.⁵⁰ The “gratifying” of her readers tastes Landau identifies serves to solidify a relationship between Italian opera and the aristocratic elite, even if Francesca Saggini rightly notes that the opera house, much like a theatre, allowed for the visibility and comingling of and across class by producing a space open to those of differing social standings.⁵¹ At once an elite and democratising force, opera serves as a marker of good taste: furthermore, in its capacity to equalise across class divides those *with* taste, the exclusion of the ill-bred Captain from the artform suggests his own failing at performing modern sensibilities.

Taste is a key marker of personal regulation. Burney’s own dedication to *Evelina* trades on the ideal of taste as an intrinsic and inherited attribute, and as a marker of sophistication and liberal ideology, suggesting the anonymous author of the book may commit themselves to the “patronage” of the literary “Inspectors” (5). It is taste—and the

⁵⁰ Leya Landau, ““The Middle State”: Italian Opera in Frances Burney’s *Cecilia*,” *Eighteenth-Century Fiction* 17, no. 4 (2005): 652-53, <https://doi.org/10.1353/ecf.2005.0004>.

⁵¹ Landau, ““The Middle State”: Italian Opera in Frances Burney’s *Cecilia*,” 664; Francesca Saggini, *Backstage in the Novel: Frances Burney and the Theater Arts* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2012), 62.

good taste of the novel itself—which renders the “trifling production of a few idle hours” worthy of the “Magistrates of the press” (5). Yet, unlike the Captain’s account of taste as the “rote” learnt behaviours of “parrots”, repeating inculcated beliefs, Burney’s emphasis throughout the dedicatory and prefatory material on Evelina’s incapacity for inculcation suggests a naturalisation of the forms of taste which commend her work:

To draw characters from nature, though not from life, and to mark the manners of the times, is the attempted plan of the following letters. For this purpose, a young female, educated in the most secluded retirement, makes, at the age of seventeen, her first appearance upon the great and busy stage of life; with a virtuous mind, a cultivated understanding, and a feeling heart, her ignorance of the forms, and inexperience in the manners, of the world, occasion all the little incidents which these volumes record, and which form the natural progression of the life of a young woman of obscure birth, but conspicuous beauty, for the first six months after her Entrance into the World. (9)

A “secluded retirement” prohibits the development of markers of taste in association with the “busy stage of life” or the “World” more generally. It is Evelina’s “virtuous mind” and “cultivated understanding” which inform her attraction to, or repulsion from, certain forms of entertainment or, indeed, people. That, furthermore, it is her “conspicuous beauty” which commends her upon her “Entrance into the World”, in contrast with her “obscure birth” negated by the separating “but”, suggests her own status as an object to which taste might be applied. If judgements are formed about Evelina herself, these are efforts at ascertaining her value: that Burney emphasises her beauty in turn suggests its importance to calculating her merit, privileging the visible surface of her body as a tool by which her “understanding” and “virtuous mind” might be discoverable. Where the Captain errs in is in his belief that tastes

are learnt through osmosis—that the “rote” learning of socialization within the highly democratic environment of the opera house or theatre supersedes natural inclinations which truly demarcate those worthy of, and those unworthy of, their status in society.

This sets *Evelina* itself in distinction to other epistolary texts of the long eighteenth-century. Where, as Chapter Two of this thesis argues, *Pamela* resists fixed identities in favour of reference to the processual ‘fall’ of its protagonist or, as Chapter Four reads, Austen’s playscript adaptation of *The History of Sir Charles Grandison* offers a futurity of resilient heterosexualities framed by their performative status, Burney instead fixes Evelina to a specific calculus of virtue which—from the novel’s outset to its conclusion—cannot meaningfully change. For all the reference to a “natural progression” in the dedication, Evelina’s basic merits are unchanging. Her artlessness—indeed, her resistance to learning art—is exemplified in distinction to the Captain, whose failure to read Evelina’s unworldliness suggests the very fixity of innocence as a character type.

Analysing the inexperienced ingenue in eighteenth-century novels, Stephanie Insley Hershinow describes adolescent women, using the case of Burney’s *Camilla*, as “theoretical persons”: youth and innocence are tested in the “experiment” of sociability, revealing the vulnerability of each.⁵² The validity of innocence is, in Hershinow’s reading, clarified by marriage arrangements within *Camilla*; describing Edgar’s suit of the title character as a “co-optation of the aesthetic of novelty”, Hershinow advances a reading which centres inexperience as an apparatus through which early realism could make itself meaningful—could insinuate its social and political project of constructing a modernised subjectivity while remaining deferent to codes of behaviour which might preclude the plots of the novels

⁵² Stephanie Insley Hershinow, *Born Yesterday: Inexperience and the Early Realist Novel* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2019), 118.

narrativizing eighteenth-century “conjugal scouting”.⁵³ The unerring capacity of the young women protagonists of these novels to remain morally sound in spite of plot’s efforts at finding fault is central to this project. Rather than *Evelina* revealing the suitability of its protagonist as a marriage prospect for Lord Orville, the novel, by pushing her into its series of entanglements with *unsuitable* marriage prospects for Evelina herself, tests the central conviction that artlessness can suffice as a social strategy for engaging with the wider world. As a “theoretical person”, Evelina serves as a thought experiment as to whether inexperience can indeed confirm the moral worthiness of its subject.

Returning to Sir Clement’s poem, if Evelina is “unconscious”, this simple fact absolves her of the “kills” she accomplishes throughout the novel: Sir Clement, Captain Mirvan, and Lord Orville are each held up to a kind of scrutiny which Evelina herself is not (333). This is not to say that Evelina’s behaviour is not challenged or scrutinised. In Letter XXIX of Volume II, Villars admonishes Evelina for her receipt of a secret communique supposedly from Lord Orville, lamenting that “though Evelina is returned,—I have lost my child!” (265). Villars’s belief in Evelina’s indiscretions in London, and likely liaison with the Lord Orville as confirmed by their correspondence suggests that, for Villars, transformation of Evelina’s character is a negative. It is apparent that Evelina’s identity is construed in static terms for Villars. The expectation that her “innocence” and “guileless” status remain intact in contact with others confirms a seeming dissolution of her agency in favour of the fixity of these interior markers of merit as unchanging, permanent, and irreconcilable with the precarity of her social position (268). For Evelina, the risk of moving closer to others is the very dissipation of her identity—at least in the eyes of Villars, her substitute father. In this scene, Evelina’s very “guileless” position confirms to Villars her lack of fault in the supposed

⁵³ Hershinow, *Born Yesterday*, 119.

liaison with Lord Orville; furthermore, by supposing that the writer must have been “intoxicated” in the writing of the secret letter supposedly from Orville extends this unconsciousness, conferring Evelina’s own faultlessness upon another (267). The diminished capacity of Lord Orville to act with propriety, seemingly, is the result of his contact with Evelina. Her “theoretical person[hood]” tests not only her mettle, but rubs off on the world around her, constructing a variant of society in which innocence is not only transferrable but osmotic.

Evelina thus may be said to narrativize the arrival of the subjectivity which the epistolary form had experimented with. A fixed identity, the ingenue, supersedes earlier experiments in characterization which found the processual, performative interpretation of the ‘self’ wanting. More importantly, in locating within a fixed feminine identity the capacity to redeem others, Burney confirms the most conservative suspicions of *Pamela* and *Clarissa*’s plots capacities to transform their villains through contact with their paragon protagonists, by demonstrating the power of a nameless social inferior to refigure the identities of the men she associates with. Here lies Evelina’s satiric weight: configuring the world’s violence upon her through its reflection outwards, at the enactors of such violence, allows for a novelistic sensibility which legitimates predation on inexperienced young women by their social superiors, but troubles the power of these violences to ultimately affect the pre-existing identities of these women.

If Evelina’s place is fixed, determined from the novel’s dedication, no effort from Sir Clement can dislodge her permanent naivete. His own observation of her “unconscious” mind in his poem figures her agency against understandings of character which emphasise rumination, thought, and intentionality, privileging instead inner moral worthiness over and above social or behavioural performance. This is key to understanding *Evelina*’s own lateness in the epistolary tradition: by fixing and predetermining the outcomes of its character through

her unchanging status, Burney rejects the radical potential of the epistolary mode to offer competing and, thus, expansionary accounts of girl- and womanhood in favour of a foreclosure emphasizing moral purity as an intrinsic status. Doing so draws attention to the waning power of epistolary narratives as an explanatory tool, while further emphasizing the reassertion of fixed identities resistant to social change. If Evelina “cannot to *you* sign Anville,” she declares the power of Villars to define her personhood, acquiescing to a new patriarchalist system rediscovering the symbolic weight of the father (26).⁵⁴ That this system would become entrenched in the later reification of the family drama as the underpinnings of the contemporary nuclear home and its subjects suggests Burney’s prescience, and the key role of epistolary fictions in ossifying a gendered account of selfhood still pertinent today. If Villars looms as the textual father, Evelina fails to remain a safe distance from others: her development as a full person impeded by the patriarchal signification which renders her an eternal inferior, a subject of a system not of her own design.

⁵⁴ Johnson, *Equivocal beings : politics, gender, and sentimentality in the 1790s* : *Wollstonecraft, Radcliffe, Burney, Austen*, 142. Johnson suggests Burney’s novel “brings [Evelina’s father] to his knees”—yet this account cannot articulate the way Villars, the non-patrimonial yet no less pertinent father figure of the text is ultimately vindicated by the rather conservative conclusion.

Conclusion: “the Phrenzy was in her Brain”: *Lady Susan* (1793–94) and the “Rise” of
Epistolarity

Epistolary fictions, focused upon conjugal narrative, grew over the course of the century to resist the representation of the adult woman; preferring instead to focus upon the marriageable ‘girl’ as a motivation for plot, the novels surveyed in this thesis converge in their reification of marriageability and, thus, patriarchal order. As Chapter One has shown in its reading of Mary Davys’s *Love and Friendship* (1718), by experimenting with and against earlier conventions of the love-complaint, early eighteenth-century epistolary fictions were able to represent the political as the personal, yet still capitulated partially to the demands of the amatory plot. Chapter Two, through its reading of *Pamela* (1740), demonstrates the centrality of the body to the mid-century epistolary novel, and Chapter Three integrates this reading within a new approach to the constitutive role of gender in shaping the body in *Clarissa* (1747–1748). Chapter Four, approaching Austen’s critically understudied ‘The History of Sir Charles Grandison or, the happy man. A comedy’ (c.1800) has argued for a queer reading of kin relations which plots against the conjugal narrative of Richardson’s novel. Finally, Chapter Five, reading Frances Burney’s *Evelina* (1778), has argued against that novel’s casting as a bildungsroman, and instead for the value of reading its static characterisations.

Yet, by the time Jane Austen came to write *Lady Susan* in 1793–94, these amatory tropes had become solid enough to form a target for satire.⁵⁵ Austen’s brief novel plots against the grain of, for instance, *Lindamira* (1713): positioning as its central protagonist not

⁵⁵ See Margaret Drabble, “Introduction,” in *Lady Susan, The Watsons, Sanditon*, ed. Margaret Drabble (London: Penguin, 2015), IX.

a naïve girl but the adult Lady Susan Vernon, a seductress and morally unruly figure whose erotic escapades form the narrative backbone of the short text.⁵⁶ Adapted for screen by Whit Stillman in 2016 under the title *Love & Friendship*, actress Kate Beckinsale described the role of Lady Susan in an interview with film journalist Nina Terrero the film as “so not what I thought of as typical Austen”.⁵⁷ That *Lady Susan* appears atypical to readers of, primarily, Austen’s six novels, might come as little surprise, even as Beckinsale draws out the implications of the role when asked to clarify her character’s “competitive streak”:

It was such a narrow, limited life that one could expect as a woman during that period. Lady Susan is a fighter for what becomes feminism. Yes, she’s fairly ruthless, but I admire her for rising above the limitations placed on her.⁵⁸

The borders of possibility for eighteenth-century women loom large in Beckinsale’s imaginary. That the rebellion of Susan Vernon against Regency mores of decency in her sexual conduct suggests, to Beckinsale, the spectre of “feminism” is unsurprising: but, for Lady Susan’s personal behaviour to register as *feminist* necessitates a decidedly modern constellation of gendered identity situated within a particular historical vantage point. The very existence of an “above” space to which Lady Susan might rise posits a utopian idealism to Austen’s novel; that this space is enterable by a mere mortal, spatialises this utopic imaginary as a mundane rather than heavenly sphere.

⁵⁶ As Gillian Russell notes, discussions of adultery in Austen’s novels tend to focus on *Mansfield Park*, an oversight which neglects formative narratives of marital infidelity found in the juvenilia, and particularly in *Lady Susan*. See Gillian Russell, ““A Hint of It, with Initials”: Adultery, Textuality and Publicity in Jane Austen’s *Lady Susan*,” *Women’s Writing* 17, no. 3 (2010): 470, <https://doi.org/10.1080/09699082.2010.508888>.

⁵⁷ Nina Terrero, “Kate Beckinsale Goes Full Austen,” *Entertainment Weekly*, 2016, 48.

⁵⁸ Terrero, “Kate Beckinsale Goes Full Austen,” 48.

Yet the seeds of such a feminist imaginary appear planted far earlier in the epistolary tradition, even if they often fail to come to fruition. Returning to *Lindamira*, the reconciliation between principles of virtue and realism necessitates a satisfactory conclusion in which Lindamira's union with her love-interest, Cleomidon, is both plausible and framed in ethical terms. A suit by another character, Colonel Harnando, is displaced in her efforts to signify her love for "my Cleomidon", the possessive pronoun indicating the sincerity of her love for him.⁵⁹ Lindamira shows Cleomidon the letters passed between her and the Colonel, allowing Cleomidon access to the romantic intrigue to authenticate her feelings: that he "Reign'd more absolute in my Heart, than ever" (222). Yet the author defers the union between Cleomidon and Lindamira—detailing, instead, an attempt on the life of a minor character, Alcander, by his wife, Lyndaraxa (223). The excessive affects are evident:

Lyndaraxa was raving mad by Fits: and when the Phrenzy was in her Brain, she one Night design'd to compleat her Character, of being a very Notorious Woman, attempted the Murder of *Alcander*; but the Weapon she made use of for this purpose, was a Rusty Knife she had by chance found in the Buttery, that it was so eaten up with Rust, it would not enter the Skin of *Alcander*
(223)

Lyndaraxa's raving fit indicates her total unsuitability for the marital marketplace, a short parable inserted into the account of Lindamira's relationship with Cleomidon to assert their acceptance of one another as mutually beneficial partners. Lyndaraxa's notoriety produces a dark mirror of Lindamira's own "Innocency" (223). Her attempt on her husband's life is futile and leads directly to her suicide shortly afterwards. This stigmatisation of female resistance to male authority as psychological, rather than political, deepens the novel's

⁵⁹ *The Lover's Secretary: Or, the Adventures of Lindamira, a Lady of Quality*, (London: Printed for R. Wellington, 1713), 222. Further citations are to this edition and appear in-text.

interest in virtue: in what sane world would Lyndaraxa hatefully reject her loving husband? In the futility of her actions—Alcander’s survival and her death—*Lindamira*’s author also gestures towards the excess of any ‘feminism’ which rejects, rather than integrates and mediates, the world: demanding, instead, a pragmatism on the part of Lyndaraxa, rather than her nihilistic optimism in the possibility of total social dysregulation. If the life-shape of women’s existence is governed by the central apparatus of conjugality, Lyndaraxa’s violence makes some sense, yet in its untimeliness—its earliness—it is ultimately relegated to the psychological. We are invited to wonder: is Lyndaraxa’s attack an early propagandistic deed, or mere “Phrenzy”? That this question is possible suggests *Lindamira*’s own disquietude upon the madness of marriage-as-ideology; that it might be answerable in the negative reinforces the feminist, the queer, and the hesitant lover as the radical source of this very discomfort. Marriage is imaginatively invoked as the apparatus by which women’s lives gain meaning and significance; Lyndaraxa’s counterattack reasserts the primacy of the individual agent over and above her gender, and thus must be subordinated to conjugal affect.

Lady Susan upends these ethical considerations by presenting a narrative which concludes in a radical uncertainty. The conclusion stipulates the marriage of its title character, Susan Vernon, to Sir James Martin yet refuses to sanctify the union along the lines of the theodicy of Richardson:

Whether Lady Susan was, or was not happy in her second choice—I do not see how it can ever be ascertained—for who would take her assurance of it, on either side of the question? The world must judge from probability. She had nothing against her, but her husband, and her conscience.⁶⁰

⁶⁰ Jane Austen, “Lady Susan,” in *Later Manuscripts*, eds. Janet Todd and Linda Bree, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 77.

The satirical force of Austen's novel lies in its refusing to situate marriage as itself a concluding factor. Rather, insisting upon Lady Susan's continued affective experience beyond her union with Sir James Martin demands of the reader an attention to her mental state. Yet it is a representation of a mental state: as James Mulvihill notes, Austen reclaims authority from the text's figures at this moment through inserting the pointedly impartial third-person narrator as a concluding voice, rather than allowing the open ending to play out in the epistolary form the rest of the novel has taken.⁶¹ The figuration of her conscience in turn spatialises this concern, suggesting the internalisation of her relationship to the politics of virtue. The spectre of virtue's publicity is itself invoked in the suggestion of a judgemental world observing her happiness: if it cannot be ascertained that Lady Susan is happy, it must be conjectured, or imagined, or—more radically—denied. Lyndaraxa's murderous intentions haunt this passage: like the far earlier epistolary figure, Lady Susan is implicitly resistant to the modes of propriety which govern her, and, moreover, in the suggestion of her potential *unhappiness* held to account for her failure to conform to the ideological impetus of marriage girding her community.⁶²

Yet, if Lady Susan is unhappy she is not mad. The husband is her “second choice”: the implicit disappointment of failure must spectrally suggest a rational, rather than frenzied, response. Austen had previously experimented with these suggestions of conjugality's disappointment; in her epistolary novella ‘Love and Freindship’, the protagonist Laura details to her epistolary interlocutor Marianne the comic effects of her marriage to the son of a Baronet, Edward Lindsay whose own perverse resistance to an appropriate marriage appears

⁶¹ James Mulvihill, “*Lady Susan*: Jane Austen's Machiavellian Moment,” *Studies in Romanticism* 50, no. 4 (2011): 624, <https://doi.org/10.1353/srm.2011.0002>.

⁶² Russell notes that Lady Susan certainly imagines a dead husband: that of her friend, Alicia Johnson. See Russell, ““A Hint of It, with Initials”: Adultery, Textuality and Publicity in Jane Austen's *Lady Susan*,” 474.

to his father shaped by his reading of “Gibberish” in “studying novels”.⁶³ ‘Love and Freindship’ plots marriage as an axis upon which Laura’s future happiness turns, yet the novella’s account of love itself is masculinised as an eroticised male sentiment:

And did you then never feel the pleasing Pangs of Love, Augusta? (replied my Edward). Does it appear impossible to your vile and corrupted Palate, to exist on Love? Can you not conceive the Luxury of living in every Distress that Poverty can inflict, with the object of your tenderest affection? (111)

To Edward, the need for romantic affect and sentiment supersedes all other bodily requirements. Describing love’s pangs suggestively works with the sexual connotations of congress, yet sanitises experiences of overwhelm or intensity through connecting the bodied experience clearly to an affective, rather than sexual, encounter. Edward rehearses a common refrain of the predator-suitors throughout this thesis even as he essentially parodies its contents. In his suggestion that love satisfies beyond the pragmatic needs of the body, he presupposes the primacy of amorous affect as the central pillar of gendered experience. In a sense, Edward operates in an antirealist vein: undermining the plausibility of his realisation—his capacity for psychologization as an embodied, agential actor undercut by his naïve assumption of romance’s centrality—in turn calls into question his professed belief in sexuality’s coordinating impulse. The figure works as Austen’s reader, crucially, knows that the distress of impoverishment outweighs the experience of love. Austen prefigures this knowledge; Laura does not describe her narrative in glowing terms, but rather as a series of “many Afflictions” (103) intended as an instructional aid. Laura reflects on her torrid

⁶³ Jane Austen, “Love and Freindship”, in *Juvenilia*, ed. Peter Sabor, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 108. All further citations refer to this edition and are provided in-text.

marriage to Edward from the vantage of adulthood—she is married at eighteen, which she now regards among her faults:

Alas! how altered now! Tho' indeed my own Misfortunes do not make less
impression on me, than they ever did, yet now I never feel for those of an
other. My accomplishments too, begin to fade— I can neither sing so well
nor Dance so gracefully as I once did—and I have entirely forgot the *Minuet*
Dela Cour—(105)

The diurnal letter writing to her interlocutor, Marianne, is easily contrasted with the slow, ruminative march of time. Age wounds, almost literally disfiguring Laura as she is forced to reflect on the life-shape which has robbed her of grace and pleasure. Her slow forgetting of the courtly minuet highlights Austen's rejection of the forms of characterisation evident in earlier epistolary fictions. Unlike the earlier female figures of the epistolary tradition, it is not Laura's *inexperience* and potentially naïve resistance or subjection to the male world which makes her narrative interesting; it is her contact with, and survival, of encounter with the masculinist worldview embodied by Edward which confers upon her the status of 'character'. Austen's Laura cannot imagine an alterity: to modify Camus's famous proverb, one must imagine Laura happy. Indeed, the Sisyphean task of acclimating oneself to the demands of heterosexist dominion are read here not into the virginal body of the girl, but rather the knowledgeable figure of the woman. The damage wrought upon her body by her acquiescence to sentiment suggests Laura's narrative as a pattern for resistance: her regrets signify a disquietude that unsettles the totalising experience of conjugal gender. Simply through surpassing the epistolary mode's obsessive locality through presenting a narrative not of immediacy but of reflection, Austen disrupts the processes of the genre and demands its accountability to emergent norms of feminine personhood. The frenzy is not in Laura's brain: it is in her culture.

Austen's *Lady Susan* complicates this pose by treating sexuality as a field of power, in which women might possess unique agency. Lady Susan is aware of the potency of her daughter, Frederica, as a sexual object on the marriage market. In letter 22 she writes:

This is insufferable! My dearest friend, I was never so enraged before, and must relieve myself by writing to you, who I know will enter into all my feelings. Who should come on Tuesday but Sir James Martin? Guess my astonishment and vexation[...] I could have poisoned him; I made the best of it however[...] I made a point also of Frederica's behaving civilly to Sir James, and gave her to understand that I was absolutely determined on her marrying him. She said something of her misery, but that was all. (42)

Lady Susan's position of power is evident in the disposability of her daughter, Frederica, through her matchmaking. Ingraining in Frederica an understanding of the necessity of a civil poise in securing a husband suggests the constellation of virtue and affect which could be read as female desire and interest; yet Lady Susan's own frustration with her potential son-in-law is expressed. That these behaviours in the male gaze—civility and affect—mask feelings of frustration and, in Frederica's case, "misery", in turn suggests the performative characteristics of desire. Here, it is encouraged by a fiction, a fiction in turn spurred by rational, or moreover, political, rather than sentimental operations. Unlike Lyndaraxa, Lady Susan exploits the privilege(s) of the patriarchal system to her own benefit: like Lyndaraxa, her plots are self-serving and oriented towards personal advancement, or vengeance, rather than social reorganisation. The spectre of feminised violence—Lady Susan's jovial threat to poison Sir James Martin—is integrated as a mere metaphor, an expression of her distaste for the company of the man who will, ultimately, become her husband.

As the epistolary narrative fragmented in the face of stylistic innovations such as the ruminative reflection of Laura in ‘Love and Friendship’ so too did its power as a narrative device begin to slowly disintegrate. The compelling narrative structures of the novels read in this thesis rely upon their immediacy: the partial realisations of scene and character which are iteratively worked out through a series of diurnal texts held in tension with their essential locality. *Lady Susan* represents a moment of departure from the amorous scripts of the form, while situating this departure within recognisable generic conventions. Yet by representing a ‘beyond’ external to the turbulence of youth—an easy site to locate and describe affective experience heightened by its proximity to the juvenile and so often naïve discovery of sexual difference—the epistolary form inverts. An adolescent, discovering the borders of identity and individuation, represents a different and compelling alternative to the mundane security of normative adulthood. To represent the ‘adult’, insecurities associated with youth are reinvigorated by fracturing the affective core of adulthood: conjugal marriage.

By thus opening a space in which the adult itself represents a queer surface—a site of hostility and retrenchment against conjugal processes of refinement and development—Austen’s late, and indeed, final, epistolary fiction articulates a total limit of the novelistic scheme proposed by *Lindamira*’s preface. The exposure of vice and vanity is no longer, alone, novel: reading these themes into the adult body resists their reification as the boundaries of feminine experience. Beckinsale is right to suggest Austen’s novel charts a “rise”. The fantasy of resistance seeded in Lyndaraxa’s frenzy starts to meet its fulfilment in the insubordinate and, finally, agential, Lady Susan Vernon. What does such agency mean for the epistolary novel? How might the ‘adult’ be reintegrated in the anti-maturation plots of the novel-in-letters? In staking a claim for the value of epistolary fictions in understanding eighteenth-century gender and genre, this thesis opens the possibility for further work investigating the roles of non-conjugal and non-amatory relations within epistolary fictions—

formations of friendship or kinship resistant to desire—which encourage relationships of equality, or resist the subordination to androcentrism the marriage plot implies.

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