

Corresponding Forms: Aspects of the Eighteenth-Century Letter

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Abstract

My thesis investigates the dialogic aspects and literary qualities ascribed to letters during the long eighteenth century. In part this involves documenting the correspondence between letters and other genres, such as the novel. Being in correspondence encouraged writers such as Burney and Johnson to express the relationship between sender and recipient in interesting ways. I posit that the letter offered a sophisticated means for writers, including those in Richardson's circle, to represent speech and thought, and mimic (with varying degrees of indirection), that of others. I consider the editorial habits and typographical conventions that governed letter-writing during the period, honing in on Richardson's contributions. I link his claim that letters were written 'to the *Moment*' with broader tropes of 'occasional' style, and show how this manifests in letters' intricate modulations of tense and person.

Chapter 1 details the conventions that prevailed in letters of the period, and their interactions with irony and innovation. I compare convention in the epistolary novels of Smollett and Richardson, and look at closure in the Johnson-Thrale correspondence. Chapter 2 demonstrates that various methods of combining one's voice with others were utilized in letters (such as those of the Burney family), including some that took advantage of the epistolary form and its reputation as 'talking on paper'. Chapter 3 shows the role of mimesis in maintaining the dialogic structure of letters, and links it to contemporary theories of sympathy and sentiment. Chapters 4 and 5 apply the findings about epistolary tradition, polyphony and sentimentalism to the letters of Sterne and Burns. In them, there is a mixture of sentiment and irony, and of individual and 'correspondent' styles. The conclusion discusses the editing of letters, both *in situ* and in preparation for publication. The twin ideals of spontaneity and sincerity, I conclude, have influenced the way we choose to edit letters in scholarly publications.

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Note on Editions

As different editions and manners of presenting letters are part of the general discussion, I have drawn on a variety of sources. For printed works, I have sometimes cited the first, or early editions of a text, because the research partly focuses on the uneven texture of eighteenth-century typography, especially with regard to quotation. In modern editions, features such as running quotation marks are usually regularised, though these details would have influenced the inflections of tone and attribution bestowed on them by readers. Having a clear idea of how letters looked on the printed page (and how far this emulated manuscript) can contribute to our understanding of the correspondences between genres and media. With this principle in mind, and thinking in particular about group identity, antithesis, and dialogism (both then, and between then and now), I have occasionally cited early editions that show us texts as they were first received (a principle to which modern editors of manuscript letters adhere). As *The Cambridge Edition of the Works of Samuel Richardson* is under way but not complete, I have used the most up-to-date editions of Richardson's letters where possible, unless I have consulted the manuscript. However, for Robert Burns, Samuel Johnson, Alexander Pope and Laurence Sterne, the following editions will be used unless otherwise specified. Volume and page numbers will be given in brackets after quotations, or in footnotes.

All references to Sterne's letters will be taken from *The Letters of Laurence Sterne*, ed. Melvyn New and Peter de Voogd, 2 vols., vols. 7 (1739-1764) and 8 (1765-1768) of *The Florida Edition of the Works of Laurence Sterne*, 8 vols., Gainesville, Fla.: University of Florida Press, 1978-2008 [2008].

All references to Burns' letters will be taken from *The Letters of Robert Burns*, ed. G. Ross Roy, 2 vols., 2nd edition, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1985.

All references to Johnson's letters will be taken from *The Letters of Samuel Johnson*, ed. Bruce Redford, 6 vols., Oxford: Clarendon, 1992-1994.

All references to the works of Johnson (excluding the *Lives of the Most Eminent English Poets*) will be taken from *The Yale Edition of the Works of Samuel Johnson*, ed. W. J. Bate and Albrecht B. Strauss, 23 vols., New Haven: Yale University Press, 1958-2010.

All references to Pope's letters will be taken from *The Correspondence of Alexander Pope*, ed. George Sherburn, 5 vols., Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1956.

List of Abbreviations

Barbault	Samuel Richardson, <i>The Correspondence of Samuel Richardson</i> , ed. Anna Laetitia Barbault, 6 vols., London: Phillips, 1804.
Carroll	Samuel Richardson, <i>Selected Letters of Samuel Richardson</i> , ed. John Carroll, Oxford: Clarendon, 1964.
FC	London, Victoria and Albert Museum, The National Art Library, Forster Collection, MSS XI-XVI (48.E.5-10), cited as FC followed by volume number and folio pagination.
Lonsdale	Samuel Johnson, <i>Lives of the Most Eminent English Poets</i> , ed. Roger Lonsdale, 4 vols., Oxford: Clarendon, 2006.
<i>OED</i>	<i>The Oxford English Dictionary Online</i> , Oxford University Press, < http://www.oed.com >.
RV	San Marino, California, The Huntington Library, The Papers of Robert Valentine, cited as RV followed by MS number and folio pagination.

All other works referred to will be found under their full titles in the bibliography.

List of Illustrations

Page 50: William Walsh, *Original Poems and Translations. By Several Hands*, 2nd edn., London: Pemberton, 1714, ij [dedication].

Page 50: Jonathan Smedley, *Gulliveriana, or, a Fourth Volume of Miscellanies*, London: Roberts, 1728 [dedication].

Page 55: MS. Pigott. d. 9. fol. 19^v [Thomas Donnell to Mr. Lambert, 7 July 1836].

Page 69: *Clarissa*, 7 vols., London: Richardson, 1748, iii.232 [Joseph Leman's letter].

Page 70: *Passages Restored [...]*, London: Richardson, 1751, p. 50 [Joseph Leman's letter].

Page 118: *Clarissa*, 7 vols., London: Richardson, 1748, iii.259 [Arabella Harlowe's letter].

Page 118: *Clarissa*, 7 vols., London: Richardson, 1748, iii.260 [Arabella Harlowe's letter].

Page 310: FC XII, fol. 1^r [Richardson's note, 'Correspondence between the Ever-to-be Valued T. Edwards, Esqr. And S. R.'].

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‘In that love that many Waters Cannot Quench nor length of Days wear out I Salute
you’ (RV 189, fol. 1^v)

INTRODUCTION

By considering the ‘aspects’ of ‘corresponding forms’, I concern myself with the particulars of letters which affected writers’ presentations of themselves and their relation to others. Grammatical aspect expresses how the flow of time is experienced by writers; in letters, temporal flow is always at risk of interruption by the vagaries of distance and the postal system. This creates the conditions for dialogic expression. ‘Aspect’ also involves ‘ways of looking, as to position or direction’ (*OED*); my thesis explores some of the many ways that letters communicate the relative social and linguistic positions of senders and recipients.

Governed by their own hierarchies, intersecting republics of letters were created by the growth of literacy and postal networks. Letters enact relations of unequal condition by offering addresses that name the respective social positions of sender and recipient. R. Harré suggests that relational collectives are defined by interactions between their members.¹ The collective has an internal structure, created by these interactions, and letters are prime evidence of such structures. Samuel Johnson’s famous letter to Lord Chesterfield drew attention to the hierarchies that governed the epistolary style, by undermining the usual declaration of humble servitude:

for I have long been wakened from that Dream of hope, in which I once boasted myself with so much exultation, My lord, Your Lordship’s Most humble, most obedient Servant,

S. J. (*Letters*, i.97)

¹ R. Harré, ‘Philosophical Aspects of the Macro-Micro Problem’, in *Advances in Social Theory and Methodology: Toward an Integration of Micro- and Macro-Sociologies*, ed. Karin Knorr-Cetina and Aaron Victor Cicourel (Boston, MA: Routledge, 1981), pp. 139-160, pp. 140, 147.

This letter is a rhetorical performance, and one that Johnson reprised by dictating copies to Giuseppe Baretti and James Boswell separately. Chesterfield apparently ‘pointed out the severest passages’ of the letter, ‘and how well they were expressed’ to the printer Robert Dodsley², perhaps because of the subversive application of polite closing formulae.³ According to James Boswell, Johnson passively sanctioned its publication by stipulating which copy he favoured, ‘if it were to come into print’ (*Life*, i.141). The multiple extant manuscript copies of this letter and its shifting audiences contribute to our picture of Johnson’s attitude towards epistolarity. He insisted on the genre’s fallibility, as much as of other writings, and this is a theme in the thesis. Doubts about the letter’s abilities to facilitate authentic human connection proliferate, telling us much about the interaction between social and literary expectations.

As the letter to Chesterfield’s complex subscription demonstrates, the familiar letter is a species of writing that resists stable interpretation. This difficulty provides an opportunity for the kind of critical investigation and development undertaken in this thesis. To take advantage of the fruitful uncertainty inherent in epistolary prose, I read letters alongside kinds of other writing, such as letter-manuals, verse epistles and novels. These are all corresponding forms, and forms of corresponding. The subject of the thesis, then, is the qualities of correspondence as they were imagined and practised in the eighteenth century.

The material covered ranges from letter-manuals of the first decades of the eighteenth century, through to the ‘lives and letters’ editions of the early nineteenth, such as Anna Laetitia Barbauld’s edition of Samuel Richardson’s correspondence

² James Boswell, *The Life of Samuel Johnson, LL.D.*, 2 vols. (London, 1791), i.143.

³ Paul Korshin has analysed Johnson’s characterisation of Chesterfield’s oratorical style in his reports of debates in Parliament. Korshin suggests that Johnson’s letter may be engaging with the irony he had come to associate with Chesterfield. See ‘The Johnson-Chesterfield Relationship: a New Hypothesis’, *PMLA*, 85:2 (March 1970), 247-259.

(1804), and James Currie's of Robert Burns' (1800). I chart Alexander Pope's lasting influence on letter-writing (including Burns' interest in the letters of 'Queen Anne's reign', which he read in John Newbery's collection of exemplary letters of Pope, Swift and their circle).⁴ The bulk of the material falls around the mid-century, following *Pamela* and the establishment of a mainstream interest in the mechanics of epistolary narrative. I link novels' articulation of epistolary relationships to those of their authors. I compare manuscript letters from the latter half of the century with novels from the same period, and glance forward to John Keats, Jane Austen and letters from the Bodleian's Pigott collection, to see how manuscript culture and quotation methods altered. I detail the conversation and competition that took place between the reality of letter-writing and accounts of its ideal state.

Chapter 1 begins with the conventions that prevailed in letters of the period, and their interactions with irony and innovation. Chapter 2 demonstrates that letters allow and demand the constant readjustment of singular and plural epistolary voices. Various methods of combining one's voice with others were utilized, including some that took advantage of the epistolary form and its reputation as 'talking on paper'. Chapter 3 shows the role of mimesis in maintaining the dialogic structure of letters, and links it to contemporary theories of sympathy and sentiment. Chapters 4 and 5 apply the findings about epistolary tradition, polyphony, and sentimentalism to the letters of Laurence Sterne and Burns. In them, there is a mixture of sentiment and irony, and of individual and 'correspondent' styles, in the letters of these two celebrated authors. The conclusion discusses the editing of letters, both *in situ* and in preparation for publication. The twin ideals of spontaneity and sincerity, I conclude, have influenced the way we choose to edit letters in scholarly publications.

⁴ All references to Burns' letters will be taken from *The Letters of Robert Burns*, ed. G. Ross Roy, 2 vols., 2nd edition (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1985), i.xlv. See Newbery, *Letters on the Most Common, as well as Most Important Occasions in Life*, 5th edn. (London, 1760).

Richardson's fiction has occasioned much critical commentary on the links between the growth of the novel and the letter as a vehicle for prose fiction. Robert Adams Day's *Told in Letters* (1966) and Frank Black's *The Epistolary Novel in the Late Eighteenth-Century* (1940) charted the popularity of the epistolary novel (before and after Richardson, respectively). More generally, Ian Watt's landmark study *The Rise of the Novel* (1957) linked the development of the novel to the phasing out of the epistolary narrative structure. Literary scholars have paid less attention to the generic expectations created by non-fictional letters. But letters had their own stylistic parameters that were reflected in their fictional counterparts, which in turn contributed to the evolution of the novel.

Richardson is a significant figure in epistolary history because his fiction has shaped how we view eighteenth-century letters as a whole. Reading his familiar epistolary style deepens our understanding of how his novels are structured. This thesis shows that modes of representing speech and thought that are usually attributed to the novel have epistolary roots. Johnson's letters appear with some frequency because his critical appraisals of Pope's letters were formative of expectations of spontaneity and sincerity in letters. Sterne and Burns' letters receive extensive analysis because they illustrate the fluidity of quotation and conventions of sensibility discussed in the preceding chapters. Rather than focus on the letters within a circle, or coterie of correspondents, I have charted the inter-generational development of the epistolary style from the beginning of Richardson's career as a novelist through to the end of Burns' extant letters. The thesis follows the growth and change of epistolarity, noting where aspects of style interleave and diverge across time and social or familial groupings.

In general, the selection of letter-writers in anthologies and works of criticism does not honour the epistolary style for itself. Howard Anderson, Philip Daghljan, and Irvin Ehrenpreis's *The Familiar Letter in the Eighteenth Century* (1966) and Bruce Redford's *The Converse of the Pen* (1986) deal with literary figures whose reputations were founded in genres other than the letter (with the exception of Lord Chesterfield and Lady Mary Wortley Montagu). More recently, Clare Brant's *Eighteenth-Century Letters and British Culture* (2006) and Susan Whyman's *The Pen and the People* (2009) have rectified the bias towards writers of non-epistolary genres by selecting letter-writers who better represent the epistolary style as it was created and experienced by the majority.

I have sought to tread a middle ground. Because of my interest in the interaction between the fictional and semi-fictional letters of the public imagination created in manuals, novels and verse epistles, I have structured the thesis on and around authors who made significant contributions to the way letters were viewed during the eighteenth century. By way of contrast with these examples, I have drawn on the letters of non-literary figures wherever possible to illustrate that differences in style between them and literary letter-writers are of degree, not of kind. This method will expose the dialogic qualities of letter-writing, by showing the interaction between 'literary' and 'non-literary' communication.

The later chapters look at two authors whose letters have been disparaged by critics since their appearance in print. The letters of Sterne and Burns have been deemed stilted; yet both authors were part of an epistolary tradition defined by a simultaneous desire to let sentiments flow freely, and a cynicism about such efforts. George Kitchen summarised Sterne's efforts as 'falsity and apparent heartlessness barely disguised by what often looks like a canting appeal to the heart'. But for the

defence, ‘Sterne’s cant is to be in great part referred to the cant of the day, the cant of “nature”’.⁵ My thesis sets out to answer these prevailing accusations by situating particular correspondences within the epistolary tradition, an effort which involves deciphering its coded phraseology, or ‘cant’.

Convention and innovation

Chapter 1 uses *Rambler* 152’s insistence on letters’ amorphous formal qualities as a touchstone from which to stress the tension in eighteenth-century writing between precept and performance, between manuals and correspondence. I argue that the conventions of super- and subscription are essential to the letter genre. Critics and editors of Richardson’s work have ignored such conventions despite the obvious fact that the epistolary form – and its rhetoric of spontaneity and sincerity – dominated his writing, both fictional and personal.

Letter-manuals insisted on ‘natural’ and ‘unaffected’ language, which created pressure to adopt a pose of epistolary negligence. This convention always threatens to lapse into cliché, but also serves as a framework for creativity. There was an ethical dimension to the need to balance convention and innovation, as Johnson hoped writers would ‘recommend known truths’ by lending them novelty. Polite language could be harnessed for subversive purposes, but there was also pressure to make grammatical and social subordination converge on one another. I demonstrate that this was particularly the case at the point of epistolary subscription, which represents a heavily codified address.

By analysing subscriptions in manuscript correspondence, dedicatory epistles, and novels, I show how conventions could be adapted to reflect varying social

⁵ George Kitchin, review of *Letters of Lawrence Sterne*, ed. Lewis Perry Curtis, *The Modern Language Review*, 32:1 (January 1937), 99-101, p. 101.

realities. The sphere of epistolary reference could embrace the general social circle. Such evidence points to letters as a communal form, ‘familiar’ in the sense of relating to the family. I use the valedictory paragraphs of servant characters in *The Expedition of Humphry Clinker* (1771) and *Clarissa* (1747-8), to uncover the cultural significance of the ubiquitous phrase ‘your humble servant’. Following on from these fictional examples, subscriptions in the final flurry of letters between Samuel Johnson and Hester Thrale reveal the social and moral import of the manner of leave-taking in letters, and thus of manifestations of convention in general.

Epistolary polyphony

To understand the characteristics of eighteenth-century epistolary voices, chapter 2 argues that we must work out how voices were delineated, separated and combined. As this chapter demonstrates, ‘concordia discors’ and ‘discordia concors’ were variously employed in dialogic texts such as letters and written debates. Contrasting epistolary styles were brought into agreement by tailoring letters to the particular requirements of a correspondence.

As well as in the contrasting styles of the writers, correspondence could be polyphonous by capturing a succession of moments. Though Richardson’s assertion that his characters write ‘to the *Moment*’ was controversial, the fiction of spontaneity was one that many letter-writers found useful.⁶ Writing for the ‘occasion’ was another term that applied to letters’ proclivity for capturing a moment. I demonstrate how occasional writing worked in Pope’s *Epistle to Arbuthnot* (1735) and in the stages of his letters’ publication, which he claimed were ‘fresh from the occasion’. I expand on

⁶ *Grandison*, Preface, i.4.

the theme of the 'occasion' to highlight the letter's deictic qualities: the epistolary 'now' imagines the recipient at the time of the letter's reading.

A shared epistolary occasion could contribute towards a voice that was distinct to a correspondence, rather than to any of the individual letter-writers. Because 'concordia discors' obscures the voice of the individual, I turn the focus to the role of possessive pronouns in negotiating the dynamics of collective epistolary styles. I demonstrate that pronouns and group modals were points of contention in personal and fictional letters. Attributing words to an individual can be difficult in a period in which the typographic rules of quotation were fluid. I enumerate quotation methods in a variety of poetic and epistolary texts, and conclude that typographic uncertainty provided a creative opportunity for letter-writers to combine their voices with that of others.

Epistolary mimesis

Whereas chapter 2 surveys the polyphonic collation of voices within correspondence, chapter 3 charts the mimetic habits of letter-writers, and the implications that were felt to follow from impersonation. Imitation of one's correspondent could be a rhetorical strategy to persuade, it could tease, or it could strengthen a social bond by inviting participation in a shared language. The dialogic structure of letters lends itself to mirroring effects. Letter-manuals, not least Richardson's *Familiar Letters* (1741), worked on the principle that letters provided a model of conduct that could be passed on to the reader by imitation of the manual's epistolary style.

Optimists saw the act of imagining one's reader within a letter – and the consequent imitation of them that ensued – as a strategy to 'talk on paper' and bridge distance. But there were doubts about the moral efficacy of epistolary mimesis.

Though his novels used letters as a potent narrative strategy, Richardson's 'personation' of vice-ridden characters worried some readers. In his own letters, he mimicked his correspondents in order to bring them to agree with him. Richardson's interest in going into character points to similarities between letters and drama. The fictional letters in *The History of Sir Charles Grandison* (1753) that imitate closet drama and the mimicry that peppers his personal letters provide evidence of the interaction between these two dialogic genres.

Considering reader-response is particularly apt in the case of letters, because they generically invite replies and are texts that address themselves explicitly to a readership. Mimesis, as this chapter goes on to argue, can be sympathetic as well as oppositional. Medical and literary theories of affect are germane to the discussion about epistolary style, because it was often claimed that letters were written 'from the heart'. The rhetoric of sentimental correspondence echoed the pre-existing model of spontaneity serving as proof of sincerity.

Some epistolary aspects of Sterne

Because of long-held assumptions about the autobiographical aspects of his novels, and because of the fraught but influential publication history of his communications with Eliza Draper, chapter 4 opens by considering the editorial history of Sterne's letters. I argue that the texts resulting from Lydia Sterne's interventions are the naturally commonplace unification of fiction and fact. Sterne used Shandean characters in his letters to obscure his own moral failings, or for other purposes, such as seduction or intimidation. Distinguishing between these uses takes us past the critical commonplace of equating Sterne with Yorick.

Like the letter-writers of earlier chapters, Sterne reflected upon and discarded epistolary norms, to free himself from the expectations of decorum. Sterne's letters also experiment with key themes apparent in his novels, such as sentimentalism and solipsism. The chapter moves on to consider the epistolarity of *Tristram Shandy* (1759-1767) as a property of the text which exemplifies many of the features of shared voice and address discussed in earlier chapters, because of its familial aspect.

The chapter next considers the rich array of speech indicators in Sterne's writing, drawing attention to the common ground between these indicators and epistolary techniques. Sterne's fiction demonstrates the failure of dialogic conversation as much as it does its success. I argue that the association of writing with speech was too complex to support a consistent division of listening and reading in Sterne's novels. Sterne's writing underlines the limitations of sentimental communication in both novels and letters, and acts as a counterpoint to the Richardsonian aspiration to converse at a distance.

The letters of Robert Burns

Chapter 5 aims to place Burns' epistolary strategies in context and to go some way towards vindicating his reputation as a prose writer. Burns used tropes of modesty to excuse his 'matter-of-fact' epistles, which some critics have taken as a cue to dismiss their aesthetic value. However, Burns was an epistolary 'trifler,' using letters to elaborate on poetic personae within a playful yet modest framework. Rather than read his letters as stilted or dismiss them as conventional, I aim to recover Burns' irreverent engagement with the eighteenth-century lineage of epistolary expression.

Burns' letters subvert order and scale in a similar way to his poetry, exposing literary and moral conventions in the process. However, editors have found Burns' prose 'habitual expressions' harder to bear than his poetic ones. Burns had a difficult relationship with prose, but used 'trifling' as a cover for his feelings of moral and stylistic inadequacy.

While he feigned disdain for Johnson and Sterne's styles, Burns enjoyed using letters to experiment with imitation of the writers who had informed his view of the genre. In sum, these literary references show Burns' cognisance of epistolary tradition, particularly in the sentimental mode. They confirm the epistolary as a distinct style, one that Burns found conducive to reconciling and elucidating the 'antithetical' parts of his mind.

Epistolary revision

The conclusion draws on recurring themes in the thesis in order to consider the revision of letters. I trace the negotiations between present and future concerns (with regard to publication) that took place in the Johnson-Thrale and Richardson-Bradshaigh correspondences. Richardson wanted his past and present selves to 'agree', and didn't shy away from editing his letters for publication. I compare the aims Richardson had for his correspondence with his attempts to produce definitive editions of *Pamela* and *Clarissa*. Revision was integral to letter-writing, even as a form of pre-emptive self-censorship, so cumulatively the layers of change stand in the way of the current desire for definitive editions of epistolary novels and letters alike.

In closing the thesis, I offer an appraisal of the *Cambridge* edition's procedures, pointing out that the *Cambridge* editors seek to re-create Richardson's

letters as they were 'first seen' by the recipient(s), and therefore to generate a fictionally unified text. The conclusion also traces the succeeding editorial treatments Burns' letters have received, and considers how this influences their reputation in relation to his poems. In considering the editorial challenges posed by the afterlives of letters (premeditated and otherwise), I reflect on the topics that have characterised the thesis: the interplay of convention with innovation, of spontaneity with sincerity, of plural identity with singular. Discussing these dialogic aspects is an essential element of critical readings that correspond with, and to, the eighteenth-century letter.

CHAPTER 1

CONVENTION AND INNOVATION

In *Rambler* 152 (1751), Samuel Johnson suggests that any attempt to describe the ‘epistolary style’ would lead to ‘critical embarrassments’. This is because ‘letters are written on all subjects, in all states of mind, and on all occasions’ and ‘cannot be reduced to any settled rules, or described by any single characteristic’.¹

Nevertheless, Johnson attempts to find a general principle that unites all letters, by suggesting that ‘a letter has no peculiarity but in its form’. Form might be understood as the physical state of letters as sent objects, or as the structural features that characterise them as linguistic interaction. During the eighteenth century, letters commonly existed in a variety of media: in print or manuscript, or in printed facsimiles of manuscripts.² In terms of their literary genre, letters appeared as prose or verse, and sometimes as a mixture of both. Letters were drafted in letter-books and never sent, or improved once sent, returned to the writer, or preserved in the writer’s own fair copy.

The growth of the epistolary novel reflected the fact that letters were increasingly used as narrative vehicles: they could be fictional, non-fictional or semi-fictional. These writings all have their own configurations, but they all share epistolary traits. Despite this array of epistolarities, Johnson’s statement about the letter’s ‘peculiarity’ suggests that it is a genre where meaning is affected by the text’s material state, and – like other genres – by its engagement with established rhetorical

¹ *Works*, v.45.

² Some publications reproduced details of letter manuscripts, such as watermarks and seals. Sir John Fenn’s letter collection, for example, was ‘authenticated by engravings of autographs, facsimiles, paper marks, and seals’. See Sir John Fenn, *Original Letters*, 4 vols. (London, 1787), title page.

figures common to the category of writing to which it belongs.

This chapter compares manuscript and manual letters in order to elucidate the peculiarities of the letter. It will examine the relationship of convention to cliché, and the significance of this relationship to the culture of the polite letter. Following on from the discussion of accepted epistolary traits, the chapter considers the communal aspects of familiar (that is, familial) correspondence. As letters are sometimes regarded as synonymous with their opening and closing salutations, the chapter gives particular weight to these portions of the Richardson-Bradshaigh and Johnson-Thrale correspondences.

Rambler 152 was quoted by a number of letter-manuals, in an attempt to define the epistolary style, though Johnson's essay is quite vague in terms of what it suggests should be present in the epistolary style:

It had [...] been of advantage, if such of our writers as have excelled in the art of decorating insignificance, had supplied us with a few sallies of innocent gaiety, effusions of honest tenderness, or exclamations of unimportant hurry. (v.44)³

It could equally have been a few gay sallies of innocence, effusions of tender honesty, or unimportant exclamations of hurry. The key is the parallel clause structure. This proves Johnson's point about letters: they must 'fill up the vacuities of actions by agreeable appearances', but how the vacuity is best filled is up to the individual. Johnson's essay was the mainstay of letter-manual introductions, despite, or because, of its view of the letter as a flexible genre. Letter-manuals' influence on actual epistolary practice is questionable, but the popularity of *Rambler* 152 makes the essay's axiom, '[p]recept has generally been posterior to performance,' (v.44) all the more appropriate.

³ Manuals quoting Johnson, without attribution, include *The Accomplished Letter-Writer or Universal Correspondent* (London, 1779). See Eve Tavor Bannet, *Empire of Letters: Letter-manuals and Transatlantic Correspondence, 1680-1820* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), p. 45.

Rambler 152 was informed by Johnson's experience of reading and writing, but it reflected the epistolary habits of others. For example, in a letter to Richardson dated only a few months before the publication of *Rambler* 152, Hester Mulso described her epistolary style in a manner that resembles Johnson's 'sallies of innocent gaiety' formula. Referring to herself in the third person out of deference to Richardson, Mulso thanks him for 'bestowing so much time and pains on one who [...] [has] nothing to entertain you with but the rude essays of an ignorant girl, the unconnected sallies of a wild imagination, with but little judgement to direct or control it.'⁴

Other than its peculiar form, a primary characteristic of the epistolary style that Johnson mentions is the letter's porous boundary with other genres of writing: 'nothing is necessary to be refused admission into a letter which is proper in any other method of treating the same subject' (v.45). Johnson's sense of the letter's porous generic status is echoed in Thomas O. Beebee's argument that 'as processes of news gathering and news distribution developed during the early modern period, letter fiction provided a shadow forum in which "news from everywhere" served various functions of defamiliarization.' While Beebee primarily concerns himself with 'collections of fictional letters', the 'unstable status' of the works he looks at comes from the epistolary ability to encompass 'fiction, sermon, news, and gossip [...] novel, and satire'.⁵ Letters could be conceived of as characteristically changeable; seemingly without conventions of their own. Or maybe the difficulty in finding 'settled rules' for letter-writing stems from the gap between theory and practice – which may itself be likened to an interrupted epistolary correspondence – and the interaction between letters and other genres.

⁴ 3 January 1751, Hester Mulso to Samuel Richardson, in Barbara Eaton, *Yes Papa! Mrs Chapone and the Bluestocking Circle* (London: Francis Boutle, 2012), p. 53.

⁵ *Epistolary Fiction in Europe 1550-1850* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), p. 79.

Studied ease

Familiar letters fall between the third and fourth permutations of ‘familiar’, as defined in Johnson’s *Dictionary* (1755): ‘[u]nceremonious; free, as among persons long acquainted’; ‘[w]ell known; brought into knowledge by frequent practice or custom.’

Manuals stipulating the formal features of familiar letters testify to a need for conventions that demonstrate mutual respect and politeness. A letter may be warm and unceremonious, but it cannot be free of the epistolary conventions that entail its being sent via the post, carrying a direction, and very often, formulaic super- and subscriptions. Free expression within the bounds of a familiar form – that is, definition four in Johnson’s *Dictionary*), ‘brought into knowledge by frequent practice or custom’ – is a familiarity borne of archetypal letters between hypothetical family members in manuals, and of copybooks, in which people learning to write imitated letters received, and written by, their family.⁶

A familiar convention offered the chance simultaneously to conceal and reveal feelings. This way of construing the familiar is comparable with some definitions of polite language, such as that used in Carey McIntosh’s analysis of conduct books and letter-manuals in the development of English prose. McIntosh draws on Brown and Levinson’s work on the universality of politeness in language, where politeness is thought of as ‘an expression of reciprocal needs, the need for approval and the need not to be impeded or hindered.’⁷

The prevalent uncertainty about whether, and how, letters could truly enact and sustain familiarity, is reflected in Johnson’s ambiguous definition of ‘familiar’.

Despite his use of a quotation in his 1755 definition of ‘letter’ from a letter-manual that

⁶ Susan Whyman, *The Pen and the People: English Letter Writers 1660-1800* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), p. 34.

⁷ *The Evolution of English Prose 1700-1800* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), p. 216.

espoused the traditional view that ‘the stile of letters ought to be free, easy, and natural; as near approaching to familiar conversation as possible’, Johnson’s suggestion that familiarity only comes with ‘frequent practice’ complicates the picture. Unceremonious, yet polite, familiarity can be achieved only through participating in epistolary correspondences and observing rules of style in context. Writing an unceremonious letter that also avoided vulgarity was a delicate process, and required the adjustment of style letter-by-letter.

Eve Bannet has shown that letter-manuals balanced the need for ‘natural’ expression with proper ‘art’ by ‘incorporating both terms of the opposition’ (43).⁸ *The Court Letter-Writer* told its readers to write ‘as we speak, deliberately, without art, and without affectation’, but also warned that ‘[f]ar greater exactness is required for writing than speaking’.⁹ This approach was useful for commentators who wanted to align balanced diction and good conduct, but it also led to directions that could seem self-defeating, as when *The Complete Letter-Writer* warned that when ‘Elegance’ is the aim, ‘the Labour is often seen, and the End perverted by the very Means’.¹⁰

Bannet’s assertion that letter-manuals constantly incorporated ‘both terms of the opposition’ suggests a general point about the way they functioned. Manuals provided good examples of the epistolary form, but were less able to demonstrate to readers how to construct the right phrases for themselves. Letter-manuals’ failure to resolve the contradiction between ease and elegance shows that having difficulty finding the right words to use is a natural part of epistolary exchange.

Eighteenth-century writers were constantly discussing the ways in which their letters could be construed as either ‘natural’ or ‘studied’; their use of conventional forms and their self-reflexive commentary on the nature of their art are in themselves

⁸ *Empire of Letters*, p. 43.

⁹ *The Court Letter-Writer* (London, 1773), pp. 42-3.

¹⁰ *The Complete Letter-Writer*, 16th edn. (London, 1778), p. 33.

signs of sincere endeavour.

The 'studied ease' paradox could be exploited for humorous and creative effect, as a letter from *The Complete Letter-Writer* (1756) reveals. This oft-reprinted manual contained a letter from 'Miss J— To Miss Lovelace, on the present Letter-Writers, and her Opinion of a well wrote Letter', which parodied the paradoxical standard of leisurely labour to which epistolary writers were supposed to aspire:

There never was a Letter wrote well, but what was wrote easily [...] And in this Easiness of Writing [...] methinks I excel even Mr *Pope* himself; who is often too elaborate and ornamental, even in some of his best Letters; though it must be confess'd he outdoes me in some few Trifles of another Sort, such as Spirit, Taste, and Sense. But let me tell Mr. *Pope*, that Letters, like Beauties, may be overdrest. There is a becoming Negligence in both; and if Mr. *Pope* could only contrive to write *without* a Genius, I don't know any one so likely to hit off *my* Manner as himself.¹¹

Pope was touted as a figure who aggravated readers with the ideal of combined 'Genius' and spontaneous 'Easiness of Writing'. Miss J's admission that she lacks 'some few Trifles' shows a lack of awareness; the letter frames a dramatic irony, in that although she draws on the register of negligence, her letter is too hastily composed to be properly polite. This letter is in turn an echo of Pope's *Essay on Criticism* (1711), in which he asserts that 'True Ease in Writing comes from Art, not Chance, / As those move easiest who have learn'd to dance'.¹² Here, Pope's stance is similar to that of letter-manuals; he deals with the contradictions of the form with pointed antithesis, by incorporating 'both terms of the opposition'.

Rambler 152 theorises on the rules governing the epistolary style, but Johnson suggests that 'precept' and speculation are not able to capture the 'art of composing' a good letter. This tension is typical of discussions surrounding epistolary style and

¹¹ *The Complete Letter-Writer; or, New and Polite English Secretary*, 2nd edn. (London, 1756), pp. 48-9.

¹² *The Twickenham Edition of the Poems of Alexander Pope*, ed. E. Audra and Aubrey Williams, (London: Methuen, 1961), i.281, ll. 362-3.

its implicit rules during the eighteenth century. (Though this is generally the case for all literary rules, which are confounded in practice; as Johnson points out, '[p]recept has generally been posterior to performance'.) Even though letter-manuals were usually prescriptive rather than descriptive, epistolary conventions did exist in real correspondence. They were learnt as the written extensions of behavioural etiquette that applied in person. They were also enforced by education, and theorised upon by letter-manuals.

Central to a letter's epistolarity is the presence of such features as superscription and subscription. A letter's form and conventions are not separate from the ideals, motives and content expressed in it. These conventions are integral to the letter's meaning. Conventions in correspondence during the eighteenth century, as Eve Bannet has observed, provided the scope for particular individual creativity. Even the presence of a superscription and subscription of the barest, most generic sort cannot be neutral. Johnson acknowledged this when he mused on beginnings at the outset of the *Rambler*:

The difficulty of the first address on any new occasion, is felt by every man in his transactions with the world, and confessed by the settled and regular forms of salutation which necessity has introduced into all languages. Judgment was wearied with the perplexity of being forced upon choice, where there was no motive to preference; and it was found convenient that some easy method of introduction should be established, which, if it wanted the allurements of novelty, might enjoy the security of prescription. (*Works*, iii.3-4)

Though Johnson is speaking of a wider set of 'occasions' than the opening of a new correspondence, his observation captures the psychological and social dilemmas that account for the existence of letter-manuals. Knowledge of the stylistic expectations that applied especially to the beginnings and ends in letters is essential to modern readings, Bannet avers, as 'without knowing what had to be said in each class of

letter [...] convention can easily be mistaken for sincerity, or repetition for originality' (59). While Bannet is right to point out the prevalence of conventions, this does not indicate a lack of sincerity in eighteenth-century letters. Rather, sincerity could not be conveyed at all without the linguistic conventions – or secure 'prescriptions', as Johnson put it – and material practicalities that supported the postal network.

In her wide-ranging study of eighteenth century letters, Susan Whyman notes the importance of changing conventions and the 'common patterns found in every type of letter'. Primarily, she observes that letters were self-reflexive; the particularities of the medium became the subject of discussion:

all writers talked endlessly about the Post Office and letter-writing, itself. They did so in every emotional mode – hilarity, disgust, anticipation, anxiety, affection, and anger. [...] These comments are generally found in the first and last paragraphs of letters, which are often deleted by editors of printed collections. Yet without knowing how contemporaries viewed letter-writing itself, we lose a crucial layer of interpretation. (22)

The omission in printed editions of parts of letters that typified the style itself has had an effect on our perception of the 'poetics' of the letter.

Samuel Richardson is a prominent example of a writer who is known for his use of the epistolary form, but whose correspondence has suffered from editorial indifference to epistolarity. The paradoxes implied by the ideal of studied ease in letters may have contributed to critical approaches that minimise the significance of the novelist's choice of form. Peter Sabor has noted the inadequacy of existing editions of Richardson's letters, namely Anna Laetitia Barbauld's *The Correspondence of Samuel Richardson* [. . .] *Selected from the Original Manuscripts* (1804), and John Carroll's *Selected Letters* (1964). Editorial policy has tended to ignore the importance of maintaining the epistolary shape of Richardson's expression: 'Carroll's slender edition contains merely excerpts from his selections:

most of his texts begin and end *in medias res*, sometimes in the midst of the discussion of a significant issue, with no indication of what or how much is being omitted.¹³ This means that the all-important mannerisms of Richardson's super- and subscriptions are not recognised as bearing upon the contents of his letters.

Richardson's epistolary activity included personal letter-writing, the composition of a letter-manual (*Letters Written to and for Particular Friends, on the most Important Occasions*, 1741), and the epistolary novels *Pamela* (1740), *Clarissa* (1747-8) and *Sir Charles Grandison* (1753-4). Epistolary features and functions occur in his work not merely as a way in to fictional narrative. While modern critics and satires contemporaneous with Richardson, such as Fielding's *Shamela* (1741), have highlighted the problems that arise from relying on the epistolary form to tell a story, epistolary conventions and techniques are an integral part of Richardson's mode of expression that transcend his purely fictional writings. His novels, semi-fictional, auto-fictional and non-fictional writings all draw upon what Richardson called the 'style and forms' of 'familiar letters' (in the full title of his letter-manual).¹⁴ By comparing Richardson's use of conventions in the surviving manuscripts of his personal letters with the letters of others, and those in letter-manuals, it may be possible to reach a better understanding of how epistolary idiolects were differentiated at the time.

Critics approaching Richardson's non-fictional work have also tended to downplay the importance of epistolary convention. For example, in his book *Samuel*

¹³ Peter Sabor, "The Job I Have Perhaps Rashly Undertaken": Publishing the Complete Correspondence of Samuel Richardson', *Eighteenth-Century Life*, 35:1 (Winter 2011), 9-28, p. 12.

¹⁴ I have borrowed the term 'auto-fictional' from Herta Müller, who uses it to describe a type of autobiography that is partly fictional. Richardson's correspondence with Lady Bradshaigh includes a narrative that expands upon the character of Mrs. Beaumont (who appears in *Grandison*), and her relationship with the mysterious 'Mr. R', who is thought to represent Richardson himself. See Louise Curran, "A Man Obscurely Situated": Samuel Richardson, Autobiography and "The History of Mrs Beaumont", *Journal for Eighteenth-Century Studies*, 36:2 (June 2013), 279-295.

Richardson: Dramatic Novelist, Mark Kinkead-Weekes attributes the dialogic elements of Richardson's novels to drama, rather than to the complex mixture of genres, including the letter, which supported written conversation during the eighteenth century. Similarly, in identifying the Biblical and conduct-book influences that informed the composition and structure of Richardson's letter-manual, Katherine Hornbeak minimises the effect of the epistolary form. She claims that Richardson was 'indifferent' to 'rhetoric', by which she means the formal properties of the letter: *Familiar Letters* 'betrays [Richardson's] complete indifference to rhetorical matters. Unlike his predecessors [...] he gives no information about forms of salutation, superscription, spelling, punctuation, and other aspects of the technique of epistolography.'¹⁵ Hornbeak creates a dichotomy between two parts of the full title of Richardson's letter-manual: the 'styles and forms to be observed in writing familiar letters', and 'how to think and act justly and prudently in all the common concerns of human life'. Although typography is not, by itself, an indication of authorial priority, it may be relevant to observe that on the title pages of all five editions of *Familiar Letters*, the words 'Letters' and 'Familiar Letters' are most prominent. The phrase 'Think and Act *Justly* and *Prudently*' is given relatively little space.

Hornbeak cites a rare instance of Richardson's abandonment of the letter in *Familiar Letters* as evidence that the author's didacticism was restricted by his choice of form. Letter 53 of *Familiar Letters*: 'From the young Lady, to the clandestine Proposer of the Match' is preceded by almost five pages of 'Instructions to young Orphan Ladies, as well as others, how to judge of Proposals of Marriage made to them without their Guardians or Friends consent, by their Milaners, Mantua-makers, or other Go-betweeners.' (These instructions are ironically undercut by the potential

¹⁵ 'Richardson's *Familiar Letters* and the Domestic conduct books', *Smith College Studies in Modern Languages*, ed. Caroline B. Bourland et. al., 19:2 (January 1938), 1-29, p. 1.

for a letter to be a dangerous 'go-between'.) Despite her interest in the parallels between conduct books and letter-manuals, Hornbeak doubts that a didactic point can be made satisfactorily within a letter. She claims that the author's 'earnestness breaks through the fiction of the letter form', and that 'Richardson's preaching has been cramped by the requirements of epistolography and fiction' (31). But the letter was the natural shape for didacticism in conduct books, letter-manuals, and epistolary novels.¹⁶ Indeed, as Louise Curran notes, Richardson printed several volumes that were explicitly both moral and epistolary in the years before *Familiar Letters*:

Richardson's work was also part of a broader tradition of epistolary works, including works of moral didacticism, classical literature, and political commentary. It is worth considering, for example, that Richardson printed the second volume of Elizabeth Rowe's *The Miscellaneous Works in Prose and Verse* (1738), which included her 'letters moral and entertaining'. In the same year he printed Seneca's *Select epistles on several moral subjects [...]*.¹⁷

Letter-writing was associated with conduct literature, as letter-manuals were concerned with the decorum and morality behind certain types of letter, and the correct enactment of power relationships therein. Letter-writing, like decorum, was a daily concern that could be cultivated in certain ways. The regimen reflected the writer's social status. Epistolary style was a powerful communicable tool, which conveyed a person's aspirations and character. Letters spread ideas, both explicitly (in the 'content') and implicitly, in the 'illocutionary force' of the message.

Richardson was sometimes ambivalent about the 'little Volume' (the *Letters Written to and For Particular Friends*) to which he owed the beginning of his career

¹⁶ See Frank Black, *The Epistolary Novel in the Late Eighteenth Century*, (Eugene: University of Oregon, 1940).

¹⁷ *Samuel Richardson: The Author as Correspondent* (University College, London, Ph. D., 2011), p. 49.

as a novelist.¹⁸ However, his letter-manual is a work in which the author's moral agenda and his rhetorical sensibilities, manifested in his use of epistolary conventions, are inseparable.

Rather than dividing letters into categories based on their supposed degree of fictionality, such as those which articulate imaginary worlds (as in novels), those which express social realities (as in real correspondence), and those which try to shape an ideal world through model letters (as in letter-manuals), it is more accurate and useful to recognise that these genres of letters permeate one another. There is idealism, artistry, pragmatism, convention and deviance in all of these epistolary media.

Epistolary form and content are indistinguishable; to draw a philosophical parallel, there can be no Cartesian division between the mind (moral message) of the model letters and their textual bodies. Letter-writing was even seen by some as an affirmation of physical selfhood: the points of super- and subscriptions enabled writers to commit their names to paper, and to reach out to their correspondents by putting their names on the same page. Johnson tried to imply a greater connection between himself and Hill Boothby by pointing out the existentially affirmative quality of correspondence:

You know Des Cartes's argument, "I think therefore I am." It is as good a consequence "I write therefore I am alive." I might give another "I am alive therefore I love Miss Boothby," but that I hope our friendship may be of far longer duration than life. (*Letters*, i.118)

Naming oneself and one's correspondent held great semantic weight in letters, and there was a great variety of address within and across letters. A letter as a

¹⁸ In a letter to Johannes Stinstra (2 June 1753), Richardson steered his correspondent away from taking an interest in his earlier work, claiming that the 'Volume of Letters is not worthy of your Perusal'. See Carroll, p. 232. *Letters written to and for Particular Friends* (London, 1741) will be given the short title *Familiar Letters* throughout.

whole could even be representative of the person who wrote it, but the subscription and the manner of valediction that precedes it holds particular (and conventional) significance. When Jonathan Swift wrote a letter of rebuke to Robert Percival, he also provided a narrative of the letter's various parts, and their symbolic and social impact. Swift begins by describing his reaction to the letter as it is presented to him: 'Seeing your frank on the outside, and the address in the same hand, it was obvious who was the writer, and before I opened it, a worthy friend being with me, I told him the subject of the difference between us'. He narrates what his expectations were: 'I was sure your answer would be extremely rude and stupid, full of very bad language in all senses'. Showing that Percival is beyond his contempt, Swift goes on to condemn the 'detestation of bad spelling, no grammar [...] an invincible want of tast' [*sic*]. Percival's bad letters are evidence of the education that, in Swift's opinion, he has clearly wasted. He declares his intention to burn any further letters from Percival 'before company': the letter is a social symbol of connectedness, and Swift's intention is a deliberate reversal of this. Finally, Swift's sarcasm extends to the matter of subscription, the naming of correspondents:

I have ordered a Copy of this Letter to be taken with an intention to print it, as a mark of my esteem for you; which however perhaps I shall not pursue; For I could willingly excuse our two names from standing in the same paper, since I am confident you have as little desire of Fame, as I have to give it you.¹⁹

As Swift indicates, the transition of a letter between manuscript and print might make the 'names [...] standing in the same paper' appear altogether different. The features of the letter that Swift enumerates in his dressing-down of Percival (frank, address, super- and subscription) distinguish the epistolary form from other prose. Editors

¹⁹ 3 January 1730, *The Correspondence of Jonathan Swift*, ed. Harold Williams, 5 vols. (Oxford: Clarendon, 1965-1972), iii.368.

from the eighteenth through to the twentieth century have ignored these features, and the conventions that surround them. If we outline their linguistic characteristics and social significance, we can then identify the innovative use of epistolary conventions by particular eighteenth-century writers.

Novelty and cliché

In her comprehensive survey of the genre, *Eighteenth-Century Letters and British Culture*, Clare Brant encourages us to read letters as a genre

made up of small interlocking parts, for instance medical letters, consolation letters, military letters, letters to the Royal Society and other intellectual communities, letters of patronage, letters of dedication, the role of letters in colonialism and imperialism, begging letters, blackmail, even the rejection letter.²⁰

Brant's categories of letter are based on the common themes and life-events dealt with in letter-manuals. While she divides letter-writing into these categories, she admits that the epistolary genre as a whole had an effect on literary activity: 'each of those parts is affected by the history of letter-writing as a whole, notably through the cumulative effect of more letters getting into print and being read by more people. The epistolary novel, for instance, increasingly assumes a reader is able to follow a special kind of narrative; periodicals and newspapers encourage particular epistolary conventions' (2).

Brant wrestles with the same difficulty of definition voiced by Johnson in *Rambler* 152, that is, letters 'cannot be properly reduced to settled rules' (Johnson); they are 'innumerable texts which share identifiable markers of genre yet do not make a stable genre' (Brant, 2). Brant's remark about the inter-generic effect of

²⁰ (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006), p. 2.

letters suggests that the 'epistolarity' of letter-writing developed through correspondence with other forms of writing, a mechanism that explains both the letter's ubiquity and its defiance of easy definition. Similarly, within the epistolary genre itself, the clichés and conventions of the 'elegant courtesy letter' developed in tandem with 'negligence, warmth and zeal' (4). Brant points out that the critical cliché of the polite eighteenth-century letter 'ignore[s] how politeness breeds its antonym, a discourse of rudeness deploying irony, satire and abuse' (4).

The use (and quite often, the deliberately contrary misuse) of conventions in letters of the eighteenth century expressed pre-existing social and linguistic realities, but also generated new, contradictory ones. Letter conventions are a framework within which new and individual expression may be formed. Convention, like cliché or dead metaphor, constitutes 'an active, structuring, probing feature of our awareness. It performs multiple functions', including the 'release of emotion'.²¹ Visually prominent conventions such as the subscription of a letter draw attention, and allow a letter-writer to define his or her relationship with the addressee within a pre-existing network of polite (and impolite) phrases.

Janet Altman has described epistolarity (at least in fiction) as 'the use of the letter's formal properties to create meaning'. The form flourishes 'at those moments when novelists most openly reflect upon the relation between storytelling and intersubjective communication and begin to question the way in which writing reflects, betrays, or constitutes the relations between self, other, and experience.'²² For Thomas Keymer, this definition rests too heavily upon the letter-instigated plot twists of novels such as *Les Liaisons Dangereuses* (1782) and as such, does not explain

²¹ Marshall McLuhan, *From Cliché to Archetype* (New York: Viking Press, 1970; 1971 edition), p. 55.

²² *Epistolarity: Approaches to a Form* (Columbus, Ohio: Ohio State University Press, 1982), p. 212.

Richardson's use of the form.²³ Nevertheless, Altman's definition highlights convention in a way that relates to letters across genres (novels and manuals alike), and goes beyond the arguments about the relative transparency and spontaneity of letter-writing which are Keymer's subject.

Altman's definition of epistolarity may be compared with that of Christopher Ricks's idea of language reinvigorated through the self-reflexive or knowing use of cliché:

The deliberate and responsible use of a cliché can foster critical self-consciousness; not a paralyzed self-consciousness of the narcissistic kind that disappears into itself, but the kind that properly grounds its imaginative flights in the cliché's unservile acknowledgement that it is a cliché.²⁴

At the point of subscription, for example, letter-writers are caught between opposing what is new, and rejecting what is known. As the author of a letter-manual, Richardson was faced with the task of teaching a letter-writing method that would encourage 'the perpetual renovation of the motives to virtue', through the 'responsible use' of the correct conventions.²⁵ The impetus behind such works, which drew so heavily upon previous publications of a similar nature, may have been summarised best of all by Johnson:

[t]he task of an author is, either to teach what is not known, or to recommend known truths by his manner of adorning them; either to let new light in upon the mind [...] or to vary the dress and situation of common objects, so as to give them fresh grace and more powerful attractions.²⁶

Johnson's conviction that 'fresh grace' was needed to adorn 'common objects' has plenty of analogues in letter-manuals. According to *The New Art of Letter-Writing*,

²³ Keymer, *Samuel Richardson's Clarissa and the Eighteenth-Century Reader* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992).

²⁴ Christopher Ricks, *The Force of Poetry* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1984), p. 364.

²⁵ *Rambler* No. 7, *Works*, iii.40.

²⁶ *Rambler* No. 3, *Works*, iii.14-5.

what distinguished letters in the same class was how far the writer followed Horace's advice to 'express common Things and Subjects as if they were not. This Manner, which is not common, is a Turn that makes what we say our own, and heightens it with the Graces of Novelty, though a Thousand others have said it before.'²⁷ Robert Dodsley emphasised the mundane eloquence of the letter in a way which echoed Johnson's point about the function of literary language more generally: '[a] fine letter does not consist in saying fine things, but expressing ordinary ones in an uncommon manner.'²⁸ *The New Art of Letter-Writing* suggests that epistolary prose should not favour style over utility; it places the 'Ear' and 'Mind' in opposition to one another, positing that features of style that occur in poetry have no place in letters. '[H]armonic Numbers', 'Epithets', 'Rhimes and Consonance' are to be avoided, as is the 'Affectation of having Periods of the same Length' (8). Johnson's famously balanced sentences would have no place in epistolary prose, according to this manual, though the syntactic character of his personal letters does not differ that much from that of his essays.

Unlike *The New Art of Letter-Writing*, *Rambler* 152 does not explicitly exclude verse from the epistolary style. While 'Rhimes and Consonance' were anathema to letter-manuals, in practice, authors such as Swift and Burns blurred the boundary between verse epistle and prose missive. Burns was known to compose verse specifically in reply to letters he received, and to send these compositions through the post. He even claimed that 'sitting down' to write prose felt more affected to him than composing lines of verse while walking.²⁹ Burns was undoubtedly unusual, but it was normal for letter-writers of the more 'common clod' to include poetic extracts in

²⁷ *The New Art of Letter-Writing* (London, 1762), p. 8.

²⁸ Robert Dodsley, *The Instructive Letter-Writer and Entertaining Companion*, 3rd edn. (London, 1769), p. 11.

²⁹ See his letter to Frances Dunlop, 29 October 1794, ii.320.

letters, and there is considerable overlap between the practices of accumulating poetry in commonplace books, and drafting letters in letter-books. So while manuals tended to exclude verse from letters, Johnson's account of letter-writing leaves open the possibility for epistles to contain poetry.

Yet while its suggestions may be unrealistic, and coloured by the rhetoric of frugality and humility, *The New Art of Letter-Writing* points to one reason for the 'embarrassment' of 'Style' (8) by convention. Letters in which a conventional pattern can be detected suggest a lack of effort to express the 'perfect Idea' of the particular circumstances relating to the writer and recipient. There is an implicit link between the 'Affectation' of prose that appeals to the ear, and a failure not only to conceal one's art, but also a failure to engage with one's recipient. Without some diversity in the 'Extent and Cadence' of its sentences, a letter might well be suspected of being a generic epistle of the kind carried by La Fleur in *A Sentimental Journey* (1768).

While *The New Art of Letter-Writing* equates a lack of 'Affectation' with what appears natural (and therefore persuasive), Johnson is more inclusive in his definition of good epistolary style. In *Rambler* 152, Johnson admits '[t]hat letters should be written with strict conformity to nature', but adds that 'it is natural to depart from familiarity of language upon occasions not familiar'. He identifies the important work done by conventions and 'Affectations': 'Wherever we are studious to please, we are afraid of trusting our first thoughts, and endeavour to recommend our opinion by studied ornaments, accuracy of method, and elegance of style' (*Works*, v.46).

Overall, *Rambler* 152 is descriptive of common habits; rather than blaming writers for using conventional phrases where a seemingly unaffected style would be the aesthetic ideal, he recognises the common urge to dress up 'common objects' to suit the occasion, and the 'figurative distortion' that may result.

Letters in the eighteenth century were increasingly ‘common objects’, used by an expanding number of literate people. Anxieties about who should have access to letters and the skills to create them may be felt in the way that letter-manuals parallel the hierarchical structure of conduct-book literature.³⁰ Ricks’s choice of diction in describing the ideal power dynamic between the cliché and the writer who uses it – ‘unservile’ – chimes with the almost ubiquitous narratives of service and friendship that defined the tone of entire epistolary relationships in manuals and in real life. Eve Bannet has written of the straining towards apparent sincerity that many letter-writers experienced when faced with maintaining the necessary fiction of a friendship that incorporated ‘service’, coupled with a theoretical equality between themselves and their correspondent:

However eloquently they might be written and however philosophical they might wax about the charms of friendship, such letters had a fundamentally politique, conventional and phatic function. Among sophisticated epistolary writers and readers, the sincerity of such letters was therefore always in question. This is evident [...] in the convention of denying the conventionality of such civilities[.] (60)

This self-consciousness about sincerity is the negative aspect of Ricks’s suggestion of self-reflexivity as the ideal way of approaching clichéd expressions. The pressure always to lend ‘fresh grace’ to a subscription might easily lead to confusion and anxiety. The reassurance that letter-manuals such as John Hill’s *The Young Secretary’s Guide* (1708) offered was a highly stratified list of formal terms of address to be used by and to different ranks of people. Superscriptions and subscriptions ‘indicated the hierarchical relationship and the degree of familiarity in which

³⁰ The reality of literate expression was often a lot more crude than some authors – such as Swift – would have liked. As Whyman has shown, distaste for the attempts of servants and the ‘lower and middling sort’ at written expression by canonical writers must be balanced against the surviving letters of tradesmen, apprentices, and servants.

correspondents thought they stood relative to each other (or in which they were pretending to stand, in order to please, flatter or persuade their addressee)'.³¹

In manuals, the hierarchically superior correspondent always named the relationship (in familial terms, for example) in the superscription, while the inferior correspondent named it only in the subscription. For instance, a father might begin 'Son' but the reply would begin 'Sir'. *The New Art of Letter-Writing* gives the following examples of subscriptions dictated by relative rank:

The Subscription closes the Letter, and, in writing to Superiors, should be conceived in very respectful Terms, as 'Your most humble and most obedient Servant, or, Your most obliged and humble Servant.' To Equals, 'Your humble and affectionate Servant, or Your Friend and humble Servant.' To Inferiors, 'Your Servant, or ready to do you a Service.' (18)

Subscriptions had formulae distinguishing between 'your servant' and the various adjectives attached to the service, depending on to whom the letter was addressed. Bannet observes that in manuals, to 'persons of quality', one added in a separate line, 'My Lord / Your Lordship / Ladyship' before the subscription. While these rules seem to uphold social hierarchy, Clare Brant points out that the parameters of super- and subscription also provided the framework for subversion and 'elegant insults'. For example, a correspondent who was owed money by a lord capitalised on the ease with which these rules could be breached: 'I have been taught to think it ill breeding, when an inferior writes to a superior to say, they are an obliged Humble Servant, and therefore with all due respect, / I have the honour to/ Subscribe myself, / Your Lordship's Most Humble Servant' (4).

³¹ Bannet, p. 60.

Sarah Fielding used the trope of humble servitude to strengthen her tie to the recipient of her letters. In a letter of 8 January 1748/9, Fielding wrote to Richardson, riffing on the implications of epistolary servitude:

'Tis but a sham quarrel between you and your pen; for had it been real, I flatter myself, that, knowing how delighted, how overjoyed, I should have been, with making your pen my master, you would have solicited him to have admitted me as his servant. Humble and faithful would I have been; I would have obeyed his call; his hours, though six, or even five, in the morning, should have been mine. Indeed, what is there I would not have done? (Barbault, ii.60)

Fielding manages to rejuvenate several clichés by combining them: the pen as metonym for the author and the 'humble and faithful' servant-correspondent. The mixture is strange enough to give the impression that Fielding is not subservient, but rather subversive. 'Female epistolizers' (as Sterne called them) became adept in the use of epistolary conventions that allowed them to express themselves in a socially acceptable, 'modest' fashion.

Fielding and Jane Collier and wrote to James Harris in 1751 expressing their thanks for a gift of his work that he had sent them. They present themselves as children to be instructed by Harris. This is a similar stance to that of asking to be the servant of Richardson's pen. Servitude and childhood are both conditions of subordination:

As little Children then Sir give us leave to consider ourselves, and as our kind Instructor accept our thanks for turning our studies from the barren Desarts of arbitrary words, into cultivated Plains where amidst the greatest variety we may in every part trace the footsteps of Reason, and where how much soever we wander, yet with such a guide we may still avoid [...].³²

³² 28 December 1751, *The Correspondence of Henry and Sarah Fielding*, ed. Martin C. Battestin and Clive T. Probyn (Oxford: Clarendon, 1993), p. 125.

The desert of female education is mentioned several times by Fielding. She is acutely aware of her 'Ignorance', and writes frequently to Harris for advice on her translation of Xenophon. By professing a failing, or asking permission to be a subordinate, Fielding could continue her literary project, safe in the knowledge that she could not be accused of lacking self-knowledge.

Because of its ubiquity in writing and speech, the phrase 'your humble servant' was very elastic in its meaning. The 'humble servant' could be subversive; Swift used it with an undertone of contempt, rather than respect, in his fraught letters with his church betters. Swift's satire employed the obverse of polite language; his letters' insolent subscriptions are variations on the 'modest proposal'. Though Johnson's *Dictionary* noted the use of 'servant' in the non-literal sense, as 'a word of civility', the example quotation is Swift's observation of the term's antonymous meaning:

this Subjection due from all Men to all Men, is something more than the Compliment of Course, when our Betters are pleased to tell us they are our humble Servants, but understand us to be their Slaves.³³

Johnson removes 'are pleased' in quoting Swift's statement, perhaps for brevity.

Swift's construction, though, alludes to epistolary topoi of indirection and complaisance. His point suggests that letters express a relationship between grammatical and social subject-object pairings. The letter-writer offers to be subject to the recipient, while occupying the active role of syntactic subject, as in the construction 'I am yours'. Using 'servant' as 'a word of civility' rather than in its literal sense could be taken too far, though. Edmund Burke thought it was inappropriate, and a modest inversion too far, for the king to call himself the 'Servant of the People', because it was so obviously untrue. He added that he had seen 'very assuming

³³ 'The Duty of Mutual Subjection', *Three Sermons* (London, 1744), p. 3.

letters, signed, Your most obedient, humble servant.³⁴ Burke suggests that over-civility can be a cover for contempt.

That ‘humble’ could in fact mean accomplished is apparent in Richardson’s interpretation of female ‘diffidence’: ‘it is the diffidence I wish to banish [...] bashfulness, or diffidence of a person’s own merits, are but other words for undoubted worthiness’.³⁵ In writing to Sarah Wescomb, Richardson made the dual function of polite language explicit to try and draw her out of her shell. Richardson’s call for the rejection of ‘diffidence’ might suggest an antipathy for convention, which would corroborate Whyman’s extensive research into trans-generational epistolary habits of the eighteenth century:

formulaic aspects of structure and content diminished [...] the epistolary balance between self-expression and controlled use of norms tipped towards more freedom. We find a gradual contraction of elaborate forms of address, such as “My Honoured Lord” to the simpler “Sir” or “Madam”. Eventually these terms also gave way, especially amongst kin, to “dearest papa” and endearing nicknames. (22)

Whyman’s vision of greater epistolary ‘freedom’ in the foreshortening of super- and subscriptions is a simplified version of the truth.

While the formal use of titles became less obligatory towards the end of the century, expressing love and friendship never became straightforward and consistent. Even manuals of the mid-century, such as *The New Art of Letter-Writing* (1762), had to negotiate the political, double-tongued aspects of polite familiarity. The exchange between the two male friends that opens the section on familiar letters in the manual concerns a lapsed friendship, and the means with which to renew it. While the first seeks a letter from the second, he also professes a mistrust for written

³⁴ *Reflections on the Revolution in France* (London, 1790), p. 40.

³⁵ 27 August 1746, *Correspondence with Sarah Wescomb, Frances Grainger and Laetitia Pilkington*, ed. John A. Dussinger (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), p. 8.

sentiments: 'My Opinion of the Matter is that People loved before Writing was in Fashion, and that, since they knew how to write, more Lyes have been told than Truth' (46). The tone is one of admonition; even as the letter claims to find silence a just reflection of the addressee's love, it strongly implies that the correspondence should not have been allowed to lapse.

Beginning a letter with a recognition of the lengthening silence that has encroached upon the relationship between two friends is hardly the most inspiring first example of the 'familiar' letter to give, and yet this is where *The New Art of Letter-Writing* starts its enumeration of the necessary techniques involved in writing familiar letters. The ability to politely recognise epistolary neglect – and thereby (politely) demand a reply – is perhaps the first rule to learn, in a 'true Style [...] of Epistolary Intercourse', because correspondences naturally wax and wane.

It is little wonder then, that by the end of the century which had been so concerned with the forms of letter-writing, Anna Seward, the 'Swan of Lichfield', should be so well drilled in the 'art' of polite rebuke:

Tho' I have not heard from dear Mrs Price since I wrote to her on the 10th Dec[ember] – yet has not that long silence induced the slightest degree of suspicion that the Heart I have ever found so warm towards me is chilled.³⁶

The contradictory signals embedded in polite language are apparent, even in the exemplary letters of manuals which are supposed to be paragons of 'true', 'plain', or 'easy Style'. What is apparent in the double-edged politeness of the manual, is the capacity for a 'familiar' letter to turn into a contemptuous one.

³⁶ August 1797, Miss A. Seward to Mrs. Penny Price. Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Pigott d. 9, fols. 105-6.

Theory and practice

Eighteenth-century letters aimed to reconcile the call to be naturally, yet finely expressed; they aspired observe decorum without becoming subservient to it. *The New Art of Letter-Writing* contains some contradictory instructions, which result from the above reconciliations, and from the attempt to formalise the unique communication that passes between friends:

The Matter of Letters are [*sic*] all Things that may be discoursed of, without any Exception. For every Thing that can be said by Word of Mouth to a Friend present, may be written to him when he is absent. It must, however, be understood, provided Prudence permits it, as all know that it is not advisable to confide a Secret to Paper, which may be lost, and fall into other Hands. (20)

Warning that anything may be said in a letter, except that which is what one wants to impart to a friend (that which is worth keeping secret), is a crippling caveat. Were it to be observed faithfully, this warning would undo the best *Clarissa*, and would undermine the use of writing letters altogether. At first, letter-writing and conversation are said to be absolutely analogous; but this permissiveness is then qualified by 'Prudence'. Letter-manuals and fiction of the eighteenth-century shared this concern with the over-arching purview of prudence; in Fielding's *Tom Jones* (1749), for example, prudence is a key 'virtue' which the protagonist must cultivate. In *The New Art of Letter-Writing*, 'Prudence' is a signal to the reader to use his or her common sense, and a way for those producing the manual to forgo responsibility, having no way of gauging the magnitude of the 'Secrets' their readers might wish to 'confide'. That one could 'confide [...] to Paper' highlights the material nature of correspondence, and suggests that paper itself as an intervening party between writer and recipient.

Letter-manuals are caught between offering a picture of ideal, moral behaviour in written form, and offering pragmatic advice for readers facing what their title pages call the 'Common Concerns of Human Life'. Living and writing well become synonymous when, as Altman states, writing 'constitutes the relations between self, other, and experience.' Susan Wright has shown how letters of the seventeenth century expressed the relative distances between correspondents on the grammatical level using deictics, which in turn have a profound ontological significance.³⁷ Letters are a confirmation of the existence of the writer, and are performative as well as informative: they include promises of service, and other speech acts. Super- and subscriptions define the relationship between the writer and addressee, and their regulation in letter-manuals, therefore, constitutes an attempt to create the ideal relationship 'between self, other, and experience.'

Even in writing to enemies, some letter-writers maintained phrases belonging to epistolary convention. A demand for remittance from Jo McLaren, a Highland Soldier, to the man who stole his 'Durk' and 'scarbard' exhibits some of the phrasing and diction one might expect in a friendly business letter:

Stoketoun on Tease November 3^d 1775

Sir

I have wrotte to you once about my
Durk, with the scarbart thereon and the Knife
and Fork one the scarbard thereof, that you
with order of your Black-guard crew
Toke of me with Botting, and Boisery
Brising to the Effusion of my Blood, and this tim
I take the opputunity to writte to you to be
Fourthcoming for the same, it will cost
you Dear unless you will, Remitte the
whole to one Mr. Joseph Nillson A

³⁷ 'Private Language Made Public: The Language of Letters as Literature', *Poetics*, 18 (1989), 549-78, p. 552.

young Gentleman in this place any time
 he will Ether call or writte for it, For it was
 For Bould in you or your, to ūse me in the
 forsd Robbing way without a cawse
 For I served his Majyste with my Durk,
 Thirty years ago with honour, where Nether you
 nor yowr Robing High-way Pake could set
 your face to the same [t]his all at present
 From Jo: MLaren³⁹

The phrase ‘I take the opputunity to writte to you’ has some of the indirection that McIntosh ascribes to the ‘nominal’ style that developed during the eighteenth century.⁴⁰ By making his point less directly – rather than simply ‘I write to you’, McLaren ‘takes the opportunity to write’ – the writer shows that he is aware of epistolary culture and its conventions. As such, he demands to be respected as a member of polite society; this point is underlined by the claim he makes to patriotic regard, having ‘served his Majyste [...] with honour’. McLaren’s use of ‘you or your’ shows that he is unsure about how the ‘Pake’ operates, whether his assailants should be addressed in the plural or whether he should focus on the ringleader. Adding ‘your/yowr’ to ‘you’ creates a repeating construction, which acts as a plural ‘you’ at a time when the distinction between ‘you were’ and ‘you was’ was in decline.

The letter features a mixture of English and Scottish orthography, especially in the words describing violence: ‘Botting’, ‘Boisery’, ‘Brising’. These words have an onomatopoeic effect. The strength of McLaren’s feeling is mediated by a gesture towards a traditional subscription: ‘[t]his all at present’. The collector of this letter, Francis Douce, notes this letter came to him with the sword in question, which shows that the letter and the object with which it is most concerned have been regarded as complementary specimens of some kind. McLaren’s letter in demand of remittance is

³⁹ Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Douce d. 1., fol. 122^r.

⁴⁰ ‘Noun and verb in English may be taken as polar opposites, with finite action verbs at one end of the spectrum and abstract nouns at the other. A text that dependsheavily on nouns, that seems to shy away from action verbs, may be called “nominal.” See *The Evolution of English Prose*, p. 33.

certainly more colourful than those usually found in letter-manuals, but it shows the ubiquity of introductory and valedictory phrases.

The theoretical importance of the subscription as set forth in letter-manuals was somewhat undermined by the widespread custom of postscripts, often as ‘remembrances’. *The New Art of Letter-Writing* advocates prudence at the point of signature, to ensure that no other person can falsify a statement using a signed document. The format of handwritten texts is described in a way that does not take into account the existence of postscripts:

It is usual among the Polite, to sign their Names at a considerable Distance below the Conclusion of the Letter, and thereby leave a large vacant Space over their Names; which, tho’ customary, is much better avoided, because it is putting it in the Power of any one who has your Letter, to write what he pleases over your Name, and to make you in all Appearance sign a Writing you would by no Means have set your Hand to. (18)

Here, the letter-manual openly favours the creation of prescriptive convention over the description of what is already ‘customary’. Many letters of the eighteenth century held at the Bodleian Library (MS Pigott d. 9, for example) have postscripts, in effect, both above and below the signature. W. Herbert writes to Mr. Lambert, parallel with the date and superscription, ‘P. S. I wrote in the parcel’ (fol. 10^r). Postscripts are an integral part of the familiar letter; they are prime evidence of a person writing up until the moment of sending.

The New Art of Letter-Writing, in seeking to warn against the possibility of a falsified statement, does not allow for protracted composition. Yet letters weren’t always written in one sitting, the writer’s pen progressing – without digression – down the page. Ricks points out the ordinariness of Keats’ practice of writing his superscription last. This trick has pathos because of ‘the sheer ordinariness of the

stratagem (known to any lover who has ever needed to write a letter where he has no privacy)⁴¹:

I do not write this till the last, that
no eye may catch it.

My dearest Girl,

I wish you could invent some means to make me at all happy without you.⁴²

The visual structure of letters – including the spaces left between the valedictory statement and the signature – reflects the relationship between author and reader. Staggered lineation at the end of a letter was an ostentatious use of paper, as several lines of valediction create blank spaces in the surrounding area. It was a sign of respect to end with an ostentatious vow of friendship; Johnson occasionally took a whole page for his subscriptions. The title pages of printed works often have a staggered paragraph at the bottom, refining itself to a smaller point. Staggering the subscription of a letter is another example of this form, and perhaps there is a correlation between the structure of epistolary endings and the triangular diminishments of printed title pages. Dedication letters that prefaced printed works had especially extravagant subscriptive staggering. A particularly elongated example of this appeared in a miscellany attributed to William Walsh, *Original Poems and Translations. By Several Hands* (1714):

⁴¹ *Keats and Embarrassment* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1974), p. 179.

⁴² August (?) 1820, Keats to Fanny Brawne, *The Letters of John Keats*, ed. Hyder Edward Rollins, 2 vols. (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1958), ii.311. All references will be to this edition.

vj DEDICATION.

make, for Speaking to You of Your Self
A Subject, that no body but Your Lord
ship can ever be tir'd with.

I am,

(with all possible Respect,)

My LORD,

Your LORDSHIP's

most Humble,

most Obedient, and

most Devoted Servant

DEDICATION:

*Go on, then, great and worthy Sir:
Prosper and be Mighty; Shine at the
Head of Politeness and Literature, and,
long, enjoy the Fruits of your learned
Labours; Fame, Fortune, Favour and
Applause: All which, as they are your
Due, so they are the hearty Wish of,*

Witty SIR,

Your constant Reader, Admirer,

And most faithful Friend

And humble Servant,

The Author.

THE

Left: *Original Poems and Translations* (1714), ij.
Right: *Gulliveriana* (1728).

The dedication to Thomas Holles Pelham takes a new line for every superlative modifier. It is a longer subscription than most, because of the extra line given over to the redundant parentheses. Such dedications to patrons were noted for their excessive use of space, to the point where the style was satirized in Jonathan Smedley's miscellany *Gulliveriana* (1728). The author makes out the dedication in this work to himself, as 'our present Set of Patrons and Encouragers of learned and ingenious Men have been push'd very hard, of late, in Poems, Epistles, Dedications, &c'. The vocabulary of dedication is made ridiculous when it is used for self-praise.

Authors took care to arrange the words of printed and manuscript letters to replicate the physical and social gestures of in-person conversation. As Christopher Ricks illustrates in *Keats and Embarrassment*, Keats evocatively describes body language in his letters. Ricks notes the influence of Sterne in Keats' letter's 'elaboration of physical posture, in its punctuational dashes and quirks, and in its surprising rescinding of what it has just said' (167). But Keats went a stage further by uniting physical leave-taking and epistolary leave-taking when he referred to his final epistolary subscription as an 'awkward bow' (ii.360). Perhaps this makes explicit a link between the physical gesture of bowing and the spatial arrangement of writing in subscriptions at the end of printed dedications. In the absence of real physical interaction, however, Keats lamented what he saw as the limitations of these Sternian techniques:

Writing has this disadvan[ta]ge of speaking. one cannot write a wink, or a nod, or a grin, or a purse of the Lips, or a *smile*—*O law!* One can-[not] put ones finger to one's nose, or yerk ye in the ribs, or lay hold of your button in writing – but in all the most lively and titterly parts of my Letter you must not fail to imagine me, as the epic poets say, now here, now there [...].¹

But for others, the physical presence of a writer could easily be projected onto the letter. The body of a letter was governed by standards of privacy and decency, like the human body. Lord Hervey admonished Stephen Fox for not using an envelope (which not everyone could afford, admittedly). The reasons seem to be to do with politeness and pragmatism, but Hervey's comments also confirm Ricks's sense of letter-writers' need to police the borders of readership:

I desire you would always put your letters in covers, for at best they are not very legible; and when they are nudities, I tear them all to pieces in opening,

¹ 7-27 September 1819, Keats to George and Georgina Keats, *Letters*, ii.205.

which makes the deciphering of them so infinitely difficult and laborious, that I am sure it would pose Mr Wills himself.²

Hervey's word for the uncovered letters – 'nudities' – reminds us of the material practicalities of letter-writing, and that these weren't necessarily as ordered as they appear in printed editions. Similarly, the ideals set out in some letter-manuals were not representative of the chaos of epistolary practice.

The signature of a letter, despite the fears expressed in *The New Art of Letter-Writing*, is not the final stamp of authority. Postscripts – even those that appear above the superscription – are used consistently as a way to distinctly switch the tone or genre of the letter. Often the postscript makes reference to the readership beyond the direct addressee: the author's compliments or remembrances are offered to the receiver's household, relatives, and friends in the vicinity. A letter appearing in the Bodleian Pigott manuscript, written by Mr. King (26 June, 1828), takes this necessary function of the end of a letter as lightly as possible.³ King, in recognition that he has clogged the last remaining spaces on his sheets of paper with recommendations and remembrances, makes a joke of his bad space management by way of apology: 'but here I am – at the end of my Letter. scarcely room enough left to beg you will accept my best wishes and remember me very kindly to my friends.' Yet even this apology is not enough, as the list of people to whom he wishes to be 'remembered' spills over to the ungainly reverse side of the paper: 'to Mr. S[...]t and Mr. Don[...], Mr. Caley [...] Fiddle faddle' (fol. 22^{r-v}). King's admission that all the formulae of 'remembrance' are degenerating into barely legible scribbles is endearing. The propriety of ending a letter with the remembrance of mutual friends, and the dismissal of such propriety as an ever-diminishing mantra of names that amounts to 'fiddle

² 14 November 1732, in *The Oxford Book of Letters*, ed. Frank and Anita Kermode (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), p. 85.

³ Letter fols. 20-22.

faddle', are juxtaposed. The humorous spark in King's admission of defeat succeeds in playfully conveying his affection for the addressee, and as such it is perhaps a good example of a 'familiar' letter. King's expression of familiarity is achieved because of the size and shape of paper that he chose to write upon, and as such his unique gesture of affection could not be represented accurately in a letter-manual or epistolary novel.

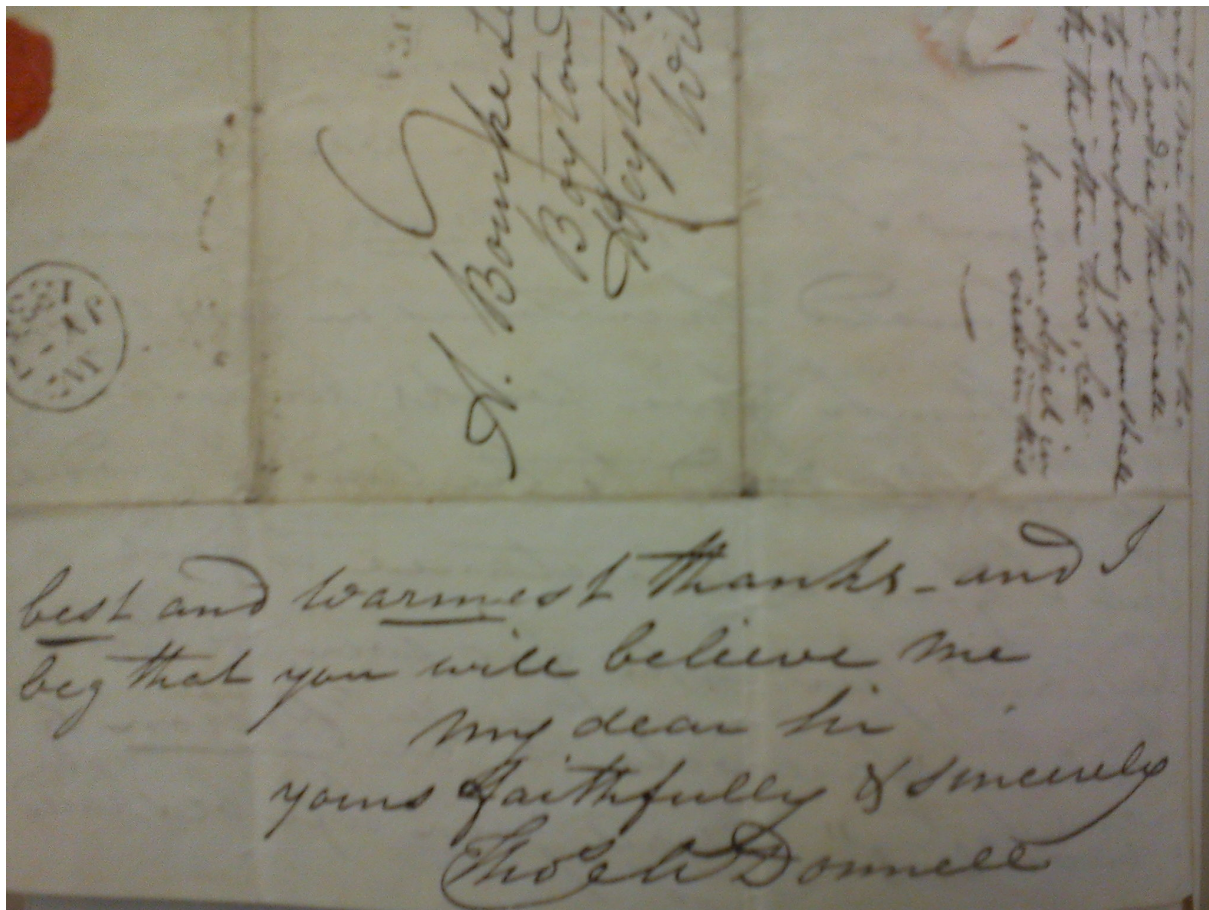
The effect of familiarity upon the formulae of politeness in letters is not just a matter of abbreviation. In the delicate economy of space that is the three-page letter, King resorts to contracting familiar phrases into a single word. His letter to Mr. Lambert launches into its final phrase with a curious melding together of the words that begin the subscription: 'and nowMyDearSir' (fol. 22^v). While this is the last resort of a man who has filled all the available space on his paper, it demonstrates that those who used them regarded the formulae of epistolary subscription as cohesive units. George Frideric Handel grouped together the words of his valedictory phrases, even when there was enough room to separate them. In a letter to Charles Jennens, he signed himself 'Your/ mostobedientandmosthumble/ Servant'.⁴ In this case, shorthand reflects the broadly recognised conventionality of the phrase. Swift, on the other hand, developed shorthand in his letters to Esther Johnson and Rebecca Dingley to express unique intimacy between himself and his correspondents. Abigail Williams suggests that 'the abbreviated pet names provide a link between the three'.⁵

Another function of the postscript, which is far more underhand than the list of remembrances and has a more uprooting effect on the entire epistle, is the switch from a letter of gratitude, to a letter of petition, with the postscript changing the purpose of the whole document. A letter from Thomas Donnell to Mr. Lambert in the

⁴ 30 September 1749, Library of Congress, Moldenhauer Archives, Digital ID: molden 2774.

⁵ *Journal to Stella: Letters to Esther Johnson and Rebecca Dingley 1710-1713*, ed. Abigail Williams (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), xxxix.

Pigott letter collection will serve as the perfect example. Donnell wrote to Lambert on 7 July 1834 (fols. 18-19), in what appears to be a letter purely of praise and gratitude, right up until the last possible space on the paper comes to be filled. Even Donnell's gratitude is smothered by polite apology for the very existence of the letter: 'May your life be spared, my dear Sir to exercise your liberal inclinations for many years; why should I bore you with the expression of what you know you possess, my best and warmest thanks – and I beg that you will believe my, my dear Sir/ Yours Faithfully & Sincerely' (fol. 19^v). The phrase beginning 'why should I bore you' is an example of what Bannet calls 'the convention of denying the conventionality of such civilities' (60). The subscription has crept out onto the folds of the letter that normally would form part of the enclosing, blank side of the paper. On the smallest section of paper, below the address, the following postscript is written in a cramped hand: 'will you permit me to take the specimen [...] with me to Liverpool, you shall have it returned with the other two, be assured. I have an object in view in this.'



MS. Pigott. d. 9. fol. 19^v. The signature is in the bottom right corner, the address panel in the centre, and the publicly visible postscript in the upper right corner.

Given Lambert's habit of sending specimens of plants (even species as prickly as cacti) via the post, Donnell's request is not an unusual one. However, Donnell's request is the only part of the letter that requires direct action on Lambert's part, and as such its abrupt and oblique quality does not sit well with the tenor of the whole. This is mostly because the postscript changes the genre of the letter from one of thanks to one of request. While Donnell may have been delaying the point out of reluctance to ask for what he wants, the position of the postscript may in fact have been to his advantage. As it is on the outward-facing side of the paper, Lambert probably read it before he came to the lavish praise on the inside, which may have made him better disposed to grant the request than if it had come in the main body of

the letter. The chronology of reading was likely to be the reverse of writing.

Considering the letter in its three-dimensional, manuscript form is the only way to arrive at this reading of the postscript's effect. More broadly, this confirms Johnson's assertion that the letter has 'no peculiarity but in its form'.

Advice in manuals such as *The New Art of Letter-Writing*, as well as Richardson's professed belief in the purity of letters between friends, are contradicted by letters which come with a specific request, such as Donnell's. Another use for the postscript is to excuse the addressee from responding to the letter. 'I try [*sic*] you will not pain yourself [...] of answering this letter' (fol. 15^v). Even this trope, however, is subverted by the ability of polite language to imply its opposite.

Another factor that complicated the relationship between theory and practice was the shift of convention across time, and the modulations of familiarity within particular correspondences. The surviving letters from Dorothy, Lady Bradshaigh to Richardson, which have not been sanitized into fair copy form, are models of the breezy, relaxed style that one would expect of a writer capable of making use of the clichéd conventions of epistolary friendship to convey just the right level of familiarity. As it states in *The New Art of Letter-Writing*, for example, the subscription alters in the adjectives one ascribes to oneself, which are tailored to the rank of the correspondent in relation to the author. Bradshaigh's superior social position lends her stylistic choices extra weight. She is able to refer to epistolary convention, but simultaneously to distance herself from it: she places brackets around the reiterated superscription that comes between the valedictory paragraph and the subscription, for example:

I must not attempt a letter, having many engagements upon my hands. But I

remember your kind reprimands, so will not omit saying, I think myself full as well as [...] when I last had the pleasure of subscribing myself,

(Sir)

Your obliged [h]umble servant.

P – Augst 13th [175]6⁶

This could be an effort at simultaneously granting Richardson the respect due to a person worthy of this form of subscription, while dispensing with the concordant formality. Bradshaigh does after all describe her feelings upon ‘subscribing’ herself to Richardson with the necessary expression of friendship and service. The act of subscription becomes (in the absence of a longer letter) the sole performative action of the relationship.

The volume of letters relating to *Pamela* in the Forster Collection, (F. 48. E. 10) is an example of the interchange between epistolary fiction and reality in Richardson’s writing. There is some internal evidence to suggest that Richardson wanted this group of letters to be considered as a unit for publication, as letter ‘L’ is described in the index as ‘Censure of the spurious continuation of Pamela. By the writer of No. XVII of this Collection.’ Cross-references of this kind – and the presence of ‘Intended’ letters ‘Not Sent’ (fol. 74) which fill gaps in correspondence and answer questions in retrospect which weren’t replied to in real life – suggest that this ‘Volume’ should be regarded as a kind of semi-fictional collection, intended to add to previously published vindications of *Pamela*.

The continuation of life into fiction in letter form, and the presence of fiction in real letters was a feature of Richardson’s work. Just as Sterne wrote letters which were partly written in the guise of Yorick or Tristram, so Richardson’s editorial treatment of his own correspondence is in keeping with the rest of his oeuvre. Much of the work he did was to conceal the names of his correspondents, but the

⁶ FC, XI, fol. 184.

valedictory commendations of many of the letters have also been crossed out. As Susan Whyman has pointed out, the first and last paragraphs of letters are often excised from print editions, which means that the information about the writer's social network conveyed in the greetings and remembrances of the final paragraphs is lost (18).

Alterations in the manuscript that show deliberation include the deletion of entire valedictory paragraphs, which show the letters to be part of an extended network of friends and relatives. Letters between Richardson and 'a Lady in Dublin' show some degree of consistency in the deletion of valedictory compliments and 'remember me to –' formulae.

In a letter from the 'Lady in Dublin', dated 26 August 1741, Richardson has deleted the postscript, which expands the scope of the letter to a sphere of mutual acquaintances: '[w]rite to me [...] for till you do I shall never forgive myself. [Mrs. Newmans, Myra, & ye Painter desire you to accept their most humble Service.]' (fol. 54). In his reply, Richardson deleted much of the material that referred to the same circle of people: 'My humble respects to &c. &c. &c.' was the version that he intended for publication, but with the omission of respects to 'ye good Doctor, to Mrs. Newman, and your young Painter, as well as to the worthy Physician, and I should have first said to your Spouse, tho' I am not personally known to him' (fol. 67). Richardson curtails a statement about his wife's relationship with the lady in Dublin; 'she often speaks of you and miss with great Respect, and Pleasure' is omitted. The deleted phrases may seem tedious litanies of remembrance, but they do convey the social, communal aspect of the letters being sent between Richardson's household and the one in Dublin. Without the input of their respective spouses (however tenuous the link), the relationship seems more clandestine, the correspondence more intimate.

The mundane lists of people who are ‘join[ed] in the cause most cordial’ serve to change the nature of the letter from one kind of familiar letter – that which requires heavy censorship in order to minimise the chances of a scandal erupting – to another: the ‘familiar’ letters written between two families. In the ritualistic regularity with which they appear, these lists bear some resemblance to prayers; in turn, praying with the household was another familiar activity.

The communal aspect of letters was recognised by manuals of the time, as ‘most compendia were adapted to the needs of a family, understood in its broad eighteenth-century sense to include servants, apprentices and kin, and designed to supply models of *familiar* letters, understood in the word’s now obsolete sense of “pertaining to the family.”’⁷ As Peter Sabor has pointed out, ‘[t]he intricate systems of composing and delivering letters in the novels, in which an epistle can be written by more than one author and dispatched to multiple recipients, are mirrored in his private correspondence.’⁸

While the communal features of Richardson’s manuscript letters and their attendant compliments have been stripped away in the Forster volumes, this does not reflect – as Hornbeak claimed – an ‘indifference’ to ‘rhetoric’ on Richardson’s part. It is most likely that Richardson was preparing the volume as a vindication of *Pamela*, as several of his alterations demonstrate the desire to reconstruct the narrative of the novel’s publication and reception in a better light. For example, Richardson’s preoccupation with the piracies that appeared as faux sequels to *Pamela* was foremost in his mind when he added to the end of the letter to his brother-in-law: ‘N. B. The Publication of the History of Pamela gave Birth to no less than 16 Pieces, [Pyracies included, as under the Titles of] Remarks, Imitations,

⁷ Bannet, p. 55.

⁸ “‘The Job I Have Perhaps Rashly Undertaken’: Publishing the Complete Correspondence of Samuel Richardson’, p. 10.

Retellings of the Story, Pyracies &c. &c.' (fol. 57). The bracketed parts of this quotation indicate Richardson's deletion, and demonstrate how at first all of the texts produced by the Pamela controversy fall under the bracket of 'Pyracies', as that was how the defensive author must have seen them immediately they sprang to mind, and how Richardson has then sought to control this by relegating 'Pyracies' to a separate category at the end of his list. Richardson's editing of his own letters corresponds with his restless attitude towards his whole oeuvre, but his personal letters were edited with the view not of creating a set of well-balanced domestic letters, but with the needs and reputations of his correspondents, and the future reception of his novels, in mind.

While letter-manuals' lists of appropriate subscriptions and valedictory paragraphs provide a theoretical framework for individual writers to use, the reality was often much more complex. A double standard of convention which nodded towards formality but which was in actual fact familiar, such as that used by Lady Bradshaigh and Richardson, was also apparent in the narrative structure of letters.

The possession of a letter could be open to dispute. The typical arrangement of a letter of multiple-ownership would be that the compliments or remembrances to the family group, or mutual friends, fall towards the end of the letter, and this indicates that the remembrance should be passed on. As Bannet notes, according to some letter-manuals, it was deemed impolite to place a remembrance at the end of a letter, as this suggested that the person being remembered, had been forgotten until that point (67). In reality, most remembrances in the manuscript letters that I have seen (including those by Richardson) occur in the valedictory paragraph, or even as late as the postscript (and even then, sometimes on a new side of paper). The intermediary quality of the postscript, in passing on messages from correspondents

other than those writing directly, means that the voice of the author is often obscured by the third person. For example, Lambert writes to Miss Pigott in a postscript 'Mrs. Raw begs to present her respectful acknowledgements for Miss Pigotts [*sic*] kind remembrance' (fol. 40^r).

Richardson's epistolary output mixes the ideal and the real, but this mixture was a common feature of epistolary behaviour during the eighteenth century. Real correspondence could be expressive of imaginative aspiration – it could reach towards the ideal – and the generic templates of letter-manuals were capable of expressing social dynamics with a depth and subtlety close to realism.

In reality, the flexibility of super- and subscriptions was far greater than the letter-manuals indicate. It was not only rank that defined the degree of familiarity between correspondents, but personal taste. The manuscript letters that comprise what is usually referred to as Jonathan Swift's *Journal to Stella* show a writer's deliberate misuse of a subscription convention in order to breath life into old forms of address. Abigail Williams surmises from internal evidence that Swift himself cancelled out passages of the idiom of 'abbreviated endearments' before they were sent, though this obliteration was inconsistent. The reason behind the cancellation is not clear, as the 'marks are not used to obscure politically or even sexually explicit material—they are effectively hiding writing that is already in code.'⁹ The 'endearments and little language, which generally occur at the end of the days' entries' are subscriptions which remove Swift from the mediocrity of the formulaic valedictions found in letter-manuals.

As already noted, Whyman observes a trend towards compacted conventions as the eighteenth century progressed, especially among the mercantile class. But

⁹ Abigail Williams, 'The Difficulties of Swift's *Journal to Stella*', *Review of English Studies*, 62 (2011), 758-776, p. 762.

Swift's abbreviated style in writing to Johnson and Dingley shows that the individual taste and circumstances of writers interacted with epistolary trends, rather than being confined by them. From this point of view, Richardson was fairly old-fashioned and conservative. As the self-appointed moral arbiter of letter-writing conduct, he spurned Lady Bradshaigh's attempts to lend more warmth to the cool expression that he saw as the ideal tone in correspondence between parents and children.

Richardson changed 'Honoured Father' in Letter 139 in *Familiar Letters* (1st ed.), to 'Honored Sir' in the 4th edition. Bradshaigh protested the appropriateness of this style: 'Is not the repetition of so many respectful words, rather overdoing it? Is it not something too formal, and does it not seem to throw a child at too great a distance from an object which, I think, ought to be approached with an easy familiarity, though with love and respect?'¹⁰ Richardson's alteration of the terms of address in his letter-manual is consistent with his amendment of Pamela's speech (which Margaret Ann Doody has described as 'refinement'), and of his tendency to find ways to clarify his moral message in *Clarissa* in its succeeding editions.¹¹

Yet rather than displaying a supreme control over the terms of address required in letters, Richardson's alterations betray a profound uncertainty about how to make use of letter forms to reflect, or even improve, social reality. The uncertainty with which he treats the valedictory paragraphs in his own manuscript letters is proof that the end of a letter was considered to be a very important locus of meaning, and one which could be altered for the better. Even the dedication of the volume of letters relating to *Pamela* in the Forster Collection displays uncertainty in the manner of subscription.¹² Richardson describes himself as seized by 'a Veneration that begun

¹⁰ Kathryn Hornbeak, 'Richardson's Aesop', *Smith College Studies in Modern Languages*, 19:2 (January 1938), p. 31.

¹¹ See *Pamela*, ed. Sabor and Doody (London: Penguin, 1980), p. 11.

¹² FC, XVI.

in the same Hour that I was first admitted into your Presence, and will continue to the last of my Life, / Dear Madam, / Your Affectionate Friend, / (So you always permitted me to style myself)/ and faithful humble Servant' (fol. 10). The permission for Richardson to 'style myself' a 'friend' – a term that implies greater equality than 'servant' – is granted by a social superior. His readjustment of deferential terms demonstrates how complex the epistolary relationship was between even the most habitual of correspondents. Richardson is also signalling his knowledge of the outside world in his bracketed explanation, and in a sense when he says 'you always' he is addressing the public and dispelling their objections to the term 'friend'. In making the case for his own familiar expression, Richardson displays a self-knowing use of convention that attempts to 'recommend known truths by his manner of adorning them'.

Subscription and character

The valediction of a letter is a particularly sensitive point because it represents the author's commitment to the opinions and directives expressed in the body of the text. As Altman states, in narrative terms, 'the closing lines can be a privileged moment for emphasis, summary, retrospective illumination, or simply a playful punch line.'¹³ In terms of character, the subscription is the point where characters validate the letter by their 'will' and sign it with their name (a powerful 'speech act'). The 'will' expressed in epistolary valedictions falls into J. L. Austin and John Searle's taxonomies of illocutionary speech acts.¹⁴ The valediction can fulfil several illocutionary types simultaneously, by asking the reader to respond (a 'commissive' illocutionary act), while excusing the length of the current letter ('expressive'), and

¹³ *Epistolarity: Approaches to a Form*, p. 145.

¹⁴ John Searle, 'A Taxonomy of Illocutionary Acts', in *Language, Mind, and Knowledge*, ed. K. Gunderson, (Minneapolis: University of Minneapolis Press, 1975), pp. 350-351.

affirming, or declaring the writer's 'belonging' to their reader ('declaration'). According to Austin's codification of speech acts, an epistolary subscription might also fall into the 'behabitive' category, which includes salutations. Austin describes behabitives as reactions to behaviour and indications of 'attitude'; they may be habitually engrained expressions of authority, or, of epistolary aspect.¹⁵

Valedictions in Richardson's *Clarissa* (1747-8) and Smollett's *The Expedition of Humphry Clinker* (1771) are modulated to express the differences between characters. Valedictory speech acts are points in the text where characters reveal themselves through their epistolary styles. Letters can act as a fundamental part of a writer's identity, standing in lieu of his/her physical, speaking self. Austin's taxonomy of illocutionary speech acts does not just apply to the end of letters, but to the whole document of an epistle, which is flanked on its outside edge by a literal 'directive' address ('To – '), and in the very act of being sent, embodies a kind of 'commissive', as a letter is almost overwhelmingly designed to elicit a response. Tabitha Bramble is particularly adept at using the end of a letter as an opportunity to issue 'directives': as housekeeper to the Bramble estate she is responsible for giving a lot of instructions. The letter may fulfil 'directives' which are far more profound than those which are part of Tabitha's purview, however. Richardson's *Clarissa* dies leaving behind her a 'will' bound up with the textual documents she entrusts to Belford.

It was fairly common for the name or title of the addressee to be reiterated in the valediction of a letter. For example, it forms part of the comically elongated valediction of the dedicatory preface to Walsh's *Original Poems and Translations* (1714): 'I am / (with all possible respect), / My Lord, / Your Lordship's [...] Servant'. The names of both writer and addressee stand close together in the valediction,

¹⁵ J. L. Austin, *How to Do Things with Words*, 2nd edn. (Oxford: Clarendon, 1975), p. 160.

which is a declarative act of some power, if Swift's willingness to 'excuse our two names from standing in the same paper' in his dispute with Percival is anything to go by. The valedictions of *Humphry Clinker* have another feature to add to this: the characters tie up their letters by collapsing the final sentence into a signature. The formula allows the writer to state their allegiance to the addressee, while maintaining a sense of flow towards the natural end of the message. The integration of the subscription into the final sentence of the letter can be used to comment on straining allegiances, as Johnson's letter to Chesterfield did. Johnson awoke from the dream in which he was Chesterfield's 'humble servant'. In a similar way, Tabitha Bramble contrasts the act of subscription with her feelings towards Doctor Lewis, whom she hopes will 'give me some raisins (which hitherto you have not done) to subscribe myself / your humble servant, / TAB. BRAMBLE'.¹⁶

If we compare the manner in which this formula is deployed in *Humphry Clinker* with the style that characterises valediction in Richardson's novels, we find that Smollett is working on the same basic principle. The characters in *Clarissa* use indirect, complex and nominative ways of describing their state of being, and relate this to their position with their addressee. This can operate as an epistolary flourish, a display of virtuoso skill in composition that has persuasive power, especially when the act of subscription is made self-reflexive: 'This from one who used to love to stile himself / *Your paternal uncle*, / JOHN HARLOWE' (ii.88). McIntosh notes how often *Clarissa* uses constructions that denote 'a state of being, not a form of behaviour' (138), as in 'I was sorry', rather than 'I regretted'. This is partly contingent upon *Clarissa*'s character: she is adept at describing complex feelings and it makes sense that her detailed knowledge of punctilio would be reflected in the flair with which she

¹⁶ *The Expedition of Humphry Clinker*, 3 vols. (London, 1771), i.164.

expresses the humility and relational aspect which are so integral to the function of the valediction.

Clarissa uses her epistolary closures to sum up the state of being that she has described in the main body of the letter. Writing to her uncle while she still lives with the Harlowes, she does not sign her name but instead concludes with 'More I cannot say, but that I am, very undeservedly, / *A most unhappy creature*' (ii.96). Clarissa adapts the letter's conventional structure to reflect her feelings, and the letter's domestic scope. This missive is only sent downstairs, not through the post. Her relation to her uncle and the duties becoming to both of them are reflected on in the body of the letter, leaving her free to define herself in the conclusion not as his niece only, but as 'unhappy'. This tactic sandwiches the letter, as she begins with '*Honoured Sir*, / I find I am a very sad creature' (ii.95), and concludes with a similar epithet for herself. Clarissa co-opts the syntactic pause in the subscription – usually reserved for a reiteration of the addressee's title, or for the addition of another qualifier such as 'affectionate' or 'humble' – to add 'very undeservedly'. Clarissa's defence of her point of view takes part of its meaning from the contrast between her subscription and the promises of obedience to family that usually occupied the ends of letters.

Richardson showed that characters could reveal themselves in the way they approached the epistolary form. Smollett's characters, too, are supposed to make the reader laugh not only because of their actions but also because of their occasionally blunt style. Smollett mocks complicated and antiquarian modes of expression in the code-switching of the Reverend Jonathan Dustwich, and in the quack doctor at Bath who describes the more disgusting areas of disease only in

Latin.¹⁷ However, Smollett does not throw off the traditional valediction, but instead streamlines the florid subscriptions in Richardson. Smollett adds another layer to his valedictions, so the formula is as follows: fairly simple statement of being of the writer, collapsing into a salutation followed by name of the addressee; reiteration of the relationship between addressee/addressor in terms of possessives ('your servant' or 'your friend'); name of the writer. For example:

We are all going to the Hot Well, where I shall drink your health in a glass of water, being,

Dear Molly,

Your humble servant to command,

Glostar, April 2d.

WIN. Jenkins. (i.6)

This valediction is combined with another speech act: that of drinking to another's health. This particular letter is from one servant to another, which makes the nominal 'humble servant/sarvent' epithet slightly confusing, though it does demonstrate the formulaic quality of the phrase. McIntosh's notion of the 'nominal style' allows for indirect phrases that perform the 'work' in sentences, rather than direct verbs:

[t]he abstraction does whatever work is involved here, just as an eighteenth-century gentleman employed a servant to perform those menial actions which he considered below his dignity; and the higher the rank, the fewer everyday actions he could permit himself. (139)

McIntosh's metaphor relates social hierarchy to linguistic indirection. However, in some cases, as with *Clarissa Harlowe*, the stative verbs and abstracts of the nominal style crowd around the point, becoming both servile to meaning (by rarefying it) and a dominant, restrictive force. *Clarissa* is both a paragon of virtue, and a servant of

¹⁷ Paul Child notes that Swift used Latin to mock quackery, too. See 'Jonathan Swift's Latin Quacks: "A consultation of four physicians upon a Lord that was dying"', *The Cambridge Quarterly*, 40 (2011), 21-35. Epistolary consultation could take place in Latin, as with Smollett's letters to Dr. Fizes. See Wayne Wild, *Medicine-by-Post: the Changing Voice of Illness in Eighteenth-Century British Consultation Letters and Literature* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2006), p. 20.

politeness. Arguably it is her 'punctilio' that leads her to fall into Lovelace's many traps. While her nominative language allows her to express the complexity of her feelings, it is her inability to refuse the requests of those around her directly that leads her into further trouble. Expressions of servitude could, in other circumstances, be empowering for the writer. Formulaic valedictory phrases release writers from having to invent their own sign-offs and therefore save them the 'work' of creating a guaranteed, polite end for their epistles.

The reiteration of the addressee's name as part of the valediction in *Humphry Clinker* is a repeat salutation. It creates a layered politeness, syntactically insulating the reader from the world outside the text and outside their relationship with the writer. Rather as Belinda's Sylphs in Pope's *The Rape of the Lock* (1712-17) form part of her protective feminine 'machinery', so the traditional, formal extremities of the letter could be said to protect the body of the text from being taken the wrong way. Pamela's letters, too, are kept in recesses of her clothing, which symbolically links the letter and clothing as areas of life governed by protective decorum. It is ostentatious, superfluous, to refer back to the beginning of the letter, at the end. It disturbs the notion of 'book-ended' narratives, and shows that letters are dialogic rather than sequentially monologic. Smollett's is a polite yet simple form that simulates the dovetailing of speech. The characters that write thus combine introspection with sociability. The letter not only says 'know this', or 'do this', but 'I am' and 'you are', it is instructive, informative and also performs a state of being and a state of being relative to one's correspondents.

The way in which this formula is applied by different characters is pivotal to analysing their role within both Smollett's and Richardson's epistolary novels. There is some suggestion of a social class gradient which correlates with a character's

ability to obfuscate the formula they are using. The more direct a use of the formula, the more it reads as a second-hand interpretation of the correct modes of expression set out in letter-manuals. In Lovelace's accomplice's letters, for example, the valedictory formula stands out starkly. In the edition of 1748, Richardson chooses to summarise parts of Leman's letter, and quote the rest using running inverted commas in the margin (though at first this quotation maintains the third person, as in 'He desires him to let him know, if his Honour's life is in danger [...] and hopes [...] "that he will not be hanged like as a common man [...] and that he will *nathetheless* think of his faithful Joseph Leman..." [230]). The subscription is italicised, as is Leman's quotation of scripture ('yet *what shall a man get to lose his soul*'): 'But howsoever I am / *Your Honour's faithful servant in all duty*'.¹⁸

‘ But *nathetheless* I am in hope of repentance here-
 ‘ after, being but a young man, if I do wrong thro’
 ‘ ignorance ; your Honour being a great man, and a
 ‘ great wit ; and I a poor creature, not worthy notice ;
 ‘ and your Honour able to answer for all. But how-
 ‘ soever I am

Your Honour's faithful servant in all duty,
 JOSEPH LEMAN,

April 15 and 16.

Clarissa, 7 vols. (London, 1748), iii.232.

Italicising a subscription sets it alongside other parts of the text which are drawn from another source, illustrating that the subscription is conventional. Richardson uses

¹⁸ *Clarissa*, 7 vols. (London, 1748), iii.232. See also Leman's earlier letter (III) in the same volume, where the valediction is even more formulaic.

italics to represent reported speech in Leman's letters, as the inverted comma and italic were both common typographical forms of quotation. In *Letters and Passages Restored from the Original Manuscripts of the History of Clarissa* (1751), Richardson 'restored' Leman's letter, adding phonetic spelling to emphasise the precariousness of the servant's literacy:

But natheless I am in hope of reppentance here-
after, being but a younge man, if I do wrong thro'
ignorrens ; your Honner being a grate man, and a
grate wit ; and I a poor crature, not worthy notice ;
and your Honner able to answer for all. But how-
fomever I am

Your Honner's fethful Sarvant in all dewtie,
April 15. and 16. JOSEPH LEMAN.

Passages Restored [...] (London, 1751), p. 50.

The italicisation of reported speech, idiomatic phrases, scripture and epistolary set pieces remains; Leman even attributes the source in one case: 'yet *what shall a man get to loos his soul*, as holy Skrittuer says, and plese your Honner?' (50). Though his bad spelling is supposed to indicate a lack of education in the *Passages Restored*, the remaining italicisation shows that Leman is very attuned to conventional understandings of quotation. Though Richardson's 'editor' persona may be supposed to have corrected his spelling in the first edition, the fact that the italicisations remain in *Passages Restored* means that they can be attributed to Leman. Furthermore, Richardson adds a dialogue between Leman and his

conscience which implies the reporting of internal speech: 'But heere my conscience smites me, that *but for some of my stories, which our Honner taute me, my old Master and my old Lady [...] would not have been abell to be half so hard-harted as they be*' (49). Leman is perspicuous; while his epistolary valediction is conventional, it fulfils a similar function to the quotation of scripture. By echoing the tropes of polite epistolary 'dewtie', Leman's valediction affirms the relationship between himself and his correspondent. However, Leman's scepticism and fear of Lovelace turns traditional obsequious compliments into accusations. In reflecting on the social distance between them, Leman draws attention to Lovelace's greater responsibility to uphold the codes of rank and honour of which they are both a part (his phonetic spelling makes the social distance even more apparent). In signing himself Lovelace's 'fethful sarvant', Leman is in fact pointing to Lovelace's own 'dewtie' not to misuse his power (as Pamela herself does with Mr. B.). His use of quotation is also an abnegation of responsibility; his conduct has hardly been as spotless as Pamela's, another servant in Richardson's oeuvre who used her literacy to remind the gentry to uphold standards of virtuous behaviour.

Valedictions in *Humphry Clinker* are echoed between servants and masters, suggesting that a 'house style' may have come into usage within the Bramble household. This familial idiolect is a reflection of the interlinking responsibilities and rights that existed between a family and its servants. Mrs. Jenkins's letters to Mary – 'Molly' – Jones express the bond between servants in a suitably simple, direct style. She is forced to incorporate the verb 'being' directly as a bridge to the possessive phrase '[y]our humble servant': 'I shall drink your health in a glass of water, being, / Dear Molly, / Your humble servant to command' (i.6). In this way she refers overtly to the coming possessive clause in the first part of the valediction; the formula achieves

its polite indirection best when we can hardly see it coming. It is as if the finely measured sentences of the ideal epistle must resemble an uninterrupted line of stitching, or some other form of artistic work that is cultivated for its aesthetic appeal. Mrs. Jenkins's insertion of 'being' into her valediction is not as seamless as Clarissa's use of statives to wrap up her letters, and this is no surprise, given both Richardson and Smollett's attempts to distinguish between literacy of the servant classes and that of the gentry. Servants in *Humphry Clinker* are prone to making orthographical mistakes that undermine the intended meaning: '[h]eaving got a frank, I now return your fever' (i.83). The conventional and polite way of thanking someone for their letter by calling it a 'favour' is turned into 'fever'; an unfortunate mistake which is intended to show, unmercifully, the inelegance of polite language when written by the less-educated.

Tabitha Bramble is even less artful and pragmatic in her first valediction: 'No more at present, but rests, / Yours, / TABITHA BRAMBLE' (i.4). A new sentence for the valediction is obviously less sophisticated, less integrated and less sociable than the other characters' strategies. This is an appropriate reflection of Tabitha's role within the family group as the disruptive maiden aunt. Tabitha's abrupt valediction, her solecisms and her honest, incomplete justification ('[n]o more at present') signal her inferior sensibility, and are not indicative of a lower rank. Just as she fails to interpret Mr. Bramble's act of charity to a poor mother at Bath as generously as it is meant, so too in her letters she lacks (or is unwilling to learn) any skill in valediction. Her choice of 'rests' rather than 'I rest' and 'yours' rather than 'your' are a slip into the third person which fits with her own slapdash style, allowing her to make the valediction careless and free-standing. It also indicates her knowledge of standardised, impersonal valedictions, ones which, because of their public currency, could almost

be said to be reported and re-recorded so often as to be of the third person, rather than between individuals referring to themselves as 'I' and 'you'.

Mr. Bramble's privileged position at the head of the household means that his expressions of affection and valediction may contain a greater degree of complacency; he is secure in his position and therefore feels free to reflect on the valedictory strategies which hold his relationship with Doctor Lewis in place: 'I know nothing of equal value with the genuine friendship of a sensible man; a rare jewel! which I cannot helping thinking myself in possession of, while I repeat the old declaration, that I am, as usual, Dear Lewis, / Your affectionate / M. BRAMBLE' (i.73). Whereas other writers, such as Lydia, must strive to conceal the homogeneity of the 'old declaration' which they make use of to solidify friendship, while apologising for the length and tedium of their 'long unconnected scrawl' (i.82), Bramble is able to take his epistolary machinery for granted, drawing attention to it without apology. Bramble also views his letters as purgatives, a way to 'communicate my crusty humours' (i.64) as part of his treatment: 'my correspondence [...] may be truly called *the lamentations of Matthew Bramble*' (i.63). To read his 'humours' Bramble views as part of his Doctor's obligation, though health was a common epistolary topic between friends and relatives, as well as between doctors and patients.¹⁹ This is why Johnson felt it appropriate to offer Hill Boothby advice on 'lubricity of the bowels' soon after exclaiming 'my heart is full of tenderness'.²⁰

Servants, like letters, act as inter-personal messengers. At Bath, the putative romance between Sir Ulic Mackilligut and Tabitha is developed in tandem with that between her woman, Win Jenkins, and the knight's 'gentleman', 'Mr O Frizzle'. The servants' exchange of information on key topics such as the financial positions of

¹⁹ This has been the focus of recent research. See Wayne Wild, *ibid.*

²⁰ 31 December 1755, *Letters*, i.120.

their respective masters/mistresses act as a kind of necessary inter-familial espionage. Jenkins and O Frizzle speak of the delicate matters involved in the potential romance between Tabitha and Mackilligut, so that those of higher rank are spared the awkwardness of the same conversation. Jenkins' confidence in her management of information, we suspect, is grossly exaggerated: 'But you nose, Molly, I was always famous for keeping secrets; and so he was very safe in trusting me with [Sir Mackilligut's] flegm for mistress; which, to be sure is very honourable, for Mr. O Frizzle assures me, he values not her portion a brass varthing – And, indeed, what's poor ten thousand pounds to a Baron Knight of his fortune? And, truly, I told Mr. O Frizzle that was all she had trust to' (i.85). Jenkins' indiscretion is a necessary part of the process of courtship to which she contributes. Rather as Swift's half-legible, swirled-over cypher in his journal to Johnson and Dingley draws attention to the 'little language' underneath, so Jenkins' flagging up of information as 'secret' emphasises its importance and ensure that it is passed on. Similarly, a bond between Jenkins and 'Mrs Patcher, my lady Kilmacullock's woman' comes about through an exchange of secrets, on account of which they are 'sworn sisters' (i.86). The proximity of the Irish and Welsh households in Bath brings about a stratified exchange of loyalties; the servants take up parallel friendships with those between their employers. In this way, servants, like letters, achieve a metonymic relationship with the households they represent.

Anxieties about forgery help to explain the focus on the signature of a letter. While not every letter could have the life-changing effect of a legal document such as a will, epistolary forgery could still have grave implications. As Lovelace's forgery of Anna Howe's handwriting attests, not even letters between intimate friends – with all the attendant familiar turns of phrase and linguistic quirks borne of shared experience

– are safe from forgery. The ability to identify the provenance of a document, and to assess whether its truth is compromised by ‘romance’, became a pivotal skill in a society in which physical presence was increasingly being substituted by paper.

In *Humphry Clinker* the concern with different styles of address and of behaviour is a point of contrast between characters, both in terms of rank and individual personality. The inclusion of the place and date of the letters offers an immediate point of comparison, as the letters are often short enough that the opening and closing apparatus are visible on the same page. Tabitha’s ‘Glostar, April 2’ is all the more belligerently solecistic when viewed against Mr. Bramble’s ‘Gloucester, April 2’, the two epistles (along with Jenkins’ and Jerry’s) forming a diurnal unit. The altercation between Jerry and his sister’s admirer affords a point of contrast between non-epistolary styles of address. Wilson’s assertion that ‘he was a gentleman, and would be treated as such’ is accompanied by what is perceived by Mr. Bramble as fanciful, faux-gentile mannerism: ‘[t]he theatrical hero was too far gone in romance to brook such usage: he replied in blank verse, and a formal challenge ensued’ (i.40-1). Bramble’s reportage of this incident melds the distinction between an argument-in-letters, and one in person, by emphasising the literary aspersions of Wilson, and by holding back detail about who issued the formal challenge, which, it is implied, will have required some form of documented arrangement.

A point of contrast is set up between the paratextual address written on the outside of letters, and the form of (usually more familiar) salutary address at the beginning of the main body of the letter. It is a piece of logic belonging to epistolary fiction that the documented reality of correspondence should be reaffirmed by the inclusion of everything that would be written on a physical epistle, despite the fact that the address (for example, ‘To Sir Watkin Phillips, of Jesus College, Oxon’) is

replicated on a flat printed page, falling short of the three-dimensional, origami-like artefact of a real letter. The three-dimensional separation between public and private afforded by the two-sided sheets of paper of a letter is flattened out, the gap between the two forms of address (necessitated by the physical act of opening a letter) foreshortened by the format of the book. Win Jenkins finds the negotiation of the division somewhat troublesome; it is perhaps a reflection of her character that she fails in her attempts to be discrete in keeping the private secrets of those around her from the public eye. In her first letter to Mary Jones, she adopts the affectionate diminutive 'Molly' for her correspondent, but addresses the letter 'To Mrs. Mary Jones'. After the whirlwind of social engagements at Bath, not to mention the advances of Mr. O Frizzle and the trauma of the King's Bath, Jenkins' sense of the public/private divide is naturally eroded. Her letter to Molly begins with an intermixture of familiarity and formality: 'Dear Molly Jones' (71).

As all goodbyes anticipate the final parting, so letter-writers in disconsolate mood will vow their permanent link with their correspondent. For example, Lydia Melford writes that she is her governess's 'humble servant, / till death' (38). The frequent disruptions of the valediction's function as end-point through the use of postscripts in *Humphry Clinker* is perhaps appropriate to the tenor of the novel, which is comic and light where *Clarissa* is morbid and teleologically weighted towards the heroine's death.

The sinister side of the epistolary valediction is the 'rest', the state of being in a non-written existence in-between letters. Boswell recorded the effect that a letter could have as a *memento mori* on Johnson: '[a]s he opened a note which his servant brought to him, he said, "An odd thought strikes me: — we shall receive no letters in the grave."' The letter 'strikes' Johnson as he receives it, though he hasn't yet read it

because letters embody meaning beyond the message of written words they carry.

They demonstrate the partiality of human knowledge, and for Johnson, the receiving and sending of letters is enough to remind him of the 'secret horror of the last':

We always make a secret comparison between a part and the whole; the termination of any period of life reminds us that life itself has likewise its termination; when we have done any thing for the last time, we involuntarily reflect that a part of the days allotted us is past, and that as more is past there is less remaining.

It is very happily and kindly provided, that in every life there are certain pauses and interruptions, which force consideration upon the careless, and seriousness upon the light; points of time where one course of action ends and another begins; and by vicissitude of fortune, or alteration of employment, by change of place, or loss of friendship, we are forced to say of something, "this is the last."²²

The last *Idler* evokes the rhythms of human life by enacting them in the 'pauses and interruptions' of the text's syntax; the reflection that 'this is the last' is delayed by the intervening clauses. Johnson reflects on the relationship between the ends of various parts of life, and the end of life itself. The end of friendship is mentioned specifically as an example more than once.

Throughout the essay, Johnson equates writing with active friendship; this is representative of his other writing, where letters provided solace because of the simple mechanism of call and response necessary to carry on a correspondence. In August 1784, Johnson was languishing with ill health and the loss of Hester Thrale's friendship. He wrote to John Ryland and Richard Brocklesby in terms that recall the rhythms or 'period[s] of life', and the horror of endings in *Idler* 103. Rather than the content of the letters, it is the mere act of communication that is important to Johnson: 'I sent You last post an idle letter, which could mean only to provoke you to

²² 5 April 1760, *Idler* 103, *Works*, ii.315.

write²³; 'I write not so much because I have anything to say, as because, I hope for an answer'. The 'idle' letter is important to Johnson, as 'the vacancy of life here makes a letter of great value'.²⁴

The 'vacancy of life' is consistent with the purpose of letter-writing described in *Rambler* 152, which is 'to maintain the necessary intercourse of civility, and fill up the vacuities of actions by agreeable appearances' (*Works*, v.44). Just as the 'natural flights of the human mind are not from pleasure to pleasure, but from hope to hope' (*Rambler* 2, *Works*, iii.10), so Johnson's experience of human interaction is, especially at times when he is faced with his own mortality, governed more by the 'vacuity' between letters, than by the 'intercourse of civility' itself. Postal rhythms gave structure to his pleasures and hopes, as when he anticipated a letter from Hester Maria ('Queeney') Thrale:

My dearest Love:

The letter which I received from my Mistress last monday was very kind, but so short, that I considered it only as a prelude to a longer, which I have expected from post to post, but having been so often disappointed, begin to fear that the toothach, which at that time contracted her letter, has been succeeded by some more formidable malady. Dear madam write immediately and free me from suspense.²⁵

The natural flights of Johnson's mind were not from pleasure to pleasure, but from 'post to post'. The pauses and interruptions in a chain of correspondence force Johnson to consider the potentially bad things that may have happened to prevent Thrale from writing.

Because writing reaches out to others, and enables readers 'better to enjoy life, or better to endure it'²⁶, Johnson thought of the end of his essays and letters as

²³ SJ to John Ryland, 23 August 1784, *Letters*, iv.380.

²⁴ SJ to Richard Brocklesby, 26 August 1784, *Letters*, iv.381.

²⁵ 20 October 1783, *Letters*, iv.227.

²⁶ *Works*, xvii.421.

paradigmatic losses and ends, as in *Idler* 103: 'I hope that my readers [...] when they see this series of trifles brought to a conclusion, they will consider that by outliving the *Idler*, they have past weeks, months, and years which are now no longer in their power; that an end must in time be put to every thing great as to every thing little' (*Works*, ii.316). The 'series of trifles' calls to mind a running correspondence, in which 'no intelligence is communicated, no business transacted' (*Rambler* 152, *Works*, v.47). Familiar letters functioned to speak of trifles and to communicate for the sake of communicating. Johnson makes clear the importance of little things and 'idle' letters, because of their proportional link with larger topics, or the sum of a person's utterances. When Hester Thrale was away in October 1779, Johnson wrote to her in a mock-heroic tone in order to offset the awkwardness of imparting trifles to her when he was doubtful of an answer:

I begin to be frighted at your omission to write, do not torment me any longer, but let me know where You are, how you got thither, how you live there and every thing else, that one friend loves to know of another.

I will show you the way.

On Sunday the gout left my ankles, and I went very commodiously to Church.
[...]

This, Madam, is the history of one of my toes; the history of my head would have perhaps been much shorter.²⁷

While he makes fun of himself for presenting Thrale with the narrative of his toe, Johnson acknowledges the inevitable prominence of trifles in everyday life.

Isobel Grundy's review of Redford's edition of Johnson's *Letters* considers Johnson's epistolary trifling to be part of the mock-heroic tradition. Grundy remarks upon the denigration of Johnson's personal letters with Thrale by critics, and identifies the mock-heroic tone in them as part of the reason. She points out a polarization between those who take the *Life of Pope* (1779) as the litmus test of

²⁷ 8 October 1779, *Letters*, iii.186.

Johnson's interest in the 'epistolick art', and those who take the letters themselves as the source of Johnson's opinion on the form. A similar division occurs between those who appreciate Johnson's correspondence with Thrale over that with Boswell. While the Johnson-Thrale correspondence is more critically neglected, the joy of Johnson's letters is their intermixture of what she recognizes as his dual critical reputations: 'a formal, authoritative Johnson available through his writings, and a private, personal Johnson available through the writings of Boswell and others.'²⁸ Furthermore, the *Life of Pope* isn't as cynical about letters as it is sometimes assumed. Johnson recognized the commonality between Pope's generic benevolence and the situation in which all epistolary writers find themselves: cut off from their addressee.

Johnson lived from 'post to post', speculating that each letter he received might be the last; in letters, each subscription was a chance to confront the 'horror of the last'. His dramatic (and permanent) falling-out with Hester Thrale via letter is the most prominent example of the special importance of epistolary valedictions in Johnson's writing. Because he did not know if Thrale had married Piozzi when she wrote to him that 'all is irrevocably settled, & out of your power to prevent'²⁹, Johnson had to write a letter which is very uncertain in its tense:

If the last act is yet to do, I, who have loved you, esteemed you, revered you, and served you, I who long thought you the first of humankind, entreat that before your fate is irrevocable, I may once more see You. I was, I once was,
Madam, most truly yours,

SAM. JOHNSON

I will come down if you permit it.

²⁸ *Eighteenth-Century Studies*, 27:1 (Autumn, 1993), 170-175, p. 173.

²⁹ 30 June 1784, *The Piozzi Letters: the correspondence of Hester Lynch Piozzi, 1784-1821 (formerly Mrs. Thrale)*, ed. Edward A. Bloom and Lillian D. Bloom, 6 vols. (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 1989-2002), i.74.

Johnson hesitantly alters the conventional subscription, 'I was, I once was', highlighting the contractual basis of an epistolary ending. Signing one's name against a vow of friendship or service at the end of each letter in the present tense is implicitly compared to the finality of the marriage documents that Thrale (from Johnson's point of view) may have signed by this stage. Johnson's postscript, like so many of the subversive postscripts in the Pigott manuscripts that I have discussed, counteracts the finality of the subscription. Thrale countered this 'rough' letter with one in which she defended her 'fame', and reflected on 'the Fruits of a Friendship never infringed upon by one harsh Expression on my Part, during twenty Years of familiar Talk'. Thrale's writing is filled with forbidding negatives: 'never infringed [...]' never did I oppose your will, or control your wish: nor can your unmerited severity itself lessen my regard'. Her stance is firm, and she concludes 'till you have changed your opinion of Mr Piozzi – let us converse no more. God bless you!' (i.83).

Thrale's valedictory paragraph isn't contradicted by any conciliatory postscript. She, like Johnson, regards friendship as consisting of 'talk' and 'converse', so naturally what is said in these letters may be regarded as tearing the very fabric of their relationship. Nevertheless, they both seem unwilling to face the horror of the last. Johnson dealt with Thrale's imminent removal to Italy by drawing on an 'apposite fictionalized account' of Mary Stuart's crossing from Scotland to England by river.³⁰ The account ends

The Queen went forward. – If the parallel reaches thus far; may it go no further.
The tears stand in my eyes.

I am going into Derbyshire, and hope to be followed by your good wishes, for I am with great affection, Your most humble servant,

SAM. JOHNSON

Any letters that come for me hither, will be sent me.³¹

³⁰ *Letters*, iv.344; n. 5.

³¹ 8 July 1784, *Letters*, iv.343-4.

As Freya Johnston notes, Johnson was fully aware of the fictitiousness of the encounter between the bishop of St. Andrews's and Mary Stuart at the 'irremeable stream'. He made use of this account to liken 'her to a doomed queen and himself to her sole true counselor'.³² Again, Johnson's postscript counterbalances the finality with which he ends the main body of the letter. However, he told Frances Burney in the following November that '[i]f I meet with one of [Thrale's] letters, I burn it instantly'.³³ This comment shows that the letter itself, rather than its contents, could be enough to signify the intentions of its sender. Johnson's 'meetings' with Thrale's letters seem to equate her presence with that of her missives. Not all her subsequent letters were burned, however.

Thrale wrote a letter full of the usual words of friendship on 15th July: 'my good Wishes [...] my most fervent Prayers', 'Your last Letter is sweetly kind, and I thank you for it most sincerely'. Thrale writes in the present tense, hoping for an on-going correspondence with Johnson, promising that she will 'never cease to be my dear Sir / Your truly affectionate and faithful serv^t / <Signature erased>.' (i.93-4). Bloom notes that the signature was probably erased at a later date, but seems sure that it reads 'Piozzi': '[Hester Thrale] had wished [Johnson] to believe that the marriage was consummated so that he would no longer interfere.' This explanation is slightly at odds with the postscript, which is explicit that the business isn't settled: 'The Lawyers delay of finishing our Settlements, & the necessity of twenty six days Residence, has kept us from being married till now. I hope your Health is mending.' The epistolary 'now' is a deictic marker that denotes the time between the letter's being sent and being received. The obliteration of the signature points to perhaps numerous re-

³² 'Correspondence', in *Samuel Johnson in Context*, ed. Jack Lynch (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), pp. 21-30, p. 28.

³³ *Letters*, iv.344, n. 7.

readings in the subsequent years by Hester Piozzi, in the vacuity left by Johnson's silence. Like Swift's valedictory swirls, the cancelled signature allows Hester Thrale-Piozzi to exist half way across 'irremeable stream'. This long good-bye, with its twisting postscripts and revoking and re-pledging of loyalties, shows how reluctant epistolary valedictions could be. The reluctance to end a correspondence was especially apparent when writing was equated, as it was for Johnson, with the chance to say "I write, therefore I am alive".³⁴

³⁴ 30 December 1755, *Letters*, i.118.

CHAPTER 2

EPISTOLARY POLYPHONY

The eighteenth-century letter is a form that explores the possibilities, doubts and difficulties of individual and shared voices or idiolects. This chapter shows how letters create and support voices that combine aspects of singular and plural identity. Earlier in the century, the Scriblerians developed a loose house style that was fostered by letter, a method that was recognised in print by Pope in his verse epistles.¹ Towards the mid-century, the prominent epistolary aesthetic in Richardson's extended circle encouraged pluralism and dialogism that rebounded between the familiar letters and published works of the group.

In writing, a 'voice' might be the expression characteristic of a person (either fictional, real, or somewhere in between), a genre of writing, or a character 'type'. To understand the characteristics of eighteenth-century written voices, we must work out how voices were delineated, separated and combined using eighteenth-century terms. As '[v]ote; suffrage; opinion expressed', and as a verb, 'VOICE' elicits these quotations in Johnson's *Dictionary* (1755):

The state was betrayed by the multitude and corruption of *voices*, and must shortly perish, if not committed to the grave judgment of some few; for two hundred gave *voices*, reducing that multitude to fifty, who, for their experience, were holden for men of greatest gravity. *Knolles*.

It was *voiced* that the king purposed to put to death Edward Plantagenet, prisoner in the tower; whereat there was a great murmur. *Bacon's Hen. VII.*

¹ This led to collaboration, as with John Gay's *Three Hours After Marriage*, which when it was printed, carried an advertisement stating 'I must farther own the Assistance I have receiv'd in this Piece from two of my Friends' (London, 1717). The two friends were probably Pope and Arbuthnot.

The explanatory quotations from Bacon and Knolles show the effects of a ‘multitude and corruption of *voices*’, and a passive voice that stimulates a ‘great murmur’. The public in these examples is at odds with the actors of the state and the king; these are voices of public dissent, with ‘corruption’ almost a collective noun for ‘voice’, which is, perhaps, synonymous with the rabble. The tendency to call upon examples of collectives to define ‘voice’ reflects a debate in eighteenth-century criticism and aesthetics about collectives and singulars. Within Johnson’s oeuvre, the *Dictionary* comprises a multitude of collected quotations, some of which were incorrectly transmitted, being misremembered or abbreviated.

Bacon’s view, quoted by Johnson, that the voice characterized the individual – ‘we can discern several men by their *voices*’ – makes a collective statement about the individuality of styles. This elision between singular and plural relates to the scheme of the *Dictionary*, which draws on stocks of contrastive quotations to form its definitions. As such, the *Dictionary* exemplifies the polyphonic aspect of Johnson’s era; original genius was balanced against the manifold opportunities to combine one’s voice with a collective. The voice, characteristic expression, or idiolect of an individual might overlap with, absorb, or mimic that of others. Interactions of this kind can be interpreted as what Johnson labelled ‘concordia discors’ or ‘discordia concors’: harmonious variety or discordant chaos.

Polyphony can comprise harmony or discord; it implies a diversity of voices, which arise naturally in dialogic texts such as letters and written debate. In his *Characteristicks* (1711), Anthony Ashley-Cooper, Earl of Shaftesbury, valued the freedom to quibble with interlocutors. He saw confrontation as an opportunity to become more polished, in moral and linguistic terms:

All Politeness is owing to Liberty. We polish one another, and rub off our

Corners and rough Sides by a sort of *amicable Collision*. To restrain this, is inevitably to bring Rust upon Mens [sic] Understandings.²

Shaftesbury's attitude towards dialogue as a rhetorical device was more ambivalent. He praised what he saw as straightforward representations of normal conversation in classical dialogues, but condemned dialogue in religious tracts. The 'Treatises [of the Antients] were generally in a free and familiar Style' (73), a style which, like the familiar letter, allowed for '*Dialogue*'. However, the modern enthusiasts' use of dialogue did not delineate or differentiate from one another the voices of the opposition sufficiently clearly:

At present, it must be own'd, the *Characters*, or *Personages*, employ'd by our new orthodox Dialogists, carry with 'em little proportion or coherence [...] 'Tis by their names only that these *Characters* are figur'd. Tho they bear different Titles, and are set up to maintain contrary Points; they are found, at the bottom, to be all of the same side, and, notwithstanding their seeming Variance, to co-operate in the most officious manner with the Author, towards the display of his own proper Wit, and the establishment of his private Opinion and Maxims.³

Shaftesbury criticised 'puppets' by which authors advance their opinions, because he felt that conflict between characters in a text was aesthetically and morally productive. This process hinges on the ability of the author to create 'personages' with enough distinct linguistic character to be deemed proper adversaries of one another.

Johnson echoed Shaftesbury's notion of '*amicable Collision*' as a necessary part of wit and politeness in his *Life of Cowley* (1779), where he identified in his subject's writing a 'combination of dissimilar images', or a '*discordia concors*'.⁴ This is, as Roger Lonsdale notes, a reversal of the Pythagorean '*concordia discors*', which

² 'An Essay on the Freedom of Wit and Humour', *Characteristicks*, 3 vols. (London, 1711), i.64.

³ *Characteristicks*, iii.292.

⁴ Lonsdale, i.200.

is associated with 'harmonious discord in music, politics and the cosmos' (i.326).

Although Johnson was negative about 'heterogeneous ideas [...] yoked together by violence' (200) in the metaphysical poets, he regarded 'concordia discors' as essential to human relationships. Therefore he showed some surprise at the uniformity of feeling in the Burney family's letters:

I question if any ship upon the ocean goes out attended with more good wishes than that which carries the fate of Burney. [...] Of this consanguineous unanimity I have had never much experience; but it appears to me one of the great lenitives of life; but it has this deficiency, that it is never found when distress is mutual – [.]⁵

The physical distance implied by the ship 'attended with [...] wishes' suggests that the 'pleasure diffused among the Burneys' is communicated in large part via letter. So too, Johnson's expression of 'love' for 'one or two whom I hardly know' of the Burneys indicates that epistolary correspondence over significant distance influenced his perceptions of the family. But this amicable perception doesn't prevent Johnson from observing the absence of productive opposition in the Burneys' letters. The adversatives 'but it appears' and 'but it has this deficiency' show that within his own mind, Johnson holds differing opinions on the subject of family unanimity. As he observed of Pope's letters, unanimity of feeling is easy to project in letters which don't demand specific action; '[i]t is easy [...] to glow with benevolence when there is nothing to be given' (*Works*, iv.59). In the case of the Burneys, Johnson reiterates this observation by calling into question the reach of epistolary unanimity 'when distress is mutual'.

As Jean Hagstrum has shown, in Johnson's view, concord should not predominate to the extent that it resulted in *aurea mediocritas*, the stifling mediocrity

⁵ SJ to Hester Thrale, 14 November 1781, *Letters* iii.373.

of the golden mean.⁶ Too great a 'consanguineous unanimity' in epistolary writings could hardly be maintained throughout the ups and downs of life, and mere 'good wishes' could indicate a lack of sincerity, or absence dictated by feeling rather than physical distance. For Johnson, then, 'concordia discors' was to be expected where 'thoughts like rivulets issuing from distant springs' met in epistolary correspondence.⁷

Correspondence could showcase stylistic variety, while still promoting social harmony, or agreement. Epistolary polyphony that was both various and harmonious was Richardson's novelistic template. He contrasted it with

the dry Narrative; where the *Novelist* moves on, his own dull Pace, to the End of his Chapter and Book, interweaving impertinent Digressions, for fear the Reader's Patience should be exhausted by his tedious Dwelling on one Subject, in the same Style: Which may not unfitly be compared to the dead Tolling of a single Bell, in Opposition to the wonderful Variety of Sounds, which constitute the Harmony of a Handel.⁸

In Richardson's analogy, 'the dry Narrative' stands for the single-voiced novel, dominated by the narrator. Richardson aspired to create a 'wonderful Variety of Sounds' in his novels through their epistolary structure. In *Clarissa*, 'Variety' is created at the cost of harmony, as Lovelace's style and Clarissa's are opposed. The novel contains more than just this counterpoint, though, as Ian Watt contended in 1957. Belford and Anna Howe's voices become more important in the third instalment, and there are multiple 'contrasts of character and temperament' between the main characters and the auxiliaries, such as Mrs. Sinclair, Uncle Anthony and Joseph Leman.⁹ In Watt's view, the counterpoint between Lovelace and Clarissa's letters gives the novel 'the terrifying ambiguity of human life itself' (238). Friction

⁶ 'Johnson and the Concordia Discors', in *The Unknown Samuel Johnson* ed. J. J. Burke and D. Kay (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1983), p. 42.

⁷ *Rambler* 167, *Works*, v.124.

⁸ Tom Keymer, ed., *Richardson's Published Commentary on Clarissa, 1747-65*, 3 vols. (London: Pickering and Chatto, 1998) i.332, i.334.

⁹ *The Rise of the Novel* (London: Hogarth, 1957), p. 209.

between the protagonists' worldviews as expressed in their own words is contrasted with what Lovelace imagines would be the effect of too much similarity between lovers: a virtuous woman and man are 'as two parallel lines; which, tho' they run side by side, can never meet'.¹¹ The novel's success lies in its embodiment of 'discordia concors' through epistolary exchange.

Polyphony's capacity to be oppositional rather than harmonious is observed by Alex Townsend, who sees Richardson's work as a multiplicity of competing voices rather than a contrapuntal fusion of fictional and real idiolects.¹² In light of the polyphony in, and correspondence between, letters and novels, M. M. Bakhtin's definition of the novel is worth reconsidering: a novel is 'a diversity of social speech types (sometimes even diversity of languages) and a diversity of individual voices, artistically organized.'¹³ What Bakhtin calls 'polyphony' or 'heteroglossia' is dramatized directly in another work that came out of Richardson's circle: Sarah Fielding and Jane Collier's *The Cry* (1754). The disputes between the chorus and characters within that work show that a 'Variety of Sounds' could result in 'discordia concors' in non-epistolary novels that set out to question the effects of dialogic writing.

Eighteenth-century correspondence embodied the contrary quality of 'concordia discors' by bringing contrasting epistolary styles into conversation with one another. Shaftesbury's oxymoronic '*amicable Collision*' was played out in letters such as Horace Walpole's. Bruce Redford notes how Walpole tailored letters to different correspondents, creating 'a harmonious union of the two identities in question': the "implied sender" and "implied recipient". Redford claims that the

¹¹ *Clarissa*, 7 vols., 2nd edn. (London, 1749), v.76.

¹² *Autonomous Voices: An Exploration of Polyphony in the Novels of Samuel Richardson* (Oxford: Peter Lang, 2003).

¹³ 'Discourse in the Novel' in *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays*, ed. Michael Holquist, trans. Carly Emerson and Michael Holquist (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1981), p. 262.

‘implied recipient’ is a product of the letter-writer.¹⁴ Richardson constructed an implied recipient in his letters to Sarah Wescomb, by projecting his expectations onto hers. Inhabiting the point of view of the ‘generality’ of female writers, Richardson presents frequent letter-writing as the only option ‘when necessary absence [...] deprive[s] her of the person of her charming friend’. Shaping an implied recipient enables Richardson to be indirect (and therefore polite) in his attempts to persuade Wescomb to be in regular epistolary contact. He asks ‘[w]ho would not choose’ to do so, rather than challenging her directly.¹⁵

Writing for the ‘occasion’

What Redford identifies as the ‘implied recipient’ was the product of eighteenth-century writers’ perception that each correspondence required a style tailored to the ‘occasion’. This style was predicated on the epistolary ‘now’: the negotiation of tense that took into account the physical and figurative distance between sender and recipient. Like Pope’s *Epistle to Arbuthnot* (1735), a letter could comprise a collective of moments of composition, just as it comprised, ideally, a ‘concordia discors’ of the correspondents’ idioms. Because the voice of a letter was sometimes (in Pope’s words) ‘*drawn up by snatches, as the several Occasions offer’d*’, texts could house a polyphony of differing, time-specific voices, a record of the self as it changed across months and years. Pope explained the circumstances that led to his verse epistle’s succeeding revisions in a prefatory note:

This Paper is a Sort of Bill of Complaint, begun many years since, and drawn up by snatches, as the several Occasions offer’d. I had no thoughts of publishing it, till it pleas’d some Persons of Rank and Fortune [...] to attack in a very extraordinary manner, not only my Writings (of which being publick the Publick

¹⁴ *The Converse of the Pen* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1986), p. 135.

¹⁵ 27 August 1746, *Correspondence*, ed. Dussinger (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), p. 6.

*may judge) but my Person, Morals, and Family, whereof to those who know me not, a truer Information may be requisite. Being divided between the Necessity to say something of Myself, and my own Laziness to undertake so awkward a Task, I thought it the shortest way to put the last hand to this Epistle.*¹⁶

This verse epistle was written to suit a wider audience than Arbuthnot, ‘Friend to my Life’ (l. 27). It is a response to the several rounds of attack to which Pope found himself and his work exposed by the ‘*the Vicious or the Ungenerous*’. Pope is an author at odds with another; the *Epistle* is his attempt to set the voices of the public – as they are invoked in Johnson’s definition of ‘voice’ – murmuring in his favour. The nominal addressee, like the ‘several Occasions offer’d’, is seen by Pope as an opportunity to write sympathetically about himself and his works (which are closely aligned in the prefatory advertisement). The verse epistle has several audiences: Arbuthnot, ‘those who know me not’, and Pope’s adversaries. He addresses one, but has an eye on the plurality of recipients to whom this epistle could not be sent before publication.

Pope also has an eye to the types of ‘occasional’ publication that his verse epistle could resemble. Swift’s assertion in *A Project for the Advancement of Religion* that there is no quality ‘which Men cannot affect and put on upon Occasion’ echoes Pope’s claim about the method of composition of the *Epistle to Arbuthnot*.¹⁷ Both Swift and Pope refer to the vast array of literature written for ‘various occasions’, such as collected poems, miscellanies, religious handbooks and letter-manuals.¹⁸ Pope’s claim to a negligent, interrupted process of composition resembles the apologia used to sell writing across a plethora of genres. This tactic had special

¹⁶ *An Epistle from Mr. Pope, to Dr. Arbuthnot* (London, 1734 [1735]), ‘Advertisement’.

¹⁷ *A Project for the Advancement of Religion, and the Reformation of Manners* (London, 1709), p. 10.

¹⁸ For example, Edward Ward, *Miscellaneous Writings [...] Also several pleasant letters upon Various Occasions both in Town and Country* (London, 1712); S. Smith, *The Christian’s Pattern [...] To Which are added prayers and meditations On various Occasions* (London, 1738); Elizabeth Singer Rowe, *Letters on Various Occasions, In Prose and Verse* (London, 1729).

significance in the context of epistolary writing, which dealt not just with a reading public, but also with a personal readership.

Because of the distinction between letters and other genres in terms of audience, Pope ran into criticism for not differentiating enough between the way he composed his letters and his other works. Johnson noted Pope's tendency to revise his works, a method which suggests the attempt to deliver uniform excellence, and to bring all his works up to the same standard. Comparing Pope with Dryden, Johnson notes that Dryden 'professed to write, merely for the people; and when he pleased others, he contented himself'.¹⁹ Dryden appears confident in his ability to write 'for the people'; 'the people' being an undifferentiated mass. Pope, on the other hand,

was not content to satisfy; he desired to excel, and therefore always endeavoured to do his best [...] He examined lines and words with minute and punctilious observation, and retouched every part with indefatigable diligence, till he had left nothing to be forgiven.

For this reason he kept his pieces very long in his hands, while he considered and reconsidered them. (iv.64)

Ironically, this method leaves a trail of inconsistencies between editions of Pope's works, creating a multiplicity of voices within his oeuvre. In the context of his letters, Pope's habit of amendment damaged his reputation, as he shattered the illusion of spontaneous epistolary production. Pope contrived to have Curll publish his letters, seemingly without his permission, which freed him from charges of vanity. This situation arose after Curll expressed interest in publishing a biography of Pope. Curll received a letter on 11 October 1733 containing biographical information about Pope, signed only 'P.T.'. The anonymous correspondent wrote again offering 'a large collection of letters' of Pope's, but Curll refused to publish. George Sherburn explains how the affair progressed:

¹⁹ Lonsdale, iv.64.

Then at long last Curll approached Pope directly, sending enclosed the letters of P. T. and asking an alliance. Pope loudly scorned the overture; but P. T. (doubtless, as Curll later said, 'Trickster Pope' himself) again moved into action, and after long, sly, and even melodramatic intrigues, on 12 May 1735 mysterious agents began delivering at the shop of Curll octavo volumes of Pope's printed letters, in various states of completeness. Pope's trickery through P. T. had worked: he himself seemed perfectly concealed, and now his loud, hypocritical outcries of injury, as well as the pre-publication advertisements announcing and denouncing the edition, aroused such interest that the letters were the literary event of the year.²⁰

Pope had, therefore, had the chance to alter letters that his readers would have assumed were unedited for the purpose of publication.

Pope's letters, and the controversy that resulted from Curll's edition of them, encouraged scepticism of the familiar letter as the 'Natural' product of the writer's first thoughts. Pope used evidence of his haste in writing as proof of its truth, glossing over the performativity and self-deception that may be present in even the most automatic writing. According to Keymer, 'Pope's correspondence turns frequently on the related themes of spontaneity and sincerity in letters [...] Even his lapses in grammar, spelling and handwriting are adduced as emblems of sincerity. "You see my letters are scribbled with all the carelessness and inattention imaginable"'.²¹

Outside the literary sphere, omitting a 'careful Perusal of what you have written' was frowned upon by some letter-manuals, while visible corrections ('if you have not Time to transcribe it') were lauded as 'Confessions' that guarded against 'future Mistakes'.²² According to *The Court Letter-Writer* (1773), the epistolary form was less suited to spontaneous expression than 'longer compositions', and it advised its readers to 'revise' their letters 'carefully' (43). Pope revised and rewrote his letters for publication in 1737, but continued to insist upon their spontaneity: 'a proof what

²⁰ Sherburn, i.xiii.

²¹ 19 November 1712, Pope to Caryll, Sherburn, i.155, in Keymer, *Richardson's Clarissa and the Eighteenth-Century Reader*, p. 8.

²² *The Complete Letter-Writer*, 16th edn. (London, 1778), p. 34.

were his real Sentiments, as they flow'd warm from the heart, and fresh from the occasion; without the least thought that ever the world should be witness to them'.²³

Pope's claim that his published letters remained 'fresh from the occasion' for which they were originally written (and that they were 'fresh' in the first place) is seen by Keymer as a denial of elements present in 'any autobiographical act [...] what in *Clarissa* Lovelace calls "the *premeditation of writing*" [...] the inescapable fact that writing is an act of the intelligence' (9-10). The urge to claim that published letters were still 'fresh' probably came from the discomfort of revealing private writings to a public that expected honesty and humility in equal measure. But as with polite language in general, forms of address and ways of approaching an interlocutor in letters need not have the force of immediacy behind them to remain a legitimate – and indispensable – part of human interaction. The result of competing demands on letters can be described as polyphony; these aesthetically complex works are arguably more 'epistolary' because of their dialogism than hypothetically 'fresh', uninhibited letters.

Nevertheless, because Pope left 'nothing to be forgiven' in his published epistles, Johnson's thought they were too uniform: 'they exhibit a perpetual and unclouded effulgence of general benevolence, and particular fondness. There is nothing but liberality, gratitude, constancy, and tenderness' (iv.58). Sherburn points out, though, that the 'innocuous insincerities [of Pope's letters] are simply those of polite social relations' (i.x). Johnson's criticism shares its root with his scepticism concerning the Burneys' letters to one another, which did not exhibit enough healthy variance: such letters lack the 'discordia concors' of family life. In Pope's case,

²³ Preface to the quarto edition of Pope's *Letters* (1737), in Sherburn, i.xxxviii-ix.

Johnson suspects that the poet has polished his style to the extent that he was incapable of writing a letter that was not 'vitiating by *affectation and ambition*' (iv.59):

It is indeed not easy to distinguish affectation from habit; he that has once studiously formed a style, rarely writes afterwards with complete ease. Pope may be said to write always with his reputation in his head; Swift perhaps like a man who remembered that he was writing to Pope; but Arbuthnot like one who lets thoughts drop from his pen as they rise into his mind. (iv.38)

In Pope's case, then, writing 'to the *Moment*' (the fiction of extempore composition advocated by Richardson) involved thinking ahead to the reception of his letters in the wider world, and to their reception as specimens of 'epistolary language'. It was not so much that Pope had edited the letters that he planted on Curll, but that they had been 'premeditated and artificial' (iv.59) to begin with. Even so, Johnson acknowledges that though Pope's attention to detail in his poetry may have carried over into his letters, the faults in the poet's letters aren't unique. To illustrate the universal faults of empty benevolence in letters, Johnson places Pope within a generalised context of human failing, suggesting that the distance between correspondents results in self-deceit:

The writer commonly believes himself. Almost every man's thoughts, while they are general, are right; and most hearts are pure, while temptation is away. It is easy to awaken generous sentiments in privacy; to despise death when there is no danger; to glow with benevolence when there is nothing to be given. (iv.58-9)

As we have seen, the *Epistle to Arbuthnot* has a layering of different time-specific voices, and a series of epistolary 'now's'; it also combines the direct address to Arbuthnot with an indirect appeal to the general readership. It is significant that Pope subjected the verse epistle form to his usual methods of revision. That it took him a long time to '*to put the last hand to this Epistle*' suggests the letter is as open to revision and to the consequent fracturing of voice as other genres.

Though Hugh Blair complained of writing that bore ‘in the title page, a Letter to a Friend [but] it is, in truth, the Public with whom the Author corresponds’, the epistolary conceit allows Pope to combine a personal audience (Arbuthnot) with the general public.²⁴ William C. Dowling has argued that the combination of specific and general address was key to the poetics of the eighteenth-century verse epistle, as the poet sought to resolve the solitude of writing from a distance with the desire to shape his or her wider readership. Dowling calls the verse epistle a method of ‘simultaneous address, a double register within which it is possible to speak to one audience directly while always addressing another by implication’.²⁵ Though Dowling claims poetry for the public, and letters for the private spheres (which ignores the semi-public aspect of many letters), he allows the verse epistle a middle ground, ‘in which the ontological claims of poetry and society [...] are heard to be mutually intelligible’. Dowling’s characterisation of Pope’s verse epistles as possessing a ‘double register’ reflects not just the double audience of the epistle (private and public), but also the many revisions Pope undertook to the work as he reassessed the relationship between himself as a poet and the society he wished to reform.

The complexity of the timescale for the poem’s completion, coupled with its several audiences, gives it a characteristic ‘voice’. This ‘voice’ is characteristic of Pope, because he was associated with aspiration that ‘a letter should be a natural image of the mind of the writer’ (Sherburn, i.94). If this ‘image’ were to be correct, Sherburn suggests, letters were ‘capable of polish, revision, amalgamation, transfer to correspondents other than the original recipients — capable even, though very

²⁴ *Lectures on Rhetoric and Belles Lettres*, 2 vols. (London, 1783), ii.297. Blair delivered the lectures from 1759, and they were only printed in 1783, so precise dating of particular remarks is problematic. However, labelling public-facing writing as epistolary was a phenomenon that spanned the dates between Blair’s lectures’ delivery and their appearance in print.

²⁵ *The Epistolary Moment: the Poetics of Eighteenth-Century Verse Epistles* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1991), p. 12.

seldom, of factual falsification' (i.x). Pope's comment about letters being the 'natural image' of their writers is part of a politeness strategy in which he questions the mechanisms that supposedly underpin the convention of epistolary honesty. He points out that it is more polite to alter the image to consider the addressee's modesty, thereby letting his correspondent know his 'true' feelings only through negation: '[t]hey say a letter should be a natural image of the mind of the writer, but if mine were so it would have been full of nothing else but acknowledgments to you, which I durst not suffer it to be'.²⁶ James McLaverty notes that the unique voice of the *Epistle to Arbuthnot* derives 'not only from the fear of prosecution for libel (real enough) and from the strain of uniting variant strands into one poem, but also from the difficulty of providing a satisfactorily complex and truthful account of the self'.²⁷ Pope's circuitous way of telling Caryll that he is grateful is a typical polite response to this complexity, but its second-guessing of Caryll's response – 'for fear you should think me too grateful' – demonstrates that its composition involved imagining various receptions by the addressee and that it therefore required revision (if only in the mind). Drafting a letter over again until one found the moment to 'put the last hand' to it keeps the text in close agreement with the unfolding iterations of the present moment, but at the same time risks disintegration of Pope's unified, consistent 'image' of himself, both as man and poet.

Richardson is known for his promotion of letters as '*instantaneous* Descriptions and Reflections'²⁸, 'written, as it were, to the *Moment*, while the Heart is agitated by Hopes and Fears, on Events undecided'.²⁹ However, as Tom Keymer has shown, such writing is characterised by 'the rhetorical or performative

²⁶ To John Caryll, 31 July 1710, Sherburn, i.94.

²⁷ *Pope, Print and Meaning* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), p. 176.

²⁸ *Clarissa*, 8 vols., 3rd edn. (London, 1750), i.viii.

²⁹ *Grandison*, Preface, i.4.

tendencies of first-person discourse'.³⁰ This means that writing 'to the *Moment*' is created from inflections and expectations of the 'occasion' in which it arises.

Grandison's Lady G. reveals this when she writes to Harriet that she will 'be sure continue' writing to the moment 'on every occasion' (iii.24). As we have seen with Pope's *Epistle to Arbuthnot*, writing to the moment *and* to the occasion could involve balancing several levels of address: letters could have simultaneously singular and plural addressees, and be written for, or to, succeeding '*Moments*'. Redford's theory of the 'implied recipient' as created by the author of a letter allows us to reinterpret Richardson's phrase, 'to the *Moment*' as meaning that the addressee of the letter is the '*Moment*' or composite occasions for which it is written.

Using the deictic self-consciousness inherent in the letter, Richardson's epistolary voice is often tailored to the occasion. As we have seen, he used anticipatory praise to dictate the style of letter he expected to receive from Sarah Wescomb:

What charming advantages, what high delights, my dear, good, and condescending Miss Wescomb, flow from the familiar correspondences of friendly and undesigning hearts! – Surprising! that the generality of young ladies, delicate by sex, by education; and polite as delicate; their imaginations likewise so happily qualifying them for these mental employments, should be so little sensible of them as they are! – When styles differ, too, as much as faces, and are indicative, generally beyond the power of disguise, of the mind of the writer! – Who would not choose, when necessary absence, when the demands of an indulgent parent, deprive her of the person of her charming friend, to have a delight in retiring to her closet, and there, by pen and ink, continue, and, as I may say, perpetuate, the ever agreeable and innocent pleasures that flow from social love, from hearts united by the same laudable ties?³¹

Richardson interjects upon his own phrases, in order to 'perpetuate' the sense of writing in the 'ever agreeable' present. The impression of immediate and artless

³⁰ *Richardson's Clarissa and the Eighteenth-Century Reader*, xvi.

³¹ 27 August 1746, *Correspondence*, ed. Dussinger (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), p. 6.

expression is an imitation of what Richardson imagines to be the general style of 'familiar correspondences of friendly and undesigning hearts'. The letter discusses the 'generality of young ladies' in the sentimental idiom that he hopes will be shared by his polite and delicate correspondents. However, the interjection '—When styles differ, too, as much as faces, and are indicative, generally beyond the power of disguise, of the mind of the writer!' is of a different tenor from the rest of the paragraph. It moves from the plural, 'generality of young ladies' to a much broader comment about writing styles, which, though general, makes its point by using the singular 'mind of the writer'.

The statement suggests that a person's writing style is as unique an identifier as his or her face, but it also implies that writing can reveal that 'styles differ', according to the mood of the writer, perhaps even from moment to moment. The paragraph itself demonstrates this, as Richardson moves back and forth between his commentary on 'familiar correspondence', and his hypothetical enactment of the female correspondent's actions, when deprived of 'her charming friend'. Richardson gestures towards the ideal union of 'hearts' through the letter, the style of which means that the mind of the writer is 'beyond the power of disguise'. However, his suggestion that 'styles differ' destabilizes the notion of any one person possessing a consistent, transparent, identifiable writing style. Yet that Fielding's *Shamela* could parody Richardson's 'to the *Moment*' style, suggests the epistolary 'now' was itself identifiably Richardsonian.

That the collective traits of the 'generality of young ladies' may be used to encourage Wescomb to write undermines the individuality of her writing style, but it also offers her the safety of a conventional idiom through which to express herself. The phrase beginning 'When styles differ' looks backwards as a modifier of 'that the

generality of young ladies [...] should be so little sensible [...]'. It also looks forwards, as the invitation to 'choose [...] to have a delight in retiring to her closet'.

Richardson's dashes offer a type of squinting construction which points backwards and forwards. The syntax of this letter is not just 'to the *Moment*'; it plays with tense, capitalising on the letter's reliance on deictic markers to bring sender and recipient closer to an 'ever agreeable' present.

Richardson's letters to Wescomb intermingle the narrating and experiencing versions of himself. Richardson alters his statements as he goes, 'my dear Selena, my Ever-amiable and Over-grateful daughter', adding compliments without conjunction. Repetition mimics stumbling speech: '[a]nd take care, take care, my dear Selena, that you make me not vain'.³² Modal alternatives are considered: '[a]nd could I not, ought I not, unless I had a very great share of vanity indeed' (33).

Richardson gives the impression of writing to the moment, by offering these alternatives. However, the prefix in 'ever-amiable' creates consistency and suggests permanence even as Richardson's phrasing aims to impress his correspondent with the fluency and immediacy of his judgement. This technique is put to figurative use when later in the letter he uses the deictic 'now' to write about scenes from the past, combining them with Wescomb's imaginary present:

I think, when ones Mind can follow any Friends in their Retirements, by knowing the places they retire to, as I have seen in your charming situation at Enfield, tho' mine is so inferior, that I offer not at Comparisons, it affords a good deal of Pleasure to a Contemplative Spirit. Now in your parlour, now in your Summer-house, now on one of your Walks; now by the Side, perhaps Angling, as the Season invites, of your truly Serpentine River, one accompanies a valued Friend Every-where: And to this Hour, I enjoy the Visit I made there [...].³³

³² 6 March 1747, *Correspondence*, ed. Dussinger (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), p.

32. Selena was Wescomb's pen-name.

³³ 6 March 1747, *Correspondence*, ed. Dussinger, p. 33.

Richardson continues to look forward to contemplating future visits, marking the result with the deictic 'here', instead of 'now':

[s]ome favourable Opportunity [...] will give me the Pleasure afterwards of contemplating, that here, and here, and here, at such a time, I had the Company of such and such a respectable Friend [...].

Emotion is anticipated in tranquillity; one suspects that, for all its insistence on the present, this letter has been written in the 'cool of leisure'. Anticipating Sterne, Richardson interjects upon his own narrative, in which dashes separate the different activities he describes, so that the paragraph emulates the 'Serpentine River' of Enfield. The variety of situations in which Wescomb is represented contrasts with the perpetual presence of Richardson, 'here' and 'now'. Richardson's deictic markers indicate a 'now' comprising predicted and recalled moments of Westcomb's experience that Richardson evoked in his own present, at the moment of his writing. The 'now' represents a summary of action, a summary of moments, the description of which arises from the epistolary situation. Because of the physical distance that has led to the writing of the letter, Richardson imagines a series of actions that he cannot witness directly. He then consolidates these moments into a synthesised present tense.

The weighted contrast of '[n]ow in your parlour, now in your Summer-house' is not too far from the equalising force balancing the halves of each line in Pope's *Windsor-Forest* (1713). Like Richardson's tribute to Wescomb and her abode, Pope sought to praise both a person (George Granville) and a place, and to promote mutual good feeling by evoking 'agreement':

Here Hills and Vales, the Woodland and the Plain,
Here Earth and Water seem to strive again,
Not *Chaos*-like together crush'd and bruis'd,

But as the World, harmoniously confus'd:
Where Order in Variety we see,
And where, tho' all things differ, all agree.³⁴

Pope calls the reader insistently to Windsor forest by repeating the deictic markers 'here' and 'where'. He takes his readers around the contours of the landscape before inviting them to see things directly from his point of view with the inclusive pronoun in the phrase 'Order in Variety we see'. This the same kind of invitation as that which is implied by the ideal reader of *An Essay on Criticism*: 'A perfect Judge will *read* each Work of Wit / With the same Spirit that its Author *writ*'.³⁵ It is an invitation to 'agree' with the poet, and in the same way, Richardson's tone in his letters to Wescomb is designed to promote correspondence, in the sense of 'agreement'. By creating an empathetic picture of Wescomb's movements in his letter, Richardson promotes a similarity of feeling between them based in his terminology. The polyphonous 'Variety of Sounds' converges into harmonious agreement, or 'concordia discors'.

Richardson also used the epistolary 'now' to instigate useful disagreement. Changing his readers' opinions of Charlotte Grandison, for example, allowed him to advance the plot and variegate her personality. Readers are led along a twisting path of opinion in much the same way that Pope leads us around Windsor forest. Richardson claimed to Bradshaigh that there were 'many Instances' when he designed to change his readers' opinions of his characters. These 'Instances' are evoked in terms of the perpetual present: he writes 'intending to make them think now one way, now another of the very same Characters'.³⁶ His antithetical phrase, 'now one way, now another', suggests the influence of poetic couplets; Pope's portrait of Lord Hervey in the *Epistle to Arbuthnot* resembles Richardson's description

³⁴ *Windsor-Forest. To the Right Honourable George Lord Lansdown* (London, 1713), p. 1.

³⁵ (London, 1711), p. 15.

³⁶ 12 November 1753, FC XI, f. 39, Carroll, p. 248.

of his authorial technique. However, Pope's Hervey demonstrates an alternative to 'concordia discors', or even to the structurally productive disagreements about characters that Richardson sought to provoke in his readers. As a 'vile Antithesis', Hervey's wit fails to resolve itself into agreement:

His Wit all see-saw between *that* and *this*,
Now high, now low, now Master up, now Miss,
And he himself one vile Antithesis. (ll. 323-5)

Although this isn't necessarily *writing* to the moment, Pope's Hervey exists in a perpetual present, conjured by the same deictic markers Richardson that used in his epistles. Writing to Bradshaigh of his authorial technique, he imagines a perpetual present of succeeding 'Instances' or occasions, of the same kind that he imagined Wescomb inhabiting, as he followed her in her 'retirement', 'now in your Summer-house, now on one of your Walks'.³⁷

Richardson insisted that the letter was a form of writing 'to the *Moment*' which revealed the mind of the writer. But the popularity of the letter itself (and its use as a frame for other forms of writing, such as novels and pamphlets) fostered awareness of correspondence as both a concurrence of styles, and as a dialogic contrast of styles. As written dialogue, the letter shares some characteristics with written debates such as Johnson's 'debates in the senate of Lilliput' for the *Gentleman's Magazine*, and offers the possibility for a complement of different written voices. Writing 'to the *Moment*' also suggests the historical moment as the 'occasion' for writing. The letter was the most common medium of written communication during the eighteenth century, and its expanding popularity coincided with debates about the linguistic characteristics suitable to different genres of writing, to different media, and

³⁷ 6 March 1747, *Correspondence*, ed. Dussinger, p. 33.

to different classes of people. Richardson's 'to the *Moment*' style touches on at least two possibilities: that there are characteristic 'voices' belonging to individuals and groups; or, as David Hume suggested, that the mind was a theatre where 'several perceptions successively make their appearance [...] and mingle in an infinite variety of postures and situations'.³⁸

Letters allowed writers to 'mingle' their voices with that of their addressee(s), according to the 'successive perceptions' or occasions offered by a particular epistolary exchange. Though, as Jack Lynch observes, critical norms have tended to atomise correspondences and approach each letter discretely, letters 'refuse to stand alone. They derive only part of their meaning from the words between "Dear Sir" and "Your humble servant"' much more comes from their place in a correspondence that can last months, years, or decades.³⁹ This accretion of meaning is reflected in the shared style of a correspondence. Because letter-writers adjust their tone to suit their addressee, there may be a moderation of differences that results in an idiom characteristic of a correspondence, rather than writing which maintains the individual styles of the respective writers.

Margaret Collier's correspondence with Richardson is such a correspondence. On the subject of female modesty, the two writers developed a back-and-forth of re-quotation and mutual development that centres on plaited napkins. Richardson first expressed frustration that women 'hide their talents in a napkin', which later became the tautological 'wrap up their napkin'd talents'.⁴⁰ Margaret Collier responded by increasing the folds in the plait image with modifiers, desecrating 'the dishonesty of

³⁸ *A Treatise of Human Nature*, ed. P. H. Nidditch and Lewis Amherst Selby-Bigge, 2nd edn. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1978), p. 253.

³⁹ Jack Lynch, "A disposition to write": Johnson as Correspondent, in *Samuel Johnson: New Contexts for a New Century*, ed. Howard D. Weinbrot (California: Huntington Library Press, 2014), pp. 89-105, p. 93.

⁴⁰ 24 December 1755; 5 January 1756, *Correspondence*, ed. Barbauld (London, 1804), ii.82; ii.92.

those girls who studiously conceal, in many inexplicable plaits (as you say) the glorious talents bestowed on them'.⁴¹ Collier then let the napkin stand for its contents: 'to continue their napkins in plaits before marriage, nor ever dare to unfold them [...] except they could meet with a noble-minded Sir Charles Grandison' (ii.98).

Collier and Richardson's plait metaphor replicates the collaborative dovetailing of ideas in epistolary correspondence. It is an elegant and appropriate image for the occasion, because of the association with female domestic pursuits such as the production of small pieces of embroidery. This is part of a wider trend in letters to express gratitude and obligation by way of 'trifles'. An example from Richardson's network is Sarah Fielding's correspondence with James Harris, in which she strategically diminishes her ambitions, in deference to Harris, whom she is asking for advice on translation. When Harris has translated a small passage for her, she assures him that she values the favour according to its true worth: 'nor shall I look upon it at all in the Light of a Trifle, tho' you are so polite as to call it so'.⁴² Both writers collaborate to maintain the idiom of epistolary humility.

The role-playing of female authorship that Richardson invited in his correspondence with women resulted in some subversive, double-tongued utterances. The subject of female literary ability was well rehearsed in Richardson's correspondences, as well as in *Grandison*. Because letters were a daily iteration of gendered duties and relationship dynamics, they offer some insightful and playful instances of the debate.

Correspondence-specific idioms incorporated what Dowling calls the 'double register' in response to situations in which letters were sent and received by groups rather than individuals. For example, several letters written together by Sarah

⁴¹ 11 Feb 1756, Barbauld, ii.96.

⁴² 21 September 1758, *The Letters of Henry and Sarah Fielding*, ed. Battestin and Probyn, p. 141.

Fielding and Jane Collier are extant; these are self-conscious, performative pieces. In one, they report to Richardson that they had dinner with a man who was sceptical of such 'silly women' being in epistolary correspondence with Richardson. The report blurs the boundary between reported conversation and their current address: 'we know you do love and like us too, say what you will to the contrary'.⁴³ It's either the *hic, haec, hoc* man they dined with, or Richardson, or perhaps a combination of both that they address here: the purpose of the writers' anecdote is to get Richardson to avow his affection for them. It is no coincidence that Fielding and Collier chose to write to Richardson, and court his pen together: there is safety in numbers. Elaborate declarations of modesty such as Fielding and Collier's were, paradoxically, an opportunity for female writers to create 'implied recipients' that demonstrated their epistolary abilities.

Richardson recognised the three-way dynamic between himself, Fielding and Collier when he wrote to Fielding:

I hate the pen more and more; or I should not have been so long silent to my dear miss Fielding as I have been. Don't you miss our dear Miss Jenny Collier more and more? – I do!⁴⁴

The inclusive 'our' coupled with the informal 'Jenny' gestures towards an intimate register of shared authorship and epistolary exchange. The parallelism of 'more and more' hatred of the pen with 'more and more' regret at Jane Collier's absence is another instance, like Margaret Collier's plaited napkin, of an echo chamber of associative and collaborative ideas from letter to letter. The majority of Richardson's surviving exchanges the Fieldings and Colliers are not jointly written, but the memory of the double-authored letter is contained within the correspondence as it proceeds.

⁴³ 8 January 1748-9, Barbauld, ii.60.

⁴⁴ 7 December 1756, Barbauld, ii.104.

Richardson's modifying phrase – 'more and more' – neatly combines the demands of the current 'moment' using his characteristic present tense style, with the permanence of his affection for, and grief over the loss of, Jane Collier. Such correspondence-specific idioms demonstrate that letters supported polyphony by encouraging the 'mingling' of minds through writing.

Dual voices and '*third handed*' letters

The plaited napkin image that Margaret Collier and Richardson developed between them in their correspondence resembles another image of co-authorship in their circle. Margaret's transcription of Jane Collier's commonplace book contains 'Sallys & Jennys Emblem (1754) concerning the Cry'. The emblem describes Sarah Fielding's and Jane Collier's method of collaboration on *The Cry* as the creation of 'a compleat Gown & Petticote for any young Lady in Town'. Sally is responsible for the weaving and the 'pattern'; Jenny 'cuts it, fits it, makes the flowers all Joyn according to the Pattern designed by Sally (as nearly that is as she could comprehend her meaning)'.⁴⁵ It is impossible to tell whether Fielding and Collier wrote this emblem together; the third person 'Sally' and 'Jenny' combines intimacy with distance. But we do know that the joint authorship of letters resulted in epistolary polyphony, and that Fielding and Collier's epistolary collaboration was mirrored in their novelistic experiment with joint authorship. Kinkead-Weekes associates characters thinking of themselves in the third person with Richardson's novels. However, in Collier's commonplace book, as well as in letters signed 'your humble servant', thinking of oneself in the third person was a feature of life-writing.

Fielding and Collier's joint letter to Richardson was written at a time when

⁴⁵ Fol. 39^v of 'A Copy of My Sisters Common Place Book Transcribed by me Margaret Collier', quoted in Michael Londry, 'Our Dear Miss Jenny Collier', *Times Literary Supplement* (5 March 2004), pp. 13-14.

there was some debate about how to indicate singular and plural address. The distinction between singular and plural ‘you’ disappeared during the eighteenth century, as the replacement of Middle English *thou/thee* with ‘you’ progressed to ‘you was’ becoming unacceptable:

Usage of this construction [‘you was’] increased considerably during the eighteenth century, and it apparently functioned as a transition in the development of you into a singular pronoun. There was a peak in usage during the 1760s, and this presumably caught the attention of the normative grammarians: though Lowth regularly used you was himself, he was the first to condemn it as ‘an enormous solecism’ in the first edition of his grammar.⁴⁶

Robert Lowth criticised Pope for using ‘you was’ in his letters and poetry, calling it a ‘great impropriety’ and not suited to the ‘Solemn Style’ of his religious poems.⁴⁷ The result of a lack of distinction between single and plural addressees was that letter-writers could be unspecific about whom they were addressing within a household or circle of acquaintances that would be reading the letter.

However, Ingrid Tieken-Boon van Ostade points out that writers such as Lowth and Lady Mary Wortley Montagu used constructions such as ‘you was’ in their familiar letters. She speculates that many writers had a ‘vernacular’ style that they reserved for conversation and private correspondence, ‘characterized by different grammatical rules from those which came to form the basis of the normative grammatical tradition’ (258). These writers still made a distinction between the epistolary vernacular and the style needed for more formal letters, though. When Collier and Fielding wrote to Richardson, therefore, they were taking advantage of the moment of transition between plural and singular of address.

⁴⁶ Ingrid Tieken-Boon van Ostade, ‘English at the Onset of the Normative Tradition’, in *The Oxford History of the English Language*, ed. Lynda Mugglestone (Oxford: Clarendon, 2006), pp. 298-339, p. 260.

⁴⁷ *A Short Introduction to English Grammar* (London, 1762), p. 49.

Fittingly, then, *The Cry* is self-consciously experimental in its representation of singular and plural identity. The presence of distinct 'personages' results in 'discordia concors'. The Cry is an entity within the novel that acts as a chorus or interlocutor that has a plural identity (the reactions of the Cry are referred to in the third person plural). The Cry gives the novel some of the features of drama by acting as a chorus, which recalls Greek tragedy, which used the chorus as a voice for the audience, for alternative views, for a backdrop to enhance the action, or to frame the plot. Aside from the social dynamic of collaboration, the confluence of different genres at the time of *The Cry's* publication also influenced its form. Closet dramas were being read and performed in domestic settings; an interest remained in Socratic dialogue as a method of exposition and argument. When Richardson offered his advice on *The Cry*, he expressed his admiration for the 'merit and novelty' of it. This seems to be a sugar accompaniment for his bitter pill of advice, that he fears it will 'slide into oblivion' unless Ferdinand is made a worthier hero, and the ending changed in a second edition.⁴⁸

The singular and plural 'you' (versus 'thou') allowed more opportunities for ambiguous inclusion in *The Cry's* innovative use of a single-voiced chorus. As well as having some of the features of ancient drama, the Cry also seems to represent a part of Portia's own mind, in that it offers an opposing view and forces her to justify her opinions. The Cry mirrors Portia's emotions and amplifies them, suggesting that it is an interlocutor that is supposed to facilitate self-knowledge. This function of the Cry changes when it starts to take on a dramatic personality that is distinct from the material provided by Portia. In fact, *The Cry* dramatizes the interaction between novelist and critic within the novel setting itself. Shaftesbury's doubts about the

⁴⁸ 17 January 1757, Barbauld, ii.108-9.

legitimacy of debate when the critical voice of opposition is a mere 'puppet' could well apply in this scenario. However, the vehemence of the Cry surpasses empty puppetry and instead approaches caricature.

The Cry's many altercations present the reader with duelling voices. In his definition of 'voice', Johnson chose exemplary quotations which present the reader with fractious voices, a great 'murmur' of conspiracy, a 'multitude and corruption of voices', and 'multitude' and 'corruption' as collective nouns for 'voice'. This seems a plausibly representative selection of what eighteenth-century writers and readers really did understand by 'voice', at least in the context of reading *The Cry* as a commentary upon the mid-century literary marketplace. The image of 'duelling voices' seems closer to the truth than Shaftesbury's vision of 'amicable collision' resulting in politeness; more 'discordia concors' than 'concordia discors'. This is commensurate with Johnson's scepticism about the uniformity of the Burneys' letters, as collective epistolary voices negotiated tensions of group and individual identity by suppressing or editing out conflict.

As we have seen, eighteenth-century letters that had to communicate between groups, such as the Richardson-Fielding correspondence, were aided by interchangeable first- and third- person pronouns. Mühläusler and Harré's 'thesis of double location' helps us to understand the role of pronouns in creating epistolary polyphony. In their book *Pronouns and People*, they contend that 'I' is not a word that denotes the 'self', because personhood is defined not only by the 'mental and moral attributes' of the inner core, but is also defined by location. We are all 'relative to an environment of beings similar to ourselves', and have personhood assigned to us by our social group. Each person has a single point of view, but this is defined by the 'locally valid theory of personhood' (87-8). The 'I' is located in the individual body

of any one speaker, but at the same time, the 'I' belongs to the group. As Susan Wright has shown, 'the linguistic structure of the personal letter' entails the 'deictic organisation of person, time and space' such that letters can 'be read as a subjective expression of the writer's image of him or herself'.⁴⁹ Letters, therefore, define the 'I' of the writer in relation to the addressee much more so than other forms of directed writing.

During the eighteenth century, it was everyday practice to use the third person instead of the first in letters: 'Mrs. Raw begs to present her respectful acknowledgements for Miss Pigotts [*sic*] kind remembrance.'⁵⁰ This ventriloquism is a common trait in letters that report speech, and its distinct place between first and third person allows the writer to maintain their authority, while at the same time acknowledging the wider audience that familiar letters often have (that is, to communicate between families, as well as between the particular correspondents). Another use of the third person address is to communicate a feeling of growing stiffness between correspondents. When Anna Seward wrote to Penny Price, that 'I have not heard from dear Mrs. Price'⁵¹, she appealed to an outside force to confirm the objective truth of her situation and thereby shame Price into responding. Price is at once 'dear' and 'Mrs.'; close to, but formally removed, from Seward.

Using the third person instead of the first, or second, was partly a change in conventions of polite address that occurred between 1760 and 1818, as Susan O'Brien observed to Sarah Lennox:

Titles were used in common, & none but by parents or the greatest intimates were ever call'd by their Christian names. Servants always call'd those they served My Lord or My Lady, My Master or my Mistress [...] Now [...] persons with or without titles are called by their Xtian names [...] Misses likewise give up

⁴⁹ S. Wright, 'The Language of Letters as Literature', *Poetics*, 18 (1989), 549-578, p. 550.

⁵⁰ Bodleian, MS Pigott d. 9, f. 40.

⁵¹ Bodleian, MS Pigott d. 9, f. 105.

their titles [...] all follow this laudable humility, & every rank contributes its mite to equality. Every man, tradesman, or farmer is Esqr., & every prentice girl a young lady. Servants speak of their masters in the third person[.]⁵²

The options available to eighteenth-century writers in selecting which pronouns to use would have undoubtedly allowed them to write from the imaginary point of view of another more readily than if the use of 'I' and 'you' had been the only options.

Pronouns in general do not always correspond with their traditional grammatical number. Mühläusler and Harré discuss the implications of using 'we' instead of 'I', in non-literary contexts. When a plural replaces a traditionally singular pronoun, the resulting 'we' is understood to contain an element of the singular, or 'egocentric':

[T]here is a tendency for all pronouns in English to acquire an egocentric force in both specific and generalized exophoric uses. The choice of *we* rather than *I* is a narrative convention which has the effect of a rhetorical distancing of the speaker from the overt self-reference. (129)

The effect is to make the convictions of the speaker more palatable; this is a form of the audience design used by writers such as Addison, who eschew 'I' for a fictional persona. In the 'academic *we*', the audience is encouraged to see itself as a participant; '[a] narrative structure is created within which the interlocutor is trapped' into perceiving things as the author presents them, as in *Windsor Forest's* 'Order in Variety *we* see'.⁵³ However, this reading of the 'academic *we*' can be overturned, as the intention of the speaker may be undermined by his/her audience:

The surface meaning of joint activity [...] frequently disguises only thinly the true agentive 'I' or [its target] 'you', and that, more generally, the authoritative

⁵² O'Brien to Lennox, 'Changes between 1760 and 1818', in *The Oxford Book of Letters*, ed. Kermode, p. 125.

⁵³ My emphasis.

persuasive voice of the ego will 'contaminate' the illusion of modesty. 'We' can acquire the very connotations its use has sought to avoid.⁵⁴

Whatever the persuasive or rhetorical effects of using 'we' instead of 'I', the fact that the 'I' remains implicit shows that a 'dual voice' is part of extra-literary communication, and that 'figurative' selves (as Dorrit Cohn defines the 'self' of characters) applies to how people think of themselves in everyday terms.⁵⁵ In normal circumstances, it is necessary to suspend one's sense of a singular self and use instead the sense of a 'dual location'. If this were not the case, the 'academic we' would not be understood by its audience or readership.

G. Urban has shown that even when there is direct quotation of a character's thought or speech, the character's 'I' is understood as an anaphor for 'he':

In 'He said "I shall buy you some ice cream"' [...] we must presume a double embedding; 'I (narrator) say "He said <I shall buy you some ice cream>" in which the embedded 'I' is third person.⁵⁶

In all narrative, the implicit, overarching 'I' of the narrator renders all other first-person voices anaphoric. This is flagged up in works in which we are reminded of the narrator's speech as a prerequisite for the existence of the story, such as Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* (1899). The self-conscious twiddling with narratorial control in *Tristram Shandy* (1759-1767) forces the reader to take note that all the characters' conversations are mediated through the initial 'I say' of Tristram's account. In short, pronouns are regularly substituted for one another. In the case of narrative, the reader suspends his/her sense of disbelief enough to take for granted the anaphoric

⁵⁴ K. M. Wales, 'Exophora re-examined: the uses of the personal pronoun WE in present-day English', *UEA Papers in Linguistics*, 12 (1980), 21-44, p. 33.

⁵⁵ *Transparent Minds: Narrative Modes for Presenting Consciousness in Fiction* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1983).

⁵⁶ G. Urban, 'The "I" of Discourse', in *Semiotics, Self and Society*, ed. B. Lee and G. Urban (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1989), 27-52.

'I' of the narrator. The third person and implicitly plural addresses of eighteenth-century letters should therefore be no surprise, especially given the form's 'deictic organisation' (Wright) and the contemporaneous linguistic transition of rules governing titles and pronouns.

Writing to and for a particular occasion, where letters were concerned, entailed the switching of first- and third- person pronouns. Letters and letter-manuals were addressed to entire households and could be written on behalf of more than one person, and as such they had to mix different levels of civility and plurality. Like fictional novelistic narratives, letters were not monologic streams of consciousness so much as a collection of polyphonic features, such as ventriloquism of others and one's correspondent, reported speech, snippets of printed news, moral lessons, quotations, *bon mots* and literary allusion. All these features find their way into the texture of letters, and the letter's 'concordia discors' could not function without them.

Despite the formalised conventions of address and direction, a letter could belong to a wider group of people, for example, the 'household-family': 'a household including its diverse dependents, such as servants, apprentices and co-resident relatives'.⁵⁷ Thomas O. Beebee thinks of letters such as those written by Anna Howe in *Clarissa* as 'virtual team project[s]', with 'all listeners to the "public talk"' being represented by the 'I' of the letter.⁵⁸ However, the multiple-ownership of a letter might well apply to only some sections, and the indications about which parts should be read aloud, and which should be kept for the reader-receiver alone, could be quite subtle. For example, in the *Journal to Stella*, Swift had separate names for both his readers, Johnson ('Ppt') and Dingley ('Dd'). However, he also used 'MD' to signify

⁵⁷ Naomi Tadmor, *Family and Friends in Eighteenth-Century England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), p. 19.

⁵⁸ *Epistolary Fiction in Europe*, p. 76.

both women, though, as Deane Swift lamented, 'MD generally stands for both these ladies; yet sometimes only for *Stella* [Johnson]'.⁵⁹

The dual address of Swift's correspondence with Johnson and Dingley was minimised by Deane Swift in order to avoid 'perplexing the reader', though it appears that Swift himself may have used the uncertainty of 'MD' deliberately, to play games with his addressees. Pope and Swift wrote with the expectation that their letters could be intercepted, so another reason Swift played such games with code could have been anticipation of an unwanted readership scanning his letters for political content.

We have seen that the ownership of a letter could be disputed, and that a single letter could have different intended audiences, as well as ventriloquize different writer-speakers in a single epistle. In her letters to her sister, Cassandra, Jane Austen refers to their mother as 'my Mother'. This suggests her awareness of the potentially public nature of some sections of her letters, but it also seems to indicate a degree of introspection. This is done as if she were quoting herself, or quoting convention. Indeed, it was conventional to use the possessive pronoun when referring to one's parents, so much so that Austen underlined 'Mother' by itself when she quoted Eliza Curling's turn of phrase:

My Mother has been talking to Eliza about our future home – and *she*, making no difficulty at all of the Sweetheart, is perfectly disposed to continue with us, but till she has written home for *Mother's* approbation, cannot quite decide. – *Mother* does not like to have her so far off.⁶⁰

⁵⁹ *Letters, Written by the Late Jonathan Swift*, ed. Deane Swift, 6 vols. (London, 1768), iv.5-6.

⁶⁰ 24 January 1809, *Letters of Jane Austen*, ed. Deirdre Le Faye, 3rd edition (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), p. 170.

‘JA invariably writes “my Mother”,’ R. W. Chapman notes, ‘and no doubt regarded “Mother” as a vulgarism.’⁶¹ The possessive pronoun in ‘my Mother’ acknowledges the wider audience of a letter, and wards off charges of vulgarity by conforming to convention. It also indicates that correspondents thought about themselves as individuals in constant use of terms of possession to reinvigorate relationships with specific family members and friends.

Before Austen, Fanny Burney used this convention in a more extreme form in her letters addressed to her father, by writing as if he were a third party: ‘I had purposed, in quitting my dearest Father, to have recommended to his blessing a little Being that — — if, like Lord Townshend's — it resembles *either* its Father *or* its Grandfather cannot but deserve it’.⁶² Using the third person for addressees seems to treat them as a character, to fictionalize them through physical and grammatical distance. Burney goes on to acknowledge the shared ownership of the letter she is writing, and its ‘*third handed*’ qualities:

I have a great deal to say to my Mother which I will communicate in a Letter *all to herself* on a Post Day & mean while, I only desire my love & compts to her, & my hearty thanks for her kindness.

Sarah is such a tremendous Mænad about my epistolary misdemeanours, that I know not if she will accept any thing short of a folio Letter, — let me try her, however, in the mean while, with begging her not to reject my cordial love thus *third handed*, but first hearted.

Perhaps because letters were passed around and read aloud, writers strove to combine the propriety and distance of the third person with the warmth of feeling expected in direct contact. Many eighteenth-century letters were, therefore, ‘*third handed*, but first hearted’. Another epistolary convention that uses possessive

⁶¹ Ibid., p. 399, n. 9.

⁶² 12 October 1794, *The Journals and Letters of Fanny Burney*, ed. Joyce Hemlow et al., 12 vols. (Oxford: Clarendon, 1972-84), iii.81.

pronouns to revalidate the relationship between correspondents is that of referring to oneself as 'your humble servant' in the middle of a narrative in which the writer was him- or herself involved. By highlighting the fact that one was present in the situation that one is describing, the writer admits a degree of subjectivity; at the same time, referring to oneself in the second person 'your' reaches for a sense of objectivity. Robert Burns is a good example of a writer using 'humble service' to poke fun at the convention itself: he referred to himself as 'your Bardship' to relieve the awkwardness of addressing potential patrons. The letter-writer performs an artful piece of strategic possession, by seeming to relinquish his or her hold on the story (giving 'service' to the addressee) but in reality reclaiming some ownership of the narrative's interpretation.

In letter-manuals, readers were encouraged to think about their own individual duties, and the respects that they paid personally in letters. In *Clarissa*, Richardson exploits the isolation that comes with thinking of oneself as a correspondent charged with constantly re-articulating one's own relationship with others, rather than expressing the shared characteristics of the family. The use of 'my mother', or 'my cousin' suddenly becomes the crux of the message, as Clarissa's overbearing familial duty isolates her from her 'friends'. The battle over whose plan for Clarissa would become the shared opinion of the family is key to her relations with the group; the novel records the ascendance of her siblings in her parents' favour, and her own decline. *Clarissa* translates into fiction the letter's ability to convey the delicate vicissitudes of collective family identity, particularly when the features peculiar to the letter are used to express the differences between characters. When Arabella writes to her sister, she directs her letter '*To the most ungrateful and undutiful of Daughters*', thereby implying that Clarissa is known by the outside world for her

familial ingratitude, such that the letter could find its way to her by this direction.

Arabella goes on to exploit the superscription in order to demonstrate Clarissa's tenuous position within the family:

To the most ungrateful and undutiful of daughters.
Harlowe-Place, Sat. April 15.
Sister that was,
FOR I know not what name you are permitted, or
choose to go by.

***Clarissa*, 7 vols. (London, 1748), iii.259.**

Arabella then lists each family member in turn, itemising the Harlowes' denunciation of her younger sister. The format of the letter illustrates this, by taking a new line for each family member:

My uncle Harlowe renounces you for ever.
 So does my uncle Antony.
 So does my aunt Hervey.
 So do *I*, base unworthy creature!— The disgrace
 of a good family, and the property of an infamous
 rake, as questionless you will soon find yourself, if
 you are not already!

***Clarissa*, 7 vols. (London, 1748), iii.260.**

Clarissa's sister uses possessive pronouns to barbarous effect. She claims to speak on behalf of everyone in the family, but this is one of the central issues in the novel:

her opinion sways the other Harlowes unduly. Although this isn't the traditional narrator/character relationship that we have come to associate with free indirect discourse, it nevertheless exhibits some of the same traits, in that the demarcations between the statement attributable to the narrator (in this case, Arabella) and characters (the other Harlowes) are suggestively obscured. Arabella is also repurposing the epistolary convention of the 'remembrance' that usually appeared towards the ends of letters. Instead of the usual litany of friends and family members whose names are listed so as to pass on good wishes, here the itemised names stand for the systematic disregard and lack of good feeling that has developed between Clarissa and the rest of her family.

In light of the fact that letters, by their very nature, include a multitude of voices, it might be expected that letter-manuals, with their insistence upon stratified addresses, hierarchical mannerisms, and generic and structured content, were simplified, single-voiced versions of their real, multivalent counterparts. However, there was creative interchange between manuals, novels and real letters. Even though a manual might reproduce the simplest, most generic and oft-printed exchange of familiar letters, such manuals are also capable of articulating some of the nuanced voicing that was necessary if a letter were to perform its multiple functions, such as speaking to more than one person at once, while seeming only to address an individual.

Using 'my mother' instead of 'our mother' could be a purely conventional recognition of the writer's awareness of their own familial duties as an individual with their own specific responsibilities, or it could indicate competitiveness and possessiveness, a desire for preference and power within the family. A good example of two letters that demonstrate this underlying tension appears in *The*

Lilliputian Library (1782), a publication that contained a set of model letters, and a group of fables, among other forms of writing. A brother writes to his sister, admonishing her for not writing. The shift between third person and first person possessive pronouns seems pointed:

Dear Sister,

I must acquaint you how unkind it is taken by every body here, that we so seldom hear from you; my mother, in particular, is not a little displeased [...] my aunt is of the same opinion, and none but myself endeavours to find excuses for you [...] You are very sensible how dear you are to us all; think then with yourself, whether it be right to omit giving us the only satisfaction that absence affords to real friends, which is often to hear from one another.

Our best respects to Mr. and Mrs. Herbert, and compliments to all friends,
From your very affectionate brother.⁶³

The inclusive pronouns towards the end, in the valedictory paragraph, are conventional. They signal that the letter is being written from the entire family at home, as does ‘my mother [...] says you are a very idle girl’, which indicates reported speech, but is not framed by quotation marks. He treats his aunt and mother as characters whose opinions he can relate without recourse to direct quotation with the summary ‘a little displeased’, and ‘is of the same opinion’. As the letter-writer, he is in the position of narrating their opinions as an amalgam of their utterances, which combines to form the family ‘discourse’. The brother uses ‘my’ instead of ‘our’ to avoid being implicated in his sister’s idleness any more than he has been, by ‘endeavouring to find excuses’ for her. This shows that as the letter-writer, he is capable of shaping the text of the letter to follow his own narrative, to a certain extent. This makes him a narrator, rather than a family amanuensis, though in this role, his motives are more straightforward than Arabella Harlowe’s. Within the same paragraph, he uses the inclusive pronoun – ‘giving us the only satisfaction’ – to

⁶³ 2 vols. (Berlin, 1782), pp. 24-5.

combine his opinion with that of his mother and aunt. Because the brother combines the reported speech and summary report of his family, and mixes these opinions with his own without demarcation, the passage could – loosely – be considered free indirect discourse. More broadly, the modulations in perceived allegiance and writing persona in this very short and generic epistle demonstrate how something akin to free indirect discourse is embedded in the function of letters, as they are required to accommodate different aspects of character, to embrace one writer's several roles, often within single letters. It is not simply that a letter-writer must acquire different styles for different correspondents, but that he or she must balance many competing considerations in writing to one person.

The sister's reply mirrors the brother's use of pronouns, but converts the brother's 'my' into her own 'my':

I write this immediately on the receipt of yours, to beg my mamma's pardon, which you, I know can procure; as also my aunt's [...] I hope you will continue to excuse all my little omissions [...] I shall certainly write to mama by next post [...] my duty to dear mama, and sincere respects to all friends,
Your ever affectionate sister. (26-7)

Letters become part of the economy of trading pronouns, as the brother's letter becomes referred to simply by the second person pronoun 'yours', and so too does the writer herself ('Your ever...'), eager to inscribe herself as belonging to the offended household to which she writes. The complexity of audience may be seen in the two layers of address implied in the phrases 'my mama's pardon, which you, I know can procure'. By placing 'you' at the beginning of the sub clause 'which you, I know can procure', the sister emphasises that she is addressing herself to her brother alone. The mix of formal pronoun and affectionate informality in the sister's 'my mama' nods towards a wider audience, and belies the confidential aspect of her

address to her sibling, highlighting the awkwardness that her brother has had to endure by being the advocate of and messenger for his sister. He mediates between her and the rest of the family in person and through letters.

The sister's reply then slips into a more relaxed and affectionate tone, once she has made the letter perform a speech act by way of swearing to reform: 'on this my promise of amendment'. The letter is both a promise of reform, and the immediate proof of it (since the original fault was her lack of communication). Having promised to write, she refers to 'my duty to dear mama', replacing a potential possessive pronoun with a term of endearment, and recognising that duty begins within the self: 'my duty'. When she says 'I shall certainly write to mama by next post', she is addressing her brother again, this time in a more direct fashion; the lack of a conspicuous 'my' or even 'our' naturalises the shared maternal interest of both siblings, and brings the stiffness of the exchange (created by the resentment of her relatives) to an end.

The details of this small family drama are articulated precisely in the shifting weight of the various possessive pronouns. The inflections of possessive pronouns in each paragraph indicate the correspondents' awareness of their responsibilities to various individuals within the 'chain' of family life. The epistolary form forces the different tones of address appropriate to different family members into a single narrative, and the result of this compression is a kind of free indirect discourse. The appearance of such a technique in a letter-manual of the late eighteenth century, which is highly derivative and generic, points to the fact that attributes supposed to belong exclusively to literary fiction may be found in more 'common objects'. The same pair of letters appeared in *The Complete Letter-Writer* as early as 1756, with largely the same accentuation of possessive pronouns, showing that these letters –

and the features of language they displayed – were common in the didactic literature of the eighteenth century.

Richardson's *Familiar Letters* (1741) also has a version of the exchange between siblings abroad and at home. Before Richardson's manual, editions of *The Secretary's Guide* (1705?) and the Rev. Thomas Cooke's *The Universal Letter-Writer* (1708) covered the topic of epistolary neglect or silence as it related to lapsed friendship. Richardson, however, made the issue a familial one, which relates to the domestic hothouse situations he created in his novels. In the manual, the epistolary neglect originates in an absent sister, staying with her aunt. Her brother writes to her, claiming familial possession: '*my Dear sister*'.⁶⁴ Charles Johnson replicated the pair of letters in his *The Complete Art of Letter-Writing*.⁶⁵ Small changes were made, which cumulatively make the two letters less formal, and less familial.

The sister in Richardson's manual is staying with her aunt, whereas in Johnson's, she stays with 'Mr. and Mrs. *Herbert*' (30). In Richardson's manual, the sister's contrition is absolute: 'Most kindly, and too justly, do you upbraid me. I own my Fault, and never will be guilty of the like again' (37). Johnson's manual begins with a casual contraction, and its first sentence is longer, giving the impression of a less straitened writer: 'I'll not set about finding Excuses, but own my Fault, and thank you for your kind Reproof; and, in Return, I promise you never to be guilty of the like again' (30). Richardson prefers his writers to avoid familiar terms like 'Mamma', which appear in Johnson's manual. His correspondents arrange their final words to make the transition into the valedictory statement without a syntactic break. Where Johnson's correspondent simply begins a new sentence ('Respect to all Friends.

⁶⁴ *Letters Written to and for Particular Friends* (London, 1741), p. 36.

⁶⁵ Charles Johnson, *The Complete Art of Letter-Writing* (London, 1779).

Your ever affectionate Sister', [31]), Richardson's uses the valediction to affirm a state of being in line with the message of the letter:

I will never err voluntarily for the future: That so I may be as worthy as possible of your kind Constructions, and shew myself, what I truly am, and ever will be,
Your most affectionate and obliged Sister (37).

Valedictions that flowed seamlessly from the body of the letter were less common in real correspondence, compared with their frequency in Richardson's manual. Joe Bray has even called these 'integrated signatures' a 'hallmark of Richardson's style', in which the 'ritual of opening and closing a letter imposes upon the writer a gesture of self-definition vis-à-vis the addressee'.⁶⁶ Bray's assessment confirms the importance of pronouns in letters, as ways of defining the writer's place in relation to the addressee, and the social groups to which both belong. The iterations of the sibling exchange found in successive generations of letter-manual forms an epistolary correspondence with its own idiom, where the individual manual is informed by the group tradition. While Richardson's *Familiar Letters* (1741) was in some ways exceptional, the letter's heteroglossia, as it is expressed in *Clarissa* and in Richardson's manual, was exploited by all kinds of correspondents to express group and individual identity within the same text.

Corpus linguistics and social network analysis are used by Tieken-Boon van Ostade and Susan Fitzmaurice to discover patterns in the group language of letters. Fitzmaurice created a corpus of letters that centres on the patron Charles Montagu, Earl of Halifax, and which contains the letters of writers who were mostly members of the Kit-Kat club, such as Addison, Congreve, Dryden, Swift and Stepney. She found that the modals used by the writers appealing to Halifax in letters of patronage

⁶⁶ *The Epistolary Novel: Representations of Consciousness* (London: Routledge, 2003) p. 146.

differed from the ‘mean’ use of modals across the whole letter corpus. This is due to the demands of the ‘humiliative discourse’ in which the writers operated. A writer had to balance ‘enhancing the public, positive face of his addressee, at the expense of his own, negative, face’, against the possibility of appearing too cringing and therefore attracting condescension rather than patronage.⁶⁷ There was no consensus about which modals were favoured in the patronage subcorpus, but Fitzmaurice shows that the modals used by Stepney and Prior in letters of patronage differed from their overall epistolary output. In one instance cited by Fitzmaurice, Stepney uses the modal ‘might’, which is characteristic of his own letters, in a passage in which he is claiming to speak for all of Halifax’s ‘friends’:

for from y^e minute you appeard in y^e world y^r virtue and zeal have struggled hard with y^e Envy of ill men, & sometimes almost terrifyed y^r friends; who, notwithstanding the happy influence they found on their private interests, while you had y^e direction of <y^e> publique affaires, *cou’d* not forbear wishing with great affection & sincerity that you *might* at last enter safely into a comodious Harbour, out of y^e reach of fortune & Caprice [...].⁶⁸

Stepney uses ‘might’ with greater frequency than the rest of the group, and in even greater frequency in his letters to Halifax. However, here we see him using ‘might’ to convey the feelings of the group, which actually represent his own ‘private interests’. This discrepancy is striking because the ‘friends’ he claims to speak for presumably include the other writers in Fitzmaurice’s corpus. Stepney claims to be expressing the thoughts and feelings of Halifax’s well-wishers and relations, but it is unclear to what degree these ‘almost terrified’ friends said what they felt verbally to Stepney. The

⁶⁷ Susan Fitzmaurice, ‘Politeness and Modal Meaning in the Construction of Humiliative Discourse in an Early Eighteenth-Century Network of Patron–Client Relationships’, *English Language and Linguistics*, 6:02 (November 2002), 239–265, p. 258.

⁶⁸ Emphases on modals are Fitzmaurice’s. 12/22 November 1698, Stepney to Charles Montagu, Earl of Halifax, Bodleian, MS Montagu d.1. ff. 62.

emphasis is on guarded, private feelings, strictly regulated according to the demands of politeness.

The result is a combination of singular and plural speech, and as such, Stepney's position is akin to the narrator of a novel, who is able to traverse the boundary between speech and thought in order to communicate the parts of character essential to the telling of the story. However, Stepney is not the mouthpiece for Halifax's friends at large. Like the narrators of other types of writing, he too has a voice. In this instance, Stepney's 'might' embeds his own idiom into the passage: he is hiding behind the plurality of Halifax's friends at large. By claiming his own stated 'affection & sincerity' is shared by Halifax's patronage group, Stepney avoids the scrutiny to which his 'sincerity' might otherwise be subject.

Stepney's use of the fictional conglomeration of Halifax's friends to express a tactical opinion shows that the line between fact and fiction was blurred in patronage letters. A much clearer example comes in Steele's letters to Halifax, which, as Fitzmaurice comments, are 'much more immediate and apparently direct' (259) than Addison's. The main reason for Steele's relative modal directness is that he is able to present his request 'on behalf of the fictitious author of *The Tatler*, Isaac Bickerstaff, Esq.' (260). This technique provides a mirror to the conventional use of second- and third-person honorific addresses – 'your Lordship' or my 'Lord Hallifax' – which proliferate among the patronage letters. Steele distances himself from the difficult business of saving face by creating a witty fiction that will amuse his patron:

I presume to enclose to your Lordship Mr. Bickerstaffe's proposall for a Subscription and ask your Lordship's favour in Promoting it, having that Philosopher's interest at Heart as much as my own, and am, indeed Confident I am the Greatest Admirer he has.⁶⁹

⁶⁹ 26 January 1709/10, Steele to Montagu, in Fitzmaurice, *ibid.*, 259-260.

This strategy was not unique to Steele's writing. Richardson's and Johnson's transparent publishing disguises ('Editor', 'Rambler' etc.) allowed them to avoid the accountability that comes with owning one's creation. A persona did not have to be rounded or developed to fulfil the various functions that politeness demanded.

Transcribing the voice

Distinguishing between the individual 'voices' and group registers within eighteenth-century texts is complicated by a diversity of quotation methods. There was no uniform way of indicating speech in the period. Many genres of writing demonstrate a layering of quotation that reflects habits of communal reading, writing and imitation. Family structure, the surrounding social environment and the interplay between individual expression and the shift towards linguistic and typographical standardisation shaped such habits. The resulting texts explore the rich uncertainties provided by the changing conventions of written speech and attribution, which ultimately bear upon perceptions of the individual 'voice'.

Johnson's was the first dictionary in English to make extensive use of exemplary quotations. It is significant, then, that the entry for the verb 'to quote' dwells upon the capacity of quotations to mislead, misguide or derail an argument:

To QUOTE. v. a. [quoter, Fr.] To cite an author or passage of an author; to adduce by way of authority or illustration the words of another.

The second chapter to the Romans is here *quoted* only to paint the margent.

Whitgifte

St. Paul *quotes* one of their poets for this saying.

Stillingst.

He changed his mind, say the papers, and *quote* for it Melchoir Adams and Hospinian.

Atterbury.

He *quoted* texts right upon our Saviour, though he expounded them wrong.

Atterbury

He will, in the middle of a session, *quote* passages out of Plato and Pindar.

Swift.

Under 'quoter', Johnson flags another negative outcome of selective, or incomplete quotation: 'I proposed this passage entire, to take off the disguise which its quoter put upon it'.

The reason for Johnson's ambivalence may in part lie in the sheer range and complexity of eighteenth-century methods of quotation, and ways of representing the continuum of communication that runs through thought, to speech, to quotation, and re-quotation. Johnson's definition of 'to quote' points out the common usage aspect of the term, as well as the literary, or usually written. Whereas to cite a 'passage of an author' points to the written, 'the words of another', used as evidence, could be either written or spoken.

Free indirect discourse (FID) is sometimes taken as the marker of a text that has achieved complexity and mimetic value. The style is often aligned with, or seen as an expansion of, free indirect speech. In fact, many of the grammatical specificities that indicate FID are to do with marking (or failing to mark out) speech. A lack of quotation marks, or a lack of attributive phrases in passages containing speech, or implied speech, is often called free indirect discourse. Charles Bally divided representations of the thoughts and speech of characters into three categories: direct speech, indirect speech, and free indirect speech. The third category uses deictic markers belonging to the character (such as 'here', 'now'), along with the tense and person of the narrator. Bally considered that since the third category 'has the tenses and pronouns of simple indirect speech [...] its name should indicate the relationship'.⁷⁰ Bally's observation that passages of indirect speech often lack introductory verbs such as 'he thought', and 'linking conjunctions' such as 'that'

⁷⁰ Roy Pascal, *The Dual Voice* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1977), p. 9.

and ‘whether’ normally present in simple indirect speech, led him to conclude that the descriptive term ‘free’ should be added to ‘indirect’.⁷¹

FID encompasses both speech and thought; it might be said to include characteristic patterns of thought and verbal expression, turns of phrase and turns of mind, of individuals or groups. Nevertheless, distinguishing between free indirect thought, speech and writing has been the aim of recent criticism.⁷² In the case of letters, the distinction between speaking and writing is problematized by the common comparisons between correspondence and ‘talking on paper’. In the novelistic contexts in which the test cases for FID were established, faithful transcriptions of verbal utterance (with all its false starts and repetitions) can hardly be said to predominate; the same can be said for letters which claim to be written dialogue. Therefore, in the context of this discussion, it seems workable to use FID as the moniker of choice, to indicate that the ‘free indirect’ relationship between the ‘discourse’ (whether written, spoken or thought) of narrator and character (or correspondent, or third party non-fictional person) is the key component of the phenomenon under discussion. The range of media to which ‘discourse’ may refer is apt to the types of comparisons I wish to draw, because correspondence between different types of writing does not preclude the significance of markers of quotation (or the lack thereof). Inasmuch as thought can be transcribed into words, it is subject to the same conditions of quotation as speech.

As FID is usually defined in relation to nineteenth- and twentieth-century texts, it is generally understood in such a way that presupposes a standardised typographical method for demarcating the speech or thoughts of individual characters. Quotation marks – inverted commas – were less universal during the

⁷¹ Explanation of Bally’s terminology in Pascal, p. 9.

⁷² E. Semino and M. Short, *Corpus Stylistics: Speech, Writing and Thought Presentation in a Corpus of English Writing* (London: Routledge, 2004).

eighteenth century than they are now. Re-examining the methods of quotation that were in use, and how they changed over the course of the century, reveals a layering of speech and thought with equivalent complexity and subtlety to FID in a range of eighteenth-century texts, from ordinary letters to *Tristram Shandy*.

In his history of Western punctuation, M. B. Parkes links the growth of the novel as a genre with the development of quotation marks, as ‘novelists deployed punctuation as a feature of the pragmatics of the written medium to assist their mimetic ambitions’.⁷³ Novels demand that the reader recreate his/her own experiences of speech, and conventions of ‘choice vocabulary and syntactical features [...] of layout and punctuation’ were developed to help demarcate ‘spoken language’.

Parkes identifies Richardson as a key author in the progression of novelistic influence on printed quotation. He cites Richardson’s interest in the theatre as the chief innovation that meant the introduction of ‘marks like the em-rule, or dash, and a series of points to indicate those hesitations and sudden changes in the direction of thought associated with spoken discourse.’ Austen uses inverted commas, according to Parkes, to enclose language ‘both direct and indirect speech as well as statements that could be neither’, and calls this technique (when contrasted with episodes of dialogue), the ‘deictic’ use of punctuation (94). Richardson’s preoccupation with the epistolary form, along with its reliance on ‘deictic organisation’ and its relative proximity to spoken language, suggests that the letter, like drama, could have influenced the development of quotation. The letter’s tendency towards ‘concordia discors’ is another generic feature that positions it as an influence upon methods of representing different idioms within a text.

⁷³ *Pause and Effect* (Aldershot: Scolar Press, 1992), p. 93.

In *Print, Manuscript and the Search for Order*, David McKitterick argues that printing was both a 'means to standardisation' and 'accepted as [a means] subject to variation'. Print was also a means to represent 'variation' in tone and voice. Changes in the manufacture of print were accompanied by 'changes in outlook, in ways of thinking not just about printing and the reproduction of words, numbers or images but also about ways by which many other aspects of human activity and knowledge were to be ordered'.⁷⁴ McKitterick links changes in printing practice to the growth of texts that provided linguistic categorisation, such as dictionaries, grammars and botanical guides based on Linnaeus. Printing itself also became the subject of categorisation and historical analysis during this period. Samuel Palmer's (unpublished) account of his trade, *A General History of Printing* (1732) used 'modern experience' to evaluate the practices of the past, including the altered uses of italic type: '[t]he world has since found its usefulness in many other respects; which being obvious to every person, I shall not particularise here, but mention only the agreeableness of a mixture of Roman and Italick'.⁷⁵ The 'agreeableness' of 'mixture' in typefaces recalls the paradox of 'concordia discors', where variety leads to agreement.

However, the use of italics is not straightforward enough to be 'obvious to every person' that encounters eighteenth-century texts today. As Joe Bray has shown in his article "'Attending to the *Minute*": Richardson's revisions of italics in *Pamela*', the role of italics changed dramatically during the century. Italics had been used to indicate Scriptural quotation since the beginning of print. They gradually spread during the seventeenth century to other forms of quotation, and by the time the first edition of *Pamela* came out in 1740, Richardson used italics to mark both

⁷⁴ (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press), 2003, p. 166.

⁷⁵ Palmer, p. 153, in McKitterick, *ibid.*, p. 169.

Biblical quotation, and the repetition of characters' spoken words in the heroine's letters.

Observing the original punctuation allows us to read the different voices within a text. McLaverty has observed that disruptions to the original punctuation in modern editions of *Pamela* can make it seem as if a speaker has changed. In Richardson's printings of *Pamela*, separate documents or long quotations are distinguished by 'the easily intelligible conventions of his time [...] running commas indicate the limits of the quotation and serve to display it'. However, in Rivero's recent edition of *Pamela*, quotation marks appear only at the beginning and end of paragraphs, but most confusingly around individual phrases that would have taken a new line in the early editions. This is pertinent to the conclusion of quoted, enclosed letters, where Mr. B's valedictory formula is both italicised and within quotation marks. McLaverty shows that "'*Yours and only Yours*' [...]" now looks like a declared imitation of another's speech.⁷⁶ This is because of the misuse of inverted commas, but the italicisation also plays a part in suggesting that Mr. B. is not the sole originator of the words. Mr. B.'s italics show that he is quoting epistolary convention; they also emphasise his own spin on tradition. Therefore, italicising '*and only Yours*' combines two mid-eighteenth century uses for the italic: quotation and emphasis.

McLaverty's regard for punctuation that indicates speech in modern editions of eighteenth-century novels is a long-standing critical concern. Joyce Tompkins remarked upon the obsolete typography of quotation in *The Popular Novel in England, 1770-1800*. Authors from this period had curious ways to aid the reader in understanding the 'direction of voice'. Tompkins felt instinctively that 'obliteration' of these marks would be detrimental:

⁷⁶ James McLaverty, review of Samuel Richardson, *Early Works: 'Aesop's Fables', 'Letters Written to and for Particular Friends', and Other Works*, ed. Alexander Pettit, and *Pamela*, ed. Albert Rivero, *Review of English Studies*, 63:262 (2012), 857-859, p. 858.

I have also preserved in extracts the original punctuation. During the 'seventies and 'eighties there survived in the novel a dramatic punctuation, unconnected with grammatical structure; it directs the movement of the voice, and, while it is certainly not consistently carried out and sometimes falls into chaos, it seemed a pity to obliterate it.⁷⁷

Like Kinkead-Weekes, Tompkins ties the unfamiliar forms of quotation to the 'dramatic' and to 'voice', but they belong to a variety of texts.

In the first half of the eighteenth century, Swift and Pope used italics to confound and satirise conventions of meaning and emphasis in print. Pope used italics to indicate pairs of opposites, but also to separate his own idiom from that of the dull critics. For example, in line 279 of *An Essay on Criticism*, the reported speech of a 'Knight' is italicised to mark it out from his interlocutors (mostly the instructive narrator of the poem, but also the Knight's implied minions):

What! Leave the Combate out? Exclaims the Knight;
 Yes, or we must renounce the *Stagyrite*.
Not so by Heav'n (he answers in a Rage
Knights, Squires, and Steeds, must enter on the Stage.
 The Stage can ne'er so vast a Throng contain.
*Then build a New, or act it in a Plain.*⁷⁸

Italics here accentuate the contrast between the speakers in dialogue, making the call-response pattern of lines resemble a play script.

In the latter half of the century, Burns' poetry emulated Pope's by using italics to add living mannerism, or tone, to the text. Burns used italics to point suggestively to similarities between pairs of nouns. In 'To a Mouse', 'Man' and 'mouse', as well as Scots words, are grouped together, which seems the reverse of using italics to indicate pairs of opposites. It also combines the lexical use of italics (in Burns' glossaries, as in Johnson's *Dictionary* and elsewhere, language differences are

⁷⁷ (London: Methuen, 1932 [1969 reprint]), Preface, vi.

⁷⁸ (London, 1711), p. 18.

indicated by italics) with the semantic yoking together of objects. Because of the various uses of italics, Burns' poems sometimes appear to contain self-quotation, as he places emphasis on Scots words. In 'To a Mouse', 'fellow-mortal' is italicised, emphasizing both the differences and shared aspects of the fate of the mouse and the narrator. Later, 'Mice and Men' plays the typographic history of italics to underline the poem's message that at once draws a moral message from the animal world, while accentuating the limits of such comparisons.

The following table shows differences between the Kilmarnock edition of Burns' 'To a Mouse' in *Poems, chiefly in the Scottish Dialect* (1786), and the Edinburgh and London editions of 1787:

Line	Kilmarnock: Wilson, 1786.	Edinburgh: Creech, 1787.	London: Strahan, 1787. 3 rd Edition.
1	sleeket, cowran, [...] <i>beastie</i>	sleekit, cowrin [...] beastie	sleekit, cowrin [...] beastie
2	panic's	panic's	pannic's
13	<i>thieve</i>	thieve	thieve
19	wee-bit	wee-bit	wee bit
23	<i>December's winds</i>	December's winds	December's winds
26	<i>Winter</i>	Winter	Winter
35	<i>sleety dribble</i>	sleety dribble	sleety dribble
36	<i>cranreuch</i>	cranreuch	cranreuch
37	thy-lane	thy lane	thy lane
40	agley	a-gley	a-gley
44	<i>present</i>	present	present
45	<i>backward</i>	backward	backward
47	<i>forward</i>	forward	forward

The editions all have a glossary of Scots words, but the Kilmarnock edition italicises more of the Scots vocabulary. Though all versions italicise 'foresight' (l. 38) and 'o' *Mice and Men*' (l. 39), editions after the Kilmarnock get rid of the italicising of 'backward' (l. 45) and 'forward' (l. 47), which had been a remaining instance of italicisation of antitheses. This leaves 'Mice and Men' as complementary nouns;

pairing them with italics plays on the poem's discussion of the differences and commonalities between animal and 'Man's dominion'. In the context of 'tho' I canna *see* / I *guess* an' *fear*' (ll. 47-8) keeping the italicisation throughout, there seems to be some residual contrastive use, which nevertheless underlines the sameness of the contrasting states: being unable to 'see', but guessing and fearing, both the speaker and the mouse find themselves powerless to control their fate.

Italics are also used in the poem to emphasise the end of lines, strong metrical points, or rhyming words, for example '*me!*' (l. 43) and '*see*' (l. 48). Semantic, or narrative emphasis is also conveyed by the italicisation (in all the editions) in 'But, Mousie, thou art no thy-lane, / In proving *foresight* may be vain' (ll. 37-8), which moves the poem from considering specifically the mouse's fate to that of the speaker, and has the air of a fable's sententious conclusion. The poem's alternative states illustrate the still-changing typography of the 1780s, and that creative ambiguities could result from the concurrent forms of quotation. The poem, though not a verse epistle, is addressed to its subject; it shares the letters' solicitude for relations between speaker/writer and reader/audience.

Bray identifies the rise of the 'diple' (quotation mark) as the catalyst that extended the use of italics even further. Because quotation marks came to be used 'to mark all kinds of quotation, both spoken and written [...] italics could be used for other purposes' (110). Italics came to be used for emphasis and antithesis (pairs of opposites would be placed in italics). Bray demonstrates that the 1801 edition of *Pamela*, which was the last edition Richardson could be said to have had a hand in, reflects the expanding functions of the italic: '[b]oth quotative and contrastive italics are added in this final revision' (114).

The full range of uses for italics is explained by Newbery in his *A Spelling-Dictionary of the English Language*, in a manner that accurately reflects the diversity of uses to which Sterne puts them:

The *Italic* being intermixed for the sake of distinguishing proper names, the titles of arguments or chapters, examples of rules to be laid down, words of any foreign language, texts of scripture or citations from other authors, speeches or sayings of any person, emphatical words, and whatever is most significant and remarkable.⁷⁹

The ‘intermixture’ of high and low, intellectual and familiar uses for the italic is what seems to relate to Sterne’s style. In particular, the possibilities of ‘speeches or sayings of any person’ to accommodate both official orations and the habitual catch phrases of a near relation (an Uncle Toby, for example) captures the variegated linguistic textures of Sterne’s literary output.

In *A Sentimental Journey* (1768), Sterne uses italics and quotation marks together:

– and was ready to enquire, (had the same *bon ton* of conversation permitted, as in the days of Esdras) – ‘*What aileth thee? and why art thou disquieted? and why is thy understanding troubled?*’ – In a word, I felt benevolence for her [...].⁸⁰

Sterne exploits the several uses of italics to create a layered text in which his sentimental urges are vindicated by a vague gesture towards the past, and to the authority of a quoted source outside his own thoughts. The phrase ‘*bon ton* of conversation’ shows the double purpose of italics. It differentiates a foreign phrase from the English text, and simultaneously gives depth and tone to a phrase that already signifies this contouring of language in its semantic content. Yorick’s nostalgia for the ‘days of Esdras’ causes a shift in tone to an out-dated idiom using

⁷⁹ 13th edn. (London, 1774), p. 43.

⁸⁰ *A Sentimental Journey and the Continuation of the Bramine’s Journal*, ed. Melvyn New and W. G. Day (Gainesville: University of Florida Press, 2002), p. 23. All references to these works will be to this edition unless otherwise stated.

the pronoun 'thou'. Italicisation of his hypothetical questions in this older register differentiates between old and new registers, and act as an index of feeling, by indicating earnestness and emphasis. The 'days of Esdras' may also allude to the Scriblerian Esdras Barnivelt, who was Pope's alias when publishing *A Key to the Lock* (1715).

Yorick's idiomatic tendency to sum up his own sentiments 'in a word' adds another layer – this time structural – to the text. By restating, with supposed brevity, what he has said before, Yorick is made more believable as a character: linguistic tics hint at contradictory ways of thinking about the same thing within a single mind. That Tristram and Yorick share this tic does not diminish its value as an indicator of fully realised characters. It does, however, place Yorick and Tristram within the overall scheme of Sterne's 'digressive and progressive' universe, in which the Shandys and their satellites (their household-family) are all made up of quotations from Sterne's imagination.⁸¹ In this sense, *Tristram Shandy* is a polyphonic anthology in much the same way as Johnson's *Dictionary*. As Ruth Finnegan remarks on the development of quotation in print, it was 'less some straight-line development into print uniformity than a series of still-continuing alternatives and variants'.⁸² Sterne, the master of digressive progression in narrative, was also adept at combining forward-looking experimentation with the typography of quotation, and older forms of indicating speech.

Commentators describing the development of print tend to over-emphasise the homogeneity of the fonts, and their uses. *The Cambridge History of the Book* claims that italic stopped being used for indirect speech in the eighteenth century (v.251),

⁸¹ *The Life and Opinions of Tristram Shandy, Gentleman*, ed. Melvyn New and Joan New, 3 vols. (Gainesville, 1978-1984), p. 82. All references will be to this edition, unless otherwise stated.

⁸² Ruth Finnegan, *Why do we Quote? The Culture and History of Quotation* (Cambridge: Open Book, 2011), p. 95.

but as late as *Tristram Shandy* a variety of uses persisted. Perhaps this is more prevalent in Sterne, as he is creating a character (Walter Shandy) steeped in seventeenth-century manuscript culture, and Latin phrasing tends towards the italic when quoted, which may be supposed to rub off on other parts of the text. However, Walter Shandy's distinctive style reminds us that at any given moment in print history, proponents of new and old ways of speaking and writing will exist concurrently. The voice of the 'moment' will always 'mingle' new and old.

When Richardson was writing *Grandison*, quotation marks were becoming more common and a standard way to indicate speech, but they were deployed alongside other means. Unattributed quotation in *Grandison* is frequent, as is abrupt or unmarked change of speaker. Quotation marks are not the norm, in fact they are sometimes used when a speaker is recalling a sententious phrase from another source, or when special gravity is being attributed to a character's words by another: 'Don't repeat those cruel words, "It can never be."' (i.75).

Harriet uses quotation marks even when she isn't quoting anyone other than herself in the present letter:

But why am I studious to torment myself? What *will* be, *must*. "Who knows what Providence has designed for Sir Charles Grandison?" – May *he* be happy! (ii.425)

She may be indicating that she has spontaneously spoken these words out loud.

Harriet's commentary on conversations she has had, and the speech she reports, often blend together. Quotation is often followed by a play-like direction, or descriptive fragment, often in the past progressive, but omitting any pronoun, for example: 'Let me, let me call in my boy. I will go for him myself. And was going' (i.75).

When reporting the speech of others indirectly, Harriet often marks the transition by capitalizing the beginning of the phrase: 'He once said himself, That his life was a various life; and that some unhappy things had befallen him' (ii.445). Capitalisation sometimes suggests quotation from an outside source, but can also indicate a shift in tone, to one of suggestive or decisive declaration. This technique was not unique to fiction; it was advocated by *The New Art of Letter-Writing*, which advised capitalisation as a way of distinguishing 'any notable Saying or Passage of an Author be quoted in his own Words'. Such passages should begin 'with a Capital, tho' not immediately after a Period' (19). This form of attribution had long been used by some letter-writers to quote themselves. For example, Pope quoted himself when he wrote to Swift (23 March 1727-8) to let him know about the progress of *The Dunciad* (1728-43). Commiserating with his friend on their growing ill health, Pope contrasted his poetic battle with the dunces with his desire to acknowledge the value of Swift's friendship to him:

As the obtaining the love of valuable men is the happiest end I know of this life, so the next felicity is to get rid of fools and scoundrels; which I can't but own to you was one part of my design in falling upon these Authors, whose incapacity is not greater than their insincerity, and of whom I have always found (if I may quote myself)

*That each bad Author is as bad a Friend.*⁸³

Pope takes his self-quotation from *An Essay on Criticism*:

And while Self-Love each jealous Writer rules,
Contending Wits becoming the *Sport of Fools*:
 But still the *Worst* with most Regret commend,
 And each *Ill Author* is as bad a *Friend*. (30)

⁸³ Sherburn, ii.481.

In Sherburn's printed edition of Pope's correspondence, the poetic quotation is italicised, in the same way that an outside source would be represented. Sherburn's source text for this letter is the 1740 *Letters of Pope and Swift*, a 'clandestine' volume which formed the precursor to volume seven of *The Works of Alexander Pope, Esq.*⁸⁴ Sherburn insists that '[b]ecause of the suspicion that has attached to Pope's "editings" of his letters the aim here has been to reproduce, with doubtless pedantic care' (xxvi), so it seems probable that the italicisation is Pope's. However, Sherburn suggests that Pope had a fluid relationship to quotation: 'Pope's tags of Greek, Latin, or French are frequently set down incorrectly, and frequently "adapted": he obviously did not verify his quotations' (xxvi). This is typical eighteenth-century practice, even in many apparently scholarly contexts, including Johnson's *Dictionary*. That Pope's fluidity of quotation could apply to self-quotation is suggested by the introduction of 'That' into the poetic line in the immediate context of his letter to Swift. The capitalisation of a preposition half way through a sentence, which introduces a distinct phrase, statement or question, was a common feature of printed texts at this time, as *The New Art of Letter-Writing's* advice to use it if a 'notable Saying or Passage of an Author be quoted in his own Words' indicates. The manual's advice reserves capitalisation for 'notable' parts of an author's corpus. Pope's capitalisation therefore suggests his self-confidence as an author from whom others will extract 'notable Sayings'.

Literacy makes people reflect consciously on the activities and feelings they narrate. Johnson's assessment of the letter to a friend as typically composed in the cool of leisure shows that premeditation was often the result of the epistolary situation. If the only source you quote is your own mind, the act of transcribing

⁸⁴ [?] vols. (London, 1742).

thought will make you consider the content in a new way. As it became possible to transcribe thought, speech, movement, and musical sound more exactly, it became more significant if, when and how an attribution is given to a part of the text that shows its origin.

The wealth of methods for transcribing different tonalities of voice and even notable 'Sayings' into letters highlights the epistolary form's polyphony. However, attributing an utterance to a particular 'voice' becomes problematic when the complex relationship of speech to writing is considered. In her study of the connection between speaking and reading, *Speaking Volumes*, Patricia Michaelson demonstrates the link between oral tradition and rising literacy during the eighteenth century. Reading aloud was common; letters were read aloud in household-families. This activity fostered what Finnegan calls 'quotations language[s]': collections of words, phrases and mannerisms used by in-groups (such as families) to recall or imitate typical, or memorable utterances or expressions arising from the group's members.⁸⁵ Letters were viewed as transcribed speech, making them doubly-polyphonic texts, given that they combine the characteristics of more than one medium, even as they accommodate (usually) a quotations language of more than one person's idiolect.

Redford identifies, in the eighteenth century, 'a sense of the epistolary enterprise that favours voice, the speaking *tone* of voice' (2). This is backed up by letter-manuals' instructions. *The New Art of Letter-Writing* advises '[i]n the Placing of Words we must consult the Ear and judge whether its Satisfaction be complete'.⁸⁶ While there is some truth to the idea that writing and printing allowed for the 'spatialisation of the intellect' (119), it is also true that a printed text is not stripped of

⁸⁵ Finnegan, *ibid.*, p. 30.

⁸⁶ 'A Gentleman of fortune', 2nd edn. (London, 1762), p. 8.

the physiology of speech: ‘even silent reading, activates the mind's ear [...] “words [...] are always phonological structures”’.⁸⁷ The *New Art of Letter-Writing*'s instruction to ‘consult the Ear’ when writing suggests that letters were seen as transcribed conversation. However, the ‘Gentleman of fortune’ responsible for the manual saw letters not as equivalent, but as inferior to speech, as a way to convey meaning and sentiment:

A Speech is in some Measure indebted, for the agreeable Emotions it produces, to the Advantages of Pronunciation, such as Sweetness and Clearness of the Voice [...] but a Piece of Writing can please only by essential Graces: So that we cannot be too exact in revising our Letters, in order to send them without Fear of regretting what we have done. (3)

For Hugh Blair, too, the ‘tones and gestures’ of oration were ‘the language of nature’, whereas ‘Words are only arbitrary, conventional symbols of our ideas’ (Michaelson, 148). But, paradoxically, because of this hierarchy between writing and speaking, Blair thought that the similarities between familiar conversation and the letter was what made the form worthy of criticism:

Epistolary Writing becomes a distinct species of Composition, subject to the cognizance of Criticism, only, or chiefly, when it is of the easy and familiar kind; when it is conversation carried on upon paper, between two friends at a distance.⁸⁸

Blair's phrasing suggests letters are extensions of pre-existing conversations, which are ‘carried on’ (continued) in absentia. This implies that conversation is primary, and letters are tributary media. It also indicates that Richardson's (and to a certain extent, Pope's) conception of correspondence as a series of successive ‘moments’ of composition prevailed later in the century.

⁸⁷ Isabelle Liberman and Donald Shankweiler, ‘Phonology and Beginning Reading: A Tutorial,’ in *Learning to Read: Basic Research and Its Implications*, ed. Laurence Rieben and Charles Perfetti (Hillsdale: Lawrence Erlbaum, 1991), p. 5, quoted in McIntosh, *ibid.*, p. 120.

⁸⁸ *Lectures on Rhetoric and Belles Lettres*, 6th edn., 3 vols. (London, 1796), iii.63.

The confusion about whether letters and speech were equivalent forms of expression, or whether one was superior, is reflected in modern critical analysis. Carey McIntosh veers towards identifying the letter primarily with what he calls 'oral' style, because of its resemblance to a conversation: '[s]ome written texts are not in the least context-free, but respond directly to a particular interlocutor, as in a conversation, or derive directly from a particular time and place, as does most of our everyday speech' (120). Yet he is surprised by the 'baby-talk' (136) of Johnson's 'informal letters, especially those to Mrs. Thrale', calling them 'islands of orality in unexpected places' (126).

McIntosh suggests that there are contradictions across Johnson's oeuvre by comparing his essays and his letters, but does not complicate the link he has made between letters and oral conversation. For him, it is enough to align the necessary 'I's and 'you's of a letter with the 'high incidence of first- and second-person pronouns [...] common in speech' (136). This doesn't take into account the complex formations of pronouns produced in letters in response to various social pressures and combinations of individual 'voices'. Johnson's epistolary 'baby-talk' doesn't negate his reputation for erudition: it is proof that letters tend towards polyphonic 'concordia discors' by accommodating a wealth of different registers.

Robert Adams Day has pointed out that that the appeal of the epistolary novel in the mid-eighteenth century may have been partly to do with the proximity between the call-response form of interaction between actors on stage, and the taking-turns format of written correspondence.⁸⁹ The interaction between written voices, or idiolects, in epistolary correspondence, is analogous to the call and response that took place between genres during the eighteenth century. Aspects of the epistolary

⁸⁹ *Told in Letters: Epistolary Fiction before Richardson* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1966).

style found their way into a variety of genres. Cooke's *The New Universal Letter Writer* (1708) – a frequently reprinted letter-manual – commented on the ubiquity of the epistolary form. According to Cooke, the letter

seems to have triumphed over almost every other species of composition; the Historian has adopted it; we have the Greek, and Roman histories, as well as that of our own nation, admirably executed in letters. Almost every thing dictative, and perceptive, is delivered in this way; the Novelist finds it better adapted to his purpose, than any other mode of writing. No great Poet is without his familiar Epistle to his Friend; and the Traveller seemed lost, till he found the method of conveying his intelligence in Letter. (iv)

Inter-generic correspondence in these texts fosters critical analyses that draw parallels between genres of writing and different media. Kinkead-Weekes assesses Pamela's idiom using a musical analogy: 'the sort of signature tune that many dramatists use to mark characteristic speech [...] Pamela's "Good Sirs" is one of these' (431). Later, he describes *Clarissa* as an 'orchestra of style' (433). Cohn uses the optic metaphor for 'point of view' in writing. Eric Griffiths prefers an aural analogy:

The intonational ambiguity of a written text may create a mute polyphony through which we see rather than hear alternatively possible voicings, and are led by such vision to reflect on the inter-resonance of such voicings.⁹⁰

Such critical analogies reflect the heterogeneity of texts produced at a time when the uses of literacy were expanding. New ways of quoting from human life using paper and ink were devised. Forms of notation were developed which expressed and recorded a range of activities that had previously been transmissible only directly.

In *Tristram Shandy* the sermon is likened to a musical text, of which the 'ascent' and 'declivity' can be 'hummed' (i.375), taking the soul along with the rising

⁹⁰ Eric Griffiths, *The Printed Voice of Victorian Poetry* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1989), p. 16.

and falling of the language. In music, Handel's recitatives – musical dialogue between set-piece arias – exaggerated the inflections of speaking. Janine Barchas compares the incorporation of a musical score in *Clarissa* with Sterne's marbled page. She argues that the score is a familiar cultural artefact that readers did not expect to see within the novel's pages. But letters, too, were familiar artefacts. Barchas goes on to say that 'music's presence underscores the performative qualities of the book.'⁹¹ It 'argues that like an actual score, the novel may be (literally or figuratively) performed, read aloud, or [...] even sung' (98). This point, too, applies to letters, which could be read aloud at the point of reception. The proximity of reading aloud in a domestic circle to singing demonstrates the polyphonic interaction of different forms of expression in everyday life.

Richardson's epistolary novels capture something of the way that generically permeable forms of writing and speech inform one another. In response to critics (including Fielding), who focused on the improbability of the letter conceit in *Pamela* and *Clarissa*, Richardson included shorthand in *Grandison*. This invention allowed for the exact transcriptions of detailed and lengthy conversations. But it was not only words that could be communicated by letter.

In *The Tatler* 88, the writer is surprised to learn from a dancing master 'that now articulate Motions, as well as Sounds, were express'd by proper Characters; and that there is nothing so common, as to communicate a Dance by a Letter.'⁹² From the description of the instructor 'reading' the dance script, it is clear the writer is sceptical about this novel use for writing:

I saw a well-made Man look with great Attention on a Book, and on a sudden

⁹¹ *Graphic Design, Print Culture & the Eighteenth-Century Novel* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), p. 94.

⁹² Richard Steele, *The Tatler*, ed. Donald Frederic Bond, 3 vols. (Oxford: Clarendon, 1987), ii. pp. 57-8.

jump into the Air so high, that his head almost touch'd the Sieling [*sic*]. He came down safe on his Right Foot, and again flew up alighting on his Left; then look'd again at his Book, and holding out his Right Leg, put it into such a quivering Motion, that I thought he would have shak'd it off.

The observer and his companion think that the dancer acts with 'violence and disorder'; the writer postulates that he is an 'enthusiast', when in fact he is cultivating a polite, and familiar accomplishment. While this gap in understanding is partly due to the writer's reserve about other 'artists' and their chosen media, it is mostly due to the involvement of the unfamiliar 'language' of the dance.

It is not only the dance script that the Tatler finds unsettling; he is baffled when the dancing-master explains that the dance notation is incorporated into his daily life. While the Tatler owes its existence to the habitual perusal of written material by its readers, it is strange for the writer that the dancing-master was 'reading a dance or two before he went out, which had been written by one who taught at an academy in France.' An alternate culture of literate people is exhibited, one that uses the same postal networks as those sending letters conveying words.

The Tatler's encounter with the dancing-master shows the possibilities of writing to a recently created readership of middle-class readers, and perhaps displaces some of the novelty of writing itself onto the dance form. It also demonstrates how much depended upon a 'consideration' of written texts, and how the universal desire to communicate could be facilitated through writing. The movements of the dancer, as the Tatler observes them, seem threatening and strange. This demonstrates another aspect of the epistolary process that knowledge communicated via the recipient's 'consideration' of the text might be garbled, or their interpretation might lack the fluency that could be achieved if the parties involved were in more immediate contact.

Johnson compared epistolary and physical gestures in a letter to Giuseppe Baretti: '[a] short letter to a distant friend is, in my opinion, an insult like that of a slight bow or cursory salutation; – proof of unwillingness to do much, even where there is a necessity of doing something' (*Letters*, i.196).⁹³ But this limitation is one shared by all writing; in letters, the universal desire to communicate is intensified by distance, and by the personal commitment of those involved. With a letter, the ability to be misunderstood, or misquoted, is personally threatening to the writer. While the dancing-master appears ridiculous to his neighbours, his being able to 'read a dance or two' via a letter demonstrates that in an age when the quotation of words was far from typographically consistent, innovative ways to quote another's expression were being considered in an expanding number of forms.

Polyphony in letters of the eighteenth century arose from the habits of sharing letters within family circles, and from the theory – propagated by correspondents and letter-manuals alike – of letters' proximity to conversation, where conversation meant the mingling of idiolects. In a literary climate that valued 'concordia discors', letters supported both harmonious variety and subversive 'discordia concors'. Letter-writers combined their voices with those of their addressee(s) and with other senders, within household-family groups, within patronage circles and within the much broader network of linguistic influence to which letters and manuals belonged.

⁹³ The observation was particularly piquant in the Johnson-Baretti correspondence, as Johnson referred to his interlocutor as 'my Baretti' with some frequency, which denotes affection and demand simultaneously.

CHAPTER 3

EPISTOLARY MIMESIS

In chapter 2, we saw correspondents finding ways to support polyphony in their letters. Epistolary traffic between family groups maintained social ties, and encouraged a mixing of singular and plural voices.

Since the eighteenth century, polyphony has been described not only as a contrapuntal equality between different voices or characters, but as mimicry or echo. The *OED* takes an example from William Derham's *Physico-theology* (1713), where polyphony is part of an exaggeration of sound by repetition: '[t]he magnifying the Sound by the Polyphonisms, or Repercussions of the Rocks, Caverns, and other phonocaptick Objects [...] in the Mount.'¹ Even as it is solidified by association with the objects in the mount, and 'magnified' by the alliterative 'Repercussions of the Rocks', polyphony as echo implies instability, confusion and eventual silence. However, even as letters celebrated the individual 'voice', correspondences maintained contiguity through reiteration and mimicry. Despite its doubtful negotiation of originality and mimicry, polyphony as echo or reflection was part of the lively epistolary culture of the eighteenth century.

This chapter will examine the place of polyphonic mimicry in letters, including Richardson's theorising of it as 'personation'. Epistolary forms of pre-emption, stylistic variation and free indirect discourse will be illustrated, and compared with their fictional counterparts in *Tristram Shandy* (1759-1767) and *The History of Sir Charles Grandison* (1753). Personation of one's correspondent could persuade in

¹ 2nd edn. (London, 1714), p. 133.

the face of opposition, a technique that Richardson used as both correspondent and as a 'dramatic' novelist. Mimesis also manifested as expressions of sympathy that brought correspondents into emotional agreement, or made the recipient present. As previous chapters have shown group identities operating within letters, this chapter shows correspondences – such as that between Richardson and Bradshaigh, and between Quakers in Robert Valentine's circle – consolidating community ties by drawing on 'quotations languages'.

Procatalepsis

Mimesis helps to structure correspondence. Although writers sometimes kept copies of letters they sent out, points to be answered in any given reply accumulated, unlike the quicker alternation of speakers in a 'live' conversation. This long wave pattern of interaction meant that recapping the sections of received letters to which one was responding made it easier for both parties to pick up the threads of argument.

Cynthia Lowenthal sees this pattern as a mutual, cyclical, and fundamentally co-operative exercise:

Partners in the epistolary cycle are also dependent on one another for the shape and substance of their letters; each document, whether a bridge or a record of absence, is a response to the letters that have gone before.²

Quotation from preceding letters was necessitated by the staggering of the correspondence in time and place. However, creative strategies for referring backwards in a correspondence were devised by writers seeking not just to replicate previous points, but also to use this replication to gain rhetorical advantage. In his seminal work on mimesis, Erich Auerbach describes parataxis and 'corresponding

² *Lady Mary Wortley Montagu and the Eighteenth-Century Familiar Letter* (Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 1994), p. 24.

figures' of 'the classical periodic style'.³ Auerbach's conception of parataxis as mimesis touches upon a structural affinity between corresponding and mimicking. Parataxis allows for the setting of phrases 'over against' one another; it suggests meaning based on relational aspect in the same way that the epistolary style does. In an exchange of letters, the halves written by each correspondent constitute a paratactic unit. Within the letters themselves, repeating the words of a correspondent could mean mimicking their style, inhabiting their epistolary voice, and subtly rephrasing it to suit a different purpose. As a written medium in which mimicry of one's correspondent is required structurally, letters invite writers to go further than recapping points already made, and to anticipate 'in-character' responses. In turn the writer can answer these anticipations immediately, and those answers influence the future responses of the recipient. This epistolary process is a complex form of procatalepsis.

Following this pattern, Richardson's personal letters recapitulate and elaborate upon the recipient's arguments in preceding letters. Richardson edits his correspondent's words in his replies in order to create consonance from dissonance. The arguments Richardson constructed in his correspondences, especially with Lady Bradshaigh, were characterised by constant re-quotation, or 'second-hand Romaging', as Bradshaigh put it.⁴ The flow of discussion in correspondence being vulnerable to the vagaries of memory and the postal system, Richardson proposed a methodical coping mechanism: the numbering of paragraphs (a technique which Voltaire also employed). This numerical solution was proposed in a combative, chiding and flirtatious tone: 'I think, for the future, if your Ladiship please, we will number our paragraphs, 1, 2, 3, 4 &c. that we may the better refer to them, and the

³ *Mimesis: the Representation of Reality in Western Literature*, 50th anniversary edition (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2003), p. 71.

⁴ 6 August 1754, FC, XI, f. 113^r.

easier see what each omits answering to' (9 July 1754, f. 110^r). Keeping account of what reply was 'owed' by a correspondent was not unique to Richardson. Jack Lynch notes the frequency with which Johnson nagged his friends to reply, as 'he is constantly negotiating his place in the give-and-take of epistolary exchange'.⁵ Johnson was aggrieved when Thrale refused to date her letters, though he asked her to.⁶ Richardson's suggestion of numbered paragraphs took the accountability to respond to a more minute level of detail. It also prompted a disagreement between himself and Bradshaigh that highlights the delight he took in mimicking her.

Bradshaigh objected to the numbering system, as it 'looks like tying you down to a task, and has the resemblance of slavery, which I detest in every shape' (f. 113^r). Richardson countered by quoting Bradshaigh directly, a method that is incommensurate with the efficiency he supposedly favours:

"We will not number our Paragraphs", says your Ladiship. Yes, but we will. "It looks like tying me down to a Task;" A very agreeable one. "And has the Resemblance of Slavery." Not so, if it be our own Proposal and Choice.⁷

On the one hand, the resemblance to theatrical or novelistic dialogue here supports Richardson's view that numbering was necessary because the letter lacks the swift exchange of conversation. However, the dialogic snippet makes Richardson's point in more underhand ways, too. It naturalises Richardson's words and distinguishes Bradshaigh's with inverted commas; her words are reshaped to neutralise her objection. Pointed attributions to the abstract 'your Ladiship' are set against the inclusive pronoun in 'our [...] Proposal and Choice'. Richardson conflates two stages of negotiation here: by attributing 'Proposal *and* Choice' to the collective 'our', he forges ahead as if his correspondent's assent had already been given. This is the

⁵ Jack Lynch, "'A disposition to write': Johnson as Correspondent", p. 105.

⁶ 25 April 1780, *Letters*, iii.244.

⁷ 28 August 1754, FC XI f. 120^r.

essence of Richardson's procataleptic tendency. Bradshaigh's polite concern that '[i]t looks like tying you [Richardson] down' is converted into 'tying me down'. This pronoun conversion confuses two possibilities: it could read as if Bradshaigh objects solely on her own behalf, or as if she fears that she is tying Richardson down to an unwanted task. Bradshaigh's attempt to avoid imposing on his time (or her polite excuse) is lost amid the layers of Richardson's overreaching quotation.

Bradshaigh, in her turn, applies procatalepsis to the most common occurrences of letter-writing life, including apology for not writing sooner:

[I did not] Imagine I had kept a Letter of yours unanswer'd above six weeks, but so it is, and thus it came to pass. – I wou'd say how, if I cou'd do it without telling a long Story. – You know I am no Lacedemonian, nor I neither, say you. Well then, I will venture to give you an account of my engagements, as Indeed, I think myself obliged to do.⁸

In the phrase 'nor I neither, say you', Bradshaigh ventriloquises her reader. It encourages a prompt return as, by taking on Richardson's voice, Bradshaigh provokes him into stating his own opinion in his own words. This pre-emptive rebuffing of objection uses the voice of the interlocutor to undercut critical responses by shaping them in a manageable form: the 'narrator' of the letter uses the idiom of the interlocutor to control the latter's response.

Even though he proposed simplifying the recapping part of each letter by numbering paragraphs, Richardson continued to use elaborate rebuffs and restatements because it allowed him to achieve what Allan Bell identifies as 'audience design'. This is the process by which '[s]tylistic or intraspeaker variation derives from and mirrors interspeaker variation.'⁹ Bell's use of 'mirrors' as a verb

⁸ 27 August 1756, FC, XI, fol. 185, letter 71.

⁹ 'Language Style as Audience Design,' *Language in Society*, 13:2 (1984), 145-204, p. 145.

hints at the active quality that mimicry, as ‘audience design’ might take on. Rather than parroting the correspondent, writers could better shape the response to their work by complementing and therefore anticipating the recipient’s style.

In his fiction, Richardson created correspondences in which the epistolary style was the theme that allowed stylistic variation to be passed back and forth. Clarissa and Anna’s friendship is expressed in the attention and deference they pay to one another’s subscriptions. Clarissa begins one volley of subscription exchange by assuring Anna that ‘I am, and ever will be, / *Your affectionate* / CLARISSA HARLOWE’ (i.54).¹⁰ Clarissa’s ‘ever’ is incorporated into Anna’s reply, which she compounds into ‘*Your ever-affectionate*’ (i.62). Clarissa selects a different modifier for her next subscription, seeking to balance parity with novelty: ‘*Your equally affectionate / and grateful*’ (i.65). Anna begins a new run with the strikingly simple ‘*Your own*’ (i.71). In a letter in which Clarissa worries that her relatives’ ‘persisted-in violence’ will ‘make it necessary for *my own*’, she concludes by changing Anna’s brief subscription into a comment on her lack of self-possession: ‘*Yours more than my own*’ (i.86). In response to her friend’s distress, Anna ratchets up the proportions of abstract belonging: ‘I am, and ever will be, most affectionately, / *All your own*’ (i.91). In chapter 1, we saw that subscriptions can carry disproportionate semantic weight in correspondence. In the Clarissa-Anna correspondence, the subscriptions signal the writers’ commitment to derive *and* mirror interesting and socially apt variants of epistolary formulae.

Richardson had in mind a perfect correspondent, and a perfect correspondence, but, as his letters to Lady Bradshaigh exemplify, when he was in charge of only one half of a correspondence, the whole inevitably deviated from his

¹⁰ *Clarissa*, 7 vols. (London, 1748).

vision. He compensated by employing audience design to get Bradshaigh's co-operation in reading and responding exactly as he would wish:

SR: '— Romantic! you will cry out — But, by your Ladiship's Leave, not more Romantic than some Women's Notions of what they call Love'

LB: 'Romantic. I will call it, since you expect it from me ^that I shou'd'¹¹

Richardson changed Bradshaigh's words in the original manuscript from an ironic comment about his presumption to predict her response to a phrase that could read as co-operation. Though the change was subtle, Richardson's intervention suggests that he sensed that this was a point of friction between himself and Bradshaigh. He tried, therefore, to make her 'correspond' with him in meaning and intention.

Bradshaigh was aware of Richardson's tendency to alter others' words; when she wrote as Charlotte he praised her 'assumed Character' (XI, f. 123^r), showing that to write as another may introduce mistaken assumptions. It was characteristic of their correspondence for Richardson and Bradshaigh to debate through the medium of *Grandison's* characters. Therefore, Bradshaigh chose to defend herself, and to point out Richardson's habit of editing others' words, by appealing to Harriet Byron's standards of propriety. Richardson thought that Harriet could have entertained the idea of bigamy enough to propose it, but Bradshaigh objected:

"and then comes Har^t with her proposal." In Earnest do you say? — In as good Earnest, let me answer, it is impossible, it is not in nature. It is not a thing of choice, otherwise I wou'd allow it to Har^t. She may force herself to say, but nobody will ever believe it can come from the heart. Therefore, put not in her mouth, words so unnatural.¹²

In suggesting the numbering of paragraphs, Richardson collapsed the stages of 'Proposal and Choice'. Bradshaigh uses the same language of negotiation here, by

¹¹ FC, XI, f. 50^v (8 December 1753); f. 56^r (11 December 1753).

¹² 11 December 1753, FC XI, f. 56^r.

refusing to class bigamy as a thing that could be proposed or chosen. The recurrence of themes of choice in this correspondence suggests that the terms of engagement between the writers was a constant preoccupation. Bradshaigh's appeal, 'put not in her mouth, words so unnatural' is also an appeal on her own behalf. Bradshaigh appeals to a sense of propriety through probability, or the 'natural', as it relates to characters' linguistic and moral consistency. The sympathetic transference between fictional character (Harriet) and real correspondent (Bradshaigh) was facilitated by the correspondence's system of quotation. Extracts from previous letters were subject to a confusing system of pronoun-switching:

"You hold yourself in readiness to be as I am; whether affronted or not; and expect that I think myself well off by your Complaisance." I am your echo, Madam. "I think myself well off by your Complaisance."¹³

Though Richardson uses inverted commas to show that the words aren't his, he also reverses the pronouns that Bradshaigh would have used; what was her 'I' becomes his 'you'. However, Richardson puts his recapitulation of Bradshaigh's statement within quotation marks, too. He claims to be her echo, but the pronouns are mirrored, not simply repeated. By distorting the typographical and syntactic expectations of quotation, Richardson shows his 'Complaisance' in echoing Bradshaigh. It is her proposal, and his choice, that he be her echo. Complaisance in Johnson's *Dictionary* is defined as both pleasure, and civility, or 'softness of manners'. Correspondence demanded complaisance in the sense of civility, and was supposed to produce complaisance, in the sense of pleasure. In turn, it was complaisant to show pleasure in acknowledging the complaisance of one's correspondent. That cause and effect

¹³ 9 July 1754, FC XI, f. 110^r.

were indicated by the same term shows that in letters, a reverberation of the passions between the writing parties was somewhat inevitable.

A co-operative version of epistolary procatalepsis, brought on by necessary absence, occurs in Sarah Fielding's *Familiar Letters between the Principal Characters in David Simple* (1747). While the Richardson-Bradshaigh correspondence demonstrates that procatalepsis can be oppositional, according to Mika Suzuki, procatalepsis between Fielding's fictional characters bespeaks perfect understanding between close friends, even when they are apart. Suzuki contends that '[m]utual understanding is idealized to such a degree that actual communication becomes unnecessary',¹⁴ but because the letter narrative demands that something be said, Cynthia is obliged write about the idealised mutual understanding itself:

As it is one of the great Pleasures of Friendship, reciprocally to communicate our Thoughts to each other; [...] I doubly enjoy every new Idea, every fresh Subject of Observation, by reflecting on what you will think or say upon it.

Thus in my Closet, at a hundred Miles distance, I converse with you, previously form in my Mind what will be your Answers; and I am so well acquainted with your way of thinking, that I flatter myself, that, was you present, you would generally speak the Words I in fancy say for you. Thus I contrive all the Methods I can, to make myself some amends for our Separation.¹⁵

Fielding's description of the correspondent in her closet resembles the one that Richardson wrote to Sarah Wescomb, aiming to convince her 'to have a delight in retiring to her closet, and there, by pen and ink, continue' the friendship at a distance.¹⁶ The imagined conversation taking place between correspondents constituted a personal 'closet drama' that relied on both parties being able to impersonate the other. The words Cynthia 'in fancy' says for her correspondent are

¹⁴ 'The "Words I in Fancy say for you": Sarah Fielding's Letters and Epistolary Method', *The Yearbook of English Studies*, vol. 28: Eighteenth-Century Lexis and Lexicography (1998), 196-211, p. 209.

¹⁵ Sarah Fielding, *Familiar Letters between the Principal Characters of David Simple*, 2 vols. (London, 1747), ii.94-5.

¹⁶ 27 August 1746, *Correspondence*, ed. Dussinger, p. 6.

thus part of a pattern of epistolary impersonation, in which the reader's response is anticipated and perhaps idealised; 'fancy' also connotes an interpretation of reality that suits one's taste.

The poet Ann Yearsley provides a non-fictional example of absence becoming presence through 'fancy'. Her verse epistles, like Pope's, were addressed to friends, but Yearsley's survive in manuscripts that were actually sent through the post, making them 'real' letters according to some editorial measures.¹⁷ Writing to Wilmer Gossip, Yearsley versifies the epistolary urge to imagine the reception of one's letter within the letter itself. In 'Absence: Occasioned by some storms having deprived the Author of her expected Friends', 'Fancy' is marked enough to warrant personification:

At this sad moment, when both Wind and Rain
With force united give My bosom pain
Because they keep *Thee* from Me. Fancy proves
Her richest Colours, and each Cloud removes,
She paints Thee pensive, in an easy Chair
With ***** thy lov'd Companion Near¹⁸

Yearsley favours 'fancy' as a persona separate from 'the Author'. This suggests a link between 'fancy' and impersonation. Its application to Yearsley's real circle of friends demonstrates that correspondence was a semi-fictional forum where writers exchanged impersonations with their counterparts.

Languages of quotation

Epistolary procatalepsis and the 'fancy' that underpinned it were grounded in familial networks of imitation in everyday speech, or 'quotations language'. To show such languages in action, Finnegan analyses information gathered from the Mass

¹⁷ For example, the poems Burns sent through the post have appeared in his edited correspondence since Ferguson's edition of 1931.

¹⁸ 27 March 1788, *The Collected Works of Ann Yearsley*, ed. Kerri Andrews, 3 vols. (London: Pickering and Chatto, 2014), i.246.

Observation project that was conducted in Britain during the twentieth century. Her comments suggest that reiterated quotation of familial phrases is an integral part of ordinary spoken conversation:

A quotations language could thus develop among small in-groups, pronounced and understood with overtones peculiar to themselves.

[...]

Shading into such examples were more recent sayings and conversations.

Someone's words or interchanges, whether from live or overheard conversations, or (overlapping with these) from reports in newspapers or other media, were repeated onwards by someone else, acknowledging that the words were not their own. [...] They sometimes acquired a longer life, but many were ephemeral, suited just to particular occasions.¹⁹

The rise in literacy rates during the eighteenth century and the common practice of keeping in touch with the family network by letter mean that the period offers the first substantial evidence of 'quotations languages' directly from the texts in which they arose.

While other communities used the end of letters to gesture towards mutual acquaintances with some regularity, the papers of Robert Valentine suggest that Quakers were more diligent in their acknowledgement of people surrounding the addressee. Thus, the formulae of acknowledging the wider community and family become so well known as to be quotable. Valentine's aunt does this: 'I Conclude with Dear Love "to thee, thy Wife", & the rest of [your rela]tions as if Nam'd, in [this] my Children Joins, thy / Loving Au[nt] [M]ary Wilson'.²⁰ This is an example of the formalisation of epistolary phrases into 'quotations languages' understood by in-groups.

Finnegan's emphasis on tonal register – 'overtones peculiar to themselves' – fits with Sterne's fictional recreation of communication through body language, and

¹⁹ Finnegan, *Why do we Quote?* (Cambridge, 2011), pp. 30-1.

²⁰ 5 July 1759, RV 213, fol. 1^v.

the 'quotations language' to which Finnegan refers could easily be applied to the Shandy household's use of repetition in conversation, or indeed to any eighteenth-century 'household-family'.²¹

The crushing of uncle Toby's drawbridge is the occasion of much retelling, to the point where even the retelling is retold: '—How can you tease me so much about it? my uncle *Toby* would reply, — I have told it you twenty times, word for word as *Trim* told it me' (i.248). Tristram's report of Uncle Toby feeling 'teazed' by the retelling of this story links the 'Hobby horses' of *Tristram Shandy* to those elucidated through conversation in *Grandison*. In both works, character is performed through utterances that contain 'overtones peculiar to themselves'. These characteristic utterances become part of the communal 'quotations language' which can be drawn upon to 'tease', mimic or personate.

Characters in Richardson's *Grandison* use their interlocutors' words to tease out their true intention, or to get them to see themselves from another's perspective. Charlotte is dismayed when, during her 'trial', Sir Charles makes use of one of her favourite words:

Can you think, that the man who engages a woman to make a promise, does not intend to hold her to it? When he *teazes* her to make it, he as good as tells her he *does*, let what will happen to make her wish she had not.

Miss Gr. O my brother! The repetition of that word *teazes*! — Are you not raillerying me? — Indeed I deserve it.

Sir Ch. Men gain all their advantages by *teasing*, by *promises*, by *importunities* — Be not concern'd, my Charlotte, that I use your word.²²

The repetition of 'tease' is designed to shame Charlotte; teasing in itself tends to involve repetition. In this case it comes from a benign source and demonstrates the

²¹ This is evident in Austen's letters, in which the linguistic mannerisms of third parties known to both Austen and her addressee are imitated. See Jane Austen, *Letters*, ed. Deirdre Le Faye, 3rd edn. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), p. 212.

²² Richardson, *Grandison*, ed. Harris, 3 vols. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1972), ii.411.

danger of a teasing man, without the harmful consequences. Here mimicry serves a useful social purpose, a purpose that the novel overall might be said to fulfil: rehearsals for life, in the form of 'the Example of a Man acting uniformly well'.²³

In another conversation piece, Harriet's habit of filling in for her correspondents in advance is turned on her when the Grandison sisters speculate about what she can have meant to say, when she leaves a sentence incomplete:

With too great eagerness, What, what said I – I was going to add – *did he say?* [...] *What, what!* Repeated Miss Grandison – My sweet girl can say nothing but *What, what!* – One of my fellows, Sir Walter Watkyns is in her head, I suppose – Did you ever see *Wat* – Watkyns, Harriet? (418)

The characters in *Grandison* repeat words that are associated with another's idiom as part of everyday conversation. Harriet relates these interactions in her letters, combining them with her own thoughts and addresses to the recipients of her letters. This complexity is not the fanciful invention of the novelist, but rather a reflection of the 'quotations language' of which familiar letters provide evidence, as well as perpetuate through the necessity of recapitulation.

Quotations languages amongst epistolary groups combined the 'concordia discors' discussed in chapter 2 with sympathetic imitation. This is evident from the Richardson-Hill correspondence. Aaron Hill's friendship with the author of *Pamela* was strengthened by the correspondence between their families, as when Hill's daughters wrote to Richardson's wife Elizabeth:

Madam,
My Sister, and I, are extremely obliged to your good Mr Richardson, for so wise, and so sweet [*sic*], a Companion, as Pamela.²⁴

²³ *Grandison* 7 vols. (London, 1754), i.vi.

²⁴ 17 December 1740, *Correspondence with Aaron Hill and the Hill Family*, ed. Christine Gerrard (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), p. 61.

Astrea Hill uses the plural 'we' throughout this letter, yet concludes with the singular 'obedient Servant'. Though Elizabeth is the overt addressee, Richardson is intended as a reader. These are features of epistolary polyphony necessary to balancing individual expression with the letter's social goal of maintaining ties between groups. Richardson's novel is welcomed as if its heroine were part of the familial network referred to within the Richardson-Hill correspondence. Significantly, Astrea responds to *Pamela* by modestly comparing herself with the virtuous character, in an act of self-reflection designed to flatter Richardson:

And sometimes we go out with our Angling Rods to entrap poor Carps, like Pamela. But at this Work, tho' we have felt often her beautiful Pity, we want the Power of her lovely Reflexion. However I am sure, we shall want this no longer, than till we are so happy to have you, warming us [...]. (62)

Astrea's comparison of her activities with those of Pamela fosters sympathy, or 'beautiful Pity' between her and the fictional character. But it also encourages the Richardsons to warm to Astrea, as she claims they could be 'warming' for her.

Reflecting upon Pamela causes Astrea to reflect upon herself, and 'we want the Power of her lovely Reflexion' is an observation that is designed to reflect well on Richardson and his authorial encouragement of self-improvement. By recounting her imitation of Pamela, Astrea hopes to gain sympathy from the Richardsons. She draws on a collective frame of reference originating in *Pamela*, a quotations language that began with Richardson, and which was reflected back to him in the letters his family received. This effect is augmented by the inclusive pronouns that evoke group participation in the reception of *Pamela*, and which encourage the readers to feel themselves part of this process.

The quotations languages in epistolary networks gave rise to intertextual mimicry in which the original utterances were hard to separate from the fictional

‘fancy’ that accrued in the course of correspondence. Employing the third person in place of the first helped to fictionalise epistolary writers’ experience. Where letters are the written testament of life, the writer can become a character in his or her own works of life-writing. The result is the recognition of one’s own register as something that may be characterised, and in turn, that this idiom can mingle with that of others.

While in Dorrit Cohn’s *Transparent Minds* (1973), free indirect discourse is defined as the mimicry of a character’s voice by a narrator, Roy Pascal’s *The Dual Voice* (1977) acknowledges that characters are capable of mimicking the narrator’s idiom, too. While FID is often discussed in relation to nineteenth-century fiction, Joe Bray has shown that Richardson had an influence on the development of the style in Austen.²⁵ Crucially, though, since it came to light in the 1920s, some critics have seen FID as originating in ‘common usage’ (Pascal, 18). In his analysis of FID in Austen’s *Emma*, Daniel P. Gunn reconciles the question of whose voice dominates (narrator or character?) by returning to the idea of FID as a quotidian style. The implication for letters is that a quotations language is the property of ordinary speech as well as of literary language. According to Gunn, FID ‘is best seen not as a representation of autonomous figural discourse but as a kind of narratorial *mimicry*, analogous to the flexible imitations of others’ discourse we all practise in informal speech and expository prose’.²⁶ Richardson’s ventriloquism of Bradshaigh is part of everyday epistolary style and resembles FID, though their occupation of *Grandison*’s characters also blurs the distinction between fictional and real epistolary writers. In turn, Richardson created characters that personate one another within the novels.

²⁵ *The Epistolary Novel: Representations of Consciousness* (2003).

²⁶ ‘Free Indirect Discourse and Narrative Authority in *Emma*’, *Narrative* 12:1 (January 2004), 35-54, pp. 35-6.

A letter-writer might create a character out of his or her past self.²⁷ It wasn't just writers of fiction, like Sterne, who inhabited characters of their own making. Letter-writers could characterise themselves as narrators. Shaping narrative was a normal part of letter-writing. Whyman quotes the grandson of John Evelyn, self-consciously reflecting on the process of putting narrative into a letter: 'I have run through each of the things I saw in some order [...] and have offered to your eyes events of daily life [...] as if putting together a story.'²⁸

Narrating a letter involved the occupation of other voices. In the following letter to Hester Thrale, Johnson occupies the point of view of his stepdaughter 'poor Lucy', possibly echoing her speech indirectly, and projecting himself into her future emotional state:

Poor Lucy is so much enfeebled in her feet that she cannot walk to church, and what is far worse, has her hearing very much impaired. I wish Miss would write to her. She will be glad. (iii.167)

Johnson translates the conditional into the future tense, performing an equivalent action to Richardson's conflation of proposal and choice in his exchanges with Bradshaigh. Johnson's letter to Thrale on the death of his amanuensis Peyton is also full of sympathetic conjecture, but in the past tense: 'he probably thought often how lightly he should tread the path of life without his burthen' (ii.315). The 'voices' of the epistolary narrator and the people to whom he or she refers are mutually influential. The epistolary narrator may mimic his/her correspondent, or a third party, creating, in Johnson's phrase, a 'mingled dialect'. This process involves a characterisation of the idioms of the agents involved; they become characters at the hands of the narrator; narrators may even caricature their own register by quoting themselves. For

²⁷ Bray, p. 40.

²⁸ 2 October 1699, Sir John Evelyn to John Evelyn, British Library Add. MS 78462, f. 695, quoted in Whyman, *ibid.*, p. 227.

example, Hester Mulso signed herself off as ‘Your humble servant / Yes Papa!’ in her letters, which refers to her verbal habit of acquiescence to her father, and as such is idiomatic self-quotation and self-parody.²⁹

As we saw in chapter 2, Pope and Swift made self-quotation into an art. The *Journal to Stella* combined quotations from older occasions in Swift’s career with imitation of the generic idiom of proverbs, as Abigail Williams has observed:

We can compare Swift’s delight in the mimicry of familiar turns of phrase in the *Journal to Stella* with his practice in *Polite Conversation*, in which the copiousness of proverbial reference becomes almost meaningless, or with the use of proverb in *Tale of a Tub*, whose very title was a familiar phrase. Sheridan observed that Swift frequently coined his own proverbs and passed them off as old adages, and many of the sayings cited by Swift are of his own invention.³⁰

Peter J. Schakel notes that when Swift stayed with the Achesons in 1728, he produced poems which ‘drew his hosts into the poems with his hosts’ own voices, but made more complex by Swift’s ventriloquism’.³¹ The ‘Market Hill’ poems were an experiment in the ‘conversational’ mode, in which Swift was responsible for inventing both halves of the conversation, and in turn a fictional ‘quotations language’. The Market Hill poems aimed to shape the reaction of the primary addressee (Lady Acheson) by ventriloquizing her, and in this regard their mimetic mechanism is not dissimilar to that in Richardson’s letters.

The ‘intended reader’ is used as a speaker in the poem ‘My Lady’s Lamentation and Complaint against the Dean’ (1728), which causes Lady Acheson to ‘listen to a representation of her own voice as she reads, the aural equivalent of looking into the proverbial satiric mirror’ (116). Schakel observes that the author’s

²⁹ See Barbara Eaton, *Yes Papa! Mrs. Chapone and the Bluestocking Circle*.

³⁰ *Journal to Stella*, ed. Abigail Williams, lxiii.

³¹ ‘Swift’s Voices: Innovation and Complication in the Poems Written at Market Hill’ in *Eighteenth-Century Contexts: Historical Inquiries in Honor of Phillip Harth*, ed. Howard Weinbrot et al. (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2001), 114-132, p. 115.

voice (usually associated with the speaker) is 'dramatised' as well as the speaker-subject's. This is similar to the state of mutual influence between characters and narrators that Gunn identifies as free indirect discourse in Austen. 'My Lady's Lamentation and Complaint' uses 'one conversational voice to convey the speech of another voice' (123): 'And then he grows mild; / Come, be a good child'.³²

In the poem 'Lady A—s—n Weary of the Dean' (1728?), Swift dramatises what he thought Lady Acheson was thinking about him, in a self-deprecating way:

After a Week, a Month, a Quarter,
And Day succeeding after Day,
Says not a Word of his Departure
Tho' not a Soul would have him stay.³³

Schakel interprets Swift's strategy as aiming to 'deflect [...] criticism' through humorous projection (118). This is like Richardson's manipulation of Lady Bradshaigh by reframing her objections as straw men. Michael Suarez calls this habit in Swift the 'gentle [satire] reserved for friends (what he called "raillery")'.³⁴ Swift's 'raillery' is similar to the domestic 'teasing' that Charlotte Grandison endured from her brother, in that it had pedagogical aims. Swift makes his satire one of the subjects of *An Epistle to a Lady*. The poem's subject and addressee (Lady Acheson) is a speaker once again, though Swift speaks as himself as well. Because of its designation as 'Epistle', and because it is 'conversational' (dialogic), this poem links raillery in the form of mimicry with the letter (*Poems*, ii.630). Acheson appeals to Swift for soft treatment, knowing his reputation for satire:

Drop, for once, your constant Rule,

³² *The Poems of Jonathan Swift*, ed. Harold Williams, 3 vols., 2nd edn. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), iii.855.

³³ *Poems*, iii.860.

³⁴ 'Swift's Satire and Parody', in *The Cambridge Companion to Jonathan Swift*, ed. Christopher Fox (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 111-127, p. 113.

Turning all to Ridicule:
Teaching others how to ape ye; (ll. 51-3)

It is Acheson who is being aped by Swift here, though he clearly hopes that the imitation will spur her on to improve her 'discourse' (l. 121) and 'Conversation' (l. 123). Though the poem is epistolary only in a loose sense, it shows that mimicry in dialogue was supposed to have a remedial effect.

Schakel calls these poems 'personal, conversational' as a way to define their genre. They are close to letters in their dialogism and concern with 'aping'. Schakel draws an analogy between 'shifting [...] generic codes' as perceived by readers, and the 'interplay between voices' disallowing a passive-receptive role (121). They 'force upon readers the choice of whether to accede or not accede to the speaker's sentiments' (128).

Henry Fielding used Richardson's favourite literary vehicle – a letter – to force his addressee to 'accede or not accede' to his sentiments. He wrote of his admiration of *Clarissa*, but used an indirect and backhanded technique to undermine his rival. Most significantly, as Sabor points out, Fielding adopts Lovelace's tone when describing his relationship with Fame, whom he has 'ravished' and with whom he is now 'in a settled cohabitation'.³⁵ By ventriloquizing Richardson's villain, Fielding exploits the openness of the epistolary style, to deliberately miss the moral point of the novel.³⁶ Sabor points out that following *Shamela*, Fielding continued to mock Richardson's style in *Amelia*, where he 'adopts the characteristically Richardsonian device of using the limited perspective of one of the characters to supply the reader

³⁵ 15 October 1748, *The Correspondence of Henry and Sarah Fielding*, ed. Battestin and Probyn, p. 71.

³⁶ David Brewer's *The Afterlife of Character* (Philadelphia, Pa.: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2005) explores this theme in detail.

with false information.³⁷

Richardson's choice of the epistolary style supposedly allowed him to use his characters' own words, almost exclusively, to describe the inner workings of their minds. The epistolary style seems to obliterate the place of the narrator completely: other than a few interjections by the 'editor' in *Pamela*, in which some events are summarized, the body of the text is, on the face of it, commanded by the characters. This stance was not uncontroversial. Richardson battled with his readers over how to interpret the texts, as he did not offer to shape their reactions within the text as much as an omnipotent narrator may have done. He also had to contend with Fielding's contempt for the epistolary style. Each author sought to undermine the other's abilities in capturing human nature. They mocked each other's authorial idiom. Richardson was almost certainly comparing his work with Fielding's when he wrote contemptuously of 'the dry Narrative; where the *Novelist* moves on [...] in the same Style'.³⁸

Fielding's teasing of Richardson through Lovelace is cogent because Richardson was fond of slipping into his fictional characters' voices when he had a particular (often moral) point to prove. He encouraged his correspondents to write to him as various characters from *Grandison*, praising Bradshaigh's 'contrivance [...] Charlotte in your Hands is very Charlottish'.³⁹ Charlotte's idiom was recognisable enough that both Richardson and Bradshaigh used it, though the exact nature of her characteristic speech was negotiable. Richardson praised Bradshaigh's 'assumed Character', as 'how naturally, how characteristically do you bring yourself off'. But he balked at 'the idea given by the Words, slobbering, flabby Substance, what an Idea

³⁷ Peter Sabor, 'Richardson, Henry Fielding, and Sarah Fielding', *The Cambridge Companion to English Literature, 1740-1830*, ed. Tom Keymer and Jon Mee (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 139-156, pp. 148-9.

³⁸ Tom Keymer, ed., *Richardson's Published Commentary on Clarissa 1747-65*, i.332, i.334.

³⁹ FC, XI, f. 123^r.

of a Thing to be Kissed! – Shall Charlotte say that?’ (XI, f. 123^r). Richardson also imitated Charlotte at various points in his correspondence with Bradshaigh. To ‘assume’ a character within a letter requires that their style be recognisable enough to be imitated; Richardson and Bradshaigh used Charlotte Grandison’s idiom to bring their opinions on other matters into focus. Richardson’s letters, therefore, blur the boundary between fiction and reality, in order to promote a correspondence of opinion and style.

Personation and morality

In his study of Richardson as ‘impersonator’, William Beatty Warner notes that, in the eighteenth-century, ‘the word *personate* carries all the several meanings of the modern term *impersonate*: (1) assume a mask, act a part; (2) deceive by pretending to be a person you are not; (3) to cheat someone in this way.’⁴⁰ Warner is right to point out the equivalence between eighteenth-century personation and impersonation, and the ambivalence its connotations of disguise and deceit attracted. When Johnson wrote to Richardson suggesting he drop the editorial persona for *Grandison*, he asked ‘What is modesty if it departs from truth? Of what use is the disguise by which nothing is concealed?’⁴¹ But Johnson invented correspondents, too: the letters in the *Rambler* and *Idler* feigned dialogue while actually being provided by Johnson himself. This complicates his question about transparent disguise, as he refers to a convention that both he and Richardson use. His rhetorical question is in itself a transparent disguise, making it an apposite way to discuss conventional mimesis in epistolary structure, and in narratives that relied on the letter’s dialogic form.

⁴⁰ William Beatty Warner, *Reading ‘Clarissa’: the Struggles of Interpretation* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1979), p. 130, n. 1.

⁴¹ 26 September 1753, Johnson to Richardson, *Letters*, i.74.

Richardson only occasionally uses the term 'personation', but the technique it describes is frequently in evidence in his letters. As author, Richardson claimed to be so immersed in his characters that he took on probable, real faults on their behalf. He wrote to Bradshaigh:

Somebody, who had not otherwise given himself the Liberty he took when he was personating Lady G. owed some of the Notions he gives that Lady, to that favourite County. But I take hold of the Defence you made for me: It is indeed true, that I had not made Charlotte so lively on this Subject, but for the Sake of the Chidings she was to receive from the graver Characters.⁴²

Richardson's use of the third person to talk about the 'Liberty he took' while writing Lady G. (or as Lady G.) contrasts with his use of 'me' when addressing Lady Bradshaigh directly. The switch within this paragraph is indicative of the wider process: sometimes Richardson stands outside his characters, and sometimes he speaks about himself as if he were a third person. These varying degrees of distance are tied to the author's aims; in this case, Richardson disavows the 'Liberty' he took by writing Lady G., but when given Bradshaigh's 'Defence', he takes credit for the character in the first person. Richardson claimed to be 'absorbed in the character'⁴³; he wrote 'on purpose to carry myself out of myself'.⁴⁴ Insisting on his characters' culpability, as opposed to his own, became another way of teasing his addressees with suggested improvements to their half of the correspondence:

Dear Lady B, are not you, who could make such kind and just Excuses for me to two worthy Ladies your Auditors [...] very severe upon me, when you acquit her and lay at my Door, the Pink and Yellow Ribbands? "How came I, you ask, to think of Pink and Yellow?" How came Charlotte by them, you should rather ask.⁴⁵

⁴² 4 January 1754, Carroll, p. 268.

⁴³ 14 February 1754, Carroll, p. 286.

⁴⁴ To Hester Mulso, 30 September 1751, Barbauld, iii.190-1.

⁴⁵ Carroll, pp. 267-8.

Warner suggests that this absorption was something Richardson hoped to replicate in his readers, 'to prevent a reader's reproach' (131). Aaron Hill's reaction to *Pamela* prefaced the novel, and his account of his identity being replaced with the characters replicates Richardson's own claim to be 'nowhere' when he wrote them:

Now and then, I am *Colbrand* the Swiss; but, as *broad* as *I stride*, in that Character, I can never escape *Mrs. Jewkes*: who often keeps me awake in the Night.⁴⁶

Richardson may have chosen Hill's account to illustrate that readers, too, could personate the characters they read about. Hill's contrastive 'Now and then' evokes the multiple aspect of reading time. Its rhythm, like the writing of letters (as we saw in chapter 2), comprised a series of 'occasions' that could set the scene for dialogic contrasts between correspondents and within each letter. In Hill's case, the juxtaposition takes place within himself as a reader. The intermittent italics in 'as *broad* as *I stride*' meld the uses of italics as contrastive and quotative. One reading would be that the correlative conjunctions are Hill's voice, and the italicised '*I*' that of Colbrand. The interlacing of voices approaches free indirect discourse, because the switching between Hill's voice and that of Hill in the 'Character' of Colbrand takes place too quickly for them to remain differentiated, and Hill is acting as the narrator of his own experience. The final 'me' could be either Hill or Colbrand, but in effect it is both, and because this is in the first person, it seems to be a kind of free indirect speech, with the boundary between Hill's and Colbrand's voices dissolved.

As Richardson's flexibility of personal pronoun in his letter to Bradshaigh shows, the author's distance from his characters could be adjusted according to the level of responsibility he wished to take on at any particular time. Warner's

⁴⁶ *Pamela*, 2nd edn. (London, 1741), i.xxx.

suggestion that Richardson wanted to avoid 'reproach' is significant, given the array of moralities and beliefs represented in *Pamela* and *Clarissa*.

Another instance of 'personation' in Richardson's correspondence occurs when he writes to Alex Claude Clairaut about Clementina's Catholicism, in justification of his enthusiastic representation of her faith:

I shall think myself unhappy, and shall be greatly disappointed, if I have not done as much Honour to the Lady for her Zeal and Stedfastness, and that from Motives that would not be found fault with at Rome; as to the Gentleman; for to both, and to all her Friends, I give equal Piety and Goodness: In short, this Part is one of those that I value myself most upon, having been as zealous a Catholic when I was to personate the Lady, and her Catholic Friends, as a Protestant, when I was the Gentleman; and have done Credit to the Clergy of both Religions, who are good Men: But how do I know, how this may be thought of in Paris, and at Rome?⁴⁷

Personation becomes an act of translation here, as Richardson considers the reception of his works in different countries, and the impact of his language, style and moral outlook in Paris and Rome. He received translations of his works in French, Dutch and German, and commented that the Abbé Prévost's omissions in his translation of *Clarissa* were perhaps a reflection on the French nation.⁴⁸ Richardson frames his 'personation' as a moral act; he does 'Honour' to the character he portrays by bringing high definition to her own zealousness, and not shying away from occupying a Catholic persona. For Richardson, the truth of character must be conveyed, even if that character is exemplary in a way that is not condoned by Protestant society.

Donnalee Frega points out that exemplarity is a trait common to many of Richardson's characters; as an author, he is just and moral in that he brings detail to all standpoints. For Frega, however, this exemplarity is unrepresentative of real

⁴⁷ 5 July 1753, *Correspondence Primarily on Sir Charles Grandison (1750-1754)*, ed. Betty A. Schellenberg (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), p. 95.

⁴⁸ To Bradshaigh, 20 February 1753, Carroll, p. 223.

behaviour.⁴⁹ Yet the moral extremity of Lovelace was, for some eighteenth-century readers, proof that Richardson's characters were not the 'puppets' of his opinion, unlike the 'personages' described by Shaftesbury in the work of religious dialogists. Bradshaigh's reading of Charlotte, and the zeal with which Richardson personated Clementina, demonstrate that while his characters may not be representative of the way people actually behaved, Richardson's commitment to personating them made their moral stances in some sense believable.

The moral extremity of Richardson's characters formed part of a discussion about fictional probability that took place after the publication of *Pamela*. In contrast, Fielding advocated for mixed characters with 'enough of Goodness' to 'engage the Admiration', but who also had 'Blemishes' to 'raise our Compassion'.⁵⁰ For Fielding, 'nothing can be of more moral Use than the Imperfections', which bring negative consequences to characters of whom we otherwise approve. Fielding also noted that 'what may be only wonderful [...] in one Man, may become improbable [...] when related to another' (ii.178). Thus he, like Richardson, advocated for 'Conservation of Character', though Fielding thought characters should be consistently a 'Mixture of Good' and 'Deformity' (iii.4), whereas Richardson thought the good and bad moral qualities should be unmixed consistently.

Johnson warned that although 'certain virtues have their correspondent faults', this 'correspondence' was not always symmetrical. Johnson worried that absolving characters' vices because of the counterweight of the corresponding virtue was irresponsible. For this reason, Richardson's Lovelace achieved a better 'moral effect of [...] fiction' than Rowe's Lothario, because while the latter 'retains too much of the

⁴⁹ *Speaking in Hunger: Gender, Discourse and Consumption in Clarissa* (Carolina: University of South Carolina Press, 1998), p. 59. Frega cites Flynn's reading of the characters as 'mythic' as one with popular weight.

⁵⁰ *Tom Jones* 4 vols. (London, 1749), iii.4.

spectator's Kindness', Lovelace makes 'virtuous resentment overpower all the benevolence which wit, and elegance, and courage, naturally excite' in the reader.⁵¹

Johnson spoke of exemplarity in fiction approaching probability in more general terms in the *Rambler* 4:

In narratives, where historical veracity has no place, I cannot discover why there should not be exhibited the most perfect idea of virtue; of virtue not angelical, nor above probability, for what we cannot credit we shall never imitate, but the highest and purest that humanity can reach [...].⁵²

Johnson thought there was a direct correlation between what young people read, and how they went on to behave. The theory that reading led to imitation had a long connection with the epistolary form, in that letter-manuals (Richardson's among them) sought to inculcate virtue at the same time as teaching the rules of good style.⁵³ Through their letters, a person could act as an exemplary citizen, friend or family member (a point which Brant makes by dividing her book into chapters which cover each of these archetypal correspondents).

Richardson and Johnson's approval of literary role models has some commonalities with Plato's theory of imitative poetry, in which the author 'speaks through a character, as it were concealing himself behind the mask of one of his literary creations'.⁵⁴ Imitative poetry is supposed to lead to imitation in those who observe it, as poetry presents us with 'role models'.⁵⁵ Frega's analysis of Clarissa and Lovelace's exemplary moral extremity fits with Johnson's idea that characters

⁵¹ Lonsdale, ii.200.

⁵² *Works*, iii.24.

⁵³ Copying out letters (whether familial or printed) was the main method by which letter-writers learned the craft in the eighteenth century. Arne Melberg sees mimesis as a related term to Kierkegaard's 'repetition' (Danish *gentagelsen*). See *Theories of Mimesis* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), pp. 1, 4-5.

⁵⁴ Charles L. Griswold, "Plato on Rhetoric and Poetry", *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Fall 2014 Edition), ed. Edward N. Zalta, <<http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/fall2014/entries/plato-rhetoric/>>.

⁵⁵ Jessica Moss, "What Is Imitative Poetry and Why Is It Bad?" in *The Cambridge Companion to Plato's Republic* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), pp. 415-444, p. 430.

should be 'perfect'. That is, when perfection is of the uniform, consistent kind advocated by the *Republic*: 'varied, contradictory characters appear excellent, while true human excellence lies in stability and uniformity of soul. But to be varied and contradictory in character is in reality to be vicious'.⁵⁶ Richardson's insistence on his heroines' consistent standards of behaviour suggests a similar underlying principle of characterisation as that espoused by Plato.⁵⁷

Apart from its negative effects on the audience, Plato disapproved of imitative poetry because it endangered the poet. Griswold explains that: '[u]nlike simple narrative, mimesis poses a particular psychic danger, because as the speaker of the narrative one may take on the character of literary persona in question.' Habitual imitation came under scrutiny again in the eighteenth century, within Richardson's literary circle. Edward Young's *Conjectures on Original Composition* (1759) decried what the author saw as a worrying trend towards imitation in literature:

That medling Ape Imitation [...] destroys all mental Individuality; the letter'd world no longer consists of Singulars, it is a Medly, a Mass; and a hundred books, at bottom, are but One. Why are Monkeys such masters of Mimickry?⁵⁸

Even as he laments the lack of 'Individuality', Young does away with it in his own writing, by favouring plurals. The 'Ape Imitation' becomes 'Monkeys'; the counterintuitive plural, 'Singulars', indicates that the mimicry has spread. Even as he decries imitation, Young's *Conjectures* bears the procataleptic remnants of the epistolary exchange from which it was derived.

⁵⁶ Moss, *ibid.*

⁵⁷ Though Richardson doesn't speak directly about Plato, the Postscript to *Clarissa* discusses Aristotle's model of 'poetic justice' in relation to tragedy, and its application in English drama. He was, therefore, aware of at least some Classical theory.

⁵⁸ Edward Young, *Conjectures on Original Composition* (London, 1759), pp. 42-3.

What Young called the ‘medling Ape imitation’ is present everywhere in letters – as we have seen – as the anticipation of the correspondent’s objections. In letters, the rebuttal of the reader’s objections is often manifested as an imaginary conversation with him or her. As an essay written as an epistle, Young’s *Conjectures* is a dialogue with Richardson, full of rhetorical questioning and addresses to the silent reader. This is in line with Young’s urging of potential writers to imitate the method and the ‘man’, but not the composition. Procatalepsis in the *Conjectures* ranges from stock phrases such as ‘[b]ut possibly you may reply’, to more extended objections punctuated by ‘but, you say’, through to questions posed with the irritating piquancy of Harriet Byron: ‘[t]hink you this too bold?’ (78).

Young mimics Richardson’s characters in his *Conjectures*, even going as far as to take on the style of representing speech in the novels. Young echoes Harriet’s use of the play-text format when he comments on his own prolixity (which Aaron Hill had noted to Richardson), thus:

What a rant, say you, is here?
– I partly grant it: Yet, consider, my Friend! (74)

Young talks about Richardson as if he were a third party: ‘A friend of mine [...] has made a convert to virtue of a species of composition, once most its foe [...] But you, I know, are sparing in your praise of this author’ (77). Young cannot resist mimicking Richardson’s coy deference, and by playing along, he shows that what he called the ‘medling Ape imitation’ has an important part to play in establishing the cultural and personal currency of characters in literature and correspondence. Even though he was suspicious of mimicry, then, Young used it to relate to his audience, a contradictory stance that isn’t that far from Richardson’s.

Personating the characteristic idiom of another did not necessarily require absolute accuracy so long as it was seen as 'probable'. However, there was some tension between the aims of making the source of the imitation recognisable, and making the imitation 'authentic' or unexaggerated. The problem of stylistic probability versus authenticity resembled the debate surrounding the moral implications of Fielding's 'probable', 'mixed' characters as opposed to Richardson's 'exemplary' ones. In 'conversations characteristic' such as those that Harriet transcribes, the recognisability of the various 'characters' was important. Just as the transition from speech to writing demanded that the reader engage with a believable fiction, so too the representation of characteristic utterances was accepted if it was suitably believable, and if it did justice to the topic. When Johnson's parliamentary debates for the *Gentleman's Magazine* were collected and republished in 1787, the editor attributed the improvement Johnson had made to the truth to his ability to construct a suitably recognisable, characteristic interaction:

it must be acknowledged, that Johnson did not give so much what they respectively said as what each ought to have said. These debates, then, may be considered as so many distinct dramas, in which, on extraordinary occasions of public expectation, known characters of considerable consequence were brought forward to act their parts. As dramas these Debates have received a just eulogy by the remark of competent judges, *how easy it was to assign to every speaker his proper speech without knowing the name*.⁵⁹

As with Johnson's attitude to fictional characters in *Rambler* 4, here the ideal is preferable to the real. Because reporting debates in parliament was illegal, the names of the politicians were obscured by faux-Lilliputian monikers. The 'extraordinary occasions' invoked by the editor are reminiscent of Pope's explanation for the *Epistle to Arbuthnot*, composed as the 'various occasions offer'd'.

⁵⁹ Johnson, *Debates in Parliament*, 2 vols. (London, 1787), i.vi-vii.

Pope's occasions were avowedly imperfect and mundane, even though cumulatively they amounted to 'extraordinary' poetry. In the political debates, the occasion dictates what each Member of Parliament 'ought to have said', and the result is a series of semi-fictional 'distinct dramas'. The implication is that the characters in this drama must be recognisable only by their voices, recalling the quotation from Bacon in Johnson's *Dictionary*'s definition of 'voice': 'we can discern several men by their *voices*'. So too, the 'distinct' voice of each particular dramatic parliamentary debate must contain 'known characters', and possess a 'known character' of its own.

In *Grandison*, Harriet Byron adopts several 'known characters' such as 'the fool' (ii.418, 420), thus fragmenting her register. Her linguistic playfulness is part of her personality, just as Richardson's 'roguery' was one of his self-identified authorial traits. 'The fool' allows Harriet to exercise her mimetic ingenuity under the guise of the ingénue. The coupling of 'play' with didactic intent in *Grandison* was remarked upon by Kinkead-Weekes in his *Samuel Richardson: Dramatic Novelist*. Kinkead-Weekes links 'the novel's interest in serious role-playing for moral purposes' (409-410) to Harriet's mimetic habits.

Richardson's prose begins to resemble a play script during set-piece conversations, though this is accounted for in *Grandison*, at least, by the easy accommodation of the letter to other forms of reading material, including the closet drama:

By the way, Lucy [...] you are fond of plays; and it is come into my head, that, to avoid all *says-I's* and *says-she's*, I will henceforth in all dialogues, write names in the margin: So fansy, my dear, that you are reading in one of your favourite volumes. (i.419)

Personation is fundamentally inconsistent with integrity of character, which is why –

despite its moral potential – Richardson had to defend the indecorous, fully realized occupation of his voice by that of his characters. It also demonstrates that letters are in some sense dramatic, because they are dialogic.

Personation and performance

On the basis of Richardson's interest in personation, the customary critical account of his dislike of the theatre can be qualified. Personation was primarily a word that applied to the stage, but Richardson chose to appropriate it to talk about his development of character, within the epistolary mode. His view on whether or not his personation relates to the theatre is difficult to discern. He expressed anti-theatrical opinions in *The Apprentice's Vade Mecum* (1734), and a pamphlet entitled *A Seasonable Examination of the Pleas and Pretensions of the Proprietors of, and Subscribers to, Play-Houses* (1735) has been attributed to Richardson by Alan McKillop.⁶⁰ T. Duncan Eaves and Ben Kimpel account for Richardson's anti-theatrical stance by showing how it accords with his middle-class, professional outlook. Theatre-going is one among a clutch of activities that apprentices should avoid (including gaming and going to taverns), because they are harmful both spiritually and economically (and in the *Vade Mecum*, the two are intertwined).⁶¹

John Dussinger goes further than Eaves and Kimpel in asserting Richardson's anti-theatrical views. He points out that Richardson not only supported Barnard's bill to restrict the number of theatres (1735); he added to it a recommendation that 'plays deemed immoral or subversive' should be censored.⁶² Dussinger thinks that this view came from a political fear of theatrical satires, which undermined the government in a way that was not so easily answered as a political essay. He

⁶⁰ 'Richardson's Early Writings – Another Pamphlet', *JEGP*, 53 (1954), 72-5.

⁶¹ *Samuel Richardson: A Biography* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1971), pp. 53-4.

⁶² "'Ciceronian Eloquence': The Politics of Virtue in *Pamela*", *Eighteenth-Century Fiction*, 12:1 (1999), 39-60, p. 47.

suggests that while they aren't directly attributable to Richardson, material in the *Daily Gazeteer*, which Richardson printed and part-owned, may also be representative of the author's views on theatre. One issue (7 May 1737) contained a letter from 'An Adventurer in Politicks', who thought that greater freedom should be given to printed satire than to stage productions. This view was reflected in the subsequent Licensing Act of 1737, which 'did not interfere with the publication of plays prohibited from being acted on stage', and printed copies of banned plays were marketed on the basis that their content had been deemed too subversive for the stage.⁶³

In his letters Richardson approves of plays by people he likes or with whom he has some connection.⁶⁴ Edward Moore's *The Gamester* (1753), as read by David Garrick, Richardson thinks is 'a moral and seasonable piece'. In the same letter to Bradshaigh, he laments that his friend Edward Young's *The Brothers* (1753) 'was acted to thin houses but just eight nights'.⁶⁵ In light of these opinions, Richardson's stance in the *Vade Mecum* seems contradictory, especially when he laments that a 'good Dramatick Writer, is a Character that this Age knows nothing of; and I would be glad to name the Person living who is fit to be made an Exception to this general Censure.' As Eaves and Kimpel point out, the difficult relationship with Fielding and his work that Richardson would later develop (especially following Fielding's 1748 letter in the style of Lovelace) means his omission of Fielding from the category of 'good Dramatick Writer' in 1734 is an early part of a lengthy rivalry. Although it is impossible to determine if the omission in the *Vade Mecum* was a deliberate snub, Richardson's remarks to Sarah Fielding on her brother's 'lowness' in 1752 suggest

⁶³ Dussinger, *ibid.*, p. 49.

⁶⁴ On the other hand, he was dismissive of Whitehead's aim to write with 'pure simplicity', as he associated this approach with Fielding's style. To Frances Grainger, 29 March 1750, see Carroll, p. 154, n. 43.

⁶⁵ 1753, in Carroll, p. 224.

that a wish to attack his character was strengthened in the decades following the *Vade Mecum*, and was only increased by Fielding's move to prose.⁶⁶

Richardson's phrasing emphasises the 'Dramatick Writer' as 'a Character', suggesting that he always thought of the writer as a character. In writing anything, a character is being assumed, and for Richardson, the writer himself should be a character capable of conveying moral clarity. Richardson's characterisation of himself may have been influenced by his frequent recourse to the epistolary mode. Letters may be called auto-fiction, because of the opportunities to develop a written character they afford, though the degree to which letters are fictional is usually unquantifiable.

The *Vade Mecum* links the 'Character' of a writer with the intentions and outcomes of his/her work. This is in line with Richardson's criticism of plays that valorise criminal behaviour, but is oddly simplistic in the face of his own detailed representations of vice. It does not account for his experiments with 'personation', and seems not to acknowledge that a 'bad' character can exist within a 'good' work. Rather than taking the anti-theatrical pamphlets as a contradiction of Richardson's interest in 'personation', we might consider the epistolary roots of the *Vade Mecum* as evidence that, for Richardson, the letter form reconciled his desire to 'personate' aspects of debate with his instinctive dislike of theatre.

Considered as an epistolary work, the *Vade Mecum*'s purpose and scope is better read by thinking about its addressee. Richardson may not be decrying the play as a medium altogether, but simply warning a particular subset of the population of the effects of certain characters on their sense of contentment. As Dussinger points out, there was a feeling (expressed in the *Daily Gazeteer*) that 'Licentiousness'

⁶⁶ To Bradshaigh, 23 February 1752, in Carroll, p. 198.

could be graded in seriousness, according to whether it appeared in print or was performed. Perhaps conversations laid out as dramatic dialogue in Richardson's novels are removed from the taint of the theatre by virtue of their appearing in print. But policing the border between the spoken and the written does not chime well with common epistolary habits of reading letters aloud, or Richardson's treatment of dialogue in his novels.

Plays are sometimes grouped with other entertainment in Richardson's letters. They can be 'genteel', when associated with Pamela's 'Opinion of some of the genteeler Diversions while in London, as the Masquerade, Opera, Plays, &c —'.⁶⁷ In another context, one of raucous youth, plays are part of a hedonistic set of activities that distract people from their moral duties: 'Then Hey for Vaux-Hall, for Ranelagh! for Capers! And how shall we blaze and flutter at Assemblies, Routs, Drums, Concerts, Plays'.⁶⁸ This list of youth's entertainments appears in a letter Richardson wrote to Frances Grainger, in which he shows that 'play' and personation go beyond the stage for him.

Making his case within the debate about children's duty to their parents, Richardson speaks from the child's point of view:

But where would Depravity end if this were to be the Argument to a Parent? I, Madam, will be the Judge of the Measures of my own Obedience to you: I am Twenty-one: I am free of all Obligation to you[.] (300)

At the end of his hypothetical 'Argument to a Parent', he stops playing the child and admits that this 'is an heightened Representation of the case' (301). Richardson 'heightens' the first-person monologue to explore the debate's extremities, and reveal the 'Consequence' of Grainger's suggestions. Indeed, the hedonic philosophy of

⁶⁷ To James Leake, August 171, Carroll, p. 45.

⁶⁸ 22 January 1750, *Correspondence*, ed. Dussinger, p. 301.

Richardson's revelling youth – the 'flaming spirit you have drawn',⁶⁹ Grainger called it – is similar to Lovelace's. Lovelace is Richardson's 'Example' of 'a faulty or vicious Character', so much so that he uses 'Lovelace' as a name for a category of vicious reader:

a faulty or vicious Character will be considered by the Generality, rather as an Acquittal than a Condemnation of themselves. A Man, an indifferent Man, will not be afraid in this Case of looking into himself, as he reads, and of drawing Comparisons. Even a Lovelace could take Pleasure in observing that King David had an atrocious Crime, in the Case of Uriah, to repent of.⁷⁰

Richardson's disagreement with Grainger arose because he felt she had misread *Clarissa*. He later cautions her to 'Remember, Madam, that Clarissa is proposed as an Example'.⁷¹ The characters in his novels, like the 'flaming spirit' in this letter, are 'Examples' of morality and immorality, designed to get readers to look into themselves as they read, and to play the part of a co-operative reader. Playing a character outside the playhouse, then, has moral purpose for Richardson. His letters were the ideal forum for the author to 'play', as he debated the moral problems of his novels with his correspondents.

Sometimes Richardson's personations mingle with his epistolary voice. In a passage of unmarked dialogue like that frequently occurring in *Grandison*, Richardson asks Grainger to imagine her reaction to a dispute:

Would you, Madam, were you passing the Street, and seeing two sturdy Combatants who had been fighting with each other, for Half an Hour before, mind the Appeal to you of the Vanquished, tho' he were to stop the Coach you were in, of the Hardships he had undergone, and his Complaints of Traitors and Burglars; the Victor, perhaps, with a bloody Nose and torn Ears, standing in Sight? – See how that vile, bloody minded Fellow has beat me, Madam – And

⁶⁹ "'What a flaming Spirit have You drawn, say you! [...]"', SR to Grainger, 29 March 1750, Dussinger, p. 321.

⁷⁰ 3 May 1750, to David Graham, *Correspondence*, ed. Schellenberg, p. 20.

⁷¹ 22 January 1750, *Correspondence*, ed. Dussinger, p. 306.

all for nothing? And would you not say, Friend, pray tell me, would you not have beat him if you could? – Coachman, drive on, drive on, coachman!⁷²

Within the scene ‘Madam’ (Grainger) poses a hypothetical question as imagined by Richardson: ‘would you not have beat him if you could?’ This comes within a scene directed by Richardson’s initial hypothetical question: ‘[w]ould you, Madam, were you passing the street’. Rather like Tristram Shandy’s interactions with his ‘Madam’ reader, it is Richardson’s hypothetical questioning that directs the tone of her response, in this case to the combatant in the street. The modal phrases trail off at the end of the paragraph with the instruction to a previously unmentioned interlocutor. The effect is to blur the boundary between Richardson’s argumentative narrative voice in the letter and that of the coach passenger.

The narrative voice in Richardson’s epistles is at times indistinct from that of the characters being evoked, such as the coach passenger. This is consistent with his novelistic strategy, in which he, as author, claimed that his technique involved character ‘play’. During the unfolding of *Grandison*, Richardson revealed to Lady Bradshaigh how he made readers reverse their first impressions of Charlotte:

In many Instances of this Piece, I have, designedly, play’d the Rogue with my Readers; intending to make them think now one way, now another, of the very same Characters.⁷³

Richardson thinks of himself as an author ‘playing’ a part. Roguery in Richardson’s letters is itself associated with playful (usually female) spirits, such as Charlotte Grandison and Anna Howe. To play the rogue, then, is to behave playfully. Charlotte in particular is prone to ‘playful Roguery’ (280) (a tautological phrase). So when Richardson plays the rogue with his readers, he would have us believe that he is

⁷² 29 March 1750, *Correspondence*, ed. Dussinger, p. 320.

⁷³ 12 November 1753, Carroll, p. 248.

falling under the influence of Charlotte. Thus Richardson's epistolary voice is subject to a kind of polyphony, through playful mimesis, and through the echoing of his characters' idioms within his own.

By shaping the narrative of his readers' responses, Richardson takes the procatalepsis of his personal letters into the fictional realm. Johnson noticed the effect, and pointed out that the planned oscillation of opinion left the 'conversation' of the reader-writer relationship one-sided:

You have a trick of laying yourself open to objections, in the first part of your work, and crushing them in subsequent parts. A great deal that I had to say before I read the conversation in the latter part, is now taken from me. (*Letters*, i.79)

This is a slight rebuke for overstepping the author's role; Johnson feels that something he 'had' has been 'taken from' him. Richardson's procataleptic 'design' is linked to the hypothetical 'play' he had to do in order to anticipate objections. Johnson's choice of a hyperbolic-sounding verb – to crush – to describe the effect implies that he thought Richardson was playing too many parts.

Kinkead-Weekes has acknowledged the dramatic features of *Pamela* and *Clarissa*, in forms such as set-piece conversations being presented as theatrical dialogue (with quotation marks being replaced by colons). Kinkead-Weekes thinks of these features of Richardson's prose as being related to the stage, and while Richardson used 'personation' to create his characters, the term can apply to the representation of speech and thought more generally.

Impersonation occurs in everyday conversation, and this fosters the overlap of voices in writing. As such, Richardson's use of 'personation' should be seen as informed by its use in relation to drama, but not confined to it. As Redford observes, the link between the letter and conversation in the eighteenth century means that the

letter is also linked to drama. Both the letter and conversation are ‘performance – an “act” in the theatrical sense as well as a “speech act” in the linguistic. Through a variety of techniques, such as masking and impersonation, the letter-writer devises substitutes for [...] physical context’.⁷⁴

Quakers such as Robert Valentine drew attention to the performance of speech acts by announcing them: ‘I draw to a conclusion not knowing but this will be the last performance of this sort’.⁷⁵ Speech acts were significant in Quaker letters because of their refusal of ‘politeness phenomena: greetings and salutations, titles and honorific pronouns’.⁷⁶ These phenomena constituted a set of ‘expressive’ speech acts (according to Searle’s model) that are particularly prominent in letters. Quakers refashioned the social graces, making them acceptably ‘plain’ by drawing attention to them as performance. Epistolary salutations were announced as a category: ‘must conclude with the Salutation of true love’; ‘I now wish to Conclude this Epistle with the salutation of dear love’.⁷⁷ These reflexive announcements reveal that letter-writing allows verbal communication to be both object and performance simultaneously.

Personation proved its usefulness through closet drama and domestic reading. Closet drama resolved for Richardson the uneasy relationship between stage and page. In *Grandison*, the role of the reader in performing the characteristic utterances of others is acknowledged:

As I think these conversations characteristic, I hope the recital of them will be excused. Yet I am sensible, those things that go off well in conversation, do not always *read* to equal advantage. (ii.13)

⁷⁴ *The Converse of the Pen*, p. 2.

⁷⁵ Jan 15 1783, RV 197, fol. 2^r.

⁷⁶ Richard Bauman, *Let Your Words Be Few: Symbolism of Speaking and Silence Among Seventeenth-Century Quakers* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), p. 43.

⁷⁷ Mary Peisley to Valentine, 15 March 1758, RV 125, fol. 1^v; Martha Routh to Valentine, 19 October 1782, RV 135 fol. 2^r.

These characters could be ‘puppets,’ charged with articulating Richardson’s opinions. By ‘conversations characteristic,’ Harriet could mean that she captures the ‘characteristics’ of those in conversation, by faithfully transcribing their spoken idioms. She could also be transcribing the characteristics of the conversation as a whole, giving her correspondent an impression of the group dynamic.

Whether the character, or the conversation is the predominant focus in Harriet’s account is a question that repeats an uncertainty surrounding ‘dialogue’ in general. This uncertainty followed Shaftesbury’s scepticism about the genre’s ability to support both ‘characteristic’ (that is, representative of a viewpoint) and oppositional ideas. However, Michael Prince observes that dialogue remained popular because it broke down problems ‘into disparate parts, yet [...] also [...] recover[ed] coherence through the free use of reason’.⁷⁸ So even though there was some doubt about the validity of dialogue for working through moral and political disagreements, some aspects of the form were nevertheless popular, especially in epistolary writing, which, as a form of written conversation, already found itself at a dialogic juncture. At home, letters were read aloud in family circles, and as such some of the conventions of stage acting applied to them. Though she hopes her writings may be used in a similar way to closet drama, Harriet is aware of the gulf between reading and conversation. It transpired that her letters *were* read communally, and these readers regarded the text as one that had to be experienced together. Sarah Fielding wrote to Richardson that she had met two women who ‘agreed to read Sir Charles Grandison together, and really waited from time to time till they could meet, each

⁷⁸ *Philosophical Dialogue in the British Enlightenment: Theology, Aesthetics and the Novel* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), p. 14.

honourably performing their covenant, and not so much as taking one unlawful peep in the absence of the other.⁷⁹

Kinkead-Weekes attributes to the ‘theme of moral community’ (422) in *Grandison*, and not the real practice of circulating letters amongst the family, Harriet’s habit of sharing her correspondence with multiple readers. The letter’s limitations in terms of narrative (such as the constant separation of correspondents being necessary to continue the reporting of events) are points at which ‘the convention can be heard to creak’ (422). However, as letters were associated with ‘talking on paper’, there was an expectation that they would be performed, either silently in the reader’s mind, or read aloud to a group. Therefore, when *The New Art of Letter-Writing* advises ‘[i]n the Placing of Words we must consult the Ear’, the manual shows a similar concern to Harriet Byron’s, that the letter will ‘*read* to equal advantage’ when it is ‘recited’ by her addressee.⁸⁰

To personate is to perform, in the sense of reciting another’s words. Because their linguistic imprints are found in a ‘characteristic’ conversation, Harriet’s interlocutors could be, as Harry Berger Jr. puts it, ‘the effects rather than the causes of their language and our interpretation’.⁸¹ This is a view of character that, like personation, equates a character’s idiolect with their self.

Personation created a frisson because it threatened to sublate the ‘original’ voice of the mimic. While Richardson played with this danger, the moral effects of ‘personation’ were made to seem dubious in a semi-theatrical text that came out of

⁷⁹ Barbauld, ii.68-70.

⁸⁰ Procatalepsis encouraged the association of letters and vocalized utterance in that it hypothesized about how the epistolary interaction would go if the participants were physically near enough to speak. In the correspondence between John Hunter and Edward Jenner, procatalepsis functions as apologia, as the epistolary conversation was an accompaniment to the prolific exchange of animal specimens. As such, it was a correspondence defined by frequent requests: ‘I want a nest with the Egg in it [...] I hear you saying there is no end to your wants.’ See *Letters from the Past*, ed. A. J. Harding Rains (Bristol: John Wright, 1976), p. 8.

⁸¹ ‘What did the King Know and When Did He Know It? Shakespearean Discourses and Psychoanalysis’, *South Atlantic Quarterly*, 88 (1989), 811-862, p. 823.

his literary circle. In Fielding and Collier's *The Cry*, the characters Portia and Melantha 'personate' (8) one another. More than merely taking their cue from Portia's emotions, the chorus, or Cry, becomes luridly fixed on Portia's impersonation of Melantha, because of its opposition to Portia, causing it to 'fall into a strange savagery.' The Cry, as an 'audience' to Portia's 'personation', is deeply affected by the performance, suggesting that mimicry is somehow more affecting than characters speaking as themselves. As Jessica Moss explains, Plato's warnings against imitative poetry in the *Republic* partly spring from the attractiveness of the imitation, especially when 'the poet imitates *eidōla* of excellence instead of genuine excellence'. The Cry's inappropriate reaction to Portia's imitation exemplifies this concern.

It may be significant that this text combines theatrical and epistolary elements of prebutter. Carolyn Woodward suggests that the 'we' of the 'Cry' itself is representative of female writers and critics.⁸² The Cry misinterprets Portia's representation of her life as she tells it, and as such the novel enacts the process of reader-response. The inclusion of a responding party (the chorus) within the text means that in a loose sense, *The Cry*'s anticipation of its addressee's response resembles the technique in an epistolary correspondence. The destructive nature of personation in *The Cry* added to a general ambivalence about mimesis, which affected attitudes to the epistolary style.

⁸² 'Who Wrote *The Cry*?: A Fable for Our Times', *Eighteenth-Century Fiction*, 9:1 (October 1996), 91-97.

Contagion and ‘cor-responsence’

The imitative practices that occurred in letter-writing elicited contrasting responses. Epistolary mimesis was understood as ‘catching’; sometimes it was described as emotionally productive ‘mirroring’. In response to the mingling of their voice with that of others that letter-writing entailed, some correspondents sought to maintain the singularity of their ‘letter’d world’ (to use Young’s phrase). They feared their voice being subsumed by another’s because of the responsive structure of correspondence, though some writers embraced mimesis as an accompaniment to the confluence of the passions.

Letters are not the only genre in which the voices of participants intermingle, but the bipartite structure of correspondence makes the mutually influential relationship between self and other particularly obvious. As an author who reappropriated his epistolary writings for ever-expanding audiences, Pope was cognisant of the wider implications of the mimetic dynamic that was prominent in, but not confined to, letters. Pope tried to maintain the individuality of his poetic voice while recognising that in order to produce poetry that resonated with an audience, he had to interact with others. The poet seems to have thought that it fell to him to be a removed spectator, though he could not reconcile this with his need to be in a crowd in order to observe the mannerisms of others:

Hurry, noise, and the observances of the world, take away the power of just thinking or natural acting. A man that lives so much in the world does but translate other men; he is nothing of his own. Our customs, our tempers, our enjoyments, our distastes are not so properly effects of our natural constitution, as distempers caught by contagion. Many would live happily without any ill ones, if they lived by themselves.⁸³

⁸³ 10 June 1725, Alexander Pope to William Broome, Sherburn, ii.302-303.

Pope's idea that a 'man that lives [...] in the world does but translate other men' raises the fear that one might be reduced to a mimic of others.

In contrast to Pope's fear of his voice being hijacked by the 'world', Lady Mary Wortley Montagu's *Turkish Embassy Letters* demonstrate how a letter-writer might balance the necessity of translating experiences across cultures and between correspondents against keeping the integrity of his or her own idiom. This process is analogous to engraftment: the medical technique linked to inoculation which Wortley Montagu introduced into British consciousness. Her letters act as cultural intermediaries between Turkey and England; she likes to counteract the misinformation that her correspondents have about foreign customs (and differentiate herself from previous foreign correspondents in Turkey).

She wrote to the Abbé Conti that 'these people are not so unpolish'd as we represent them. Tis true their magnificence is of a different taste from ours, and perhaps a better.'⁸⁴ She designs her sentence to surprise the reader, by ending with the suggestion that Turkish taste is 'perhaps [...] better'. This is typical of Wortley Montagu's controlled admission of foreign influence into her writing. Her letters are full of comparisons between the societies of London and Constantinople, though at the same time, she guards against criticism and maintains equanimity by questioning the extent to which direct comparisons can be drawn: 'the pleasure of going in a Barge to Chelsea is not comparable to rowing upon the Canal of the Sea here'.⁸⁵

Wortley Montagu's writing aims at stylistic inoculation, as she maintains cultural boundaries by consciously reflecting upon them, and at times by selectively adopting foreign practice. Just as a correspondent must alter his or her writing to suit the expectations of the recipient, so Wortley Montagu must match the 'troublesome

⁸⁴ 19 May 1718, to the Abbé Conti, *The Complete Letters of Lady Mary Wortley Montagu*, ed. Robert Halsband, 3 vols. (Oxford: Clarendon, 1965-7), i.414-5.

⁸⁵ [10 April 1718], to Lady Bristol, Halsband, i.397.

Equipage' of the French Ambassadress. Clare Brant has remarked on the facility with which Wortley Montagu adapts the subject matter of her letters to suit the interest of her correspondent.⁸⁶ Her famous adoption of Turkish dress allowed her to be like the mimic of Johnson's 'London', and insinuate herself into scenes where she would otherwise have drawn 'a vast crowd of Spectators [...] all as silent as Death'. Covering her identity with 'Turkish dress' is 'disguise enough' to give her the freedom to gratify her 'Curiosity to go to see the Exchange' (354). Like Pope, too, Wortley Montagu identifies with the figure of removed spectator, and finds blatant reversals of this role, typified by the 'crowd of Spectators' unsettling to her sense of individual identity.

Wortley Montagu also felt the danger of becoming so immersed in Turkish life that she might be overwhelmed by it. She compared the Turkish retreat from which she wrote to Pope with 'the Elysian fields'. The pleasure of living in languor is offset by the sinister implication that she is 'dead and bury'd', or that her correspondents assume her to be so, from lack of contact. Wortley Montagu describes the disillusionment she feels with her former routine in London, and the accompanying numbness of her faculty of sympathy. While she assures Pope that he is the exception, Wortley Montagu reports that her letters no longer maintain her sympathy with events in England, instead, the

Reflection on the great Gulph between You and Me cools all News that comes hither. I can neither be sensibly touch'd with Joy or Grief when I consider that possibly the Cause of either is remov'd befor [*sic*] the Letter comes to my hands.⁸⁷

⁸⁶ *Lady Mary Wortley Montagu: The Letters*, ed. Clare Brant (London: David Campbell, 1992), xvii.

⁸⁷ 17 June 1717, to Pope, Halsband, i.367.

Her 'Indolence', which she blames on the Turkish heat, is at least in part the product of Wortley Montagu's careful epistolary self-fashioning. She is aware that Pope will be pleased with her references to the *Aeneid*, and the conceit of being 'dead to all the World beside' her correspondent is one that arises from epistolary convention, as much as Constantinople's climate. It also plays into Pope's wish to contrast himself with 'all the World beside'. There is camaraderie to be had in standing apart from the crowd, together.

Wortley Montagu's willingness to adopt and mimic Turkish custom was not just down to diplomacy: it also allowed her to make serious remarks about the arbitrary nature of 'fashion' in areas of life as important as medicine. To Sarah Chiswell, she wrote that she hoped that she could 'bring [...] into fashion' engraftment against smallpox, but she feared that English doctors might not have 'Virtue enough to destroy such a considerable branch of their revenue for the good of Mankind'. The French Ambassador, she reports, said 'they take the Small pox here by way of diversion as they take the Waters in other Countrys'.⁸⁸

Wortley Montagu's *Embassy Letters* thus allowed her to exploit the role of travel writer to point out the subjective value of different customs in all spheres of life. Her immersion in the Turkish language also allowed her to forgo the tiresome repetition of epistolary set pieces, as she wrote to an anonymous Lady of the customary verses of Turkish love letters, but could not, she claimed, 'recollect any tolerable phrase to conclude my Letter'.⁸⁹ Wortley Montagu was sensible of the unusual position in which she found herself, as an English woman of rank, able to travel with relative safety, and be admitted into private scenes of Muslim life. She was aware of the expectation of cultural contamination, and of the effect this might

⁸⁸ 1 April 1717, Halsband, i.339.

⁸⁹ 16 March [1718], to Lady—, Halsband, i.391.

have on her written style. However, her characteristic pragmatism allowed her to turn the fear of contamination into a well-formed epistolary apologia: 'My Letter is insensibly grown so long, I am asham'd of it. This is a very bad Symptom. Tis well if I don't degenerate in a downright story teller.'⁹⁰ Wortley Montagu's medical metaphor is aptly chosen, as she contemplated the controlled infection that was 'engraftment', while facing a similar task in administering the right doses of novel information to her correspondents.

Despite the precedent of cultural translation through letters sent by Wortley Montagu, Johnson feared the deformities of language produced by translation – and perhaps, cross-channel correspondence – would destroy the singularity of English identity. Johnson's *Dictionary* defined the verb 'infect' as '[t]o act upon by contagion; to affect with communicated qualities; to hurt by contagion.' The definition doesn't specify infection as corporeal, but instead points to the common association between language and contagion in the phrase 'communicated qualities'. Conversely, in the definition of 'contagion', infection is specified as a 'body to body' communication of disease: '[t]he emission from body to body by which diseases are communicated.' What this demonstrates is that 'communication' can be corporeal (it was even used as a euphemism for sex), despite being most commonly associated with language, and that contagion can be linguistic. In attempting to define free indirect discourse, critics such as Dorrit Cohn and Daniel P. Gunn have used the term 'stylistic contagion', a term which captures the eighteenth-century ambivalence towards the idea that in reading, writing and speaking, one could be affected by 'communicated qualities'.⁹¹ The influence of 'communicated qualities' was particularly suspicious where foreign influence was concerned. However, the popularity of travel journals

⁹⁰ 10 March 1718, to Lady Mar, Halsband, i.387.

⁹¹ Dorrit Cohn, *Transparent Minds*, and D. P. Gunn, 'Free Indirect Discourse and Narrative Authority in *Emma*', *Narrative*, 12:1 (January 2004), 35-54.

framed as correspondence sent from abroad attests to the value to British cultural life that exposure to other styles of living offered.

It was thought by some that choices in fashion (both clothing and words) that were clearly not part of the ‘uniformity’ of the English nation reflected a malign influence in morality and politics. Letters often conveyed information about changes in style, both implicitly (by making use of such changes without comment), and explicitly, by enumerating them for the benefit of a correspondent. Lady Sarah Lennox, writing to Lady Susan O’Brien in 1766, described some of the jargon that was catching on in fashionable society:

I told you the word “boar” is a fashionable expression for tiresome people & conversations [...] To “grub up such a one” is also a new expression [...] When you know what “lending a tascusa” is, you are *au fait* of the *bon ton*. You have lent that puppy Major Walpole many a “tascusa”, & indeed I think you have the knack of lending them better than anybody, so when you are *glumpy* & that some puppy comes & talks to you, the snub that they will get from you is exactly a tascusa in its full force.⁹²

Lennox begins this passage by separating the novelty jargon from her own idiom with quotation marks. By the end of the passage, the fashionable mannerisms (‘puppy’, ‘*glumpy*’, ‘*au fait* of the *bon ton*’) have taken over. As we saw in chapter 2, at the time in which Lennox wrote, the quotation mark (or ‘diple’) and the italic were both valid forms of indicating loan words, or the speeches or sayings of any person. Lennox’s combination of italics and quotation marks shows how representing the characteristic speech of others could be similar to an act of translation.⁹³ ‘Glumpy’ is italicised as if it were a loan word, when it is a neologism in English; ‘tascusa’ is penned in by quotation marks, when it is faux Spanish. By the end of the passage,

⁹² 9 January 1766, Lady Sarah Lennox, to Lady Susan O’Brien, in *The Oxford Book of Letters*, ed. Kermode, p. 117.

⁹³ Richardson took to underlining idiomatic phrases from his novels’ characters in his correspondence with Bradshaigh: ‘and so-forth, as Charlotte says’ (8 December 1753, MS FC XI, f. 50^v).

Lennox uses the slang term ‘puppy’ without quotation marks, and similarly ‘tascusa’ is naturalised. Lennox deliberately swamps her own voice with other voices, terms and idioms for comic effect; however, some commentators worried that loan words could not always be regulated, and they feared that such mimicry would have political ramifications.

According to Tieken-Boon van Ostade, geographical and social mobility encouraged members of epistolary networks to imitate one another. She points out that letters ‘help us reconstruct social networks, the study of which is important in tracing the origins and processes of linguistic change’.⁹⁴ Not only do letters record linguistic change, they facilitate it. Linguistic innovations were introduced into written usage through letters, and the structure of the epistolary network had a part to play in the adoption process.

Tieken-Boon van Ostade uses social network analysis to speculate that writers on the margins of networks, such as John Gay, would innovate, and the more socially influential members would spread the innovation. Gay ‘was probably the first to use the formula *yours sincerely*’, but it was Swift, Pope and Wortley Montagu who spread it (334). Similarly, Johnson’s network around the time of the *Dictionary*’s publication included Richardson as ‘linguistic innovator’ (335):

Johnson conceivably picked up innovations (vocabulary, usage of periphrastic *do*) from [Richardson] which others in turn adopted from him, due to his recognized status as a writer and lexicographer. But Richardson also belonged to other networks, in which he occupied a more central position. Sarah Fielding belonged to one of them: she admired Richardson and his work, and consequently modelled certain aspects of her language on him.

⁹⁴ ‘English at the Onset of the Normative Tradition’, in *The Oxford History of English*, ed. Lynda Mugglestone, pp. 298-339, p. 311.

It is likely, however, that Johnson would have been influenced by Richardson's fiction without having known the author directly. There need be no direct social tie for linguistic influence to occur. The line of influence may also be hard to trace, given the culture of reading letters aloud and circulating them within a diffuse and untraceable network.

While Tieken-Boon van Ostade's methodology is based in corpus linguistics and social network analysis, the process of language change described can also be figured in terms understood by Richardson and Fielding themselves. Implicit in the above account are eighteenth-century conceptions of language that catch on. Richardson drew attention to the implications of 'catching' as a figure of speech in a letter to Bradshaigh:

"Off, off, thou foolish Softness," pathetically say you! "And to make me more perfectly a Christian let me catch at Fortitude – Not it will not do – It flies me – Another fear I protest!" – Charming Sensibility! But by the Words catch at Fortitude you seem to suppose it on the Wing. Ah Madam, you have soon done with your Essay to obtain it: – But resolve to make it a Guest for only an Hour in a Day! And it may quickly become an Inmate.⁹⁵

In contrast to Pope's squeamishness about imitating others, Robert Burns quoted Pope's *Essay on Man* (1733-4) – 'catch the manners living as they rise' (Epistle I, l. 14) – hoping to be imbued with the idiom of Pope and to 'catch' the idiom of mankind at large at the same time. In a letter written to John Murdoch in June 1783, Burns painted himself within a crowd scene in order to show his powers of sentimental observation:

I forget that I am a poor, insignificant [*sic*] devil, unnoticed [*sic*] and unknown, stalking up and down fairs and markets [...] reading a page or two of mankind,

⁹⁵ 15 December 1748, FC XI, f. 10^v.

and “catching the manners living as they rise”, whilst the men of business jostle me on every side, as an idle encumbrance in their way.⁹⁶

Burns’ alteration of Pope’s ‘catch’ to ‘catching’ adds his own inflection to the phrase. As the gerund chimes with ‘reading’ and ‘living’, it gives internal cohesion to the passage. The adaptation shows Burns drawing on another’s idiom and applying it to his own. He seizes the moment to write of things ‘as they rise’, just as Pope claimed, in the title of his verse epistle, to write to Arbuthnot ‘as the several Occasions offer’d’. The misquotation is true to the specific temporality of the letter – written ‘to the *Moment*’ – but it is also part of the classic epistolary pose of self-fashioned negligence. Burns adds something of his own style into a familiar poem, and a well-known epistolary convention, by mimicking both.

Letters are directed, positioned communications that reflect differences of ‘aspect’ – ‘ways of looking, as to position or direction’ (*OED*) – in terms of public and private, individual and collective utterances. For Richard Steele, an ‘aspect’ was a look or a glance (*OED*); for Pope, such glances could ‘catch the eye’. Catching, falling, rising, and flowing were verbs that recurred in eighteenth-century descriptions of the epistolary style. They expressed letters’ mobility and their ability to transmit knowledge and emotion. To Johnson, Arbuthnot’s letters were more attractive than Pope’s, because the former wrote ‘like one who lets thoughts drop from his pen as they rise into his mind.’

Though Johnson’s comment on Arbuthnot’s style was complimentary, it was also felt that writing letters spontaneously enough to ‘catch’ rising thoughts could indicate an unguarded susceptibility to the emotional transference of correspondence. This mobility of feeling was linked to interaction between the idioms

⁹⁶ *Letters*, i.18.

of the individual correspondents, which were in turn shaped by the expectations of epistolary decorum.

David Hume and Adam Smith introduced the idea into the popular consciousness of sympathy, at a time when epistolary literacy was growing exponentially, and in turn these theories of affect influenced how letter-writing was perceived. In *A Treatise of Human Nature* (1739-40), Hume accounted for what he perceived to be the characteristics of nations, by arguing that sympathy between individuals results in uniformity:

Hatred, resentment, esteem, love, courage, mirth and melancholy; all these passions I feel more from communication than from my own natural temper and disposition.⁹⁷

Imitation, or unconscious social mirroring, affects one's 'own natural temper and disposition'; communication facilitates 'uniformity' of feeling. A letter might facilitate the writer's sympathy with the recipient, or a group. Sympathy with a group may also be affirmed by communicating that sympathy to a third party by letter. Uniformity of feeling is a tactical and social advantage in hostile or difficult situations, and one way to affirm one's sympathy with the group is to discuss it in a letter. Lewis Howell wrote to his father from his army headquarters in Lewes Town, offsetting the difficulty he found himself in with the uniform feeling of those *in* uniform:

I live very hard here, since I came down I have laid on the Floor without Blanket or Great Coat of my own having lost Both at through mistake at Wilmington – Some Days We live on Dumplins & Melasses not having a Mouthfull of meat --- But I can assure you I never was heartier or merrier in my life, all the Subaltern Officers live together & we may say --- if we are poor Rogues we are merry Ones --- Remember me to all Friends and Believe your Affectionate Son
Lewis Howell⁹⁸

⁹⁷ ed. Nidditch, pp. 316-7.

⁹⁸ 26 June 1776, Howell Family Papers, Huntington Manuscript 67278, fol. 1^v.

Howell moves from his singular experiences (losing his coat) to quoting from the general stock of expressions that must have circulated amongst his peers. The conditional 'we may say' implies that the poor yet merry 'Rogue' epithet was an oft-repeated method of communicating sympathy in the group. Howell's description of himself as 'never [...] merrier' is echoed as the group's experiences of being 'merry' together. Similarly the parallelism of 'we are poor' and 'we are merry' is an encouragement by Howell to see himself as similar to his fellows. Howell's letter performs sympathy by reporting, for a third party, the expression that fostered camaraderie amongst the 'Rogues'. The dashes around 'if we are poor Rogues we are merry Ones' suggests quotation, but it creates an ambiguity by seemingly seeking to maintain some distance between Howell's expressions and the general 'quotations language' that surrounds him.

In his *The Theory of Moral Sentiments* (1759), Smith proposed that managing outside influences on one's writing and feelings was possible, even when one allowed for the influence of 'sympathy'. The 'most perfect command of his own original and selfish feelings, the most exquisite sensibility both to the original and sympathetic feelings of others' (152) could be obtained by regarding the 'sentiments' of the 'spectator'. Like Pope and Wortley Montagu, the corrective influence of spectatorship may be the force to which Howell appeals in writing to his father. Though he needs mutual sympathy from his peers, he must temper it with his ties to family, which has a quotations language and system of sympathy of its own.

Rather than convert our impression of another's suffering into our own emotion, as Hume suggested, Smith proposed that we change place 'in fancy with

the sufferer'.⁹⁹ The way that 'moral sentiments' operate, according to Smith, is by 'bringing the case home to ourselves' through an act of wilful self-deception. Correspondence encourages the changing of places 'in fancy', as Sarah Fielding observed. The writer imagines how the letter will be received, thus sympathising with the recipients. As we have seen, pronoun switching or reversal is a key feature of letters, because carrying on a conversation upon paper necessitates the recapitulation of previous statements, often with pronouns converted to match the writer's perspective. Therefore, letters are about 'bringing the case home to ourselves', structurally and materially. Howell's letter sympathises with its audience by assuring his family of the supportive atmosphere he currently enjoys; by writing to his family he brings 'home' to his current situation.

Letters were seen as vehicles for sympathy, but some disapproved of the susceptibility to be influenced by others' emotions that correspondence could entail. Richardson's correspondent George Cheyne popularised the idea of nervous disease being a sign of 'refined sensibility' in his *The English Malady* (1733). With great sensibility came the ready movement of feeling, through the body, and between correspondents. David Shuttleton notes that Cheyne increased the 'fellowship of valetudinarians' by encouraging Richardson to 'seek out other nervous sufferers' and sharing 'other patients' letters.'¹⁰⁰

Just as refined sensibility was associated in Cheyne's circle with the ability to communicate one's nervous complaints to others by letter, so the English 'malady' rubbed off on perceptions of correspondence. The terminology surrounding disease and the terminology surrounding verbal (and written) communication were

⁹⁹ Adam Smith, *The Theory of Moral Sentiments*, ed. Knud Haakonssen (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), p. 258. Smith's vocabulary for the imagination – 'in fancy' – echoes Sarah Fielding and Ann Yearsley's styles of epistolary mimesis, discussed above.

¹⁰⁰ *Correspondence with George Cheyne and Thomas Edwards*, ed. David E. Shuttleton (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), xlvii.

complementary, such that 'conversation' could signify the illicit exchange of corrupted mannerisms. Johnson lamented, in the preface to his *Dictionary*, that

[c]ommerce, however necessary, however lucrative, as it depraves the manners, corrupts the language; they that have frequent intercourse with strangers, to whom they endeavour to accommodate themselves, must in time learn a mingled dialect.

Johnson's squeamishness about linguistic mixture here recalls his dislike of Fielding's characters, in which there was a 'Mixture' of good and 'Deformity'. Fielding thought the mixture necessary to 'raise our Compassion', and this is in line with the ways that compassion itself was described by Hume and Johnson. In Hume's theory, sympathy was explained via a 'mingled' series of images. Sympathy was a reflective process, in which the sentiments of all parties 'reverberated' back and forth:

the minds of men are mirrors to one another, not only because they reflect each others emotions, but also because those rays of passions, sentiments and opinions may be often reverberated, and may decay away by insensible degrees. (*Treatise*, 365)

Hume's choice of imagery is mixed: he seems to welcome the reverberation of ideas, but admits that the resulting sentiments will 'decay'. The phenomenon he describes attracted a wealth of metaphors, and within Hume's own description the visual, aural and biological (in the term 'decay') are likened to one another. What all these metaphors have in common is a call-response pattern. This is significant because it suggests that dialogic forms of writing such as the letter were important operators in the economy of affect.

However, when sympathy is viewed as a correspondence of the passions, it makes the origin of the passions difficult to locate. In his biography of Thomas Gray,

Johnson praises the poet's *Elegy Written in a Country Church-yard* for its ability to implant ideas in the mind, ideas that seem to have originated with the reader:

The *Church-yard* abounds with images which find a mirrour in every mind, and with sentiments to which every bosom returns an echo. The four stanzas beginning *Yet even these bones*, are to me original: I have never seen the notions in any other place; yet he that reads them here, persuades himself that he has always felt them.¹⁰¹

From this passage, it seems as if Johnson views sympathy as necessary for reading and understanding poetry. Sympathy is key to the dissemination of literature, but it also raises questions of originality, mimicry and influence in written expression.

The effect of someone mimicking you is that you mimic in return. This process may be what Johnson was referring to in the preface to his *Dictionary*, when he worried that commercial investors were learning a 'mingled dialect' because they were 'endeavour[ing] to accommodate themselves' to 'strangers'. Smith elucidated a similar effect when he pointed out that a man seeking sympathy must consider the position of his spectators, by

lowering his passion to that pitch in which the spectators are capable of going along with him. He must flatten [...] the sharpness of its natural tone, in order to reduce it to harmony and concord with the emotions of those who are around him [...] Though they will never be unisons, they may be concords, and this is all that is wanted or required. (275-6)

The disadvantage of a keen sensibility is the lack of control over one's own reactions, and the absence of emotional and mental autonomy. Smith drew attention to the political danger of being 'tainted' by a 'general contagion', but he also believed in the remedial benefit to society of the 'impartial spectator' (*TMS*, 180-1).

¹⁰¹ Lonsdale, iv.184.

Smith's account of emotion in motion also lends itself to seeing letters as vehicles for the transmission of sympathy. For eighteenth-century Quakers, the transmission of sympathy was one of the primary goals of letter-writing. In the letters of Quakers in Robert Valentine's circle, 'sympathy' was a conventional term that stood for the letter's purpose as a whole. The clues to sympathy's conventionality include its regular occurrence, and its coupling with both spiritual and epistolary set phrases. Quakers identified with public Friends undertaking journeys on behalf of the community: 'my mind hath been baptized into sympathy with thee in feeling these states, my heart within me has been humbled on thy account'.¹⁰² As an epistolary convention Quaker sympathy occurred alongside the 'remember me to' valedictory formula: 'the family I am now in desire to be affectionately remember[e]d to you they feel a near sympathy with you'.¹⁰³

Sympathy regularly appears in the opening paragraphs of letters as a justification for making contact, and even occasionally as a prompt to reply: 'I do not think myself worthy of a Letter from you, yet, if from a Sympathy, Thou [are] willing to Gratify me with a few Lines, they will be very Acceptable'.¹⁰⁴ Despite its aim being emotional uniformity with the Society of Friends, Quaker sympathy distinguished itself theologically and linguistically from more mainstream manifestations of refined sensibility. The Quaker Samuel Neale accepts 'sensibility' as a desirable social state, but qualifies this by separating the rhetoric of his friend Robert Valentine from the generality of communication:

insensibility pervades the Camp, as with a Cloud; thy honest plain dealing is Infinitely preferable to fine Words & smooth speeches without life or Energy, its [*sic*] like the Axe to the Root of the Corrupt tree [...].¹⁰⁵

¹⁰² 15 August 1782, John Thorp to Valentine, RV 179, fol. 1^r.

¹⁰³ 25 Feb 1782, Valentine to 'My dear Children', RV 193, fol. 2^r.

¹⁰⁴ 29 Dec 1782, John Conran to Valentine, RV 38, fol. 1^v.

¹⁰⁵ 1783, Samuel Neale to Robert Valentine, RV 112, fol. 1^r.

Quakers were maligned for their insistence on plain speech, so Neale's assertion that Valentine's 'plain dealing' is a counter to 'insensibility' suggests that sensibility can be forthright. Far from being the sickly, corrupt product of 'mingled' dialects, Neale sees Quaker sensibility as a remedial force. The frequent, yet 'plain' formulae expressing sympathy in Quaker letters show that letters could balance influences from inside and outside effectively.

Quaker service was expressed by reaching out to 'Friends and Family' with regularity. The physical distance between Friends in Britain and America meant that special care had to be taken to maintain emotional ties. In the letter that followed from the one he wrote from White Haven, Valentine embraces repetitious constructions to emphasise the correspondence he expects from his children, materially and emotionally:

-----I am at the penning of these lines in the House of my dear Friend Isaac Wilson whose Wife visited Friends in America and one of his Daughters is employ'd in transmitting my feelings to you [...] I wish you to be particular in the transmitting me every thing material relating to my Friends whose welfare in all respects with yours I much desire --- .¹⁰⁶

The repetition of 'transmitting' enacts the mirroring of his behaviour that Valentine expects of his children. The process of transmission is stripped of directional preposition. This speaks to Johnson's *Dictionary* definition of correspondence as 'reciprocal communication'. What Barry Levy calls the 'infectious exchange' of holy conversation is exemplified in Valentine's imparting of feeling in a manner that in its content and structure encourages correspondent action.¹⁰⁷ It is striking that secular

¹⁰⁶ 25 February 1782, RV 193, fol. 2^r.

¹⁰⁷ 'The Birth of the "Modern Family" in Early America: Quaker and Anglican Families in the Delaware Valley, Pennsylvania, 1681-1750', in Michael Zuckerman, *Friends and Neighbors: Group Life in America's First Plural Society* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1982), pp. 26-64.

concepts of sensibility found voice in Quaker letters; it suggests a significant overlap, or correspondence, between the epistolary styles of disparate groups.

As we have seen, Quakers' refusal to use 'politeness phenomena' in conversation meant they were hyperaware of their vocabulary. Consequently, Valentine announces a distinct 'language' to his children: 'I need not write much to you but this Language is from the Heart'.¹⁰⁸ Valentine combines the language of the 'heart' with Christian doctrine in his description of his voyage. Prayer and epistolary remembrance are combined as he uses the letter both to narrate his past remembrances of his children, and to renew them on paper:

whilst I was awake my Heart was often humbled and Contrited before him who is the Shepperd of his Israel and oftner than there are hours in the day was my mind turned towards You my dear Children with Breathings of Hear[t] to the God and Father of all Our Mercies for Your preservation [...].¹⁰⁹

Valentine dwells on the 'heart' as a metonym for intention and feeling. The odd construction 'Breathings of Heart' is typical of sentimental preoccupation with the respiratory system, and the tendency to conflate 'Breath' with self. It also suggests divine inspiration. For Valentine, God has 'Heart Searching Power' (fol. 3^r). He overlays the sentimental 'heart' with 'holy conversation'. The text performs such 'Breathings of Heart', as Valentine invokes the names of God with the intention of not just naming, but addressing him. Prayer and narration are combined; that the 'Breathings' are ritualistic is indicated by their plurality.

Other members of Valentine's circle conflate the language of sympathy, or the 'heart', and Christian rhetoric. Samuel Neale, writing to Israel Pemberton, expounded on the mechanisms of sympathy that operated through God's 'truth': 'we are led to

¹⁰⁸ 22 Nov 1781, RV 189, fol. 1^v.

¹⁰⁹ 18 Jan 1782, RV 192, fol. 3^r.

feel the woes of others, to sympathize with the afflicted, alleviate their sorrows, strengthen the hands of those whom the Lord has anointed for his Work and service'.¹¹⁰ Sympathy guides Neale to create parallelisms as he expands on his theme. The verbs 'feel', 'sympathize', 'alleviate' and 'strengthen' make the sentence seem both repetitious and progressive. In speaking of sympathy, repetition between the parts of the sentence enacts the process of feeling. Neale's letter figures the state of Quaker practice in the progressive terms of a travel narrative, or what he calls 'the pilgrimage through Time' (fol. 1').

The Quakers were by no means the only community to use letters productively to promote emotional agreement and group solidarity. Despite Johnson and Pope's fear of becoming a mere 'translator' of others, many correspondents were able to 'catch' the 'manners' offered by epistolary correspondence to productive effect. Through the reverberation of 'passions, sentiments and opinions', epistolary exchange catches, and intermingles, the 'living manners' of the correspondents.

Richardson managed outside influences on his work through controlled mimesis of his correspondents, which leads him to express distaste for unregulated affective suggestibility. Perhaps he wanted to clear himself of the charge of having rendered his characters to such a degree that his personal integrity was compromised. In any case, he is openly critical of public displays of overbearing sympathy.

Whitehead's methods of gleaning sympathy for his characters from the theatre audience met with disapproval from Richardson. While Richardson was satisfied by stories of readers being greatly affected by the plight of Pamela and Clarissa, he was disdainful of Horatia's public grief in the play, which he thought elicited ignoble

¹¹⁰ 7 October 1773, RV 109, fol. 2'.

sympathy from the female audience: '[i]t was the poet's notion that she must whine, and be madly in love, to be a woman, to set all the women in the boxes, pit, and galleries a sympathising with her'.¹¹¹ It is the style rather than the medium of which Richardson disapproves, as had Whitehead 'brought together the two lovers',

they might have poured out their silly souls into each other's bosoms, and called upon the celestial register to record their vows above, and all the souls in the playhouse might then have fanned away and sighed and sobbed and murmured respectively to *their* sighs, sobs, and murmurs [...]. (156)

This picture of the playhouse is undignified. Richardson mocks the 'register' of the lovers' scene and the parallels between stage and audience, suggesting an excess of feeling by using excessive conjunctions. Ian Watt suggested that despite his reputation as a populariser of sentimental writing, Richardson was in fact opposed to the 'cult of love' (174).¹¹² Richardson certainly showed great cynicism towards the emotional exchange associated with sentimental affect when he had Lovelace misuse its terminology to try and read letters exchanged by Clarissa and Anna Howe.

The letter as 'sentimental correspondence' was a medium that encouraged emotional transmission between sender and recipient; even the circulation of letters to third parties could lead to greater mutual understanding. Mr. B begins to sympathise with Pamela when he reads her letters, though he is not (at first) an addressee. Lovelace hoped to use the familiarising effect of letters to his advantage by reading Clarissa's correspondence with Anna Howe:

How happy should I think myself to be admitted into their correspondence! I would joyfully make an exchange of communications.

So, tho' I hoped to succeed by her consent [and little did she think I had so happily in part succeeded without it] I thought it not amiss to urge for it [...]

¹¹¹ 29 March 1750, Carroll, p. 155.

¹¹² Incidentally, Watt also refers to letter-writing as a 'cult' (p. 196).

I proceeded therefore—That I loved Familiar-letter-writing, as I had more than once told her, above all the species of writing: It was writing from the heart (without the fetters prescribed by method or study) as the word *Correspondence* implied. Not the heart only; the *soul* was in it.

[...]

– For my own part, it was the principal diversion I had in her absence [...].¹¹³

While Watt and Warner have cited Lovelace's false etymology of correspondence as representative of Richardson's opinion, when the conversation between the two principal characters is taken as a whole, the scene is more circumspect. Clarissa flatters Lovelace by imitating him subtly, but counters his sentimental etymology. She begins with a parallel construction that answers his '[f]or my own part'. She then rejects the speedy conversion of reaction into writing; unlike Arbuthnot, she does not necessarily condone letting thoughts drop from the pen as they spring to mind. She thereby refuses to be drawn into a hasty commitment to share her own writings:

For her part, she had always thought me a man of sense [...] – And should therefore hope, that, when I wrote, it exceeded even my speech: For that it was impossible, be the Letters written in as easy and familiar a style as they would, but that they must have that advantage from sitting down to write them which prompt speech could not always have. She should think it very strange, therefore, if my Letters were barren of sentiment [...]. (78)

For Clarissa, 'premeditation' does not preclude 'sentiment'; rather, it is necessary to it. The conversation between Lovelace and Clarissa rehearses two contrasting opinions on the epistolary style, and although both opinions are coloured by the personal motives of the characters, the scene suggests that Richardson saw the potential for correspondence between the two stylistic ideals of deliberation and knee-jerk sentimental reactivity. He wrote to Wescomb of correspondence's virtues, listing traits identified in Lovelace and Clarissa's contrasting accounts.

Correspondence is 'more ardent, and less broken in upon' than conversation, and yet

¹¹³ *Clarissa*, 4th edn., 7 vols. (London, 1751), iv.76-77.

this emotional short-circuiting is possible 'because of the deliberation it allows, from the preparation to, and action of writing'.¹¹⁴

Mimesis in eighteenth century novels and plays prompted some of the same arguments that Plato had made against mimesis in his *Republic*. However, in the non-fictional realm, mimesis structured and perpetuated epistolary dialogue. Personation of one's correspondent was central to theories of sentimental affect, as the mechanism by which sympathy was supposed to occur required imitation of the emotions perceived in the subject. This in turn led to exploitation and deception through the appearance of sympathy; the expectation of emotional transference could be exploited to mimic sympathy for nefarious ends. Another downside to personation, according to Johnson and critics of sentimental literature, was the degradation of individual, or 'original', emotions and thoughts. Sympathising with another could lead to confusion about the origin of sentiments, though some meanings of sentiment tied it to cognition and intellectual development. Sentiment could be the simultaneity of 'cor-respondence', as in Lovelace's model, or the 'reasonable feeling' composed of careful response, as in Clarissa's.¹¹⁵ This duality in perceptions of the role of mimesis in fostering sentiment paralleled opinions of letter-writing: the epistolary style was seen as spontaneous overflow of feeling, but also as considered 'sentiments' recollected. In reality epistolary mimesis mixes the two. The narrating self mimics the addressee and third parties, balancing 'original' and 'sympathetic' expressions to create an inoculated epistolary style. But the narrating self also mimics the experiencing (past) self, thereby showing the co-respondence of sense and sentiment.

¹¹⁴ 27 August 1746, *Correspondence*, ed. Dussinger, p. 6.

¹¹⁵ R. F. Brissenden, *Virtue in Distress: Studies in the Novel of Sentiment from Richardson to Sade* (London: Macmillan, 1974), p. 54.

CHAPTER 4

SOME EPISTOLARY ASPECTS OF STERNE¹

The editors of the Florida edition of Laurence Sterne's letters, Melvyn New and Peter de Voogd, observe that 'almost every letter can be found to offer its own special textual problems' (vii.xxxix). Sterne was far from unusual in having a chaotic epistolary life, and the afterlives of his letters have been similarly complex. Some of the extant letters are holographs not meant for publication, while others only exist in published versions. Other letters were drafts, or templates: Sterne had a secret 'letter book', which sometimes functioned as a manual of epistolary seduction. Like many letter-writers of the eighteenth century, Sterne took copies of his letters and re-wrote material, though his intentions with regards to publication were not clear.² Like other famous literary figures, such as Pope, he had to reconcile the private mode of correspondence with his celebrity, and, like Richardson, he made some preparation for the publication of his letters after his death, though with both authors, these preparations were ambivalent. Sterne, like many epistolary writers, self-consciously engaged with convention, and worried about the security of his letters. After the publication of the first volumes of *Tristram Shandy* (1759), fame made his worry more acute, and the precedent of his fiction overshadowed his style of correspondence.

In December 1761 Sterne suggested that his wife and daughter could raise some money by publishing his letters. Paradoxically, he suggested that their selling point would be that 'not one of 'em was ever wrote, like Popes or Voitures to be

¹ All references to Sterne's letters will be taken from *The Letters of Laurence Sterne*, ed. Melvyn New and Peter de Voogd, 2 vols., vols. 7 (1739-1764) and 8 (1765-1768) of *The Florida Edition of the Works of Laurence Sterne*, 8 vols. (Gainesville, Fa.: University of Florida Press, 1978-2008 [2008]).

² For example, Sterne re-wrote a letter to Anne James on 21 April 1767, which he had first produced a rough copy of the previous day (viii.574-577).

printed'. This assertion shows that Sterne's letters were the subjects of doubtful futurity for the writer as well as for readers; the curious doubling of 'not one' and 'ever' hinting at Sterne's habit of epistolary re-drafting. Furthermore, Sterne predicts that the letters' spontaneous composition means 'they are more likely to be read' (vii.214).³ The passive infinitive implies the texts' distance from both writer and readership, and shows that though he took pains to cultivate his public personae, he was not entirely in control of, or responsible for, the corpus of writings attributed to him. These plans show an author at an epistolary juncture, exploring a new aspect of his letters revealed by fame.

The Florida edition addresses the complexity of the textual states of Sterne's letters by providing multiple versions of some letters. A prominent example is the three versions of a famous letter in which Sterne responds to the 'Council' of an anonymous correspondent who had 'thought the vein of humour [in *Tristram Shandy*] too light for the colour of my Cassock' (vii.83). New and de Voogd allow readers to compare the states of the text as it appears in the 'letter book' (1 January 1760), as it was printed in the *Gentleman's Magazine* (July 1779), and as it was published in 1894 from a copyist's manuscript.

The Florida editors have responded to the variety of textual states by 'reexamin[ing] the textual problems presented by each and every letter as a distinct editorial entity' (vii.xlvi). Generations of vexed publication history have made this approach necessary. The editions that appeared in the latter half of the eighteenth century demonstrate the distasteful paradoxes involved in using letters as fodder for either vindictive, or vindicating, biography. Each edition offers a slightly different portrait of Sterne, from, as it were, a different aspect: Sterne the sentimental lover,

³ LS for Elizabeth Sterne, 'Memorandums left with Mrs Montague, In Case I should die abroad', 28 December 1761.

the neglectful husband, the Shandy-headed author, and so on. The first collection of Sterne's letters to be published was the *Letters from Yorick to Eliza* (1773), which may have been edited by the printer, William Johnston. Subsequent editions contained purported replies from Eliza Draper, though these (New and de Voogd contend) are probably forgeries, but it is not clear by whom. Draper was adamant that her half of the correspondence should remain private (viii.759).⁴

William Combe published *Sterne's Letters to his Friends on Various Occasions* in 1775, which he had gathered from various sources. Some of the material he invented himself. Lydia Sterne Medalle published her three-volume edition of Sterne's letters in October 1775. *Letters of the late Rev. Mr Sterne* contained a 'fragment in the manner of Rabelais' and 'Memoirs of his Life and Family'. This was intended to be the definitive edition of Sterne's letters, and demonstrates some of the difficulties that those of his family and correspondents were left upon his death. There was a struggle between several different versions of Sterne, and importantly for Lydia Sterne Medalle, the need for a public version of her family, which vindicated her mother while minimising the damage done to her father's reputation. New and de Voogd criticise Medalle's tampering with the letters' diction, syntax and intentions, but concede that her editorial practices were usual for the later eighteenth century.

Even though her tampering with the documents is to be lamented, New and de Voogd note that Medalle made stylistic changes – such as altering valedictions – while keeping incriminating, defaming or adulterous passages intact. Although she cut Eliza Draper out of some material, her goal seems to have been to vindicate her mother, not her father, as Draper's letter to Anne James suggests:

⁴ Eliza Draper to Anne James, 15 April 1772.

Miss Sterne, in her letter, tells me – *that her Father did sometimes misrepresent her mother, in order to justify his neglect of her* – I do not think highly of a Daughter, who could compliment a living Parent, however justly – at the expence of a Deceased one – but as this was Miss Sternes Opinion – she might in common justice to have supposed ^that Mrs Sterne had been misrepresented to me. (viii.765)

Later editors of Sterne's letters have attempted to use them to vindicate the writer.

Lewis Perry Curtis sees them as a 'key to the man', which

justify a tolerance of his character that has developed along with our recognition of his genius. His letters show us that his faults are little more than foibles. They do much to rehabilitate him. And, if they tend rather to complicate than to solve the riddle of his personality, they do in any event acquaint us with his tremendous charm.⁶

This touches on the use that many letters are deemed to have as testimonies or documents of justice, as biographical props and glosses to a writer's published work. On the other hand, New and de Voogd are sceptical of praise for Sterne's letters: 'his spontaneity was often forced, his sincerity dubious, and his sentiments rather commonplace' (vii.lv). They suggest that Sterne thought a rapid response was preferable to a letter of stylistic genius. This may be a judgement that the letters of writers known for both their wit and sentiment will attract, if the intentions and expectations of the epistolary situation aren't taken into account. Incidentally, 'commonplace' is a word that has also been used to describe Burns' letters, but, as chapter 5 will show, what was common for Burns was not for others.

⁶ *Letters of Lawrence Sterne* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1935), xxv.

Shandean debts

The commonplaceness of Sterne's letters is entirely appropriate. In reading them, we are forced to realise the terms on which we mistakenly read letters, supposing that their expediency should be subordinate to their eloquence. We can't read letters only as 'keys to the man' or as keys to his work. In *A Political Romance, Address'd to —, Esq. of York* (York, 1759), Sterne showed the folly of any such key. The *Romance's* title page claims that its key was 'subjoined', but instead the text devolves into disputes of interpretation; a one-for-one relationship between the fictional characters of the romance and real people cannot be found. Similarly, Sterne's letters do not straightforwardly reveal answers to questions about the author's life and fiction because they are literary artefacts, which display an idiom of their own. Unsurprisingly, this idiom evades strict categorisation; it is a case of intersecting styles, rather than conventions being applied in isolation from the real social content of letters.

The idioms of the letters are partly dependent upon the addressee, as *A Political Romance* invited its readers to decipher it through the puzzle of the anonymous 'Esq. of York'. At the same time, the limitations of defining a work by its intended addressee are the text's subject. The paradoxes involved with the collaboration between reader and writer in making the meaning of a text was something that Sterne exploited in both his fiction and correspondence. We can hope to read Sterne's letters as the intersection between his life and fiction, or as the fictions of everyday life. As personal experience expressed according to the demands of epistolary self-representation, they are like most works of fiction: fact and imagination, unified by hope.

Howard Anderson finds other merits in Sterne's letters than their being

‘spontaneous’. Anderson points out the author’s strategies for encouraging a ‘sympathetic response’, which include making his letters ‘very much like [his] other literary work’.⁷

Sterne profits personally as well as financially by his fiction, in that it gives him personae to hide behind in his letters. Sterne finds it convenient to use Shandean metaphors to describe his *modus operandi*; at times, he avers, his moral failings are obscured by the ‘windings’ of his prose. An unsent letter to Daniel Draper is a good example of this habit: ‘writing a Letter to a gentleman I have not the honour to be known to, & [...] a Letter likewise upon no *^kind^* business (in the Ideas of the world) is *^a little^* out of the common Course of Things – but I’m so myself’ (viii.585).⁸ This is a reference to the eccentric interests of Walter Shandy, which are ‘out of the common way’ (i.264), and also to the digressive narration in *Tristram Shandy*. In Sterne criticism, it is common to refer to certain phrases in Sterne’s letters as ‘Shandean’, which suggests something more than ‘commonplace’ sentiments. Sterne uses Yorick and Tristram for specific and pragmatic purposes. His fictional characters are used to market his works, flirt with women, and intimidate or impress his correspondent.

Depending on the purpose of his letter (and the time it was written), Sterne either accepted the combining of his life with his fiction, or resented it. By 1767 he was forced to reflect that ‘[t]he world has imagined, because I wrote *Tristram Shandy*, that I was myself more Shandean than I ever really was’ (viii.633).⁹ In contrast to this, sometimes Sterne’s purpose in writing was emotional fulfilment, and the familial ties of the Shandy family were something he brought to his real-life letters in order to

⁷ ‘Sterne’s Letters: Consciousness and Sympathy’, in *The Familiar Letter in the Eighteenth Century*, ed. Howard Anderson et al. (Lawrence: University of Kansas Press), pp. 130-147, p. 131.

⁸ 2 June 1767.

⁹ To the Earl of – , 28 November 1767.

bring the glow of fiction to his own situation.

In his review of Curtis' edition of the letters, George Kitchin touches on the unfortunate aspect of Sterne's reliance on the Shandean style. Kitchin suggests that the author's personal and literary achievements were scuppered by the overlap between his letters and his fiction:

even a man of genius, who is shut up like Sterne in his own Shandean bandbox of a world cannot write like men free of the world. Cowper could make his little domestic world supremely interesting, but then he had no Shandean pose to distort everything.¹⁰

Underpinning Kitchin's assertion that the 'Shandean pose [...] distort[s] everything' is the same disappointment that New and de Voogd have with Sterne's lack of spontaneity. In both critical accounts of the author's epistolary style, there is the assumption that Sterne could have avoided all posing had he tried hard enough. In contrast, Anderson suggests that Sterne's sincerity begins with 'proper self-awareness' (147), which doesn't require spontaneity, but instead offers something better: the regard for his recipient suggested by his having tried his best to garner his or her sympathy and attention.

Because of the cultural notoriety of *Letters from Yorick to Eliza* (1773), and Sterne's publication of his sermons as *The Sermons of Mr. Yorick* (1760), it might be assumed that Sterne used Yorick as his dominant pseudonym. Indeed, Willard Connely's literary biography of Sterne is entitled *Laurence Sterne as Yorick* (1958), and is indiscriminate in its application of his subject's pseudonym. Though Yorick is Sterne's most recognised persona, Sterne switched between regarding Tristram as his child, and identifying Tristram as himself. In his final years he veered more

¹⁰ Review of Curtis' *Letters of Lawrence Sterne*, in *The Modern Language Review*, 32:1 (January 1937), 99-101, p. 101.

towards Yorick as an alter ego, though these phases were by no means separate. Sometimes both characters were used to voice part of Sterne's agenda within a single letter. Tristram and Yorick cannot be identified as clearly different parts of Sterne's persona, though Tristram tends to belong to the younger, bawdier letters.

The letters to Eliza Draper were signed as 'YORICK', which had a profound impact on her understanding of Sterne. She refers to the author as 'Yorick' when writing of him to Anne James, but laments that she was deceived by his apparent goodness. Sterne's avid religiosity in writing to Draper was an attempt to dignify his attraction towards her into 'sentimental friendship'. Sterne addresses both Eliza Draper and Lydia Sterne as 'thee' and 'thou', suggesting their equivalent standing in his mind as recipients for whom this familiar style was appropriate. The mixture of religious and sexual feelings made Yorick the obvious choice of persona. These letters are scattered with quotations from scripture and from his sermons.

The composition of *A Sentimental Journey* was strongly linked to Sterne's developing theories of sensibility, which were cultivated during his correspondence with Eliza Draper. The parallel journals that they kept (Sterne's half being called by him 'the Bramine's Journal'), and the crossover of phrases between Sterne's letters and *A Sentimental Journey*, point to a corresponding relationship between his personal writings and his fiction. Parnell proposes that echoes of the *Journal* in *A Sentimental Journey* may have been Sterne mocking his own folly in the former, from a point of post-infatuation.¹¹ But while critics scorn Sterne's self-awareness at times when it gives way to 'mawkishness', Parnell reminds us that to the modern reader, the difference between 'real and rhetorical emotion' can be hard to gauge in eighteenth-century texts (xxxix).

¹¹ *A Sentimental Journey and Other Writings*, ed. Ian Jack and Tim Parnell (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003; 2008), xxxii.

Sterne used his surroundings while writing *A Sentimental Journey* to illustrate his state of mind. To the stock characters of Tristram and Yorick, Sterne added a tomcat to the repertoire of his epistolary personae. His loneliness and sexual angst are summed up in the tomcat. To John Hall-Stevenson he wrote 'I long to return to you, but I sit here alone as solitary and as sad as a tom cat, which bye the bye is all the company I keep – he follows me from the parlour, to the kitchen, into the garden, and every place' (viii.609-610).¹² Anderson sees a Shakespearean allusion in the cat, as Falstaff was supposed to be 'sad as a cat' (139). The sentimental interactions with animals in *A Sentimental Journey* are given a newly bathetic significance, when viewed against Sterne's reflections on his past adventures by way of feline analogy:

The past is over – and I can justify myself unto myself – can you do as much? – No faith! – “You can feel!” Aye so can my cat, when he hears a female caterwauling on the house top – but caterwauling disgusts me. I had rather raise a gentle flame, than have a different one raised in me. – Now, I take heav'n to witness, after all this *badinage* my heart is innocent [...] The truth is this – that my pen governs me — not me my pen. (viii.618-619)¹³

Sterne continues the Swiftian 'badinage' here by way of a well-worn euphemism: 'my pen governs me', a register which resonates with his male colleague, 'Sir W.'. To his daughter, Sterne writes of the cat as a creature whose company is conducive to 'sentimental thoughts', and he contrasts the cat with Lydia's 'lively French dog' (viii.612-613).¹⁴ The imagined interaction between the dog and cat – 'I will not have my cat abused' – is symbolic of Sterne's difficult relationship with his wife and daughter. He loved them, but often found himself apart from them, which he seems to conclude was beneficial to his writing.

Melvyn New finds it noteworthy that 'a writer so often praised for one of the

¹² 11 August 1767.

¹³ 19 September 1767.

¹⁴ 24 August 1767.

most carefully drawn family circles in English literature should have lived away from his parents after the age of ten.’¹⁵ Letters were often the products of the household-family during the eighteenth century, but Sterne’s epistolary domesticity is a fiction. In reality, the Sternes could not stand to live together, though it seems (from the doctored evidence which survives) that they were mostly civil and tolerant towards one another.

In Richardson’s *Grandison*, Harriet Byron resolves a romantic conflict by taking on her rejected suitor’s parents as surrogate family members, and embarking upon epistolary correspondences with them. Similarly, by bringing elements of fiction into his letters, taking lovers and adopting Eliza as a ‘daughter’, Sterne attempts to patch up his fractured domestic situation.

The personae used by Sterne in his letters foster self-reflection. This is a quality manifested in other parts of his epistolary style. Sterne reflects upon epistolary (and social) propriety with self-consciousness, in order to free himself from the expectations of decorum. He theorises social rules, in order to separate them from their contextual justification, and encroaches upon his correspondent by using terms of address that are not appropriate for his level of acquaintance with the (usually female) addressee.

In his earlier letters of seduction, Sterne relies heavily on Tristram as a cover for the insinuations he makes, his ‘steps and windings’ (viii.416) guided by a ‘shandy-headed’ writer.¹⁶ Later, this style reaches the pitch of self-parody, in his (possibly spoof) love-letter to Elizabeth Vesey. Sterne wonders aloud that ‘I am influenced to write a Letter to you upon so short an Acquaintance – short, did I say – I unsay it

¹⁵ Melvyn New, ‘Sterne, Laurence (1713-1768)’, *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* online edn., September 2010 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), <<http://ezproxy.ouls.ox.ac.uk:2117/view/article/26412>> [accessed 26 Feb 2013].

¹⁶ To Lady P., [?April 23, 1765].

again'. This self-contradiction seeks to contain the objections of the recipient, by voicing and containing them. Sterne continues with some tongue-in-cheek innuendo: 'surely the most penetrating of her sex need not be told that intimacies of this kind are not to be dated by hours [...] but by the slow or rapid progress of our intimacies' (viii.491).¹⁷

Sterne's attitude towards his correspondence is bound up with his theories about morality and sensibility (which were sometimes incompatible). The letters also show how satire and sensibility can co-exist in a text. As for many letter-writers during the eighteenth century, part of Sterne's posturing involves deliberate hypocrisy. He professes to write truthfully, and claims that this veracity is evident in the 'spontaneous' nature of the composition. However, his habit of re-using material undermines his claim to spontaneous innovation.

Two letters in particular show up Sterne's process of recycling, as the material that reappears bears upon the very subject of original writing. To Mary Macartney, he defended a 'warm' simile by contrasting it with 'the dull phlegm of an unfeeling John Trot (*suivant les ordonnances*) "*That Yrs of the 8th Inst came safe to hand*"' (vii.160).¹⁸ Having satirised the mode of impersonal convention, he proceeds to rail against writers who go about 'litterary commerce [...] as Attorneys do Bonds, by filling up blanks, and who in lieu of sending me what I sat expecting – a Letter – surprise me with an Essay cut and clip'd at all corners.'

Sterne seems to be critical of formulaic correspondence, and claims, to Macartney, to be an 'inconsiderate Soul [...] who never yet knew what it was to speak or write one premeditated word'. The claim is repeated two months later to Jane

¹⁷ June 20 [1766].

¹⁸ End of June 1760.

Fenton, with ‘speak or write’ becoming ‘say or write’ (vii.165).¹⁹ Perhaps the hyperbolic extension of the conventional analogy between letters and conversation is meant to signal to his correspondents that his letters are semi-fictional. His recipients might admire the consistency and execution of his claims to spontaneity, without expecting these claims to be literally true.

Sterne’s letter to Jane Fenton repeats the distaste for ‘honest John-Trot-Stile’ (vii.164), which he dismisses as being inappropriately ‘like a Letter of Business’. This time the template letter is placed in the same category as ‘the Stile of y^r female Epistolizers cut & trim’d at all points’. Sterne’s lack of premeditation is a fiction, but it is hard to see how far he expected his readers to be ‘taken in’ by his claim. Perhaps he is drawing on this well-known epistolary paradox in order to excuse himself to Macartney and Fenton. Sterne could not have re-used this material without some sense of the irony involved; it may be that this irony is the point of the gesture, though how far his recipients were privy to this intention is uncertain. Letters were not the only texts that Sterne re-used: the sermon in *Tristram Shandy* was his (i.145-164). Sermons were plagiarised and re-used in the eighteenth century to the extent that the practice was well-known to congregations, and encouraged by bishops; even Tillotson ‘cannibalized old sermons for new occasions’.²⁰ The letter, then, was not the only genre in which there was a disparity between expected and achieved levels of originality.

Sterne’s letters are tailored to the recipient, but not absolutely. He wants a response when he’s lonely, ‘thinking a bad Letter in season – to be better than a good one, out of it’ (vii.164) and writes of the same issues to different people, often in

¹⁹ 3 August 1760.

²⁰ William Gibson, ‘The British Sermon 1689-1901: Quantities, Performance, and Culture’, in *The Oxford Handbook of the British Sermon 1689-1901*, ed. Keith Francis et. al. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), pp. 3-26, p. 14.

a barely altered form. Some letters, especially those written to seduce women, follow a formula, but even so, through the recycling of material, we can see the ebb and flow of Sterne's passions. The best example of this is the first extant letter addressed to Eliza Draper, which was at one time addressed to 'the Countess *****' (viii.435).²¹ The manuscript shows emendation at all the points where the Countess/ Bramine is appealed to by name. There is some overlap between *The Journal to Eliza* and Sterne's letters. A passage addressed to Eliza, beginning 'worn out with fevers of all kinds but most, by that fever of the heart', echoes a letter that he supposedly wrote to his future wife in 1739/40. Tim Parnell cautions that we cannot tell if it was Lydia Medalle who invented the letter by quoting the *Journal*, or if it was Sterne who re-used the letter when writing the *Journal*.²²

To John Hall-Stevenson, Sterne often writes of 'the Devil', 'nonsense' and foolishness. When he mentions that he is 'busy playing the fool with my uncle Toby, who I have got soused over head and ears in love' (vii.294), it is in keeping with the rapport of 'badinage' that he has with this particular correspondent.²³ This 'badinage' related to Swift's love of the 'bagatelle', and in turn Burns took up this comic mode. The Scriblerians, like Hall-Stevenson's circle, had a club style that they employed when writing to, and of, each other. We might see these fraternal letters as an epistolary sub-genre, in which the language of badinage is employed to garner a sympathetic response, in the same way that the language of 'the heart' was used to elicit female approval.

Badinage could serve practical, as well as purely social, ends. When he repeats the topic of Uncle Toby's love affair to his banker Robert Foley, Sterne's phrasing is designed to convince the reader of the fiscal value of Toby's story: 'I am

²¹ [?Tuesday 18 June 1765]

²² Jack and Parnell, eds., p. 108, 246.

²³ 19 October 1762.

got pretty well, and sport much with my uncle Toby in the volume I am now fabricating for the laughing part of the world – for the melancholy part of it, I have nothing but my prayers’ (vii.298).²⁴ Sterne sometimes used Foley as a contact through which to garner more subscriptions for his work, which is why he emphasises its broad comic appeal.

His letters to his banker aside, Sterne was sensitive to the parallels – and intersections – between epistolary and financial debt (another trait that his letters share with Burns’). He was indebted to John Tillotson in his capacity as a sermon-writer, for his insights into the religious and social implications of obligation and debt. A ‘small edition’ of ‘Tillotson’s Sermons’ was among the select few books that travelled across the channel with the Sternes in 1762 (vii.261).²⁵ Tillotson shows that in charitable transactions, giving is preferable to receiving, as it confers power upon the giver, as well as spiritual righteousness. Tillotson writes that

[t]o receive kindness from others, supposeth we stand in need of it; and to stand in need of, is to be in a state of being obliged and indebted. Obligation is a dear thing, and a real debt which lies heavy and uneasie upon a grateful mind: So much obligation as any Man hath to another, so much he hath lost of his own liberty and freedom; for it gives him that hath obliged us, a superiority and advantage over us. And what Solomon says of the *borrower*, that he is a *servant to the lender*, is in proportion true in this case, that *the receiver is a servant to the giver*.²⁶

These concepts are important in letter-writing, because so much correspondence is dedicated to settling money matters, and because of the cost of letters themselves. On a social level, letters constitute the debts and credits of friendship; without reciprocity the debts would be weighted too much one on side.

²⁴ 9 November 1762.

²⁵ Sterne wrote to Thomas Becket to ‘send over the underwritten Books’ on 12 May 1762.

²⁶ ‘Of the Blessedness of Giving, more than that of Receiving’, *The Works of the Most Reverend Dr. John Tillotson* 12 vols. (London, 1748), xi.70. New and de Voogd speculate that Sterne means the duodecimo edition of 1748 (vii.263, n. 9). The italicised quotation in this passage does not occur in earlier editions, which may have contributed to Sterne’s typographical aesthetic.

Sterne was able to reverse the account of debt and credit between him and the James family by taking formal expressions of gratitude and obligation to the extreme, and thereby reversing them. In August 1767 he asked that the Jameses direct a parcel to him 'enclosed under cover':

I have but one excuse for this freedom which I am prompted to use from a persuasion that it is doing you pleasure to give you an opportunity of doing an obliging thing – and as to myself I rest satisfied, for 'tis only scoring up another debt of thanks to the millions I owe you both already [...].
(viii.603)²⁷

The exaggeration of numbers of thanks is characteristic of Sterne; he often writes 'a thousand thanks'. The intensifying phrase had been used since at least c. 1570, according to the *OED* ('thank, *n.*'). The over-enumeration of gratitude seems to cheapen its meaning; the *OED* notes that intensifying phrases based on thanks can be ironic. Perhaps this is another self-conscious engagement with convention by Sterne, who is expressing the discomfort he feels when indebted to his correspondents, and to 'John Trot' style. Tillotson's principles of giving and receiving were turned towards pecuniary and literary gain; Sterne was willing to balance his debt to another person by engaging in correspondence, against the benefit he received.

Sterne collaborated with Crebillon to stage a correspondence between them that would give Sterne a straw man against which to vindicate *Tristram Shandy*, and thereby to increase his profits. He explained the scheme to David Garrick on 19 April 1762:

Crebillon has made a convention with me, which, if he is not too lazy, will be no bad persiflage – as soon as I get to Thoulouse he has agreed to write me an expostulatory letter upon the indecorums of T. Shandy – which

²⁷ 2 August 1767.

is to be answered by recrimination upon the liberties in his own works – these are to be printed together – Crebillion against Sterne – Sterne against Crebillion – the copy to be sold, and the money equally divided – This is good Swiss-policy. (vii.252)

This would not be the only time that Sterne wrote letters collaboratively. New and de Voogd suggest that Combe and Sterne may have collaborated on the bawdy letter addressed to Elizabeth Vesey, which was probably never intended to be sent, but which may have given the writers some satisfaction in puncturing the salon-speak of the addressee (viii.493).²⁸ The suggestion of collaboration must remain a conjecture, not least because Sterne showed resistance to mutual indebtedness in other areas of his correspondence.

In the textual matter of letters, debt takes the form of quotation.

Acknowledging a debt to another writer or source is a complicated business. Sterne often uses quotation marks without naming his source, which leads New and de Voogd to conclude that sometimes he (not unlike Pope and Swift) is quoting himself, or is using inverted commas or underlining to highlight a passage, rather than attribute it to an external source. Another factor to consider is censorship: Sterne may be nodding towards the constraints set on him by the French system of checking post when he places the phrase “*more I say not*” in inverted commas (vii.315).²⁹

In some cases Sterne intermingles the two halves of a correspondence, by combining the sentence structure of his letter with a quotation from the letter to which he is replying. For example, he writes to Robert Brown, ‘You are absolutely right in most of your conjectures about me (unless what are excessively panegyric) – 1st “That I am a queer dog” [...] “As for my conning Montaigne as much as my pray’r

²⁸ 20 June 1766.

²⁹ To John Mill, 5 March 1763.

book” – there you are right again’ (vii.168).³⁰ This was a normal way to quote someone for Sterne and his contemporaries, but what stands out here is Sterne’s use of the technique to reconcile Brown’s positive and negative comments, by humorously pretending to be exact in the listing of articles against him. The deictic marker ‘*there* you are right again’ (my emphasis) gestures, as the letter as a whole does, towards the location of the recipient, in seeming compliance.

As we have seen in previous chapters, Richardson tried to itemise the points to which he must reply with less humour than Sterne. However, both authors were creative with the representation of dialogue in their fiction: Sterne was fond of dashes to indicate change of speaker, while in quick-fire conversation pieces, Richardson reverted to dramatic dialogue with each speaker taking a new line. It may be that the direct quotation of the recipient, creating the appearance of dialogue, relates to Sterne’s and Richardson’s love of mimicry. In Sterne’s case, Anderson thinks that mimicry helped him to ‘reduce the distance between his reader and himself’ (137).

When relating news of national importance, Sterne tries to capture the general mood, but is wary of having such statements attributed to him personally. To Stephen Croft, he wrote that

the present system being to remove that Phalanx of great people, which stood betwixt the throne and the subjects, and suffer them to have immediate access without intervention of a cabal – (this is the language of others) [...]. (vii.177-8)³¹

By contrast, Sterne’s use of fictional characters in his letters provides him with a kind of self-sufficiency of quotation. His confidence that he can supply the other half of the correspondence, in the form of procatalepsis, is another way of asserting self-sufficiency.

³⁰ 9 September 1760.

³¹ 25 December 1760.

Portraits and shadows

Procatalepsis – the anticipation of an objection, and the rebuttal of it – appears in *Tristram Shandy* in the addresses to specific readers and critics. It is also a feature of his letters (though as chapter 3 demonstrated, this was a prevailing feature of letters). To Draper, he writes that if she won't answer, 'I will write one for thee, knowing it is such an one as thou wouldst have written, I will regard it as my Eliza's' (viii.558).³² This stance suggests that all Sterne's epistolary writing is a kind of self-portrait, as he remakes his correspondents in his own image, and frees himself from being in their debt. Once the majority of *Tristram Shandy* had appeared in print, he wrote to Dr. John Eustace that

[i]t is too much to write books and find heads to understand them [...] a true feeler always brings half the entertainment along with him. His own ideas are only call'd forth by what he reads, and the vibrations within, so entirely correspond with those excited, 'tis like reading himself and not the book. (viii.646)³³

This quotation is pivotal to reading Sterne's letters alongside his published works in several respects. It puts forward a theory of the way a sentimental text should elicit feeling, and of the ideal reader for such a work. That the vibrations 'correspond' bears upon our interpretation of Sterne's epistolary output: it shows us the ideal of correspondence, heart-to-heart, but it also shows us that 'correspondence' reaches further than letters in its significance. All relationships are about correspondence, though Sterne also shows the counter to such an ideal, by demonstrating that such sentimentalism can be solipsism: 'reading himself and not the book'. For Sterne, as the author of the work he describes, this 'reading himself' has special significance. It

³² March 1767.

³³ 9 Feb 1768.

suggests that the novels and letters each have a claim to reveal his character (to himself and his correspondents), and that his fiction has veracity comparable with than utterances and ‘strokes’ of his letters.

Because letters are by their nature intersectional, they are often compared with other genres of writing, and other media. In Sterne’s letters, the portrait is a recurring point of comparison with the epistolary form. Like letters, portraits are representations of a subject that aim to appear faithful to the truth, but this aim may be compromised by the painter or writer’s acts of interpretation.

Letters are a written part of life, and become over time the raw material of life-writing. These functions overlap: writing to another person can become a form of autobiography, or a written self-portrait. During the eighteenth century, written and pictorial expression was often compared. Richardson is an important figure to consider here, as he uses portraiture emblematically in *Clarissa*, as Lynn Shepherd has shown.³⁴ As we saw in chapter 2, Richardson wrote to Wescomb in 1746, urging her to be candid in her writing, because ‘styles differ, too, as much as faces, and are indicative, generally beyond the power of disguise, of the mind of the writer!’³⁵

Portraits, like letters, have artistic value because they are taken from the ‘original’; as Johnson has it in his *Dictionary* definition of 1755, a portrait is a ‘picture drawn after the life.’ Terms relating to portraiture were often used as metaphors for language that revealed the subject or object’s character. Johnson’s definition deviates from the purely pictorial meaning of ‘portrait’ in the examples he uses, which include one from Dryden about the tragic or comic nature of writing.

Visual metaphors abound in relation to eighteenth-century writing, especially in the repeated use of ‘strokes’ to indicate aspects of a written description of a person.

³⁴ Lynn Shepherd, *Clarissa’s Painter: Portraiture, Illustration and Representation in the Novels of Samuel Richardson* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009).

³⁵ 27 August 1746, *Correspondence*, ed. Dussinger, p. 6.

For example, Aaron Hill, when asked by Richardson to edit *Clarissa*, expressed his admiration for the author's style in pictorial terms:

You have formed a style [...] where verbosity becomes a virtue; because, in pictures which you draw with such a skilful negligence, redundance but conveys resemblance; and to contract the strokes, would be to spoil the likeness.³⁶

The 'likeness' here is of a fictional character; there is fidelity to a plausible invention, rather than to reality. In fiction of the long eighteenth century, a character's 'likeness' is sometimes found most tellingly in their letters, though the villainous Lovelace in *Clarissa* plays upon this assumption. By contrast, in Austen's *Persuasion*, Mr. Elliot's character is 'revealed' by a letter that 'was a dreadful picture of ingratitude'.³⁷

In this context, a portrait or picture is another point of reference that is supposed to show the writer's ingenuousness. For example, when Sterne wrote to Garrick in 1760, he claimed that *Tristram Shandy* had 'gone forth into the world, hot as it came from my Brain, without one Correction --- tis however a picture of myself, & so far may bid the fairer for being an Original' (112).

Sterne uses portraiture as a metonym for autobiography; this is presumably to do with the privileging of sight over other senses as a means of gathering information about a person. Sterne's use of the image is consistent with his interest in the relationship between physiognomy and character. Uncle Toby's wound, Slawkenbergius's nose, Tristram's nose, and his accidental circumcision are all formative experiences for their respective characters. Though Sterne was irresolute about the academic language that accompanied the analysis of the body's 'animal spirits', he wanted his friends to be represented faithfully in portraits. He objected to a portrait of Eliza in which she was 'dressed in smiles, with all the advantages of

³⁶ 7 January 1745, *Correspondence*, ed. Gerrard (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), pp. 169-170.

³⁷ *Persuasion*, ed. James Kinsley (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), p. 169.

silks, pearls, and ermine'.³⁸ His concern reveals his belief in the link between a person's physical appearance and his or her character.

Sterne's troubled relationship with his own body also influenced his interpretation of visual and textual portraiture. His consumptive lungs constricted what he could do much of the time, and guided his steps abroad in search of cures. The diagnosis of 'a venereal case' was deeply embarrassing for Sterne, whose inconsistent moral code was exposed in the process. To his doctors he protested 'I have had no commerce whatever with the sex, not even my wife, added I, these fifteen years' (viii.579). His sense of himself as a good person whose behaviour did not match the disease was disrupted when he was told that 'these taints of the blood laid dormant twenty years' (viii.580). He almost refused to have treatment because he had such difficulty admitting the sexual adventures of his youth; accepting treatment would, he felt, mean 'submit[ting] to be treated like a *sinner*, in a point where I had acted like a *saint*' (viii.579). He dealt with the embarrassment by creating linguistic distance between himself and the diseased body he described. He referred to himself in the third and first person, and as both Tristram and Yorick (viii.579-580). To William Petty, Earl of Shelburne, Sterne recounted his treatment as an 'anecdote in Tristram Shandy's Life', 'as whimsical a story [...] as ever befel one of my family – Shandy's nose, his name, his sash window are fools to it' (viii.579).³⁹ He found comfort in making his own experience a 'story'; recounting the colourful dialogue he had with his doctors brought him fortitude when he was 'worn down to a shadow'.

Sterne's metaphor is visual; that he sees himself as a 'shadow' suggests that he may have had a former self-portrait in mind, to which he had become a dark

³⁸ *Letters from Yorick to Eliza* (London, 1778), p. 28.

³⁹ [2]1 May 1767. The account of his diagnosis also appears in *The Journal to Eliza* (24 April 1767), see Jack and Parnell (eds.), p. 112.

imitation.⁴⁰ The dependence of shadows upon an original object that has light cast upon it is suggestive, in Sterne's case, of the way that he became dependent upon his self-imitating Shandy personae (if public exposure can be taken for 'light'). The different lights in which one could be cast in both painting and fiction were of concern to Sterne. Eliza Draper was painted at his behest, in response to a portrait of her which he disliked, partly for its style, and partly because it was commissioned by his rivals in her affection, the Newnhams. As he said of the reception of *Tristram Shandy* in 1767, 'we are often painted in divers colours, according to the ideas each one frames in his head' (viii.633-4).⁴¹

A correspondence between two people may become an act of mutual portraiture, or shadowing. As we have seen, letters were thought of as 'talking on paper'; 'conversation', in eighteenth-century terms, was a process that could be verbal or pictorial: '[conversation] could mean physical contact as well as verbal exchange, and [...] was often used to characterise the relationship between a picture and its beholder'.⁴² Sterne and a friend commissioned portraits of one another as a Harlequin and Mountebank, respectively. Each letter-writer anticipated the recipient's responses, and this created a version of the other person, which was, in the writer's eyes, characteristic or representative of the correspondent. The Richardson-Bradshaigh correspondence is an example of such mutual portraiture. As Louise Curran has observed, Bradshaigh's correspondence with the author of *Clarissa* was entwined with painted portraits.⁴³

⁴⁰ Thomas Patch's 'Caricature of Sterne greeting Death' (*Letters*, viii.470) presents Sterne as a shadow of death, in the resemblance between his emaciated form and that of the skeleton he greets.

⁴¹ To the Earl of —, 28 November 1767.

⁴² Shepherd, *ibid.*, p. 46.

⁴³ 'A Portrait of the Artist: Lady Bradshaigh, *Clarissa*, and "The History of Mrs Beaumont"', in *Samuel Richardson: The Author as Correspondent*, pp. 86-139.

Joseph Highmore was commissioned by Bradshaigh to paint Richardson; in the resulting portrait, the author stands in the foreground with his writing materials, and an altered version of Highmore's portrait of the Bradshaighs (which Richardson had commissioned) can be seen in the background, over the mantelpiece. In their epistolary correspondence, Bradshaigh and Richardson anticipated and altered each other's words, just as Sterne did those of his wife: 'I long to hear from you, and that all my letters and things are come safe to you, and then you will say that I have not been a bad lad [...] You will smile at this last article' (vii.279-280).⁴⁴ In his letters to Lydia, Sterne fills in for his wife, using his daughter as a mediating force, he is able to express familiar affection for 'your mother': 'I have preached at the ambassador's chapel – Hezekiah – (an odd subject your mother will say)' (vii.356).⁴⁵

Letters differ from visual portraiture in their grammatical form. A letter unfolds syntactically, though the visual shape of paragraphs, and physical dimensions of paper affect the way it is read. An epistolary portrait, even between close correspondents like Sterne and Hall-Stevenson, or Richardson and Bradshaigh, can formalize the distances between the portrait, the writer, and the reader. This distance is most obviously manifested in the use of third person pronouns. For example, Richardson wrote to Bradshaigh in 1749 that he would wait for her in the park

till you tell me you have seen a person who answers to this description, namely, Short; rather plump than emaciated, notwithstanding his complaints: about five foot five inches [...] looking directly foreright, as passers-by would imagine, but observing all that stirs on either hand of him without moving his short neck; hardly ever turning back: [...] a gray eye, too often over-clouded by mistiness from the head: by chance lively; very lively it will be, if he have hope of seeing a lady whom he loves and honours [...]⁴⁶

⁴⁴ [17] June 1762, to Elizabeth Sterne.

⁴⁵ 15 May 1764.

⁴⁶ November-December (?) 1749, Carroll, pp. 135-6.

Because this self-portrait is written, it contains not only static physical features, but also habitual body language and emblematic movement. Richardson's self-fashioning is the product of the moral imperative to appear modest, but it also expresses the awkwardness of an artist putting himself at the centre of his own writing. This confirms what Marcia Pointon has written, that 'at its most abstract portraiture is a question of the relationship between the self as art and the self in art'.⁴⁷

Particularly for Richardson, who only ever admitted to being the 'editor' of his own novels in public, and for whom the writing process was akin to being possessed by another 'character', it makes sense that he creates a persona who prefers to observe and characterize others, as Joseph Addison did with 'Mr. Spectator'. So acute was his insistence on a modest evasion of the spotlight that Richardson wrote to Susanna Highmore with a self-description that ironically seems to sacrifice openness and virtue for the sake of remaining unseen. He called himself a 'sly sinner, creeping along the very edges of the walks, getting behind benches [...] afraid of being seen, as a thief of detection.'⁴⁸

A similar picture developed in Sterne's letters. In the last years of his life, he described himself repeatedly as a 'shadow', creeping uninvited to the James's house. In the *Bramine's Journal*, the 'shadow' shows the potential for Sterne's capacity to inhabit his fictional characters to become self-alienation. In the journal, he addresses himself as if he were a third party, and this grammatical distance is accompanied by an implied erosion of character, signified by the 'shadow' image. His self-apostrophe echoes the lament for Yorick in *Tristram Shandy*, but it is sullied by the tone of reproach, aimed at Eliza: 'poor Sick-headed, sick hearted Yorick! Eliza has made a

⁴⁷ *Hanging the Head: Portraiture and Social Formation in Eighteenth-Century England* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993), p.1.

⁴⁸ 2 August 1748, Barbauld, ii.206.

Shadow of thee' (173). Though he took advantage of the benefits of being mistaken for a Shandy in his earlier letters, eventually Sterne's epistolary character became a 'shadow' to his own 'Original' novels. He struggled to be a picture of the life, taken after the work.

Epistolarity in Sterne's fiction

We have seen that Shandean characters made appearances in Sterne's letters, but the reverse was also true: letters form a part of Sterne's fictional narratives. *Tristram Shandy* is not an epistolary novel, but it is imbued with epistolarity. The conditions shaping its emergence meant that each volume incorporated criticism of the previous volume, resulting in a dialogic, reactive structure that resembles that between epistolary correspondents. Internally, *Tristram Shandy* is largely concerned with domestic relations, and family history. It is (among other things) a fictional representation of the literary practices maintained by families during the period, of which letters formed a significant part.

Letters comprised a large part of the literate activities of everyday life in Sterne's lifetime. The widespread writing of letters set the precedent of representing speech, thought and body language in the same piece of writing on a day-to-day basis. As Charles Taylor affirms, 'the rise of the modern novel [...] entrenched the egalitarian affirmation of ordinary life [...] The very form of narration, relating the – sometimes minute – particulars of life, puts all events and lives on the same stylistic footing.'⁴⁹ There are limits to the equalising force of narrative, however.

Subordination of clauses must still occur, and even when the subjects are all

⁴⁹ *Sources of the Self* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), pp. 286-7.

traditionally seen as trivial, the syntax that contains them will confer uneven prominence.

Coupled with Sterne's knack for digression, grammatical subordination in the context of a letter could become a mechanism of satire. The first London edition of the first two volumes of *Tristram Shandy* includes a dedicatory epistle to William Pitt, the Elder. It applies the author's characteristic interruptions to the pose of humility required of a 'poor Wight of a Dedicator'.⁵⁰ Like the digressions that impede the linearity of the main body of the novel, subordinated sections intervene to such an extent that they draw prominence away from the explicit purpose of the sentence:

I humbly beg, Sir, that you will honour this book by taking it — (not under your Protection, — it must protect itself, but) — into the country with you [...]

*I am, great Sir,
(and what is more to your Honour,)
I am, good Sir,
Your well wisher,
and most humble Fellow-Subject*

THE AUTHOR.

Sterne divides the clarification beginning 'not under your Protection' from the rest of the sentence with dashes and parentheses. This gives the impression of corrections taking place *in situ* in speech, and draws attention to the book's supposed lack of protection (while politely and pre-emptively declining it). The visual arrangement of words on the page also causes digression; as 'AUTHOR' is largest, it draws the reader's eye from the compliments to the addressee. Added to the stumbling 'great' and 'good' qualifiers, the dedication risks being read as self-description. Epistolary subscriptions invited the reader's eye to skip ahead to the signature because they

⁵⁰ Ian Campbell Ross has used the 'second, corrected, state' of the dedication in his edition.

were separated from the main body of text. Sterne exploits this tendency while he gently subverts the traditional linguistic pattern of subscription.

The subscription is an elongated version of the conventional form, which could be interrupted by an extra address that nodded to the status of the recipient, such as ‘Madam’, ‘Your Lordship’, or the title that Curll gave to ‘My SUBSCRIBERS’ in the dedication to *Mr. Pope's Literary Correspondence. Volume the Fifth*: ‘I am, Gentlemen, Your obliged / Humble Servant, / E. CURLL’.⁵¹ Given the conventional expectations of subscription that were explored in chapter 1, Sterne’s is unusually complex: it has more syntactic, but less social, subordination than its equivalents. The equivocating ‘Fellow-Subject’ offsets the superlative humility of ‘most humble’. Sterne plays on the ‘great and good’ celebrity of Pitt, who had recently presided over victories in the Seven Years War, but his parenthetical interjection – ‘(and what is more to your Honour)’ – makes the flattery complicated and Shandy-headed. Though the dedication is characteristic of its author, and in that respect not ‘ordinary’, yet its circuitous structure shows how ordinary it was for letter-writers to struggle over points of convention. Taylor’s point that novels draw attention to the ‘ordinary’ stands, when Sterne’s unusual dedication is read as a Shandean styling of a common epistolary genre.

Sterne does not limit himself to one genre or style, but his work is structured on, and plays with, the ambiguous relationship between speech and writing, and that between the individual sense of self, and that of a group. These are fruitful ambiguities that *Tristram Shandy* shares with letters.

Tristram’s autobiography is in fact a family biography, of the kind kept by families in commonplace books that sometimes found their way into print, such as the

⁵¹ 5 vols. (London, 1737), v.ii.

Thraliana of Hester Thrale (later Piozzi). The stories that make up Sterne's novel are a group effort, although Tristram rarely divulges the exact provenance of his anecdotes, except to admit that he is 'indebted' to uncle Toby for the anecdote of his conception (i.4). Letters, too, demanded that the correspondents be indebted to one another, as Tristram was for family anecdotes, but in the epistolary context this was accompanied by the financial cost to the recipient. The implications of Tristram's admission of indebtedness (doubts about paternity aside) are that the reader is to imagine that the narrator has garnered a great deal of information from his family over the years, and that he is the mouthpiece for a shared Shandy 'lore'. Tristram acts as the biographer for the generation above him, having observed (and presumably participated in) discussions over the years. The novel's characters complement one another, and their utterances are filtered through Tristram's written account. Repetition and interaction results in the honing of anecdotes. Letter-writing served the same purpose: it was a form of literacy that allowed for the development, and articulation, of opinions through written conversation.

Tristram expresses the equivalence between speech and writing directly: '[w]riting, when properly managed, (as you may be sure I think mine is) is but a different name for conversation' (i.125). Tristram brings his own character into the general truism by interjecting with the first person assurance that his writing is, 'I think', 'properly managed'. This is characteristic of the allusion to other texts in the novel, and of 'learned' ones in particular. He is drawing upon a long tradition when he articulates this opinion, as the aphoristic phrasing suggests. Although, how far he expected his readership to follow him in this tradition, especially given the work's defiance of convention in many regards, is a vexed question. Having different names

for the same thing – writing, conversation – is itself a kind of conversation, a tussle over decorum, another word for which might be Tristram's 'management'.

Letter-manuals frequently compared epistles and conversation. One early example came in William Walsh's preface to *Letters and Poems* (1692), where he instructed his readers that 'the style of letters ought to be as near approaching familiar conversation as possible.' The premise survived the shift towards a model that catered for a wider social readership for the letter-manual. In *The Complete Letter-writer* (1778), a 'true familiar letter [...] expresseth our Meaning the same as if we were discoursing with the Party to whom we write in succinct and easy Terms' (32). The increased prevalence of the 'familiar' letter as a generic term for personal epistles also reinforced the popularity of 'written conversation'. This cannot have failed to spill over into other genres of writing, including the novel. In turn, the popularity of domestic performance, and the common practice of reading letters aloud, meant that performance and conversation converged; structured dialogue and the ability to debate were prized.

This is relevant to *Tristram Shandy*, where the domestic setting allows characters to rehearse their opinions until they become 'familiar' narratives. A good recital of a text in the home was also an accomplishment worth fixating upon, as Corporal Trim's reading of the sermon makes plain:

He stood before them with his body swayed, and bent forwards just so far, as to make an angle of 85 degrees and a half upon the plain of the horizon; – which sound orators, to whom I address this know very well, to be the true persuasive angle of incidence. (i.140)

The account of Trim's 'mathematical exactness' in preparing his reading stance is couched in technical language, which demonstrates how oratory was being cultivated and codified (to a degree worthy of satire, in Sterne's view). For Patricia Michaelson,

Trim's performance 'exemplifies sentimental reading and its effect on both performer and audience.'⁵² Sterne's letters also incorporate gesture and situation, recalling his novels' transcription of both speech and movement. Anderson quotes Sterne to Eliza – 'the sky seems to smile upon me as I look up to it'⁵³ – to demonstrate how this technique makes him 'present' to the reader (142).

The similarities between reading and acting become relevant in this context. The eloquence of the familiar letter was judged according to its effect when vocalised (or even simply sub-vocalised by a silent reader): 'In the Placing of Words we must consult the Ear and judge whether its Satisfaction be complete.'⁵⁴ Sterne attempts to show phonetically what sounds made by his characters that are not strictly words sound like. For example, the abbess of Andouillets and Margarita try to address their mules: 'Get on with you, said the abbess [...] — Whu—v—w— — whew—w—w— whuv'd Margarita, pursing her sweet lips betwixt a hoot and a whistle' (ii.610-11). This is an attempt to 'consult the Ear' which contributes to the dramatic soundscape of the novel. Such unique (and funny) phonetic transcriptions invite the reader to try them out.

At the point of reception, the 'silent speech' of the letter became audible speech when the letter was read aloud. Eve Bannet identifies the letter as a 'speech act': 'Reading a letter aloud in company acted as a vocalization of the absent writer's speech act within the conversation that it stimulated among the company who heard it.'⁵⁵ Not all writers would have imagined their letter being spoken, however. Even so, because letters were the most direct way of conversing with someone on paper, they could claim special influence over other forms of communication during the

⁵² Patricia Howell Michaelson, *Speaking Volumes: Women, Reading and Speech in the Age of Austen* (California: Stanford University Press, 2002), p. 150.

⁵³ *Letters from Yorick to Eliza* (London, 1773), p. 27.

⁵⁴ *The New Art of Letter-Writing*, 2nd edn. (London, 1762), p. 8.

⁵⁵ *Empire of Letters*, p. 46.

period that contained 'written conversation'.

There seems to have been little distinction made between reading aloud from letters (in manuscript and print), fictional works, newspapers, and pamphlets. As letters are a combination of textual influences, speech and writing, manuscript and print are, as D. F. McKenzie has it, 'complementary modes'.⁵⁶

The texture of *Tristram Shandy* is largely indebted to the domestic sphere in which literacy and speech were complementary forms. Being able to hold, and defend, opinions (Tristram's father), and to account for oneself through narrating an intelligible autobiography (Uncle Toby) are the markers of selfhood, and that selfhood is brought about by reiterated oration. Conversations in the parlour are littered with hints that the account is a synthesis of many conversations that have taken place, along similar lines: 'In a word, he would say, error was error [...] You cry out, he would say [...] — Why? — he would ask' (i.170-1). 'In a word' could belong either to Tristram or the speaker, especially as the family and its associates share some verbal tics (this one being associated with Yorick most closely). Using the conditional 'would say' instead of 'he said' signifies the habitual, on-going element of these conversations. A repertoire of certain conversations comes to define Walter Shandy's behaviour, and it is implied that he finds it difficult to deviate from it.

Uncle Toby's recovery from his wound is at first put in jeopardy by his inability to relate his story to well-wishers who come to comfort him:

the many perplexities he was in, arose out of the almost insurmountable difficulties he found in telling his story intelligibly, and giving such clear ideas of the differences and distinctions between the scarp and counterscarp. (i.94)

⁵⁶ 'Speech-Manuscript-Print' in *New Directions in Textual Studies*, ed. Oliphant and Bradford ([Austin]: University of Texas Press, 1990), pp. 86-109, p. 88.

Having brought on 'exacerbations of his wound' (i.95), once Toby is able to research the topic, his war re-enactments become his hobby-horse, and come to define his appearances in the text. The selfhood within *Tristram Shandy* is therefore somewhere between speech and writing, and is contingent upon various kinds of audience response: from the characters present to the fictional audience who speak to Tristram, and the non-fictional audience who wrote to Sterne.

By contrast, in *A Sentimental Journey*, Yorick claims that the source of the self is internal: sentiment is the fountain of inner divinity. It is true that the eccentricity of Tristram's father, and the directions his thoughts take do emerge from a strongly defined interior self. However, the context in which his (and the other characters') opinions are realised, is domestic and dialogic. With this in mind, the way in which Yorick frames his thoughts on sensibility should be noted. He apostrophises, just as Tristram often does, and this technique means that the definition comes in the form of directed address:

–Dear sensibility! source inexhausted of all that's precious in our joys, or costly in our sorrows! Thou chainest thy martyr down upon his bed of straw – and 'tis thou who lifts him up to HEAVEN – eternal fountain of our feelings! – 'tis here I trace thee – and this is thy divinity which stirs within me – not, that in some sad and sickening moments, "*my soul shrinks back upon herself, and startles at destruction*" – mere pomp of words! – but that I feel some generous joys and generous cares beyond myself – (155)

The apostrophe is unstable in its mode of address. Its beginning – 'Dear sensibility' – seems to mimic the superscription of a letter. It switches between Yorick addressing his own personal sensibility, and the plurality of human sensibility as a personified and generalised entity: 'fountain of *our* feelings' (my emphasis). One effect of literary sensibility on readers was to encourage them to enact the shared sensibility indicated by Yorick's 'our feelings'.

Richardson had been receiving testimonies of reactions to his novels via letter since the publication of *Pamela*, which conformed to a shared emotional and gestural code. Using an anecdote from Aaron Hill's correspondence, David Brewer demonstrates that Richardson's printed text was viewed as an authentic source of sensibility that transcended the boundaries between speech and written media. *Pamela* was said to have elicited tears from a naughty schoolboy.⁵⁷ In Brewer's interpretation, the story serves to show that although the printed letters remain unsmudged by the heroine's tears, the power of Pamela's voice transforms each book into a text that is individually authenticated by the reader's response. When Yorick locates his sensibility with the deictic 'here', he refers to a physical gesture outside the written text, and thereby reaches out to the reader, prompting them to follow suit. This is comparable with Sterne's deictic pointers in his letter to Brown: 'there you are right again'. Apostrophes to an absent person are common in *Tristram Shandy*, as are references to the physical world of the writer. In Sterne's fiction, the address heightens the importance of the section because its message is directed, yet the direction is various and uncertain.

Apostrophes in *Tristram Shandy* are directed towards a range of entities and persons, from the abstract to the concrete. Towards the end, when Toby is negotiating with Widow Wadman, there is a particularly spirited address from Tristram to his uncle, which emphasises the distance in time between the event and the recollection. 'Honest soul!', the narrator expostulates, before taking over the speaking role for his uncle: 'I will answer for him [...] I see him yonder with his pipe pendulous in his hand' (ii.706). The apostrophe is used to direct the narrative, but it does not invite a response; it is there to create the effect of dialogue, while leaving

⁵⁷ *The Afterlife of Character, 1726-1825*, p. 147.

the power of oration and observation to the narrator. Brewer has noted that reader continuations of scenes from *Tristram Shandy*, and artists' depictions, converge on the incidents that Tristram explicitly tells his readers to embellish, or continue, for themselves (159). This suggests that the narrator remains in firm control, despite the frequent addresses to characters and readers.

Talking on paper

As well as apostrophe, Sterne uses another form of address: the written dialogue. This was a common way of exploring the pros and cons of contrasting opinions (in private and printed material) on a particular issue during the eighteenth century. For example, Dryden's *An Essay of Dramatic Poesie* represented varying points of view on drama by using dialogue, explaining himself in the dedicatory epistle to Lord Buckhurst:

I will give your Lordship the Relation of a Dispute betwixt some of our Wits upon this subject, in which they did not onely speak of Playes in Verse, but mingled, in the freedom of Discourse, some things of the Ancient, many of the Modern wayes of writing, comparing those with these, and the Wits of our Nation with those of others: 'tis true they differ'd in their opinions, as 'tis probable they would: neither do I take upon me to reconcile, but to relate them: and that as Tacitus professes of himself, Sine studio partium aut ira: without Passion or Interest; leaving your Lordship to decide it in favour of which part you shall judge most reasonable, and withall, to pardon the many errours of,

Your Lordships most obedient humble Servant,

JOHN DRYDEN.⁵⁸

The dynamic between the interlocutors in Dryden's text, and between the interlocutors and the reading audience, while not identical, may be compared with that in *Tristram Shandy*. Insofar as a person is defined by his or her views, or

⁵⁸ *Of Dramatick Poesie, An Essay* (London: Herringman, 1668).

opinions, the dialogue is a natural form for self-expression to take. Indeed, Tristram ties life and opinions together, 'hoping and expecting that your knowledge of my character, and of what kind of mortal I am, by the one, will give you a better relish for the other' (i.9). Because we are repeatedly told that Tristram's family is eccentric and out of the common way, and because the opinions they hold are so clearly not based on reason (though they have some internal logic), we might see *Tristram Shandy* as a satire on the dialogic form as it was used by Dryden.

The text reflects on its nearness to written dialogues. The unfulfilling conversations between Tristram's parents, in which Tristram's mother fails to maintain the back-and-forth of structured debate, imply that such rhythms are the template for the rest of the novel's interactions. The repeated failure of measured interaction is a trope that adds to the characterful eccentricity of the Shandy family. Tristram compares 'the *proposition*, the *reply*, and *rejoinder*, which terminated my father's and my mother's conversations, in his beds of justice' (ii.630) to his attempts to speak to animals. This underlines the fact that language in *Tristram Shandy* is understood by different characters according to the variances within their minds, which depend upon the subject of their hobby-horse.

The novel is full of misunderstandings. Uncle Toby's proto-Pavlovian responses to words relating to the military lead him to mistake the meaning of Tristram's father several times. The novel demonstrates the failure of communication as much as it demonstrates the spectrum of communicative tools (typographically and linguistically). Sterne was heavily influenced by Locke, taking many of his theories on character and selfhood into the making of Tristram and his family. The work can be viewed as a compendium of theories about communication, as it is about education (the *Tristrapedia*); it has a sense of all the other kinds of books it

could be.

Locke's thoughts on communication, and the 'imperfections and abuses' of speech in *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding* (1689), provide one explanation for the collision of linguistic modes in *Tristram Shandy*. For Locke, uniting words with their corresponding objects and concepts in a unified and standardised way is a possibility worth considering. This is because speech is 'the great Bond that holds Society together, and the common Conduit, whereby the Improvements of Knowledge are conveyed from one Man, and one Generation, to another'.⁵⁹ Letters were a contribution to the unification of words and objects, as sending them from one place to another was a reminder that writing words down makes them physical and transferable. Locke's optimism regarding language came despite the alarms of the late seventeenth century about copious language, misunderstanding, and disputatiousness leading to another civil war. Dryden's reference to the 'modest inquisitions of the Royal Society' shows that disputatiousness could also be a defence against ignorance, if the language was 'modest' enough.

The characters within Tristram's family network speak to one another through his writing; so too do Tristram and his projected readership. The Sir, Madam and 'your lordships and reverences' frame the story with silent (occasionally vocalised) objections and comments. This is a way for Tristram to address obvious objections to the work (such as bawdiness) by responding immediately, and by placing the objection in his own words:

There is nothing so foolish, when you are at the expence of making an entertainment of this kind, as to order things so badly, as to let your criticks and gentry of refined taste run it down [...] I have left half a

⁵⁹ ed. Nidditch, p. 509.

dozen places purposely open for them [...]. (i.96-7)

Tristram's frequent addresses to 'Sir' and 'Madam', mimics a form of syntactic interjection that was common in both speech and writing. For example, Boswell's *The Life of Samuel Johnson* (1791) is littered with conversations in which Johnson punctuates his arguments with addresses in order to gain an argumentative advantage. Johnson's notable remarks about Richardson and Fielding's contrasting styles arose in conversation, and their argumentative rhythm was characterised by (as Boswell reports it) frequent addresses between himself and the 'Sir' with whom he is at odds:

Sir, there is more knowledge of the heart in one letter of Richardson's, than in all 'Tom Jones.' I, indeed, never read 'Joseph Andrews.' [sic] ERSKINE. "Surely, Sir, Richardson is very tedious." JOHNSON. "Why, Sir, if you were to read Richardson for the story, your impatience would be so much fretted, that you would hang yourself."⁶⁰

The syntactic pauses provided by 'Why, Sir' seem to condescend to the addressee by confirming that the conversation is dialogic. In the same way, Tristram had allowed room for his 'criticks'. This technique is something *Tristram Shandy* has in common with Richardson's *Grandison*, and with Richardson's own spirited exchanges with Lady Bradshaigh. In a letter dripping with sentimental affect, Sterne justified himself to Sarah Tuting with a procataleptic twist, which left a place for her interruption, as Tristram left places for critical intervention:

This is mere Selfishness; and Yet I thought I was writing the most sentimental Letter that ever the hand of true gallantry traced out — and o' my conscience I still believe I am — but I wait to be accused before I justify. (vii.380)⁶¹

⁶⁰ *The Life of Samuel Johnson, LL. D.*, 2 vols. (London, 1791), i.369.

⁶¹ 27 August 1764.

This is only the second paragraph of a letter that had begun with a farewell ('Well! once more adieu!'). Sterne set out to question sentimental letter-writing, and thereby to intrigue and provoke Tuting's reply; he shapes the occasion for writing. He hints at the sublimation of individual expression that can occur when conventions are strictly adhered to, with the personification of 'gallantry' merely 'tracing out' the directions handed down by epistolary precedent. Sterne is in correspondence with himself here, switching tenses to indicate the simultaneity of writing and appraising that has gone into this letter.

As *Tristram Shandy* experiments with the dialogic convention, the presence of the interlocutors from Tristram's reading audience is not straightforward. In fact, it owes something to the epistolary novel. In Richardson's *Grandison*, Harriet's uncle Selby's character is delineated not in his own words, but through Harriet's anticipation of his responses, and her ripostes. Another epistolary novelist employed this humorous effect: Smollett obscures one side of the correspondences in *Humphry Clinker*, so that the reader can see the effect of letters received on Mr. Bramble, Tabitha et al., which increases the dramatic irony created by their inability to see how they are perceived.

What such a stylistic link suggests is a commitment to 'written conversation', or at least the simulation of it. However, in his article on Tristram's 'phantom audience', William C. Dowling makes a distinction between readers and listeners:

readers – "the gentle reader", "the Christian reader" etc. – are those who exist beyond that point in the crowd where faces blur and grow indistinct [...] Listeners, on the other hand, are those sitting in the front row, wholly if dimly visible in the reflection of the footlights.

The meaning of Tristram's equation of writing and conversation lies precisely in the division of audience into listeners and readers. For it is with the members of the audience who sit in the front row that Tristram conducts his imaginary conversation [...] who seem to him so visibly present that they not only seem to be in the room [...] but to respond or even to interject

comments as he tells his story [...] Yet these responses and interjections, like Sir and Madam themselves, are wholly imagined.⁶²

Dowling equates the theatre and the novel's addresses to readers too absolutely. Rather than an over-arching theatrical scheme, it is the moving feast of images and characters that represent Tristram's readers that is important for the overall effect. More importantly, the division between reading and listening is a false one, given the eighteenth-century predilection for reading texts aloud – almost indiscriminately – whether they were letters, plays or novels.

Sterne's letters suggest that he was in the habit of asking his friends to hear parts of the novel read aloud. He wished that his correspondent, Jane Fenton, or, the 'Witty Widow, Mrs. F—' could be present so that she could offer her 'opinion':

Now I wish to God, I was at y^r Elbow – I have just finished one Vol^{me} of Shandy & I want to read it to some one who I know [...] [can] taste & relish humour [...] I could wish only to have y^r Opinion – shall I, in truth give You mine? (vii.165)⁶³

Another letter, written during the composition of the novel (September 1761), suggests that reading segments aloud was habitual in the Sterne household. Sterne must have led household prayers, and read sermons aloud, too. The author shows the processes of writing, copying and reading to be complementary, and everyday:

I shall write as long as I live, 'tis, in fact, my hobby-horse: and so much I am delighted with my uncle Toby's imaginary character, that I am become an enthusiast. – My Lydia helps to copy for me – and my wife knits and listens as I read her chapters. (vii.205)⁶⁴

From these accounts, we can see the serialisation of the novel as it fits into Sterne's diurnal rhythms. It must be admitted, though, that Sterne's idyllic family picture in the

⁶² "'Tristram Shandy's' Phantom Audience', *NOVEL: A Forum on Fiction*, 13:3 (Spring, 1980), 284-295, p. 287.

⁶³ 3 August 1760.

⁶⁴ To Lady –, 21 September 1761.

The author's habit of writing every day, and the novel's serialisation, links it to the accumulated trifles of the dedicatory epistle. In the version of Sterne's reply to anonymous 'Council' that appeared in the *Gentleman's Magazine*, the author proclaims that trifling is a key part of *Tristram Shandy's* tone: 'I am persuaded that the happiness of the Cervantic humour arises from this very thing, — of describing silly and trifling events, with the circumstantial pomp of great ones' (vii.92).⁶⁷

Coleridge may have had this passage in mind when he commented on Sterne's 'bringing forward into distinct consciousness those minutiae of thought and feeling which appear trifles [...] [that] have an importance for the moment / and yet almost every man feels in one way or another'.⁶⁸ Committing trifles to paper in the form of letters was, itself, a common experience amongst the readership of *Tristram Shandy*.

The Shandy family's middle-class lifestyle is tied to activities that involve literacy to some degree or other. Uncle Toby and Trim regulate their 'approaches and attacks, by the accounts my uncle *Toby* received from the daily papers, — they went on, during the whole siege, step by step with the allies' (ii.536). This re-enactment is a literal form of the practice of reading aloud for dramatic effect. Tristram's father instils in his son a love of learning in all spheres of life, even to the point of reading aloud to the tailor, as he sews his son's breeches. It seems as if he wants the 'lecture upon the *latus clavus*' (ii.533) to be sewn into the waistband. Tristram's close readings of Yorick's manuscripts show the urge to bring the history of the Shandy family and its satellites into a coherent written form, though the genre to which the resulting work would belong is not clear. It also shows the conviction that 'character' can somehow be gauged from a person's writings, especially when

⁶⁷ No date.

⁶⁸ 'Lectures 1808-1819 on Literature' ed. R. A. Foakes, in *The Collected Works of Samuel Taylor Coleridge*, Number 5 (1987), gen. ed. Kathleen Coburn (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1971-2002), ii.175.

they are in his/her own hand.

Yorick's commendation of his funeral sermon for Le Fever by writing 'Bravo!' on the manuscript is excused by Tristram because of the way it is written on the page: 'it is two inches, at least, and a half's from and below the concluding line of the sermon, at the very extremity of the page, and in that right hand corner of it, which, you know, is generally covered with your thumb' (ii.516). This obsessiveness about the spatial layout of manuscripts, and the physical habits that go with reading them, was something that letter-manuals also concerned themselves with. As we saw in chapter 1, was not uncommon for manuals to advise writers not to leave a great deal of space between their signature and the concluding remark, as someone could add to the letter, and write against the sender's name.⁶⁹ Swift's letters to Pope, as well as many epistolary novels before *Pamela*, had to deal with the possibility of interception. This paranoia is the result of the elision of writing and self, which in letters and in Sterne's novel are very closely associated. Apart from his fiction and letters, Sterne mythologised his life as a man of letters by sketching an anecdote of his early literacy so as to emphasise its predictive power. In his 'memoirs', he recalls that

[The school-master] had the cieling [sic] of the school-room new white-washed—the ladder remained there—I one unlucky day mounted it, and wrote [...] in large capital letters, LAU. STERNE, for which the usher severely whipped me. My master was very much hurt at this, and said, before me, that never should that name be effaced, for I was a boy of genius, and he was sure I should come to preferment.⁷⁰

As Sterne speaks as Tristram in his letters, so Tristram ventriloquises his family members in the novel, and knits together layers of direct and generalised speech, quotation, and thought. This creates a written texture that resembles the group epistles sent between families during the period, in which sections were dictated and

⁶⁹ *The New Art of Letter-Writing* (London, 1762), p. 18.

⁷⁰ *Sterne's Memoirs*, ed. Kenneth Monkman (Coxwold: Laurence Sterne Trust, 1985), pp. 17-18.

then augmented at the point of sending, and read aloud at the point of reception.

At the novel's opening, before Tristram has established the practice of addressing different members of his readership on appropriate occasions (Dear Sir, Madam &c.) he seems to translate his father's speech into the first person, making the text seem double-tongued: 'pray, what was your father saying?' The italics in the same section, we assume, denote speech, but might also indicate what a potential reader might say: '*Did ever woman, in the history of the world*' (i.2). The subsequent phrase of his father's 'speech' is not in italics; it belongs perhaps to a time when the story is being recalled; it has a double tense. Within this single passage, there is direct and indirect speech, and speech that could be dialogue belonging to the story being told, or to the narrator (or indeed the reader) commenting upon the story. This is typical of the mixed mode of the rest of the novel.

Self-quotation, or re-quotation is a very necessary narrative device in *Tristram Shandy*. Chapters and episodes will often begin with a snippet of speech, which leads on to an explanatory digression. Sterne recovers the situation when he revives the conversation by repeating the quotation, sometimes with a nod towards the artificiality of the technique: '—"Because," quoth my great grandmother, repeating the words again, — "you have little or no nose, Sir" —' (i.259). Recapitulation of one's own, and the recipient's, words, is a key part of maintaining epistolary dialogue, as we have seen in earlier chapters.

Despite the delicacy with which Sterne lays down levels of quotation, in Ian Ross's edition of *Tristram Shandy*, 'running quotation marks in the left margin have been omitted and normal modern practice concerning quotations has been followed.'⁷¹ Yet Sterne's indentation adds to the meaning of text by openly declaring

⁷¹ Oxford World's Classics (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1983), xxv.

that the words they should be attributed to a distinct speaker.

Yorick's apostrophe to sensibility in *A Sentimental Journey* contains an unattributed quotation, which Yorick dismisses as the 'mere pomp of words'. Without the quotation marks, however, it is far less clear that this is supposed to be a statement not issued from Yorick to begin with. *Tristram Shandy* is full of quotations of the kind rejected by Yorick in his apostrophe to sensibility, which are both italicised and enclosed in quotation marks. As we have seen in chapter 2, italics could be used to signify that the highlighted words were not the speaker's own.⁷²

Sterne is also adept at withholding quotation from the reader. Sometimes he censors the characters' dialogue, so that they can fill in the gaps themselves. Often this is to accentuate, rather than diminish, the potentially rude parts of the story. He entreats his readers 'to guard against the temptations and suggestions of the devil, and suffer him by no art or wile to put any other ideas into their minds, than what I put into my definition' (i.258). This is, of course, inviting his readers' imaginations to run wild, building into the text his expectation that the reader will wish to disobey him.

For the most part, asterisks fill the omissions that conceal the wounds to Tristram and Toby's groins. As Tom Keymer has shown, hiatuses in Sterne's fiction recall Swift's asterisks and dashes; this was the 'open door' policy that allowed him to circumvent criticism. But Sterne's 'dramatization of narrative aporia through creative deformations of print conventions' also owes much to novels of the 1750s, Keymer avers. The 'style of asterisking mid-sentence conversational lacunae', for example, 'is closer to *Ephraim Tristram Bates* [an unsuccessful ur-*Tristram Shandy*] than to *A Tale of a Tub*'.⁷³

Sentimental texts such as MacKenzie's *The Man of Feeling* (1771) used

⁷² In *Ma(r)king the Text: The Presentation of Meaning on the Literary Page* ed. Joe Bray et al. (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2000), pp. 105-119 (p. 105).

⁷³ Sterne, *the Moderns, and the Novel*, p. 74.

hiatuses to indicate material damage to the fictional document from which the narrative was supposed to derive. In Sterne, Uncle Toby's ability to tell his story coherently repairs psychologically the trauma caused by the physical damage he has suffered. An omission of another kind occurs when the letter that brings the news of Bobby's death, arrives at Shandy Hall. The letter is not quoted at all; it is represented by long dashes, which may be a phoneticised version of Toby's 'humming': 'he leaned forwards upon the table with both elbows, as my uncle *Toby* hummed over the letter' (281). The long dash is used to represent a letter being read again during Tristram's travels in France. The King's 'prolegomenon' is read over 'a little too rapidly' and as such is withheld from the reader. The effect is similar to that wrought by the absence of direct speech from the 'Sir' and 'Madam' reader-characters, and the silent interlocutors who form a hypothetical half of the fictional correspondences in *Grandison*. That is, the obscuring of the exact words makes the focus rest upon the letter's effect.

In the case of Bobby's death, the letter is the catalyst for the differing reactions of the inhabitants of Shandy Hall. Tristram's father expresses his grief in fractured truisms and by quoting '*Servius Sulpicius's* consolatory letter to *Tully*' (i.423): "Remember, said I to myself again – remember thou art a man" (i.422). Obadiah, restricted by his limited level of literacy, underlines the point that written and oral communication were in dialogue at the time of the novel, and are plaited together in the Shandy household: 'I heard the letter read with my own ears' (i.430). Toby responds by praying: "May the Lord God of heaven and earth protect him and restore him," said my uncle Toby, praying silently for my father, and with tears in his eyes' (i.423). This is just one example of the non-vocal phrases that are described as speech throughout the novel.

Another prolific strain of this mode of transcribed communication is the interpretation of body language as a verbal utterance. Tristram speaks to an ass at Lyons. He is drawn to the ‘patient endurance of sufferings, wrote so unaffectedly in his looks and carriage’ of asses in general, because it affords him the opportunity to impute sentiment to the animal, through imagined speech:

never is my imagination so busy as in framing his responses from the etchings of his countenance – and where those carry me not deep enough – in flying from my own heart into his, and seeing what is natural for an ass to think – as well as a man, upon the occasion [...]. (ii.630)

The conversation with the ass both confirms and denies Locke’s assertions about the ‘abuses’ of language, and the need to create a universal link between words and things. It is not just language that holds back communication, it is characters’ obliviousness to one another, and their desire to finish their own opinionated monologues, without interruption. The ‘apostrophe’ to the dead ass in *A Sentimental Journey* reiterates the theme, with death completing the animal’s inability to communicate, not just in human terms, but also in any terms (53). Tristram’s father shows little regard for the responses of others once he has started speaking on a well-loved topic; Toby listens out for the key words that speak to his hobby-horse. Every monologue is interrupted, because there is no such thing as a soul that communes only with itself. Even self-enclosed texts, such as Toby’s ‘apologetical oration’ are broken in upon by the comments of those reading to themselves (ii.554).

Every text contains fragments of other texts, and every text assumes an audience, even if the audience is another version of the author. Thus, Sterne’s novels demonstrate the uses and limitations of literacy in defining, conveying and expressing the self. The multiple states of Sterne’s letters, and his frequent recourse to fictional personae within them, create a correspondence between different aspects

of the author's self. In his letters, Sterne became a 'shadow' to himself by re-cycling opinions, anticipating (or foreshadowing) criticism, and finding himself pale in comparison with the vivacity of the Shandys. But even when he wrote letters to express something about the limits of communication and the textual self, Sterne appreciated the letter as a vehicle to expose character, to say, sometimes with phatic redundancy, 'I can justify myself unto myself' (viii.618).⁷⁴

⁷⁴ To Sir W., 19 September 1767.

CHAPTER 5

THE LETTERS OF BURNS

While they have often been neglected by modern criticism, the merit of Robert Burns' epistles was recognised even before their publication, by another famous poet and letter-writer, Lord Byron. On reading Burns' 'unpublished, and never-to-be published, Letters', Byron was struck by their mixture of obscenity and spirituality:

What an antithetical mind! – tenderness, roughness – delicacy, coarseness – sentiment, sensuality – soaring and grovelling, dirt and deity – all mixed up in that compound of inspired clay!²

Burns' 'antithetical mind', Byron observed, was in its lowest register in the letters, which were 'full of oaths and obscene songs'. But the letters were also evidence that to be 'all mixed up' – to trifle with the relative significance of big and small things – is to be inspired. Byron's comment further relates to the nature of letters. They cannot help mixing 'dirt and deity', because of the range of daily features of life they describe. This chapter will assess the relationship between Burns' letters and his poetry, and demonstrate that the lexical contrasts that enlivened Burns' poetry are also present in his letters. This chapter argues that the 'antithetical mind' Byron identified was a result of Burns' positioning of his epistles in relation to the traditions of letter-writing that had prevailed earlier in the century. Just as Burns' dexterity with Scottish and English poetic traditions is apparent in his verse, his letters engage with a repertoire of well-worn conventions, but do so with thoughtful indirectness.

² Dec 1813, *Byron's Letters and Journals*, ed. Leslie A. Marchand, 13 vols. (London: John Murray, 1973-94), iii.239.

Burns wrote to William Dunbar, writer to the Signet, in language that seems to be the source of Byron's earthy epithet for Burns, the 'compound of inspired clay'. The image highlights Burns' humanity, and his near-universal appeal.³ This did not prevent him from attempting to differentiate himself from the 'common Clod' when addressing himself to Dunbar:

We are not shapen out of the common, heavy, methodical Clod, the elemental Stuff of the plodding, selfish Race, the Sons of Arithmetick and Prudence; our feelings & hearts are not benumbed & poisoned by the cursed influence of riches, which, whatever blessing they may be in other respects, are no friends to the nobler qualities of the heart; in the name of random Sensibility then, let never the moon change on our silence any more. – I have had a tract of bad health most part of this winter, else you had heard from me long ere now. – Thank Heaven, I am now got so much better as to be able to partake a little in the enjoyments of life. (ii.3-4)⁴

Instead of his poetic Muse, the force that inspires Burns' correspondence is 'random Sensibility'; that is, thought and feeling snatched from his daily toil. Even though he tries, perhaps with a sense of self-mockery, to escape the dirt and roughness of the land he works on, Burns' epistolary Muse is firmly entrenched in it. The 'tract' of bad health the poet refers to shows his thought processes being informed by the language of farming logistics. In this case, the 'antithetical mind' Byron saw is present in Burns' letters because of the productive friction between the language of 'nobler qualities' and that of the Excise. More generally, Burns uses his letters to reconcile the 'rubs & plagues of absence, distance, misfortunes, ill health, &c.' (ii.5) with his literary ambitions.

³ Byron's assessment has had some impact on modern perceptions of Burns, as Ian McIntyre's biography bears the title *Dirt and Deity: A Life of Robert Burns* (London: Harper Collins, 1995). Brean Hammond has explored Burns' influence on Byron in some detail. See 'Byron' in *The Edinburgh Companion to Scottish Romanticism*, ed. Murray Pittock (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2011), 150-65; 'The "Ethical Turn" in Literary Criticism: Burns and Byron', in *Burns and Other Poets*, ed. David Sergeant and Fiona Stafford (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2013), 168-181.

⁴ 14 January – 2 February 1790.

Though the letter to Dunbar aspires to place Burns in the same social category as that of his recipient, Burns' letters have long been seen as unworthy of his poetic work. As early as 1809, Francis Jeffrey criticised the letters in his review of Robert Cromek's *Reliques of Robert Burns* (1808).⁵ He disparaged Burns' efforts for their lack of spontaneity by suggesting they were primarily composed as 'exercises, and for display' (256). Drawing on Burns' reputation as a humble Scottish bard, Jeffrey complained of the artifice in tone, and the lack of natural expression, which he felt did not correspond with the poems' mixture of Scots and English: 'few of them [are] written with simplicity or plainness; and though natural enough as to the sentiment, they are generally very strained and elaborate in the expression' (256).

Jeffrey cited the lack of 'facts [and] feelings peculiarly connected with the author or his correspondent' as a fault in Burns. Yet he also expected that letters should speak to the 'darling chord' of later readers' hearts, and found the 'general declamation, moral reflections, and vague discussions' wanting in that respect. Behind this judgement lies the assumption that Burns' letters should be as neatly crafted and apparently extempore as his poetry, though his poetry was subject to constant re-drafting, often in the wake of being sent in letters to his friends.

Jeffrey ignored the fact that letter-writing was a self-conscious exercise for even the most proficient in the form, and that 'complaints of having nothing to say, and of the necessity and difficulty of letter writing' (another fault Jeffrey decries in Burns), were common throat-clearing strategies in letters of the period. References to the act of writing were common in real letters, as Susan Whyman has observed, and in epistolary fiction. In Burns' letters to his social superiors, and those to whom he was indebted, the poet drew attention to the conventions of humility, in order to

⁵ *Edinburgh Review*, 13 (January 1809), 249-276.

claim greater authenticity and sincerity of feeling than writers of the 'common Clod'.

This was, in turn, a common strategy for letter-writers. To John Ballantine, Burns attempted to aver his sincerity by suggesting that epistolary gratitude had only recently become a point of difficulty:

Expressions of gratitude are now so prostituted by the Unmeaning & the Insincere, that a man, *in earnest*, does not know how to meddle with them, without contamination; but when I forget what I owe to M^r Ballantine's goodness, may every Good Man forget me, & every Scoundrel tuck me under the arm & call me Brother!!! (ii.106)⁶

Letters such as these indicated an authorial awareness of the conventions, expectations, and critical theory that governed letter-writing, and which had developed not only in letters themselves but also in public commentary, letter-manuals, and fiction.

The concern Burns expressed when writing to Ballantine about the 'contamination' of feeling by convention was a way for him to build a persona as a correspondent of sensibility. Burns felt unequal to Ballantine as a 'Man of Business', and 'determined to appear before [him] in another character', that of the Ballad-writer. Burns was aware of the range of 'languages' available to him, and their corresponding 'characters', though explicitly distancing his style from that of any one 'character' was a strategy that allowed Burns to write in his own interest to contrasting recipients. After writing to Ballantine in these terms about '[e]xpressions of gratitude', early in the following year Burns wrote to Mr. Corbet, the supervisor general of the Excise, professing a very similar opinion about the 'language of supplication':

I have in my time taken up the pen on several ticklish subjects, but none that

⁶ September 1791.

ever cost me half so much as the language of supplication. – To lay open one's wants & woes to the mercy of another's benevolence, is a business so prostituted by the worthless & unfeeling, that a man of Principle & Delicacy shrinks from it as from Contamination. (ii.132)⁷

Again, Burns separates himself from the species of 'worthless & unfeeling' correspondent who makes use of stock phrases when called upon to express thanks or to beg a favour. Yet many of his poems have diminutive subjects, to whom Burns attributes gestures of supplication. The poet anthropomorphises the mountain daisy, addressing it as if he were refusing its supplicating prayer by ploughing it up even as 'Thou lifts thy unassuming head / In humble guise'.⁸ Though he was wary of clichéd epistolary supplication, his poems allow him to comment upon this tendency by vocalising unusual, small subjects.

The repetition of the themes of prostitution and contamination in relation to epistolary language shows that, while he may have drawn on the diction of 'random Sensibility' in his letters, Burns' epistles were crafted to suit the occasion. He used commonplace stock of snippets of opinion that could be polished and re-used. Burns' first editor, James Currie, recognised that 'writing nearly at the same time, and under the same feelings, to different individuals' meant that it was natural to 'fall into the same train of sentiment, and forms of expression'.⁹

Though the pragmatics of correspondence were known by some of Burns' contemporaries, Jeffrey ignores the social pressures that the poet faced as a letter-writer, and looks down on the recycling of opinion in them as 'general declamation' (256). Jeffrey's dismissiveness may also be triggered by the sheer disparity in language between Burns' Scottish dialect verse and his letters, which were

⁷ [Feb?] 1792.

⁸ 'To a Mountain-Daisy', *Poems, Chiefly in the Scottish Dialect*, by Robert Burns (Kilmarnock, 1786), p. 171.

⁹ *The Works of Robert Burns, with an Account of his Life*, 4 vols. (Liverpool, 1800), ii.v.

sometimes characterized by the polite indirectness of Latinate vocabulary. If their Scottish language authenticated the poems, then the letters might really appear ‘prostituted’ to the ‘language of supplication’. Jeffrey expects plainness in Burns, forgetting that the poems’ sophistication comes from the juxtaposition of the Scottish dialect, the ‘polished’ language of the polite, and the bedrock of religious vocabulary from the *Book of Common Prayer*. For example, in ‘A Poet’s Welcome to his Love-Begotten Daughter’, Burns draws on, and distances himself from, the vocabulary of priests and the ‘kirk’, in the line ‘Tho’ now they ca’ me fornicator’ (l. 7). This is made to seem inhumane, when set next to the father’s baby-talk addresses to ‘my bonie, sweet, wee dochter’ (l. 14). Through the use of contrasting language, Burns is able to question authority, while conveying the warmth of the ‘fireside circle’. Though Jeffrey decries Burns’ letters by comparison with his poems, the ‘A Poet’s Welcome’ was a ‘daughter’ of the post, like so many of Burns’ poems. It wasn’t printed in Burns’ lifetime, but he sent it through the post in 1787 as ‘A Poet’s Welcome to his bastart wean’ (i.127).¹⁰

Burns had conscious control over his language choices, in both poetry and prose. He was willing to code-switch according to the preferences of his collaborator, George Thomson, to whom he wrote:

My song is but just begun; [...] & I should like, before I proceed, to know your opinion of it. – I have sprinkled it with the Scottish dialect, but it may be easily turned into correct English. (ii.245)¹¹

Burns employs such contrasts in his letters, too. He switches between the modes of speech and writing associated with different groups of people, turning to Scottish dialect words only occasionally, usually with close male correspondents. After a theft

¹⁰ To ‘Mr Will...’, 2 July 1787.

¹¹ [early September 1793]

of papers from his room, Burns wrote to George Ried using Scots as a shorthand to indicate to Ried his genuine hurry: 'The fewer words I can tell my story in so much the better as I am in an unco tirryfyke of a hurry' (i.106).¹² To suggest an inverse correlation between 'polish' in Burns' letters and dialect words would be misleading, however. Though some of the 'vernacular' letters show evidence of spontaneity, Karina Williamson suggests that Burns' 'epistolary style is at its most studied when appearing least composed'.¹³

By contrast, when Burns wrote to Alexander Cunningham in September 1792 after having neglected the correspondence, he used the diction of Scottish folklore to immerse his correspondent in his 'present', in which he had 'snatched an hour near "witching time of night"':

O, thou Spirit! whatever thou art, or wherever thou makst thyself visible! Be thou a Bogle by the eerie side of an auld thorn, in the dreary glen through which the herd-callan maun bicker in his gloamin route frae the fauld! (ii.145)¹⁴

The elaborate scene-setting in this letter indicates that Burns is writing with solicitude and as much leisure as is possible in the midst of his 'hurry of business'. The Bogle, Brownie and Kelpie are figures from a story-telling tradition that Burns invokes to foster a mood of familiarity and humour between himself and Cunningham. Burns indirectly asks forgiveness for his neglect of his correspondent by provoking sympathy for the hardships he faces 'on the merciless wheels of the Excise'. Burns, like the 'herd-callan', 'maun bicker in his gloamin route' back from the Excise. He too is subject to the 'perils & miseries of Man on the foundering horse', witnessed by the

¹² 19 April 1787.

¹³ 'The Emergence of Privacy: Letters, Journals and Domestic Writing', in *The Edinburgh History of Scottish Literature*, ed. Ian Brown and Susan Manning, 3 vols. (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2007), ii.57-70, p. 60.

¹⁴ 10 September 1792.

Kelpie. Burns deploys the diction of Scots in haste and leisure; he uses it with both the delicacy and coarseness that Byron observed.

This linguistic precision and variety did not just range between Scots and English. Burns delineated quite a few modes of expression, often quoting other poets or using phrases like 'to speak in your cant, "in the hour of Cause." – ' (i.41).¹⁵ Like Byron, he is fond of labelling formulaic phrases as either 'cant' or the 'language of' refusal, apology, and consolation; that is, the clichés of letters written with a single (often unpalatable) purpose. For example, he praised his 'dear E' (probably Alison Begby) for the manner of her letter, which was 'in the politest language of refusal' (i.13); but this is also a criticism of her adeptness in writing such 'peremptory' abnegations.¹⁶ Burns sought to comfort John Tennant by suggesting that his rival in love had limited understanding of the woman in question, and a concurrent dearth of style: 'tho' he talks of her being "a grand cracker" to speak in Mr Paterson's own style, yet he seems to have little idea of her engaging frank, honest-hearted manner' (i.23).¹⁷ What Jeffrey saw as a lack of 'simplicity and plainness' may well have been Burns' conscious use of different 'languages' and 'characters', or what Byron called his 'antithetical mind'.

The language of humility

Burns' letters and poems set domestic comforts and miseries alongside feelings and events that are both local and national, specific and generally applicable. He puts conventionally overlooked subjects at the centre of his poetry, such as the mountain daisy, mouse, hare and toothache. In describing them and his reaction to them, he is able to extrapolate from such occasions to consider universal, even metaphysical

¹⁵ To John Richmond, 9 July 1786.

¹⁶ [June 1781?]

¹⁷ 13 September 1784.

concerns. Like Aesop's fables, these poems take a small specific event and use it to find a moral or morals. But sometimes the moral of Burns' poems is to question the need for, or appropriateness of, a moral. His poems – like his letters – investigate the conventions upon which they are based. Manipulating the usual order and scale of things is a favourite technique in Burns. His letters are similarly alive to the possibilities of inverting and exaggerating epistolary conventions, in order to question the relative value of trifles and momentous events.

Burns questions the value of letters as a genre, by exploring the meaning behind the common dismissal of the trifle in letters. Trifles could be pieces of writing, confection or conversation. The *OED* notes that as well as being a kind of dessert, the trifle has long been a modest name given to a 'literary work, piece of music, etc., light or trivial in style'. Burns expands upon the culinary theme in a letter to Captain Grose: 'I am not, God knows, vain of my Composition, & you like intellectual food more substantial, than the whipt syllabub of epistolary Compliment' (ii.62).¹⁸ The syllabub was close to the trifle in being a sweet delicacy that was figuratively taken for empty talk. In a letter to the Provost Robert Maxwell, in which he lists the various 'Subjects' that he could take as the theme of his epistle, Burns describes the 'baudy' as the 'Sugar-plum' of the lot (i.462)¹⁹; if something written is sweet, it is an illicit or brief pleasure. Trifling had long been a legitimate outlet for joy and humour, and as such it elicited Shaftesbury's praise as a mode of expression: 'the best of our modern Conversations are apt to run chiefly upon Trifles [...] there is reason for more Allowance in the way of Humour and Gaiety'.²⁰

Johnson's *Dictionary* has the trifle as 'a thing of no moment'. The trifle, though, is also of the moment; it is light and belonging to the day-to-day machinations

¹⁸ 1 December 1790.

¹⁹ 20 December 1789.

²⁰ Anthony Ashley-Cooper, *Characteristicks*, 3 vols. (1711), i.77.

of life. Johnson meant ‘moment’ in the sense of momentous, but his choice of words touches upon the time-specific nature of trifling things. Richardson, along with many letter-writers, thought (or at least said that he thought), that a letter should be ‘to the *Moment*’, whether the moment be momentous or not.

Johnson’s *Rambler* 152 identifies letters as the form of writing that is closest to trifles and trifling, ‘as much of life must be passed in affairs which become considerable only by their frequent occurrence, and much of the pleasure which our condition allows must be produced by giving elegance to trifles’.²¹ The essay uses the subject of letters to reflect upon life. When Johnson said of Swift, that he thought ‘trifles a necessary part of life’, he might also have been speaking for himself. According to the *Rambler*, life is composed of a series of trifles, that is, small occasions of ambiguous significance: ‘Trifles will always require exuberance of ornament [...] words ought surely to be labored when they are intended to stand for things’ (47). This phrase implies that trifles somehow ‘stand for things’ in a way that other writing does not.

Johnson shows how the trifle can signify something darker. It can be the product of polite tension, or artificial humility, and it is therefore ‘necessary to learn how to become little without becoming mean, to maintain the necessary intercourses of civility, and fill up the vacuities of action by agreeable appearances’ (44). Trifles are a way of coming to terms with the momentously mundane; they sweeten the disagreeable, where to be agreeable gains sympathy and applause.

There is a striking similarity in the treatment of happy vacuity in letters in *Rambler* 152, and a passage of Adam Smith’s *The Theory of Moral Sentiments* (1759):

²¹ *Works*, v.42-7, p. 44.

Mankind, however, more readily sympathize with those smaller joys which flow from less important causes. It is decent to be humble amidst great prosperity; but we can scarce express too much satisfaction in all the little occurrences of common life [...] in all those frivolous nothings which fill up the void of human life. Nothing is more graceful than the habitual cheerfulness, which is always founded upon a peculiar relish for all the little pleasures which common occurrences afford. We readily sympathize with it: it inspires us with the same joy, and makes every trifle turn up to us in the same agreeable aspect in which it presents itself to the person endowed with this happy disposition.²²

A trifle may be the name given to things of varying importance at a particular point in time, especially when the thing in question is a piece of writing. As the *OED* observes, to call a literary work or piece of music a trifle is to say it is 'light or trivial in style; a slight or facetious composition; a bagatelle.' This meaning is, though, '[o]ften used in meiosis'. This is the case in letters, where the motives of politeness and self-protection order the contents to such an extent that, paradoxically, the trifle becomes a marker of importance. Trifle shifted from meaning something of very small consequence, to include the meaning 'in a small degree [...] somewhat, rather', at the beginning of the eighteenth century. The manner in which little pleasures appear, in Smith's account, recalls Burns' suppliant mountain daisy: the ephemeral trifles in Smith 'turn up to us', as the daisy, 'turned down' by the plough, had lifted its 'unassuming head'.

Swift was fond of using the term 'bagatelle' to refer to his behaviour and writing style. When Curll published his letters in 1741, the French term '*la bagatelle*' was footnoted as 'Trifling', suggesting that its use as a verb was not as well known as the use of trifle as a verb, or a word indicating a habitual state of playfulness. Swift's

²² ed. Haakonssen, p. 51.

French expression adds to his flippancy.²³ The bagatelle was a recurring theme in his correspondence with Lord Bolingbroke.

Johnson commented on the importance of trifles in Swift's writing in his *Lives of the Poets*:

His favourite maxim was *vive la bagatelle*; he thought trifles a necessary part of life, and perhaps found them necessary to himself. It seems impossible to him to be idle, and his disorders made it difficult or dangerous to be long seriously studious, or laboriously diligent. The love of ease is always gaining upon age, and he had one temptation to petty amusements peculiar to himself; whatever he did, he was sure to hear applauded[.]²⁴

Swift and Sheridan exchanged many verse epistles, which fall under the category of 'trifles'. Their chief purpose was to be a fun diversion.

For Burns, the 'trifle' had a particular association with "my Jean". The changing value that he set upon Jean Armour, from estrangement, to marriage and financial commitment to her and their children, matches the different values placed upon trifles. Burns offers different motives according to the closeness of the correspondent; to John Richmond he wrote 'to you I will confess it, from a foolish, hankering fondness – very ill-plac'd indeed' (i.41).²⁵ Here he claims to be waiting on Jean only to inquire after her health, before admitting to John Richmond that it is his emotions that guide him. Upon his marriage, Burns wrote many letters repeating the story of how he and Armour became reconciled, once the poet had returned from Edinburgh. There are many variants on the theme, but Burns always repeats his unwillingness to 'trifle' with the 'deposit' of his wife's 'happiness or misery' (i.318).²⁶

Letters could be exercises in playing out a particular opinion or turn of phrase, and also because they run the risk of being unwanted trifles which must be paid for

²³ *Dean Swift's Literary Correspondence* (London, 1741), p. 84.

²⁴ Lonsdale, iii.206-7.

²⁵ 9 July 1786.

²⁶ To Margaret Chalmers, 16 September 1788.

by the recipient; even more reason to make one's trifling sweet. In his *Lectures on Rhetoric and Belles Lettres*, delivered from 1759, Blair had associated trifling in letters with the 'gaiety and vivacity of the French genius', and though he praised Voiture's 'extremely sparkling' compositions and his ability to 'trifle in the most entertaining manner', he was keen to stress that 'he is too open and professed a wit, to be thoroughly agreeable as a Letter Writer'.²⁷ To be so trifling as to be disagreeable, then, was a grave offence. Perhaps the pressure of getting the balance between wit and sobriety right is part of the reason that authors have recourse to labelling their own work 'trifling'. Being 'agreeable' was the standard of good communication in speech and writing for Smith. He linked propriety of speech with morality in his *Lectures on Rhetoric*, which he delivered in 1762-3, and which Hugh Blair attended.

As a form of self-defence, and an implied anticipation of the reader's response, the trifle moniker invites praise while professing humility. To call one's own letter, or larger works, a trifle, became a conventional apology. David Hume reverted to this defence when he wrote to Smith in March 1757, having amended his *Four Dissertations* (1757) to avoid a dispute over blasphemy in the texts with Warburton:

I have got down a few Copies of my Dissertations lately publish'd at London; and shall send you one by the first Glasgow Waggon. I beg of you to do me the Favor of accepting this Trifle. You have read the Dissertations in Manuscript; but you will find that on the natural History of Religion somewhat amended in point of Prudence. I do not apprehend, that it will much increase the Clamour against me.²⁸

²⁷ *Lectures on Rhetoric and Belles Lettres* 2 vols. (London, 1783), ii.303.

²⁸ *The Letters of David Hume*, ed. J. Y. T. Greig, 2 vols. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1932), i.245.

Hume partly uses 'this Trifle' as a metonym for the dissertations as they are sent in a package on the 'Glasgow Waggon'. Because small amenities, curiosities and luxuries were so often sent through the post, as well as articles of business, it was common to talk of anything enclosed with a letter as a trifle. Hume is also using the diminutive cover of the trifle to show his indifference to Warburton's attack. Through deliberate understatement of his work's significance, Hume minimizes the potential consequences of a bad reception.

Burns' letters are particularly prone to litotes, or undervaluing his efforts in meiosis. This is because his reputation as the 'ploughman poet' was a strong selling point, and in this character it befitted him to appear humble. This was added to the modesty that was already expected in epistles. Burns cultivated this humble image to a certain extent, though he used it to stand, like the trifle, for the momentous, disguised as the work of an 'idle' moment. When presenting new work to his patrons and friends, Burns played down the poems' worth in his estimation, and asked for feedback or alterations. Even the Preface to the *Kilmarnock Poems* (1786) described the works as 'trifles', even though a good portion of them deals with serious topics like death and 'Ruin' (iii). In April 1786, he wrote to John Ballantine for his opinion of a 'parcel of pieces', which he claimed he sent 'merely to amuse you, as it is too trifling and prolix to publish' (i.31).²⁹ This is a paradoxical estimation, perhaps deliberately so: the light 'trifling' and the heaviness suggested by 'prolix' seem an odd combination, until the appellation of 'trifle' is considered a blatant bluff. Burns' bagatelles are both 'light' and intensely important cultural statements. The ploughman poet is both humble and a bold affirmation of the artistry originating in rural, domestic Scotland.

²⁹ [April? 1786]

There is a particular link between trifling words and music, as the *OED* points to ‘bagatelle’ as an alternative term for a trifle, which closely aligns ‘light verse’ and songs. The affinity between trifling and music-making identified by the *OED* is affirmed by the way that Burns treats his poetry within his letters. His poetry was entwined with music, especially during his collaboration with Johnson on the *Scots Musical Museum*. In his letters, Burns often transcribed a poem and gave the tune to which it is to be sung; alternatively he referred to the work as a ‘bagatelle’, which is both a light song, and a ‘trifle, a thing of no value or importance’.

Burns’ reputation as a poet who celebrated the beauty of humble, rural subjects resulted in the Reverend Archdeacon Alison sending Burns a copy of his *Essays on the Nature and Principles of Taste* (1790). Alison asked that the poet ‘ponder over the performance, with the look-out of a Critic’. Alison’s request for feedback on the *Essays* highlights the similarity between the trifling litotes of letters, and the apologetic titles of other genres, such as essays and humble proposals. Although Alison’s views on beauty and the sublime seem to have matched Burns’, the task of evaluating ‘a Book which does honor to Science & the intellectual powers of man’ scuppered Burns’ fluency of reaction. It is striking that having considered the *Essays*, Burns is compelled to say that at first Alison’s propositions seemed ‘paradoxical’, even though these paradoxes seem in agreement with Burns’ aesthetic aims:

That the martial clangor of a trumpet had something in it vastly more grand, heroic & sublime, than the twingle-twangle of a jews-harp; that the delicate flexure of a rose-twigg, when the half-blown flower is heavy with the tears of the dawn, was infinitely more beautiful & elegant than the upright stub of a burdock; & that from something innate, & independent of all association of ideas; these I had set down as irrefragable, orthodox truths, until perusing your book shook my faith. (ii.71)³⁰

³⁰ 14 February 1791.

Elsewhere in his letters, Burns is decidedly anti-establishment. He is interested in the revolutionary politics of France; he questions the privilege of the rich and the noble, and above all he questions the orthodoxy of the church. In his poems he focuses on objects and traditions that were otherwise neglected. Perhaps rather than being genuinely averse at first to 'paradoxical' ideas in Alison's work, Burns simply felt the epistolary obligation to flatter the author by exaggerating its novelty, which had, after all, been presented to him as a gift.

In recapitulating Alison's thesis, Burns also gives himself the opportunity to express the ideas in his own evocative terms. The example of the 'upright stub of a burdock' is reminiscent of 'To a Mountain Daisie', the 'Wee, modest, crimson-tipped flow'r' of which Burns had written around five years before Alison's essays were published. Even when faced with a work that validated his focus on the small and humble, Burns evidently still felt the need to play down his achievement when writing to a person with whom he wasn't on familiar terms. At the same time, he reinforces the authenticity of his poetic experience as the Scottish bard by telling Alison of his previous reading in relation to his agricultural work. He read Euclid's 'elements of Geometry [...] in the winter-evenings of the first season I held the plough' (ii.71). Within this context, the significance that Burns attributes to Alison's book – 'it shook my faith – is an even greater compliment, because he places the *Essays* on a par with Euclid in the sample of his previous reading that he presents to his correspondent.

Sampling the registers associated with his different roles – poet, Scot, ploughman, excise-man, friend – gave Burns the flexibility to address contrasting correspondents in a way that he imagined appealed to them. For example, Burns'

trifling allowed him to appear patriotic without seeming to take himself too seriously. In collecting the folk poetry and music of the localities around him, he showed that he regarded indigenous Scottish culture to be deserving of print. He also thought that Scottish 'manners' differed from those of the English. Shortly following the publication of his first volume of poems, Frances Dunlop and the Earl of Buchan encouraged Burns to write poetry that promoted Scottish identity. A feature of Burns' early relationships with his patrons, while he was still uncertain of his place in the literary world, was applying the language of sentimentality to the landscape of Ayrshire. To the Earl he wrote 'Your Lordship touches the darling chord of my heart when you advise me to fire my Muse at Scottish story and Scottish scenes' (i.91).³¹ Burns' phrase, 'the darling chord of my heart', draws on sentimental understandings of physiognomy, in which vibrations are the language, and the nerves and heart the organs of reception. The 'chord' is a communicative link, and a musical harmony. Burns draws on the sentimental mode as a way to frame his contribution to Scottish literature in language with which the Earl would have been familiar. As we saw in chapter 3, speaking of harmony (as Burns does here, with 'chord') promotes harmony, and this is a technique that Burns uses here to appear to have already aligned his aims with the Earl's suggestion.

To Dunlop, Burns went further, and claimed a title for himself in the 'appellation of, a Scotch Bard' (i.101).³² Burns' contribution to the *Scots Musical Museum* was in part his own work, and not the unaltered collections of oral culture that he claimed.³³ Where he deemed it necessary, Burns would expand or truncate a song, and up to 188 of the songs he contributed were entirely his own work. Because these poems

³¹ 7 February 1787.

³² 22 March 1787.

³³ Burns' legitimate, yet not entirely ingenuous, contribution to the *Scots Musical Museum* resembles that made by James Macpherson in his *Fragments of Ancient Poetry, Collected in the Highlands of Scotland* (Edinburgh, 1760).

were sent in batches to Johnson through the post, and to Burns' critical (and local) circle, they constitute a significant part of his letters. His role in inventing, as well as recording, Scottish songs for Johnson's *Musical Museum* shows that on some level he considered himself to be the 'Scotch bard' capable of speaking for Scottish oral culture in the world of letters and print.

The unofficial title of 'bard' that sprang up in Burns' correspondence with Dunlop was a name he used to comedic effect. As we have seen in chapter one, the bashful or funny substitution of 'your humble servant' for 'I' or 'me' was common in the eighteenth century. The third person was used in deferential addresses, such as 'Your Lordship'. Burns takes these tropes and makes his own mock-title, 'your Bardship', which is both self-effacing and aggrandizing. Burns uses a similar technique in his poems, by adopting a pose of mock-humility. In 'To a Louse,' the speaker remonstrates with the 'crowlin ferlie' (l. 1) for violating the expectations of social hierarchy. The speaker objects to the louse appearing on 'Sae fine a lady' (l. 10), but says he would have been less surprised to see it on a beggar. The vehemence of the speaker's apparently class-based assumption about the louse shifts the tone to one of false modesty. The 'fine lady' is the object of the moral, not the louse, because she cannot see herself as others see her, and consequently puts on 'airs'. The poem parallels the assertion Smith makes in the *Theory of Moral Sentiments*, that a person growing up in a solitary place is unable to 'think of his own character' until exposed to the 'countenance and behaviour' of others (129). Burns' poems' piquant social observations were inspired by Pope's posturing in his letters as a lonely spectator, but also by the visits he made to church, which forced together people of varying social status. Pope's influence can be felt in the term that Burns

uses for the richer church-goer he observed, a 'bloated son of Wealth & Dullness'.³⁴

The message of 'To a Louse' is one that Burns found applicable to his own life, as he was made acutely aware of his background, and the financial limitations it placed on him, despite his literary achievement. Spectating on social inequality was one way that Burns dealt with feelings of frustration, and as a consequence his work bears a strong resemblance to Smith's theory of spectatorship and its association with the faculty of social empathy. Because of his outsider status in Edinburgh and London, and because he revered traditional forms of Scottish poetry, iterations of the tropes of gratitude, servitude and authenticity are particularly vexed and complicated in Burns' letters.

His pretensions to greater things, and his snobbery about the reach and readership of his poems, were in conflict with his expectation of future obscurity, and the fear of poverty. He wrote to William Niven of the misgivings he had about being widely known: 'remember this, never blow my Songs amo[ng] the Million, as I would abhor to hear every Prentice mouthing my poor performances in the streets' (i.49).³⁵ By giving access to his 'poor performances' to Niven and the 'Maybole friends', Burns intends to show 'a respect as sincere as the [faith] of dying SAINTS.' The value of the poetry itself cannot be stated straightforwardly; Burns' choice of simile is so grandiose and macabre that it calls into question the 'sincere' intention behind it. By providing only indirect self-evaluations, Burns evades outright egotism, and instead trifles with the performance of modesty.

Burns' attitudes towards earlier eighteenth-century epistolary tropes – such as trifling meiosis – changed over time. Before he was able to say 'I am not [...] vain of my [epistolary] Composition' (ii.62), he grappled with being unable to write a good

³⁴ To Deborah Duff Davies, 6 April 1793, ii.203.

³⁵ 1 September 1786.

letter in the time he had to spare for the task.³⁶ He hoped that John Kennedy would accept his hasty letter 'in the beaten way of Friendship, with the ordinary phrase, perhaps, rather more than ordinary sincerity, of [...] Rob^t Burns' (i.54).³⁷ Burns struggled to accept the 'ordinary phrase' of his letters. This was often his excuse, when he had delayed a reply longer than was polite.

To Ballantine, Burns excused himself by saying that because of the 'debt' he owed to his correspondent, he preferred not to use 'the next Merchant's phrase, dressed up a little' (i.55).³⁸ Implying that pragmatism will always trump style in letters of trade was not a new way to differentiate oneself as a potentially accomplished writer. Both Sterne and Burns said they disapproved of hastiness attributable to an overreaching business-like approach to letter-writing. Elsewhere, Burns' grovelling to Ballantine seems to have come out of a genuine belief that 'better health and more spirits may enable me to make [...] something better than this stupid, matter-of-fact epistle' (i.71).³⁹

Despite his varied approach to language, Burns' epistles are partially recycled. He frequently re-used his 'favourite quotations', and borrowed from previous letters so much that certain phrases became self-quotation, or Burns' recognition of his own 'cant'. J. De Lancey Ferguson, the first editor of the Clarendon edition of Burns' letters (1931), took it upon himself to defend them against the charge of being impersonal and formulaic. Instead of taking into account the influence of convention (and therefore formulae) on eighteenth-century letters, Ferguson focused on letters that had come to light since the last critical edition to prove that 'really personal passages' (xliii) were present in the extant documents. Repetitiousness is another

³⁶ To Captain Grose, 1 December 1790.

³⁷ 26 September 1786.

³⁸ 27 September 1786.

³⁹ 13 December 1786.

convention – like the premeditated appeal to spontaneity – that is commonly employed, but often denied.

But repetitions and conventions should not be seen as a failing. They offer insight into the different ways that the author related to various correspondents; but, even more strongly, they point to the development of his ideas through recapitulation of the same events. As we have seen in chapter four, Sterne conflates the formulaic properties of ‘female epistolisers’ and ‘Letters of Business’. However, like Burns, Sterne used these generalisations at times when he felt he should apologise for his own writing, or indeed as a recycled observation. Self-deprecating statements from authors themselves risk modern readers’ misinterpretation, as without an understanding of the literary context particular to the epistolary style at the time, we might take seriously Burns’ complaints about his ‘matter-of-fact’ letters, when we would be less likely to do so in the case of his poetry.

The language of the heart

Burns was influenced by rhetoric of the earlier eighteenth century on the value of spontaneity in letters. He corresponded with Blair, author of the *Lectures on Belles Lettres*, where the cynicism and sentiment towards letters of the previous decades found a prominent articulation. Pope’s mixture of satire, sentiment and spontaneity in his epistolary work (in both prose and verse) also has echoes in Burns.

Responding successfully to the traditions and expectations of the epistolary form required a degree of explicit self-commentary, and a surface renunciation of established forms. For example, Burns often makes an apology by excusing himself from apologising: ‘I am so struck, on a review, with the impertinent length of this

letter, that I shall not increase it with one single word of an apology' (i.37).⁴⁰ Another technique along these lines is anti-flattery, which Burns uses to enhance his reputation among potential patrons as '[t]he obscure Bard', 'little acquainted with Politeness'. By stating 'what task the world would assign me in this letter', Burns pays his respects to Mrs Stewart, but avoids the embarrassment that actually performing the task – 'heap[ing] the altar with incense and flattery' – would bring to both himself and his correspondent (i.53). Robert Crawford describes the contradictions in Burns' language of humility, exemplified by a letter to John Whitefoord. The letter 'mix[es] flattery with asserted independence' and 'was typical of Burns's courting of patrons [...] Denying knowledge of etiquette, he writes in formal, high-register English, protesting his "letter is not the manoeuvre of the needy [...]". Yet that is pretty much what it was.'⁴¹

Burns was not the only writer of the period to talk self-consciously about epistolary norms in this way, nor the only writer to invert politeness strategies in order to fulfil them. As an author seeking to maintain the support of a network of patrons, Ann Yearsley framed her expressions of gratitude in a similar way to Burns. As Kerri Andrews notes, letters were vital for writers looking to maintain networks of patrons, in an era when it was wise to cultivate a group of supporters.⁴² Yearsley, like Burns, emphasised her rural credentials, and claimed to be unable to perform the epistolary social graces with ease, in order to convince her recipient of her honesty. After Ralph Griffiths presented her with some books, Yearsley offered him a verbal 'gift' by way of a well-turned thank-you note:

I beg you will accept my warm acknowledgements. I cannot enrich them with

⁴⁰ [John Arnot, April 1786]

⁴¹ *The Bard: Robert Burns, A Biography* (London: Jonathan Cape, 2009), p. 240.

⁴² *The Collected Works of Ann Yearsley*, ed. Kerri Andrews, i.xxxiv.

the flowers of rhetoric but I can assure you they are breathed from a heart unaffectedly sincere (272).

Burns, too, claimed to be ‘embarrassed how to express the feelings of my heart, particularly Gratitude’ when he wrote to James Sibbald, but fleshed out his point by quoting *Othello*, ‘Rude am I in speech’ (i.77-8).⁴³

Yearsley was smeared by her sometime patron, Hannah More, by way of an altered letter, which she partially copied and sent to Elizabeth Montagu. Andrews’ discovery of Yearsley’s original letter shows that More ‘ensures that she is seen to be following correct letter-writing protocol, whereas her “savage” and uncivilised protégée is demonstrably ignorant of all such forms’.⁴⁴ In particular, More cut Yearsley’s deferential subscription. This strategy shows the social significance of epistolary forms, and how difficult managing a patron could be, especially for a labouring-class writer. No wonder, then, that Yearsley resorted to defensive modesty when talking of her work. As More had presented her to the public as an ‘unlettered Poet’, so Yearsley referred to her work as the reflection of the class status that had come to define her: ‘my manuscripts rude as myself and unfinished’.⁴⁵

The spontaneity and ‘rudeness’ of Burns’ letters were compromised by the thought that his poetic fame, coupled with his amorous adventures, would make trouble for his posthumous legacy. He complained to Agnes M’Lehose of the constriction of expression produced by her threats:

How can you expect a Correspondent should write you, when you declare that you mean to preserve his letters with a view, sooner or later, to expose them on the pillory of derision & rack of criticism? This is gagging me compleatly as to speaking the sentiments of my bosom; else, Madam, I could perhaps too truly

⁴³ [January 1787]

⁴⁴ Kerri Andrews, ‘Patronal Care and Maternal Feeling: New Correspondence between Ann Yearsley and Hannah More’, *Romanticism*, 16:1 (2010), 43-59, pp. 56-7.

⁴⁵ AY to Joseph Cottle, [December] 1797, *Collected Works*, i.275.

“Join grief with grief & echo sighs to thine!” – (ii.99).⁴⁶

Here Burns quotes Pope’s *Eloisa to Abelard* (1717), which is appropriate given the unfulfilled longing of Eloisa; the poem is less about love than about the frustrated ideal of love, imposed upon by imprisonment and distance. It may be that Burns was thinking of Swift’s *A Journal to Stella* (1766), or the publications purporting to be between Sterne and ‘Eliza’ that appeared in the 1770s.⁴⁷ Burns’ correspondence with M’Lehose has in fact received individual editorial and critical attention.⁴⁸

Thomas Stewart’s *Letters Addressed to Clarinda* (1802) set the precedent for separate publication for this correspondence; Roy has since published it separately.⁴⁹

The letters that introduced Burns to the genre were, according to him, part of a ‘collection of letters written by the Wits of Queen Anne’s reign’ (i.xlv). Crawford has identified the publication as the fifth edition of Newbery’s *Letters on the Most Common, as well as Important Occasions* (1760).⁵⁰ Crawford points out that Newbery’s volume taught that proficiency in letter-writing came through ‘imitating very frequently’ the ‘most celebrated and distinguished for this species of writing’ (i). But Newbery’s *Letters* were filled with the epistles of poets. This goes to show that even though ‘species’ of writing were differentiated in critical theory of the time (in Richardson’s prefaces to his works, and in Blair’s *Lectures*), in working practice, there was a degree of overlap. Burns’ intermingling of his poems and letters was in

⁴⁶ [July 1791?]

⁴⁷ *Letters from Yorick to Eliza*, ed. [?William Johnston] (London, 1773); [?William Combe], *Letters from Eliza to Yorick* (London, 1775).

⁴⁸ Pauline Gray, ‘Prudes, Pirates and Bills of Suspension: the Correspondence of Burns and “Clarinda”’, *Burns Chronicle* (Autumn 2007), 9-13.

⁴⁹ *Letters Addressed to Clarinda, &c.* (Columbia: University of Southern California Press, c. 2009). This tradition, along with the logical advantages that come with reading letters as part of a specific correspondence, support the inclusion, in the forthcoming edition of Burns’ letters, of some of the poet’s received letters. Pamela Clemit has also taken this approach in her edition, *The Letters of William Godwin* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011 —), the final volume of which will be incoming letters.

⁵⁰ *The Bard*, p. 66.

line with Newbery's focus on the friendships of Swift and Pope, then. Crawford also points out that the 'attractive examples of warm, witty male friendship' (74) in Newbery's *Letters* gave Burns a model with which to 'develop writing and friendship together'. He therefore 'would try to assemble groups of male friends for witty and philosophical engagement' (75). The *Letters* brought epistolary texts into Burns' corpus of quotable, re-usable texts, and taught him that practice would produce 'polish':

Years afterwards, Burns would quote from Newbery's book in his own correspondence. A favourite was the letter from Lord Bolingbroke to Swift where, having praised friendship, Bolingbroke signs off, "Adieu, dear *Swift*, with all thy faults I love thee intirely; make an effort, and love me on with all mine." Burns quoted that from memory to male and female correspondents. (74)

That Burns did not distinguish between male and female addressees in quoting this passage shows that the forgiveness of faults (including ones of epistolary style) was fundamental to his notion of friendship. According to Crawford, of the letters in Newbery's book, Pope's in particular appealed to Burns, because in them he linked 'poetry to idleness', and set himself apart from 'all the world's biz' (74).

Apart from providing Burns with a model of the writer as detached, idle, observer, another (contrasting) parallel between the two writers suggests itself in the controversy surrounding the labour that went into their letters. Even in a culture that advocated the imitation and quotation of model letters, Pope's letters were infamous for their doctored spontaneity, as a multiplicity of editions was prepared for the press (both authorised and unauthorised by Pope) from 1726 onwards.⁵¹ Ferguson thought that Pope's edition of his letters⁵² could have been the volume of 'Wits' to which Burns refers:

⁵¹ Sherburn, i.xvii.

⁵² *Letters of Mr. Alexander Pope, and Several of his Friends* (London, 1737).

from his twice quoting one of Bolingbroke's letters to Swift it seems reasonable to infer that the book at least included selections from that version of these men's correspondence with Pope which the latter surreptitiously prepared for the press — and may, indeed, have been the very volume itself. (i.xlv)

As we saw in chapter 2, the common practice of editing one's letters for publication was decried in Pope's case, and this fed into his reputation as 'Trickster *Pope*'.⁵³ Claiming in a letter to be writing to the moment, while carefully considering the result, was a technique with which Burns was familiar. Among his papers is a draft of a letter to Margaret Chalmers which does just this: 'I have no formed design in all this; but just in the nakedness of my heart write you down a meer matter-of-fact story' (i.82).⁵⁴ Ferguson reveals another epistolary model for Burns: Elizabeth Rowe. Her 'letters moral and entertaining' were included in Burns' schoolbook, Arthur Masson's *A Collection of English Prose and Verse*.⁵⁵ Rowe's 'point' and 'antithesis' were employed to 'dazzle Clarinda' (xlv).

In 1781, Burns wrote to another sweetheart (possibly Alison Begby) of the 'pure' feelings, which 'account for the uncommon style of all my letters to you.' He sought to distinguish himself from other letter-writers, and thereby to be exempted from the usual rules of correspondence. His 'uncommon' style, he explained, was more 'serious' than the average lover's, 'which to tell you the truth, has made me often afraid lest you should take me for some zealous bigot, who conversed with his mistress as he would converse with his minister' (i.8). Burns shows his correspondent that he is aware of the different styles of address appropriate for religious and amorous settings, but in another letter to her he pleads ignorance of

⁵³ *Mr. Pope's Literary Correspondence. Volume the Second*, ed. E. Curll (London, 1735), xiii.

⁵⁴ [January? 1787]

⁵⁵ Ferguson does not say which edition Burns owned.

convention as a way of claiming sincerity: 'I hope my D[eares]t you will not despise me because I am ignorant of the flattering arts of courtship' (i.8).

Burns avows that the 'language of the heart is [...] the only courtship I shall ever use to you' (i.11), but this phrase smacks of the 'cant' of sentimentalism, especially as Burns was cynical about the distinction given to any 'language of' jargon. The 'language of the heart' that Burns chooses to exemplify his meaning is (as he did ten years later in 1791, to M'Lehose) a quotation from *Eloisa to Abelard*. The imaginary freedom in love voiced by Pope's *Eloisa* reflects Burns' wish (rather than his expectation), that he and his 'dear E.' will reach the 'happy state' of a free flowing correspondence, 'when souls each other draw, / When love is liberty, and nature law.'⁵⁶ *Eloisa to Abelard* was a poem to which Burns returned when he craved the ideal of love and friendship that Pope represented in Newbery's *Letters*. In 1788, as he looked upon a social landscape changed by his poetic success, Burns quoted the poem that exalted the 'idea' of the beloved correspondent, which could be relied upon to remain constant. Hoping to keep his sentimental friendship with M'Lehose in good repair, he quotes Pope:

Thy friendship, which hitherto I have too much neglected, to secure it shall, all the future days and nights of my life, be my steady [*sic*] care!— The idea of my Clarinda follows—

"Hide it my heart, within that close disguise,
"Where mix'd with God's her lov'd idea lies"—

But I fear that inconstancy, the consequent imperfection of human weakness.— Shall I meet with a friendship that defies years of Absence and the chances and changes of Fortune?⁵⁷

⁵⁶ Pope, *Eloisa to Abelard*, 2nd edn. (London, 1720), p. 10, ll. 91-2.

⁵⁷ 20 January 1788, ii.212-3.

The anthology of quotations to which Burns returned provided the literary and social model that Newbery advocated that he repeat, and attempt to imitate, through all his 'changes of Fortune' and through the succession of his lovers. The fact that the same poem appears in letters to different romantic interests (and that Burns applied it also to his 'Conjugal love' in November 1794⁵⁸) goes to show the enduring influence on Burns of Newbery's *Letters* and the letter-writing style that it stood for. Burns repeatedly imitated 'distinguished' authors in order to polish his writing and his relationships, but he also feared that he lacked the social constancy and security represented by the idealised versions of the English 'wits' in the *Letters*.

By quoting Pope, Burns was engaging with a debate about the sincerity and spontaneity of letters that had been provoked by Pope's publication of his doctored epistles in 1737. *Eloisa to Abelard* is a poignant text to quote, as the expressions of love and grief within it would have been framed – for later readers – by the moral panic associated with Pope's disingenuous letters. By quoting a verse epistle about disappointed love, penned by an infamous letter-writer, Burns expressed ambivalence towards the art of letter-writing. However, Burns did not totally reject sentimental 'correspondence'. Rather, his 'antithetical mind' embraced the ideal, while recognising its unattainability, given the competition from what Byron identified as sentiment's antithesis in Burns' letters: sensuality. Drawing on the language of sentimental literature to a hyperbolic extent, Burns compared his circulatory system with the written word, notably when 'old Mr Armour' saw fit to 'mutilate [the] unlucky paper' which had been the unofficial marriage document between Burns and Jean

⁵⁸ To George Thomson, i.323.

Armour: 'the names were all cut out of the paper, my heart died within me, and cut my very veins with the news' (i.30).⁵⁹

Later writers, including Keats, shared Burns' ambivalence towards sentimentalism. Like Burns, Keats explicitly rejected the tropes of sentimental letter-writing, but retained some of its preoccupation with the letter as an extension, or symbol, of the writer's physical state. He was harsh about the 'perplexed strain of mingled finesse and sentiment' in which Rousseau and his 'Ladies' communicated, and thanked god that Fanny Brawne could 'love me without being Letter-written and sentimentaliz'd into it.'⁶⁰ While he was suspicious of sentimental language being used as romantic coercion, when Keats wrote to his friend Benjamin Bailey, he drew upon the same language to acknowledge the importance of their friendship:

Thus far had I written when I received your last, which made me at the sight of the direction caper for despair—but for one thing I am glad that I have been neglectful—and that is, therefrom I have received a proof of your utmost kindness which at this present I feel very much—and I wish I had a heart always open to such sensations—but there is no altering a Man's nature and mine must be radically wrong for it will lie dormant a whole Month.⁶¹

Keats trifles with the overblown language of 'mingled finesse and sentiment' by describing his receipt of Bailey's letter in exaggerated – and antithetical ('caper for despair') – terms. He says he is resigned to having a heart that is not always 'open', but what this passage actually expresses is genuine gratitude through the veil of mock self-depreciation.

Burns was fascinating, though sometimes disappointing, for Keats, and it is a mark of how far his trifling brand of sentimentalism permeated into later writing that the resemblance between the two poets' prose writings was remarked upon as early

⁵⁹ 15 April 1786.

⁶⁰ 27 February 1820, Keats to Fanny Brawne, *Letters*, ii.267.

⁶¹ 28-30 October 1817, Keats to Benjamin Bailey, *Letters*, i.173.

as 1836. George Keats lent James Freeman Clarke, a Boston and Louisville divine, Keats' journal letter of 25-27 June 1818 (*Letters*, i.298, n. 1). Clarke printed it, along with some commentary, which is reminiscent of Byron's comments on the 'antithetical mind' of Burns:

There is in them [...] an earnest struggling after truth, which remind[s] us of the prose of Burns. They are only letters, not regular treatises, yet they touch upon the deepest veins of thought, and ascend the highest heaven of contemplation.⁶²

Even in talking about the correspondence of authors touched by sentimental tropes, the 'deepest veins' of its style – which combine the corporeal and the epistolary – are often tapped.

In his attempt to seduce Margaret Chalmers, Burns links the circulatory system of the blood with the postal network: 'I will not subscribe myself, your humble serv^t, for that is a phrase I think at least fifty miles off from the heart' (i.82).⁶³ The cardiac image recalls the false etymology of 'correspondence', in which the first syllable was supposedly derived from 'coeur'. As we have seen in chapter three, this notion sprang from Richardson's *Clarissa*, where Anna Howe chides Clarissa for writing heart-to-heart to Lovelace: 'must not a person be capable of premeditated Art, who can sit down to write, and not write from the heart?'⁶⁴ Dwelling on the heart and veins became a trope of sentimental literature, and though he did not, after a brief reading of *Pamela*, identify Richardson as an influence of key importance, Burns was openly indebted to Sterne and McKenzie.⁶⁵

The burlesque and bathetic elements of Sterne's sentimentalism were perhaps

⁶² 'Winander Lake and Mountains, and Ambleside Fall', *Western Messenger, Devoted to Religion and Literature*, 1:11 (June 1836), 772-777, p. 773.

⁶³ [January? 1787]

⁶⁴ *Clarissa*, 4th edn., 7 vols. (London, 1751), v.39.

⁶⁵ 'My reading was only encreased by two stray volumes of Pamela, and one of Ferdinand Count Fathom, which gave me some idea of Novels'. To John Moore, 2 August 1787, i.143.

more important to Burns than the gushing effusion usually associated with that literary style. In April 1786, after his 'sort of Wedlock' with Armour had been broken, Burns wrote a letter to John Arnot, in which he lightened the subject by adopting a Shandean persona and narrative style. The progressive and digressive plot of Sterne's *Tristram Shandy* is bound up with the Shandy family's life and opinions, which lie 'out of the common way' (*TS*, i.264). In Burns' letter to Arnot, the author pleads his case for a similarly divergent mode of storytelling, 'as my actions, & my motives for action, are peculiarly like myself, & that is peculiarly like nobody else, I shall just beg a leisure-moment & a spare-tear of you, untill I tell my story my own way' (i.34). Imitating Sterne's very idiosyncratic style, copying Tristram's declarations of individuality, Burns adds the sentimental style to his collection of epistolary cants.

Later in the letter Burns uses Uncle Toby's military euphemisms to describe his attempted conquest of Armour: 'I was vigourously [*sic*] pressing on the siege; had carried the counterscarp [...] nay, having mastered the covered way' (i.35). Burns takes the bawdiness of the 'covered way', without the bashful innocence of Uncle Toby, and even announces that he is to 'change the metaphor'. His self-conscious absorption of Sterne is not the letter's most bathetic point, however. Burns describes the ritual public humiliation he received for his extra-marital relationship with Jean Armour. He goes on to lash out at 'Religion, a feebly-struggling beaver', and aligns himself with the self-pity of Milton's Satan, engrossed by 'the womb of uncreated night' (i.36). The 'soaring, grovelling' admixture in this letter reaches mock-epic proportions with the mention of Milton.

Burns uses the eccentricity of Sterne's characters to emphasise his dedication to the poetic Muse. He claimed, when he wrote to George Thomson in thanks for the 'packet' of songs he had received, that 'Ballad-making is now as compleatly my

hobby-horse, as ever Fortification was Uncle Toby's' (ii.204).⁶⁶ The hyphenation of both 'ballad-making' and 'hobby-horse' suggests equivalence between the two pairs. This underlines syntactically Burns' comparison between his work and Sterne's. Comparative techniques such as this show how form and content in epistolary prose can be made to reflect one another with the same attentiveness to detail that one might expect in poetry, through rhyme and assonance.

Despite Burns' obvious debt to *Tristram Shandy*, and his appreciation of *A Sentimental Journey*, he chose to distance himself from 'the pauses of Sterne' in averring the truth of his gratitude to Frances Dunlop:

There is an affectation of gratitude which I dislike. – The periods of Johnson and the pauses of Sterne may hide a selfish heart. – For my part, Madam, I trust I have too much pride for servility, and too little prudence for selfishness. (i.104-5)⁶⁷

This paragraph recalls, with knowing irony, the balanced parallels of Johnson's 'periods', and is punctuated by dashes, which are Sterne's typographical signature. Burns is showing off his reading; the disparagement of Sterne and Johnson is not genuine. Sterne was not known for his affectations of gratitude, and one of Johnson's most famous letters was his rebuke of his sometime patron, Lord Chesterfield. Burns criticises Johnson's 'periods' for potentially concealing 'a selfish heart', but this opinion echoes Johnson's judgement of letters in the *Life of Pope*, that 'a friendly Letter is a calm and deliberate performance [...] and surely no man sits down to depreciate by design his own character'.⁶⁸ By displaying his knowledge of writers such as Sterne and Johnson through imitation, Burns flags up his cognisance of epistolary tradition. These imitations, coupled with surface-level disdain for the

⁶⁶ 7 April 1793.

⁶⁷ 15 April 1787.

⁶⁸ Lonsdale, iv.58.

style being imitated, confirm the epistolary as a mode that Burns found conducive to reconciling and elucidating the ‘antithetical’ parts of his mind.

To George Thomson, Burns admitted the influence of Sterne’s ‘sentimental friendship’ with Eliza on his own epistolary communication with women. He offers this information as a way of explaining his preference for ‘Craigie-burn wood’, a song inspired by Jean Lorimer, which he hopes Thomson will add to the printed ‘Selection’:

The Lady on whom it was made, is one of the finest women in Scotland; & in fact (*entre nous*) is in a manner to me what Sterne’s Eliza was to him – a Mistress, or Friend, or what you will, in the guileless simplicity of Platonic love. – (Now don’t put any of your squinting construction on this, or have any clishmaclavier about it among our acquaintances) – I assure you that to my lovely Friend you are indebted for many of your best songs of mine. (ii.315)⁶⁹

This extract shows that Burns’ ingratitude towards his eighteenth-century predecessors in the letter to Frances Dunlop, like his Scottish dialect, can be switched on and off at will. What a contrast, too, between his claims to ‘Platonic love’ with the woman in question, and his infamous remarks about Jean Armour on their reconciliation. Burns draws on the trope of ‘sentimental friendship’ as one of his approaches (another being the specificity of the song’s provenance) in the face of Thomson’s indifference to ‘Craigie-burn wood’, perhaps hoping that talk of ‘sentiment’ will move Thomson to an agreeable sentiment of his own. In relation to his poetry, Burns used the word ‘sentiment’ to mean the feelings that were the driving force behind a song or ballad. Sometimes the sentiment is one he approves, whereas at other times he must harness the calculated roughness of rural life to ‘thresh a few loose sentiments’ (ii.204) out of a song in which they don’t sit well.⁷⁰

⁶⁹ 19 October 1794. See *The Poems and Songs of Robert Burns*, ed. James Kinsley, 3 vols. (Oxford: Clarendon, 1968), ii.598-99. All further references to Burns’ *Poems* will be to this edition.

⁷⁰ To George Thomson, 7 April 1793.

Burns' sentimentalism, like Sterne's, unites sympathy and comedy. For example, Burns looks at pain and sympathy in the 'Address to the Toothache' from a position of comedic distance:

When fevers burn, or agues freezes,
 Rheumatics gnaw, or colics squeezes,
 Our neebors sympathize, to ease us,
 Wi' pitying moan;
 But thou – the hell o' a' diseases,
 They mock our groan.⁷¹

Smith makes a similar point about the toothache in *The Theory of Moral Sentiments*. The toothache is used to show how our 'neighbor's sympathy' is not triggered by very painful, yet seemingly minor ailments: 'The gout or tooth-ach, though exquisitely painful, excite very little sympathy; more dangerous diseases, though accompanied with very little pain, excite the highest' (36). There is a disparity between the spectator's sympathy and the immediate pain that the object of sympathy feels. Underlying this disparity is the theory that sentiments must be supported by morality, which in this case means that sympathy must be expressed in proportion to the seriousness of the ailment. However, as Burns' 'Address to the Toothache' points out, the spectator's reaction to the pain of toothache is mockery, which has the opposite effect to sympathy. Burns throws into question the decorum that governs the 'moral' distribution of sympathy, and highlights a limitation of interpersonal understanding.

In his letters, Burns extends this theme, by asking to what extent people can really know each other and feel for one another, or even themselves. He often confides in his correspondents that he has taken pains to know himself. To the reverend William Greenfield, he writes 'in the Confessor style' of his fear of the 'full

⁷¹ *Poems*, ii.791.

glare of learned and polite observation'. Through the layers of 'seeming self-abasement, and affected modesty', Burns asks to be taken seriously when he says 'I have long studied myself, and I think I know pretty exactly what ground I occupy, both as a Man, & a Poet' (i.74).⁷²

The nature of sympathy and propriety of self-approbation are key questions in Burns. This is something that may in part have resulted from his experiences of public humiliation, and his subsequent attempts to 'study' his virtues and faults. This spectatorship of the self, and its relation to theories of virtue, makes Burns' letters recall Smith's advocacy of mental self-adjudication. Burns uses autobiographical letters to provide evidence of his self-awareness, and celebrates this as a virtue in itself. This habit resembles the rule suggested by Smith that '[n]o action can properly be called virtuous, which is not accompanied with the sentiment of self-approbation' (208). The examination of one's virtues and faults was a moral and religious imperative; letters allowed the fulfilment of this imperative to be communicated. Acts of conscience could include the maintenance of correspondence with an 'honored Friend' such as John Ballantine, to whom Burns wrote:

It gives me a secret comfort to observe in myself that I am not yet so far gone as Willie Gaw's Skate, "Past redemption;" for I have still this favorable symptom [*sic*] of grace, that when my Conscience, as in the case of this letter, tells me I am leaving something undone that I ought to do, it teases me eternally till I do it. (i.82)⁷³

Burns was desperate to distance himself from any claim that he had become intoxicated by fame to his correspondents. A month earlier in December 1786, he wrote to Reverend William Greenfield to highlight his efforts to maintain spiritual integrity:

⁷² December 1786.

⁷³ 14 January 1787.

I mention this to you, once for all, merely, in the Confessor style, to disburthen my conscience, and that – “When proud Fortune’s ebbing tide recedes” – you may bear me witness, when my buble of fame was at the highest, I stood, unintoxicated, with the inebriating cup in my hand, looking forward, with rueful resolve, to the hastening time when the stroke of envious Calumny, with all the eagerness of vengeful triumph, should dash it to the ground. (i.74)

This passage also appears in a letter to Frances Dunlop of 15 January 1787, a day later than the letter to Greenfield (i.85-6). Roy notes that Ferguson thought Currie added the passage to the Greenfield letter because ‘he was afraid to give [it] under the name of its proper addressee’ (i.86). But Roy suggests that as Burns frequently re-used paragraphs, and as there are differences in the manifestations of the same phrases between the letters to Greenfield and Dunlop, it is more likely to have been recycling on Burns’ part than misappropriation on Currie’s. In response to the same bout of press coverage that caused Burns to ask Dunlop and Greenfield to witness his modesty, a similar image appears a month later in a letter to George Lowrie of 5 February 1787, where the poet assures his friend ‘I have no great temptation to be intoxicated with the cup of Prosperity’ (i.89). The repetition shows Burns asking multiple contacts to ‘bear witness’ to his prevailing modesty. This shows the spiritual weight given to epistolary community.

Recapitulating the same events in different letters was not extraordinary, and yet the critical heritage of Burns’ letters has been characterised by disdain for the ‘impersonal’ effect in part produced by repetition. But the expectation that each letter should be a unique document for the recipient is a position that doesn’t take into account the letter’s polyphonic tendencies. As we have seen in chapter 2, opportunities were produced by, and demands put upon, the epistolary form, to accommodate singular and plural identities at the stages of writing and reading. A

writer such as Burns could address multiple recipients within a single letter, and conversely, use multiple letters to address one topic.

Denunciations of Burns' epistolary recycling as insincere do not hold true when we consider that Burns' sentimental predecessors (including Sterne) recycled, too. Smith thought that by 'bringing the case home to ourselves', it is possible to judge another person. By contrast, in the case of 'our own sentiments and conduct' (128), '[w]e endeavour to examine our own conduct as we imagine any other fair and impartial spectator would examine it' (129). Society is the 'mirror' in which we judge our conduct, and perhaps the same principle holds in estimating the writings of others. Certainly, Burns' reading of Newbery's *Letters* left a deep impression on him, in that he proclaimed his literary influences, in hopes that he might be compared favourably with them.

In a letter to the schoolmaster John Murdoch, Burns lists the literary works that have provided him with a mirror against which to judge his poetry. However, as with other manifestations of his sentimentalism – such as Burns' claim to Dunbar that he could separate himself from the 'plodding' and methodical, through 'random Sensibility' – the desire to be immersed in the crowd, but also to rise above it, provides a paradoxical twist:

My favorite authors are of the sentim^l kind [...] these are the glorious models after which I endeavour to form my conduct, and 'tis incongruous, 'tis absurd to suppose that the man whose minds glows with sentiments lighted up at their sacred flame – the man whose heart distends with benevolence to all the human race – he “who can soar above this little scene of things” – can descend to mind the paulty concerns [*sic*] about which the terrae-filial race fret, and fume, and vex themselves? O how the glorious triumph swells my heart! I forget that I am a poor, insignifant [*sic*] devil, unnoticed [*sic*] and unknown, stalking up and down fairs and markets [...] reading a page or two of mankind, and “catching the manners living as they rise,” whilst the men of business jostle me on every side, as an idle encumbrance in their way. (i.17-8)⁷⁴

⁷⁴ 15 January 1783.

The 'soaring, grovelling' mind that Byron identified in Burns' letters is manifested in the claim to mobility of imagination. Quoting Thomson's *Autumn*, 'who soar above this little scene of things' (l. 964), Burns places himself within Thomson's orbit in the house of fame. Burns' 'benevolence to all the human race' is quickly broken by the 'descent' of his mind to the world of 'fairs and markets', which he populates with a different 'race' of people, perhaps the same as the 'the plodding, selfish Race, the Sons of Arithmetick and Prudence' from whom he differentiated himself in writing to Dunbar. Disdain for 'Arithmetick' here echoes Burns' dislike for 'matter-of-fact' epistles. Burns paints himself in a crowd scene to illustrate his powers of sentimental observation, but only after he has warmed to the theme of the man of feeling in an unfeeling world. Burns selectively applies the self-spectatorship advocated by Smith to his own case, seeming to remind himself of his status as a 'poor devil', but failing to see that his supposedly universal benevolence is selective.

This selectiveness is at odds with Burns' interest elsewhere in 'this little scene of things', and particularly with his efforts to defend the merits of traditional ballads in documenting the everyday. Though he explicitly claims sentimental superiority when he is trying to impress a learned correspondent, Burns' letters are actually very pragmatic. Material concerns often dictate their shape and contents. He sat down to write a certain amount, often according to the size and quality of paper to hand. There is sometimes competition for space between prose and verse, and sometimes Burns feels he has created a debt by communicating in prose:

To make some amends, *mes cheres Mesdames*, for dragging you on to this second sheet; and to relieve a little the tiresomeness of my unstudied and uncorrectible prose, I shall transcribe you some of my late poetic bagatelles. (i.320)⁷⁵

⁷⁵ To Margaret Chalmers, 16 September 1788.

The writer refers to these physical facts of the sheets of paper in order to stress the intrusion of life on his writing, in contrast to the ideal of a letter written at 'leisure'.

Corresponding forms: verse and prose

Just as a poem may be creatively constrained by its verse form, so the letter is ruled by the 'time & paper' available to the correspondents. When circumstances allow, Burns deftly weaves together the letter's news with the story of its production. He ended a heartfelt letter to his father, written on 27 December 1781, by saying 'I have but just time & paper [to] return you my grateful thanks for the many Lessons of Virtue and Piety you have given me' (i.7). Burns' phrase may seem mundane and obvious, but it is also neat and zeugmatic. In classical rhetoric, zeugma simply means the 'yoking' of two words by a single verb. Johnson defined it as such in his *Dictionary* (1755). However, zeugma was acquiring an additional trait during the 'neo-classical' eighteenth century, that of yoking together two 'incongruous' words, by drawing on contrasting meanings of the verb.⁷⁶

Famously, Pope used zeugma to mock-epic effect in 'The Rape of the Lock' (1712), in phrases such as 'stain her Honour or her new Brocade' and 'lose her Heart, or Necklace, at a Ball'. Pope's zeugma produces a pun by highlighting the moral incongruity of weighing equally a stain on Belinda's 'new Brocade' with a stain to her 'Honour'. Burns made much use of Pope in his letters, as we have already seen. His returns to the 'living manners' of *An Essay on Man* (1734) show his interest in social satire as well as stylistic precedents in literature. It seems reasonable to suggest, then, that Burns would have caught Pope's manner of

⁷⁶ Sylvia Adamson, 'Literary Language', in *The Cambridge History of the English Language*, ed. Roger Lass, 6 vols. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992-2001), iii.539-653, p. 611.

employing zeugma, and used it in his own writing when he needed to convey incongruity.

In acknowledging the 'time & paper' that constrain his writing to his father, Burns displays some of his characteristic melancholy. He confines the grand theme of spiritual and moral education within the tail end of the letter, which he began by exclaiming 'I dare not, either review past events, or look forward into futurity'. Time and paper are equally weighted in syntactic terms, although they are not really comparable resources. The act of equating them, though, draws attention to (and begs pardon for) the brevity with which his father's 'many Lessons of Virtue and Piety' are mentioned. Similarly, 'Virtue and Piety' seem incongruously paralleled with the immediate concerns of 'time & paper'. Burns' 'grateful thanks' uses the conventional, pleonastic language of a polite reply to express gratitude for formative 'past events'. But by stating that 'time & paper' constrain his acknowledgement of so great a debt, Burns draws on Pope's use of zeugma; he 'soars and grovels' simultaneously. In his letters, then, as well as in poems such as 'To a Louse', Burns was able to use the consciousness of relative social station that came with epistolary practice to achieve a mobile literary personality.

The recollections Burns gives of his process of composition vary greatly between poetry and letters. To write a letter he had to 'sit down' to do it, which he often presents as an arduous task. Poetry, on the other hand, he creates while riding or 'jogging' from place to place. His ability to compose poetry while outside, in the midst of his agricultural duties, authenticates Burns' efforts as 'Scotch bard' and ploughman-poet. The rhythm of riding may well have aided his metrical writing. On the other hand, poetic composition was not always the work of a moment; with James

Johnson's *Scots Musical Museum*, Burns favoured a different approach: 'Be not in a hurry; let us go on correctly; and your name shall be immortal' (i.339).⁷⁷

The supernatural and the mundane, the elevated and the lowly, and the spiritual and the material are combined in Burns' poetry and letters. References to Burns' Muse serve to promote the higher purpose of his poetry, while implying some irony, in a self-knowing avowal of disinterest in money. To John Arnot, who was subscribed to the first Edinburgh edition of Burns' *Poems*, he writes 'I should be much hurt, Sir, if any one should view my poor Parnassian Pegasus in the light of a spur-galled Hack, & think that I wish to make a shilling or two by him. – I spurn the thought. –' (i.34).⁷⁸ The echo of 'spur-galled' in 'spurn the thought' is an example of Burns using aural repetition to hint at the mixed nature of his motives, and the interconnectedness of his endeavours. The Muse is his horse, which is a vehicle for original expression, and a ridiculous, Shandean Hobby-horse, as well as an image peculiar to his own rural employments (particularly prevalent in 'Tam o' Shanter').

Sermons and religious ritual influenced Burns' sense of the letter's place in daily life. His valedictions sometimes highlight the link between letters and prayers: 'Amen Amen' (i.42).⁷⁹ French valedictions become more common in the late 1780s; the simplicity of 'A Dieu je vous commende' is an easy stock phrase to which to return. Because it is not in English, it can be taken as a set phrase that requires little alteration, like part of the order of service.

In saying farewell, Burns often blesses his correspondent. While this is not in itself uncommon, he sometimes puts the blessing in verse, which has the effect of giving the blessing the familiar formality of speech acts in Christian tradition. An

⁷⁷ 15 November 1788.

⁷⁸ [April 1786]

⁷⁹ To John Richmond, 9 July 1786.

irreverent tone does not detract from this stanza's heartfelt good wishes to John

Kennedy:

Farewell D^r Friend! may Guid-luck hit you,
And 'mang her favorites admit you!
If e'er Detraction shore to smit you,
May nane believe him!
And ony deil that thinks to get you,
Good Lord deceive him! ! ! (i.46)⁸⁰

One of the most-cited sources in the letters is the metrical Psalms, which are mostly paraphrased, and therefore probably quoted from memory. Burns' rhyming farewells show how close the rhythms of social leave-taking come to poetry. And poetry is central in Burns' letters. The letter and poem are sometimes complementary forms, but more often the letter serves as a vehicle for the gift of a poem or two. After expressing his awkwardness at conveying gratitude to his patrons, Burns progressed to offering poems through the post as a way of cancelling figurative and fiscal debt.

In late July 1787, Burns affirmed the value of his prose, over and above his poetry, to the same correspondent (Dunlop), to whom he had abased the prose of Johnson and Sterne: 'Without any Poetic licence, I assure you upon the honor of plain, unfettered, truth-delivering Prose' (i.132).⁸¹ This reversal of sentiment is comic, but it is also a reminder to modern readers to take Burns' rhetorical epistolary postures with a large pinch of salt.

Part of the interplay between high and low is deliberately provoked by Burns' conception of the hierarchical structure of genres. In the 'hour of inspiration', 'plain, dull, historic Prose' is raised to 'Metaphor and Measure!' (i.63).⁸² Obviously, figurative language is not confined to Burns' poetry. Despite his criticism of the fussy

⁸⁰ 10 August 1786.

⁸¹ 30 or 31 July 1787.

⁸² 'Miss W[ilhelmina] A[lexander] of *Ballochmyle*, inclosing a song I had composed on her', 18 November 1786.

'point' and 'paragraph' of committed prose writers, Burns' letters can be metaphoric, and measured. There are frequent apostrophes, and alliteration; this may be a poet's way of collecting words, or making prose more rhythmic: 'For me, I am witless wild, and wicked' (i.45).⁸³ Burns' negative assessments of epistolary prose should also be read as part of his contradictory idiom. While he may denigrate the 'prostitution' of sincerity in formulaic letters of thanks and petition, Burns is equally scathing about the 'Nonsense' that inspires other modes of writing. He light-heartedly includes his own 'fancies & reveries' within the category of nonsensically inspired writing, when he is in search of a subject to entertain his correspondent, Alexander Cunningham. As we saw earlier, in his letter to Cunningham of 10 September 1792, Burns appeals to a supernatural force to help him with the task. Though he first speculates that the spirit is akin to the Kelpie or Bogle of Scottish folklore, later in the letter to Cunningham the spirit takes on a personification that is more akin to the King of Dulness from Pope's *The Dunciad* (1723-1749):

[C]ome, & assist a poor devil who is quite jaded in the attempt to share half an idea among half a hundred words; to fill up four quarto pages, while he has not got one single sentence of recollection, information, or remark, worth putting pen to paper for! –

I feel, I feel the presence of Supernatural assistance! Circled in the embrace of my elbow-chair, my breast labors, like the bloated Sybil on her three-footed stool, & like her too, labors with Nonsense. – Nonsense, auspicious name! – Tutor, Friend & Finger-post in the mystic mazes of Law; the cadaverous paths of Physic; & particularly in the sightless soarings of SCHOOL DIVINITY (ii.146)

Burns begins his invocation to a third party for inspiration in a state of seeming humility. However, rather than condemning his own prose writings, he moves on to group the efforts of law, physic and divinity within the scope of nonsense. This combination of what Byron identified as the 'soaring, grovelling' antithesis of Burns'

⁸³ To James Smith, [About 1 August 1786].

letters applies to the writer's assessments of his poems and prose, but also to his judgements of himself.

Autobiographical passages in Burns are often preceded by a claim that he has nothing to say of himself, or of what he's been doing. These autobiographical comments can sometimes be on the nature of his character, as changed by recent events. At the beginning of August 1786, when he feared he would have to leave for Jamaica in the wake of his disastrous first attempt to marry Jean Armour, he wrote to James Smith that he had 'scarcely any vestige of the image God left me, except a pretty large portion of honour and an enthusiastic, incoherent Benevolence' (i.45). This letter also contains a four-line stanza partly based on Addison's *Cato*, which demonstrates Burns' complementary use of prose and verse:

O Jeany, thou hast stolen away my soul!
In vain I strive against the lov'd idea:
Thy tender image sallies on my thoughts,
My firm resolves become easy prey!

The quatrain serves to tell of Burns' emotional state to his friend, though it is also directed at Armour herself. The address to 'Jeany', along with Burns' request to Smith that 'If you see Jean tell her, I will meet her, So help me Heaven in my hour of need!' demonstrates how a letter can fulfil multiple functions, and speak to different audiences. Burns' self-evaluations were tailored to the recipient(s). On 2 August 1787, to Dr. John Moore, Burns wrote 'a history of MYSELF' (i.133), in which he sought to consolidate his reputation in London as the poetic champion of the 'Scotch idiom' (i.137). Although he plays down the magnitude of this task by explaining that it is 'a whim' to 'divert my spirits', he also hopes that the 'twitching qualms of conscience' contained in the document will not appear 'trifling and impertinent' (i.134). Wavering between self-damnation and self-praise, Burns uses the letter's

conventional concern with politeness and humility to test the scale of his own importance, and that of his chosen poetic subjects:

The very goosefeather in my hand seems instinctively to know the well-worn path of my imagination, the favourite theme of my song; and is with difficulty restrained from giving you a couple of paragraphs on the amours of my Compeers, the humble inmates of the farm-house and cottage; but the grave sons of Science, Ambition or Avarice baptize these things by the name of Follies. – To the sons and daughters of labor and poverty they are matters of the most serious nature: to them, the ardent hope, the stolen interview, the tender farewell, are the greatest and most delicious part of their enjoyments. (i.140)

Burns uses personification of 'Science, Ambition [and] Avarice' to distinguish himself from the establishments against which his poems in Scottish dialect were seen to contrast. He used the same technique in his letter to Dunbar, in which he separated those of a sentimental disposition from the 'Sons of Arithmetick and Prudence', though in writing to Moore, Burns rather seems to identify himself with the 'common Clod' that he eschewed when writing to Dunbar. This shows how Burns' epistolary posturing was antithetical in part because of the different characters that he wished to project, depending upon the correspondent. The soaring and grovelling occurred in varying proportions, depending upon his purpose.

Where necessary, Burns channelled the persona of the 'humble servant' of eighteenth-century epistolary style into his own exuberant, indulgent self-reproach. The result is prose that soars and grovels to the point of hyperbole. On 23 February 1793, he wrote to William Nicol

For me, I am a beast, a reptile, & know nothing. – From the cave of my ignorance, amid the fogs of my dulness & pestilential fumes of my Political heresies, I look up to thee, as doth a toad through the iron-barred lucerne of a pestiferous dungeon to the cloudless glory of the summer sun! (ii.184)

Burns' headnote in the Glenriddell manuscript explains his choice of mock-panegyric style. Nicol was 'the worthiest, & positively the cleverest fellow I ever knew', but was also the most imprudent and unholy among Burns' acquaintance (ii.183). Although Burns' tactic isn't subtle, it is nevertheless another manifestation of his urge to mix up the social and stylistic expectations he associated with letters.

Despite the obvious proximity of Burns' verse and letters, the relationship between the two types of writing is a complicated mixture. Poetry and life can be dealt with within the same paragraph: 'I am just going to put on Sackcloth [*sic*] & ashes this day. – I am indulged so far as to appear in my own seat. – Peccavi Pater, misère [*sic*] mei – My book will be ready in a fortnight' (i.41-2).⁸⁴ In this case, poetry is part of Burns' order of business, and does not dictate the tone of the letter. Too often, Burns' correspondence has been set against his published poetry. The first editor of his letters, Dr James Currie, found it necessary to 'mutilate many of the individual letters', while leaving parts that he deemed inseparable from Burns' poetic idiom: 'corrections have never been extended to any habitual expression of the Poet, even where his phraseology may seem to violate the delicacies of good taste'.⁸⁵ Currie's account of his editorial method shows that there was a double standard when it came to 'good taste' in different genres. Burns had earned his right to be rude in verse by popularising the Scottish dialect; in letters, however, it was less acceptable to be indecorous. For Currie, the characteristics of Burns' idiom are defined by the 'habitual expression' of 'the Poet'. This privileges the poetry of Burns in a way that denigrates unnecessarily the value of his epistles.

After the success of his *Poems, Chiefly in the Scottish Dialect* (1786), and his return from Edinburgh, many of Burns' poems were shared through the postal

⁸⁴ To John Richmond, 9 July 1786.

⁸⁵ *The Works of Robert Burns; with an Account of his Life*, 4 vols. (Liverpool, 1800), ii. 'Advertisement'.

system, and were flanked by explanatory prose. The author expressed reluctance to share these poems with a wider audience, forbidding his correspondents to make copies in some instances. He claimed to Frances Dunlop in particular that she received the first written transcription from the poet's memory of his new songs. The composition and reception of these works, therefore, are bound up with the epistolary process. G. Ross Roy, the editor of the second edition Ferguson's *The Letters of Robert Burns*, recognises this, and adopts a pragmatic approach to marking the line between letters and poetry: 'I consider [rhyming epistles] as letters because there is evidence that several of them were in fact posted, probably they all were' (lxi).

In his August 1786 letter to James Smith, Burns includes a four-line stanza, the first line paraphrased from Addison's *Cato*, Act I, scene 6. Ferguson notes that the 'remainder is apparently Burns' own' (i.45). That the lines don't exist anywhere else, and that Burns combines his own words with those of Addison, means that Burns used the letter as a forum for spontaneous literary engrafting.

It was common for Burns to invent new quatrains within his letters, and he occasionally replied solely in 'extempore' verse:

The King's most humble servant, I
Can scarcely spare a minute;
But I'll be wi' you by an' by;
Or else the Deil's be in it. (i.444)⁸⁶

Ferguson posits that this was probably a reply to a rhymed invitation to dinner. In some cases, Burns hopes that the enclosing a 'bagatelle' will 'be a kind of distant Language of Friendship' (i.51).⁸⁷ In later letters, Burns deals with a lack of inspiration in conveying his news by inserting even more poetry. The context behind the poem's

⁸⁶ [To an unidentified correspondent – Robert Riddell?, 16 October 1789?]

⁸⁷ To Robert Muir, [8 September 1786].

composition fills up the prose parts of the letter, and fulfils that letter's immediate function as a news-bringer.

Burns enjoys disrupting the expectations of literary quality set by English polite society, and he enjoys being creative in both poetry and prose. When Burns wrote to Robert Cleghorn, the 'dirt and deity' contrast identified by Byron was arranged such that the polite language of prose letters was contrasted with the visceral dirt of the traditional songs with which Burns interested himself:

I make you [a] present of the following new Edition of an old Cloaciniad song, [a] species of composition which I have heard you admire, and a kind of song which I know you wanted much. – It is sung to an old tune, something like Take your auld cloak about you –

There was twa wives, and twa witty wives [...]. (ii.126-7)⁸⁸

The poem that follows is about a woman who 'f-rted by the byre-en' (l. 7) and 'cackit a' her stockins' (l. 16). Burns' typically polite epistolary language contrasts nicely with the tone of the song. By emphasising the traditional aspect and age of the poem in his prose introduction, Burns creates a surprising dichotomy between the two writing styles. By referring euphemistically to the 'species of composition' to which the song belongs, Burns satirises the diction of eighteenth-century literary criticism, where the categorisation of written genres was used to discriminate levels of literary value, often according to its relative politeness.

Epistolarity was decidedly a part of Burns' poetics. The *Kilmarnock Poems* has pieces whose titles suggest a tone guided by the address, if not one directly informed by epistolary practices. From 'The Author's Earnest Cry and Prayer' to the House of Commons (29), to the 'Address to the Deil' (55), the collection repeatedly engages in imaginary appeals to outward sources. The number of explicit

⁸⁸ To Robert Cleghorn, [1792?].

addressees, and within this group, the cluster of poetic epistles ('Epistle to a Young Friend', 'Epistle to [...] an Old Scotch Bard', 'To the Same', 'To W. S*****N, Ochil Tree', 'Epistle to J. R*****', Enclosing Some Poems') demonstrates the weight Burns gave to dialogism in his poetry. On the other hand, as Roy notes, 'Burns not infrequently divided prose from verse in his letters with a line across the page' (ix).

In his letters to George Thomson, Burns defends songs and poems that his collaborators on the *Scots Musical Museum* wanted to reject. In November 1793, he complained to Alexander Cunningham that Thomson had rejected 'O my Love's like the red, red rose' for publication, as '[i]t is the only species of Song about which our ideas disagree. – What to me, appears the simple & the wild, to him, & I suspect to you likewise, will be looked on as the ludicrous & the absurd' (ii.259). Drawing a parallel between the 'simple and wild' subject matter of the poem, the rose, and the 'species' of poem, Burns references issues of literary classification that had been prevalent since Richardson distinguished his novels as a new 'species' of writing. After Thomson rejected the song, Burns offered it to Pietro Urbani, but only because he promised to 'set it in a suitable manner', and because none of Thomson's 'airs, *suitable to it*' (ii.258) were 'unoccupied'. The parallels between the music and poetry 'suitable' for each other in Burns' phrasing, and the range of melodies to which this particular song has been set (*Poems* ii.734-5), shows that Burns' and Thomson's notions of aesthetic convention and decorum were sometimes in conflict. Burns' letters were arenas for the discussion of literary quality, and how it can be found in many forms; Burns defended what he saw as typically Scottish, perhaps overlooked, literary species. His nationalism, his revolutionary politics, and his theories of poetic quality (as critic and writer) were all related to one another in his letters. His letters mixed together the 'common Clod' and the sentimental in such a way that he could

display his authentic Scottish Bard credentials to their best advantage. Above his own interest in sculpting a literary persona, though, the letter form allowed Burns to harness the conventional humility of eighteenth-century correspondence to promote his Parnassian Pegasus as the muse of small things.

CONCLUSION

EPISTOLARY REVISION

Reviewing letters of the past, we are confronted with documents that seem to belong to a specific time, but which in fact represent a palimpsest of occasions. Pope, Richardson, Johnson, Sterne and Burns all recycled and revised at least parts of their letters as a natural part of the epistolary process (whether or not publication was imminent). Habitual revision means that letters are neither entirely spontaneous truth nor wholly premeditated dissimulation, because familiarity is an idiom subject to instabilities of time and audience. Uncovering the fresh occasions to which these authors turned their epistles, along with the approaches of recent critical editions to revision, will reveal something of the relationship between epistolary moments of then and now.

As we saw in chapter 2, Pope's claim that his letters were printed 'as they flow'd warm from the heart' received some hostile responses, and a magnanimous but sceptical one from Johnson.¹ Readers reacted to claims that published letters were the preserved composition of a single occasion in a range of ways, from contempt to the willing suspension of disbelief. In turn, such reactions developed into ruts of conventional thought. Entrenched opinions were reflected and consolidated by successive editions of letter-manuals, which were updated and expanded to include more 'modern authors', but which did not see a complete overhaul of content. For example, the title page of the 16th edition of *The Complete Letter-Writer* (1778) is a sedimentary cross-section of epistolary culture from the preceding decades.

¹ Sherburn, i.xxxviii-ix.

Additions of 'a few select LETTERS, / By the late Rev. LAURENCE STERNE' follows an epigraph from Pope's *Eloisa to Abelard*. The poem frenetically idealises correspondence as an unselfconscious exercise, 'speed[ing] the soft Intercourse from Soul to Soul'. But this is belied by the manual's provision of letter templates for the 'most common OCCASIONS in LIFE', and is further complicated by Pope's own tarnished reputation as a letter-writer. The urge to bring these publications up-to-date was offset by the iterative pattern of change, and complicated by the 'discordia concors' of seemingly contradictory opinions.

By 1783, Johnson's views on letters expressed in the *Life of Pope* had garnered enough influence that it was paraphrased in Hugh Blair's *Lectures*. In echoing Johnson, Blair signals his participation in a long-standing conversation about the disjuncture between the ideal and real epistolary style. This allusiveness demonstrates that the key terms had stagnated, even though the genre in question was supposed to typify freshness:

It is childish indeed to expect, that in Letters we are to find the whole heart of the Author unveiled. Concealment and disguise take place, more or less, in all human intercourse. But still, as Letters from one friend to another make the nearest approach to conversation, we may expect to see more of a character displayed in these than in other productions, which are studied for public view. We please ourselves with beholding the Writer in a situation which allows him to be at his ease, and to give vent occasionally to the overflowings of his heart.²

Johnson made the friendships of children the exception to his doubt about the human ability to communicate thoughts directly; this conveys wistfulness about the social innocence of children (which is compared to that of 'the *Golden age*').³ To Blair, sentimental expectations about the 'whole heart' being transcribed are not childlike,

² (Dublin, 1783), iii.88.

³ Lonsdale, iv.58.

but 'childish'. Even so, Blair replicates the dialectic of Johnson's opinion (which recognised the simultaneity of convention and sincerity), by suggesting that letters could 'give vent occasionally' to 'overflowings'. 'Occasionally' is an appropriately ambiguous modifier; it allows for the letter to be the right medium in which to 'vent', but also suggests that this potential might be fulfilled only some of the time.

Added to the pressure to write with the appearance of immediacy in order to convey honesty was the feeling that, after Pope, it was a reader's duty to examine published letters for signs of revision. Aaron Hill used Pope's conventional protestations that his expressions were sincere to undermine him personally, decrying 'that unnecessary noise he used to make in boast of his morality [...] It seemed to me almost a call to suspicion, that a man should rate the duties of plain honesty, as if they had been qualities extraordinary!'⁴ In fact, the ridicule to which Quakers were exposed because of their opposition to ceremonial etiquette in favour of 'plain honesty' undermines Hill's claim that such 'qualities' were not 'extraordinary'.⁵

Hill saw no inconsistency in maintaining his approval for Richardson's moral scheme, which was expressed using the 'disguise' of the fictional editor persona, while decrying Pope's 'unnecessary noise' and taking it as 'a call' to investigative close reading. The reader's role in maintaining expectations of sincerity is touched upon in Blair's inclusive phrase '[w]e please ourselves with beholding the Writer'. The reader's self-reflexive pleasure suggests that the fiction of an 'artless' letter is constructed for the benefit of its audience, and that difficulty or contempt arose as that readership expanded.

⁴ 10 September 1744, *Correspondence*, ed. Gerrard, p. 166-7.

⁵ Richard Bauman, *Let Your Words Be Few: Symbolism of Speaking and Silence Among Seventeenth-Century Quakers* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), pp. 44-5.

Revision and expanding circles of correspondence

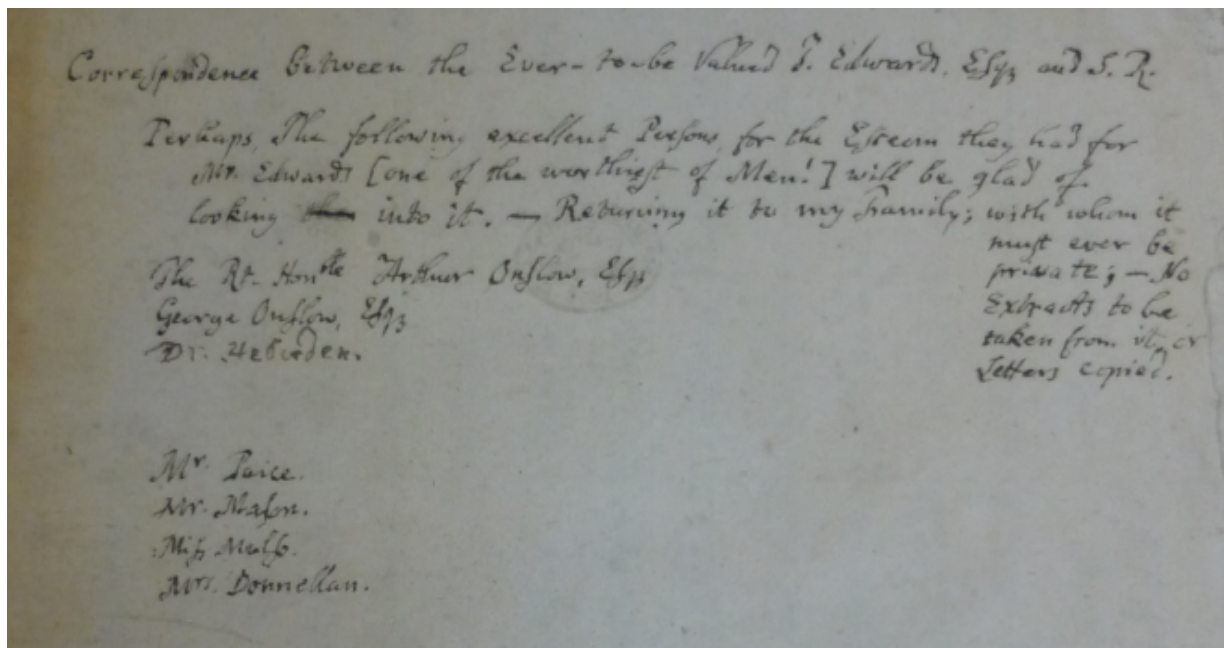
Richardson redefined his letters by inviting new readers to peruse them, because, as earlier chapters have demonstrated, the ‘voice’ of a letter was partly characterised by its position within groups such as coteries and household-families. Louise Curran notes that Richardson sometimes uses ‘publish’ to mean non-print circulation; it may be that he thought of circulating his letters with Thomas Edwards, amongst their mutual friends and following Edwards’ death, as a kind of publication.⁶ By circulating them, Richardson turned the letters into a monument to his friendship with Edwards, and a model of noble sentiments. The first leaf of the correspondence carries Richardson’s note on its distribution:

Correspondence between the Ever-to-be Valued T. Edwards, Esqr. And S. R.

Perhaps, The following excellent Persons for the Esteem they had for
Mr. Edwards [one of the worthiest of Men!] will be glad of
looking ~~the~~ into it. – Returning it to my Family; with whom it
must ever be
private; – No
Extracts to be
taken from it, or
Letters copied.⁷

⁶ *The Author as Correspondent*, p. 258.

⁷ FC XII, fol. 1^r.

FC XII, fol. 1^r.

This note is not very carefully presented; there is a clear difference between the style of presentation for circulation here, and at the beginning of the volume of letters relating to *Pamela*, which has a title page and dedicatory epistle in mock-type handwriting.⁸ And yet, the repetition of words that indicate permanence – ‘Ever-to-be Valued’, ‘must ever be private’ – show that Richardson wanted to colour the future readings of his friendship with Edwards as unchangingly positive. As no more letters could be exchanged between the two men, there could be no more renewal and validation of their relationship in statements of mutual service. Richardson may have sought to rehearse the vows of friendship in Edwards’ letters by giving them to a select readership that was capable of reinvigorating their meaning. The superlative terms in which he refers to Edwards, as ‘one of the worthiest of Men!’ recalls praise of Charles Grandison, ‘best of friends, and best of men!’,⁹ whom Edwards had helped to ‘correct, adorn & finish’.¹⁰ The echo of Grandison idealises the friendship between

⁸ FC XVI, fol. 10.

⁹ *Grandison*, ed. Harris, ii.231.

¹⁰ 2 May 1751, FC XII, fol. 99^v.

Richardson and Edwards, over and above the fluctuations in familiarity that took place within the correspondence itself.

Richardson wants to share Edwards' letters with those for whom they have a close relevance, without granting them permission to take an active role in copying and selecting parts (with the inevitable editing and abbreviation that would follow), according to their own model of Edwards. Richardson's decision to share these letters, but also to place restrictions on what the readers could do with them, is similar to his impulse to discuss improvements that might be made to his novels, while maintaining the power to veto any suggestion. Richardson's need to control the dissemination of his correspondence with Edwards, while seemingly allowing a dialogue on the subject to be started amongst the small group in which he circulated it, highlights a paradox in his attitude towards reader participation in the creation of (both fictional and non-fictional) texts. Whether or not it was realistic to expect that 'No Extracts' would be taken, nor any 'Letters copied', Richardson's instruction makes clear that while he was adept at revising texts with particular, or altered audiences in mind (for example, his edition of *Æsop*) this did not prevent him from aiming at an immutable edition, with an authority akin to that of a variorum, each time he set about improving and revising a text.¹¹

The desire to find an original and consistent epistolary style denies the variegated reality of correspondence. As we saw in chapter 2, correspondence comprises different motives, moments and addressees within one letter and across the output of any particular writer. However, the hope of discovering epistolary consistency is alluring, whether the consistency is thought to be the spontaneous

¹¹ Richardson acknowledged the complex editorial situation in the Preface to his *Æsop*: 'When there are so many Editions of *Æsop's Fables*, it will be expected, that some Reasons should be given for the Appearance of a new one' (i). His justification is one of a printer: his edition was 'fit for the *Hands* and *Pockets* for which it was principally designed' (x): those of children. See *Æsop's Fables* (London, 1740).

overflow of feeling, or (in Johnson's description) the calm of deliberate performance. This is in large part due to the association that is hoped to exist between long-lasting friendship and the linguistic constancy of familiar epistolary terms. This hope is apparent in Richardson's correspondence with Edwards, where vows of friendship fall as thick and fast as Pope's protestations of honesty, seeking to redress the fact that Richardson and Edwards were far apart geographically, and rarely met. A particularly startling example of a vow of gratitude that is both defined and undermined by its authentic immediacy, occurs during the composition of *Grandison*:

Miss Mulso is very proud of the honour you have done her in your sonnet. She desired, when I wrote, yt her particular thanks might be returned to you for it. [...] After long long Travelling I think I have found ye Good Man; just found him. But you, Sir, & an auxiliary Lady or two must correct, adorn & finish him.¹²

Richardson's complicated use of tense in the main body of the letter ('[s]he desired, when I wrote') resurfaces in the postscript: 'I have found' has been amended to 'just found him'. It is unlikely that Richardson wished to indicate that he had had an epiphany relating to *Grandison* while he wrote the letter to Edwards, but perhaps he wanted to make clear that there had been significant progress since the two had last communicated.

The delineation of time in relation to Miss Mulso's 'particular thanks' in the main body of the letter is given its own particularity ('when I wrote'), which conjures up the situation in which the letter was being written. Richardson's affirmation of his own authorial status – 'when I wrote' – makes it clear that he is passing on 'particular thanks' at the request of another person, keeping his own gratitude for a separate portion of the letter. The phrase 'when I wrote' has the odd effect of emphasising the thanks of Miss Mulso, but also detracting from it, by making it seem transitory, and

¹² 2 May 1751, FC XII, fol. 99^v.

subject to the changes wrought inevitably by time, such that her gratitude might have waned in the intervening period between Richardson's letter being written, and when Edwards first read it. The obverse side of the genuinely spontaneous letter is that it exposes the mutability of human loyalty.

Richardson's idea of what constituted an ideal ending for a 'familiar' letter seems to have changed throughout his life. A fair copy of a letter written to his brother-in-law ended 'believe me to be, / Your Affectionate and / Faithful Friend & Servant / S. R.'¹³ At some point, Richardson has deleted '& Servant': perhaps later in life he felt that this was too deferential, or even too formal. Whatever the reason, it is testament to the letter's status as a genre with a delicate system of codification that an epistolary author of such significance could agonise about the best way to sign off to a friend or relative. In his frail hand, Richardson has added another subscription: 'I am, my dear Friend, / Your Affectionate & Faithful / Friend and Servant / S. R.' This is further evidence of Richardson's indecision about which adjectives and nouns to use to describe himself in relation to his brother-in-law. As discussed in chapter 1, letter-manuals suggested altering the subscription by adjusting the adjectives one ascribes to oneself, which is tailored to the rank of the correspondent in relation to the author. Perhaps the fashion for valedictory comments had changed by the time Richardson was in later life, or perhaps he felt the first subscription was not warm or clear enough. The repetition of 'friend' certainly suggests that he was keen to signal to future generations that his relationship with his brother-in-law had been a strong one.

¹³ August 1741, FC XVI, 1, fol. 57.

Preparing for, and pre-empting, publication

Authors' premeditated thoughts concerning a future audience impinged upon the text of familiar letters. Johnson wrote to Hester Thrale that '[i]n a Man's Letters you know, Madam, his soul lies naked, his letters are only the mirrour of his breast, whatever passes within him is shown undisguised in its natural process.' Johnson's lavish affirmations of 'undisguised' feeling are hyperbolic; his recognition of the letter's limits is manifested as an ironic imitation of Pope:

Is not my soul laid open in these voracious pages? Do you not see me reduced to my first principles? This is the pleasure of corresponding with a friend, where doubt and mistrust have no place [...] These are the letters by which souls are united, and by which Minds naturally in unison move each other as they are moved themselves [...] I have indeed concealed nothing from you, nor do I expect ever to repent of having thus opened my heart.¹⁴

The description of the ideal function of a friendly letter is wilfully compromised by Johnson's nod towards the future reception of the letter, which reaches beyond the 'united' souls of those who first corresponded as friends, and implies either a wider readership, or the breakdown of friendship. Johnson's hope that he will not repent his openness is genuine, as he and Thrale disagreed about the uses to which their correspondence might be put in the future. Although the epistolary style was routinely (that is, conventionally) depreciated for its prosaic quality, letters' mediocrity also made them desirable when it came to publication. Unedited letters seemed to promise access to a writer's private life and thoughts. Consequently, Hester Piozzi stripped documents that had been revised for publication of the 'title' of letters:

¹⁴ 27 October 1777, *Letters*, iii.89-90.

such as were prepared for the press by their writers, have forfeited all title to the name of letters; nor are I believe ever considered as familiar chat spread upon paper for the advantage or entertainment of a distant friend.¹⁵

Piozzi's register is mixed, because the forbidding quality control implied by the prefatory note is coupled with the letter's supposed open-hearted negligence. After the formality of 'forfeited' and 'title', we might expect a smoothly Latinate construction like 'familiar conversation', but the colloquial 'chat' is the kind of language that we might associate with letters that have remained unedited since being sent. Perhaps that was the effect to which Piozzi aspired. In any case, the contrastive vocabulary conveys the tension inherent in bringing manuscript letters into print, a situation that was particularly acute for Johnson, whose legacy was contested by a clutch of biographers.

There was some negotiation between present and future concerns in the Richardson-Bradshaigh correspondence. Richardson's speculations about the future uses for his letters caused him to reflect on the disparities between past and present selves. Re-perusal constituted a powerful epistolary occasion for Richardson, and further complicated the 'voice' of the texts. The publication of *Pamela* in 1740 seems to have acted as the catalyst for Richardson to begin organising his correspondence. By 1753 he had arranged his letters into 'Volumes of Epistolary Correspondencies'.¹⁶ He hoped that 'in comparing the Sentiments of my Correspondents, at the time, with their present', he might 'improv[e] from both'.¹⁷ The improvement to be gained was tempered by Richardson's policy of homogenising the versions of his and Bradshaigh's letter texts, so that they were 'made both to agree'. This behaviour left

¹⁵ Piozzi, *Letters to and from the Late Samuel Johnson, LL. D.*, 2 vols. (London, 1788), i.iv.

¹⁶ SR to Johannes Stinstra, 2 June 1753, *The Richardson-Stinstra Correspondence and Stinstra's Prefaces to "Clarissa"*, ed. William Slattery (Carbondale, 1969), p. 30.

¹⁷ SR to Thomas Edwards, 27 January 1755, Barbauld, iii.114.

him dreading a leaked publication that was inconsistent with his vision, so he felt the need to articulate to Bradshaigh that ‘we are under no obligation to any body, or to the Public [...] to keep to the Letter of the Correspondence as it passed.’¹⁸ The pun on ‘letter’ (an epistle, and keeping a text literally the same), demonstrates Richardson’s willingness to see letters that had already ‘passed’ from sender to recipient as linguistically flexible.

During the period in which they were discussing publishing their correspondence, Richardson and Bradshaigh exchanged letters that redefined their understanding of epistolary temporality and honesty. Curran has observed a change in the Richardson-Bradshaigh correspondence during March 1758, when editing began. Although their letters ‘had often been written with other people in mind, and parts of [them] distributed to other readers, as editing proceeded [...] Richardson and Bradshaigh began to write letters that were conscious of public readers.’¹⁹ Bradshaigh suggests that ‘care may be taken, to write in such a manner for the future, as not to make alteration necessary’.²⁰ In effect, she advocates a form of pre-emptive revision that obliterates the first thoughts of the moment.

Following the moral scrutiny that the method and message of his novels had received, Richardson’s desire to forge ‘concordia discors’ from the letters of the past and present surpassed his role as editor of a very public correspondence. He strove to find a consistent self, one who, as far as is possible, was morally consistent (and therefore, perhaps, stylistically consistent) with his past self. While Lady Bradshaigh was able to put faith in Richardson’s ‘Disguises, Corrections, &c.’ for neutralising ‘any bad Consequences’, he was still afraid that ‘some disagreeable use might hereafter

¹⁸ 2 January 1758, FC XI, fol. 227.

¹⁹ “‘Into Whosever Hands Our Letters Might Fall”, Samuel Richardson’s Correspondence and “the Public Eye”, *Eighteenth-Century Life*, 35:1 (Winter 2011), 51-64, p. 59.

²⁰ 31 March 1758, FC XI, fol. 234.

be made either from your Copy or mine'.²¹ The trials of evolving situations meant that – like his fictional characters – Richardson could not anticipate the outcome of his actions or writings, or the manner of their reception.

Bradshaigh exemplifies the position of *de facto* hypocrisy that received notions about the composition and reception of familiar letters dictated. She was able to remove some letters that she considered 'Indelicate, & ill wrote' but also warned that 'too Severe a Correction is a great fault, for shou'd they not appear extempore, and just as the thoughts flow'd at the time of writing?'²² The appearance of spontaneity, however, should be balanced against the appearance of modesty:

You will say, that our Correspondence is allready become so publick, that altering names, &c. is of little consequence, but I do not think so. [...] It looks modest, to Endeavour at Concealment.

Crucially, Bradshaigh makes no claim to be modest, and implies that the purpose of appearing modest is not to succeed in being so, but to produce a doctored version of the truth while making a conventional gesture towards modestly concealing it.

Whyman points out that it was common practice to edit the letters of one's family, and suggests that we take this fact to our readings of surviving epistolary material:

We must ask which aspects of life were present, which were not, and why. Many letters, I suspect, were intentionally destroyed due to prudish attitudes of later men and women, who were socialized to be modest.²³

Bradshaigh's specific requirement when it came to modesty was the concealment of the names of those mentioned in her correspondence with Richardson. Replacing a person's name with an initial was such a commonplace aspect of published texts that

²¹ 2 January 1758, FC XI, fol. 227.

²² 21 April 1758, FC XI, fol. 241.

²³ *The Pen and the People*, p. 171.

her singling out of this particular type of 'Disguise' as the bare minimum of modesty seems to make sense within a wider literary context that fostered the pervasive habit of reading *à clef*. Richardson's pre-emptive revision, on the other hand, went beyond the familiar textual conventions. As early as 1751, he had suggested that the whole letter-writing process required a greater solicitude than the mere retrospective deletion of names: 'And do you not think, Madam, that invention, execution, expression, are too much to be left to the moment?'²⁴

The audiences that Richardson envisaged for his correspondence were as various as those for which the respective editions of his novels catered. He pitched his manuscript letters to different correspondents with a broad spectrum of possible uses. To his friend Thomas Edwards he suggested that they might 'divert my Children, & teach them to honour their Fathers Friends, in their Closets'.²⁵

Richardson seeks to promote his scheme by flattering Edwards with an imagined future where Richardson's children revere Edwards because he was one of 'their Fathers Friends'. To Bradshaigh, Richardson suggested a more female-specific use for the letters, 'for young Women, who wish to be tho:t prudent & good,' and as Bradshaigh was particularly interested in debating aspects of his novels, 'a Critique on Clarissa & Grandison'.²⁶ As Curran points out, though, Richardson was equally capable of changing his mind about the manuscripts over time, and not simply as a result of the expectations of the particular correspondent he was addressing. He 'preserved his letters with Silvester as "a Warning Piece to Posterity" [...] In a later copy of this letter [...] Richardson replaced "to Posterity" with "to his Friends and

²⁴ *Grandison*, ed. Harris, i.vii.

²⁵ 27 January 1755, FC XII, I, fol. 130.

²⁶ 2 January 1758, FC XI, fols. 227-8.

Family.”²⁷

The aims Richardson had for his correspondence are comparable with his attempts to produce definitive editions of *Pamela* and *Clarissa*. In the end, the process of revision came to be part of the identity of the texts themselves, such that there can be no one definitive edition, only a series of richly corresponding intertexts. Richardson’s novels became editions for the year in which they were issued – printed for the occasion – taking into account how his readership had developed during the time that the novels had been available. This process reflects an emergent interest in variorum editions of Shakespeare, by Pope and subsequently Johnson. For all its textual ballast, a variorum cannot ever be definitive and utterly complete. Johnson used a generative, letter-based and dialogic approach to the interpretation of key texts, and he felt able to engage with Richardson as part of this. He wrote to him requesting that the author consider adding an index to *Clarissa*:

I thank you once more, dear Sir, for your Books; but cannot I prevail this time for an Index; such [as] I wished and shall wish to *Clarissa*. Suppose that in one volume an accurate index was made to the three Works; – but while I am writing an objection arises – such an Index to the three, would look like the preclusion of a fourth to which I will never contribute, for if I cannot benefit mankind I hope never to injure them.²⁸

Johnson is not so much writing, as revising to the moment, by anticipating objections and cancelling his own idea. As we saw in chapter 3, verbs of transmission such as Johnson’s ‘arises’ characterise the feeling of spontaneity in letters of his time. Footnotes in his edition of Shakespeare are similarly ephemeral: they invite commentary and completion; they expect to be superseded. In this vein Johnson appealed to Thomas Warton:

²⁷ Curran, “‘Into Whosoever Hands Our Letters Might Fall’: Samuel Richardson’s Correspondence and ‘the Public Eye’”, p. 62, n. 7.

²⁸ 26 September 1753, *Letters*, i.75.

Dear Sir,

Your notes upon my poet were very acceptable to me, I beg that you will be so kind as to continue your searches [...] A commentary must arise from the fortuitous discoveries of many men, in devious walks of literature. Some of your remarks are on plays already printed, but I purpose to add an appendix of notes, so that nothing comes too late.²⁹

Again, Johnson conveys the 'fortuitous' nature of his written endeavours with the verb 'arise'. This letter to Warton highlights the collaborative and evolving nature of the Shakespeare variorum: 'nothing comes too late' when the 'devious' walks of literature that the contributors follow provide differing routes into the text.

Modern editions

As co-general editor of *The Cambridge Edition of the Works of Samuel Richardson*, Peter Sabor is faced with producing an edition which rises to the occasion of the current critical moment:

readers will not have access to the extensive and often rebarbative revisions and expurgations that Richardson made to his correspondence in the final years of his life. No edition can be all things to all readers. The old ideal of a definitive edition has been succeeded by an understanding among most textual scholars that any edition is a performance of some kind, offering one but not the only solution to problems inherent in the text it represents.³⁰

The idea of an edition that is a 'performance' but which nevertheless attempts to be a sincere representation of the original text is one which chimes well with eighteenth-century debates about the letter. If the letter aims to conceal its art, then epistolary writing (and its published incarnations) might be said to be a 'performance', but one which often aims to convey sincere thoughts. In recent years, the view of an edition as a 'performance' has resulted in critical reappraisals of older editions' principles.

²⁹ 14 April 1758, *Letters*, i.162.

³⁰ "'The Job I Have Perhaps Rashly Undertaken': Publishing the Complete Correspondence of Samuel Richardson," p. 25.

With regard to Richardson's letters, this approach has rehabilitated Anna Laetitia Barbauld's reputation. William McCarthy has shown that Barbauld's practices in her 1804 edition of Richardson's correspondence were commensurate with the level of intervention expected at the time. Barbauld worked on the principle of reproducing the letters as last seen by their author, as opposed to the first time they were viewed by their first principle addressee. Though Barbauld's *Correspondence* has drawn criticism from 'Richardsonians', McCarthy points to the contributions of the printer, and Richardson's deletions, as less faithful to the original manuscript state than she had been.³¹

Several influential critics of the last century have placed the emphasis of meaning in letters upon the time of first reading, at the expense of future readings and interpretations by either the writer or subsequent readers. Thomas O. Beebee perceives a dichotomy between letter-writing and storytelling, aligning the former with gossip and news, and the latter with 'transmitting a tale polished through the generations'.³² This is a false dichotomy, as letters sculpt experience with creative care, and storytelling contains an element of the conveyance of news, as new information helps a narrative to progress. However, for Beebee, letters have time-specific meaning; he takes as his mantra a comment made by a character in an epistolary novel, that '[a] letter not read in its own time is worth no more than last year's newspaper' (78).

In overseeing *The Cambridge Edition*, Keymer and Sabor have taken account of the state of Richardson's letters as sent documents. For these editors, the letter is a message that acquires meaning through being read:

³¹ 'What did Anna Barbauld do to Samuel Richardson's *Correspondence*?', *Studies in Bibliography*, 54 (2001), 191-223.

³² *Epistolary Fiction in Europe 1500-1850*, p. 76.

we determined that the edition should reproduce, as closely as possible, the state of the text in which each letter was sent and therefore read. [...] Textual notes will normally record only those changes made by the letter writer at the time of writing, and thus seen by the recipient on first reading.³³

The policy of trying to reproduce a letter as it was ‘seen by the recipient on first reading’, at the expense of any subsequent revision, leads Sabor to admit that some creative refashioning must take place in order to recover the letter’s ‘original’ state: ‘For Hill, several letters exist in two or more versions, each one fragmentary or otherwise defective. Gerrard, editor of the Hill correspondence, has conflated texts in such cases, in an attempt to recreate the lost originals’ (21). In effect, then, the correspondence that exists between letters that develop over time and across several editions of copying – between letters of past and on-going present – is obliterated by the attempt to reconstruct the initial (rather than the final) intention.

While the editorial policy of recreating one (now imaginary) original text seems to complement the specific temporal aspect of the letter medium, it is in itself a fiction of unity and of spontaneity. The narrative of editing and obliteration that can be read in the manuscripts of Richardson’s letters would be difficult to recreate in print. However, the principle of first-reading would seem to disregard letters that were never actually sent, yet were part of the discussion about the novels fostered by the author. For example, Richardson’s intended volume of letters relating to *Pamela* (FC XVI) contains several letters labelled by the author as ‘Intended’, or ‘Not Sent’ (fol. 74). A fascinating reply by Richardson to Cheyne on matters of ‘Matrimonial Tenderness’ (31 August 1741, fol. 61) in *Pamela II*, in which Richardson politely rejects his friend’s suggestions, was never sent. In fact, the author was so worried that Cheyne’s opinion of the treatment of this matter in *Pamela II* was unalterably

³³ Sabor, *ibid.*, p. 20.

negative that he decided to enclose his response to his friend's objections in a letter to Mr. Bertrand. Richardson's instructions to Bertrand factored in the possibility of another layer of re-writing: 'If you think the letter to the Doctor, will be taken amiss, be pleased to keep it back, and I will send another and shorter' (31 August 1741, fol. 65). This letter to Bertrand, in turn, was merely 'Intended'. These letters were probably never 'seen by the recipient', so they do not, strictly speaking, fit into the model of epistolary validity propounded by Keymer and Sabor. But they play a part in the story of Richardson's epistolary life, and provide insight into the ways in which he related to his friends and considered his own literary work.

Just as letter-manuals demonstrated to aspiring correspondents that they must resolve the contradictions of spontaneity and sincerity for themselves by incorporating 'both terms of the opposition,' so too *The Cambridge Edition* has to negotiate two opposing views of Richardson's texts. While 'Richardson's subsequent rounds of revision are essential to complete understanding' (xiii), the general editors take Jocelyn Harris's view that 'to the extent that he allowed outside pressure to influence his work, each edition is [...] further removed from the original conception, and often destructive of the spontaneity or colloquial tone of the first edition'.³⁴ In current scholarly editions of his novels, then, Richardson's work is still subject to the expectation that 'spontaneity' and truth (in this case manifested as 'colloquial tone') are aligned in works that take the form of familiar letters. *The Cambridge Edition* 'takes as its copy-text the earliest version of each work to have been authorised and published.'³⁵ To a certain extent, this means that the edition rejects the revisionist attitude of the author to his own work. However, it is in line with Richardson's comprehension of the need to make his work available in a format that is useful for its

³⁴ *Grandison*, i.xxviii.

³⁵ General editors' preface, i.xiii.

specific audience.

It is not unknown for the narrative of revision and self-censorship to be recognised as an important part of authorial identity. Richardson's tampering with his novels and the addition of footnotes, prefaces and postscripts has been seen by some as an indication of the author's diminishing respect for his readers' ability to interpret correctly the moral message of the texts. Richardson the moralist dinosaur is a character that emerges from this interpretation of his revisions. However, rather than setting him against a story of progression – in which Richardson comes to represent old-fashioned fable-telling and formal address – we might see the changes he made to his own letters as pieces of a polyphonic body of work.

Katherine Hornbeak notes that in Richardson's re-working of L'Estrange's *Aesop's Fables*, revision is the feature of the text that is most revealing about the author's intentions, style and character. However, for the purposes of *The Cambridge Edition*, Keymer and Sabor have taken the view that 'cumulatively his revisions can dim our sense of his originality and distinctiveness as a writer'. They identify 'the basic characteristics of a Richardson novel in its first edition' as 'typically more provocative and transgressive; and in matters of meaning and interpretation, [...] typically more indeterminate and open' (xv). Yet it is not only the first editions of his novels that are 'indeterminate'. Richardson's positioning of himself as 'editor' of his work was more than a convenient persona: he was his own first editor, and the capacity to support further revision was built into his writing.

A parallel narrative of evolution has occurred in the modern editions of Richardson's work. In 1980, Sabor edited *Pamela* using an unpublished collation of the 1801 and 1810 texts, claiming that this would make 'Richardson's final version generally available for the first time' (although he included 'corrections' made after the

author's death).³⁶ Sabor's concentration on final intentions was undercut by Margaret Doody's introduction to the same edition, in which she praised the novel's lack of narrative closure as an affirmation that '[n]o process ever comes to an end, as long as life lasts [...] The novel has a sense of the inexhaustible in life' (20).

Doody echoes Johnson's link between letter-writing and existence: 'I write therefore I am alive'. In Richardson's case, revisions are affirmations of life. His habit of tinkering with his writing is part of his authorial idiom and habit that was as indeterminate and dialogic as the familiar letter itself. The exchange of a correspondence amounts to a constant editorial flux, with the terms of association between the writers (and their extended networks) being reiterated, altered and confirmed.

The editorial questions raised by Richardson's letters are not unique; corresponding issues apply to the surviving letters of all the authors discussed in this thesis. As New and de Voogd observe, in relation to Sterne's letters, 'almost every letter can be found to offer its own special textual problems' (vii.xxxix). The editorial history of epistolary texts provides a view onto the changing ideals of letter-writing that have presided over the centuries and decades. Considering the editorial and critical heritage of Burns' letters, for example, leads to a better understanding of their cultural significance. As with Richardson and Sterne, historical layers of Burns scholarship play a part in the way the letters are presented in editions, and thought of by readers and scholars. For example, the division of manuscript material between commonplace books and letters by Burns' first twentieth-century editor was partly due to the pre-existence of an adequately 'accessible' edition of the journals and commonplace books (Ferguson, i.v).

³⁶ *Pamela*, ed. Sabor and Doody (London, 1980), p. 21.

The Oxford Edition of the Works of Robert Burns will take a similar approach, following Ferguson. The first volume of the project was the commonplace books and journals.³⁸ Like Ferguson and Roy's, the Oxford edition of the letters will include the poems sent through the post, but the forthcoming volumes of correspondence under Pauline Mackay's editorship will increase the corpus by printing in full poems that were sent through the post, whether or not they were rhymed epistles. Whereas Roy gives the number of the poem in *The Poems and Songs*, Mackay will reproduce the poems, so they can be seen within the context of Burns' other sent communications.³⁹ This is appropriate given Burns' sceptical attitude towards literary discrimination; he was determined to do justice to the ballads that pleased the 'mere Scotch ear' (ii.242).⁴⁰ Ferguson aptly leaves 'the term "letters"' open: 'all the poet's communications with other persons, including, when these are in the nature of the messages, dedicatory inscriptions in books' (v). So for Ferguson, letters are not defined by their prosody or prosaic form, but by their outreaching status as 'communications'. This is worth bearing in mind as a counter to the criticism of Burns' prose as against his poetry; letters and poems aren't so easily divided. Ferguson's definition presents an open-ended idea of epistolarity that could well be applied to the works of any of the authors covered in this thesis. For example, as chapter 4 showed, in Sterne's oeuvre there was significant crossover between his novels and letters.

Ferguson's acknowledgement of letters' relational qualities was accompanied by a new editorial respect for the shape of epistolary conventions, particularly

³⁸ *Commonplace Books, Tour Journals, and Miscellaneous Prose*, ed. Nigel Leask (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014).

³⁹ Mackay, 'Editing Robert Burns's Correspondence for the 21st Century' at the 'Editing Robert Burns for the 21st Century' Panel at the British Association for Romantic Studies (BARS) Conference, 17 July 2015, University of Cardiff.

⁴⁰ To George Thomson, [early September 1793].

salutations. Roy notes that the subscriptions of Burns' salutations – like those of so many authors in earlier editions – had been the victims of editorial zeal:

Burns frequently closed a letter with something of a flourish which was often reduced to 'I am &c, &c' or just '&c' by editors. The worst mutilation occurred as a result of nineteenth-century sensitivity: not only did improper words and passages disappear, but so did recipients' names [...]. (viii)

While letters often have fewer variant states than poems, Roy asserts, they are still seen as mutable texts.

Currie had two explanations for the imperfections of Burns' letters: the private nature of letters 'never intended to see the light', and the 'sincerity' of 'our poet' (*Works*, i.34). By the judgement of the time and as Burns himself professed, both letters and labouring-class poets were prone to 'crude unpolished ideas' (*Letters*, i.85).⁴¹ Currie promised compensation for a lack of 'elegance, or perfect correctness' (*Works*, i.34) in the form of an 'opportunity of seeing our poet, as he gives the incidents of his life, unfold the peculiarities of his character'. Currie echoes Burns' presentations of himself in the letters, the 'peculiarities' recalling the poet's identification with *Tristram Shandy's* eccentricity, and 'character' following Burns' frequent descriptions of his 'character' in response to public interest and in contrast to 'that character' a poet was expected to possess (i.85). Despite laying the ground for a softer reception for the letters' imperfections, Currie altered much to protect Burns' reputation and those of his female correspondents. He toned down fiery political and religious statements, and corrected punctuation and spelling.

Robert Thornton compares the letters in Currie's edition of Burns' *Works* with Ferguson's.⁴² Thornton finds that although Burns sought to prove his modesty by writing of it to patrons, Currie still thought it necessary to add in further proofs (405).

⁴¹ To [Mrs. Dunlop], 15 January 1787.

⁴² Robert D. Thornton, 'James Currie's Editing of the Correspondence of Robert Burns', *Studies in Scottish Literature*, 35:1 (2007), 403-418.

Currie added his own ‘character’ to Burns, sometimes in passages that deal with observations of character, such as Burns’ quotation of Pope when he was in Edinburgh: ‘I was all attention ‘to catch the manners living as they rise’” (i.145).⁴³ Currie’s version reads ‘to catch the characters and the manners’.⁴⁴ Characters populate Burns’ letters as caricatures of acquaintances and as the different ‘cants’ he moves between. Currie’s addition of extra character is a succinct reminder of the shape given to letters of ‘our bard’ – and inevitably, to the other eighteenth-century writers covered in this thesis – by sedimentary layers of editorship, and the hierarchies of quality imposed on different parts of literary oeuvres, a problem that Burns encountered as he weighed the different registers appropriate for his audiences.

The ‘characters’ of Burns’ letters are analogous to the ‘personation’ in Richardson’s correspondence, a feature of letters that this thesis has sought to bring out. Personation was itself a part of the wider range of polyphonies to which eighteenth-century letters gave written form. Quotations languages flourished in epistolary texts, from the Biblically-inspired plain speaking letters of the Quakers surrounding Robert Valentine, to the anecdotal and fictionally-familial Shandean tics that Sterne used as an emotional crutch in his correspondence.

Quotations languages could be a composite of epistolary conventions learned from manuals or from fellow correspondents. Modulations in the iterations of these conventions (including playful or repurposing or subversion) repay careful reading, as they reveal the weight a writer gave to novelty. As chapter 1 has shown, the structures of the super- and subscription were indicative of the relationship between sender and recipient. Richardson and Smollett drew on the stock of conventional

⁴³ To [John Moore], August 1787.

⁴⁴ Thornton, *ibid.*, p. 405.

endings in their fiction to make characters reveal themselves (and their place within group dynamics) in their own words.

Quotations languages also manifested in letters with some frequency as imitation of the addressee, or as the creation 'in fancy', of a verbal picture of the reception of the letter. These scenes were conventional, and sprang from the necessary distance between sender and recipient implied by the epistolary situation. A consequence of the distance between sender and recipient in Richardson's correspondence was the epistolary 'now'. The 'now' of Richardson's letters was a synthesis of quotations from previous instalments in the correspondence, and an anticipatory staging of the recipient's reaction. Rather than a monologic text that recounts the thoughts and feelings of the writer, Richardson's letters frequently resort to dialogue in which he imitates his addressee.

These letters showcase the conventional indirection (via pronoun switching and evolving, yet vague, quotation indicators) that allowed for protracted runs of correspondence, and for plural forms of address. Imitation of one's addressee, as chapter 3 shows, could be sympathetic or mocking, but in order to be successful in either of these modes, the writer had to adapt his or her style to suit the 'implied recipient'. Burns' letters are particularly acute examples of the flexibility of tone, lexical set choices, and authorial personae that could come from addressing a diverse set of correspondents. An occasional style (a style suitable to the 'occasion', as well as the correspondent) could arise to match the needs of the writers, with degrees of conventionality, polyphony, and mimicry being adjusted in each letter; or, as Bradshaigh put it, 'in every line, a Twin heart'.⁴⁵

⁴⁵ 12 August 1757, FC XI, f. 215^r.

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