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THE ELEVATION OF THE NOVEL IN ENGLAND: HEGEMONY AND LITERARY HISTORY

BY WILLIAM B. WARNER

In the last few years the question of the novel's rise in England has felt all the shocks and complications of theoretical and political critique. Although traditional literary histories of the early "masters" of English fiction have been rewritten by marxist and Foucaultian literary histories, in at least one regard, the more things change, the more they remain the same. Even the most theoretically sophisticated and politically progressive of these recent literary histories return to familiar canonical texts to stage the formation of "the" English novel.¹ These literary histories extend an idea dear to Richardson and Fielding: of the cultural novelty of their novels, of their radical and unheralded break with earlier novels. One of the most efficient ways to break the spell of this *grand récit* of the novel's rise is to ask: when and why does it begin to be told?

Modern attempts to tell the novel's rise follow in the wake of Richardson's and Fielding's efforts to introduce "new species" of English novels by displacing the popular novels written, in the six decades before 1740, by Aphra Behn, Delarivière Manley, and Eliza Haywood. The rationales offered by Richardson and Fielding for their novelistic practice are first drafts for what will later be told, within literary studies, as "the rise of the novel." By allowing Behn, Manley and Haywood to emerge out of the footnotes and margins of literary history, recent feminist literary history—written in very different ways by Jane Spencer, Mary Ann Schofield, Paula Backscheider, Laura Brown, Judith Kagan Gardiner, Janet Todd, and Catherine Gallagher—offers chances for a fundamental revision of the novel's elevation in England. In their literary historical narratives, Spencer, Schofield and Todd place Behn, Manley and Haywood at the beginning of a tradition of women's novel writing which develops through Sarah Fielding, Charlotte Lennox, Frances Burney and Jane Austen. But this elaboration of a separate, semi-autonomous domain of "women's writing" serves to obscure what my own more inclusive literary history seeks to apprehend: the specific role played by the novels of Behn, Manley and Haywood in the novel's elevation in the 1740s.²

Neither traditional nor marxist nor feminist literary histories allows

one to grasp what is sudden or brutal, odd or unexpected or contingent about the novel's elevation into a new cultural legitimacy. Nor do they allow one to understand how, when it comes to the rupture in the reading and writing of novels in England in the 1740s it is, as John Frow writes, "not so much the old that dies as the new that kills."³ Only with this perspective on the rhythms of cultural strife can one understand how it came to be that the novels of Richardson and Fielding, rather than novels by others, won a unique combination of popularity and cultural importance. In other words, given the popularity of Behn, Manley, Haywood, and Defoe, given the aesthetic "finish" of novels by Behn and Congreve, given the coherent ethical design of novels written by Penelope Aubin and Jane Barker, how is it that Richardson's and Fielding's novels are the ones that were countersigned in the eighteenth century as exemplary models for future novels? The ethical program, mimetic coherence and aesthetic ambition claimed by Richardson and Fielding for their novels were "countersigned" by many of their early readers, as well as early critics like Samuel Johnson in his *Rambler* #4 essay. This positive reception of their novels functioned as a "contingent decision" in favor of their novels, and against the novels of Behn, Manley, and Haywood they supplanted. Like the "decision" in a legal proceeding or sporting event, it establishes a hierarchical relation of one term or agent over another; the decision is "contingent" because it did not have to happen the way it did.⁴

RE-ARTICULATING THE NOVEL: RICHARDSON AND FIELDING
IN THE 1740S

Well over two hundred years of novelistic and critical practice has sustained itself upon a certain fable of origins. This fable casts Richardson and Fielding as the first coherent, self-conscious practitioners of what would become the modern novel, as rival inventors of two diametrically opposed, yet complementary types of novelistic writing, one that explores psychic depths, and another that narrates the diverse forms of the social: in short, as the two fathers of the novel. Such a fabulous double paternity for the novel helped do what genealogies always do, to produce a pedigree for a literary genre with very dubious origins. The bipolar simplicity of this fable has helped produce the pulsive force to promote the novel as a "serious" and intelligible option for subsequent writers. But, as I have already suggested, this fable has stood in for, and thus helped to efface, a much more plural and complex history of early novel writing.

The complex cultural event I am calling “the elevation of the novel” depends upon two events: first, the operation of the market as it facilitates the popular circulation of the novel, and supports shifts in novel reading; and second, a hegemonic articulatory “moment” expressed in the “programs” to elevate the novel pursued in parallel but different ways by Richardson and Fielding. The “decision” in favor of the elevated novel of Richardson and Fielding is reached by a broad group of readers, who express themselves through “the market,” as well as those readers who claim and exercise special critical and moral authority. How does the market come to play a decisive influence in this “turn” in the history of culture and literature? The novel of the late seventeenth and early eighteenth century is one of the first instances of popular culture circulating as a commodity within a system of production and consumption that approximates that which we know today. Literary historians have noted the break this entailed with the patronage system that had encouraged a catering to the taste of a coterie audience. But it also entailed a fundamental break with the literary ideal that had informed Western print culture: the assumption that by writing according to classically ordained models, authors should aspire to produce works that would have timeless value. By contrast, writers of early novels in England, perhaps influenced by the rationale for the new and modern developed by both Protestantism and the New Science, scandalize the high cultural expectation that a book be written to endure.⁵

The early novelists wrote the first “disposable” books—books written in anticipation of their own obsolescence, and in acceptance of their own transient function as part of a culture of serial entertainments. Only as replaceable elements in a series could the early novel negotiate the market’s contradictory double demand: to produce the effect of the latest hit, yet appear enticingly new, to be, quite paradoxically, *recurrently new*. The compositional strategies that issue from this marketing imperative are familiar from Hollywood film production: a recourse to adaptations, translations, sequels. The special rigor with which Pope lampoons Haywood in *The Dunciad* results in part from her particularly successful deployment of this new, more market-oriented concept of the book in her short novels of the 1720s.

By using the market as a compass for interpreting the directions of popular taste, early novelists could bring their writing into increasingly intimate exchange with that taste. In such a commodified cultural system, events at the site of consumption engender a feed-back loop that modifies activity at the site of production. To understand the

elevation of the early novel, we need to bring everything that is usually comprised under the word “production,”—writing, authorial intention, audience address, publication, conscious and unconscious models, etc.—into relation with what primes and directs this productivity—the tug of consumption and popularity. The market orients Richardson and Fielding toward those novels of Behn, Manley and Haywood which offered the dominant prior instance of the sort of popularity and atavistic pleasure Richardson and Fielding wished to mobilize for different ends. If the popular success of novels by Behn, Manley and Haywood had defined “the novel” as a racy, immoral story of love, Richardson and Fielding rearticulate the novel so as to win a contingent decision in favor of what is claimed to be a “new species” of writing. This “decision” is not punctual but gradually unfolding: it begins with the spectacular popularity of *Pamela* (1740) and the imitations and refutations it provoked; the decision becomes confirmed over the course of the decade, with the popularity of *Joseph Andrews* (1742) as well as the critical and popular success accorded *Clarissa* (1747–48) and *Tom Jones* (1749). By the end of the decade the possibilities of this terrain of production and consumption, the set of cultural practices called “reading novels” had been remapped.

Because the novels of Richardson and Fielding in the 1740s focus upon the topic the earlier novels of Behn, Manley and Haywood had told—the adventures of the protagonist as developed through a story of love, passion and (sometimes) marriage—it is entirely appropriate that *Pamela* was called a “dilated novel” when it was published.⁶ But there is a pointed reason why the exchange between Richardson’s and Fielding’s novels of the 1740s and the novels of amorous intrigue they sought to supplant is obscure, complex and vexed. The exchange between these two very different species of novels is antagonistic. Neither Richardson nor Fielding offers his writing as another discrete narrative practice to be consumed alongside the novels of Behn, Manley and Haywood, like different columns on a Chinese menu. Nor does either envision his writing as a simple inversion or negation of a wayward novelistic writing that can be subsumed, either logically or dialectically, into their own more enlightened practice. Instead, by claiming to inaugurate an entirely “new” species of writing, Richardson and Fielding both seek to assert the fundamental difference of their own projects from these antagonists—the notorious trio of Behn, Manley and Haywood—who continue to circulate in the market as threatening rivals in a zero-sum struggle to control a common cultural space and activity.⁷ If Behn’s and Haywood’s novels flourish, then their popularity drains

Richardson's and Fielding's projects of their cultural efficacy. This antagonism is most difficult to define because it is an unstable, non-relation between two terms and subject positions that the antagonists have every interest in obscuring, and is only graspable from a later analytical perspective.

The antagonism of the reformed novel to the popular novel is legible wherever Richardson and Fielding polemicize on behalf of their new practice: on the title page, in prefaces, and chapter headings; in private and public letters, advertisements, and critical essays. Thus in the title page of the first edition of *Pamela*, the reader is promised that we are offered a narrative that "at the same time that it agreeably entertains, [by a Variety of curious and affecting Incidents,] is entirely divested of all those Images, which, in too many pieces calculated for Amusement only, tend to inflame the Minds they should instruct."⁸ Is this, as it seems to be, the first "G" rating ever offered for popular culture? Notice that in this fleeting title-page allusion to the "bad" early novel, opponents are not named. The "novel" is so disreputable a cultural terrain, that merely naming a specific novelist could compromise the whole project to reform the novel.⁹ The antagonism between the reformed novel and the popular novel never becomes a fair fight or open relationship, dialogue or debate. The earlier novel of amorous intrigue is not a legitimate precursor, but the alternative in popular entertainment that is being put out of play by ethically-enlightened novels. The popularity of these earlier novels functions less as an "influence" upon Richardson and Fielding than a plague-like "influenza," against the uncontrolled spread of which Richardson and Fielding produce their novels as warning, antidote and cure. Antagonism is the pulsive force in the event my secret history seeks to interpret: the sudden violent shift in the cultural credit from an earlier species of writing to one proclaimed to be an-other.

Through their novel-writing practice in the 1740s, as well as their polemical critical statements in support of that practice, Richardson and Fielding successfully hegemonize the novel through a series of articulatory moves that reshape what their culture takes the novel to be. First they annul the significant differences between prior instances of novel writing. Thus under the opprobrious terms "romance" and "novel" they include: the artificial, idealistic, and long out of fashion French "grand romance" of Honoré d'Urfé, *La Calprenède*, and *Madeleine de Scudéry*; the short novel, adapted out of Italian, Spanish and French novella by Aphra Behn in the late Restoration and turned into a formula for popular fiction in the 1720s by Eliza Haywood; and finally

the “secret history,” adopted from French models by Behn, and practiced with enormous notoriety and scandal by Manley, who was imitated by Haywood and Defoe. Now lumped together in shadowy caricatures, these early novels are often condemned for diametrically opposed reasons: for offering implausibly idealistic accounts of love [what Richardson calls “romantic fustian”], or inappropriately literal depictions of sex. What renders these early novels essentially equivalent is their tendency to induce mental delusion and moral corruption.

Now placed on the other side of a boundary drawn by a new hegemonic practice of narrative, the (old) novel appears as beyond the pale, appropriately relegated to the curious heap of surpassed cultural forms. What lies on this side of a newly drawn frontier of cultural legitimacy acquires identity and value as the new species of (utterly un-novelistic) writing, consistently tagged by Richardson and Fielding with the term “history.” Within this new “province” of writing, the divergent practices of Richardson and Fielding now evidence significant differences of narrative form or representational strategy. Thus Sarah Fielding chose to write the first part of *David Simple* in the third person narrative used by her brother in *Joseph Andrews*, but published its second part as a novel in “familiar letters,” under the influence of Richardson’s practice.”¹⁰ In *Rambler* #4 (1750) Johnson defended Richardson’s attempt to offer his heroines as exemplars of virtue against Fielding’s effort to deploy “mixed characters” as the more realistic protagonists for fiction. The lively and contentious debates about the proper form for fiction after 1740 makes the novels of Richardson and Fielding appear to be what literary history has made them ever since: a horizon for critical reflection upon “the novel.” But this horizon is not a natural or stable boundary; it only appears as one from where literary history has put us. The interplay of presence and absence this horizon secures is predicated upon a certain forgetting of those earlier novels of Behn, Manley and Haywood which evidence characters both mixed and ideal, narratives in both the first and third person. It is only from the vantage point of Richardson’s and Fielding’s effort to give the novel a higher cultural calling that the novels of Behn, Manley and Haywood are made to appear “low” or immoral. In other words, “the elevation of the novel” performatively produces “high” and “low” as judgments about what constitutes coherent ethical design. Since this repositioning of the novel results from a quite conscious attempt to hegemonize or lead a culture’s practice of reading, it has little of the spontaneity suggested by the phrase the “rise the novel.” Only by eroding the cultural legitimacy of earlier novels could Rich-

ardson and Fielding later come to appear as “the first” “real,” that is legitimate, novelists.

Richardson and Fielding disavowed rather than assumed their debt to those popular novels whose cultural space they would redefine, and whose narrative resources they incorporate. Their rearticulation of the novel depends upon appropriating terms from the earlier novel—such as the female libertine, or the intricate seduction scheme—and articulating (by connecting together, and thus “speaking”) these elements in a new way, with new meaning, as part of a new form of novel. To produce an antidotal substitute to the earlier popular novel, Richardson and Fielding must swallow those racy novels of love by Behn, Manley and Haywood, divest them of their offensive tendencies, feed on their popular subject matter, so hidden within the plot lines and scenes of the healthy reformed novel, the old discredited novel can help bring popularity to Richardson’s and Fielding’s texts. If the early novels were, in Richetti’s words, “machines for producing pleasurable fantasy” (8), the influence of those novels that “merely amuse” comes to be expressed in the reformed novel’s obsession with the problem of how readers read. Because his characters are destined for more than fantasmatic identification, Richardson deploys extraordinary vigilance about the way his characters are “consumed”: he embeds responses to Pamela and Clarissa within the novels; extends each text long after the basic action is complete, so their story may be haggled out before the reader finishes the text; adds revisions that foreclose false readings, and so on. In all these ways Richardson seeks to forestall a tendency built into those aspects of the early novel he would adopt: stories of love, written in first person letter/narratives, that encourage spontaneous reader identification and thus tend to lose their way. Richardson becomes a postman intent upon delivering his “letter/novel” to its correct (that is, ethical) destination.

It is difficult to reform and elevate the novel because Richardson and Fielding’s moral fiction is founded upon the volatile, undecidable ground of the early novel. By this I mean that the moral telos of their new novels is not “given” or decided in advance, by their wish to write ethical novels. Quite the contrary. Both authors not only must contend with the errant readings encouraged by the earlier novels and reading habits, but counter the dangerous tendencies of those novelistic themes and motifs they embed in their novels. In a letter of 13 August 1741, to Dr. George Cheyne, who had worried that Pamela and B do too much “fondling” before their marriage, Richardson defends, at the same time that he defends against, the erotic currents in *Pamela*. They

are indispensable if Richardson is going to interpose his novel as a replacement for “such Novels and Romances, as have a tendency to inflame and corrupt;” only through a calculated and controlled incorporation of the popular novel can Richardson take readers at that “Time of Life, in which the passions will predominate” and direct those passions to “Laudable meanings and Purposes.”¹¹ In Fielding we find a very different strategy for incorporating the popular novel. In the first interpolated story in *Joseph Andrews*, entitled “The History of Leonora; or, the Unfortunate Jilt,” we get the story of a young woman whose values and manners seem to have been perverted by a too literal identification with certain heroines of Behn, Manley and Haywood. Fielding tells Leonora’s story so as to dissipate the cultural credit of the early novel. What gets pulled into the body of Fielding’s writing is a popular novel that, parodied and interrupted, rewritten and re-contextualized, supports a new species of ethical fiction.

OVERWRITING THE INTERTEXTS

The articulatory moment by which Richardson and Fielding founded their species of writing upon an earlier one has justified, at least since the later eighteenth century, relegating the novels of Behn, Manley, Haywood to a marginal “pre-history” of “the novel.” Most subsequent literary histories have concurred with the critical judgment that the novels of these three writers lack the coherent subjectivity (character), cohesive structure (plot), and consistent ethics (theme) that Richardson and Fielding would bring to the novel. If we are to open that “pre-history” of the novel to historical investigation, we must reread Behn, Manley and Haywood as more than precursors to the texts to follow; we must concede them differences and autonomy as part of another earlier cultural terrain. We can begin to do this if we attend to the implications of the way Richardson and Fielding *overwrite* the novels of Behn, Manley and Haywood. From the vantage point of their conscious project to elevate the novel, such an overwriting means writing above and beyond them, toward higher cultural purposes. But overwriting the earlier novel involves a paradoxical double relation: the earlier novel becomes an intertextual support and that which is to be superseded, that which is repeated as well as revised, invoked as it is effaced. Thus “the elevation of the novel” is founded in an antagonistic, but never acknowledged or conscious intertextual exchange with the earlier novel. This overwriting, in the special sense I am using it, offers chances for reading against the grain of earlier literary histories.

To interpret the unacknowledged exchanges working within a text

like *Pamela*, one must reverse the procedures of that sort of literary history that goes back to earlier noncanonical texts to find the “sources” for canonical texts. Thus one should not read the novels of Behn, Manley and Haywood, or Penelope Aubin, Elizabeth Rowe and Jane Barker, in hopes of finding the closest possible resemblance to the stories, characters, or ethos of Richardson’s novel.¹² Such an assemblage of single sources, supposed to operate as causes or influences upon the single author of the privileged text, fails to develop a general profile of those antithetical novels circulating among readers before 1740. Nor will I be focusing upon the intertextual networks of explicit or implicit allusion subservient to the conscious intentions of the author: evident, for example, when Fielding announces on the title page to *Joseph Andrews* that the “history” is written in “the manner of Cervantes.”

To read the general cultural antagonism between Richardson and the novelists he would displace, one might more fruitfully begin with a rather perverse question: Where does one find a character who could not be more *different* from Pamela? Although there are many plausible candidates, my choice is the erotically inventive central character of Eliza Haywood’s *Fantomina; or, Love in a Maze* (1725). Let me remind you of her story. Fascinated with the erotic freedom of prostitutes at the theater, Fantomina changes her upper class dress for the garb of these ladies. When she is approached by the charming Beauplaisir, one who has long admired her, but always been in awe of her reputation, she decides to follow the dictates of her own passion and indulge his solicitations. Through a gradually escalating series of half-steps she loses her virtue and finds herself entangled in secret amour with him. When his desire for her begins to languish she contrives an original solution: by changing her dress, hair color, accent, and manner, she transforms herself into a series of erotic objects to engage Beauplaisir’s fascination: Celia, the “rude” “country lass” who serves as the maid in his guest house in Bath; Mrs. Bloomer, the charming widow in distress, who begs his assistance on the road back to London from Bath; and finally, an upper class enchantress called Incognita, who carries him through an erotic encounter in her London apartments, while staying masked and anonymous. This chain of erotic intrigue is brought to an abrupt close with the sudden return of Fantomina’s mother, and the discovery that the heroine is pregnant.

Pamela incorporates and displaces the narrative and thematic elements we find in *Fantomina*. Near the end of Pamela’s tenure as a servant in Mr. B’s estate at Bedfordshire, there is a scene that offers

a telling contrast to Haywood's novel. By way of preparing for her return to her father's modest home, Pamela has "trick'd" herself out in "homespun" country clothes. This metamorphosis from the silks she had been wearing is so striking that the housekeeper doesn't recognize Pamela when she appears in her new outfit. Mrs. Jervis prevails upon Pamela to be introduced anonymously to Mr. B, who calculatedly (Pamela thinks) uses the chance to kiss her. Pamela narrates: "He came up to me, and took me by the hand, and said, Whose pretty maiden are you?—I dare say you are *Pamela's* sister, you are so like her. So neat, so clean, so pretty! . . . I would not be so free with your *Sister*, you may believe; but I must kiss you" (61). This provokes Pamela's emphatic assertion of her true identity. After her escape she is called back to receive Mr. B's accusation: since he had recently resolved to give Pamela no "Notice," now "you must disguise yourself, to attract me." She offers this defence: "I have put on no Disguise. . . . I have been in Disguise indeed ever since my good Lady, your Mother, took me from my poor parents" (62). After Pamela leaves the room, a servant overhears Mr. B say, "By God I will have her!" This scene has decisive consequences. Rather than letting Pamela return home to her parents, Mr. B makes plans to take Pamela, against her will, to his Lincolnshire estate. There the heroine finds herself removed from the ordinary everyday reality of modern England, and thrown into a fantasy-laden, erotically-charged setting more compatible with the romance and the early popular novel, where B pursues, with unrestrained passion, his plots on her virtue. After the disguise scene, B becomes the active prosecutor of the romance coordinates of the action, a possibility suggested early on in the text, when he says to Pamela, "we shall make out between us, before we have done, a pretty Story in Romance, I warrant ye!" (42).¹³

Pamela rearticulates the resources for fantasy and pleasure working in a novel like *Fantomina*. In both stories the heroine's disguise works in parallel ways: as a stimulus to a male desire that is in danger of fading, and as a way to carry the narrative forward to a new phase of the action. In both a transformation of life, and a romantic plasticity and mobility of the self, is catalyzed by the heroine's artistry in changing her dress. By putting this empowering fantasy into practice, *Fantomina* can control the desire that would control her: by appearing as a succession of beautiful women, *Fantomina* fulfills an impossible male demand for infinite variety; by tricking the male gaze that would fix her, she cures that gaze of its tendency to rove; by taking control of the whole *mise en scène* of the courtship scenario, *Fantomina* directs

the spectacle of courtship that would subject her. In all these ways, Fantomina achieves a temporary reprieve from that whole courtship system as described by Paula Backscheider: a discursive system that positions women as the one “on trial,” subject to the “attack of spectacle,” always in danger of becoming grotesque, threatened with the loss of love.¹⁴ But the critique and transgression of the courtship system in Haywood’s *Fantomina*, developed from the vantage point of a female heroine’s achievement of erotic mastery, encounters its limit when the fruits of her licence become the occasion for her mother’s determined investigations and harsh measures—a secret lying-in, and retirement to a convent.

By contrast with Haywood’s novel, Richardson’s *Pamela* represents the heroine’s participation in disguise as problematic, an issue open to reflection in the novel by the strenuous debate it provokes between the heroine and B. From the moment Pamela puts on her outfit in her bedroom, Pamela’s pleasure in her new appearance is presented in a risky and morally equivocal light: looking in “the Glass, as proud as any thing . . . I never lik’d myself so well in my Life”. Pamela’s conduct-book self-assessment of her impending social decline—“O the Pleasure of descending with Ease, Innocence and Resignation!”—is qualified by the way the scene echoes the narcissism of Eve’s look in the pool in Paradise, or Belinda’s “rites of pride” before her mirror in *The Rape of the Lock*. Pamela’s complicity in acquiescing to the masquerade staged by Mrs. Jervis—Pamela admits “it looks too free *in me*, and *to him*”—means Pamela must submit to the kiss which she does not consciously seek. But what starts out in the naive frolics of the teenaged heroine turns, through the intensity of B’s desire, into the violence of B’s accusations, and his subsequent plots. Pamela’s defensive insistence that her new dress is her truest clothing and her recent dress, a kind of disguise, does not make Pamela’s clothing the reliable signs of a stable social position. Instead, her clothes, manner, and language become equally arbitrary and non-natural, the instruments for dressing across and between classes. This problem of truth and error in dress—as it denotes or confuses class position, bars or provokes sexual exchange—complicates that aspect of the scene that offers the surest anchor of the ethical conduct book agenda of Richardson’s novel: Pamela’s presentation of self. When Pamela says, “O Sir, said I, I am *Pamela*, indeed I am: Indeed I am *Pamela*, *her own self!*” (61), the very repetition of the first person pronoun, the double chiasmatic assertion, the intensifiers “indeed, indeed,” the emphasis and overemphasis of this circular enunciation of identity betrays the dif-

faculty of stabilizing identity. The precariousness of this incipient selfhood results from factors operating elsewhere in the scene, the shifts of dress, class, and language that enable the mobile erotic exchange Pamela and B are having such a difficult time controlling.

My reading of Richardson's novel in parallel with Eliza Haywood's is offered as an alternative to conventional studies of the "influence" of one text or writer upon the "author" of an other. Richardson does not have to have read Haywood to have his text receive the shaping force of the "influenza" of her popularity. Reading the stories of *Fantomina* and *Pamela* together suggests how motifs typical of numberless early novels—disguise, an erotic agon, and fantasies of self-transformation through change in dress—become indispensable to the reformed novel Richardson writes. Thus production of *Pamela*'s exemplary self depends upon the way dressing the heroine, in new clothes as well as the clothes of her language, produces effects of truth or unveiling out of the ruses of disguise. This masquerade may be ethically risky, but it is essential to the comic denouement of *Pamela*. It also serves as an apt metaphor for what may be entailed in Richardson's attempt to elevate the novel: redressing the novel with clothes that are paradoxically at once more modest and truthful, not a covering but the naked truth. The critical storm that *Pamela* provoked suggests that writers like Fielding, in his *Shamela* (April 1741) and Haywood, in her *Anti-Pamela; or, Feign'd Innocence Detected* (July 1741), immediately understood and exploited the constitutive tensions in Richardson's revision of the novel: between Richardson's conduct-book agenda—to represent a paragon of virtue, to represent her pathway to reward—and the intricate and eroticizing modes of the earlier novel he incorporates, but never fully controls.

READING OVER THE VORTEX OF THE NOVEL'S ELEVATION

Although reading *Pamela* alongside the short novel *Fantomina* suggests the difference and antagonism between the writings of Richardson and the early Haywood, it only offers a tantalizing hint of the possible alternative coherences of the novels of Behn, Manley, and Haywood. To understand disguise in *Fantomina* as a positive constituent of a novel and culture radically different from that projected by *Pamela*, one would need to carry out a sustained reading of a long, ambitious and influential novel like Behn's *Love Letters Between a Nobleman and His Sister* (1684–87).¹⁵ I write "possible" "coherence" because the very success of Richardson and Fielding's rearticulation of the novel for their own culture, and every subsequent English literary history,

has made it most difficult to read these early novelists outside the generic conceptions that proliferate with the novel's elevation in the 1740s. *Love Letters* may be oriented toward collective cultural obsessions—like following the dialectical interplay of love and honor, self-interest and public virtue, disguise and truth—markedly different from those that concern the novel writers and readers after 1740. But to remark these differences does not return *Love Letters* to a historicist primal ground for knowing the text as history. Nor can we ground literary history by reading *Love Letters* “in itself,” as a virtual identity, free of history. Literary history can only produce its explanatory framing narrative by interweaving each text into a significant intertextual context. But a self-reflexive literary history understands that one can never do this for the first time. A historically-sensitive literary history will inhabit rather than refuse the ironies and displacements produced by the history of novel writing and reading that precedes and complicates its efforts.

The elevation of the novel in the 1740s operates like a vortex within every subsequent effort to read the early novel in England. Appearing as a rupture, disturbance, or gap in the history of novel reading and writing, it throws some of the functions and ideas of novelistic writing down into obscurity, and throws others up into prominence; as a feature of the cultural land(sea)scape, it reiterates the influence of certain texts (like *Pamela*), and is an abyss for other (like *Love Letters*); as a mobile field of force, it enters subsequent critical contexts to direct the reading and assessment of early novels. To read across the vortex left by the elevation of the novel means reading in terms of shadowy origins and indelible destinations, prospectively and retrospectively, facing both forward and back. One can emphasize the paradoxical relation of history and text this entails by casting the problem in terms of intentionality. Aphra Behn did not write *Love Letters* so it could be overwritten sixty years later by Richardson, but this did happen. To read *Love Letters* over (in spite of, in view of) the vortex of the novel's elevation, one needs to attempt a double reading of *Love Letters*. On the one hand, one must seek to grasp those now mostly illegible ways Behn's writing rearticulates the literature of love she inherits; on the other, since the texts of Richardson and Fielding inaugurate the concept of the elevated novel we find ourselves thrown into, we need to read *Love Letters* with an eye to how they and others overwrite that text. To write a literary history that includes *Love Letters*, the text must be read for itself (as enunciation, in relation to precursor texts), but also as a novel swirling toward that “other” reformed novel that engulfs it.

Space does not here permit a detailed reading of Behn's novel within the alternative literary history this essay advocates. However, a very brief discussion of this novel will allow me to suggest how it might displace our literary history of the novel's rise. Published in three installments (1684, 1685, 1687), *Love Letters* is a disguised secret history loosely based upon the scandalous elopement of Henrietta Berkeley with her brother-in-law Forde, Lord Grey of Werke, captain of Monmouth's horse. The novel's extended fictional exploration of infidelity in love, published during the height of the succession crisis, develops a political allegory strongly critical of the infidelity of the English people to the Stuart line. More comprehensively, *Love Letters* is about *love*: its different species, social positionalities, ideal realizations and bathetic collapse. *Love Letters* is also about *love letters*: thus, about the chance for etching (young) love (new), for the first time, and its impossibility; about a rhetoric of the love letter that encompasses both singular inventions and fatal repetitions; about the letter and the spirit of the letter(s) of love; and thus about how a lettered lover's discourse entangles its communicants. Finally, *Love Letters* is about the between that befalls love and its letters. What comes between a "nobleman" called Philander, and his "sister"-in-law, Sylvia, is first of all the social law that proscribes their incestuous love. But more significantly there is the gap, space and slippage between love letters that produces tricky contaminating effects. Lovers, to remain lovers, must constantly be sending and receiving, emitting and transmitting the letter and spirit of their love. But in doing so, they are also habitually putting love's arrival at risk. In part 1 of the novel, the fold in their letters results from a recourse to diplomacy (from "di-ploma," a folded paper) necessitated by a desire that must disguise itself to survive and achieve its ends. But when the ruses of the diplomatic subject, and its pursuit of its self interest, become habitual, then that climactic moment of truth—when lovers were to take off all disguises for each other—may never arrive, may be interminably deferred . . . as it is in *Love Letters Between a Nobleman and His Sister*.

How does Behn write a novel that realizes the utopian promise and abysmal possibilities entailed in the three terms: "love" "letters" "between"? Behn braids together two generic types of love narrative, the first-person novel in letters and the third person low comic novella, into a more capacious third-person narrative that can enclose and critique them both. What results is a dialogical and implicitly intertextual exchange between the grounding assumptions of the two earlier

generic types of love narrative, issuing in a more sophisticated and "modern" interpretation of sexual relations. Like the two most famous novels of letters of Behn's time—the *Letters from a Portuguese Nun to a Cavalier* and the letters of Heloise and Abelard—part one of Behn's *Love Letters* displays insistently personal interpretations of an excessive self-lacerating passion.¹⁶ Part one of *Love Letters* receives a piquant counterpoint in the novella written by Philander to Octavio in three long letters scattered through parts two and three of the novel (164–72; 232–46; 315–20). This novella within the novel, telling of Philander's seduction of Calista, the wife of the lecherous old Count of Clarinau, resembles the novellas of Boccaccio or Chaucer. The whole is delivered as an entertaining "sport," in that urbane style of muted, tongue-in-cheek self-glorification, appropriate to bragging between men about their seduction of women.

The early love story of Philander and Sylvia and the tale of Philander's seduction of Calista confront each other as equally suspect narratives of love: one implausibly exalted, the other comically debased; one naively innocent, the other jaded experience, and both with the same hero—the philandering Philander. By contrast, the third-person narrator who emerges in parts two and three of *Love Letters* produces a story that appears less artfully fictive, and thus more historically plausible. Between parts one and two of *Love Letters* action moves from France to Holland, and love becomes politics pursued by other means.¹⁷ What is called "love" increasingly entails diplomacy, the assertion of one's self-interest through negotiations, which in its turn requires disguise, a veiling of one's motives and intentions so as to win one's object at the expense of the other. By carrying the novel of amorous intrigue to its logical limit, *Love Letters* opens a coherent ethical critique of earlier genres of love narrative, as well as its own action. Sylvia's use of disguise becomes less instrumental and more habitual; diplomatic maneuvers appear less witty than treacherous, and Octavio's climactic renunciation of the ruses his passion for Sylvia had entailed is cast in an ideal light.

Even this cursory overview of *Love Letters* resituates a theme central to the most influential literary histories of the novel's rise. Thus from Watt to Armstrong to Bender it has been argued, in different terms, that "the novel" plays a crucial role in the constitution of "the" modern subject. For example, Armstrong locates in Richardson's *Pamela* the moment when the invention of a certain discursive construct—the "domestic woman" as the object of Mr. B's desire—established the paradigm for "the" modern subject, as divorced in some fundamental

way from political life. Although this thesis proves useful for the study of later culture, it produces the impression that there is no subjectivity realized in the novel before Richardson. A reading of Aphra Behn's *Love Letters* makes such a hypothesis seem unacceptably modernist in its bias. In fact those selves that come to the reader of *Love Letters*—diplomatic subjects thrown into the “fatality” of their passion, and making ceaseless use of disguise—elucidate precisely the issue that Armstrong finds Richardson occulting: the politics of subjectivity, its implication in the play of power, the battle of the sexes, the defiles of representation.

The counter-articulations of love, diplomacy and disguise effected by Richardson and Fielding in the 1740s, and later comprehended under the term “sentimental” and the “ethics of the good heart,” become part of a fictional program that would do much to change the way early novels like *Love Letters* appear to us today. How this happens is a long story, but I can sketch a few of the ways that Richardson, in his role as an “organic intellectual,” overwrites the kind of fiction he abhorred.¹⁸ Richardson reinterprets the cardinal terms of the novels of Behn, Manley and Haywood: “love,” subject to a new critical ambivalence, is devalued, diplomacy is interpreted as selfishness, disguise as deceit. Richardson's method of doing this is quite ingenious. By incorporating the vicious tendencies of the earlier novel within his own male characters and opposing them to his own virtuous, and finally victorious heroines, Richardson offers an antidote within his own fiction to the poisonous influence of the female novelists.¹⁹ Thus B and Lovelace are possessed by an extravagant morally irresponsible love, a diplomatic pursuit of their self interest, and a penchant for intrigue and disguise. By contrast, Pamela and Clarissa write a discourse of conduct that develops an explicit critique and alternative to the social values and ideas of the novels of Behn, Manley and Haywood. Their love is not a mighty, autonomous force, but a quite manageable “inclination,” subordinated to rational estimations of the worth of the beloved; Pamela and Clarissa eschew those who act from self-interest and propound an ethos of strict honesty and spontaneous directness. This program sharply restricts—though, as we have seen, Richardson cannot completely eliminate—the heroine's recourse to disguise.²⁰ Though Richardson stays with the seduction plot he inherits from the novels and dramas of the Restoration and early eighteenth century, he works a decisive shift in perspective and sympathy. While the novels like *Fantomina* and *Love Letters* are told from the vantage point of the worldly and inventive seducer, the novels of Richardson and Field-

ing exfoliate around those characters—virtuous, innocent, and often naive—who become the objects of others' plots.²¹

HEGEMONY AND LITERARY HISTORY

Although what Homer Brown has called “the institution of the novel” has passed through a full two and a half centuries, my account of Richardson’s and Fielding’s role in rearticulating the novels of Behn, Manley and Haywood suggests that the cultural position of the novel is not fixed, it still pivots within an unstable vortex.²² Because the elevated novel habitually refers to the popular novel it overwrites, there is a fundamental instability about Richardson’s and Fielding’s “program” to elevate the novel. In his recent work, the marxist theorist Ernesto Laclau offers valuable ways to describe the antagonistic (non-)relation of forces that only seem to reach a stable form at moments of cultural and political hegemony. He notes that antagonistic forces have a radical nonrelational alterity to one another, and thus cannot “know” one another.²³ The privileged first term—here Richardson and Fielding’s novel—can “violently subordinate” a second term—here, “the early novel of Behn, Manley and Haywood”—so this contingent “decision” constitutes an identity [“the novel”] which carries within it the destabilizing negativity of this contingent founding instant. But this very application of “power”—the reformed novel’s ability to repress the earlier novel it both invokes but disavows—functions also as a limitation on power. The subordinated term is never simply abolished, but is in fact carried forward, in ghostly secondary traces, in the hegemonic cultural formation. This repression is shadowed by certain limits, and the possible breakdown or reversal of this hierarchy of two terms.

In other words, the contingent decision in favor of the reformed novel, once apparently final, is subsequently opened to appeal and repeal, in the light of new contingencies. Richardson and Fielding’s decisive victory for the high-toned morally responsible novel continued to gain consensus into the nineteenth century, and became one of the implicit criteria for a novel’s inclusion in the canon. It received no systematic challenge (that I know of) until the polemics of Hardy and D. H. Lawrence on behalf of a more realistic “modern” treatments of sex and love. The recent feminist revaluation of the women novelists of the early eighteenth century seems to depend upon a change in contemporary reinterpretation of what is happening in the novels of Behn, Manley, and Haywood: explicit treatments of gender, sexuality and power that have critical currency in our own time. The 1970s also

saw the return of “the romance”—in Harlequin guise—to centrality in popular culture. But you won’t find the contemporary romance in the bookstore under a section entitled either “novel” or “literature”; you have to look under “romance” or “fiction.” It seems the “elevation of the novel” is still bearing its effects into the contemporary mapping of culture; it is a decision still undergoing review.

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NOTES

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¹ The classical study of eighteenth-century English novelists is Alan Dugald McKillop, *The Early Masters of English Fiction* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1956), a delimitation of authors accepted and consolidated by Ian Watt in his *The Rise of the Novel* (Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 1957). These studies have received revision in marxist and Foucaultian studies: Michael McKeon, *The Origins of the English Novel (1600–1740)* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Univ. Press, 1987); J. Paul Hunter, *Before Novels: The Cultural Contexts of Eighteenth-Century English Fiction* (New York: W. W. Norton & Co., 1990); Nancy Armstrong, *Desire and Domestic Fiction: A Political History of the Novel* (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1987); John Bender, *Imagining the Penitentiary: Fiction and the Architecture of Mind in Eighteenth-Century England* (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1987). Hunter, McKeon, Armstrong, and Bender mark the caesura between “the novel” and its contextual origins in very different ways. Hunter focuses upon the various constituents of culture “before novels” appeared. McKeon devotes the first two of three parts of his book to the ideological strife that originated “the Novel,” before leaping to consideration of six canonical novels in the third and final part of the book. While Armstrong focuses the beginning of the novel and the modern self in Richardson’s writing of *Pamela*, Bender distributes invention for the “imagining of the penitentiary” and the subjectivity it entails to Defoe, Fielding, and others. In an essay important for my own study, Judith Kegan Gardiner has demonstrated how different currently prevailing conceptions of “the novel” are used by critics like Michael McKeon to disqualify Aphra Behn’s *Love Letters* from consideration as a novel, perhaps the “first English novel,” and by Jane Spencer to qualify the feminist tendencies of the same novel. See Gardiner’s “The First English Novel: Aphra Behn’s *Love Letters*, The Canon, and Women’s Tastes,” *Tulsa Studies in Women’s Literature* 8 (1985): 201–22.

² Recent feminist literary histories of the early novel include Jane Spencer, *The Rise of the Woman Novelist: From Aphra Behn to Jane Austen* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1986); Janet Todd, *The Sign of Angellica: Women, Writing, and Fiction, 1660–1800* (London: Virago, 1989); Mary Ann Schofield, *Masking and Unmasking the Female Mind: Distinguishing Romances in Feminine Fiction, 1713–1799* (Newark: Univ. of Delaware Press, 1990). These feminist reinterpretations of the novel’s beginnings in England have many of the qualities of a “monumental history” (in Nietzsche’s sense): they revalue and reappropriate early modern novelistic writing in view of inventing a new women’s culture. But there are limits and liabilities entailed in this alternative feminist history. Firstly, the strategies for the lifting of the old repression changes the leading players rather than reconceiving the form of literary history. The history of women’s writing is given the same progressive, dialectical shape as canonical and marxist literary histories, but where male writers were, there shall women writers be—not as the fathers

but mothers of the novel, with not Richardson but Behn as the first English novelist. Secondly, reading anachronistically for precursors of feminism in early modern texts produces a new set of obstacles for understanding the distinct qualities of a novelist like Aphra Behn. Judith Kegan Gardiner (note 1) demonstrates how the various concepts of women's writing invoked by Ruth Perry, Jane Spencer, and Nancy Miller produce problems for reading Behn's novel with any sympathy. Gardiner acknowledges various problems with proclaiming any one novel the "first" novel—it is "necessarily fallacious" (201)—but she does precisely this for Behn's *Love Letters* as part of an effort to revalue "women's erotic 'formula' fiction" (202).

³ John Frow, *Marxism and Literary History* (Cambridge: Harvard Univ. Press, 1986), 110.

⁴ John Guillory has offered a powerful critique of attempts, whether from the right or the left, to defend or recast "the canon" in terms of a reified, transhistorical conceptions of value, predicated upon democratic protocols of fair representation. See "Canonical and Non-Canonical: A Critique of the Current Debate," *ELH* 54 (1987): 483–527. Rather than ground my revisionary literary history in twentieth-century claims about the value of women's writing, my study seeks to understand why the men and women of the early modern period devalued the many novelists before Richardson. Such a remapping of the terrain of the early novel complicates the "exclusion" of early popular women novelists from subsequent literary histories. My own study of the early novels of Richardson and Fielding suggests ways in which Behn, Manley and Haywood, although seldom named, are still "there," woven into a (secret) affiliation, as the antagonistic "other" of Richardson and Fielding's novels.

⁵ On the commingling of the influence of Protestantism and the New Science see McKeon (note 1); for the strife around divergent concepts of reading and the book, see Martha Woodmansee, "Toward a Genealogy of the Aesthetic: The German Reading Debate of the 1790s," *Cultural Critique* 11 (1988–89): 203–21.

⁶ See *A Literary History of England*, ed. Albert C. Baugh (New York: Appleton-Century-Crofts, 1967), 803.

⁷ Behn's most significant novel, *Love Letters Between a Nobleman and His Sister*, was published in seven editions over the course of the first five decades of the eighteenth century: 1708, 1712, 1718, 1735 (serialized in the *Oxford Journal*), 1736, 1759, 1765. Haywood's collected novels of the 1720s and 1730s were published as *Secret Histories, Novels, and Poems* in four volumes in 1742.

⁸ Samuel Richardson, *Pamela*, ed. T. C. Duncan Eaves and Ben D. Kimpel (New York: Houghton Mifflin, 1971). All citations of the novel will be to this edition.

⁹ Richardson follows the same strategy in the anonymous introduction he apparently wrote for the collected novels of Penelope Aubin in 1739. See Wolfgang Zach, "Mrs. Aubin and Richardson's Earliest Literary Manifesto (1739)," *English Studies: A Journal of English Language and Literature* 62 (1981): 271–85.

¹⁰ See Martin C. Battestin, *Henry Fielding: A Life* (London: Routledge, 1989), 414–15.

¹¹ *Selected Letters of Samuel Richardson*, ed. John Carroll (Oxford: Clarendon, 1964), 46–47.

¹² This is the kind of strategy pursued most convincingly for Richardson's *Pamela* in valuable chapters devoted to literary and cultural backgrounds of the novel in McKillop's *Samuel Richardson: Printer and Novelist* (Chapel Hill: Univ. of North Carolina Press, 1936), and Margaret Doody's *A Natural Passion* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1974).

¹³ Ronald Paulson has pointed out to me the strong resemblance between the scene of Pamela's disguise, and the first plate of Hogarth's *The Harlot's Progress* (1732).

¹⁴ The phases are those used by Paula Backscheider in an as-yet unpublished manuscript she was kind enough to let me consult, entitled "The Resisting Text: Women Writing Women."

¹⁵ Like *Love in Excess* (1719–20) and *Clarissa* (1747–48), *Love Letters* was published in three parts, and only subsequently published as a single novel.

¹⁶ See the French *Portuguese Letters from a Nun to a Cavalier* (1669) and the English *Five Love-Letters from a Nun to a Cavalier*, trans. Roger L'Estrange (1678). The Letters of Heloise (d.1164) and Abelard (d.1142) were first published in France in 1616, and were followed by many imitations and free translations, including John Hughes's translation (1713) and Pope's "Eloisa to Abelard" published in the 1717 *Works*.

¹⁷ Thus during the short time where Sylvia and Philander live together in Holland, Sylvia falls sick, and Philander is forced into exile in Germany, over the first sixty pages of the novel's second part, circumstances have changed so a set of political imperatives invade and explode the love dyad, into a fantastic proliferating geometry of no less than eight overlapping love triangles. Octavio becomes friend of Philander and (secret) lover of Sylvia; Brilliard, the tame instrument of Philander, and clandestine husband of Sylvia, emerges as a secretly aspiring lover of Sylvia, and torments himself by listening through the wall to their love-making; Brilliard seduces Sylvia's lady in waiting Antonet, who harbors a secret admiration for Octavio; Philander seduces Calista, sister to Octavio, away from the Count of Clarnau, while continuing to profess his love in letters to Sylvia; later, after Octavio becomes a successful lover to Sylvia, his Uncle Sabastian becomes his rival for Sylvia. To complicate these heterosexual love triangles, there is a strong homoerotic entanglement, quite explicitly addressed by the text, between women (Antonet and Sylvia) as well as between men (Octavio and Philander).

¹⁸ Gramsci's term, "organic intellectual," is applied to Richardson by Terry Eagleton in *The Rape of Clarissa* (Minneapolis: Univ. of Minnesota Press, 1982), 2-6.

¹⁹ The metaphor is Richardson's own. In a letter to Sara Chapone where he remarks that three contemporary women writers of scandal are enough to make "the Behns, the Manleys, and the Heywood's" look white, and calls upon Chapone to develop an "antidote to these Women's poison." *Selected Letters*, ed. Carroll, 173.

²⁰ The whole tortured history of the reception of Richardson's work suggests the way it exceeds the ethical program that motivated its writing. Thus, for example, the sentimental program to reform love, and dispense with diplomacy and disguise has the effect of displacing the self-divisions it would overcome. Thus in order to weave a veil of representation to cover the body of virtue, Richardson develops the blush of modesty, as a privileged, gendered term by which the female heroine may signify her virtue in a divided and contaminated social sphere, without falling prey to its divisions. The blush veils the heroine at the moment where her complicity, guilt, or desire might become readable. But this blush implies the very self-dividedness it would annul.

²¹ Charlotte Morgan notes that Penelope Aubin seems to be one of the first to work this shift in the use of the seduction scenario. See her valuable early study, *The Rise of the Novel of Manners: A Study of English Prose Fiction Between 1600 and 1740* (New York: Russe & Russell, 1963). In French literature of the eighteenth century, as late as Laclos and Sade, there is a persistent privileging of the seducer's standpoint. That Richardson gives so much weight and space to the seducer's narrative in *Clarissa* helps to produce the struggle of interpretations around this most ambiguous, and historically conflicted of the novels of the 1740s.

²² See Homer Brown's essay, "Of the Title to Things Real: Conflicting Stories," *ELH* 55 (1989): 917-54.

²³ Ernesto Laclau, lecture given at SUNY, Buffalo, Spring 1991.