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Performing Authorship:
How Women Writers Defined Authorship
In Eighteenth-Century Britain

by

Megan Bruening

A Dissertation

Presented to the Graduate and Research Committee

of Lehigh University

in Candidacy for the Degree of

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the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

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Performing Authorship:
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To Matt

For all the love and laughter you've given me.

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ABSTRACT

This project focuses on how women writers in Eighteenth-Century Britain defined authorship. Examining four case studies (Eliza Haywood, Sarah Fielding, Fanny Burney, and Jane Austen) I argue that the defining function of authorship is the creation and regulation of a community of readers; within this community, the author cyclically creates and re-creates her textual, interpretive authority. Each author I study uses different strategies to achieve this community function and creates a unique dynamic between the author and the reader. This dissertation forces us to reevaluate the way that we define authorship; authorship is not a static label or identity but a fluctuating process of managing a community through textual interpretation. This definition also helps readers to understand why certain women authors (namely Jane Austen) survived for a longer period than others; the difference lies in the creation and management of a community that continues to entice readers to reenter the text and seek the author's authorized interpretations.

Introduction

The Qualities of Authorship

On the morning of December 20, 2019 I awoke to find my social media feed filled with anger, disappointment, and sorrow directed against one of the most influential authors in young adult literature: J.K. Rowling. The previous day Rowling had tweeted in support of Maya Forstater, a researcher that was fired due to transphobic comments. Like so many fans, I grew up reading the *Harry Potter* series, and, like so many others, I admired the author who strove against the odds as a single mother to become successful, and who created literature that has been “proven” to make young readers more empathetic and respectful of difference.¹ But Rowling’s tweet sent shock waves through her community of readers, who took to the internet to hash out how they should define this author as either a misguided artist or a hateful bigot. Watching these debates unfold reinforced the argument I had been researching and writing about for years: authorship, as Rowling’s example proves, is not just about producing a text. The key element of authorship is to create interpretive authority that commands a community. To achieve an enduring legacy that outlasts the historical contexts in which she wrote, an author must produce texts that continuously drive the creation of relationships between readers and the author that reassert her authority over the interpretation of her work.² Authorship is a dialectical epistemological process, through which an author interprets her text and creates a community that listens and responds to her interpretation. Rowling made

¹ Stetka, Bret. “Why Everyone Should Read Harry Potter.” *Scientific American*. <https://www.scientificamerican.com/article/why-everyone-should-read-harry-potter/> Accessed 7 Apr. 2020.

² To clarify further: power is the ability to make something (an interpretation of a text), authority is the ability to make people listen to and respect the interpretation that you make.

choices throughout her career to define her authorship as inspirational to a diverse community: she created texts that emphasized tolerance and acceptance, making all feel welcome. She also inspired her community by advertising her personal narrative leading up to the publication of *Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone*. This strategy proved to be a double-edged sword however, as her community is currently involved in a heated dialectical process to interpret the narrative she is now making with her personal beliefs. Her authority as an author is shifting, because her community questions if it should listen to and respect her interpretive choices. Rowling famously declared that one of her characters was gay, and this interpretation is now identified as queerbaiting, rather than a genuine attempt at inclusion.³ As her interpretive authority changes, so too does the community she initially created through the *Harry Potter* series. Rowling's legacy remains in limbo too. Will her reputation as a successful author endure, or will it be engulfed in a record of angry tweets? And while it is hard to imagine, it is also worth questioning if her works will also meet a similar fate: will *Harry Potter* cease to be a cultural crux for people to bond over, turning into an uncomfortable topic inspiring dismayed silence? Or perhaps they, like the works of Jane Austen, will serve very different cultural purposes than they do now.

Finding strategies to invite and keep readers in a community that honors your interpretive authority is the work of an author, but it is by no means easy, as Rowling's example proves, and as Virginia Woolf thoroughly illustrates with her fictional account

³Romano, Aja. "J.K. Rowling's latest tweet." *Vox*. 19 Dec. 2019.
<https://www.vox.com/culture/2019/12/19/21029852/jk-rowling-terf-transphobia-history-timeline> Accessed 7 Apr. 2020.

of Shakespeare's sister, who is mocked and rejected at every turn.⁴ Becoming an author requires community, which is difficult for anyone, "But for women, I thought, looking at the empty shelves, these difficulties were infinitely more formidable."⁵ Woolf explains that as difficult as material conditions were for women writers, the immaterial were worse, because sexism made it 'impossible' for women to become authors; developing authority, the ability to make people listen to and respect your interpretations, was more than uphill work when facing a hostile audience that "snubbed, slapped, lectured and exhorted" you.⁶ At the same time, no author can work in isolation, or become an author without a community of readers and colleagues. Woolf elaborates, "For masterpieces are not single and solitary births; they are the outcome of many years of thinking in common, of thinking by the body of the people."⁷ Women authors were not isolated artists but defined themselves as autonomous members and leaders of literary communities. They strove against their hostile audiences and defined authorship by textually regulating the 'thinking of the people,' or directing interpretive behaviors. This regulation would reinforce the author's authority and her right to produce literature, encouraging readers to engage in critical conversations about the world around them. Woolf adds that "She [Brontë] knew, no one better, how enormously her genius would have profited if it had not spent itself in solitary visions over distant fields; if experience and intercourse and travel had been granted her," but that both were denied her (and all women authors).⁸ I

⁴ Woolf, Virginia. *A Room of One's Own*. 1929. E-Book, Feedbooks, 2019, pp.39-41.

⁵ Ibid., pp.44.

⁶ Ibid., pp.46.

⁷ Ibid., pp.55.

⁸ Ibid., pp.59.

argue that women authors used specific strategies to create their own intercourse with fellow writers, critics, and readers to define themselves as authors.

Critically and financially successful authors defined their authorship by textually creating communities of readers that would recognize and respect the author's authority to interpret the text and its surrounding world. Claiming authority, and creating a community to keep that authority alive, was the key to defining authorship for women writers. But this definition of authorship did not suddenly appear in the Eighteenth century: the authors I analyze in this dissertation owe a great debt to the woman writer who, according to Woolf, turned an important corner and proved that women could publish: Aphra Behn (1640-1689).⁹

From the Beginning: Behn and Author Scholarship

One of the first women admitted to the canon of British writers (if Woolf's essay and Norton anthologies are anything to go by), Behn was a successful playwright, novelist, and poet with patrons in the highest circles of society. Her audience was not limited to the elite though, as Woolf points out; her sexually explicit material and inclusion of touchy topics of race and gender appealed to many readers allowing her legacy to last long after her death.¹⁰ According to Jane Spencer, author of *Rise of the Woman Novelist* (1986), Behn set up a model of authorship focused on resistance, in which women were sexually liberated artists protesting social oppression.¹¹ Resisting patriarchal oppression by working for a living (Woolf says this alone is the most important thing Behn did) and writing openly about female sexual desire, Behn defined

⁹ Ibid., pp.53.

¹⁰ Ibid., pp.53-4.

¹¹ Spencer, Jane. *Rise of the Woman Novelist: From Aphra Behn to Jane Austen*. Blackwell, 1986.

authorship as an avenue to independence and rebellion. Spencer laments that the women writers following Behn failed to live up to this model and argues that Behn's successors defined authorship as either virtuous, chaste, and submissive artistry, or as escapism. Women authors could resist, submit, or escape oppression, and Behn's choice of resistance paved the way for future women writers to define authorship as gaining rather than losing authority. Behn's model of authorship and resistance involved women taking power or authority back from others (specifically men). Spencer's work, useful in arguing that woman writers help define professional authorship writ large, fails to acknowledge and accept the complexities and ambiguities of authorial performance. Women authors could adopt some or all of Spencer's "modes" in their careers or even in a single text; Eliza Haywood's *Betsy Thoughtless*, with its racy scenes, protests the sexual repression of women, while featuring a conservative, domestic conclusion, blurring Spencer's categories. My dissertation contradicts in the dichotomizing or categorization of authorship as a single, unified identity, offering a truer and more complex view.

Indeed, Behn's own career belies the easy lines that Spencer draws. Spencer points out how Behn used autobiographical and narrative devices to create an individualized, personalized authorial presence. But at the same time, Behn's biography was obscured (probably by Behn herself), and that authorial presence fluctuates in its dynamic relationship to the characters and the reader; consider how Behn/the narrator relates to the tale of eponymous *Oroonoko*, first presenting herself as an active participant and then as a detached witness to tragedy. The recognition of such complexities is seen in

Janet Todd's *Sign of Angellica* (1990).¹² Taking the title from Behn's infamous courtesan in "The Rover," Todd's book argues that women writers found power in places of socially prescribed weakness. She provides case studies of many woman writers, arguing that each responded to her contemporary contexts through different textual techniques. More specifically, she argues that during the first third of the century women writers focused on bluntly describing sexual and political affairs, which made their authorship less valuable (because it was associated with scandal). Behn's play, *The Forc'd Marriage* (1670) and Haywood's *Opera of Operas* (1723), both deal with explicit sexual relationships and royal politics at the same time, embodying Todd's "first" stage of authorship. The second part of the century saw the rise of sensibility and gave women authors (if they engaged in this discourse) an air of respectable morality; Fielding's *The Governess* (1749) certainly falls into this category as she uses didactic interpretive schema to teach morals to the audience. Todd's third and final stage consists of women authors drawing on the Gothic tropes of entrapment or domestic virtue. Burney's accounts of her time in court do, on the surface, connect to Todd's third period, but I argue that Burney acknowledged her "entrapment" and used texts to create autonomy for herself and a life beyond that of domestic virtue. As in Spencer's analysis, Behn plays a key role in Todd's work as the starting point for women authors. I argue that women writers developed authority through a variety of techniques that go beyond the categories Todd identifies, though all have, as their primary goal, the creation and management of communities.

¹² Todd, Janet. *Sign of Angellica: Women, Writing, and Fiction, 1600-1800*. Columbia UP, 1992.

While Todd and Spencer's preference for the rebellious Behn confirmed her status in the canon, Ros Ballaster elevated her work to new heights in *Seductive Forms* (1992).¹³ Behn uses her female characters to discuss ways that women can write their own stories, or define their identities against the patriarchal grain.¹⁴ *The Rover* is full of women (the courtesan Angellica, the constant lover Florinda, and the rebellious Helena) who try to write their own stories by creating plots and narratives to attract and engage the attention of their lovers. Ballaster argues that the 'fair triumvirate of wit' (Aphra Behn, Delarivier Manley, and Eliza Haywood) understood the stakes of amatory fiction. This genre provided women writers the chance to revise femininity and to explain how, in a seduction narrative, the struggle over interpretation of language is political and symbolizes a larger gendered struggle for power. I argue that Ballaster's argument (authorship was about exploring the struggle for interpretation) expands beyond the genre of amatory or seductive fiction; women writers had to wrangle with communities over interpretive authority in order to be successful authors. At the same time, woman authors inevitably had a harder time in gaining control over interpretation because of their gender, and I assert that the struggle over interpretation was not always between men and women. As Eliza Haywood's *The Female Spectator* and Sarah Fielding's *Remarks on Clarissa* and *The Cry* confirm, women from different backgrounds and beliefs clash over interpretive control. I argue that women writers understood authorship as a matter of

¹³ Ballaster, Ros. *Seductive Forms: Women's Amatory Fiction from 1684-1740*. Clarendon, 1998.

¹⁴ Fun fact: this technique of using female characters to explore strategies of self-definition was the topic of my honors undergrad thesis, though I did not use Behn as an example. I referred to Eliza Haywood, Sarah Fielding, and Anne Radcliffe for examples.

creating a community that, instead of fighting over interpretive control, would acknowledge, submit to, or even crave the authority of the woman author.

As Ballaster argues, Behn recognized that the struggle for interpretive control is often made manifest through physical control over the female body. For instance, in *The Adventure of the Black Lady* (1684), readers are left wondering who the black lady of the title is, or in other words, how to interpret the female bodies they encounter in the text. When it is finally revealed that the ruined, pregnant heroine Bellamora has black hair, readers must grapple with the question of how to interpret Behn's blackness as literal or moral (or both!). The point is that Behn's work forces readers to grapple with the issue of embodiment when we discuss interpretive authority and authorship in general. Alexander Pope infamously solidified the connection between the author and her body in his *Dunciad*, in which he compared Eliza Haywood to a prostitute and her books to bastard children. In order to maintain authority in the literary market, women authors had to respond to the cultural construct that interwove their personal bodies with their professional work. Catherine Gallagher's *Nobody's Story* (1995) explains how women writers approached this issue, arguing that these authors created themselves as "Nobody" and a "No-Body."¹⁵ Women writers adopted a blank persona or embodied absence itself; this blank could be commoditized in specific socio-economic environments. For example, in *The Invisible Spy* (1755) Haywood states that readers cannot discover her true identity any more than they could win the cash prize for a current contest to find accurate measures for latitude and longitude at sea: she quite literally places a price on the blank that is her authorship, or commodifies the absence of her body and identity. Gallagher's

¹⁵ Gallagher, Catherine. *Nobody's Story: The Vanishing Acts of Women Writers in the Marketplace, 1670-1920*. University of California Press, 1994.

analysis of women writers works very well in some cases, but fails to recognize the ways that women authors both accepted *and* rejected embodiment (like Haywood who used puffs that described her physical beauty), and her analysis does not speak to later writers like Fanny Burney who published accounts (Court Diaries) of painful bodily experiences. Absence, in the form of anonymity, is a technique for creating authority and community, but I argue that the absence of a body or a self is always framed or contextualized by the author's community. There may be 'no-body' in a text, but that nobody inspires the figurative gathering of other bodies *around* a text. This strategy of becoming a "nobody" is a way for authors to engender community while eluding some of the hostility Woolf speaks of in her essay.

The ability to attract and gather bodies around a text was crucial not just for women writers like Behn, but according to Paula Backscheider, was crucial in the development of a broad discursive trend - what she calls "spectacular politics."

Spectacular Politics: Theatrical Power and Mass Popular Culture in Early Modern England (1993) shows how popular texts, from royal events to Behn's plays, functioned in new social processes where public opinion had great power.¹⁶ Backscheider argues that public spaces became increasingly gendered and binary in the early modern period, but, that amidst this polarization, Behn created a new discourse of sexual difference with a focus on the female experience. The powerful women I mentioned previously from *The Rover* confirm Backscheider's analysis, as they drive the plot with their search for autonomy and sexual fulfillment, and the heroines of future women writers (like Burney's Evelina and Cecilia) would also serve as experiments for how women could

¹⁶ Backscheider, Paula. *Spectacular Politics: Theatrical Power and Mass Popular Culture in Early Modern England*. Johns Hopkins UP, 1993.

gain authority. Women authors of Eighteenth-century Britain did not just focus on the female experience though. They strove to create communities of men *and* women through their authorship. They implicitly fought against the polarization Backscheider refers to by creating communities where everyone, regardless of gender, was united in the interpretation of a text (under the author's authority, of course). Backscheider herself discusses how men and women authors should be studied and read together in "The Novel's Gendered Space" (2003), acknowledging that, since men and women authors worked together, their works should not be entirely separated in critical analysis.¹⁷ Throughout my chapters I discuss how these women writers directly and indirectly included their male colleagues in their textual communities. For example, in her translation of *Xenophone's Memoirs of Socrates* (1762), Sarah Fielding references her close working relationship with a respected classicist, James Harris. Within this reference though, Fielding takes the opportunity to emphasize his emotional character and indirectly contrast it to her objectivity as a scholar. Because of the gendered oppression they faced (thanks in part to the binary developments Backscheider outlines) women had to develop unique textual strategies like this one to participate in communities typically dominated by men and to assert themselves as authority figures. These strategies of developing authority also give rise to the community the author oversees and relies on for support in future textual endeavors.

Women authors had to develop their definition of authorship amidst the backdrop of the polarization of gender, and what Michael McKeon identifies as the crucial context

¹⁷ Backscheider, Paula. "The Novel's Gendered Space" in *Revising Women: Eighteenth-Century "Women's Fiction" and Social Engagement*, edited by Paula Backscheider, Johns Hopkins UP, 2002, pp.1-30.

for the novel - social instability; the Eighteenth century was a perfect time for women writers to take advantage of formal (textual) and social instability to create authority and communities in new ways. McKeon asserts that in Eighteenth-century England, social and literary categories were becoming increasingly destabilized, creating an opening for a new form of literature – the novel. And with a new form of literature, the definition of authorship inevitably expanded and changed. In *The Origins of the English Novel: 1600-1740* (1987) McKeon argues that the novel, focused on individual experience, emerged to understand social instability and to address its connected epistemological crisis.¹⁸ As traditional sources of social authority (like the aristocracy) faltered or faded away, authors and readers had to answer the question of who or what is the authority that can direct epistemological work. Behn's *Oroonoko*, for example, begins with the narrator parsing out how the story she tells is true, how the story's sources are legitimate, and how its lack of invention or fancy makes it both honest and entertaining. As a novelist, Behn conveys authority by emphasizing the story's truth, and thereby guides readers in understanding or knowing the text. For the women writers in this dissertation, interpreting texts is part of a dialectical epistemological process; analyzing a text is a way to discover if the text is rational and worthy of attention, and to discover if the author's claim to authority itself is rational and justified. Interpretation is therefore central to the creation of authority and therefore authorship. Haywood, Fielding, Burney, and Austen all develop different strategies to guide readers in interpreting the text and the world. At the same time, while these writers do often focus on individual experience, their novels also consistently speak to a communal experience, or the novels are delivered in a

¹⁸ McKeon, Michael. *The Origins of the English Novel: 1600-1740*, 15th Anniversary Edition, Johns Hopkins UP, 2002.

multivocal voice (like Haywood's *The Female Spectator* and Fielding and Collier's *The Cry*). In other words, this dissertation complicates McKeon's assumption that the novel is a form dedicated to the exploration of society through the individual; the authors in this dissertation use the novel form as a way of creating dialectical community, not just exploring individual experience.

Theoretical Contexts: Authorship Cont. and Performance

As my references to Virginia Woolf's 1929 essay demonstrate, the idea that authorship is a social process is not new, but my dissertation clearly identifies the way that social process works for women writers. Michel Foucault's influential lecture "What is an Author?" identifies the author function as part of social discourses of appropriation and value. Foucault explains, "First, they [authors] are objects of appropriation; the form of property they have become is of a particular type whose legal codification was accomplished some years ago [the Eighteenth century]." ¹⁹ The idea of the author is used to claim ownership of a text, so that when a text is transgressive, the author can be punished. But Foucault does not allow room for the complexities or positions of women writers, who were often anonymous too. How does a woman or an anonymous person own a text when she cannot legally own anything? How can an anonymous entity claim ownership without a name? These are questions female authors answer or circumvent through the creation and regulation of a community that acknowledges the author's authority and interpretive ownership of a text, regardless of her gender. For example, Haywood used her community of Hillarians (a circle of artists in London) to indirectly point to her ownership of her first novel, even as she remained anonymous. Foucault's

¹⁹ Foucault, Michel. "What is an Author?" 22 Feb. 1969, Collège de France, Lecture.

point about the transgressive nature of writing and writers resonates with the women authors in this project: authorship was an inherently transgressive process for women, and writers took advantage of this “fact” in their definition as authors. Haywood called herself a “Dangerous Woman-Poet” in her 1724 play *A Wife to Be Let*, making it clear that she knew her profession was socially dangerous. Sarah Fielding took an opposing approach to Haywood’s, emphasizing in *The Governess* (1749) that her work was *not* transgressive or dangerous, but dedicated to teaching children moral precepts. And Burney’s attempts at comedy, which her mentors identified as transgressing acceptable norms of femininity, were so ‘dangerous’ they were not published for many years, even after the author’s death. Each author used the idea of transgression in different ways, confirming or rejecting it to build their authority in a community.

Foucault also acknowledges that authorship was not a stable concept, something that women writers took advantage of to create and change their authorship over time. He remarks, “the ‘author-function’ is not universal or constant in all discourse,” but “The meaning and value attributed to the text depended on [the author],” as Rowling’s example proves.²⁰ Foucault adds, “If by accident or design a text was presented anonymously, every effort was made to locate its author. Literary anonymity was of interest only as a puzzle to be solved.”²¹ The name of an author signified not just skill, but also the author’s place in a community. Haywood did not reveal her name with her first publication, but still connected her authorship to a specific group of successful artists, so when she added her name to later works, she transferred that community association to her name.

Burney’s name, following the revelation that she was the author of *Evelina*, signified skill

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Ibid.

(because it was well-received) and her association with other famous authors like Samuel Johnson. All the women writers I examine here took advantage of the fluctuating nature of authorship to try out different strategies (including the puzzle of anonymity) of presenting themselves as authority figures to a community that they created.

Perhaps the most important point that Foucault makes in his essay is the argument that authorship is not the result of spontaneous, individual action, but is instead the result of ‘complex operations’ involving multiple people. Foucault explains the author function:

is not formed spontaneously through the simple attribution of a discourse to an individual. It results from a complex operation whose purpose is to construct the rational entity we call an author. Undoubtedly, this construction is assigned a 'realistic' dimension as we speak of an individual's 'profundity' or 'creative' power, his intentions or the original inspiration manifested in writing. Nevertheless, these aspects of an individual, which we designate as an author (or which comprise an individual as an author), are projections, in terms always more or less psychological, of our way of handling texts: in the comparisons we make, the traits we extract as pertinent, the continuities we assign, or the exclusions we practice. In addition, all these operations vary according to the period and the form of discourse concerned.²²

Foucault proceeds to explain how these “complex operations” mimic Christian authentication or exegesis. A person does not decide to be an author on her own: authorship requires a community acknowledging and respecting that a writer is an author. This “complex operation,” of getting readers to recognize a woman author as an author,

²² Ibid.

involved textual different strategies for the writers I examine. What did they do in their texts to identify specific “aspects” of the individual (their professional authorial selves) that they wanted readers to latch onto during reading? The answer varies for each writer: Haywood deployed a variety of strategies to keep readers excited and guessing as to her identity and authority; Fielding emphasized the didactic expression of her interpretive models; Burney negotiated with her readers for interpretive authority; and Austen used humor to create paradox of universality and exclusion. In all these strategies, women authors manage their communities to create authority and to control, as much as possible, the “complex operations” that define their authorship. My dissertation specifies Foucault’s theory and clarifies it by explaining how authorship worked in the cases of some of the most influential and successful authors of Eighteenth-century Britain.

Since authorship is a process, not a static identity, I refer to the work women writers do as a performance or action, as opposed to a state of being. My definition of performance is drawn from the work of performance theorist Richard Schechner, who argues that that “Performances – of art, rituals, or ordinary life – are “restored behaviors,” “twice-behaved behaviors,” performed actions that people train for and rehearse.”²³ Restored behaviors are “physical, verbal, or virtual actions that are not-for-the-first time; that are prepared or rehearsed.”²⁴ When I speak of authorship as a process, I refer to a sequence of actions, or textual strategies, that the author performs. The goal of this performance is to create a community in which the author has authority. All the women authors I study were conscious that they were performing for an audience to achieve

²³ Schechner, Richard. *Performance Studies: An Introduction*. New York, Routledge, 2013, pp.28.

²⁴ Ibid., pp.29.

these goals, though the degree to which they make that consciousness explicit varies. Performativity is defined as the subject's level of consciousness that they are performing for an audience. Haywood is perhaps the most performative author in this project: in the conclusion of *A Wife to Be Lett*, Haywood explicitly addresses her community's desire for novelty, and how her work fulfills that desire. Fielding's authorship is inconsistent in its performativity: in *The Cry* (1754), a collaboration with Jane Collier, is highly performative, as the authors constantly compare their work to that of acting on a stage. But Fielding's other novels rarely engage in this kind of display. Burney, constantly put on display by her royal and literary communities, is like Haywood in her consciousness of performance. In her court letters Burney is highly conscious of her work as an author, since her patrons often referred to her expertise. And Austen's famous conclusions, like that of *Mansfield Park*, display a marked consciousness that she is writing for an audience that expects certain things (like closure) of the author. The degree of performativity affects the dialectical process of authorship; the way that the author delivers or performs her authority will impact how her community relates to her and her interpretations.

Using the word performance in a literary analysis inevitably recalls the work of Judith Butler. Comparing my understanding of performance with hers sheds light onto how the performance of gender and authorship, while connected, are not the same thing, which is important distinction to make when analyzing women authors, who were so often judged primarily by their gender. In her essay "Performative Acts and Gender Constitution" (1988) Butler states, "gender is in no way a stable identity or locus of agency from which various acts proceed; rather, it is an identity tenuously constituted in

time – an identity instituted through a *stylized repetition of acts*...bodily gestures, movements, and enactments of various kinds constitute the illusion of an abiding gendered self.”²⁵ Both gender and authorship not static things but the result of repeated acts, though instead of gestures/bodily movements, writers use specific textual strategies to define themselves as authors. Butler makes a key point by saying that performance offers an *illusion* of the stable self: in the case of women authors, their identity as authors may appear to be stable, but as I show through my analysis, authorship changes over time, sometime even within the span of one novel. In other words, the process of authorship gives rise to an idea of a singular author, but that author changes as her textual strategies do; Austen’s position in relation to her readers changes when she makes jokes to mock the characters, the readers, and perhaps even herself. Butler stresses the *work* of identity (of gender, or in my case, authorship) when she says, “One is not simply a body, but, in some very key sense, one *does* one’s body, and, indeed, one does one’s body differently from one’s contemporaries and from one’s embodied predecessors and successors as well.”²⁶ A woman is not an author, but is rather *doing* authorship through a process of textual moves to create a community and authority. Sarah Fielding emphasizes this “doing” work in texts like *Remarks on Clarissa* (1749), which consists of women interpreting Richardson’s story and educating male readers on how to read the novel.

There are differences between how Butler and I conceive of identity-as-performance. Butler explains that “gender is a project which has cultural survival as its

²⁵ Butler, Judith. “Performative Acts and Gender Constitution: An Essay in Phenomenology and Feminist Theory.” *Theatre Journal*, vol.40, no.4, Dec 1988, pp.519 (original emphasis).

²⁶ *Ibid.*, pp.522 (my emphasis).

end.”²⁷ In general, cultural survival is what women authors sought as well: they wanted people to continue purchasing and discussing their texts; Austen is the most successful in ensuring her cultural survival thanks to her strategy of creating texts that, because of their structural nuance, demand repeated engagement or the continuation of a dialectical interpretive process. At the same time, the women authors in this dissertation put their cultural survival at risk through their bold critique of institutions (Haywood criticized the Royal Family and the patriarchy in general; Burney criticized the Royal Family and blind English patriotism) and through formal experimentation (Fielding went beyond the bounds of the novel to create *The Cry* and her commentary on Greek classics). Women authors did perform authorship with cultural survival in mind, but also as an avenue to criticize the world around them, even if that criticism put their cultural survival at risk. To do the work of authorship, these women had to create community and authority, but they could have more complex ends than survival alone.

Chapter Outline

The romantic ideal of the lonely genius authoress toiling away in her garret to produce anonymous novels belies the inextricable connection between authorship and community. Authorship was not a static identity for women writers of Eighteenth-century Britain. Authorship is a dynamic and performative process of creating authority and a community that respects that authority. Women writers deployed different strategies to engage in this process but all of the writers examined in this dissertation demonstrate how performing authorship was a means to cyclically build the interpretive authority of

²⁷ Ibid.

women, and to repeatedly assert the right for women to engage in critical conversations about the world around them.

This argument forces us to reevaluate what it means to be an author. Instead of creating general definitions of authorship, or forcing women writers into binary or rigid categories, my dissertation allows us to think about authorship in a more nuanced and complex way. This nuanced understanding in turn helps us make connections between writers across the century. This argument enables readers to see how authorship developed over time in a narrative of creating communities through text. At the same time, my thesis opens new avenues for how Eighteenth-century studies analyzes authorship in gendered categories. On the one hand, my dissertation demonstrates that women writers effectively developed their own definition of authorship, one that did not rely on ownership as much as on the creation of authority and community. On the other hand, because male writers and readers were included in these communities, we can understand authorship as a process that works across gendered boundaries. Unlike anthologies that focus only on women, my dissertation proves there is value in recognizing how authorship was a process involving men and women because producing texts *did* literally involve the work of men and women in the literary market, and because women writers did not seek to exclude themselves from the canon or communities their male colleagues created. They did not strive to create their own canon of female writers, but instead performed authorship in a unique way to persuasively argue for their place in *the* canon of good literature.

Because this project is focused on Eighteenth-century Britain, my argument about authorship is also tied into the field of novel studies. To paraphrase my analysis of

McKeon, the authors in this dissertation prove that the novel was crucial in providing a forum in which women could establish their authorship. The result of formal experimentation and social instability, the novel offered women authors the opportunity to experiment with the idea of authorship, itself an unstable and fluid identity. The success of these authors demonstrates that the novel was unique not just in its ability to dive into questions of social instability and epistemology, as McKeon claims, but also in its ability to create communities centered on the interpretive authority of the author. Defining authorship in new ways helps us to define the novel in a new way, as the form that perhaps most effectively executes the authority and community functions of authorship.

This project has broader philosophical implications in terms of how we understand the self as a process, and a result of epistemological dialecticism, rather than as a unified subject. Eighteenth-century women writers constantly modified their strategies to continue to appeal to different readers: their authorship was never static, suggesting that any identity is also fluid and composed of a series of actions that occur over time, as Butler argues in her conception of gender. Moreover, because authorship depends on community, we can recognize that identity is a social process that involves listening and responding to the voices of others. Identity is, in this sense, multivocal and unstable as it constantly shifts in response to the community that surrounds a subject. The classical Western ideal of the self as a unified and stable subject is contradicted by this understanding of authorship. Through the work of these authors, we can see the emergence of a much more modern conception of identity as fluid and unstable, allowing

us to trace post-modernist ideas of identity back through time and to make space for women writers in this tradition of thought.

Each chapter is dedicated to one author and the strategies she used to perform authorship. While some strategies, such as adopting the role of a teacher or a didactic tone, can be seen in several of these case studies, what makes each writer unique is the dynamic between the author and her community or the way that her authority is built and functions in relation to her reader. The difference in dynamics can also explain why Austen's authorship, which is paradoxically universal and exclusive, endured in the form of a vibrant and adaptive readership, while her predecessors, creating more authoritative dynamics with their readers, fell into relative obscurity. I chose these authors because they all: (1) achieved critical and financial success as published writers (and so could define themselves as "professional" authors; I discuss this term more in chapter 3); (2) wrote multiple works during their careers including but not limited to the form of novel; (3) demonstrated an interest through their narrators, characters, and/or the content of their works in exploring what it means to be an author; (4) all defined authorship as building interpretive authority and regulating a community that respects that authority.

The first chapter is dedicated to the great "Arbitress of Passions," Eliza Haywood (1693-1756). Haywood is a biographically elusive figure who also constantly used different textual strategies to define herself as an author, making her elusive for a scholar. Haywood's strategies, though varied, are broken down into five categories: the use of false anonymity to implicitly allude to authority and community, fluidly shifting her performance of gender when responding to critics, networking with popular male colleagues, using narrative voices to create authority, and finally crafting a fictional

community of women. Haywood performed interpretive authority that was superficially shared with the readers, but ultimately always defined herself as the ultimate authority on her texts. Her trademark of adaptivity and elusive quality made Haywood appealing during her lifetime and continues to make her stand out in the definition of authorship. Her experimentation with many strategies created avenues of exploration for future women writers and solidified the role that community would have in the success of women authors.

Sarah Fielding (1710-1768), the focus of chapter two, rejected Haywood's more brazen strategies of identifying herself by name and openly attacking her critics. Fielding focused on the *doing* or the interpretive work and authority of an author. She created different interpretive schemes or apparatus for readers to follow, modeling them through teacher figures or wise female characters. Fielding's communities are therefore consistently hierarchical, and while she encouraged readers to engage in literary discussions, she always made it clear that the community should respect either the author or the character that initiated the discussion and modeled interpretive behaviors. Fielding did show respect for the authors in her historical community, particularly the men that supported her literary career. Her engagement with these scholars was another key strategy in performing authorship. Cyclically creating authority through these strategies, Fielding ensured that readers would respect her as the author, though her community was not a democratic one.

While Fielding strove to separate her personal self from her authorship, Fanny Burney (1752-1840) knew that this boundary was not easy to maintain. Through her novels and court diaries/letters, Burney explained how authorship requires negotiating

interpretive authority with its members. Community is a site of contention for Burney, and the work of authorship is to use texts to leverage power in the social and literary communities upon which her professional career depended. In other words, Burney did not create authority in the same ways as Haywood and Fielding, who demanded authority from readers, or taught readers that she was the best authority. Burney managed her community by negotiating meaning with readers, patrons, and critics. She often gives readers a hint (or the way she wants readers to interpret her works), but she is profoundly conscious of the need to accumulate social and literary capital to encourage readers to follow that direction. Burney gave future readers a very definite hint when she constructed her own legacy through her memoirs; while this tactic met with harsh criticism, it is nonetheless a fascinating example of how an author develops authority on her own story and attempts to control her future reputation.

The author with the most enduring legacy, however, is the subject of the final chapter: Jane Austen (1775-1817). Austen approaches the dual requirements of authorship through humor and the creation of a paradoxical community. Austen creates communities that are simultaneously open to any reader *and* exclusive, in the sense that only careful readers can access the author's "real" meaning. Moreover humor of Austen's text often centers on excluding people from community. Anyone can access Austen's text and take pride in being a member of her club of readers that "really gets" her meaning/jokes, but every reader is also always under the constant threat of being excluded from that community due to a lack of understanding or personal flaws that make them the butt of Austen's joke. Austen deploys tendentious jokes (humor with a hostile tendency), sarcastic ambivalent signifiers, and narrative bait-and-switches that offer the

tantalizing chance to be a part of the elite Austen community, at the risk of being left out of the joke. Austen's paradoxical approach to creating and managing community drives readers back into her texts to reread the novels in the hope that they will be on the same level (or have the same interpretive knowledge and authority) as the author. This demand for repeated reading ensuring that Austen's authorship, through its communities of readers, would thrive for generations and inspire countless performances in the forms of adaptations. Building on the experience of her predecessors, Austen found an effective dynamic of creating authority within a community that loved, and would continue to love, her as an author. While none of these authors have Twitter accounts like J.K. Rowling to defend (or implode) their authorship today, the strategies they employed to create authority and community continue to resonate with readers, proving that they defined themselves not only as authors, but as some of the most successful ones in British literature.

Chapter 1: Always Becoming Eliza Haywood

Introduction: The Elusive Haywood Brand

Eliza Haywood holds a paradoxical position in the field of Eighteenth-Century studies. She is acknowledged as one of the most popular writers of the time but, despite her popularity, is one the most biographically mysterious. As Paula Backscheider argued in her touchstone article, “The Shadow of an Author: Eliza Haywood” (1998), Haywood kept her personal narrative private while successfully responding to public trends in the literary marketplace.²⁸ Publishing an astonishing number of novels, acting in and producing popular plays, writing critical and political pieces, and even opening a publishing house, Haywood was an adaptable author, changing her authorship with each new work. This trademark adaptability was key to Haywood’s ability to continually create her authority anew, and to maintain interpretive control over the communities she created. Her constant adaptations create an eclectic and fragmented authorship, so Haywood was always becoming an author, never stagnating or maintaining consistency of authorial being for a moment, even within a single text.²⁹ The one consistent byline through this process of becoming is the importance of community. In other words, becoming an author always means creating a community that responds to Haywood’s authority.

Haywood was not the first woman writer to perform the strategies that I will explore in this chapter, though she is unique in how she emphasizes community as the

²⁸ Backscheider, Paula. “The Shadow of an Author: Eliza Haywood.” *Eighteenth-Century Fiction*. vol.11, no.1, 1991, pp. 79-102.

²⁹ My use of the word “becoming” is influenced by but not directly quoted from Deleuze and Guattari. I define becoming as a state of fluid existence that is always moving and changing depending on the influences or circumstances surrounding the subject.

crux of authorship. Haywood owes a considerable debt to her predecessors, especially Aphra Behn, for laying the foundation of women authorship. What sets Haywood apart from her predecessors is first, the highly performative nature of her authorship. She displays a marked consciousness that she is performing for an audience to create a community that supports her. Behn also performed for an audience, but Haywood's career marks a shift in how community was a crucial and constant goal for that performance. Haywood used different textual strategies to create communities that would acknowledge her authority and continue to buy her works. We see earlier authors like Behn (or going back even further, Mary Sidney) exploring with the idea of female community, but Haywood defines authorship itself as a process of building and managing community – not just creating it or reflecting on it in fiction.³⁰

Haywood constantly reimagined her authorship to become something new while operating in the context of contemporary artists and texts. Unlike Delarivier Manley for example, who promoted a biography in her novels, or Alexander Pope who staunchly settled himself into the role of defender of liberal authorship, Haywood's authorship shifted – the ways that she created, managed, and related to her communities changed over time. Acknowledging the diversity of her works, there are four categories of strategies that I will examine in this chapter: (1) The use of false anonymity, or pretending to be anonymous while her community pointed her to her identity; (2) Fluidly shifting her gendered position in relation to critics, Haywood acknowledged and eluded the power of the literary community; (3) Through networking with Haywood established herself as an equal to the men in her literary community; (4) Using appealing narrative

³⁰ Sarah Fielding would shift the context of this community from the public world of literary publication to education.

voices to create an authoritative position for herself at the head of a community of readers. These strategies come together in *The Female Spectator*, where she most clearly articulates authorship as a process of creating authority and community. Haywood's performance does not suggest that everyone can become an author, but her authorship argues that readers, especially women, benefit from understanding selfhood as a process of fragmentation and mutability, rather than a narrative of linear construction to one teleological end set by oppressive gender norms. By identifying community as the key to authorship, Haywood affirmed that her readers, however socially vulnerable they may be, were not alone and that they could become interpretive authorities in their communities.

The Incognita: False Anonymity

Little is known about Haywood's biography: Backscheider has done vital work on this topic, yet much remains speculative, even her birth and death dates! I mention this gap in knowledge to demonstrate Haywood's dedication to secrecy, and its central role in her authorship.³¹ Behn also kept her personal life a secret, but what is unique about Haywood is how she created moments of false anonymity that were undermined by her community context. According to a posthumous source, Haywood instructed a friend to keep all biographical details secret, and to destroy all her personal papers.³² Such a request was not uncommon for an Eighteenth-century woman; some of Jane Austen's letters were destroyed in a similar fashion. But Haywood's use of anonymity during her

³¹ Early scholars collapsed Haywood's professional and personal lives (like George Whicher's title "The *Romances* of Eliza Haywood," my emphasis). I am arguing that Haywood did not perform such a collapse; rather she used anonymity and the evocation of danger to shroud her personal life in mystery, casting an exciting shadow *onto* her professional life.

³² Backscheider, Paula. "Shadow of an Author: Eliza Haywood." *Eighteenth-Century Fiction*. vol.11, no.1, 1991, pp. 79-102.

lifetime was a crucial step in creating authority and a community of supporters. Through the strategic use of false anonymity, Haywood enticed readers with the allure of transgressive novelty and demonstrated her authority over the text of by framing how readers would read the novel as the product of an writer connected to an influential community of artists and patrons, whose support proved the novel worthy of public consumption.

While some women authors like Fielding and Burney reveal their motivations (ranging from financial to moralistic), Haywood does not offer readers a “rationale” in her debut novel *Love in Excess* (1719).³³ This lack of motive was a deliberate move on Haywood’s part.³⁴ By withholding her motives and her name, Haywood began her authorial performance with a blank slate that could be modified throughout her career. Although Haywood leaned into the trait of scandal that *Love in Excess* would establish, it is significant that she began her career on this note of possibility. This opening shows that Haywood understood authorial performance as a mutable series of acts that would change as a community of readers responded to her work. The anonymity of the title page excites readers because of these possibilities and encourages them to become part of the

³³ In a later letter Haywood claims she turned to novels to support her two children, but the very existence of these children is still disputed, and I question Haywood’s belated ascription of motivation to family after the domestic novel was in vogue. Backscheider, Paula. “The Shadow of an Author: Eliza Haywood,” *Eighteenth-Century Fiction*, vol.11, no.1, 1998, pp.79-102. See also: Blouch, Christine “Eliza Haywood and the Romance of Obscurity.” *SEL*, vol.31, 1991, pp. 535-551.

³⁴ Male and female authors varied in their decision to include their names on a title page: for instance Jonathan Swift vacillated between anonymity and public ownership to protect himself from political attack. Manley capitalized on her name and publicized it to attract attention, and her contemporary Mary Pix always published under her name. Some eighteenth-century women writers like Catherine Trotter began their careers quietly as anonymous “ladies” but became known later due to their success. Haywood steers a middle path here by using the anonymous ‘lady’ but anticipates the excitement that authors like Manley inspired.

community of readers seeking to solve the puzzle of anonymity (as Foucault would say).³⁵

And, yet, Haywood was not so anonymous as the paratextual material of *Love in Excess* makes her seem. By including information about her historical community, Haywood points to her identity. Before publishing her first novel, Haywood made her public debut as an actress in Dublin, appearing as Chloe in Thomas Shadwell's adaptation of *Timon of Athens*. Through the theater she met her publisher and bookseller William Chetwood, a successful theater manager. Chetwood introduced her to what is now called the 'Hillarian' literary circle. Named after Aaron Hill (manager of the popular Little Theater in Haymarket), the Hillarians included Haywood, her frenemy Richard Savage, and the famous actress Anne Oldfield (the dedicatee of the novel). Anyone familiar with Chetwood, Hill, Savage, or Oldfield (and all would be featured in gossip and publications) would know Haywood as a member of their circles, and it would not take much detective work to link Haywood to this novel, explicitly written by a young star new to London and under Chetwood's wing.³⁶ This artistic community frames Haywood's anonymous performance, like a group photo with an obvious sticky note over the author's face. She manages to deploy anonymity to engage interest while also citing her good connections. Haywood encourages readers to join her textual community and to

³⁵ While Haywood's identity as the author remains secret, her gender is clear. In other words, the reader could not assume that the author is male. This clarity is achieved through Chetwood's dedicatory letter, where he identifies the author as a young lady and describes her in effeminate terms (vulnerable and in need of patronage/protection).

³⁶ If there were any doubts as to this connection, they were clarified when Savage wrote puffs for the next Volume of *Love in Excess*. Savage and Haywood regularly referenced each other in their works after, though in a context of conflict.

trust in her authority as a writer by pointing to the people (the Hillarians) that trust her already.

The phrase “good connections” may seem ironic given the scandal attached to some of Haywood’s friends, but Haywood capitalized on the reputation of the community turning a liability into a marketing strategy for her authorship. In the preface, Chetwood humbly asks Oldfield to approve the novel, as other works have benefited by her promotion. Oldfield was scandalous because of her sexual relationship with the aristocrat Brigadier General Charles Churchill and her profession as an actress did not make her any more respectable. Appealing to a potential source of support by identifying Oldfield as the dedicatee, Haywood may be anonymous, but she is connected to leading patrons/artists. The authority of Oldfield, which seen in her support of other good works, is transferred to the new novel. Moreover, Oldfield’s name would make readers think of political/social elites and sexual scandals, both featured in *Love in Excess*, so the appeal to the personal connection also makes a link between the novel and the genre of scandal fiction. Haywood’s first work demonstrates that anonymity is not an “all or nothing” practice; women can modify how they withhold their names within a community context to control the dissemination of identity and assert their authority.

Anonymity creates possibilities framed by positive community connections, and Haywood uses that openness to create an inconsistent persona that is always becoming something new, which will engage readers and reinforce her authority through repeated success. In the dedication Chetwood says, “I shall think my self very happy if I could have it to say the reading of these following lines had filled up the casma of one of your

vacant hours.”³⁷ Chetwood’s excessive modesty aligns with the trope of the modest woman writer, but it directly contradicts Haywood’s reputation as an actress and member of the Hillarian group. Haywood repeated this contradictory quality of secrecy and publicity throughout her works: she never considered a past performance as limiting future authorial endeavors.³⁸

Haywood knew how to create communities in her texts, and, through her characters, explored with how women could manage those communities when they were not supposed to possess any authority.³⁹ The eponymous heroine of *Fantomina* becomes anonymity itself through disguise, gaining authority over Beauplasir, representative of her larger social community and the patriarchy. Styling herself as “Incognita,” Fantomina addresses the “All-Conquering Beauplasir” with a letter, inviting him to an assignation.⁴⁰ Fantomina writes tongue-in-cheek, as she has fooled the “All-Conquering” man with a series of disguises. The Incognita (her final persona) refuses her name, but Fantomina has always denied Beauplasir that marker of self, taking on a series of personas. Haywood employed different pen names to signal she was performing different personas, but her connections to other artists or works implicitly pointed out her “real” identity. As with her heroine, Haywood’s names serve as markers of eclecticism and the ability to manipulate her audience; it is not a stable sign but rather an indicator that she is

³⁷ Haywood, Eliza. *Love in Excess*. Edited by David Oakleaf. 2nd Ed. Ontario, Broadview, 2000, pp.35.

³⁸ Haywood’s ability to shift, regardless of past performances (authorial performances in texts and performances of her scandalous past via critics) continued throughout her career.

³⁹ Haywood did not “create” the Hillarian circle, but she textually re-created it in her publications and use her texts to signal how she managed certain relationships within that community (see her eventual fallout with Richard Savage).

⁴⁰ Haywood, Eliza. “Fantomina.” *Popular Fiction by Women 1660-1730: An Anthology*, edited by Paula R. Backscheider and John J. Richetti, Cary, Oxford UP, 1997, pp. 242.

engaging in the process of authorship, of creating and managing a community that is always excited by the possibility of what the author might do next.⁴¹

Haywood also uses Alovysa in *Love in Excess*, to explain how false anonymity, achieved with community framing, is necessary for authorial success. Writing an anonymous note, Alovysa reveals her passion to D'Elmont, explaining if he looks for the signs of love, he will find her out. Alovysa acknowledges she takes a huge risk in publishing her passion, as D'Elmont could (if he identifies her) expose her, just like Haywood could be exposed. Alovysa entices her reader with anonymity, forbidding complete "knowledge" but stoking curiosity all the same, referencing the exciting danger attending her performance (like Haywood does so often). Alovysa remarks she writes from a position of anonymity due to "her own want of power," and the desire to know "the secrets of his heart, without the shame of revealing her own."⁴² Alovysa stresses that the role of author is a dangerous one because it means a woman is vulnerable to the public gaze. There is an additional danger: the reader could misidentify the author and ascribe power to another textual source. The fact that D'Elmont misreads her note and misidentifies the anonymous author emphasizes that explicitly flirting with danger in textual production can threaten the authority an author has over her own works (because that power can be incorrectly ascribed if she is totally anonymous). In this moment Haywood deploys an example of a failed authorial performance with which we can contrast Haywood's own: her more nuanced performance of false anonymity (in which

⁴¹ This 'shiftiness' can be traced in Manley and Behn's works as well. In *The New Atalantis* Manley appears under the guise of several characters, and Behn was known under various names too (Astrea maybe being the most well-known). Haywood takes this restored behavior and uses it to teach readers how strategic control of personal information/anonymity is a power move in the sexual and literary market.

⁴² Haywood, *Love in Excess*. pp.38-9.

she is indirectly identified through community connections) is successful (meaning she received credit for her work).⁴³ Total anonymity may appear desirable for women writers, but Haywood shows through her character how this “all or nothing” approach can be hazardous.

The way that Haywood modified her name over the volumes of *Love in Excess* demonstrates how she maintained authority while using different strategies. Only a “young lady” in volume one, the title page of the second volume includes “By Mrs. Eliza Haywood.” The first volume acts as a prologue to Haywood’s performance, establishing her authority within the London artistic community, which was also a place of exciting transgression; the addition of her name in volume two enhances this risqué persona because a married woman of sexual and worldly experience (with the honorific Mrs.) should focus on supporting masculine authority in the home, not engaging in published discourse. The success of the first volume also gave Haywood credit in the print market: the triumph of *Love in Excess* shows that Haywood could write a financially successful and popular book, encouraging more people to join her community of readers and reinforcing her authority as an author – she has experience to prove she can write and interpret texts that keep readers engaged.⁴⁴ Using her Hillarian community as a launch pad for Volume I, Haywood claims a place of authority on the first page of Volume II with her name. Haywood makes a powerful point for women writers: you can claim

⁴³ In other sections of the text, Alovysa is not necessarily a ‘failed’ author. Shortly after this event Alovysa successfully weaves a narrative for a neighbor, convincing him his daughter must attend a convent to protect her reputation. Just at Haywood’s authorial performance is ever-changing, so are those of her heroines.

⁴⁴ This sense of authority can also be read in the increasing presence of a narrator voice/commentary in the second volume (see narrator section).

authorship of your text, but you must lay some groundwork that will engage the audience and identify your communities.

Haywood did not only deploy communities like the Hillarian circle: she also used other relationships to frame her authorship. For example, one of Haywood's most popular texts was *La Belle Assemblée* (1724) is a translation of Madeleine Angélique Poisson de Gomez's *Les Journées Amusantes* (1722). She did not attach her name to the popular translation until 1732, when she played the role of Lady Flame in Samuel Johnson's *The Blazing Comet*.⁴⁵ In advertisements for the play she was listed as "Madam de Gomez," (the original author of *La Belle Assemblée*). Patrick Spedding explains, "Haywood wanted to capitalize on people's curiosity and to use it as a draw-card to *The Blazing Comet*. That way, those interested in the identity of the author of [*Belle Assemblée*] had to go and see the play."⁴⁶ Haywood's performance (a result of a relationship with Johnson) connects *Les Journées Amusantes* to her own work and her own identity. Haywood turns her authorial production into a literal stage performance through the curation and advertisement of a textual community or network. Playing with anonymity and the presentation of her name, Haywood established authorship as flexible and responsive to the historical communities around her, while still maintaining her authority over a community of readers that were incited to seek more of their elusive author.

The Dangers of the Text: Exposure and Criticism

⁴⁵ Spedding, Patrick. *A Bibliography of Eliza Haywood*. London, Pickering and Chatto, 2004, pp. 162.

⁴⁶ Ibid., pp. 168.

Two dangers confronting authors in the Eighteenth-Century print market were exposure and criticism.⁴⁷ By exposure I refer to the possibility that readers would reveal the author's personal information without her consent, and this possibility was particularly dangerous for women writers, who faced harsh enough criticism and condemnation without fear of personal attack. Haywood moved between positions of confrontation and victimization, often finding a position of ambivalence to situate herself in the critical community as a shrewd, adaptable professional that could handle these threats.⁴⁸ Sometimes Haywood establishes herself as above the critical audience, defending herself against the gendered prejudice of critics, but sometimes she complicates how she relates to her gender, presenting herself as more of a victim. Shifting her position between that of victim, transgressor, and critic produced an eclectic image that interested communities of readers and, in different ways, reinforced her

⁴⁷ The OED gives two different definitions for "danger" that were used in the late 17th and 18th centuries: one is the power of an entity to do harm, another is "liability or exposure to harm of injury; the condition of being exposed to the chance of evil." The latter definition speaks exactly to the danger Haywood flirted with throughout her career. "danger, n. and adj." *OED Online*, Oxford UP, March 2018. www.oed.com/view/Entry/47183. Accessed 31 May. 2018.

⁴⁸ Haywood was not the first woman writer to deliberately flirt with the danger of exposure. Perhaps the most prominent 18th-century example is Delarivier Manley and her publication of *The New Atalantis* in 1709. Attacking the Churchills and their supporters, Manley's novel is a scathing critique that describes the personal lives of politicians. Manley was arrested for libel but quickly released (the only way to prove the stories were real was for the politicians to come forward, and the novel went through several editions with character keys. Haywood experienced a similar situation when she was arrested for libel in 1749 following the publication of a politically charged pamphlet. Haywood denied authoring the text, but acknowledged she published and distributed the work: separating herself from her work (as Manley did) shows how Haywood was playing with practical dangers a, and the fact that she was not prosecuted shows how good she was at avoiding both. Haywood took this behavior of "flirting with danger" and put her unique spin on it by deploying it to create a contradictory, eclectic authorial persona over a longer period than the consistent Manley.

authority as a writer that could and would interpret her texts as valuable and good, in spite of the critics.

To successfully establish her authority Haywood played with the gendering of her profession. In 1724 Haywood wrote and starred in the popular comedy “A Wife to Be Lett.” The prologue, performed by comic actor and Drury Lane manager Theophilus Cibber, states, “A dangerous Woman-Poet wrote the Play.”^{49, 50} Using the word “dangerous,” Haywood demonstrates that she knows how her performance is transgressive because it defies gender norms dictating that women remain private; moreover, romance texts like hers were considered dangerous for inspiring lust. And the speaker, Cibber, adds additional shock value through his family’s association with the racy world of theater; his father Colly Cibber was a controversial actor-manager. Haywood manipulates this connection to catch the interest of a potential community, and by referring to her experience as a writer, affirms her authority in the literary world. The fact that she identifies herself as “Woman-Poet” is significant as well: Haywood does not dissociate herself from her gender but capitalizes on it precisely because it emphasizes how her performance is dangerous. Putting the two titles (Woman and Poet) together, Haywood makes a bold claim that the two are intertwined, or that her performance of each identity is simultaneous, and that her community accepts this performance by supporting her on stage.

⁴⁹ Haywood, Eliza. “A Wife to Be Lett.” London, 1729. 2nd Ed. pp.v.
<https://archive.org/details/wifetobelettcome00hayw>. Accessed 31 May. 2018.

⁵⁰ It is also interesting to consider how the title ‘Woman-Poet’ connects Haywood to actual poets, like Behn and Katherine Philips. Haywood rarely addresses other women writers in her own works: this phrase could be an oblique reference to a tradition of well-respected women writers that she wishes to build on/where she wants to place her own legacy.

But Haywood complicates the gendering of her authorship, showing how it is always in a state of becoming. Cibber continues, “Measure her Force, by her known Novels, writ / With manly Vigour, and with Woman’s Wit.”^{51, 52} Haywood challenges the audience with her command to “measure” her success, emphasized by the word choice of “force” and “known.” Haywood builds on her success to lend authority to her current performance and to stake a claim in the community’s interest. Haywood explains that her gender is not an impediment to her authorial performance. On the contrary, her identity as a woman gives her works a unique kind of “wit” where “manly” performances can only provide “vigour.” She does, however, claim to possess *both* masculine and feminine traits related to good writing. Given the discursive importance and prevalence of “wit” in literary criticism, this claim to the best of male and female wit is bold. Haywood declares she has achieved the ability to produce works that meet high standards of “wit” that both men and women will recognize.⁵³ She turns the danger of her gender into a powerful advantage that she literally performs on stage with her play. In this complex gendering, Haywood establishes her authorship as combining the best of the masculine and feminine, assuring her authority over a community that is typically prompted to disregard women writers.

During the epilogue, the character of the Author expands on the complexities of gender and authorship, clarifying how Haywood holds authority in her community. The

⁵¹ Ibid., pp.v.

⁵² Earlier writers (like Behn) had a similarly diverse profile of works (plays, novels, poems, etc.).

⁵³ I acknowledge that authors like Behn, Manley, and Finch previously demonstrated that women had and could effectively deploy wit in literature. Haywood builds on this demonstration by asserting her feminine wit AND masculine abilities, further complicating how we can gender authorship.

Author asserts, “We Women, who by Nature love to tease ye, Will have it, that the newest things / best please ye.”⁵⁴ Haywood identifies herself (through “we”) with a stereotype of the inconstant, flirtatious woman but ends with a sharp critique of the male desire for novelty. Haywood wants to make the audience recognize that they love novelty and therefore that they drive the productions (like *Love in Excess*) that “tease” the reader with transgression and an adaptive or changeful woman. Haywood states that readers and authors are connected in a community where both parties accept transgressive behavior, and she declares her authority to guide that community in social critique, without glossing over the gendered dynamics that frame her professional career. Haywood comments that there is more than one way for a woman or author to “stir” the audience, and one option is to initially follow cultural scripts and then break them. She states, “Women, however stirring in their Way, / Are ne’er too active, when they move to obey.”⁵⁵ Following or obeying the wishes of your community does not equate to slavish subservience because it can be an “active” choice preceded by thoughtful reflection, in fact it proves that Haywood has the upper hand because she knows what the audience wants and can cater to those desires in her own way. Haywood argues that women writers can both perform transgression and obedience, and this eclectic shift is what “teazes” and attracts a community. Haywood concludes the epilogue by saying, “Virtue must pass through Fire to prove its Weight / And equal Danger make the Triumph great.”⁵⁶ Haywood’s authorial performance has “prove[d] its Weight” by passing through the “Fire” that is the print market and its critics. The “Danger[s]” of publishing in this brutal

⁵⁴ Ibid., pp.71.

⁵⁵ Ibid., pp.72.

⁵⁶ Ibid., pp.72.

world, especially as a woman, makes her “Triumph” or success as an author even more fantastic. With her final lines Haywood declares to her critics that her survival in the print market proves her authority and serves to encourage additional readers to join her community.

Part of Haywood’s survival is contingent on her effective engagement with the critics in her literary community, in which she adopts a confrontational position, demanding the respect accorded to any male author and rejecting the prejudices that confront women writers. By confronting critics, Haywood gains greater sympathy from the audience because she depicts herself as the victim of individual gendered malice, which in turns gives the reader room to separate themselves from these villainous critics and form their own community of righteous Haywood supporters. In *Memoirs of Baron de Brosse* (1724) she “refers to the ‘numerous Difficulties a Woman has to struggle through in her Approach to Fame’ (envy of critics if she is successful, contempt if she is not).”⁵⁷ Like in “A Wife to Be Let,” Haywood acknowledges the gender norms that affect her career and explains that these difficulties are not inherent to her identity, but instead come from the society that forces difficulties upon her. She elaborates “‘I am not without Enemies, who, perhaps, may have represented me in a Light vastly different from what I am.’”⁵⁸ Spedding argues these “enemies” are the circle surrounding Martha Fowke Sansom, the woman who replaced Haywood as Savage’s friend/lover. She is aware of how her literary community, ruled by sexism, can turn against a woman author. Haywood affirms her authority by showing how she has a complex and realistic understanding of the way the print market works: she knows that no matter how successful or popular her

⁵⁷ Spedding, pp.218.

⁵⁸ Ibid., pp.218.

books are, “enemies” (a strong choice of words) will place difficulties in her way. At the same time, by identifying specific critics as ruled by foolish prejudice, Haywood gives her readers a common enemy to hate, and turns criticism into an opportunity for her community to solidify or rally around her.

Haywood’s poignant response to criticism extended beyond personal connections and even included the royal family, as we see in her introduction to her play *Frederick, Duke of Brunswick-Lunenburgh* (1729). Haywood connects her individual experience as an author to larger, contemporary concerns about gendered education, showing how Haywood recognized that defining authorship had broad social stakes. The play ran for three nights, but Haywood was disappointed that its name-sake did not appear for the performance; in fact she remarks it “was the only new play of the season the Royal Family did not ‘honour...with their Presence.’”⁵⁹ Haywood proceeds to argue that because the Royal Family did not attend, the public assumed the play was historically inaccurate or that it demonized Prince of Wales. She defends the play by saying,

Nature, the only Instructress of my unlearned Pen, has, I hope, furnish’d me with Expressions not altogether incongruous to the different Passions by which my characters are agitated...I [have] taken all imaginable Care not to offend the Rules’, the unities of time and place, ‘prescrib’d for Theatrical Entertainments...I depend the candid Reader will forgive the Want of those Embellishments of Poetry, which the little Improvements my Sex receives from Education, allow’d me not the Power to adorn it with.’⁶⁰

⁵⁹ Ibid., pp.310.

⁶⁰ Qtd. in Spedding, pp.310.

Naming Nature as her teacher, Haywood goes over the heads of her critics, citing a greater aesthetic and interpretive authority than male coffeehouse dwellers. Then she moves from Nature to artifice (the classical rules of the theater), claiming authority as one well versed in theatrical forms and rules, and indeed, as an actress/playwright she would be familiar with both. These claims take a dramatic shift in the final line, where she asks her readers to be lenient, because a woman cannot be completely educated in the finer “Embellishments” of poetry. She does not degrade her work by bringing up the limits of her education (she does not apologize to the reader or say it is poor) but implies the play could have been even better if she had a good education.⁶¹ She calls the critical community out for decrying her work when they are the same men that prevent or make it difficult for women authors to receive the education in “Embellishments” that men demand in their reviews. Haywood does not bow to the community she performs for, nor does she ignore it: through her confrontational attitude she challenges both their critiques and the gender discourse that enables that critiques. Haywood maintains her authority by putting the sexist literary world in its place, showing how their interpretations of her work are flawed and how hers are correct.

While she decried the male sexism that attacked her work, Haywood did occasionally collaborate with male authors, including Henry Fielding and William Hatchett, to enhance the dangerous appeal of her authorship and create new communities. Fielding’s oppositional plays are sometimes blamed for the Theatrical Licensing Act of 1737, which severely restricted theatrical production. Hatchett was also associated with dangerous politics, as manifested in a 1749 pamphlet that got Haywood arrested for

⁶¹ Her use of the word “little” to modify “Improvements” suggests that Haywood does not hold the flourishes of polished writing in high regard.

distributing politically dangerous material. In 1731 Haywood left her theater (Lincoln's Inn Fields) to work with Fielding at the Haymarket Theater. With Fielding's permission, she worked with Hatchett to adapt his famous farce, "Tragedy of Tragedies" (1731) into one of her most successful plays, "Opera of Operas" (1733). Haywood chose to join forces with Fielding, even though he was her critic and rival, because the connection to boosted her credibility in the theatrical world, and it added an additional element of danger and therefore excitement to the play, attracting an even broader range of readers. Joining forces with Fielding and Hatchett reveals how she publicly promoted her connection to the literary community of playwrights to engage with danger that would attract audiences. Using other authors in this way is a power play – it reflects Haywood's authority as she reinterprets her colleague's work and her confidence in playing with transgression (through networking) to promote her authorship.

Haywood used Fielding's politically transgressive reputation to build her own authorship, hinting at the collaborative authorship she would promote explicitly in "The Female Spectator." The most significant change Haywood made in her adaptation was the new and politically complicated conclusion. Backscheider interprets Fielding's play as an allegory for the chaos and discord that reigned in the royal family specifically those due to tensions between the controlling Queen Caroline and Frederick, Prince of Wales.⁶² Haywood took this suggestion of political commentary and made it explicit in her conclusion: as in the original conclusion, all the characters are dead, killed in a farcical train of murders and accidents. To the amazement of the audience, as represented by two critic-characters, the wizard Merlin appears, resurrects the cast, and reunites the family in

⁶² Haywood, Eliza. *Selected Fiction and Drama of Eliza Haywood*. Ed. Paula Backscheider. Oxford, Oxford UP, 1999, pp.175.

perfect harmony. Backscheider explains that Merlin was a symbol for the British monarchy and the nation's golden future.⁶³ Bringing in Merlin, Haywood makes a pointed statement about how the royal family should reconcile for the benefit of the nation. But, as any reader can recognize, the "deus ex machina" quality of the wizard's intervention is ridiculous and comic. Backscheider elaborates, "Haywood's play seems to partake both of the nation's hopes about its monarchy and of the ridicule poured on any "easy" resolution of the rivalries among the king, Caroline, Walpole, and Frederick."⁶⁴ Comparing the antics of a farcical family to the conflicts of royalty was a risky move, but Haywood consciously invites this danger, using Fielding's play as a vehicle for additional political commentary. "The Opera of Operas" shows how Haywood deployed her professional connections to promote her authorship as well as attract audiences with her scandalous connections. Moreover, the fact that Haywood publicizes these connections shows how her artistic community (Fielding and Hatchett) had confidence in her performance and were willing to collaborate with her even as she did something dangerous, reaffirming her authority and ability as an author.

Claiming Authority: Narrative Voices

Playing with false anonymity and the dangers of authorship allowed Haywood endless possibilities to attract the interest of her readers and entice them into joining her textual communities. Haywood recognized that authorship included not only attracting readers to a community, but also required establishing her interpretive authority to manage that group of readers. Using the voice of a narrator, Haywood forges direct links

⁶³ Backscheider, Paula. "The Shadow of an Author: Eliza Haywood," *Eighteenth-Century Fiction*, vol. 11, no. 1, pp. 96-7.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 98.

between the readers and herself as an author. Adaptable as always, Haywood does not use one consistent narrative voice, but throughout her works there is a common theme of first creating a subservient narrative presence. But after this personable, intimate connection between reader and author is established, the narrator makes it clear that the author has total authority over the reader in terms of interpreting the text and the world. The dynamic between author and reader, as established through narrative voice, is initially one that emphasizes community, but then shifts to an authoritative relationship where the author explains how the reader should interpret the text or topic at hand.

The way that Haywood gradually changes her narrative voices throughout her first novel shows her deliberate process in how she invites readers into a community and then establishes her authority *over* that community. In Volume I of *Love in Excess* when Amena receives D'Elmont's addresses, the narrator remarks that Amena is "little versed in the art of dissimulation, so necessary to her sex," and therefore "by her too open and generous behavior" is almost ruined.⁶⁵ The narrator identifies modesty as dissimulation, and therefore indirectly critiques how gender norms warp good values like modesty. In this moment the author does not tell the reader what to think about the text, but through subtle word choice hints at how readers should interpret the story. As readers move into Volume II the narrator takes on a more authoritative and personalized tone. Offering a critique of D'Elmont, who forces himself upon a sleeping Melliora, the narrator states, "I believe there are very few men, how stoical soever they pretend to be," would let such an opportunity pass by.⁶⁶ Using the first-person pronoun gives the narrator subjectivity; instead of a passive narrator in Volume I, readers now encounter a narrator with opinions.

⁶⁵ Haywood, *Love in Excess*, pp.46-7.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, pp.117.

Moreover there is a claim to authority with the use of the word “I” because the narrator wants their opinions to be attributed to a defined subject. The dynamic between the author and community has shifted as the narrative voice engages the audience’s attention directly with the personal pronoun and commentary. This potential for engagement turns into a demand in Volume III. When the narrator scolds individuals for preaching moderation she exclaims: “These *insipids*, who know nothing of the matter, tell us very gravely, that we *ought* to love with moderation and discretion, - and take care that it is for our interest... Wretches!”⁶⁷ The use of italics and insulting language conveys a harsh tone; through the narrator the author makes a clear interpretation of the text and insults anyone who would disagree with her. As with her strategy of anonymity, she builds her authority and community over time, so the audience is amenable to her increasingly daring moves. Her strategic use of narrative voice and the deployment of anonymity over the course of the novel shows how Haywood performed authorship with a kind of cumulative effect within a novel – the result is not only increased authority but also a community in which she reigns supreme.

In later novels this shift in dynamic is faster, though the resulting authority and community is the same. In *Betsy Thoughtless* (1751) the narrator speaks directly to the reader through chapter headings, initially staging Haywood’s authorship as negotiation but quickly revealing it as instruction, playing with the community dynamics between reader and author.^{68, 69} The first chapter title reads, “Gives the reader room to guess at

⁶⁷ Ibid., pp.186 (original emphasis).

⁶⁸ Many other authors were using chapter headings to direct readers in this way (see Henry Fielding’s *Tom Jones* and Lawrence Sterne’s *Tristram Shandy*). Haywood does something unique by using the chapter titles to vary the power relations between reader

what is to ensue, tho' ten to one but he finds himself deceived."⁷⁰ The first clause suggests interpretive space for the reader since they can predict what will happen, but the word "Gives" and the latter clause indicate Haywood's control over the text, because she is providing this open space. And the second clause makes it clear Haywood believes the reader will make an incorrect interpretation.⁷¹ In Chapter VIII of Volume IV the narrator reports the chapter, "Presents the reader with some passages, which could not conveniently be told before, and without all doubt have been for a long time impatiently expected."⁷² The narrator reminds the reader that the structure of the text is within the author's control, as the word "conveniently" expresses, and that the author knows how the text is being read and what kind of response it elicits (e.g. impatience). Haywood reminds readers of how she controls the structure and pace of the text based on knowledge of her readers. Through the narrator, Haywood demonstrates her authority in conditioning how her community will respond to the text.⁷³ At the same time, Haywood

and author, often affirming one and then undercutting the other (instead of dogmatically telling the reader what is happening, as in the case of the Henry Fielding example).

⁶⁹ Fielding will take this role of instructress and modifying it, will make interpretation the central function of her authorship.

⁷⁰ Haywood, Eliza. *Betsy Thoughtless*. Edited by Christine Blouch. Ontario, Broadview, 1998, pp.27.

⁷¹ Haywood pretends to negotiate with the reader: she gives him/her the pretense of control and then withdraws it by demonstrating her actual power to control reader response through the headings.

⁷² Ibid., pp.513.

⁷³ This interpretive authority reflects a genre shift in the works of her male and female contemporaries: Haywood's explicit claim to interpretive authority in *Betsy Thoughtless* reflects the structural changes that the novel experienced in the mid-century. For instance Richardson's *Pamela*, while composed mostly of epistles, does contain an explicit, moralizing interpretation by the "editor" at the end of the novel. *Betsy Thoughtless* ends with such a conclusion: "Thus were the virtues of our heroine (those follies that had defaced them being fully corrected) at length rewarded with a happiness, retarded only till she had render'd herself wholly worthy of receiving it." Haywood, Eliza. Edited by Christine Blouch. Ontario, Broadview, 1998, pp.634.

acknowledges the reader is a part of her performance – they need to accept her invitation to read and recognize her interpretations as authoritative in order to be a part of her authorial community. The community dynamic is not so hierarchical as Haywood’s snide narrators make it seem. She does have authority to dictate to her reader, but the reader must voluntarily enter her community through engaging with her texts.

In other works Haywood does not explicitly claim interpretive authority, instead using the narrator to remind readers of how she leads the community because she makes poignant interpretations that any reasonable reader would agree with. In *The Invisible Spy* (1755) after Explorabilus provides observations on a tragi-comedy of a young girl seeking autonomy in marriage he states: “I promise to be hereafter more circumspect, and confine myself to the bare recital of such facts as shall come within my cognizance, without pretending to intrude my own opinion.”⁷⁴ In this passage, he chastises himself for indiscretion (indicated by the word “circumspect”) in interpreting the story too often. Through a humbled narrative voice, Haywood rejects an explicit authoritative stance to push readers to acknowledge that this story, detailing the tyranny of the patriarchy, is *factual* rather than an opinion inserted by an author. In this moment Haywood *implicitly* rather than explicitly encourages the reader to interpret the story as true (a reflection of oppression) by claiming the commentary is not important. In other words, she redirects the reader’s interpretive focus through the narrator, who tells the reader to focus on the bare facts of the story and not his opinions. Haywood’s claim to interpretive authority is subtle and complex here, but still present and powerful.

⁷⁴ Haywood, *The Invisible Spy*, London, Gardner, 1755, pp.191.
<https://archive.org/details/invisiblespy01haywiala/page/n4/mode/2up> Accessed 6 Apr. 2020.

And yet within a hundred pages of this subtle passage, the voice shifts to an authoritative stance, demonstrating the flexibility of narrative voice and how it allows for metacommentary on authorship itself. Describing a comic courtship Explorabilus reports, “I have not yet done with any of *my* characters.”⁷⁵ The possessive is strange because he previously adopted an outsider stance and now posits ownership of the characters. The rationale for this shift in position is the content. The comedy relies on the exceptionally clever planning of the heroines, impeccable timing, and a series of coincidences. These devices show the hand of an author more clearly than the other stories, so his words are a meta-textual acknowledgement on Haywood’s part. Explorabilus adds, “I am pretty sure neither my reputation, nor the profits of my publisher, will suffer by their [critics] ill-nature.”⁷⁶ Directly referencing an authorial reputation (albeit an anonymous one!) he completely casts off the role of outside observer and takes on that of a market-driven writer. Haywood references the popular, scandalous reputation that fueled her success, indicating she knows how authorial performance is built over time through these external (or meta-textual) narratives of reputation. This strategy of shifting narrative voice allows Haywood elasticity in becoming an author, how she contextualizes her performance by acknowledging the literary marketplace and establishing authority in her communities.

Conclusion: The Female Spectator and Authorial Community

Throughout her career Haywood played with the idea of women telling each other their stories and analyzing them together, but it was not until late in her career that she solidified the idea of a female authorial community in the periodical *The Female*

⁷⁵ Ibid., pp.275. My emphasis.

⁷⁶ Ibid., pp.276.

Spectator (1744-6). In the latter half of the century Haywood continued to produce works at an astounding rate (at least one novel per year), but *The Female Spectator* stands out in her bibliography because it is a new kind of authorial performance – the first women-authored periodical. In this text, Haywood proposes that an author *is* a community, and that by coming together as a group, women writers can establish their authority and encourage women to critically interpret the world around them. While Haywood’s identity is mutable and fragmented over the course of several volumes as in *Love in Excess*, *The Female Spectator*’s identity is fragmented from the start because she is not one unified subject but is composed of a community of women. Fragmentation takes on a new valence here in this late authorial performance: in earlier works, Haywood fragmented herself to change/adapt with each text. In *The Female Spectator*, fragments come together to form a community and as the individual contributors/fragments are always changing so does the community and the authorial identity of *The Female Spectator*.

Haywood does not separate this new form of authorship from the dominant, male tradition, as the title of the periodical and name of the narrator indicates. Referencing the popular and influential periodical *The Spectator*, Haywood makes a bold claim to equity with two of the most famous writers of the age (Addison and Steele), who adopted the persona of the Spectator to comment on English life. Indeed, the narrator calls the Spectator her “Learned Brother, of ever precious memory.”⁷⁷ While readers might assume Haywood would stage authorship as a distinct tradition from that of her male counterparts because she is a woman, the title of *The Female Spectator* suggests

⁷⁷ Haywood, Eliza. *The Female Spectator*. vol.1, 1744. London, 1775, pp.1. <https://archive.org/details/femalespectator01haywiala>. Accessed 31 May 2018.

otherwise.⁷⁸ This deliberate strategy of calling on her male colleagues has multiple payoffs. It lends cultural power to the periodical as it references an influential work and establishes parity between works authored by men and women, thereby claiming that women's authorial ventures are worthy of attention. Moreover, the reference to the male *Spectator* serves to bolster the authority of *The Female Spectator*, who, by calling the former her brother, suggests that she has similar powers of observation and interpretation.

The community of *The Female Spectator* engages with the strategies seen in Haywood's earlier works: anonymity and the evocation of danger. What is different about the periodical, however, is that multiple women are performing these strategies simultaneously to produce the text and a community. The Female Spectator tells readers that "spies are placed" throughout world to bring her intelligence, and through her network "all the Secrets of Europe [are] laid open at one view."⁷⁹ This authority on the newest news is gained through a predominantly female community (her spies) and disseminated through writing. By setting up an anonymous world of Female Spectators, the text implies that anyone can be THE Female Spectator. This anonymous figure empowers women: by "spectating" and then sharing their observations, the Female Spectators can contribute as a community, becoming authors that have authority over how a text (letters, reports of gossip, treatises or tracts) is understood by the reading public.

There is, however, a leader or group of leaders in this mass of spectators, and Haywood creates this structure to implicitly establish herself as a leader among of women

⁷⁸ The small detail of her name in the periodical reinforces Backscheider and Warner's scholarly trajectory to consider Haywood (and her fellow women writers) not as writing in a separate tradition but rather as part of one canonical tradition of the novel.

⁷⁹ Ibid., p.5

writers. The Female Spectator elaborates, “I, for my own part, love to get as well acquainted as I can with an author, before I run the risk of losing my time pursuing his work.”⁸⁰ The periodical was originally published anonymously, so the statement is contradictory: readers cannot get acquainted with the author(s) as no name is attached to the text and pseudonyms are used throughout. The Female Spectator describes her unusually good education, early life as an empty-headed socialite, and her current desire to help (young) readers profit from her experience by avoiding the mistakes she made. The Female Spectator works with three other women representing polite society: the noble, happy wife Mira, the dignified widow of fashion, and the beautiful, accomplished merchant’s daughter Euphrosine. Haywood uses these figures to emphasize the community aspect of authorship, while maintaining the basic structure of having a center of authority.^{81, 82}

After introducing this structure of a community with a clear authority, the Female Spectator explains how authorship is a dialectical process, or the result of listening and responding to different texts and voices. She explains, “we agreed to lay down certain rules to be observed among us, in order to preserve that harmony which it is necessary

⁸⁰ Ibid., pp.1

⁸¹ Scholars argue that the three women did not exist but were all fictional creations of Haywood’s: see Lynn Marie Wright and Donald J. Newman, “Introduction” in *Fair Philosopher: Eliza Haywood and the Female Spectator*. Bucknell UP, 2006, pp.13-41.

⁸² Haywood was by no means the only author engaging in communities (fictional or otherwise) in periodical form. John Dunton’s *Athenian Mercury* (1690-1) had a similarly fragmented/composite form but was not written by or for women (though The Athenian Society did briefly publish a ‘spin-off’ called *The Ladies’ Mercury* in 1693 that lasted for four weeks). Haywood’s periodical also emphasized the act of writing and reading women’s works in a way that was appealing and empowering.

should exist in all societies.”⁸³ The use of the word “we” prevents readers from assuming the others work under her direction, but instead, as she later explains, that the women work together to read and choose what texts to write and respond to. There is an authorial cohort that works together and owns texts. Moreover, by using the word “societies,” Haywood indicates the stakes of this authorial venture. The Female Spectator(s) do not form a group of gossiping housewives, but a respectable collection of individuals coming together under a common goal of social critique and the shared value of supporting female authorship. *The Female Spectator* demonstrates that when women authors work together powerful texts are produced and authorship can take on new, communal forms.

Haywood makes it clear that participating in this performative community entails contributing and listening to criticism: empowerment comes not only through claiming interpretive authority, but also through responding to the authority of others (a dramatic departure from Haywood’s demanding narrators, signaling Haywood’s willingness to experiment with new strategies).⁸⁴ The Female Spectator reflects on the story of spoiled Seomanthe, whose husband robbed her of her fortune through marriage, reporting:

I was going on to recite some other instances of the mischeifs [sic], which, for the most part, are the consequence of laying young people under too great a restraint, when MIRA came in, and seeing what I was about, took the pen out of my hand, and told me I had already said enough; if I proceeded to expatiate any farther on that head, I should be in danger of being understood to countenance an extreme on the other side, which was much more frequently fatal to our sex.

⁸³ Haywood, Eliza. *The Female Spectator*. vol.1, 1744. London, 1775, pp.57. <https://archive.org/details/femalespectator01haywiala>. Accessed 31 May 2018.

⁸⁴ Sarah Fielding will reinforce this lesson in *Remarks on Clarissa* (1749).

I yielded to her superior judgment, and needed but few arguments to be convinced, that if unbridled youth were indulged in all the liberties it would take, we should scarce see anything but unhappy objects before maturity arrived.⁸⁵

The narrator's positive diction indicates she takes Mira's comments seriously, because it only takes a "few superior" arguments to persuade her to modify her writing. Moreover Mira's commentary underscores how women writers have a duty to help each other improve, lest the poor performances be "fatal" to the sex and delegitimize woman authors in general. *The Female Spectator* is, as Bakhtin would say, dialogical, because women become better writers by sharing and discussing their work, countering the idea that a woman can or should only write in isolated privacy. As *The Female Spectator* continues, the periodical features letters from a wide range of authors (wealthy matrons, coffeehouse politicians, and natural scientists). When the community becomes wider, the author of *The Female Spectator* becomes more eclectic and her authority increases because her interpretations is based on a broad range of experiences and knowledge.

For instance, the first letter *The Female Spectator* publishes comes from a concerned mother: the Female Spectator treats her epistolary performance with respect and welcomes the writer as a member of the community and an authority. The letter's writer, Mrs. Sarah Oldfashion from Hanover Square, begins, "where I imagine you fall a little short of my expectations, I am entirely silent. This I think is dealing with you as a friend, and you will therefore not take it ill if I sometimes play the monitor."⁸⁶ Like Mira, the letter-writer is unafraid to critique *The Female Spectator* when necessary. Oldfashion

⁸⁵ Ibid., pp.25.

⁸⁶ Ibid., p.213-34.

establishes her authority to teach as a “monitor” and to also empower fellow women, because she treats *The Female Spectator* with respect like a friend. Unlike other works, where Haywood claims authority over readers because she is the author, this text establishes a shared authority among women writers.⁸⁷ This attitude not only encourages women to perform authorship because they know they will not be treated with condescension or arrogance; this attitude also produces an unique perspective in Haywood’s textual career. The author of *The Female Spectator* can claim authority to speak on public matters because, instead of only promoting her own beliefs, she draws on the experience and authority of many other women writers that engage in public concerns, like education (the topic of Oldfashion’s letter).

The Female Spectator emphasizes how, if female authorship is to survive, women writers must create a community by supporting and building on the writings of each other. Oldfashion argues that *The Female Spectator* has not been severe enough in her critique of luxury, as her daughter Biddy has become spoilt and disobedient. *The Female Spectator* sympathizes with the writer’s situation saying, “The case of this lady, I must confess, is greatly to be commiserated.”⁸⁸ As always, the narrator uses the singular “I” pronoun, but the usage here is interesting for a specific reason: the first narrator (the unnamed socialite) does not have children, but it is likely that Mira and the widow do. Therefore, when the speaker responds with commiseration and sympathy, she is reminding the reader that when she performs authorship she refers to different female

⁸⁷ It is important to note the that *Female Spectator* does not always treat its letter-writers with such respect (her response to Politico Curioso in Book 8 is a good instance of a different attitude). But when responding to women contributors, the *Female Spectator* regularly considers their texts with thoughtfulness and respect.

⁸⁸ Haywood, *The Female Spectator*, pp.217.

experiences like motherhood.⁸⁹ Throughout *The Female Spectator* Haywood deliberately includes mothers, who were socially defined by that function, in a public/professional community, expanding what it means to become an author and again reinforcing her authority through reference to the experience of others.⁹⁰

The community structure of *The Female Spectator* also affects the way that the content of the periodical is presented; in her novels Haywood is regularly direct with her criticism of the world, but *The Female Spectator* is slower in delivering such critiques, developing its interpretation through different perspectives and voices or in a dialectical way. The Female Spectator argues Oldfashion will only succeed in correcting her daughter by “recourse to force,” of which she cannot approve, and which will cause Biddy to rebel.⁹¹ She immediately tells the story of a tyrannical father disciplining his daughter with expectedly poor results. After fourteen pages of family drama, The Female Spectator states Oldfashion should slowly “wean” Biddy from her giddy pursuits.⁹² The structure of this section reveals a shift in how Haywood uses narrative voice and performs authorship in general. In some novels, the narrator interrupts the plot to provide commentary, as in *Love in Excess*, or to begin chapters as in *Betsy Thoughtless*. Here Haywood offers “bad” advice first, using a story to critique this possibility, and then concludes with the real solution. This structural strategy corresponds to the communal

⁸⁹ In this instance then we see Haywood modifying her strategy of using narrator voice to claim authority: she uses the explicit narrator Oldfashion and implicit narrator voices of The Female Spectator to perform an authorial performance speaking to maternal social experience.

⁹⁰ See also Eve Tavor Bannet’s references to epistle communities of women (100-101). “Patriot or Opportunist? Eliza Haywood and the Politics of the Female Spectator” in *Fair Philosopher: Eliza Haywood and the Female Spectator*. Lewisburg, Bucknell UP, 2006: pp.82-104.

⁹¹ Haywood, *The Female Spectator*, pp.220.

⁹² Ibid., pp.234.

aspect of the text. Haywood is not in an authoritative position speaking down to her community. She performs authorship as a dialogical, conversational practice, which is reflected in her conversational structure: she does not bluntly give readers an answer or critique but uses the story as a conversation starter that leads both author and reader to one conclusion.⁹³ Again, authority is shared among women writers as their texts (the story and the letter) come together to prove a point.

Haywood went on to write many works after *The Female Spectator*, but she developed this unique communal authorial performance after twenty-five years because she saw an opportunity to develop a reputation for herself as a leader in the tradition of women writers. Bannet argues that *The Female Spectator* “show[s] [Haywood] developing a matriarchal feminist politics based on the cultivation of women’s reason and virtue.”⁹⁴ While Bannet applies Haywood’s matriarchal development to politics, I apply it to authorship: she was developing a community structure for woman authors to emulate. After the periodical was republished (it went through many editions) with her name on the title page, Haywood could be identified as a key figure in the history of woman authors. Of course as Haywood scholars know, Haywood did not receive this laudable appellation of authorial leader. Clara Reeve famously wrote that Haywood was a bad scandal writer who reformed in the middle of the century, leading a virtuous life until her death. Haywood was interested in establishing a different kind of authorship than what Reeve describes. Through her strategies of false anonymity, playing with gender when confronting critics, networking with other writers, and developing shifting narrative

⁹³ We will see Sarah Fielding use this conversational/dialogical structure constantly throughout her works.

⁹⁴ Bannet, pp.83.

voices, Haywood developed a toolbox for women writers to refer to when creating the authority and community required for authorship. She “birthed” many books that would help define the novel form, inspired other writers, and at a foundational level helped open the door further for women authors. She may not have been called “the mother of the novel” in her own time, but her performance in *The Female Spectator* sets her authorship up as an encouraging enterprise that will help women authors flourish in a community context.⁹⁵

The Female Spectator was one of Haywood’s most popular and enduring works, and as a result the community she created is one of the most significant aspects of her authorship. Spedding writes,

Shortly before her death in 1756 Haywood [through The Whitehall Evening-Post] acknowledged the ‘Indulgence of the Public’ for the ‘great reception’ [*The Female Spectator*] had met with and thanked her readers for the ‘many complimentary Letters’ she had received ‘particularly from the Ladies’ to whom she was ‘induced to think’ she was ‘principally indebted for the Largeness of their Scale.’⁹⁶

The puff, written in anticipation of the periodical’s republication, shows that Haywood believed in and relied on a community of women for the continuation of her authorial performance. The claim that she received such compliments indicates that her attempts at creating a community worked. While unknown to one another, the individual readers of

⁹⁵ As far as I am aware, there is no later woman writer that directly references Haywood as a positive inspiration or influence. My point is rather that Haywood, towards the end of her career, conceived of authorship not as an independent act, but as a communal performance that ideally empowers women to share their thoughts/texts with the world in a public way.

⁹⁶ Spedding, pp.431.

The Female Spectator were connected through their admiration of and dedication to the idea authorship of that Haywood embodied in the periodical. Although Haywood wrote other works after *The Female Spectator*, she returned to it often by reusing the authorial personas of Mira and Euphrosine in other texts, and through extensive advertisement and republication.⁹⁷ Returning to this text again and again through these authorial figures, Haywood indicated her interest and dedication to the idea that creating a community was crucial to future women writers.

⁹⁷ Ibid., pp.432.

Chapter 2: Sarah Fielding Function as Performance

Introduction: The Labyrinth

Sarah Fielding compared her work as an author to searching “the labyrinths of the human mind;” the comparison reveals Fielding’s focus on interpretation, on understanding the way the reader’s mind works and then guiding that mind to interpret her texts.⁹⁸ For Fielding, authorship meant *doing*, and doing a specific kind of work in the labyrinth, namely modeling textual interpretation for readers through the deployment of various interpretive apparatus for readers to imitate. Fielding anticipates how readers would read her texts (she knew how their labyrinths worked), and cyclically creates her own authority by showing how her interpretive schema are the most enlightening. As a result, a community of readers is formed that works together in the ways Fielding identified to understand a text. Like Haywood, Fielding recognized a crucial fact: authorship does not occur in isolation. The crucial work of authorship requires collaboration and community.

Fielding understood authorship meant establishing her authority among classical and contemporary writers, which was no small feat for a woman writer. Fielding interprets the works of male authors as support for her own texts, boosting her own authority while paying homage to the literary canon. This authority, manifested in characters and interpretive apparatus, does not always allow for discussion, but instead focuses on empowering women - admittedly at the cost of limiting debate. Fielding’s communities are largely hierarchical, with a centralized female figure guiding her fellow

⁹⁸ Most famously quoted in *The Cry*. Fielding, Sarah and Jane Collier. *The Cry*. Dublin, Faulkner, 1754, vol. II, p.143. <https://catalog.hathitrust.org/Record/100024427> Accessed 6 Apr. 2020.

readers. When examining Fielding's communities, scholars mostly analyze *The Adventures of David Simple* (1744), framing their interventions through contemporary debates over sensibility and bourgeois values. Moving beyond this argument, this chapter proves that, for Fielding, community was *always* part of her authorship and that community was the intended outcome of her authorial strategies, which focused on engendering authority through interpretation.

It may seem odd to argue that Fielding "performed" for her readers, given that she withdrew from the spotlight unlike Haywood. For instance, a letter from Richardson reveals that Fielding actively avoided telling others about her career.⁹⁹ As I explain in my introduction, performance is a series of "actions that people train for and rehearse," and that series it can be modified over time for different audiences.¹⁰⁰ Under this definition, Fielding performed authorship – repeatedly interpreting texts, generating authority, and creating community for an audience. Fielding's performance consists of modeling and encouraging specific strategies of interpretation: these strategies, while teaching a reader how to understand a text, also engender Fielding's authority because her teachings prove her to be a critical, knowledgeable, and fair author. This authority forms the basis for a community of readers, who all agree to follow Fielding's interpretations and teachings. The communities Fielding portrays are often, though not always, dominated by female voices collaborating on the interpretation of a text. Community is forged through the act of interpretation, and this act is almost always guided by a central female figure whose rational interpretations affirm her authority.

⁹⁹ See Bree, Linda. *Sarah Fielding*. New York, University of Essex Press, 1996, pp.18.

¹⁰⁰ Schechner, Richard. *Performance Studies: An Introduction*. London, Routledge, 2013, pp.28.

This authorization is achieved in a cyclical manner. Fielding claims authority to interpret texts, her interpretations bolster her authority, which then authorizes her continued textual production and authorship. More specifically, Fielding uses the interpretive structures of teacher figures, dialogical conversation, revisionary readings of historical figures, and networking or connecting texts through references and footnotes. What makes Fielding stand apart from other authors using these techniques is her emphasis on collaboration and community. She does not present herself as an isolated figure imposing these interpretive techniques on others, but creates women who, through their dialogical and critical reasoning, persuade readers to participate in their communities. Authorship is the function of interpreting texts thereby claiming authority not only because of the canonical texts cited, but also due to the skill the author demonstrates in choosing, combining, and analyzing the sources.

Fielding recognized how contemporary and classic sources, often written by male authors, cast long shadows over eighteenth-century writers, especially women. By defining authorship as interpretation and collaboration, Fielding proved her equality with male colleagues and established herself as an authority that could entertain and educate the public. Focusing on interpretation as the foundation for authority, Fielding shifted the focus of authorship to centralizing the author's power, and away from Haywood's emphasis on enticing new readers with the allure of transgression. She also made a clear argument for how and why women should lead textual communities; however, these communities were not egalitarian and were closed to low class readers. Fielding makes Haywood's generic communities of readers specific and reveals the intersection between defining authorship and issues of social equality or classism.

At the Gates of the Labyrinth: David Simple as Foundation

Scholars have thoroughly discussed *The Adventures of David Simple* (1744) and its conclusion *Volume the Last* (1753) with good reason. Fielding published under the name “The Author of David Simple” for most of her career.¹⁰¹ Like Haywood, Fielding used her first success to frame her career, though Fielding does not present herself as a celebrity in a circle of popular artists. This anonymity draws focus away from Sarah Fielding as author and to the female authority figures that will do the work of authorship in the text.¹⁰² The plot of the novel is simple (no pun intended). After being betrayed by his brother, David searches London for a true friend. He fails until he meets Cynthia, Camilla, and Valentine. Helping each to escape dependence and poverty, David forms a community of sensible friends in a happy conclusion. Scholars like Gary Gautier and Michael Genovese contextualize this novel within the literary and discursive movement of sensibility, in which feeling is prized and self-interest condemned.^{103, 104} The little community forms a contrast to the materialistic world of bourgeois capitalism, embodied in the selfish secondary characters that populate London. This trend of historicist macro-analysis has highlighted the crucial theme of community seen throughout Fielding’s

¹⁰¹ While “The Author” is a gender-neutral term, the frontispiece of the first edition includes “By A Lady,” and the Advertisement and Henry Fielding’s introduction to the second edition identify the author as a genteel female. Like Haywood, Fielding plays with gendered anonymity, but the difference is Fielding does not create a celebrity persona out of this scandalous fact. In contrast to Haywood, Fielding uses the “shock” of revealing her gender without the threat of personal attack (since people did not know her name at first, and then afterwards was protected by her brother’s approval).

¹⁰² It is this shift in focus (away from the anonymous author to the FEMALE authority) that distinguishes Fielding from her male colleagues that also used anonymous or pen names on their publications.

¹⁰³ Gautier, Gary. “Henry and Sarah Fielding on Romance and Sensibility.” *NOVEL: A Forum on Fiction*. vol.31, no.2, Spring 1998, pp.195-214.

¹⁰⁴ Genovese, Michael. “‘A Mixture of Bad in All’: The Character of Self-Interest in Sarah Fielding’s *David Simple*.” *The Age of Johnson*, vol. 22, 2012, pp.207–31

works. I argue that the novel's community also functions as a model for interpretive practices that women alone demonstrate.

While the little family is described in egalitarian terms, it is the women, particularly Cynthia, who lead the community in teaching the men and readers to interpret the world. Detailing her life to David, Cynthia regularly quotes other authors and uses extended metaphors. Fielding highlights her interpretations of these authors and even her own metaphors with the use of italics.¹⁰⁵ Throughout the novel Cynthia acts as the central agent of interpretation and encourages the analytical work of others. When they hear a story, Cynthia "fancied it would be no ill Entertainment, if every one of them were to tell their Thoughts to the rest of the Company."¹⁰⁶ Cynthia encourages interpretive collaboration so that the community can benefit from the analysis everyone makes. While everyone's opinions are valued, Cynthia is marked for her special talents: "Cynthia had the Thanks of the whole Company for her Relation, particularly Valentine's, who expressed the greatest Admiration at her manner of telling it."¹⁰⁷ At the end of *David Simple* the community is happy to share interpretations, but leaves the final judgement of the best analysis to their female leader. Cynthia's interpretive authority provides a center for her community in a structure repeated throughout most of Fielding's works, and it is significant that she remains in this position even as the community around her changes.¹⁰⁸

¹⁰⁵ Fielding, Sarah. *The Adventures of David Simple*. London, Millar, 1744, Book II. pp.82-4.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid., Book III, pp.148.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid., Book IV, pp.214.

¹⁰⁸ Schellenberg describes Cynthia as a moderator of a social circle, but the explicit praise for how she manipulates texts argues for a creative (not just regulatory) function. See Schellenberg, Betty. "Constructing the Circle in Sarah Fielding's *David Simple*" in *The*

Things take a tragic turn for the family in *Volume the Last*, in which few of the characters survive, but their survival proves that even if the original community changes, the author's work or essence of her authorship will adapt and continue.¹⁰⁹ Readers could argue that *Volume the Last* demonstrates how capitalism strangles communities of sentiment, but useful to ask what else Fielding is saying about community, particularly as it relates to authorship. It is easy to read the conclusion of *Volume the Last* as a funeral for the ideal of authorship as community since the community itself dies. But this reading is too simple and forgets an important fact. Two members of the community survive: Cynthia and Camilla junior, named after her deceased mother. Readers can safely assume that Cynthia will pass on her collaborative skills and knowledge just like she did in the original novel, and that the community, though modified, will live on through her relationship with Camilla junior. Just as the individuality of the author does not matter in performing the function of authorship, the composition of the community can change while continuing to exist.¹¹⁰ *David Simple* asserts that women can and should be interpretive authorities, and the sequel concludes that the women authors do not need a stable community to survive or continue performing. As Haywood's own strategies proves, the woman author can adapt as her community changes – a promise of flexibility any author would need to survive the ever-changing print market and literary world.

Conversational Circle: Rereading the English Novel, 1750-1775. Lexington, University Press of Kentucky, 1996.

¹⁰⁹ Terry discusses how *friendship* changes and fails between the two novels. See Terry, Richard. "'David Simple' and the Fallacy of Friendship." *Studies in English Literature, 1500-1900*. Vol. 44, no.3, Summer, 2004, pp.525-544.

¹¹⁰ The appellation of "junior" to the daughter Camilla may come across as a simple repetition of the community and not actual or substantial change. Camilla the younger though will grow up/learn in a very different environment (a single-adoptive mother household) from that of her mother (an oppressive stepmother), so the community composition is changing in significant ways over the course of a generation.

The Teacher and Her Community

When Fielding created communities in and through her works, she made it clear that either the author or a female character was in the position of authority.¹¹¹ This central authority is often a didactic figure that encourages conversation about texts, and then explicitly interprets them for the discerning reader. Fielding was aware that not all readers are discerning, or that some would misinterpret her reading, and that not everyone would readily acknowledge her authority and join her communities. To begin understanding Fielding's creation of authority and struggle to foster community as a woman author, we turn to her most explicit interpretive structure, that of a teacher.

Mrs. Teachum, as her name denotes, is the teacher of a group of ladies in Fielding's 1749 novel *The Governess*, and the titular character illustrates how to teach interpretive techniques to readers. Lauded at its publication and in modern criticism as an early instance of children's literature, the novel follows the educational progress of Mrs. Teachum's pupils. Led by Miss Jenny Peace, the group meets regularly to tell, read, and discuss stories.¹¹² Before the storytelling begins, the first chapter provides the governess' background: Mrs. Teachum married a good clergyman that "took great Delight in improving his Wife" through an unusually good education, but he soon died.¹¹³

Associating the teacher with religion was a rhetorically sound move given how the topic

¹¹¹ Bree notes this positioning is appropriate given Fielding's environment: "Her emphasis on fiction's didactic function was particularly appropriate to validating the serious intentions of the woman novelist. Women's role in 18th-century society was limited, but it did involve responsibility for the provision of guidance on morals and conduct." Bree, Linda. *Sarah Fielding*. Twayne Publishers, 1996, pp.30.

¹¹² See Bree, pp.59.

¹¹³ Fielding, Sarah. *The Governess*. Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1996, pp.2

of female education was a controversial topic.¹¹⁴ As the pupil of a moral clergyman, Mrs. Teachum is a “safe” authority because she is associated with the status quo that is the church. Her education (and therefore her authority), originating from a respectable husband, can do no harm to herself or her pupils.¹¹⁵ Her name, as with so many of Fielding’s character’s, is significant too. Mrs. Teachum is defined by her allegorical function to model interpretation. The allegorical nature of her name and repeated actions of telling stories, listening to her girls’ analyses, and then providing her own interpretation, emphasize that authority does not come from a unique personality and is instead conceived through interpretation (or teaching those analytical strategies).

Mrs. Teachum is not the only didactic figure to provide interpretation though: the character of the Author textually works with Mrs. Teachum to assure the reader they are correctly instructed by a moral and sensible leader, thereby shoring up the authority of the author that created them both. The Author speaks of Mrs. Teachum as a real person, which may seem paradoxical given the character’s allegorical status. For instance, after the younger girls misbehave, the Author remarks “Mrs. Teachum’s Method of punishing I never could find out.”¹¹⁶ By addressing the character as a personal acquaintance, the Author insists that lessons of Mrs. Teachum are real and therefore of pragmatic import to

¹¹⁴ At the time of the novel’s publication there was great debate over what children should learn and how they should be educated. Locke’s essay “Some Thoughts Concerning Education,” though published in 1693, was still influential in Fielding’s time as a framework for considering education. In terms of female education Bree writes “In a society where...the chief aim of a girl’s life should be to get herself a husband...learning was seen as a handicap rather than an advantage in this objective.” Bree, Linda. *Sarah Fielding*. Twayne Publishers, 1996, pp.58. Fordyce’s *Sermons to Young Women* (1766), which Jane Austen later critiqued, offered a similarly sexist perspective.

¹¹⁵ It soon becomes clear that Mrs. Teachum’s authority is not just a byproduct of her husband’s authority but is also the result of her own rational approach to interpreting texts and the world.

¹¹⁶ Fielding, Sarah. *The Governess*. Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1996, pp.10.

the reader. Just because an author may use a fictional character to model the work of interpretation does not mean the author's authority is in any way fictional. Mrs. Teachum may not be a real person, but her authority is legitimate because it has real-world implications, as her lessons.¹¹⁷

As fictional figures, the Author and Mrs. Teachum are united in their goal to teach girls to be knowledgeable and kind, and Fielding makes the two figures work together to perform interpretation. In the preface, the Author explains, "the true Use of Books is to make you wiser and better" and "I depend on the Goodness of all my little readers, to acknowledge" the instructive interpretations of the stories, usually focusing on controlling the passions and listening to religious and moral authorities.¹¹⁸ Mrs. Teachum's goal is "to improve their minds in all useful Knowledge [sic]; to render them obedient to their Superiors, and gentle, kind, and affectionate to each other."¹¹⁹ The emphasis on emotional control and submission in both passages reassures skeptical readers that might question if girls should be educated, and it also stresses the teacher's authority over how the children will develop interpretive skills. Opening with a safely educated lady, and then identifying the purpose of education as supporting social hierarchies, the teachers (without suspicion or criticism) proceed to interpret texts for the readers.

Miss Jenny Peace is the initial touchstone for the formation of community, and she emphasizes that authorship includes instructing *and* encouraging interpretation, or in

¹¹⁷ In fact in a letter to a friend (Jane Collier) reviewing drafts of the novel, Fielding explains that she prefers to leave the method of punishment unknown. See Bree, pp.69.

¹¹⁸ Fielding, Sarah. *The Governess*. Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1996, pp.vii and xiii.

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.*, pp.1-2.

other words, requires collaboration, not just asserting authority. Reconciling the girls after a fight, Jenny remarks “there is nothing more likely to amend the future Part of any one’s life, than the recollecting and confessing the Faults of the past.”¹²⁰ Affirming the moral and educational goal of the novel, Jenny implies that if dedicated to this worthy goal and educated by safe figures like Mrs. Teachum, anyone can interpret texts and thereby gain authority. Even the smallest girls (ages 5 and 6) tell stories with valuable moral lessons that are recorded and repeated for later instruction. Jenny proposes the girls take turns telling their stories and the tales they receive via literature, letters, or gossip. Jenny does not discount any text because of genre: her role is to help community members put these texts together in meaningful ways. In this way Jenny is not an absolute authority figure: she collaborates with her fellow students, writes a summary of their discussion, and then receives a “final verdict” from Mrs. Teachum, who reads their accounts.¹²¹ In *The Governess* it is clear an authority like the Author or Mrs. Teachum must finally step in to interpret them for the reader.

While every girl contributes texts, there is a consistent leader who combines the stories to prove clear, persuasive moral lessons, thereby uniting the girls in interpretive agreement and strengthening the community. Mrs. Teachum represents the organizing function of authorship: a good author takes sources and, through interpretation, puts them together in a cohesive whole. In the beginning of the novel, “The Misses all agreed, that

¹²⁰ Ibid., pp.23.

¹²¹ Burdan constructs Mrs. Teachum as a malevolent figure, arguing she represents the surveillance of women instrumental to patriarchal oppression. I disagree with this image because Mrs. Teachum encourages the collaboration and community of women, something inherently threatening to the patriarchal order. Burdan, Judith. “Girls *Must Be Seen and Heard*: Domestic Surveillance in Sarah Fielding’s *The Governess*.” *Children’s Literature Association Quarterly*, vol. 19, no. 1, 1994, pp.8-14.

certainly it was of no Use to read, without understanding what they had read.”¹²²

Schofield remarks, “*The Governess* teaches how to read fiction. It also teaches the principles of self-examination, for each character has to record [and interpret] her own life story.”¹²³ Jenny encourages the girls to read texts and to interpret them to locate moral lessons. If present, Mrs. Teachum immediately provides an interpretation of the girls’ texts, explaining “In order therefore to make what you read of any Use to you, you must not only think...in general, but make the Application to yourselves.”¹²⁴ If she is not present, Jenny writes the stories for Mrs. Teachum, who then provides an interpretation to carry back to the girls.¹²⁵ Unlike Jenny, who collaborates with her fellow classmates, Mrs. Teachum acts as an ultimate authority, telling the reader what a text means without allowing for dialogue.

The positive descriptions of the girls’ reading and analysis argue that women can and should be authors by creating and interpreting their own texts. On one occasion the students read a popular tragic play, *The Funeral* by Richard Sheridan. The young Miss Sukey offers an allegorical interpretation of the play but simplifies some parts, so she is corrected by Mrs. Teachum. The governess anticipates critics of theater saying, “Nay (continued this good Woman) I like that you should know something of all kinds of Writings, where neither Morals nor Manners are offended.”¹²⁶ Emphasizing Mrs. Teachum’s morality (she is a *good* woman), Fielding highlights that interpreting writing

¹²² Fielding, Sarah. *The Governess*. Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1996, pp.70.

¹²³ Schofield, Mary. *Masking and Unmasking the Female Mind: Disguising Romances in Feminine Fiction 1713-1799*. Newark: University of Delaware Press. 1990. 113.

¹²⁴ Fielding, Sarah. *The Governess*. Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1996, pp.73.

¹²⁵ Bree argues the entire narrative of stories that Jenny writes “has been reified as ‘the Story of Miss *Jenny Peace*’s reconciling all her little companions.” See Bree, pp.244.

¹²⁶ Fielding, *The Governess*, pp.196.

is beneficial to a community's overall development. The passage asserts that women can identify morally beneficial texts and spread their lessons. Mrs. Teachum also indicates that intertextual education - reading and learning from *all* kinds of writing - is important to developing understanding. The structure of direct instruction, and Miss Sukey's quick adoption of her teacher's lesson, strongly encourages readers to adopt Mrs. Teachum's reading of the play and support the idea that women can hold authority through interpretation.

The novel meets an abrupt end shortly thereafter, and the continued collaboration reinforces how Fielding's conception of authorship is functional, not personal. Jenny, placed in school following the death of her father, is whisked away by her aunt. After giving her colleagues a brief lecture on fortitude, Jenny fulfills her promise to write often. We do not see the letters, but the narrator tells us the remaining girls continue their storytelling, reading Jenny's texts and interpreting them with the guidance of Mrs. Teachum. The persistence of the community, despite the absence of Jenny, suggests that the individuality of an authority figure does not matter. Gadeken elaborates, "the novel expresses the social nature of identity and relationships...and argues that the community should be constructed and guided by values that emphasize communal rather than individual good."¹²⁷ If there is someone to oversee the community's interpretations (which teach lessons for communal good) that community will survive. If that "someone" can establish authority through interpretive work, the community she supervises will

¹²⁷ Gadeken, Sara. "Sarah Fielding's Childhood Utopia" in *Utopian and Dystopian Writing for Children and Young Adults*. Edited By Carrie Hintz and Elaine Ostry. New York, Routledge, 2003, pp.59.

continue even after she is gone, because through that authority she will have taught others similar practices, so that authority can be transferred and recreated.

The Governess is one of Fielding's most famous works, but its didactic structure is found, albeit altered, in the later and more experimental novel, *The Cry* (1754). *The Governess* is implicitly based on the premise that the audience will listen to their authority figures (the girls follow Jenny and Mrs. Teachum with little resistance). *The Cry* explores what happens when a woman encounters a hostile audience, like the one Fielding and other women writers faced in the print market. Tracing a connection between *The Governess* and *The Cry* demonstrates how Fielding staged authorship in similar ways but played with the context of a docile or hostile audience to understand the limits of how intertextual and interpretive behaviors generate authority and community.

Mrs. Teachum and Jenny occasionally cite outside sources (like the Bible) to support their lectures, but *The Cry* often uses referential interpretive practices deeply to cope with critics. In the novel Portia tells her life story to Una, the personification of Truth, and to the Cry, an embodiment of all that is ignorant and narrow-minded.^{128, 129} Through the Cry, Fielding and her co-author Jane Collier attack incorrect interpretive practices, using Portia as a model of authorship who knows how to read texts, glean important moral lessons from them, thereby proving her authority. The Cry criticizes

¹²⁸ "Una" is a reference to Edmund Spenser's *The Faerie Queen*: in the epic poem Una is the personification of the True Church. For more on the significance of Una's name and the reference to Spenser, see chapter seven in Bree's *Sarah Fielding*.

¹²⁹ The name of the Cry is usually linked to the noun "Outcry," but could also be a reference to the practice of "hue and cry," in which everyone that is able must raise a cry/help to apprehend a criminal. Under this reading the Cry are against Portia because she has committed a "crime" in doing the work of authorship, which goes against gender norms. The Cry vary so much though in their accusations against Portia that it is hard to assume this practice is what Fielding refers to with the antagonists' name.

Portia for her story-telling methods, but they are silent when she uses an outside source to justify her interpretations. At one point the narrator explains that due to “their respect for so approv’d an author as Fenelon, the archbishop of Cambray, for the present [they] withheld their tongues.”¹³⁰ While the Cry is too stupid to interpret canonized sources themselves, it respects the authority of these texts. Portia’s reference to such ‘authorized’ works demonstrates that authors (perhaps especially women authors) need to incorporate canonical texts into their own to prove their authority. In other words, when dealing with a hostile audience, the author relies on canonical sources to bolster her interpretations and therefore her authority. Portia cannot yet create community through this intertextuality (the Cry is not ready to submit to her authority entirely), but she maintains her right to examine texts and keeps open the possibility of creating a community of readers.

Portia often uses fables, metaphors, and hypotheticals to illustrate her arguments, but nothing raises more ire in the Cry than her creation of new words: she shows how the interpretive function of authorship can include creating tools that can help people understand texts in new ways. Musing on how ungoverned passions lead to destruction, Portia says “I want a single word, by which I can at once convey the idea of all evil passions...and I think every common latin dictionary will shew how adequate the word *turba* is for this purpose.”¹³¹ She then cites Horace, noting he allowed the coining of new words if “it is stamp’t with an image of acknowledged authority” (in this case the Latin and English dictionary).¹³² Drawing on different linguistic authorities, Portia claims the power to create new words: her authority comes from the ability to use that creationary

¹³⁰ Fielding, Sarah. *The Cry*. New York, Scholars’ Facsimiles and Reprints, 1986, vol.1, pp.54.

¹³¹ Ibid., vol.1, pp.194.

¹³² Ibid., vol.1, pp.196.

power to interpret the moral stories she tells. Remarking on the radical quality of this moment Bree writes, “Innovation – in language, as in politics, was regarded with suspicion as potentially subversive. In the 1750s a challenge to the stability of language represented one on the status quo in general.”¹³³ Later Fielding and Collier use Portia’s new word themselves, explaining that “the Cry began to drop their furious looks, and the turba within them to abate something of their stings.”¹³⁴ Subtly including the linguistic creation of their character, Fielding and Collier reinforce their character’s authority and also their own by showing how useful and rational this new vocabulary is in interpreting the text of *The Cry* itself and they also include the reader in the community of people who use this insightful term.

Portia uses outside sources to back her claims and directly confronts their prejudices, attempting to persuade them to accept her rational authority, but half-way through the novel she theatrically performs the part of another character and uses dramatic sarcasm to interpret the story. This behavior demonstrates Fielding’s willingness to engage with different textual forms (dramatic monologue within a novel) to teach interpretative skills in a new and entertaining way.¹³⁵ Portia describes Melantha, an envious and vain coquette by first speaking from the third-person perspective, but then shifts to the first person saying, “Shall I, O Una, relate only my own observations, or may I be permitted to suppose Melantha present, and speaking; by which means, in a more lively manner, I could paint all her sensations, and throw into action every motion of her

¹³³ Bree., pp.102-3.

¹³⁴ Fielding, *The Cry*. vol.2, pp.21.

¹³⁵ Portia’s dramatic exercise also demonstrates how the authority generated by interpretation can occur beyond the traditional framework of the novel (which Fielding stuck to for most of her career). It indicates a flexibility that we rarely see in other Fielding novels.

heart?”¹³⁶ Una grants permission, and Portia “[in the assumed character of Melantha]” proceeds with her story.¹³⁷ Using the theatrical mode of the soliloquy, Portia approaches interpretation in a different way. She weaves commentary into her dramatic representation itself, using Melantha’s hyperbolic language to demonstrate how vicious untamed passions can be. Literally performing interpretation by playing Melantha, Portia demonstrates how the combination of genres (novel and play), arising from the interpretive technique of performative metacommentary, can lead to unique ways of analyzing a story. Unfortunately the Cry does not submit to Portia’s interpretive authority, but readers of the novel are encouraged to do so because of the author’s and Una’s approval, and because they do not want to be like the ignorant horde that is the Cry. In *The Governess* and *The Cry*, Fielding proves that the didactic approach to creating authority and community can be effective, even if the audience is not entirely submissive, as in the case of the latter text.

Dealing With Mansplaining: Remarks on Clarissa and Familiar Letters

Fielding was interested in creating intertextual communities of women authors and readers, but her works do not exclude men from critical conversation. Women remain the central authority figures by teaching men how to understand texts, and their interpretive structures form the basis for collaborative works and relationships. Women have a unique or distinctive critical lens from which men, blinded by prejudice, could learn.¹³⁸ In 1749 Fielding wrote a piece of literary criticism (one of the first definitively authored by a woman) titled *Remarks on Clarissa*, in which she discusses the merits of

¹³⁶ Ibid., vol.2, pp.143.

¹³⁷ Ibid., vol.2, pp.144.

¹³⁸ Fielding will expand on this idea of a female-centered critical approach in her pseudo-biographical works (see the “In Her Own Words” section of this chapter).

Richardson's novel.¹³⁹ Using a conversational structure, Fielding allows men to engage in dialogue with women who, through dialectical processes, instruct readers in proper interpretive practices. Their strategy is a restructuring of Fielding's didactic author function: they do not use lectures like those of Mrs. Teachum or Portia but create a dialogue in which women guide men through a conversation to a nuanced understanding of a book. Unlike Jenny, these women do not submit to another or higher authority figure – the final judgement is their own.

The women in *Remarks* use conversation to indirectly teach (male) readers how to interpret texts, avoiding accusations of being overbearing or disrespectful while effectively instructing others. This approach may seem socially conservative, because the women do not want to upset the status quo of male authority, but through their dialectical tactics the women succeed in creating gender-inclusive communities where outright rebellion would fail. The first male character criticizes Richardson's work because of *Clarissa's* length, in response to which the wise Miss Gibson "took out a little Almanack out of her pocket," and uses it to prove that the best stories are not necessarily short like almanac entries.¹⁴⁰ Wittily, but quietly, pointing out the error in her companion's interpretation, Miss Gibson sets herself up as the person readers should look to for

¹³⁹ In *Sarah Fielding* Bree confirms that Richardson held Fielding's *Remarks* in high regard: "In these redrafts [of *Clarissa*] he undoubtedly made use of *Remarks on Clarissa*, especially since he was so impressed with its arguments" (79). He even distributed copies of the publication to his friends (78-9). In terms of the general significance of the publication she writes, "In what was in 1749 the male-dominated field of literary criticism, Fielding clearly made a confident and competent contribution" (79). In contrast to her brother, who responded to Richardson's success with his satire *Shamela*, Fielding shows with her novel's title and content that she wants to engage with (or textually collaborate with) Richardson, and not to close communication between authors and texts through criticism.

¹⁴⁰ Fielding, Sarah. *Remarks on Clarissa*. Los Angeles, William Andrews Clark Memorial Library, 1985, p.5.

analysis. Miss Gibson counters the illogical and weak critique of men, always paying respect to Richardson. For instance, when a critic condemns the meek character of Mrs. Harlowe, Miss Gibson replies: “Mrs. Harlow’s Faults might not be thrown on the Author, unless it could be proved that he himself intended her Conduct should deserve no censure.”¹⁴¹ She then uses close readings of relevant passages to explain how Mrs. Harlowe’s character is meant to draw the reader’s disapproval, so Richardson can make a point about wifely obedience. Miss Gibson models the interpretive strategy of close reading to demonstrate how detailed analyses of a text give insight into the meaning of a work. She creates her own authority through careful, logical analysis, inspiring readers to join the community of characters that acknowledges her skill.

Miss Gibson demonstrates it is not enough to read a book: the reader must be able to interpret the author’s intentions, and that ability is often reserved for women. In fact a young girl, “who had hitherto been silent” is inspired by Miss Gibson to add her own thoughts to the conversation, which the original speaker takes up and expands upon.¹⁴² This brief interaction powerfully demonstrates how authorship means encouraging others to become interpreters. Just as *The Female Spectator* affirmed and empowered women to write, Miss Gibson (and Mrs. Teachum and Jenny) invites other women to join her community. The community still works under one authority (the person whose interpretations started the group) but men and women from any genteel circle (like the

¹⁴¹ Ibid., pp.9.

¹⁴² Ibid., pp.10.

one featured in *Remarks*) are encouraged to collaborate under their authority's guidance.¹⁴³

The character Bellario's transformation from a prejudiced reader to an enlightened protégé serves as an example for the reader and reinforces Miss Gibson's authority. Miss Gibson "with her usual Penetration" takes on many contradictory and poorly supported critiques of Clarissa's character.¹⁴⁴ Bellario argues that Clarissa does not love Lovelace enough and that she should gratefully receive the violent homage he offers. Miss Gibson responds for several pages, quoting full paragraphs from the novel to support her argument that Clarissa responds as she rationally and morally must, with reservation. The narrator states,

Bellario answered, with that Candor, which is known to be one of the most distinguishing Marks of his Character by all who have the Pleasure of his Acquaintance, That if it proved so, he should have the greatest Esteem and highest Veneration for Clarissa, and would suspend his Judgement till he saw the remaining Part of the Story.¹⁴⁵

Through Bellario, the male reader learns he can benefit from the instruction of a woman without losing face before the company. Bellario does not need to bow to the specific person of Miss Gibson but needs to acknowledge the rational interpretations she models.

¹⁴³ The question of what if readers do not agree with the authority is partly addressed in my section on *The Cry* where I discuss docile versus hostile audiences. Fielding acknowledges that some disagreements (especially where interpretive differences are centered on sexist beliefs or irrationality) cannot be resolved and that the author must protect her authority by disengaging from the critic. As I examine on p.18 though, it is possible for an authority to change based on discussions with her community.

¹⁴⁴ Ibid., pp.14.

¹⁴⁵ Ibid., pp.19.

In other words, Fielding uses Bellario as an example of how a rational and socially elite man can and should take instruction from the unique perspective of female authority.

When a married woman joins the conversation, the text illustrates how dialectical collaboration results in new interpretations and how an authority figure can learn from her community. When the company objects to Miss Howe's marrying the "insipid" Mr. Hickman, a married lady interprets his character according to specific quotes.¹⁴⁶ Miss Gibson does not agree with the lady, and they debate for several pages whether Hickman is worthy of approbation. In a moment reminiscent of *The Governess*, the elder Lady teaches the young Miss Gibson to adopt her view that a steady, good man is more valuable than a spirited one. At first an absolute authority, Miss Gibson's interpretation is changed as a result of the conversation. Like Haywood's *Female Spectator*, "good" authors and readers are willing to accept criticism from their community; the authority that a woman's interpretation generates can be subject to constructive critique, and this critical exchange reinforces bonds between community members.

Miss Gibson inspires the production of texts and the creation of a community that enjoys literary interpretation. Bellario not only accepts the teachings of his instructress, but also reproduces her close reading strategies in letters. Writing Miss Gibson a long letter, Bellario successfully answers the objections that other men level against *Clarissa*, using close readings to support his arguments.¹⁴⁷ After teaching him how to correctly interpret the novel, the women can with "[high] delight" watch him critically engage with *Clarissa*.¹⁴⁸ Bellario writes, "You seem'd so pleased last Night with my Conversation, if I

¹⁴⁶ Ibid., pp.25.

¹⁴⁷ Ibid., pp.30-1.

¹⁴⁸ Ibid., pp.30.

may be allowed the Expression, to your Favourite Clarissa, that I could not seek any Repose till I had thrown together my Thoughts on that Head, in order to address them to you.”¹⁴⁹ Thanks to Miss Gibson’s modeling and encouragement, she has now formed significant intellectual connections to the people around her including Bellario and the other women she talks with. These connections are not based on gender (no one cares that the married Bellario is writing to the single Miss Gibson) but on the act of interpreting texts. Using her characters to model interpretation and restructure the didactic authority to one of dialectic debate, Fielding encourages readers to connect to one another through their readings, if they follow the practices she and her characters demonstrate.

The dialogical nature of community, where women teach interpretation through conversation, is emphasized in the letters of Fielding’s *Familiar Letters Between the Principle Characters of David Simple* (1747). The letter format also reinforces how women can correct the misinterpretations of men (as in *Remarks*). The rarely-studied work shows how Fielding thought about authorship outside the novel form, and in ways that correspond to contemporary literary trends.¹⁵⁰ The premise of *Familiar Letters* is that *David Simple* heroines Camilla and Cynthia are separated when the latter goes to Bath, so they correspond and thereby model interpretive practices for their husbands and readers. All the letters consist of stories they hear, followed by lengthy analyses of the tales including the moral lesson and the writer’s manner of storytelling. Unsurprisingly, the women always agree in their interpretations. Camilla writes, “Your communicating of your Sentiments on Belinda’s Story, was to me a great indulgence, as they exactly

¹⁴⁹ Ibid., pp.34.

¹⁵⁰ It is obvious but perhaps necessary to state that Richardson made the epistolary novel popular in the mid-eighteenth century.

corresponded with my own; and I am always pleased to find, that we sympathize in our Thoughts, and agree in our Notions.”¹⁵¹ From such sentiments it is unclear if either woman is learning from the other (compare this experience to that of Miss Gibson in *Remarks*). What is clear, however, is that the act of explaining texts reveals internal processes (“Thoughts” and “Notions”) and that this activity brings women together. Through these letters Fielding argues that literary interpretation successfully reveals the “labyrinths” of the mind and promotes community when interpretations are discussed.

Like *Remarks*, men are not excluded from the conversation, but they need some extra help from the women around them to properly interpret texts. Writing for his wife, David Simple tells Cynthia how he was baffled by the rude behavior of a couple, going through multiple incorrect interpretations until “Camilla...undeceived me” and revealed vanity as the cause of their conduct.¹⁵² David adds, “I was perfectly startled at what they said,” and laments the fact that humanity can be selfish (something that he learned repeatedly over the course of his eponymous novel).¹⁵³ The fact that David fails to correctly read the world may not be surprising, as Dragos writes, “he cannot read outward signs at face value because of his inherent sympathy unsupported by reasoning,” and, indeed, readers of the original novel would be familiar with David’s misinterpretations.¹⁵⁴ Camilla’s astute nature may require more explanation. In the preface Fielding writes, “As such Observations are generally supposed to be the Effects of long Experience in, and

¹⁵¹ Fielding, Sarah. *Familiar Letters Between The Principle Characters in David Simple, and Some Others. To Which Is Added, A Vision*. London, Millar, 1747, vol.2, pp.187. <https://catalog.hathitrust.org/Record/100614594> Accessed 25 Jan. 2019.

¹⁵² Ibid., vol.1, pp.194.

¹⁵³ Ibid., vol.1, pp.195.

¹⁵⁴ Dragos, Ivana. *Embattled Reason, Principled Sentiment and Political Radicalism: Quixotism in English Novels, 1742-1801*. New York, Rodopi, 2014, pp.132.

much Acquaintance with Mankind, it may perhaps surprize [sic] many, to find them in the Works of a Woman; especially one, who, to use the common Phrase, hath *seen so little of the World*.”¹⁵⁵ Fielding refutes such sexist prejudice at length in the introduction, but she also refutes it through Camilla in the midst of David’s interpretive blunders. Camilla has very little experience of “the World” and is shy, but always interprets stories correctly. Using David’s misinterpretation as a case study, Fielding deploys Camilla to argue that women do not need vast social experience to function as authors. The interpretive work of authorship is not confined by experience (something that men supposedly had more of than women) but is defined by rational reading. By modeling reading practices focused on close reading and rationality (rather than sympathy), women can become authorities in their communities.

Fellow Scholar: Collaboration in Discovering the Labyrinths of the Mind

In her most experimental work, Fielding focuses exclusively on women working to perform authorship in a communal context. *The Cry* was a product of co-authorship: Fielding partnered with long-time friend and colleague Jane Collier to write the novel. Although Fielding integrated the works of others into her own texts, *The Cry* is the only example of co-authorship in her career. It is significant that Fielding joined forces with another woman writer to demonstrate the ways in which women can work together in the print market to reach the two goals authorship – creating community and authority. In the introduction of *The Cry* the authors speak in a plural voice, emphasizing the function of their authorship rather than their specific identities as individuals. The introduction begins with: “Our address is to the candid reader; to the morose critic we know that all

¹⁵⁵ Fielding, *Familiar Letters*, vol.1, pp.xvi.

address is vain.”¹⁵⁶ The use of the “our” conveys plurality of authorship, and the sentence declares wisdom and experience: the authors know what kinds of audiences they face and exude confidence in writing off anyone who disagrees with them. The authors add, “we beg to inform the readers, that our intention in the following pages, is not to amuse them with a number of surprising incidents and adventures, but rather to paint the inward mind.”¹⁵⁷ Later using the phrase, “the labyrinths” of the mind, the authors set an ambitious goal of describing the mind.¹⁵⁸ Fielding and Collier will not just tell an interesting story but will also interpret it for the reader to unravel the workings of the human psyche. The authors expand the purpose of the novel beyond entertainment and moral instruction to create something new – a fictional exploration of psychology. This ambitious purpose is achieved when women collaborate to produce a novel (such a monumental effort requires help from a community).

The complex exploration requires the authors to break some of the rules that novel-readers may expect them to follow, suggesting that interpretive authority does not require following formal convention. *The Cry* regularly blends genres including drama (both tragic and comedy, classical and modern), fable, novel/novella/romance, biography, philosophical treatise, and different textual structures (novelistic descriptions, monologues, soliloquies, dialogues, theatrical script including blocking). The author explains, “to dive into those recesses [of the mind]...’tis necessary to assume a certain freedom in writing, not strictly perhaps within the limits prescribed by rules.”¹⁵⁹ A new kind of authorship (collaborative, intertextual, and centered on female interpretive

¹⁵⁶ Fielding, *The Cry*, vol.1, pp.1.

¹⁵⁷ Ibid., vol.1, pp.11.

¹⁵⁸ Ibid., vol.2, pp.143.

¹⁵⁹ Ibid., vo.1, pp.14.

authority) demands a new kind of writing. The author adds, “Altho’ we have borrow’d from the stage the name of scenes, and generally its dialogue, yet we have kept the privilege of being our own chorus, in order not only to point out the behavior of our actors...to express or relate some things not proper to be spoken by our principal characters.”¹⁶⁰ Using the language of the theater, the authors cast themselves as a Greek chorus that will explain a modern story for the audience. Fielding and Collier lend credibility to the structure of the novel where the authors interject to provide commentary because it aligns with a classical motif and tradition. In this way the authors also modify Fielding’s structure of instruction; the narrators will act as a chorus to provide insight in the form of commentary instead of a teacher’s lecture.¹⁶¹

To tell the truth is part of an author’s interpretive function, and so the authorial voice of the narrator does intrude to tell the reader what is “really” going on. In a footnote the authors say, “For it is the false or improper applications that such characters are apt to make of their reading, which we endeavor to bring to light.”¹⁶² This footnote is significant because it explicitly identifies the author as the authority on what readings are right or wrong, but it claims the authors only want to bring problems “to light,” not fix or correct them. Yet, by constantly referring to Portia’s correct interpretations, supported by Una/Truth herself, Fielding and Collier show that they consider themselves obliged to show readers their mistakes AND offer a better model. For example, Portia reports how she genuinely loves a male friend: the Cry interpret her words as evidence of unfeminine

¹⁶⁰ Ibid., vol.1, pp.16.

¹⁶¹ Unlike the dialectical tactics of Miss Gibson, the authors here leave no room for interpretive debate and are therefore much more like the instructors outlined in my first section. The implications of this absolute authority are addressed in the conclusion.

¹⁶² Ibid., vol.1, pp.86.

brashness. The Cry's reading is wrong, as Portia proves by closely reading her own words (explaining the meaning of her word choice) to argue that women can be both feminine and truthful in expressing attachment. Una expresses her approbation of Portia's interpretation, silencing any remaining objections of the Cry.¹⁶³ Using characters that embody goodness and truth (Portia and Una), Fielding and Collier create clear models for readers to imitate.¹⁶⁴

The theatrical nature and structure of the text (each chapter is a scene, and characters speak in lines) allows Collier and Fielding to show how women, supporting each other through collaboration, create intertextual communities to combat the ignorance of the world. But these communities are not entirely egalitarian, because "the wary author...is not entirely prepared to relinquish the authority of the fictional narrator."¹⁶⁵ In a play, the audience receives knowledge that characters lack, but in *The Cry* the author withholds information from the reader: "If our readers have a curiosity to know what answer Portia made...we cannot give them that satisfaction."¹⁶⁶ Instead of seeing/hearing Portia as the audience would in a play, the reader is thrust back into a novel convention in which the author holds all the information and therefore complete interpretive authority. At the end of the novel the author takes the demarcation between reader and author to a new level. When the Cry rises, furious, at the conversion of a coquette Cylinda, the authors report "But this matter was soon decided by the falling of a large curtain, which on one side left Una, Portia, and Cylinda, and on the other side the

¹⁶³ Ibid.

¹⁶⁴ For an analysis of how Fielding uses non-novelistic techniques to this end in multiple works, see Friedman, Emily C. "Remarks on Richardson: Sarah Fielding and the Rational Reader." *Eighteenth-Century Fiction*. vol.22, no.2, Winter 2009-10, pp.309-326.

¹⁶⁵ Bree, pp.93.

¹⁶⁶ Fielding, *The Cry*. vol.3, pp.110.

Cry.”¹⁶⁷ Using stage imagery, Fielding and Collier create a visual of women united, supporting each other in interpretation as they absolutely refute the Cry’s irrationality. The Cry cannot be part of the community because they refuse to acknowledge female authority. Fielding and Collier accept that not everyone wants to join their textual communities and focus instead on the triumph of their rational heroines shutting out/down the alienated and ignorant crowd. Collaborating with other women produces community in *The Cry* as well as the text itself; in other words, Fielding and Collier use the content of the novel to practice what they preached in their co-authorship, the development and teaching of interpretive strategies to form a community of rational readers.

In Her Own Words: Biographical Revision in Cleopatra and Octavia

Until now I have discussed texts that are set in Fielding’s present moment, but she also used historical settings to discuss how women perform as authors against the grain of canonical male criticism. *The Lives of Cleopatra and Octavia* (1757) is a pseudo-historical biography in which the reader travels through the underworld to hear first-hand the stories of these famous women, who revise the traditional narratives of their lives.¹⁶⁸ Relying on research of the highest rigor, Fielding explores how women, through interpretation, can fight against historical trends of unjust male criticism.¹⁶⁹ Fielding positions the female characters as textual collaborators to explore how interpretive

¹⁶⁷ Ibid., vol.3, pp.293.

¹⁶⁸ For more on the genre of women’s biography and its political ramifications, see London, April. “Sarah Fielding’s *Lives of Cleopatra and Octavia*: Anecdote and Women’s Biographical Histories.” *Studies in Eighteenth-Century Culture*. vol.43, 2014, pp.137-151.

¹⁶⁹ Bree expands on this point, arguing these texts act “As demolition of male constructions of femininity – constructions that were at least as valid for the 18th century as for the classical world” (116).

practices are gendered and how women, as authors, can manipulate this gendering to revise their own stories.

Fielding's biography of Cleopatra and Octavia explains how women can revise their own stories by reinterpreting them, but it also argues that the lack of interpretation can be dangerous. Cleopatra's narrative is taken almost directly from classical sources (mostly Plutarch) but her narration offers a unique spin, explaining how male readers create unhealthy reading contexts in which they can be duped by women, who are in turn encouraged in their bad behaviors by men. Like the men in *Remarks*, Mark Antony is blinded by gender bias and cannot accurately read Cleopatra's texts. Cleopatra remarks, "he had so long accustomed himself to follow the Bent of his Humour, without any regard to the Justice or Injustice of his Actions, that he was the fittest Instrument I could have found" to practice on.¹⁷⁰ Antony's selfishness and capriciousness, engendered by the power he holds as a man, allow Cleopatra to impose her own interpretations (namely that of victimization) of the historical narrative onto Antony. Through Cleopatra's interpretation of Antony, Fielding exposes the masculine prerogatives of gratification and control as interpretive pitfalls for men. Through her "evil" queen, Fielding implicitly tells the reader to avoid these toxic gender norms and the flawed textual interpretations they inspire.

Cleopatra's most significant interpretation is in the conclusion, which proclaims she can analyze her own story and learn from it. She concludes, "I could not avoid reflecting on my past Life; and found, upon the whole, that the Indulgence of my

¹⁷⁰ Fielding, Sarah. *The Lives of Cleopatra and Octavia*. Lewisburg, Bucknell UP, 1994, pp.65.

Ambition...had produced far more Misery than Happiness.”¹⁷¹ When she finishes her narrative, Cleopatra possess the authority to interpret it logically and morally. She elaborates how her habit of indulging her passions, reinforced by Antony’s sycophancy, ruined her life. Her final lines are: “Thus I breathed my last, sadly imposing on myself, and fell a wretched Sacrifice to that Treachery and Ambition, wherein I had so long placed my chief Delight; and of whose fatal Consequences I shall be, to all future Ages, a perpetual and disgraceful Monument.”¹⁷² Scholars contend that Cleopatra makes a subtle but powerful feminist argument in her narrative, pointing out how men enable the feminine stereotypes of vanity, hypocrisy, and selfishness.¹⁷³ But this line does not revise the image of Cleopatra as a vain and vicious woman; she does not use the conclusion to exonerate herself through this feminist critique. Maybe Fielding was avoiding criticism herself by creating a more culturally conservative Cleopatra that feels remorse for her ‘unfeminine’ behavior. According to Fielding, historians like Plutarch never portrayed Cleopatra as capable of interpreting her own story and learning from her actions. Fielding uses Cleopatra to prove that women have the intellectual capacity and authority to review their own lives, drawing out lessons that may save others, though the realizations come too late to save themselves.

Octavia, as an educated yet relentlessly moral woman, however, can always interpret texts and, therefore, is more successful in generating interpretive strategies and revisionary authority. Octavia begins her story by correcting male historians: “I was the Daughter of Caius Octavius, by his Wife Atia...A Circumstance I the more willingly

¹⁷¹ Ibid., pp.125.

¹⁷² Ibid., pp.125.

¹⁷³ Bree, *Sarah Fielding*. 116.

mention, in order to refute those Critics, who, from a Mistake in Plutarch, contend for my being...only the Half-sister to Augustus.”¹⁷⁴ Octavia’s casual correction of male historians creates strong authority – her tone shows that she does not doubt her correctness. On the other hand, Octavia defines herself (as historians would do for many years) in the context of her male relations, suggesting an author’s revisionary interpretations cannot totally ignore masculine narratives. Octavia proceeds, “My chief Care was to keep my Mind composed and undisturbed; that in every Accident which befell me, I might have Power to exert my Reason, and give my Judgement its due Scope.”¹⁷⁵ In contrast to Cleopatra, Octavia has been raised to rationally interpret everything around her. Only when the immediate emotional response is taken away in death does Cleopatra gain the clarity needed to interpret her life. Octavia’s introduction assures readers that this authority figure will not only be honest and correct, but also rational and moral in her interpretations. Octavia acts as a foil to Cleopatra in terms of morals and successful interpretive strategies.¹⁷⁶

Admittedly, there is not much for Octavia to interpret: her narrative is not half the length of Cleopatra’s, but Octavia’s story does explore how moral women can strive against the interpretive mistakes of men. Because Antony is so used to Cleopatra’s caprice, he thinks Octavia’s steadfast affection is a farce. Octavia elaborates, “He misrepresented to himself all my Actions, and disingenuously interpreted all my

¹⁷⁴ Ibid., pp.126.

¹⁷⁵ Ibid., pp.126.

¹⁷⁶ Octavia and Cleopatra do not work together as in other fictional communities (those of *Remarks*, *David Simple*, or *The Cry*), but Fielding fulfills her author function by putting these two women/interpretive techniques and insights into conversation with each other.

words.”¹⁷⁷ Octavia proves how masculine conceptions of love, marriage, and women warp reality, causing goodness to be misinterpreted as evil. After describing his errors, Octavia argues that if Antony had thought about it more, he would “make another Discovery; namely, how necessary it is for a Man’s own Happiness, to use the Woman with whom he lives, with Lenity and Good-nature.”¹⁷⁸ Octavia takes Antony’s misinterpretations and, like Portia or Miss Gibson, uses them as foundation for a lesson that readers can learn from. And because she is defined from the beginning as an intelligent, moral figure (like Mrs. Teachum), Octavia is an authority that safely promotes didactic interpretations. Octavia’s story ends with her peaceful death, surrounded by her children (including the adopted children of Cleopatra) that she has educated. Sticking to her moral and interpretive guns, Octavia passes on her reading strategies to the familial community she has made, giving her a positive legacy that her foil lacks. Just like Jenny, although the original authority figure is gone, by modeling correct interpretive strategies, Octavia’s authority and community will continue.

Conclusion: One More Thing - Footnotes and Framing in Xenophon’s Memoirs

Fielding regularly alluded to and referenced the works of other authors in her novels, but I want to focus on how she uses footnotes to frame a late and unstudied work - her translation of the classical Greek text, *Xenophon’s Memoirs of Socrates* (1762). The text is remarkable because Fielding, as a woman, should not have known Greek at all, let alone enough to translate a classical philosophical piece into readable prose. Even more astounding is that Fielding included her name; Bree explains “Fielding’s pride in her achievement can be measured by the fact that *Memoirs of Socrates* is the only one of her

¹⁷⁷ Ibid., pp.135.

¹⁷⁸ Ibid., pp.137.

works to carry her name” on the title page.¹⁷⁹ In this textual achievement Fielding uses footnotes to show that writing is collaborative and that interpretation can take place literally outside the page; reading requires a network of texts and interpreters curated by an authority (the author).

Fielding uses footnotes as a scaffold to help readers interpret the text and to recognize the community of writers in which she works. The first footnote reads, “The Sense of this Passage, together with the Notes which here follow upon the several Particulars contained in it, were obligingly given me by one not more known for his *Learning*, than esteemed for his *Candour* and *Benevolence* – Mr. Harris, of Salisbury.”¹⁸⁰ James Harris, a longtime friend Fielding and famous classicist, provided Fielding with help translating difficult passages. Gratefully and humbly recognizing Harris’ contributions in footnote form, Fielding aligns herself with a critically acclaimed scholar, validating her authority. It is interesting that Fielding characterizes Harris not only by his education/professional background, but also by specific character traits. For Fielding, the performance of authorship did not depend on individuality or personality, but on the fulfillment of specific functions (interpretive authority and community). In this footnote then, Fielding thanks her tutor, but also clearly indicates that he (a benevolent and candid individual) does not ‘do’ authorship like she does. His individuality leaves an imprint on the text where Fielding’s authorship is implicitly cast as a process of objective translation and rational interpretation. This contrast is heightened when Fielding quotes a lengthy

¹⁷⁹ Bree, *Sarah Fielding*. 22.

¹⁸⁰ Fielding, Sarah (Translator). *Xenophon’s Memoirs of Socrates: With, The Defence of Socrates, Before His Judges*. London, Pope and Millar, 1762, pp.2 (footnote a). <https://archive.org/details/xenophonsmemoir00fielgoog/page/n362>. Accessed 26 Jan. 2019

explanation of a passage from Harris' own letters.¹⁸¹ Fielding does offer her own commentary, but by explicitly identifying Harris as the author of the footnote's interpretation, she separates his words from her own, creating a community in which other subjective scholars revolve around her as an authority that decides where and how their interpretations will interact with her text.

Other footnotes combine translation with literary and philosophical critique, demonstrating her ability to create new texts out of interpretations of old ones. Explaining the translation of a single word, Fielding remarks, "It is hoped the having chosen to denominate this Person by the Word Sensuality, rather than *Pleasure* hitherto commonly used, may be allowed; as it seemed, that Pleasure should always be considered, not as contrary *to* but a wore [sic] Attendant on Virtue."¹⁸² Hedging the disapproval of the reader with words like "hoped," "may," and "seemed," Fielding avoids criticism but still uses footnotes to produce a reading that goes beyond the plot. Amid this humility, Fielding makes a clear argument that Pleasure and Virtue are intertwined. Fielding interprets her own translation to make an argument about moral behavior: she does not use a didactic approach or a dialectical one but, through a footnote, slides this argument within her translation work. She thereby achieves the effects of humbly promoting her authority as a translator and giving the audience an interpretation of the *Memoirs* without speaking through a didactic voice (something male readers would not like to hear, especially in a work that should already be out of bounds for a female writer).

Fielding uses footnotes to provide literary commentary on the text in ways that are reminiscent of the narrative voices in her novels, showing how she combined

¹⁸¹ Ibid., pp.248.

¹⁸² Ibid., pp.96 (footnote f) .

interpretive schema. At the end of one chapter Fielding writes, “Though I am sorry to lessen the Merit of this excellent Philosopher; yet I cannot but wish the Reader might see how much more usefully this Subject hath been treated by a Christian Moralist in Number 106 of the Adventurer.”¹⁸³ In this footnote Fielding puts a classical text into conversation with a modern Christian periodical, suggesting that a reader can interpret Socrates’ lesson in a new and more contemporary way with the help of other authors (including Hawkesworth and Johnson, the authors of *A Christian Moralist*). Although she does not cite a specific author like with Harris in the earlier footnotes, Fielding still creates a textual community in which texts speak to each other through the interpretive intervention of the author.

Using punctuation like that of her earliest novels in her footnotes, Fielding intervenes in the text by drawing on her early ‘sentimental’ style to emotionally engage readers of this classical (and potentially dry) philosophical text, revealing how the authorial function of interpretation involves multiple layers of textual construction. Identifying the scholars that came to Socrates for advice, Fielding writes: “And when, to Friends like these, we may still add many others; -- Plato, Chaerephon, Crito; and, --to mention no more, -- our amiable Xenophon; --almost all of them the wisest as well as the best Men of their Age;--who can suspect the Virtue of Socrates? – Who can doubt his being, a Happy Man!”¹⁸⁴ Janine Barchas makes a compelling argument for the way Fielding’s use of dashes in *David Simple* creates a breathless, emotional response in the

¹⁸³ Ibid., pp.213 (footnote c).

¹⁸⁴ Ibid., pp.235, (footnote e).

reader as the speaker is overwhelmed with emotion.¹⁸⁵ The fact that Fielding returned to the dash and dramatic punctuation (like the unnecessary comma in the second sentence creating an extended pause and the exclamation point at the end) indicates an intention to interpret the classic in a “modern” way through stylistic choices. Referencing so many classical writers places Fielding’s translation within a canon that carried cultural authority, which is transferred to the work that cites it. The punctuation combines this classical framework with the personal, emotional tone of the novel. Using the footnote as an interpretive tool, Fielding combines the genres of classic treatise and novel.

Fielding almost exclusively cites male authors in the text, and in many other works focuses on canonical male authors to boost the authority of her readings. There is one powerful instance in the *Memoirs* where Fielding cites a woman writer, and the moment reinforces her argument in *The Cry* and *Remarks* that women authors can work together to create authority and communities. Condemning the reasoning of one of Socrates’ critics, Fielding exclaims, “How sophistical is this Way of Reasoning; and how pernicious the Notion it is endeavoring to establish! But I can no Way so effectually shew the ill Tendency of it, as in borrowing, for the Purpose, the Words of One who will ever be, not only a Credit to her Sex, but an Honour to her Country.”¹⁸⁶ This credit and honor belong to Mrs. Elizabeth Carter, a respected scholar who translated the *Discourses of Epictetus* in 1758, just a few years before Fielding published her own translation. Since

¹⁸⁵ Barchas, Janine. “Sarah Fielding’s Dashing Style and Eighteenth-Century Print Culture.” *ELH*. vol.63, no.3, 1996, pp.633-656.

¹⁸⁶ Fielding, *Memoirs of Socrates*, pp.316 (footnote f).

Fielding never cited women writers, this reference and praise stands out.¹⁸⁷ Although different in background and financial situation, Carter and Fielding were similar in terms of translating classical texts; the footnote gestures to an implicit, discursive collaboration between two authors that successfully entered a hostile field.

What makes the footnote even more interesting is that Carter belonged to the artistic community called the Bluestockings, which was supervised by Lady Elizabeth Montagu, who financially supported Fielding during the latter part of her life, corresponded with Fielding regularly, and invited Fielding to her salons.^{188, 189} While Haywood opened the authorial community in *The Female Spectator* to all literate women, Fielding seems to have higher standards for the authorial communities she wants to participate in. A becomes an author by performing interpretation for a didactic purpose in a genteel way, through scholarly works or clearly moral novels. Carter proved herself “worthy” of Fielding’s community through her scholarly work. Carter’s successful manipulation of a classical text was enough for Fielding to consider her as an equal worthy of being cited in her own text. The citation explains how Fielding considered creating community at a historical level in some texts and at an abstract level in others; we have seen how interpretive strategies bring readers together in general around the

¹⁸⁷ A significant reason why Fielding did not cite women writers was the opprobrium associated with women writing and particularly with the novel. See my conclusion for more on this concept.

¹⁸⁸ For more on the relationship between Fielding and Montague (including the latter’s failed plans for a female community of genteel but poor artists like Fielding), see Fielding, Henry and Sarah Fielding. *The Correspondence of Henry and Sarah Fielding*. Edited by Martin C. Battestin and Clive T. Probyn, London, Clarendon Press, 1993.

¹⁸⁹ In chapter one I remarked on how Haywood was situated within the Hillarian circle in her first novel. I consider Fielding to be doing different work here, as the inclusion of the footnote suggests a parity with a fellow scholar; we do not see Haywood making a similar comparison to other authors in her works.

depersonalized author. In this work, however, Fielding puts her authorial work into contact with a community of specific people (including Harris and Carter), while also inviting readers to be a part of the textual community.

Like Haywood and her other authorial predecessors, Fielding exhibited flexibility in how she performed authorship over time and within different texts. Looking at Fielding's entire career, she had strict rules for who could enter her collaborative communities: the genteel, middle-to-upper class literate woman was the leader of parties exploring the labyrinth. Fielding's strictness may be due to the scandal and scorn that women writers and novels met with; by carefully selecting her references and collaborators Fielding was trying to elevate female authorship to new and safe heights. Future writers like Burney would build on this "genteel" image, focusing on how to situate their performances in relation to the actual scholars/writers surrounding them instead of the generic reader, critic, or "Cry." By constructing authorship as functional rather than personal, Fielding opened new possibilities for women writers seeking to perform authorship as separate from their personal lives, while still creating space for relationships with others through text. As we will see, however, that distinction between the personal and professional may be desirable but was not always easy to maintain.

Chapter 3: Frances Burney and Communal Difficulties

Introduction: Managing Community

Frances D'Arblay Burney's rather recent appearance in current scholarship belies her success as a writer, and points to an obstacle that Haywood, Fielding, and other women writers of the Eighteenth century faced, namely that critics posthumously gave women authors a bad reputation.¹⁹⁰ During most of her career Burney received critical acclaim, but her final novel (*The Wanderer*, 1814) struck a harsh chord with vicious reviewers decrying a woman's right or ability to speak on issues like the French Revolution and national identity.¹⁹¹ Negative reviews of her father's memoirs (published in 1832) and her own journals published by her niece Charlotte Barrett in 1854 consolidated the critics' image of an old egotistical woman trying to capitalize on an early success (her first novel *Evelina*, 1778).^{192, 193}

It appears that Burney's authorship was out of her control even before her death. Her texts, however, reveal that authorship depends on how the author negotiates her authority in the community that reads her novels, and this negotiation can be set up to function after the author's death.¹⁹⁴ This negotiation occurred not in the realm of abstract,

¹⁹⁰ See Clark, Lorna. "The Afterlife and Further Reading." *The Cambridge Companion to Frances Burney*, edited by Peter Sabor, Cambridge University Press, 2007, pp.163-180.

¹⁹¹ Burney was certainly not the first woman to comment on these topics (see Mary Wollstonecraft) but her previous career as a novelist and association with the French through her husband made her final work especially offensive to critics.

¹⁹² See Looser, Devoney. "'Her Later Works Happily Forgotten': Rewriting Frances Burney and Old Age." *Eighteenth-Century Life*, vol. 31, no. 3, 2013, pp.1-29.

¹⁹³ For an overview of Burney's afterlife in the Victorian era, see Civalé, Susan. "The Literary Afterlife of Frances Burney and the Victorian Periodical Press." *Victorian Periodicals Reviews*, vol. 44, no. 3, 2011, pp.236-266.

¹⁹⁴ Julia Epstein argues that Burney predicted this critical trajectory: "She prophesied accurately the downhill path her popular career would take," confirming that she

ideal, or fictional communities like Haywood's *Female Spectator* or in Fielding's novels, but in a historically specific context.¹⁹⁵ Burney had to create her place in historical communities including the literary salons of Hester Thrale, the extensive Burney family network, the Royal household, and networks of booksellers and critics. Burney's authorship consists of negotiating the fluctuations of authority, contextualized within a tug-of-war between her performance as Author (a professional public critic) and her socially assigned identity as Fanny Burney (daughter of Dr. Charles Burney, protégé of Samuel Crisp and Samuel Johnson, royal servant, etc.).^{196, 197} Haywood created exciting personas within community contexts, and her penultimate community was one entirely under her control. Sarah Fielding used community to cyclically create centralized interpretive authority. In both cases community is a site of opportunity where a central author figure (usually female) can assert her authority over others. Burney, however, acknowledged that community is a site of contention and requires mediation between the author and her audience.

understood authorship to include the curating of her legacy. *The Iron Pen: Frances Burney and the Politics of Women's Writing*. University of Wisconsin Press, 1989, pp.195.

¹⁹⁵ My thesis for this chapter refutes Haggerty's claim that community was impossible for women, demonstrating (through textual analysis) how Burney as an author and her heroines were not passive victims of oppression but self-aware subjects capable of manipulating social bonds. See Haggerty, George. "A Friend, A Fop, and A Feminist: The Failure of Community in Burney." *The Eighteenth Century*, vol. 56, no. 5, 1995, pp. 248-265.

¹⁹⁶ Thaddeus, Janice Farrar. *Frances Burney: A Literary Life*. Palgrave Macmillan, 2000, pp.64.

¹⁹⁷ Critics, most notably Margaret Anne Doody and Katherine M. Rogers, have collapsed these two identities in their biographical readings of Burney's work. I reject the premise that Burney's works are autobiographical and focus instead on how the management of personal networks and communities relates to her construction of professional authorship.

Burney defined professional authorship as negotiating interpretive control with members of her community to produce text that identified her as an authority in the print market and in the broader realm of social critique. I use the term “professional” to express that authorship was a source of necessary income, and an identity that that was not totally determined by her family connections – she worked to become an author.¹⁹⁸ Her conscious, deliberate manipulation of community indicates an increased awareness (compared to Haywood and Fielding) of how a woman can construct a professional identity of authorship that is stable and historicized.¹⁹⁹ Focusing on the diary she wrote during her tenure at court (1785-90), we can see how Burney’s attempts to negotiate her place as a professional author played out in the historical specificity of Eighteenth-century Britain and, by reading her novels, how these strategies are reflected in fictional experimentation. The comparison between the diary and novels shows how Burney’s conscious negotiation tactics at court were anticipated by her early novels (*Evelina* and *Cecilia*) and reinscribed in her later works (*Camilla* and *The Wanderer*). I will conclude by examining Burney’s revisionary practices, which demonstrate a heightened

¹⁹⁸ As Skinner reports, the eighteenth century was a crucial time in defining professionalism: she argues that “professionalization was part of the process by which status was conferred on some occupations and denied to others” (300) occurring in a larger economic shift where value was ascribed to labor, not birth. As Burney fought to be identified as a professional in a network, the venture of authorship itself was undergoing definition as a profession and not a pastime. Skinner, Gillian. “Professionalism, Performance, and Private Theatricals in Frances Burney’s *The Wanderer*.” *Romanticism*. vol. 18, no. 3, 2012, pp.294-305.

¹⁹⁹ Doody argues, “Burney always notes the flux and flow of power. In the most minute conversational scenes in her novels, power is always flowing from one member of the group to another, and she sees that in ‘polite society’ serious systems of exploitation and control are in operation” (99). Doody, Margaret Anne. “Burney and Politics.” *The Cambridge Companion to Frances Burney*, edited by Peter Sabor, Cambridge University Press, 2007, pp.93-110.

consciousness of and desire to create a stable legacy for herself centered on an idea of authorial professionalism, instead of letting her community define her in the future.

Successfully creating authority through negotiating with her community, Burney proved that authorship was an achievable goal. She also provides realistic, perhaps cautionary, advice on how to supervise the exchange of authority between an author and her audience. Dr. Burney and Crisp endorsed the image of Burney writing along in her garret, but Burney makes it clear that authorship takes place within communities that have tangible impacts on an author's production. Throughout her career, Burney argued that she was capable and successful in coping with these impacts, ultimately re-centering herself in her networks as a professional author who could, through textual means, acquire authority despite the interference of her community.

The Royal Book Club: Court Records and Negotiating Authority

Through the intervention of Mary Delany, a family friend and a confidant of both King George III and Queen Charlotte, Burney was offered the position of Keeper of the Robes in 1785. Her duties consisted of being constantly at hand for the Queen and helping her dress. Burney had strong reservations about the position including the total lack of independence, the inability to dictate her own pursuits/hours, and separation from family and friends. But under pressure from her community, particularly her father and Delany, Burney accepted the post. In addition to providing an income (which Burney knew she would need following her father's death), the position provided Burney with social capital and an opportunity to meet new people; both the capital and networking opportunities were crucial for a professional author seeking to negotiate her place in the literary world. I do not argue that Burney took the position solely to advance her authorial

career, but instead claim that Burney knew these careers would overlap and hopefully advance her position as a writer.

Scholars have commented on the historical usefulness of Burney's diaries and letters from her time at court, but have also focused on the intense suffering the position produced.^{200, 201} I will not dismiss the tremendous pain Burney experienced, but I want to focus on how Burney successfully established her position as a professional author. Indeed, her definition as an established author was key in her appointment: typically reserved for noble ladies seeking social and economic advancement, the Keeper of the Robes had to be discreet and balance the privacy of the position (attendant to the Queen and Royal Family) with the publicity of the court. As an author who successfully yet discreetly entered the print market with the anonymous *Evelina*, Burney proved to the Queen that she could manage this duality of public and private. Moreover, as a respected author, Burney added prestige to the Queen's court, and the Queen could justifiably identify herself as an artistic patron.

Through the published court diaries Burney tells readers that a female author cannot ignore the realities of community expectations and that it is possible to use text to manipulate the dynamic between author and audience. The continuity of audience (the royal family) in the diary, and the stress of her position, highlights how Burney

²⁰⁰ For an analysis on traditional, biographical readings of Burney's text, particularly the plays, as a reflection of her suffering in court, see Darby, Barbara. *Frances Burney, Dramatist: Gender, Performance, and the Late Eighteenth-Century Stage*. University Press of Kentucky, 1997, pp. 45. See also Zonitch's influential reading of how internalized violence at court inspired Burney: Zonitch, Barbara. *Familiar Violence: Gender and Social Upheaval in the Novels of Frances Burney*. University of Delaware Press, 1997, pp. 86-90.

²⁰¹ For a review of criticism on the court diaries (and their failings), see Lorna J., Clark "Frances Burney's Methods of Narrating the Court Experience." *Journal for Eighteenth-Century Studies*, vol. 40, no. 2, 2017, pp.223-235.

recognizes how her personal life bled into her profession, despite her efforts to keep the two separate. Moreover, the exaggerated restrictions of court life inspired Burney to provide lessons on how authors use interpretive strategies to create spaces for autonomy and authority in oppressive structures.

Before Burney entered court service, the King and Queen had clear ideas authorship, and she had to carefully walk the line between asserting her own autonomy in defining her profession and following court rules in supporting the monarch. Early in their acquaintance, the Queen asks Burney if she will write more novels, admitting “To be sure it is, I own, a very home question, for one who has not the pleasure to know you.”²⁰² The Queen considers authorship a very personal matter, assuming an author will only discuss her career with intimate connections. Her hesitation, shown through the breaking of the first sentence into multiple clauses, indicate the Queen thinks she’s treading on sensitive ground. Burney barely replies to this condescension with thanks for her attention, implying that authorship *is* indeed a highly personal, subjective process as the Queen presumes. Burney cannot respond to the Queen as a professional author but is instead awed into courtly silence. In this moment it seems that Burney fully submits to the Queen’s idea of authorship as subjective and isolated instead of a profession that Burney *had* to discuss with others, as her own experience with *Evelina* proved, since it threw her into literary communities of critics and patrons. The moment of embarrassed silence proves that community expectations and structures materially affect how an author defines herself. Over time, Burney grew in confidence and ability in asserting her

²⁰² Burney, Fanny. *Diary and Letters of Madame d’Arblay: Edited by Her Niece*, edited by Charlotte Barrett. Cambridge University Press, 2013, vol. II, part IX, pp.327.

professional authority amid perceived oppression, and indeed we see the seeds of that assertion in her first novel.

The Queen's presumption is somewhat misguided, as Burney's preface to *Evelina* shows authorship requires engaging with a community. Her address to critics emphasizes how important it was for authors to negotiate authority with their networks. But this negotiation must be based on the author's professionalism and the quality of her work, not on her personality or family connections. Novelists (including Haywood and Fielding) often spoke to critics in introductions, asking reviewers to be kind in their interpretations. Burney's address is noteworthy because of the way she negotiates interpretive authority with specific readers. Burney speaks to the writers of two popular magazines, The Monthly Review (founded in 1749 by editor Ralph Griffiths) and the Critical Review (founded in 1756 as a Tory paper and supported by Johnson; family friend Crisp also contributed).²⁰³ Instead of addressing critics in general, Burney singles out specific critics that she knows will influence the current literary discourse. By asking these critics to review her work favorably, Burney situates the work in a very specific community. She reveals a high level of consciousness of how she can negotiate authority with critics through flattery, or how by identifying them as the arbiters of literary taste, she can direct them to interpret her work favorably. The Queen assumes that Burney shares her writing with those who know her well, but this novel's preface complicates the assumption through its invocation of a community. She utilizes a network but emphasizes her professionalism by removing her name, a marker of personality and personal connections.

²⁰³ Based on Burney's diaries and letters she knew neither of these men personally.

The address signifies that Burney was able and willing to fluidly move between anonymity and historical specificity by placing herself in these critical communities. Burney was a member of the “Streatham Worthies:” organized by socialite and author Hester Thrale, the circle was a community of artists and thinkers including Samuel Johnson, Joshua Reynolds, Edmund Burke, and David Garrick. Vivien Jones adds, “The professionalism which Burney developed through her relationship with the Streatham circle is perhaps nowhere more apparent than in this deliberate cultivation of powerful advocates.”²⁰⁴ In *Evelina* she uses anonymity as a kind of insurance: she can point to this preface to prove that she used literary, not personal or social, capital to get positive reviews.^{205, 206} In other words, the professional etiquette of the literary market is the foundation for Burney’s community; it is not based on the excitement of transgression (as with Haywood) or her functionality (as with Fielding). Burney confidently writes that critics can judge the work without fear of harming an individual or for the sake of personal gain: “no refractory murmuring will follow your censure, no private interest be gratified by your praise.”²⁰⁷ Through anonymity, Burney promotes her professionalism, enabling the professionalism of the critic: she structures a community to follow the same “rules” that will treat her favorably. Burney also places herself in a laudable and unique

²⁰⁴ Jones, Vivien. “Burney and Gender.” *The Cambridge Companion to Frances Burney*, edited by Peter Sabor, Cambridge University Press, 2007, pp.120.

²⁰⁵ Greenfield takes a slightly different tack in saying “Burney viewed anonymity as a form of self-promotion.” Greenfield, Susan. “‘O Dear Resemblance of Thy Murdered Mother:’ Female Authorship in *Evelina*. *Eighteenth-Century Fiction*, vol. 3, no. 4, 1991, pp.304.

²⁰⁶ Jones adds, “Instead, anonymity allows Burney to transcend gender in the interests of securing an unbiased reading for subject-matter.” Jones, Vivien. “Burney and Gender.” *The Cambridge Companion to Frances Burney*, edited by Peter Sabor, Cambridge University Press, 2007, pp.117.

²⁰⁷ Burney, Frances. *Evelina*. Penguin Books, 1994, pp.5.

position to appeal to the critic and reader. Burney explains “No hackneyed writer, inured to abuse, and callous to criticism, here braves your severity; - neither does a half-starv’d garretteer.”²⁰⁸ Calling upon two novelist stereotypes, Burney asserts that while new, she neither writes *only* for money (like the garret denizen) nor is so arrogant as to write poor material without caring what readers may think (like the hack writer). Distinguishing herself in this way, Burney appeals to the reader’s desire for novelty because she is not following the common track of writers. She boosts her authority saying that, by virtue of her position as the anonymous yet genteel writer, she deserves attention in the literary community. Negotiating with cultural stereotypes gives Burney cultural capital. She intrigues readers and encourages critical respect by subverting their expectations, which she proves, through her sarcastic imagery, to be faulty.

As her oft-cited comic descriptions of court etiquette suggest, Burney knew that the expectations of an author could be extreme.²⁰⁹ Although court protocol restricted Burney’s physical freedom, she found space to explore how authorship was a way of creating authority in servile positions. In 1786 Burney reports

The Queen was alone; and told me she had been so much struck with the Duke of Suffolk's letter to his son, in the Paston collection, that she wished to hear my opinion of it. She then condescended to read it to me. It is indeed both instructive and interesting. A conversation then took place, which lasted almost all the morning...²¹⁰

²⁰⁸ Ibid., pp.5.

²⁰⁹ Burney, Fanny. *Diary and Letters of Madame d’Arblay: Edited by Her Niece*, edited by Charlotte Barrett, Cambridge University Press, 2013, vol. II, part IX, pp.345.

²¹⁰ Ibid., vol. III, part VIII, pp.269.

The way that Burney contextualizes the conversation subtly reveals the authors' authority to reinterpret the script of court behavior. Readers would expect to see the Queen as an aloof patroness and for Burney to treat her with reverence (as we see in their early acquaintance), and this expectation is partly met when Burney describes the Queen as "condescending." But Burney clarifies that the Queen seeks out the author's conversation because she waits until she is alone, a time that was a prized commodity in the monarch's routine. The fact that the Queen engages Burney in a long conversation (it lasted "all" morning) is also significant: the royal family had regimented hours that could not be interrupted. Telling the reader that the Queen gave so much time to the conversation, Burney argues that as an author, she has cultural capital that grants her patron the space to break the rules of the community. Analyses of Burney's court diaries, like Margaret Anne Doody's, tend to focus on how the writer is harmed by protocol, but here readers can recognize the Queen is also restrained by these structures, because Burney carefully notes how unusual it is for the Queen to take time for herself.²¹¹ It is only reasonable that the Queen would want to spend time with an acclaimed author like Burney. Burney's authority as author becomes in turn authority for the Queen to break the community rules that bind them both to robotic routines, like a typical morning full of official visits and social calls. Burney records the event for posterity to prove she could establish her own authority to help herself and others resist what she considered brutal suppression.

In the early years of her service, Burney's diary focuses on the Queen as the active agent in their literary conversations, but by 1790 Burney wrote that she too played an active role, recasting herself as a professional that was more equal to her patroness.

²¹¹ Doody, Margaret Anne. *Frances Burney: The Life in the Works*. Rutgers UP, 1988.

Reflecting on how other ladies remain totally silent when the Queen reads, Burney remarks, “when reading alone with the Queen, or listening to her reading to me, I have always frankly spoken almost whatever has occurred to me.”²¹² The first two clauses emphasize Burney’s special relationship to the Queen: she reads alone with a woman usually surrounded by courtiers and the Queen performs the subservient role of reading *to* the novelist. As with the Paston conversation, Burney demonstrates that her authority to interpret texts becomes grounds for the Queen to cede her authority as patron. Burney use of “frankly” and “whatever” also indicate intellectual freedom. Burney’s body and movements are stifled at court, but because her authority is predicated on her success as a published author, she can achieve intellectual autonomy. These examples demonstrate a cyclical give-and-take of authority: Burney responds to the Queen’s initial encouragement with assertions of autonomy, which the Queen approves, allowing Burney to display her interpretive authority.

As these examples prove, the Queen loomed large in Burney’s definition of authorship.²¹³ The court forced Burney into a patronage model that was changing in the late Eighteenth century.²¹⁴ Burney’s relationship with the royal family underscores the reality facing women writers, but the texts she writes for these patrons show that this

²¹² Ibid., vol. V, part III, pp.79-80.

²¹³ It is interesting to consider how Queen Charlotte is an authority figure like Johnson that looms large in Burney’s authorial career. What is unique about the Queen and her relationship with Burney is the latter’s explicitly professional nature. Johnson advised Burney and other artists encouraged/influenced her, but Queen Charlotte employed Burney as a professional servant in a patronage role that is not mimicked or echoed elsewhere in Burney’s networks. When Burney left court, the royal family pulled together an annual pension for their beloved author.

²¹⁴ As Alvin Kernan explains, in the Eighteenth century there was a change from a patronage to a public model of supporting authors, in which the reading public, rather than a specific noble patron, financially supported authors. Kernan, Alvin. *Samuel Johnson and the Impact of Print*. Princeton UP, 1989.

reality can be mediated by social critique or interpretive authority. The Queen suggests that Burney write a poem on her favorite piece of clothing, a house coat, which she often wore since it was quickly donned or discarded. The poem itself appears to be praise of the Queen, but it is also a critique of the vanity that fills the court. Speaking to the Queen's coat, the speaker declaims, "Thrice honour'd Robe! couldst thou espy / The form that deigns to shew thy worth," "Wouldst thou not swell with vain delight?"²¹⁵ The flowery diction and references to homage ("deigns") play into the dynamic that the Queen sets; the humble author is honored by her notice. After this stanza, however, the speaker moves into a critique of two things the court reveled in - pomp and show: "Plaudits by pomp and shew to win; / Those seek simplicity and grace / Whose dignity is from within."²¹⁶ Burney argues against the ridiculous nature of court etiquette, which revolved around showing the self in specific dress, spaces, and with predetermined associates. The values of simplicity, grace, and dignity are not found at court. Continuing this subtle critique, the concluding lines identify the house-coat's "moral end."²¹⁷ The speaker explains, "Since hours are register'd on high, / The friend of Time is Virtue's friend."²¹⁸ One of Burney's justified complaints about court service was that she had no control over her time: all courtiers were at the beck and call of the royal family. Aligning Virtue and Time (they both have the same friend) Burney suggests the exercise of one is the exercise of the other. There is also irony here: the Queen likes the housecoat because it saves her time. But she has no care whatsoever for the time of her servants (including Burney); she often called Burney away from her own elaborate court dressing, forcing

²¹⁵ Ibid., vol. III, part VI, pp.179, lines1-2 and 5.

²¹⁶ Ibid., lines 22-24.

²¹⁷ Ibid., line 38.

²¹⁸ Ibid., lines 39-40.

her to appear in a nightgown and cap in front of others. Burney acquiesces to her reader's request for textual production, and then uses that text to critically interpret the social structures or norms that support that patron's power over the author. The pomp that the royal family uses to awe the court is shown to be shallow vanity and an enemy of true virtue, which is based in simplicity and the effective use of time. Deploying her own interpretive authority as a writer allows Burney to deconstruct her patron's authority; she textually changes the balance of power in her favor by proving she adheres to virtue (unlike her hypocritical employers).

Through writing, Burney clarifies her position within the community, asserting her textual authority even as autonomy over her physical self is dismantled. She created a text that responded to the feudal feelings of her patron, offered a critique of the Court, and regulated her community by limiting textual distribution. After presenting the poem to the Queen, Burney learns that Mrs. Delany wants a copy too. The Queen "had referred her to me; saying at the same time,— 'I would give you them [lines], and I would shew and produce them often, and to many, but I cannot, because of what belongs to myself in them.'"²¹⁹ Burney *and* Queen own a text, but Burney has exerted authority by interpreting the Queen in a specific way. Burney creates and regulates ownership of her text by making it personal and critical of the Queen. The Queen knows Burney won't distribute it, gesturing at Burney's professionalism in her ability to balance the public and private. Although she requested the poem, the Queen gives authority back to Burney by affirming that only the author can control who sees her texts. The Queen's phraseology is also interesting: she cannot distribute the poem because of what "belongs to myself" in

²¹⁹ Ibid., vol. III, part VI, pp.227.

the text. Burney interprets a national symbol of power as a subjective human being; her poem subverts the display of royal power as time mismanagement. Burney created a text that a queen could not use or distribute as she wished, as was her intention. Burney clarifies this intention by switching from her usual first-person perspective to the performative third-person perspective, emphasizing consciousness of her authorial strategies. Listening to Mrs. Delany's account Burney muses, "Very true, my conscious Queen! thought conscious F. B., for on that very reliance did I compose and present them."²²⁰ The repeated word "conscious" indicates the Queen is aware of some potential wrong-doing - she knows the poem is a critique. Moreover, the word "conscious" stresses how Burney knows how she can manipulate the relationship between the savvy author and self-conscious reader. This consciousness is heightened by the shift in perspective and use of the initials "F.B." instead of the first-person pronoun "I." Avoiding this more personal pronoun, Burney creates distance between herself and the reader, and underlines her professional identity in deliberately creating a text that allows her authority and control in a community where she often felt helpless.²²¹

This strategy of shifting perspective and pronouns is used to similar effect in the novels, where the heroine steps outside of her situation to comment on her lack of authority in a community, or barter for autonomy. Attempting to dissuade her guardian

²²⁰ Ibid.

²²¹ Analyzing the way Burney's theatricality connects with her development of free indirect style, Frank says, "Burney's development of narrative techniques for modulating distance, including free indirect discourse, grows out of the configuration of theater, shame, and narration" (616). While I do not think shame is at play here for Burney (perhaps it is for the Queen), the moment does gesture to her future development of narrative techniques like ironic separation of the self from the subject. Marcie, Frank. "Frances Burney's Theatricality." *ELH*. 2015, vol. 82, no. 2, pp.615-635. See also Darby, *Frances Burney, Dramatist: Gender, Performance, and the Late Eighteenth-Century Stage*. University Press of Kentucky, 1997, pp.15.

Mr. Harrel from completely ruining himself with building projects, the eponymous heroine of *Cecilia* (1782) declines to participate in the planning. When he chastises her for gravity, Cecilia replies in the third-person: “‘She has indeed,’ answered Cecilia, trying to smile, ‘not much taste for the pleasure of being always surrounded by workmen.’”²²² Acting as her own narrator, Cecilia uses the third-person perspective to distance herself from the uncomfortable situation, just like Burney uses “F.B.” to create professional distance between herself and her patron. Harrel tries to interpret Cecilia as a prudish, naive girl who needs guidance in the “real world.” Cecilia tries, through humor and use of the third-person perspective, to reinterpret the narrative that her guardian is writing for her. In both the court scene and *Cecilia* passage, Burney combines ironic humor with the change in perspective, creating linguistic distance between the speaker and the listener. Confronting a patron can be daunting, but Burney demonstrates how manipulation of text or language gives women authority to resist the pressures of their communities.

As an author, Burney did have opportunities to structure her community in terms of reading: she interpreted texts that would become the focal point of her interactions with court residents. The royals respect Burney’s authority on literature, and she takes advantage of this respect to reinforce her authority and professionalism. In 1788 Burney reports,

I carried the Queen, in the morning, a key, I had at her command drawn up, of Swift's “History of John Bull.” I found that work so filled, not only with politics (into which I have never entered), but with vulgarisms the most offensive, that I

²²² Burney, Frances. *Cecilia*. Oxford University Press, 1990, pp.101.

frankly told her Majesty how far I felt myself from recommending it to her own perusal, or that of the Princess Royal.²²³

At first Burney stresses the Queen's agency by saying she "commands" the production of a text. But then Burney places herself as the interpretive authority: because *she* never discusses politics and *she* thinks the text is crude, it is inappropriate for royalty. The fact that Burney "frankly" reveals her opinion to the Queen further proves that she has authority in this situation. Instead of being stifled by her community, Burney proudly deploys her authority to critique the text. This is not the first instance in which Burney recommended striking a book from the royal reading list: she was shocked at the risqué novel *The Mysterious Mother* (1768) and similarly made the Queen aware of her disapproval.²²⁴ By interpreting the work through her key, Burney shows skill as an author, recognizing what details are important (deserving a place in the key) and providing judgement on the utility and morality of the text. Burney deliberately and confidently exerts authority as an author; she can tell what "good" writing is because she is a good writer herself. The author's social capital has great value to the royals: they could have chastised or even dismissed her for impudence in arguing how the family should be educated, but instead they immediately submit to her authority by ignoring the novel.

Burney's authority as an author went beyond recommending reading material: she also assisted the royal family in their own writing. Her authorship allowed her to move up the social ladder and bypass rigorous court etiquette to claim authority with and over her

²²³ Burney, Fanny. *Diary and Letters of Madame d'Arblay: Edited by Her Niece*. Edited by Charlotte Barrett. Cambridge University Press, 2013, vol. IV, part I, pp.2.

²²⁴ Ibid., vol. III, part VI, p.204

community. Sometimes Burney's aid was informally requested. For example, in 1787 she writes, "the Princess charged me to stay, and to help her; and while she was writing, applied to me continually about her expressions; and, having finished, said, "Now, Miss Burney,—as I am sure nobody knows so well,—will you look at this, and tell me if it is proper?" She then put it into my hand."²²⁵ The passage provides fascinating contrasts in language. The word "charged" indicates the Princess' power over Burney, but the use of the word "help" suggests the patroness is aware that she requires the professional skills of her social inferior. The Princess' language exudes a tone of politeness and even humility, as she flatters Burney's experience (*nobody* knows writing *so* well) and describes Burney as an instructress (Burney can directly *tell* a royal what is proper). Burney does help the Princess finish her letter, and the scene of the author teaching the royal was repeated throughout Burney's time at court. Burney plays with language, particularly verbs, to establish her position as a literary professional to demonstrate to the diary's reader that her audience (the Princess) recognized her authority, and therefore, so should all readers.

The Queen also asked for Burney's help with writing, though with a political slant that raises the stakes for Burney's authorship. In 1789 Burney reports, "The Queen sent for me in the afternoon, to hear her own private diary, and tell her if it was English. Indeed there was scarce an expression that was foreign."²²⁶ Hailing from what is today northern Germany, Queen Charlotte began her reign with no knowledge of English (though she quickly learned the language) and she received criticism for associating with German friends, most notably Madame Schwellenberg, Burney's tyrannical supervisor. The year previous this entry, the Queen often argued with her eldest son (the future King

²²⁵ Ibid., vol. III, part VII, pp.234

²²⁶ Ibid., vol. V, part II, pp.39

George IV) because she believed he wanted to seize the Regency while King George III was incapacitated. This background contextualizes the Queen's somewhat strange request to Burney. Queen Charlotte knew, even as an absolute authority in her household, that her national authority was under scrutiny and her language could be a source of weakness that critics could capitalize on (saying she was not truly English, pro-German, not intelligent, etc.). The Queen is not just asking for grammatical help from Burney: she is implicitly asking the published author if her language conforms to English discourse and therefore if she, as expressed in the language, is English too. Burney can weigh in on how the monarch is "truly" English, because the Queen recognizes the authority Burney holds as an English novelist who knows how to effectively use the English language. Burney's response, that there is "scarce" a foreign expression, shows on the one hand confirmation of the Queen's obvious wishes but the modifying adjective is suggestive. Burney does not say there are *no* foreign expressions, but *scarcely* any. Through this linguistic choice, Burney pays service to the authority of her mistress but maintains her authority to decide what is "really" English (in language and identity) by making a slight critique (there are still *some* foreign idioms present). Through her interpretation of the Queen's language, Burney solidifies her authority and engages with concepts of the politicized self in her diary without being obviously political and therefore in danger of critique.

The question of Burney's politics is the topic of vexed scholarly debates. Burney's final novel, *The Wanderer* (1814), encourages us to re-center these debates of around issues of language, not government politics. As the court records show, Burney's authorship was based on professional, interpretive facility and the use of text in relationships. Closely reading *The Wanderer* allows us to see this definition of authorship

play out in novel form, providing insight into how Burney understood politics as inherently interwoven with her work as a writer. Julia Epstein famously asserts Burney is an angry woman using texts to fight back against oppression (and Julia Zonitch agrees).^{227, 228} Margaret Doody argues that *The Wanderer*, with its emphasis on universal empathy, cannot be conservative, but as Rogers notes, most feminists today would say that Burney's politics are not as clear cut as either of these scholars claim.^{229, 230} And, as Brian McCrea aptly argues, thanks to her time in court, politics was always personal for Burney because she spent five years living with the physical embodiments of political power.²³¹ While Burney's texts obviously provide support for many political readings, it is rare to see a reading that addresses the connection between politics and authorship through the language of *The Wanderer*.

In the conclusion of *The Wanderer*, Burney shows how interpretation becomes a way to manage the fluctuations of authority in a community. After much mystery and suffering the novel's heroine (Juliet) is reunited with her guardian, the Bishop. The conversations between the Bishop and Juliet's uncle, Admiral Powel, focus on authority over language, creating a metaphorical space for Burney in political discourse. When the

²²⁷ Epstein, Julia. "Fanny Burney's Epistolary Voices." *The Eighteenth Century: Theory and Interpretation*, 1986, vol. 27, no. 2, pp.165. See also Zonitch, Julia, *The Iron Pen: Frances Burney and the Politics of Women's Writing*. Madison: University of Wisconsin Press. 1989.

²²⁸ Zonitch. *Familiar Violence: Gender and Social Upheaval in the Novels of Frances Burney*. University of Delaware Press, 1997, pp.113.

²²⁹ Doody, Margaret Anne. *Frances Burney: The Life in the Works*. Rutgers University Press, 1988, pp.318, 331, 367.

²³⁰ Rogers, Katherine. *Frances Burney: The World of 'Female Difficulties.'* Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1990, pp. 159. For an example of this more nuanced analysis see Wallace, Tara Ghoshal. "Burney as Dramatist" *The Cambridge Companion to Frances Burney*, edited by Peter Sabor, Cambridge University Press, 2007, pp.55-74.

²³¹ McCrea, Brian. *Frances Burney and Narrative Prior to Ideology*, University of Delaware Press, 2013, pp.86.

Admiral meets the Bishop, he welcomes the clergyman by saying, “I ought to beg your pardon, perhaps, for speaking to you in English; but I have partly forgot my French; which...I never thought it much worth to study.”²³² When the Bishop explains that he can understand English the Admiral replies, “I am cordially glad to hear it...for that’s an item that gives me at once a good opinion of you!”²³³ The exchange mirrors Burney’s experience; her authority over the English language is key to negotiating relationships and defining political and national identity. What is ironic about the Admiral’s speech is the fact that he claims French is not worth learning, but he uses multiple words derived from the French language (pardon, matter, study, cordially, opinion). While Burney was not an etymologist, her skill with the French language is well-documented. Even if her readers could not read French, glancing at the novel’s lengthy French passages would reveal similarities between the English and French language. The patriotic Englishman looks down on the French, but through the novel’s use of French and its derived vocabulary, Burney argues the linguistic connection between the two languages parallels connections between the two nations. Also, the central French speakers of the novel (Juliet, Gabrielle, and the Bishop) are all moral and valued members of a community; Burney makes a political argument for sympathy between the two nations based on their similarities, including linguistic. As with the Queen, Burney acknowledges that language is key in defining identity and position within a community, and so as an authority on language, Burney possesses political authority. She parses out the complexities of language and negotiates the relationships between people and their nations with more

²³² Burney, Frances. *The Wanderer; or, Female Difficulties*. Oxford University Press, 1991, pp.858.

²³³ Ibid.

nuance than the average patriotic reader like Admiral Powel, which again reinforces her authority through contrast to a bad reader or interpreter.

In addition to national politics, Burney had to work within the social politics of her artistic networks. The connections Burney made while writing her early works (namely the Streatham circle) were influences for the rest of her career.²³⁴ Her manipulation of these relationships was especially important to how Burney traded power in court.²³⁵ These relationships could be a liability: Burney was initially terrified that Thrale would be unkind in her memoirs because she disapproved of Thrale's second marriage, but Burney turned these risks into opportunities to reinforce her authority. She explains, "The Queen is reading Mrs. Piozzi's [née Thrale] *Tour* to me, instead of my reading it to her. She loves reading aloud, and in this work finds me an able commentator."²³⁶ Once again, the Queen takes on the subservient role of reading while the author comments. Adding that the Queen "loves reading aloud" allows Burney to superficially preserve the status quo; she does not force Queen Charlotte into a submissive posture. Burney uses this shift in dynamic to rearticulate her own position in the Streatham network. Commenting on the text, Burney anticipates how she will be read by her patrons and the court community. From places of potential powerlessness

²³⁴ Jones explains, "The professionalism which Burney developed through her relationship with the Streatham circle is perhaps nowhere more apparent than in this deliberate cultivation of powerful advocates." Jones, Vivien. "Burney and Gender." *The Cambridge Companion to Frances Burney*, edited by Peter Sabor, Cambridge University Press, 2007, pp.120.

²³⁵ It is worth emphasizing that Burney's Streatham circle was unique in its emphasis on public authorship and professionalism, in comparison to the Montague's bluestocking circle, which focused on the private circulation of women's works and patronage. See Ulph, Cassandra. "Frances Burney's Private Professionalism." *Journal for Eighteenth-Century Studies*, vol. 38, no. 3, 2015, pp.377-93.

²³⁶ Burney, Fanny. *Diary and Letters of Madame d'Arblay: Edited by Her Niece*, edited by Charlotte Barrett. Cambridge University Press, 2013, vol. V, part I, pp.30.

(Thrale's enemy and a court servant), Burney leverages her authority as a member of the literary elite to reinterpret her narrative. Burney explains, "I reaped opportunity of clearing several points that had been darkened by calumny, and of softening others that had been viewed wholly through false lights."²³⁷ Even though Burney was not the object of this calumny, she claims the right to interpret and rewrite another author's work because of her unique position (one of authority) in the community. Burney took advantage of her court service to interpret her own story for the most elite audience in the country.

It is one thing for Burney to offer her commentary while the Queen reads, but the fact that King George sought out her commentary on Boswell's *Life of Johnson* (1791) demonstrates how her authority was reinforced by her audience, who respected her place in the community.²³⁸ Burney says, "The King, who was now also reading this work, applied to me for explanations without end. Every night at this period he entered the Queen's dressing-room, and detained Her Majesty's proceedings by a length of discourse with me upon this subject."²³⁹ The King and Queen were rigorous in their adherence to court protocol, so the fact that King George interrupted his spouse's ritualized dressing often and for long is surprising. The consistent deviance from etiquette shows how much the King respected Burney's interpretive authority. Burney's close relationship to Johnson was well known, and the royal couple seek Burney's commentary because of her position

²³⁷ Ibid., vol. IV, part I, pp.13.

²³⁸ For an analysis of Johnson's impact on Burney's writing (and how critics identified her writing as "Johnsonian") see Spencer, Jane "Evelina and Cecilia" *The Cambridge Companion to Frances Burney*, edited by Peter Sabor, Cambridge University Press, 2007, pp.23-38.

²³⁹ Burney, Fanny. *Diary and Letters of Madame d'Arblay: Edited by Her Niece*, edited by Charlotte Barrett. Cambridge University Press, 2013, vol. V, part V, pp.176-7.

in the Streatham network. For Burney, authorship includes promoting her position in a network for other communities, who would affirm her authority as a member of that esteemed group.²⁴⁰ *Evelina* and *Cecilia* introduced Burney to the Streatham circle, but her social capital obtained through association with that circle proved crucial, as this anecdote about the King shows, in defining her authorial career and asserting her authority. This cultural capital grants her authority over her court community.

At the same time, Burney was careful to argue that networking alone did not make an author. While she took advantage of her connections, Burney firmly asserted that an author must have textual capital (successful publications) to be a true professional. Burney's novel *Camilla* (1796) exemplifies this argument through Dr. Orkborne, the selfish and useless classicist hired to teach Camilla's sister Eugenia.²⁴¹ In Book III, three chapters are dedicated to Orkborne's "adventures": An Author's Notion of Travelling (ch.3), An Author's Opinion of Visiting (ch.5), and An Author's Idea of Order (ch.6).²⁴² At the beginning of chapter three it is not clear to whom "Author" refers. Readers may assume it is Burney, as such authorial interventions were not uncommon in eighteenth-century novels. Instead, the chapter focuses on Orkborne and his inability to go on a short ride without filling the carriage with classical texts. The following chapters portray Orkborne's obliviousness to social decorum (he stays in the carriage reading instead of retrieving his pupil) and his anger at having his books reorganized. Neither the narrator

²⁴⁰ Burney's interpretive influence went beyond this immediate audience: through her *Memoirs*, Burney was able to spread her interpretation of Johnson and her place in his circle. This instance can be read as a rehearsal for that later performance.

²⁴¹ There is little scholarship on Orkborne or *Camilla* in general, but Doody does note that the doctor "is a comic hidden representation of the [abstract] author." Doody, Margaret Anne. *Frances Burney: The Life in the Works*. Rutgers University Press, 1988, pp.248.

²⁴² Burney, Frances. *Camilla: A Picture of Youth*. Floating Press, 2009. pp.336, 400, 419.

nor the characters call Orkborne an author, but he is given that title because he constantly tells people he is drafting an analysis of classical literature. He never produces anything other than scraps of paper, and only survives because his patron, Sir Hugh, maintains him. Sir Hugh is impressed by Orkborne's classical education, and so the tutor uses this false authority to keep the goodwill of his employer. Relying on a patronage model that was becoming outmoded, Orkborne claims a position as author without producing the work necessary for a real professional.

Through these ironic chapters Burney points out that, while networks are important to authors, connections alone do not constitute professional authorship. An author needs to produce text that becomes the focal point for a community of people that are willing to negotiate with the author for interpretive authority of that text. Using Orkborne as a hyperbolic foil, Burney argues that she is a professional author because she does not rest on the laurels of patronage. She works hard to generate valuable texts and then negotiates their production and reception within her historically specific networks. This argument was especially important for Burney because of the way *Camilla* was published. Asking her network for aid, Burney gathered enough resources through subscriptions to publish her novel. Orkborne is a sly assurance to her subscribers and readers that Burney is not taking undue advantage of her community like the classicist. Burney implicitly addresses her community to define her relationship to them, not as a sycophant who produced nothing while leaning on patrons, but as a productive author who creates texts the public wants to consume and spread. Authority, one of the keystones of authorship, is achieved through interpreting a text with and for a community, not through networking.

Conclusion: What is a Legacy? Burney's Self-Revision

During her time at court, Burney walked a fine line between authorial independence and submitting to royal power, and, as she grew older, she used her memoirs to solidify a professional legacy that future readers could use to interpret her work. Revising her letters and diaries as well as her father's memoirs, Burney carefully crafted a linear narrative of her life, creating a stable, historicized authorship for future communities to respect. Examining the way that Burney revised her late works and memoirs underscores the deliberate consciousness with which Burney defined professional authorship. Because Burney was part of so many literary and social communities she was often mentioned in other writings (like those of Thrale/Piozzi and Boswell). Burney knew these communities would write about her after death. In order to assert authority over the interpretation of her authorship, Burney had to carefully revise her 'personal' writings for public consumption.²⁴³ But, at the same time, she did not want to distance herself entirely from these elite networks. Reading the revisions of Burney's late texts demonstrates how she wanted to (re)define herself as a professional within a network of amazing people. She strove to maintain authority over her own professional narrative even after death, which required careful construction of her and her family's personal writings.

The most obvious examples of Burney revising and interpreting her authorial career are her own diaries and the memoirs of her father, but I want to turn first to a text that rarely receives critical attention, "The Adventure at Ilfracombe," written in 1823. A

²⁴³ I use quotes here because she explicitly addressed her diaries to specific family members (most often her sister Susanna Philips). So while these papers were originally for the family only, they were never truly private for Burney.

revised version of this story is published in Volume 7 of her memoirs (edited by her niece Charlotte Barret and published in 1842): the 1823 manuscript indicates revisions that Burney intended to make before the story's insertion into the published journals. While the "Adventure" and her memoirs offer a sense of immediacy and connection to the authoress, my analysis proves that Burney thought of her memoirs not in terms of personal authenticity but rather as the product of professional skill. Burney's revisions demonstrate her dedication to editing and interpreting her personal experience to emphasize her professional skill.

Located in the Frances d'Arblay papers at the Berg Collection, "The Adventure at Ilfracombe" tells an exciting tale. While visiting the town with her son Alex and his school friends, Burney goes for a walk by the sea. Unaware of the rising tide, Burney finds herself trapped on a rock and surrounded by a stormy sea; after several hours her son and his friends rescue her. The manuscript is full of planned revisions and is mediated through translation; the manuscript in the Berg Collection is the English version for friends on "this side of the channel."²⁴⁴ The revisions show that Burney would not leave her authorial identity to the hands of fate or the future, but instead carefully decided what texts best represented her professional authorship.

She frames the story with an explanation of its origin, emphasizing her professional motivation to please the public, not her personal connections. Burney begins the manuscript by stating, "The latent desire that was pronounced, with respect to the use of my pen, by Him whose every expressed desire I now execute as Law, though with

²⁴⁴ Burney, Frances. "Adventure at Ilfracombe." 1817. Holograph. 1 item. Frances Burney d'Arblay Collection of Papers. 1653-1894 [bulk 1775-1839]. The Henry W. and Albert A. Berg Collection of English and American Literature, The New York Public Library. pp.1.

pleasure, - nay delight – was to enjoin my committing to paper my unextraordinary adventure at Ilfracomb [sic].” “Him” refers to Burney’s husband, General Alexander d’Arblay, and the capitalization plus the use of the word “Law” strike a strong note of patriarchal rule. But this subservient attitude, combined with the use of “unextraordinary” makes two things clear: first, she does not think this personal anecdote, that has no apparent bearing on her professional career, worth recording; second, she writes only to oblige her community. This “origin story” is entirely absent from the published journals. This absence shows how Burney wanted her texts to define her as an author who wrote for the sake of writing interesting and edifying work, not for the sake of personal connections (a motivation she strove against in the address to critics in *Evelina*). Burney defines herself as a professional giving her reading public what they want in her memoirs, which is a skillful literary account of an interesting life.

The most consistent revisionary pattern in the manuscript is excising Burney’s emotional experience and emphasizing her professional skill in creating the account. Entire pages describing her intense fear are crossed out with black “X’s” in favor of focusing on the plot.²⁴⁵ Burney’s distress is reasonable and poignantly conveyed; at one point she finds another trapped lady and describes the “*heartfelt gaiety* [sic]...*such as rarely, alas! I have since experienced*. I called upon her to join me, in accents *the most caressing*, and which evidently convinced her of her *even exquisite* welcome.”²⁴⁶ All the italicized language, however, was cut (indicated by ink lines through the phrases). Writing this revision after her husband’s death in 1818, Burney’s grief (she has not experienced gaiety since his passing) is considered irrelevant or inappropriate for

²⁴⁵ Ibid., pp.12, 19, 41, 42.

²⁴⁶ Ibid., pp.21.

publication. The focus is not on the author's complex, internal state, but on what is literally happening. The subjectivity of the author does not matter as much as what she is doing: Fielding's focus on the functionality of authorship is echoed here as Burney focuses on interpreting what is happening. The revisions show how Burney's authorship meant editing her personal experience to produce a professional image for readers to consume. Burney is firmly in control of how her personal experience intersects with her professional skill or, in other words, how her legacy is formed and how people will interpret her work.

Burney did not intend to give readers an unmediated look into her mind with the publication of her papers, but instead, to offer instances of professional ability. In the genre of memoir or diary, readers would expect "authenticity" or direct access to the internal state of a public figure. But comparing the original manuscript with the published journal shows how even intense emotional scenes were consciously crafted for an audience. It is clear from the cuts she made to "The Adventure at Ilfracombe," that while she strove to satisfy the generic modes of memoir (showing people her "real" feelings), she wanted the emphasis to be on her writing, not her personality. It is easy to imagine any of Burney's heroines in her place in this story: her recorded emotional responses are not particularly unique. "The Adventure" is about her role as writer, about her control of the text, not her individual helplessness.

Burney's emphasis on her professionalism comes to a complicated climax in her father's memoirs, in which she constantly describes her career and central position in literary networks while also identifying herself as a dutiful daughter. Burney was harshly criticized for egotism when the memoirs were published, and indeed much of the text is

dedicated to the publication history of Burney's own novels, and descriptions of Dr. Burney's friends are excerpts from her own letters and diaries. Acknowledging this negative critical context, I argue that Burney considered *The Memoirs of Dr. Charles Burney* (1832) as an opportunity to reinforce her authority and identity as professional author. Reading Dr. Burney's memoirs as a revision of Burney's authorial career and as a foundation of her legacy allows us to explore what Devoney Looser calls a critically forgotten text, and to understand authorship as the performance of an entire life.

The *Memoirs* begin with an explanation of the text's origin, defining Burney as an objective editor while justifying her intrusions into the text. Throughout the *Memoirs* Burney tries to balance her professionalism in collating her family's texts to best represent her father and present herself as an important author. Burney opens the text saying:

The intentions, or, rather, the directions of Dr. Burney that his Memoirs should be published; and the expectation of his family and friends that they should pass through the hands of his present Editor and Memorialist, have made the task of arranging the ensuing collations with her own personal recollections, appear to her a sacred duty from the year 1814.²⁴⁷

Burney's word choice is significant. She clarifies that she is not promoting this work for her own sake, but at the direction of her father; like her preface to *Evelina*, she clears herself from the motive of publishing solely for profit – a sentiment reinforced by the religious diction of the final clause. And again, as with her first novel, Burney situates

²⁴⁷ Burney, Frances. *Memoirs of Dr. Burney – Arranged From His Own Manuscripts, From Family Papers, and From Personal Recollections*. 1832. Gregg International Publishers Limited, 1972. vol. I, pp.v.

herself as author within a community of specific, historical individuals (the Burney family, who pushed her to publish Dr. Burney's writings). The verbs that Burney uses to describe her actions are intriguing: she denies agency at first by saying the writings simply "pass" through her, and she merely "arranges" them. The paucity of Dr. Burney's actual writing, however, means that Burney herself writes most of the *Memoirs*. She does admit that her own "recollections" will be included, and the word implies retrieving and inserting memories into the text. But, as readers quickly learn, Burney often re-tells stories through her own edited letters. In other words, the text she produces is mediated through revision; it is not an objective recollection of the past or a "pure" collection of her father's writing. She denies explicit authority over her father's story but claims the power to interpret her father's life through her own work.

Still, Burney strives for objectivity and submission to her father's wishes by using the titles of Editor and Memorialist. The label of Editor links nicely to Burney's claim that she only receives the texts and makes minimal changes through its collation.

"Memorialist," however, requires deeper analysis. Looser argues,

We might consider that through the use of this term, Burney is calling herself something more than a writer of memoir or biography. A now obsolete eighteenth-century meaning of "memorialist," according to the OED, was "a person who has a good memory," a fitting descriptor of the *raison d'être* provided in the text for Frances Burney's late-life authorship.²⁴⁸

Much of Burney's network was dismantled at this point by the death or illness of its members, but by emphasizing her ability to remember, Burney casts herself as a vital if

²⁴⁸ Ibid., pp.9.

not the central figure in these communities. As a novice Burney was patronized by her fellow artists, but now, thanks to her memory, Burney becomes a crucial embodiment and central authority of a historically significant community. The title of Memorialist emphasizes her unique and powerful position as a professional who worked with some of the greatest artists of the eighteenth century.

Drawing on a lifetime of professional connections and memories, Burney did make key omissions to her father's narrative. Burney used the memoir form to renegotiate authority with one of the most prominent figures in her community (her father) and to make herself a central authority in the literary world, not simply a peripheral member included thanks to her father's influence. Shortly after the publication of *Evelina* and her introduction to Thrale's salon, Burney was encouraged to write a comedy by the Streatham circle. She received support from many artists including Richard Sheridan (famous playwright and manager of the Drury Lane theater). Readers in the Streatham circle loved Burney's manuscript of the comedy "The Witlings," but Dr. Burney and his friend Crisp condemned the play in what Burney called a "hissing, groaning, catcalling epistle" that killed her works, her "mes enfans."²⁴⁹ The two "daddies" discouraged Burney from comedy because it is too coarse and unfeminine. This debate and heartbreak are completely excluded from the *Memoirs*. Burney moves from the publication of *Evelina* immediately to the publication of *Cecilia* saying "Not, however, to his daughter did the Doctor recommend any...remission of penmanship."²⁵⁰

²⁴⁹ Burney, Fanny. *Diary and Letters of Madame d'Arblay: Edited by Her Niece*, edited by Charlotte Barrett. Cambridge University Press, 2013, vol. I, part VI, pp.211 and 208.

²⁵⁰ Burney, Frances. *Memoirs of Dr. Burney – Arranged From His Own Manuscripts, From Family Papers, and From Personal Recollections*. 1832. Gregg International Publishers Limited, 1972. vol. I, pp.215.

But in fact he strongly recommended remission in the case of her comedy! This omission may be read as a gesture of respect (Burney did not want to portray her father as a tyrant), but the fact that she saved these letters to be published in her own memoirs complicates this “respectful” reading.²⁵¹ By excluding the “Witlings” episode in his memoirs, Burney decides that her father will be portrayed only as a support to her career, or a secondary character in her own story. By including the incident in her own memoirs much later, Burney portrays herself as an underdog that strove against all odds, including the unfair criticism of her father, to become successful. This (re)negotiation shows how Burney considered her authorship as fluid during her lifetime, but she must have the final word by producing a definitive account of her career. In other words, the disparity between the two memoirs proves that Burney consciously and carefully constructed accounts of her life to create specific images of authorship that emphasized her professionalism and authority. Burney was not willing to let the legacy of her career be dictated by others, as her editing of these memoirs indicates.²⁵²

Burney used her father’s memoirs not only to renegotiate the dynamics between father and author, but also to textually reinterpret negotiations with others, including King George and Queen Charlotte. In her own diary Burney stresses how kind the Queen was in not discussing Burney’s novels or referencing her authorship at all (Burney hated

²⁵¹ Thaddeus for instance says Burney “was simply revising her father into the sort of man she though he wanted to world to remember.” Thaddeus, Janice Farrar. *Frances Burney: A Literary Life*. Palgrave Macmillan, 2000, pp.188.

²⁵² Saggini argues that “Dr. Burney’s and Crisp’s anxieties about her theatrical project show how Burney’s authorial persona was by now inextricably bound to her family context.” I argue that Dr. Burney and Crisp thought so, but that Burney’s revisions in the *Memoirs* show she was trying to achieve the opposite – freeing her professional authorial identity from the unfair constraints of her family. Saggini, Francesca. *Backstage in the Novel: Frances Burney and the Theater Arts*. Translated by Laura Kopp. University of Virginia Press, 2012, pp.126.

public praise). Queen Charlotte's insistence on court etiquette and mild demeanor generally disallowed strong expressions of praise. In her father's memoirs, however, Burney reports that Dr. Burney received the following compliment during a royal audience: "O! your daughter, cried the Queen, lifting up one of her hands, is a very extraordinary genius indeed!"²⁵³ The strong language ("cried" and "extraordinary") seems out of character for the placid Queen we see her in Burney's diary. And the almost stage-like direction of "lifting up one of her hands" feels artificial, if not theatrical. Why would the Queen, normally so reserved with praise (especially of novels), raise her voice and hand to laud Burney in front of her father? Burney was not present at this audience, but she claims, "these accounts [of her royal favor]...were placed amongst hoards to which he had the most frequent recourse for recreation in his latter years," suggesting that, if the story is not literally true, there is a degree of authenticity in the account to make Dr. Burney enjoy revisiting the memory.²⁵⁴ The difference in the Queen's characterization is, like the editing of the "Witling" episode, an instance of Burney renegotiating her place in a community. Highlighting this scene, Burney justifies her court appointment, and places her and her mistress on a different footing from what we see in the court diary. In the diary accounts, the Queen magnanimously invites Burney to court, but this scene in the *Memoirs* suggests the Queen actively approves of and desires to meet the author, casting herself as an avid reader or fan (therefore below or at the same level as the authoress). Without being disrespectful to the Queen or her father, Burney uses the opportunity of her father's memoirs to reconfigure the foundation upon which

²⁵³ Burney, Frances. *Memoirs of Dr. Burney – Arranged From His Own Manuscripts, From Family Papers, and From Personal Recollections*. 1832. Gregg International Publishers Limited, 1972, vol.III, pp.20.

²⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, vol.III, pp.59.

her relationship with the Queen and the royal community was built. Burney uses *Memoirs* to mitigate the powerlessness that she often described in her own court diaries. Reading the two biographical works together as a literary production of a professional legacy, proves that Burney considered her authorship as a narrative of negotiating authority between the members of her community.

Burney scholars often describe the author as constantly beset by her interfering community, especially her family members and father. Analyzing her court diaries, novels, and memoirs shows how Burney was often successful in empowering herself and managing her communities to define her authorship. Operating in a specific and influential context of literary and artistic leaders, Burney could not ignore how her personal life intersected with her professional career. But she consciously created and revised texts that would control her public image, one focused on her professional skill as a writer and the authority that skill granted her in her network. She curated texts to define herself as a central figure in the literary world, even as that world tried to reduce her to dependency on her family or the court. Burney's lifetime of asserting her professional authorship explains why she never entirely faded into obscurity, like so many eighteenth-century women writers, and why she is increasingly popular in criticism and coursework today. Her contemporary critics and their immediate Victorian descendants may have cast a shadow over her work for a brief while, but Burney's project was ultimately successful; her deliberate negotiations secured her a place in history as one of the most influential professional authors of the eighteenth century.

Chapter 4: Jane Austen: An Exclusive Epitome

Introduction: The Paradox of Austen

All the women featured in this dissertation were successful authors, achieving popularity, financial, and critical success, despite hostile audiences. But of the writers featured in this project, only Jane Austen has attracted enduring critical and popular attention, while her predecessors have sunk into comparative obscurity. Austen's books have gone through countless editions, and the author herself has been memorialized and distributed through films, action figures, and even gin. Studying the "afterlife" of Austen, or how she circulated in pop culture following her death, is a field unto itself, and, as Devoney Looser thoroughly illustrates in *The Making of Jane Austen* (2017), studying how fans used the image of the author gives us insights into how readers understand her authorship. I want to shift the critical conversation to *why* this field of afterlife studies exists in the first place. A key question for this chapter is: What did Austen do in her texts that led to such an enduring and appealing performance of authorship, and one with such a different outcome compared to those of her colleagues?

An easy answer to this question is that she was a better writer than the women I have examined here. But critical reviews of Haywood's later work, and those of Fielding and Burney, indicate that all received positive reviews during their lifetimes and beyond. Or in other words, in their contemporary contexts, all were considered 'good' writers. The more complicated but true answer to the question of why Austen's authorship had a longer life is because of the unique ways she used language to create a universal yet

exclusive community of readers motivated to repeatedly return to her texts.²⁵⁵ As my advisor Michael Kramp once said, you don't need an English degree to read and understand Austen; he added there are few (if any) British writers other than William Shakespeare that have her universal appeal and influence.²⁵⁶ Yet at the same time, Austen's enticing texts are built through language that is exclusionary, that leaves people out of jokes that can bind the author and reader together. This paradox of universality and exclusion is at the crux of Austen's authorship. She is an author that both invites and excludes to create an interpretive community of self-aware individuals that are driven to repeatedly read and interpret her texts. This process of simultaneous invitation and exclusion is framed by the deployment of humor, a strategy that the other authors in this project rarely use, though Haywood does have her moments of sarcasm.

Austen is unique because, to define her authorship, she uses tendentious jokes, sarcastic and ambivalent signs, and narrative bait-and-switches to simultaneously invite readers into a community while excluding some (potentially those same readers!) from the elite that understand her novels. The connection between humor and community is obvious - laughter is an acknowledgement of a shared experience, and in the case of Austen, a shared interpretation involving the exclusion of others who fail to reach the same interpretive conclusions. Many scholarly works, perhaps most notably Audrey

²⁵⁵ I draw this idea of exclusion and inclusion from D.A. Miller's foundational work, *Jane Austen, or the Secret of Style*. As he claims of Austen's novels, "If the one moment, private and elective, united us all in common ecstasy, the other, public and compulsory, brought alienation into our midst" (2). Miller genders this alienation and Austen's language, whereas I focus more on the communal function of the novels. Miller, D.A., *Jane Austen, or the Secret of Style*, Princeton University Press, 2005.

²⁵⁶ The universality of Austen's language also differentiates her from her male contemporaries in eighteenth-century comedy. No one can doubt that Sterne's humor is tendentious for instance, but his language is much less accessible than that of Austen. Moreover, Austen's comedy often focuses on the topic of community building itself.

Bilger's *Laughing Feminism* (1998) and Jillian Heydt-Stevenson's *Unbecoming Conjunctions* (2005), have analyzed Austen's comedy, though usually in terms of laughter as a social corrective or feminist critique.²⁵⁷ I argue that Austen's humor is best understood as an avenue to building, deconstructing, and excluding others from a textual community.²⁵⁸

Austen's three primary comic techniques are unique in their structure or process, but all have the same result in creating the paradoxical community that is both universal, sharing authority with the author, and exclusionary, where the author holds complete interpretive control. Tendentious jokes, defined by Freud as jokes that contain hostility or lust, fill Austen's novels and are based on shared hostile or judgmental interpretations of the text. Like an in-joke amongst a group of friends, Austen's tendentious jokes are built to appeal to shared experience, but she constructs the jokes in such a way as to potentially exclude and condemn people guilty of the same sins as the butt of the joke. In a similarly paradoxical fashion, Austen deploys narrative gaps or blanks in her novels: sarcastically addressing the reader, Austen creates ambivalent or absent signifiers that, depending on how you interpret the signified, can, in the mode of Derrida's explanation

²⁵⁷ Goss aptly sums up the critical conversation: "For Barreca, for Gillooly, and for Bilger, women's comedy in general and Austen's comedy in particular enact rebellion through the simple act of laughter amid a culture that suggests such an act undermines their proper demeanor and dignity." Goss, Erin. "Introduction" in *Jane Austen and Comedy*, edited by Erin Goss, Bucknell University Press, 2019, pp.9.

²⁵⁸ When I use the word "humor" I am referring to its modern connotation of material designed/intended to make the audience laugh. In Austen's day, the humor I describe would be aligned more with the idea of wit: "[I]n the eighteenth century, 'humor' denoted that lightheartedness related to comical elements that were sympathetic or kind to a situation, especially when compared to the bitter, biting comic, satiric and intellectual overtones of 'wit' Lambdin, Laura Cooner and Robert Thomas Lambdin. "Humor and Wit in Jane Austen's Poems and Charades" in *A Companion to Jane Austen*, edited by Laura Cooner Lambdin and Robert Thomas Lambdin. Greenwood, 2000, pp.244.

of pharmakon, harm (exclude) or heal (include) the reader from the community.²⁵⁹ The last strategy centralizes Austen's authority the most, and it provides more humor for the author than for the reader because it destabilizes community. Austen executes what I call a narrative bait-and-switch, in which Austen leads readers to think they know more than they actually do: Austen invites the reader into apparent interpretive parity with the author, and then collapses that parity, making the reader the butt of the author's joke. But she still opens space for the reader to re-enter that community through careful rereading.

Austen's exclusivity is not based on class or cultural literacy, but on the interpretation of her works. Inclusion in Austen's community is based on careful, close, and repeated readings of her texts. Austen uses her language to invite readers into a community and that engages in close reading and enjoys the exclusion of the socially unaware, though the reader himself may fall into these categories.^{260, 261} As D.A. Miller wrote, Austen's humor "[leaves] its ostensible victim unaware of how he is being judged, [but also] keeps the dark cloud of shame that fails to descend on *him* hanging ominously over *us*."²⁶² In each strategy I identify, there is the chance that the reader will become the outsider that is mocked or excluded from Austen's community. These shifts in

²⁵⁹ Derrida, Jacques. "Dissemination/Plato's Pharmacy" in *The Norton Anthology of Theory and Criticism*, translated by Barbara Johnson, edited by Jeffrey J. Williams, New York: Norton, 2018, pp.1702.

²⁶⁰ This concept of self-awareness, as key to inclusion in Austen's community, is inspired by D.A. Miller's remark that the core of Austen's jokes is "the ignominy of a subject's *hopelessly insufficient social realization*." Miller, D.A., *Jane Austen, or the Secret of Style*, Princeton University Press, 2005, pp.28 (original emphasis).

²⁶¹ Wiltshire and Looser both argue that Austen constructs her language in such a way (with layered meanings) to require multiple readings. Wiltshire, John, *The Hidden Jane Austen*. Cambridge University Press, 2014. pp.1. Looser, Devoney. *The Making of Jane Austen*. Johns Hopkins University Press, 2017. pp.185.

²⁶² Miller, D.A., *Jane Austen, or the Secret of Style*, Princeton University Press, 2005, pp.5-6.

positionality are appealing to the reader because of the possibility for empowerment and a feeling of deep engagement or even equality with the author is worth the risk or the threat of exclusion.

Austen carefully used language to create a community unlike those of her predecessors. Putting herself on the same level as her readers, or sharing authority with them, Austen allowed her broad audience to feel empowered by their membership in her exclusive textual community. This feeling of empowerment moves outward through time and space into the myriad of adaptations and merchandise we see today. But these same techniques also inevitably involve the exclusion of those that do not “get” Austen’s joke, or those that find themselves as the target of her humor. I argue that her novels and her authorship are democratic in that they are open to everyone, but this ideal democracy is fraught with inequality. These novels reveal that even the most egalitarian and democratic textual community necessitates the exclusion of others who do not live up to that democracy’s standards of behavior. And Austen herself shows, demanding that her readers engage in self-reflection, it is impossible to always meet these standards. This chapter represents an effort to return to the linguistic and comedic roots of Austen’s community, and to understand how the paradox of her authorship continues to invite and exclude audiences. Persuading her readers to repeatedly return to her works for the chance to be a part of the elite club, Austen ensured that her authorship would endure in a way that was more successful than her predecessors.

You Can’t Sit With Us (Unless You Get the Joke)

Austen’s wit is the subject of much critical and popular conversation, which is initially surprising, given that many of her jokes are downright mean. But this initial

surprise gives way when we realize how the tendency of Austen's jokes is not only to express hostility, but also to create community between the author and readers. Drawing on Freud's *The Joke and Its Relation to the Subconscious*, we can understand how Austen's humor and her authorship is paradoxically welcoming and hostile. According to Freud there are two categories of jokes: those that serve no specific purpose or exist in and for themselves, and tendentious jokes, that have a specific tendency.²⁶³ He specifies that tendentious jokes have either a hostile or lewd tendency. Unsurprisingly Freud focuses on the lewd tendency, but I focus on the hostile tendency since Austen heavily relies on the hostile joke to create an exclusive community of people that "get" her harsh in-jokes, while always leaving open the possibility that the laughing reader could become the target.

A good example of how tendentious jokes paradoxically build community comes from Austen's letters, which provide insight into the communal function of humor and its role in defining Austen's authorship. The most complete edition of Austen's letters available to the public until the twentieth century was the 1884 compilation edited and presented by Lord Brabourne, the son of Austen's favorite niece Fanny Knight. In the introduction Brabourne argues the public should value his edition because it includes new letters lately found in his mother's belongings that previous family members missed. Scholars have discussed how these earlier family publications softened or sanitized Austen's image, and Brabourne's paratextual material continues that trend, but some jokes in the letters prove Austen had a hostile sense of humor, and that she deployed this

²⁶³ Freud, Sigmund. *The Joke and Its Relation to the Unconscious*, translated by Joyce Crick, Penguin, 2003, pp.85.

humor to create community. Brabourne in turn must grapple with how to build his own community of Austen fans in response to the author's exclusionary work.

Sharing local news with her sister Cassandra, Austen drops a verbal bomb when she writes, "Mrs. Hall, of Sherborne, was brought to bed yesterday of a dead child, some weeks before she expected, owing to a fright. I suppose she happened unawares to look at her husband."²⁶⁴ The hostile tendency of this joke is clear, as Austen insults Mr. Hall by causally connecting his appearance to the death of his child. Austen's editor, Brabourne, tries to explain this tendentious joke in a couple of ways. First, he reports in his introduction that

There are other allusions to things and people scattered throughout these letters, to understand which it is necessary to bear in mind that they are often made in the purest spirit of playful nonsense, and are by no means to be taken as grave and serious expressions of opinion or statement of facts.²⁶⁵

The use of the word "nonsense" takes all the power out of Austen's joke. Brabourne encourages us to gloss over this tendentious moment as insignificant noise. But as Freud explains of jokes in general, "we may surmise that there is sense hiding in this nonsense, and it is this sense in the nonsense that makes the nonsense the joke."²⁶⁶ So what is the "sense" in this joke about a dead child? Austen's joke questions the validity of the medical diagnosis that a child dies in the womb from a mother's fear, but at a more fundamental level, Austen's cruel joke admits that there is no easy or comfortable way to

²⁶⁴ Austen, Jane. *Letters of Jane Austen*, edited by Edward Knatchbull-Hugessen Lord Brabourne, vol. 2, Cambridge University Press, 2009. pp.159.

²⁶⁵ Ibid., pp.122.

²⁶⁶ Freud, Sigmund. *The Joke and Its Relation to the Unconscious*. Trans. Joyce Crick. Penguin: 2003. pp.46.

talk about the realities of marriage, pregnancy, childbirth, and death.²⁶⁷ Austen's community in this letter consists of her family, and knowledge of the Halls may also have influenced her choice to make this joke; she could be assured her family would recognize the hostility of the joke was supposed to be confined to a community that would not judge her harshly.^{268, 269} Brabourne, however, argues that all of Austen's fans can be included in this community because they recognize the joke as "nonsense." He tries to take Austen's original community and expand it by reinterpreting her language, denying Austen's own and more radical interpretive authority in analyzing a tragedy as a moment to laugh at social discomfort.

Brabourne also argues that Austen's jokes can be glossed over because they perform a discourse exclusive to the Austen family, but in fact we can see in this example how Austen's tendentious jokes are universal *and* exclusive at the same time. Brabourne elaborates,

Many people will think this explanation superfluous, but I have so often met with matter-of-fact individuals who persist in taking everything in its plain and literal sense, that I think it well to make it. It is to this day a peculiarity of some of the

²⁶⁷ Another potential interpretation, suggested by Lyndon Dominique, is that Mrs. Hall was unfaithful, and the dead child is proof of her guilt. This interpretation aligns with my own because infidelity was another uncomfortable topic her community would rather gloss over than acknowledge.

²⁶⁸ Ostade writes: "for Austen, letter-writing "seems to have had the primary function of *consolidating* the network to which she belonged, rather than of opening it up to reach out to the world at large." Indeed, "more than a third of Jane Austen's correspondents were relatives." Tieken-Boon van Ostade, Ingrid. *In Search of Jane Austen: the Language of the Letters*, New York: Oxford UP, 2014, pp.52-3 (original emphasis), 61.

²⁶⁹ See also Soha Chung: "Especially because laughing could cause her to be an object of misinterpretation and censure, Austen is expressing her trust in her sister through the candid description of her laughter." "After the Laughter: Seeking Perfect Happiness in *Emma*" in *Jane Austen and Comedy*, edited by Erin Goss, Bucknell University Press, 2019, pp.81.

Austens (and doubtless not confined to them) to talk and write nonsense to each other which, easily understood between themselves at the time, might have a curious appearance if published a hundred years hence.²⁷⁰

In the first clause of the first sentence, Brabourne alludes to Austen's popularity: most people do not need his commentary or interpretation because they will be familiar with Austen's humor from the novels, and they probably already think well of her. In other words, Brabourne assumes that either his aunt's novels or his family's previous descriptions of Austen will inspire readers to transfer the same interpretive experiences and expectations to the letters.²⁷¹ But Brabourne still anticipates that "bad readers," or those that superficially read his edition, will judge Austen unfairly. And, indeed, these are the unsophisticated readers Austen herself strove to exclude in her novels through the nuanced construction of her language. But Brabourne's repetition that his family wrote "nonsense" requires further investigation. Brabourne makes a valid point about how communities form their own discursive practices; the Austen family had a unique way of writing and speaking to each other just as any family does. But he characterizes this discourse as "nonsense" simply because the joke contradicts the saintly image of Austen his family tried to create, and because he thinks the average reader would not want to be a part of this discursive community. And to a degree Brabourne is correct: we do not get

²⁷⁰ Austen, Jane. *Letters of Jane Austen*, edited by Edward Knatchbull-Hugessen Lord Brabourne, vol. 2, Cambridge University Press, 2009, pp.123.

²⁷¹ Gillian Dooley summarizes: "There is a marked difference between the Jane Austen we find in her letters--confident, sharp, and witty, especially in the letters to her sister--and the Jane Austen presented by various of her family members after her death--pious, kindly, and unambitious, having led what her brother Henry called "a life of usefulness, literature and religion." "'My Fanny' and 'A Heroine Whom No One but Myself Will Much Like.'" *Persuasions: The Jane Austen Journal Online*, vol.38, no.1, Winter 2017, pp.11.

any contextual information about the Halls that could frame our understanding of the joke. Brabourne is trying to create a public community that is united around *his* authority and *his* interpretation of Austen, instead of her actual language. Brabourne invites everyone in the audience in to laugh at an uncomfortable situation and join a community of *his* making, which interprets Austen's private letters as harmless nonsense. Austen herself has a different strategy for creating community, using direct and humorous language in a tendentious joke to encourage readers to understand her words as commentary on uncomfortable topics and social practices.

Many of Austen's most poignant tendentious jokes relate to characters trying and failing to fit into a community. Readers join an exclusive community as we laugh at these outsiders, but Austen uses careful language to imply that we may be the misfits too. Austen's authorship shifts quickly and subtly in these tendentious jokes from that of a friendly companion, joined in laughter and interpretive authority, to that of a harsh judge laughing at those same companions that are not on her interpretive level. Austen's first novel, *Sense and Sensibility* (1811), featuring heroines that regularly confront unpleasant additions to their community, is full of tendentious humor. Early in the novel, after the Dashwood sisters have moved to Devonshire, the heroines face the daunting task of making polite conversation with their vain, reserved, and anti-intellectual cousin Lady Middleton. The narrator praises Lady Middleton for bringing her son to the meeting stating, "On every formal visit a child ought to be of the party, by way of provision for discourse."²⁷² The structure of the sentence is maxim-like, with its early use of the verb "ought." The passage is abstract and general, speaking to a universal need to lubricate

²⁷² Austen, Jane. *Sense and Sensibility*. *Jane Austen: Seven Novels*. Barnes and Noble, 2006. pp.17.

involuntary community building with an easy discussion topic. Wiltshire elaborates, “Taken-for-granted aspects of human experience and behaviour...are typically mined for their salience and operative power as structural components of Jane Austen’s texts.”²⁷³ What is “taken-for-granted” here is the discomfort of forming relationships with people that you do not like; anyone can understand Austen’s language and apply the joke to their own experience, making the quote a universal invitation to community. Reader and author laugh at the discomfort that everyone feels at these moments, summed up by the universal statement of using kids as a topic of conversation. Moreover, speaking of a human child as a “provision,” or a thing to be consumed for company, is amusing but dry humor. Readers can laugh at the line because they understand, like the author, how awkward it is to be forced to attempt community building with someone they do not like or respect. The tendentious joke is a site for author and readers to connect as they interpret the scene in the same laughing way.

But not everyone is allowed in this community, and a reader’s status can easily shift from insider to outsider. Lady Middleton and her husband are left out of this joke, as are readers who take this maxim at face value because they lack the self-awareness to see that there are rational things to discuss or build relationships on other than commenting on a child’s height or likeness to its parents.²⁷⁴ At the same time, the fact that Austen structures the sentence like a given fact or maxim suggests that everyone, *including the reader*, is likely to be guilty of using a child as an excuse for talking, instead of thinking of something better to discuss or trying harder to form connections with others. As

²⁷³ Wiltshire, John, *The Hidden Jane Austen*. Cambridge University Press, 2014. pp.9.

²⁷⁴ Austen, Jane. *Sense and Sensibility in Jane Austen: Seven Novels*. Barnes and Noble, 2006. pp.17.

indicated by “every,” Austen knows that not only will the audience have observed this event, but also that they will also have probably participated in it. The reader could very well be a Lady Middleton, or a Dashwood sister, who knows how shallow the topic of a child’s height is but still participates in its discussion anyway for the sake of limiting uncomfortable social discourse. Austen’s language invokes a universal experience in which the reader is a laughing observer or a shamed participant depending on their personal experience, which informs their interpretation of the joke.

In *Persuasion* (1818), this shared experience of laughter and shame is made explicit through a demand for self-reflection following enjoyment of a cruel joke. After Anne Elliot reconnects with her former lover Captain Wentworth, Austen describes how he inspires new grief in Mrs. Musgrove for her son and Dick, who was Wentworth’s cabin boy, and “whom alive nobody had cared for.”²⁷⁵ Still, the narrator reports, Captain Wentworth listens very patiently to “her large fat sighings” over his forgettable cabin boy. The narrator breaks the story to remark:

Personal size and mental sorrow have certainly no necessary proportions. A large bulky figure has as good a right to be in deep affliction, as the most graceful set of limbs in the world. But, fair or not fair, there are unbecoming conjunctions, which reason will patronize in vain – which taste cannot tolerate – which ridicule will seize.²⁷⁶

At first the narrator seems to be condemning the reader for potentially laughing at the image of the plump Mrs. Musgrove weeping for her little-loved son. The first two lines

²⁷⁵ Austen, Jane. *Persuasion* in *Jane Austen: Seven Novels*. Barnes and Noble, 2006. pp.1077.

²⁷⁶ Ibid.

reject the idea that physicality plays any role in emotional capacity, or in other words, rejects the idea of visual, even slapstick comedy. But then the narrator admits that “unbecoming conjunctions” or incongruities (in this case a body that exudes comfort and health displaying discomfort and distress) inevitably make people laugh. Despite the mental filters of reason and taste, which would discourage laughter at distress, the narrator acknowledges laughter will occur. Sigler says that the text is “ambivalent” about “its own comic operations,” but the double dashes in the final line emphasize that there are emotions, present in the reader that we (in good taste) may not want to explore, such as ironic amusement at this woman’s real, albeit quickly-got-up, grief.^{277, 278} What is fascinating about this narrative intervention is not just that the text asks the reader to reflect on their own interpretive practices that are revealed by laughter, but the fact that the author is also “judged” like the reader is. It may be uncomfortable to admit that physicality does affect our view of others, but the author *enables* and *encourages* this physical humor by drawing attention to Mrs. Musgrove’s body (her *large* and *fat* sighings). The reader already knows Mrs. Musgrove’s grief is not profound, and that her theatrical display of mourning is amusing in of itself because her actions do not align with her previous behavior (incongruity is often a source of humor). Through the voice of the judgmental narrator, Austen goes further, though, by making a joke about the incongruity of Mrs. Musgrove’s grief and size and then calls herself as an author *and* the reader out through the narrator’s voice for making *and* enjoying that joke. As Austen

²⁷⁷ Sigler, David. “Jane Austen: Comedy Against Happiness” in *Jane Austen and Comedy*, edited by Erin Goss. Bucknell University Press, 2019, pp.45.

²⁷⁸ See also Wiltshire, John, *The Hidden Jane Austen*. Cambridge University Press, 2014. pp.111.

shames Mrs. Musgrove with her language, she shames us readers and herself for participating in the joke. Sigler argues, “In tendentious jokes, joke teller and listener bond in and through their cruelty to the butt of the joke.”²⁷⁹ Austen and the reader are certainly united in laughter here, but the severe tone of the reproof in the narrator’s voice also unites these the author and reader in shame. Austen uses a tonally severe comedy to create a community that laughs together but is also capable of reflecting on that laughter, and of admitting that the humor that forges connections between people can be cruel and exclusionary for superficial reasons like physical appearance.

Sometimes Austen’s tendentious jokes have a very individualized target in the form of a character, but even in these moments Austen encourages readers to understand her jokes as indicative of a larger plot or theme. In other words, Austen shows how interpreting very specific jokes gives careful readers insight into future action; readers with such close reading skills gain authority, like the author, to *fully* understand what is happening (and what will happen) in the novel. After the heroines of *Sense and Sensibility* settle into their neighborhood, their gregarious cousin Sir John Middleton introduces them to two distant cousins of Mrs. Jenkins, his mother-in-law. The narrator explains the cousins’ quick introduction by exclaiming, “Benevolent, philanthropic man! It was painful to him even to keep a third cousin to himself.”²⁸⁰ The grandiose adjectives and exclamation point make it clear the author wants us to interpret Sir John as foolish. Exploring Austen’s typical use of the exclamation point Wiltshire explains, “The deployment of repetitions, dashes and exclamation marks serves the representation both

²⁷⁹ Ibid., pp.37.

²⁸⁰ Austen, Jane. *Sense and Sensibility in Jane Austen: Seven Novels*. Barnes and Noble, 2006. pp.63.

of thoughts and of acute emotional pain.”²⁸¹ Using the exclamation point then highlights Austen’s sarcasm as she mocks the ‘acute’ pain the rich knight must be feeling, namely a desire to avoid being left alone with his wife. Sir John’s folly consists of trying to force two uneducated and lower-class women into his genteel neighborhood. Granted, he is successful, but the sarcasm of this quote makes it clear the readers are meant to laugh at Sir John, not approve of him. Austen is united with the audience, laughing with them at this foolish figure. Austen’s hostility, rendered into sarcasm through her tone and use of punctuation, becomes a foundation for community. But who is left out or excluded from this democratic moment?

Sir John and the Miss Steeles are obviously excluded from the joke as they are the primary targets, but Austen leaves enough room in the novel for the reader to be left out of her community as well. At this point in the novel, we know that the Miss Steeles overcame Lady Middleton’s snobbery with “very civil” manners, “very smart” dress, and praise of her house and children; clearly the girls have no problem making the children the main “provision” of their discourse.²⁸² Elinor does not put much stock in Sir John’s recommendation when he describes them as “the sweetest girls in the world,” but he showers similar praise on her and her sister in company (he “boasts of their attractions to the Miss Steeles”).²⁸³ All this is to say that the reader may question the hostility in Austen’s sarcastic joke about Sir John, or if this generous character truly merits the hostility contained within this tendentious joke. This hostility is clarified within the following pages, in which Elinor and the reader discover that the Miss Steeles are

²⁸¹ Wiltshire, John, *The Hidden Jane Austen*. Cambridge University Press, 2014. pp.111.

²⁸² Austen, Jane. *Sense and Sensibility in Jane Austen: Seven Novels*. Barnes and Noble, 2006. pp.63.

²⁸³ *Ibid.*, pp.63.

impertinent and vulgar, and that, therefore, Sir John's benevolence has duped him into introducing relatives that discomfort and emotionally harm his cousins. The joke lets readers into the brief 'secret,' as it were, of the Miss Steele's unsuitability to the Dashwood community. Careful readers, imitating or striving for Austen's authority, can pick up on this interpretation of the characters that will be made explicit in the chapter following the joke.

Analyzing Austen's tendentious jokes gives us insight into how her humor, while cutting in its cruelty, manages to form relationships between readers and the author. At the same time, the way the jokes are structured forces readers to recognize the fluidity of their positions as laughing companions or the victim of the author's wit. The complexity of Austen's humor drives readers back into her texts to figure out which category they fall into; the chance for interpretive companionship with the author, and therefore a sense of empowerment and exclusive superiority over the joke's victim, outweighs the threat of exclusion. This enticing possibility, created through Austen's tendentious jokes, helps explain the longevity and success of her authorship.

Medicine or Poison: The Sarcastic Blank

Analyzing the linguistic playfulness of verbal jokes, Freud remarks, "Words are malleable material, allowing all kinds of things to be done to them."²⁸⁴ A joke succeeds when the audience and author both do the same thing to, or interpret, words in the same way. As Derrida points out though, because writing is never "purely present, unveiled, naked, offered up in person in its truth" but is always "detoured" by a signifier, this

²⁸⁴ Freud., pp.25.

assumption of shared interpretation is complicated, if not fallacious.^{285, 286} Throughout her novels, Austen leaves sarcastic blanks, or absent and ambivalent signifiers, for the readers to fill in. The sarcastic tone that frames these absences suggests that readers *should* know what the blank needs to be filled in with, that they *should* have interpretive authority, or that based on their previous reading experiences they should be able to supply their own signifiers.²⁸⁷ This very act of inserting absence and ambivalence into the text paradoxically encourages the making of a community, because it implies there is a group of people that share interpretive authority and can fill in the blank, but it also excludes people that may not be able to do the same. Even worse, readers may fill the blank in with meaning that designates them as the butt of Austen's joke, or the subject of her critique.²⁸⁸ To put it in the words of Derrida, interpreting a text with absent or ambivalent signifiers always poses the risk of "getting a few fingers caught," or finding a

²⁸⁵ Derrida, Jacques. "Dissemination/Plato's Pharmacy" in *The Norton Anthology of Theory and Criticism*, translated by Barbara Johnson, edited by Jeffrey J. Williams, New York: Norton, 2018, pp.1703.

²⁸⁶ Miller argues that the genre of the novel requires "incompletion, deferral, lack" (41). Austen takes this generic hallmark and frames it with humor (sarcasm) and uses it to build community/exclude readers.

²⁸⁷ Austin-Bolt argues "At key moments, the silence of Austen's narrators, I would suggest, provides a temporary opportunity for the reader to take the narrator's stance," but she fails to acknowledge the dangers of performing this narrative function or its relation to Austen's community (280). "Mediating Happiness: Performances of Jane Austen's Narrators." *Studies in Eighteenth-Century Culture*, vol. 42, 2013, pp. 271-289.

²⁸⁸ Brian Boyd writes, "Because we give of ourselves, often our most private selves, in filling in what a novel's words leave blank, our engagement with an author can feel deeply personal" (304). The emotional/personal stakes for filling in these absent signifiers is high. "Does Austen Need Narrators? Does Anyone?" *New Literary History*, vol. 48, no. 2, Spring 2017. pp. 285-308.

meaning that harms the reader.²⁸⁹ Austen's sarcastically framed absent and ambivalent signifiers can be both a way of forging community and a form of exclusion.²⁹⁰

Austen often provokes reader empowerment or frustration with these absences in the controversial conclusions of her novels. At a climactic moment in *Emma* (1815), Austen denies readers the pleasure of an explicit proposal, and with a teasing tone tells her community that they don't need her explicit descriptions even as she acknowledges that is exactly what the reader wants to read. After Knightley passionately declares his love to Emma, the narrator asks, "What did she [Emma] say? – Just what she ought, of course. A lady always does."²⁹¹ The rhetorical question, which quickly moves from the perspective of the character to the narrator, signals to the reader there is an absent signifier (or signifiers, as Austen leaves out an entire portion of the proposal scene). The terseness of the answer expresses a teasing or sarcastic tone, as the narrator assumes that the reader knows what Emma will say, as well as what a woman "ought" to say without any additional details. Moreover, the humor of this passage is enhanced by knowledge or the reader's interpretation of Emma, who often does *not* do what she "ought."²⁹² Readers may be frustrated that Austen does not give them Emma's response, or in other words, that they are excluded from complete interpretive authority because there is literally no

²⁸⁹ Derrida, Jacques. "Dissemination/Plato's Pharmacy" in *The Norton Anthology of Theory and Criticism*. Trans. Barbara Johnson. Ed. Jeffrey J. Williams. Norton & Co.: New York. 2018. pp.1698.

²⁹⁰ I draw on Derrida's explanation of *pharmakon* (writing) as both healing/remedy and deadly/poison. Derrida, Jacques. "Dissemination/Plato's Pharmacy" in *The Norton Anthology of Theory and Criticism*. Trans. Barbara Johnson. Ed. Jeffrey J. Williams. Norton & Co.: New York. 2018. pp.1702-3.

²⁹¹ Austen, Jane. *Emma* in *Jane Austen: Seven Novels*. Barnes and Noble, 2006, pp. 885.

²⁹² Dooley elaborates: "She is often, if not usually, wrong, sometimes with potentially disastrous consequences for the happiness of those she purports to be helping." "My Fanny' and 'A Heroine Whom No One but Myself Will Much Like.'" *Persuasions: The Jane Austen Journal Online*, vol.38, no.1, Winter 2017, pp.29.

text to analyze. If they are unfamiliar or disagree with the gender norms that dictate Emma's reply, this rhetorical question and its "ought" could make readers feel like outsiders. By asking a rhetorical question and using the expectant verb "ought," Austen shows that she knows the reader wants full disclosure of the scene but denies the reader that pleasure anyway.²⁹³ At the same time, these absent signifiers are placed at the end of the novel after the reader, through free indirect discourse, has become very familiar with the heroine's feelings and thought processes.²⁹⁴ Through the question and sarcastic response, Austen makes a joke about how readers already know the heroine's response, and therefore do not need an explicit description from the author, despite their desire for textual closure. It is as if Austen says to her readers, "I have given you enough information, you can do the rest." The dynamic between author and reader is one in which the author asserts authority (she decides what goes in a text and what is excluded), uses humor to thwart reader expectations and exclude them from her community, and still empowers them to fill in the blanks based on shared knowledge that comes through careful and perhaps multiple readings of the novel. Austen plays with who has interpretive authority and capacity through these gaps in narrative.

²⁹³ Derrida notes that writing always elicits the "question of knowing what is done and what is not done." What is unique about Austen's writing is the way that she frames this question to make readers question their inclusion or exclusion from a community of knowledgeable readers (readers who know how to fill in the blanks). Derrida, Jacques. "Dissemination/Plato's Pharmacy" in *The Norton Anthology of Theory and Criticism*. Trans. Barbara Johnson. Ed. Jeffrey J. Williams. Norton & Co.: New York. 2018. pp.1705

²⁹⁴ I define free indirect discourse as a textual mode in which the narration fluidly shifts between the minds or consciousness of character and that of a narrator. For a full explanation of the FID debate in Austen studies, see Boyd, Brian. "Does Austen Need Narrators? Does Anyone?" *New Literary History*, vol. 48, no. 2, Spring 2017, pp.285-308.

Sometimes these blanks do not take the form of absent signifiers, but instead appear as ambivalent vocabulary that requires the reader to do significant interpretive work to join the author. In the final chapter of *Mansfield Park* the narrator explains, “My Fanny indeed at this very time, I have the satisfaction of knowing, must have been happy in spite of everything.”²⁹⁵ At first glance, this line appears perfectly explicit and not ambivalent at all, but Austen’s careful choice of vocabulary makes space for interpretation and for the act of welcoming or excluding readers from the novel’s community. In the final clause of the passage the narrator says Fanny *must* have been happy. She uses the subjunctive, provisional “must” to indicate that, based on her abundance of knowledge (gleaned through free indirect discourse) of the heroine that she shares with the readers, the narrator can predict Fanny’s emotional state.²⁹⁶ This single word leaves enough doubt or ambivalence open for the reader to question how to interpret Fanny’s feelings. The rare use of the possessive “my” does encourage readers to unite with the narrator (who claims the heroine as her own), but that provisional verb in the second clause admits the possibility of a different interpretation, or the possibility that readers may disbelieve in this happy ending, and therefore may be excluded from the satisfaction or healing that occurs when Fanny is reunited with the Mansfield family.

This ambivalence is not comically framed, but the ensuing explanation is, sarcastically thwarting reader expectations like in *Emma* and leaving the possibilities of community inclusion and authority unsettled. After we learn that Edmund recovers from his heartbreak and pursues Fanny, the narrator explains “I purposely abstain from dates

²⁹⁵ Austen, Jane. *Mansfield Park* in *Jane Austen: Seven Novels*. Barnes and Noble, 2006. pp. 649.

²⁹⁶ Wiltshire, John, *The Hidden Jane Austen*. Cambridge University Press, 2014. pp.120.

on this occasion that every one may be at liberty to fix their own, aware that the cure of unconquerable passions, and the transfer of unchanging attachments, must vary much as to time in different people.”²⁹⁷ The humor of this passage comes from the dramatic and ironic word choice, as Edmund’s passions and attachments were not unconquerable and unchanging. And she explicitly tells the reader that she is “at liberty” or have the power to fill in the blanks in terms of the narrative of Fanny and Edmund’s courtship. Wiltshire explains, “Here, as increasingly in *Mansfield Park*, the reader is asked to carry the knowledge of Fanny’s passionate inner life forward through small hints, for this is a text in which indicative silences are left to perform a good deal of emotional work.”²⁹⁸ Austen acknowledges that the morally or socially proper timeline for her heroine depends on her reader’s individual experience and beliefs: leaving the narrative open (or introducing absent signifiers), Austen forces readers to interpret the text either as a proper romance for a patient woman or as a creepy story in which a man switches his affections too quickly, without expressing her interpretive authority to say what her own analysis is. Using humor to frame the absence, Austen draws attention to that absence but leaves it unresolved, which in turn leaves readers questioning how to interpret the ending and which interpretation would correspond to the that of the author. Through the introduction of these ambivalent and absent signifiers, Austen makes readers question what the interpretation is (and if it is harmful/excluding or healing/welcoming to the reader) and if they can join the community at all, or if they are always excluded from a relationship with Austen. As with tendentious jokes, however, the possibility of inclusion in this

²⁹⁷ Austen, Jane. *Mansfield Park* in *Jane Austen: Seven Novels*. Barnes and Noble, 2006. pp. 654.

²⁹⁸ Wiltshire, John, *The Hidden Jane Austen*. Cambridge University Press, 2014. pp.99-100.

interpretive community and intimacy with Austen invites readers to return to the text to consider new interpretive possibilities, ensuring that Austen's authorship remained active and powerful for many years.

Conclusion: Narrative Bait-and-Switch

Because Austen often uses free indirect discourse, readers can usually say (with varying degrees of confidence) that they can fill moments of ambiguous or ambivalent silence with correct content and therefore count themselves as members of the elite community that characterizes Austen's works. But Austen shakes such confidence by performing narrative bait-and-switches: she structures the narrative of her works to make readers think they know what is happening and that they are members of a democratic community, sharing interpretive authority with the author. But then the narrative takes a sudden twist, and readers are left feeling unexpectedly excluded. And yet because Austen's narrative is so precisely structured, readers can enjoy returning to the narrative, re-reading it for clues that foreshadow this twist. In other words, Austen's narrative structuring performs a sequence of community building, exclusion, and then raises the potential for community reconstruction. She drives her readers back into the texts to fully parse out the layers of meaning that are only glimpsed on a first read. This structural technique partly explains the longevity of Austen's authorship: the bait-and-switch helps ensure readers will return to the texts and Austen's community. *Emma* is the example that comes most readily to mind when we discuss the surprising structure of the Austen novel: the "big twist" of Churchill's engagement certainly excludes readers who did not detect the secret, but I would like to turn to two other examples of Austen's bait-and-switch technique because of the role the narrator plays in each, which heightens the effect of

inclusion/exclusion from narrative knowledge, and because the switch occurs multiple times within a limited span of pages, demonstrating the fluidity of positionality and authority of Austen's authorship.

Henry Crawford of *Mansfield Park* participates in multiple bait-and-switch moments that allow Austen to build and threaten a community of readers in the conclusion. From the beginning of the novel, Crawford is characterized as selfish and vain, but his affection for Fanny seems genuine, and Fanny herself admits that he shows "wonderful improvement" after his visit in Portsmouth.²⁹⁹ There is a slight moment of baiting here, as the reader is encouraged to feel sympathetic toward a man who is attached to the heroine and appreciates her more than her biological or adopted family. But the narrator cautions the reader with an aside that Fanny does "not consider how different a circle she had been just seeing him" act in.³⁰⁰ Using free indirect discourse, Austen encourages readers initially to acknowledge Crawford's "improvement," but then switches to the narrator's voice to interpret Crawford outside of her heroine's discourse. Austen's careful construction of Crawford forces readers to consistently change how they view the character. As these changes occur, Austen makes readers question their interpretive authority, or if they are "in the know" on what Crawford ultimately is, and therefore if they are if they are equal members of a democratic community with the author. Austen observed this intended impact of uncertainty in her brother Henry Austen when he first read the novel: "Henry has this moment said that he likes my M. P. better and better; he is in the third volume. I believe now he has changed his mind as to

²⁹⁹ Austen, Jane. *Mansfield Park* in *Jane Austen: Seven Novels*. Barnes and Noble, 2006. pp.624.

³⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, pp.624.

foreseeing the end; he said yesterday, at least, that he defied anybody to say whether H. C. would be reformed, or would forget Fanny in a fortnight.”³⁰¹ Austen initiates readers into a community united in interpretive judgement against Crawford, but by carefully laying out a fluctuating narrative structure of Crawford’s “reform” and shifting perspectives in free indirect discourse, like in the passage above, Austen introduces enough uncertainty to make readers feel left out of an intimate relationship with the author.

The big bait-and-switch moment consists not only of Crawford’s elopement with Maria, since the narrator’s aside cautions us that Crawford may be unsteady, but also includes the narrator’s final analysis, providing insight that catches readers off guard and excludes them from a community set on interpreting Crawford as a villain. All the Bertrams speak of the adultery in strong terms, condemning Crawford, so it is surprising that the narrator explains the affair with sympathy, saying Crawford ran off with Maria “because he could not help it, regretting Fanny, even at the moment.”³⁰² The narrator adds that although Crawford will not share Maria’s public shame, because he has sense he will always experience “no small portion of vexation and regret” that will sometimes “rise to self-reproach” for what he has done to the Bertrams, to Fanny, and himself for losing a chance of happiness; the narrator explains he would have honestly won Fanny if he had simply pursued his initial course of action.³⁰³ The narrator’s language is not straight forward: Crawford will experience “no *small* portion” and he will only

³⁰¹ Austen, Jane. *Letters of Jane Austen*, edited by Edward Knatchbull-Hugessen Lord Brabourne, vol. 2, Cambridge University Press, 2009, pp.225-6.

³⁰² Austen, Jane. *Mansfield Park* in *Jane Austen: Seven Novels*. Barnes and Noble, 2006, pp.653.

³⁰³ *Ibid.*, pp.654, 653.

“sometimes” feel self-reproach. But all the same, the pity for Crawford and the confirmation that he did love Fanny shows an unexpected sympathy on Austen’s part. For most of the book Austen encourages readers to align themselves with Fanny’s dislike of Crawford by using free indirect discourse, sometimes intervening to offer more nuanced readings of his character through the voice of the narrator. But in the conclusion, Austen shakes the community that bonds through dislike of Crawford (or their interpretation of him), by analyzing his character with more sympathy than the narrative has given. Ending with this analysis, Austen structures the novel in such a way as to encourage readers to go back and look at earlier scenes with Crawford and understand them in a new light. By structuring the narrative with several surprising turns (Crawford’s love and then his ambivalent defense), Austen builds a community that claims to understand Crawford as a cad, deconstructs that community, and leaves open the possibility for that community to be rebuilt upon re-reading and understanding the author’s broader, structural arc for the character. As an author Austen constantly shifts who has interpretive authority in the community through the surprising turns in her narrative.

In her posthumously published novel *Lady Susan* (written ca. 1794, published 1871) this community deconstruction is more abrupt when Austen breaks with generic form and makes readers question a seemingly one-note characterization of the eponymous protagonist. After over forty letters detailing the stratagems of the wily Lady Susan and her family’s resistance to these schemes, the novel abruptly ends with a conclusion from a hitherto unknown narrator.³⁰⁴ The deserving hero and heroine are

³⁰⁴ In this section I draw on the Optional Narrator Thesis (as opposed to the Necessary Narrator Thesis) as described by Boyd: “authors may choose to invent fictional narrators,” and that we do not need to separate the author (Austen) from the narrator in

united in matrimony, and Lady Susan marries a foolish aristocrat while having an affair with a married man. Outlining these marriages, the narrator interjects, “Whether Lady Susan was or was not happy in her second choice, I do not see how it can ever be ascertained; for who would take her assurance of either side of the question?”³⁰⁵ The question implies the narrator does not have full authority or access to Lady Susan’s character or mind. This denial of knowledge and authority strikes the reader as odd because the reader *does* have access to Lady Susan’s character and consciousness, as developed through the blunt letters she addresses to her friend Lady Alicia. And because readers also have access to the letters of Lady Vernon, Lady Susan’s sister-in-law, we know how Lady Susan’s public behavior contrasts with aligns with her selfish purposes. The narrator adopts a personal perspective using “I” in the conclusion to make readers question if they *have* had access to Lady Susan’s nature, that would allow us to determine whether she is happy with her second marriage. The use of “I” and the rhetorical question indicate that Austen regulated her community of readers by forcing them and training them to re-read her works.³⁰⁶ The author demands her community exclude people that read on a surface level and assume they perfectly understand the character, ensuring that readers will participate in her community repeatedly and for a long time, which in turn secures the endurance of her authorship; readers will continue to engage with her texts

analysis. “Does Austen Need Narrators? Does Anyone?” *New Literary History*, vol. 48, no. 2, Spring 2017, pp.285.

³⁰⁵ Austen, Jane. *Lady Susan* in *Jane Austen: Seven Novels*. Barnes and Noble, 2006. pp.1220.

³⁰⁶ Analyzing the novella Lise Gaston writes “while Mrs. Vernon’s relate dialogue and narrative mimesis, Lady Susan’s letters are mediated performances of descriptive summary.” Austen’s narrative intervention/bait and switch encourages readers to return to the text and examine the mediation. “Gossip Economies: Jane Austen, *Lady Susan*, and the Right to Self-Fashion.” *European Romantic Review*, vol. 27, no.3, 2016, pp.407.

and strive to become a member of her community and intimate with the author through interpretive knowledge. Breaking with the generic expectations of the epistolary novel by suddenly introducing a narrator, Austen deploys language that requires nuanced/complex readings, excluding readers from full interpretive authority on the text.

Following this moment of exclusion, however, Austen brings up the opportunity for readers to feel included in her community by passing judgment on minor characters that are consistently identified as stupid. Mentioning the fop Sir James (Lady Susan's second husband), the narrator declares, "I leave him, therefore, to all the pity that anybody can give him" (1220). Rejecting the character by "leaving" him to no pity or sympathy (as indicated by the word "anybody"), the narrator denies any emotional connection to Sir James, unlike the conclusion of *Mansfield Park*, where the narrator happily claims "my Fanny" as an object of sympathy and interest. But the author and reader are united in this rejection or exclusion of Sir James from the happy ending/from the sympathy of the community. Excluding Sir James becomes the basis of the exclusionary community, who would also reject anyone shallow enough to feel pity for the dupe of Lady Susan. Immediately afterwards the narrator admits, "For myself, I confess that *I* can only pity Miss Mainwaring," a vain and foolish woman who failed to secure Sir James for herself.³⁰⁷ The repeated personal language (myself, twice using "I" and one of them italicized) makes it seem like the narrator is hazarding an opinion that many readers may contradict. But the narrator explains she pities Miss Mainwaring because in her pursuit of Sir James she came to town, put "herself to an expense in clothes which impoverished her for two years," and was still "defrauded of her due by a

³⁰⁷ Austen, Jane. *Lady Susan in Jane Austen: Seven Novels*. Barnes and Noble, 2006, pp.1220.

woman ten years older than herself.”³⁰⁸ This explanation, aligning with previous disparaging descriptions of Miss Mainwaring, makes it clear that the pity is sarcastic. The final lines invite the reader to join in the author’s sarcasm, as expressed through the character of the narrator; like the fat-joke in *Persuasion*, reader and author enjoy a joke at a character’s expense. The sarcastic affirmation of exclusion and inclusion in the author’s sympathy invites discerning readers to judge characters as unworthy of an emotional response. A community is formed between readers and the author as they exclude these blind characters from their sympathy or a happy ending.

Austen’s narrative bait-and-switches are not always made obvious by a dramatic plot climax or the entrance of a new narrator: in *Northanger Abbey* (finished in 1803, but not published until December 1817) the surprising twist comes when the concluding analysis makes readers re-think their interpretation of the novel’s “villain” and its chastened protagonist. The narrator tells us within one paragraph we are given all we need to know about this heroine, and indeed, the narrator adds in chapter two: “it may be stated, for the reader’s more certain information, lest the following pages should otherwise fail of giving any idea of what her character is meant to be,” that she is affectionate, cheerful, and not vain.³⁰⁹ Using the word “fail” is ironic, since Austen has been so explicit in defining Catherine it’s impossible for the reader to misunderstand this transparent character. As Wiltshire explains, “*Northanger Abbey*’s comedy turns on the contradiction between these figures’ self-presentation or social performance and their

³⁰⁸ Ibid., pp.1220.

³⁰⁹ Austen, Jane. *Northanger Abbey* in *Jane Austen: Seven Novels*. Barnes and Noble, 2006, pp.919.

transparently obvious motives.”³¹⁰ Author and readers are united in laughing at this incongruity, and at Catherine’s tendency to force Gothic tropes onto modern English life. Wiltshire elaborates that Austen’s readers, familiar with the Johnsonian argument of Henry Tilney (that we shouldn’t let our imaginations run away with us), will join in universal judgement against Catherine when she assumes General Tilney is a murderous villain. Exposing readers to transparent hypocrisy and incongruity, the novel presents a clear narrative structure in which Catherine’s faulty interpretive practices will be corrected. This clarity provides the basis for a community of readers that shares interpretive authority.

But Austen shakes the foundation of this community by arguing that Catherine’s analysis is not so faulty as the reader was led to believe. After Henry proposes, he explains that he does not have his father’s consent; the narrator clarifies that “Catherine, at any rate, heard enough to feel that in suspecting General Tilney of either murdering or shutting up his wife, she had scarcely sinned against his character, or magnified his cruelty.”³¹¹ Following Catherine’s chastisement, her subdued behavior, and “resolution” to “always [judge] and [act] in the future with the greatest good sense,” readers are conditioned to be surprised by this narrative confirmation of Catherine’s condemnation.³¹² The word “scarcely” suggests that Catherine is being hyperbolic, since it’s hard to see how bullying his family for the sake of money is “scarcely” better than murder and domestic abuse. But, Henry admits he is “ashamed” of his father’s behavior, reinforcing Catherine’s own judgement; she is not so biased by feeling as to be

³¹⁰ Wiltshire, John, *The Hidden Jane Austen*. Cambridge University Press, 2014, pp.24.

³¹¹ Austen, Jane. *Northanger Abbey* in *Jane Austen: Seven Novels*. Barnes and Noble, 2006, pp.1038.

³¹² *Ibid.*, pp.1013.

completely unfair to the General.³¹³ Wiltshire remarks, “the comedy turns on the fact that he has been shown to be a bully and control freak from his very first appearance in the novel.”³¹⁴ Settled into a smooth narrative of folly and miseducation, readers find themselves jolted by this passage into re-reading or at least re-thinking the novel, questioning if their laughter at Catherine’s gothic imaginings was as justified as it appears on a first reading. After careful reading, readers can appreciate the comedy that Wiltshire points out, though at first they may feel left out from the joke as Austen laughs at their expense when they are surprised by the validity of Catherine’s judgement. The novelty or surprise of Austen’s narrative bait-and-switches entertains readers and provides a reason to return to the text: readers can delight in re-reading the text and catching hints of Austen’s narrative plans. This knowledge, gained through repeated readings, also creates a community of readers that ‘really know’ what’s happening in Austen’s novels, and as with the tendentious jokes or ambivalent signifiers, this strategy allows Austen to invite readers into a bond with her as an author.

Austen’s ability to appeal to different readers is doubtlessly strong, and, according to some, is without peer. This universal appeal and accessibility are tempered, however, by Austen’s exclusivity. The only people welcome in her community are those who can repeatedly read her carefully constructed language closely, recognizing the folly of those characters lacking self-realization, and interpret her humor in specific ways. Laughing at her tendentious jokes, struggling with the interpretation of ambivalent or absent signifiers, and then recovering from the whiplash of Austen’s narrative turns are all prerequisites of joining Austen’s community. And Austen makes it difficult, if not

³¹³ Ibid., pp.1038.

³¹⁴ Wiltshire, John, *The Hidden Jane Austen*. Cambridge University Press, 2014, pp.25.

impossible, to meet these requirements every time, because the nuance and complexity of her language force readers to return to her texts often to gain new understandings of her novels. Although Austen did not develop a persona like Haywood, emphasize her functionality like Fielding, or create a biographical legacy like Burney, she managed a unique feat in creating novels that drive readers back into her texts as they seek more complete knowledge of the story and a position within Austen's exclusive community. Creating a community of return customers, if you will, Austen made herself a guarantee that her authorship would continue to function for a very long time. Austen cultivates a community of readers that share her knowledge, not only of the novel, but also of a world often ruled by the irrational and petty.

Austen defined and performed professional authorship as the process of community building, as did so many of her predecessors. But her paradoxical tactic of welcoming and excluding, of creating a universal and dismissive community, is unique, and helps explain both her continued appeal and the empowerment she provided to so many readers seeking to use her name and image for their ideological purposes. Austen ensured her legacy by creating a series of novels that would inspire regular and repeated reading. Crafting an interpretive community that is enticing by virtue of its exclusivity and the promise of intimacy with the author, Austen ensured that people would continually read her works and keep her authorship alive.

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- | | |
|------|---|
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Gipson Center for 18 th -Century Studies Travel Grant, Lehigh University |
| 2019 | Gipson Center for 18 th -Century Studies Research Grant, Lehigh University |

PhD Dissertation

My dissertation focuses on how women writers in Eighteenth-Century Britain defined authorship. Examining four case studies (Eliza Haywood, Sarah Fielding, Fanny Burney, and Jane Austen) I argue that the defining function of authorship is the creation and regulation of a community of readers. Each author I study uses different strategies (or restored behaviors, as performance theorists would say) to achieve this community function and creates a unique dynamic between the figure of the author and the reader. This dissertation forces us to reevaluate the way that we define authorship; authorship is not a static label or identity but a fluctuating process of managing a community through textual interpretation.

Fields of Interest

Eighteenth-Century British Fiction
Women Writers of the Eighteenth Century
History of the Novel
The Gothic Novel

Recent Conference Papers

“Ways of Knowing the Unknowable in Lovecraft and ‘The Call of Cthulhu’ RPG.
International Gothic Association Conference, Manchester UK, July 2018.

“Playing the Author: Eliza Haywood and Performative Authorship in Her Early Plays.”
East-Central American Society of Eighteenth-Century Studies Conference,
Staunton VA, October 2018.

Publications

“Review: Paula Byrne, *The Genius of Jane Austen*.” *Rhizomes* 33 (2017).

Affiliations

National Association of Fellowship Advisors
International Gothic Association
Phi Beta Kappa