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The Letter-Writing Manual and the Epistolary Novel

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Abstract: The relationship between real and fictional letters in the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries has been the source of much critical debate. Disagreement surrounds the extent to which the increasingly popular genre of the epistolary novel drew on the practices and techniques of actual correspondence. On the one hand are those who see epistolary fiction as developing out of real-life letters, with some literary-stylistic additions. On the other hand are those who reject this teleological approach in favour of one that emphasizes the functional versatility of the letter in the period, and the difficulty, if not impossibility, of drawing a distinction between its real and fictional incarnations. This relationship between real correspondence and epistolary fiction is brought into sharp focus by the genre of the letter-writing manual, which rose sharply in popularity from the last two decades of the seventeenth century onwards. Concentrating on John Hill's *The Young Secretary's Guide* (1689), Thomas Goodman's *The Experience's Secretary* (1699), and G. F.'s *The Secretary's Guide* (1705), in particular, in this article, I suggest that the style of the letter-writing manual from this period can, with caution, be compared with that of the epistolary novel. I pay particular attention to the ways in which letters in these manuals respond to and quote from each other and the often subtle ways in which they thus incorporate different voices. This polyvocality is taken further in Samuel Richardson's manual *Familiar Letters* (1741), which, as is well known, provided the raw material for his first novel *Pamela; or Virtue Rewarded* (1741). I demonstrate that some of the stylistic techniques which would prove crucial to the great epistolary novels of the later eighteenth century, including Richardson's, can be found, at least in embryonic form, in the letter-writing manuals of the Restoration period.

Keywords: epistolary novel, free indirect writing, letter-writing manual, polyvocality, Samuel Richardson, stylistics

1. *Introduction*

The relationship between real and fictional letters in the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries has been the source of much critical debate. Disagreement surrounds the extent to which the increasingly popular genre of the epistolary novel, which flourished following the publication of *Les Lettres portugaises* in 1669, drew on the practices and techniques of actual correspondence. On the one hand are those who see epistolary fiction as developing out of real-life letters, with literary-stylistic additions such as polyphonic point of view. The chief proponents of this argument are the authors of the two classic histories of the epistolary novel in English, Godfrey Frank Singer and Robert Adams Day, and critics of French epistolary fiction and its emergence from letter-writing manuals, such as Bernard Bray and Laurent Versini.[1] On the other hand are those who reject this teleological approach in favour of one that emphasizes both the formal and the functional versatility of the letter in the period, and the difficulty, if not impossibility, of drawing a distinction between its real and fictional incarnations. Adherents to this view include

James How, whose discussion of how the establishment of the Post Office in the 1650s opened up new 'epistolary spaces', applies to letters of all kinds, and Thomas O. Beebee, whose conception of the letter 'as a Protean form which crystallized social relationships in a variety of ways' leads him to claim that 'epistolary fiction is a function rather than a thing; it arises when an outside "real" reader takes up the position of the fictional addressee'.[2] As Beebee acknowledges, 'this line of argument tends to blur the boundary between real correspondence and epistolary fiction.'[3]

This relationship between real correspondence and epistolary fiction is brought into sharp focus by the genre of the letter-writing manual. While instruction in letter-writing has a long history dating back to the earliest known literate cultures,[4] the publication of Angel Day's *The English Secretorie* in 1607 is often thought to have sparked a proliferation in letter-writing manuals in England throughout the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Key works included Thomas Blount's *The Academy of Eloquence* (1653) and the three texts I will be discussing here: John Hill's *The Young Secretarie's Guide or, a Speedy Help to Learning* (1687), Thomas Goodman's *The Experience'd Secretary; or, Citizen and Countryman's Companion* (1699), and G. F.'s *The Secretary's Guide* (1705).[5]

Another crucial figure of course is Samuel Richardson, whose first novel *Pamela; or, Virtue Rewarded* (1741) arose, as is well-known, from a letter-writing manual he was commissioned to write, which was published in 1741 (after *Pamela*) as *Letters Written to and for Particular Friends, on the most Important Occasions* (commonly known as *Familiar Letters*). The debate about the relationship between the real and the fictional letter is crystallized in the argument between those who claim that these model letters designed for real-life occasions provided the raw material which Richardson transformed, with the aid of various literary-stylistic additions, in his fiction, versus those who argue that it is hard, if not impossible to draw a line, in either formal or functional terms, between the letters in Richardson's *Familiar Letters* and those in his novels. Beebee suggests, for example, that 'in offering their letters as models to be imitated, manuals and novels both functioned interactively', positing a 'larger feedback-loop between real, model, and fictional letters as they cross-pollinate and mutually condition each other through the centuries'.[6]

In suggesting that, from a stylistic point of view, the model letters of the Restoration letter-writing manual can, with caution, be compared to those in epistolary novels, I will here attempt to chart a middle ground between these two positions. I will pay particular attention to the way in which letters in these manuals respond to and quote from each other and to the often subtle ways in which they thus incorporate different voices. This intermingling of perspectives can be seen as an early, embryonic form of free indirect discourse. Although this style is usually associated in its fully fledged form with the late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century novel, as I will discuss, there is a well-established school of thought which associates the rising genre of the novel in the earlier eighteenth century with the capacity to represent different voices, and the relationships between them.[7] The letters in the late seventeenth- and early eighteenth-century letter-writing manual remain largely formulaic, as evidenced by the repetition of stock characters and exchanges throughout the period. Yet as I will demonstrate, it is also possible to trace within them the emergence of certain productive and influential stylistic features. In particular, the Restoration letter-writing manual allows, at least in glimpses, for an interactive blending of perspectives between correspondents which would prove crucial for the flourishing of the epistolary novel.[8]

2. Letter-Writing Manuals of the Restoration Period

John Hill's *The Young Secretary's Guide; or, a Speedy Help to Learning* (1687) was the most popular letter-writing guide of the late seventeenth century. Much-imitated and re-published, it was in its twentieth edition by 1719. It was an invaluable resource for the writing of practical, business letters, especially for a rising class who were discovering they needed some epistolary guidance. According to Linda C. Mitchell, 'the ability to write letters brought some degree of power to anyone who had to conduct legal or commercial business, and the newly literate population soon recognized Hill's book as an important reference tool. The text was popular because it addressed the practical aims of the working-class audience.'[9] Noting that the manual 'could easily serve as the prototype of business English texts today', Mitchell claims that 'Hill succeeded in selling the book because he delivered what he promised in the introduction: business letters, legal models, social correspondence, and financial tables. The buyer had a valuable reference book in *The Young Secretary's Guide*'.[10]

As well as model letters to be written on a particular occasion or for a particular purpose, such as 'A Letter of Acknowledgement to a Person of Note, for a Benefit received' and 'A Letter of Congratulation to a Person upon his Marriage', *The Young Secretary's Guide* contains some suggested replies. Out of a total of one hundred and thirty eight letters in the manual as a whole, twenty eight answer a previous letter in the volume. To put it another way, out of one hundred and ten initial letters, twenty eight, or just over a quarter, generate replies which are also included. Many of these replying letters are apologies in response to various kinds of complaint or reproof. An example of such an exchange takes place between an uncle and his nephew. The uncle opens his letter as follows:

> Cousin,
> I am sorry I have found an Occasion to write unto you in this Dialect; but really, the Care I have of your Welfare being daily disturbed together with my own Quiet, through the loud Clamours and Complaints that are frequently brought against you arising from the Effects, as I understand, of your Extravagancies and Debaucheries, I can do no less than plainly deal with you, and let you know how heinously I resent it ...[11]

The uncle's letter of reproof is followed by 'The Answer of Excuse':

> Kind Uncle,
> I received your Letter, and find by the Contents that I have been represented to you as the most profligate of Men. Indeed I dare not go about to excuse all those Follies and youthful Frailties, of which in some measure I have been guilty, though indeed they have been aggravated far beyond what they really were.[12]

Each letter-writer refers in broad terms to the accusations, with the uncle not going any further into the 'Extravagancies and Debaucheries'. Though his tone is certainly forceful, he remains formal, and the nephew is polite and respectful in reply, acknowledging his faults although claiming they have been exaggerated. These are model letters designed to repair the relationship and put the nephew back on the path of decorum.

There is a distinctly formal tone too in an exchange between a husband and wife who have been separated for some unspecified reason. In his letter to his wife and children, addressed to 'Most Loving Wife', the husband asks after her health and entertainment,

before reporting that he has sent 'such necessaries as I imagine useful or convenient for you':

> For tho' you are absent from me, yet it is the great Concern of my Thoughts, to study the Method and Means to promote your welfare, which I ever render equal, if not superior to my own; and so with all the Love and tender Regard of a Husband and Father, with my Love to you, our Children, and all our Friends and Relations, I remain, Dear Wife, Your Loving Husband, D. P.[13]

In her 'Answer to the Foregoing Letter', addressed to 'Kind and ever loving Husband', the wife notes that she has received his letter, which, next to his company, she kindly esteems. She assures him that she and the children are in good health and well-entertained and thanks him for the things he has sent. 'In accordance with the virtue of an obedient wife' she signs off 'and so, with my Prayers for your Health and Welfare, I continue to be, Dear Husband, Your loving and constant Wife, A. P.'[14]

Letters between husbands and wives are not always so politely formal in other manuals of the period. Thomas Goodman's *The Experienc'd Secretary* (1699) includes a rather angry letter from a wife to her husband, complaining about his absence, and urging his speedy return. Having chided her husband, the wife consoles herself by reflecting that 'it must be weighty Affairs, unexpectedly fallen out, that detains you, or else I might, upon sudden starts of Imagination, be apt to tax you with Lukewarmness or Indifferency in Affection'.[15] Her tone remains frustrated as she ends the letter: 'but however things stand, send me your Answer, or, rather, bring it your self: Till then I remain, Your loving, though impatient, Wife, A. C.'[16]

This directness is picked up by the husband in his half-apologetic reply:

> My Hony,
> I am sorry I have not in so long a time written to you to inform you of the Occasion of my long Absence. I wanted no good Will to do it, but a Conveniency of sending, it being so far out of the usual Post-road, as well as having my Time taken up about urgent Affairs: Take not this for a feigned Excuse, but a Reality. My Business is now drawing near a conclusion, which will redound to both our advantages. You seem somewhat comical with me in your Letter; and I hope, at my return to satisfie your Expectation in all Particulars: Let no Doubts or Fears dwell on your Mind, that my Love to you can abase; no charming Beauty shall tempt me to injure you. So, wishing you Rest and Happiness, in expectation to follow my Letter in a few Days, I am
> Your most affectionate Husband, B. G.[17]

Though the letter mostly seems intended to placate, there is a hint of existing tension and a previous argument in 'Take not this for a feigned Excuse, but a Reality', and a note of accusation too in 'You seem somewhat comical with me in your Letter'. The relevant definition of 'comical' in the *OED* is the now obsolete 2a: 'Of a style, subject, idea, etc.: suitable for comedy; trivial, coarse, low, undignified'. This sense is traced to the late sixteenth century, with seventeenth-century examples including one from Robert Burton's *The Anatomy of Melancholy* (1621). The husband's identification of his wife's tone here adds a less formal, slightly more personal and distinctive element, suggestive of the strained relationship between them.

This less dignified, even coarser tone is also apparent in a number of courtship letters in *The Experience'd Secretary*, specifically in the exchange between the lower class country folk Roger and Margery. This begins with 'a Plain Country Love-Letter' from Roger:

> Honest Margery,
> I know not what the Matter is with me, but sure I am, ever since I saw you last Wake, I have had something strangely hanging on my Mind, it seems weighty and troublesome to me, so that my Business goes on tedious and slowly, and my Sleep disturbed. I find my self in all Affairs uneasie; therefore, in hopes to make things more agreeable to me, I have disburthened my Trouble a little, by writing to you, for in Truth, after having ruminated a World of Matters, what should be the cause of all this Hurly burly, I begin to suspect it is Love, though I can't be well assured of it, because I do not remember I ever was enamoured in my Life; so that being a new and strange Disease to me, I earnestly entreat your Opinion and Advice in it, as you tender my Health and Welfare, for certainly both are at stake if I long continue thus.[18]

The business-like, formal tone recognizable from the letter-writing manual of the period ('I find my self in all Affairs uneasie', 'I have disburthened my Trouble a little') is humorously mixed here with more homespun, rural dialect. A 'Wake' is 'the local annual festival of an English (now chiefly rural) parish, observed […] as an occasion for making holiday, entertainment of friends, and often for village sports, dancing, and other amusements' (*OED* 4b), while 'Hurly burly' denotes 'Commotion, tumult, strife, uproar, turmoil, confusion' (*OED* Aa). Though the *OED* does note that it was 'formerly a more dignified word than now', most of its seventeenth-century and later examples do suggest a certain lack of decorum, if not raucousness (most famously it appears in the witches' opening speech in *Macbeth*).

Not surprisingly, in her response to 'Kind Rodg', Margery initially seems somewhat baffled, noting that 'I received your Letter, which I read over many times because I was puzzled to understand it; you tell me you are in much Disturbance since you saw me, and I know not well what you will; I am sorry anything (if it were so) should give you the least disturbance'.[19] However, as her letter continues, it appears her apparent confusion may be a tease:

> I know not well what more to say, as being restrained by my Blushes; however, I shall be at the next Wake, and if you think it worth your while to meet me at Gammer Gubbin's, it may be both of us together may happen to find out the Cause of your perplexities, which you single seem somewhat at a loss to do. So, with my kind Respects to you, wishing you quiet Repose, I remain
> Yours in all friendly Offices, H. A.[20]

The perhaps exaggeratedly formal tone partially obscures what seems to be a more intimate understanding. That the pair may have previous knowledge of each other is suggested by shared references such as 'Gammer Gubbin's', while 'I shall be at the next Wake' could at the very least be viewed as encouragement. As with the exchange between the irate wife and her husband, there is a suggestion of an underlying relationship here, an informality beneath the comically formal surface, which allows, at least potentially, for the imagination of character and the generation of narrative interest.

This exchange between country lovers reappears in a different form in G. F.'s *The Secretary's Guide. In Four Parts* (1705). Although the names and specific details are changed, the fundamentals of the interaction remain the same. As Mitchell notes, 'authors of these manuals lifted freely from other books' with the result that 'one might read the same model letters in manuals by different authors'.[21] In *The Secretary's Guide*, the exchange opens with 'A plain Country Love-Letter from Humphrey to Dorothy', in which Humphrey expresses a similar confusion to Roger's:

> Honest Dorothy,
> These are to inform you, after my hearty Commendations, That I cannot but remember my kind Love unto you; for I do assure you, when I saw you last at our Wake, that your fair Physiognomy made such an Impression on my Heart, that ever since, where-ever I am, or whatever I do, your Image is always before my Mind, and, a Dad, I know not what to make on't, for it was never so with me before; but I have lately been rambling among my Thoughts to find out the Reason on't; and, after thinking of one thing, and thinking of another, the Duce take me if I don't think 'tis Love.[22]

Again beneath the formal tone of 'my hearty Commendations' and 'your fair Physiognomy', suggestions of Humphrey's lower class and rural dialect are apparent in the exasperated 'a Dad' and 'the Duce', as well as the repeated 'on't' for 'of it' and 'for it' and the contraction in ''tis Love'. Like Margery in *The Experience'd Secretary*, Dorothy's first reaction appears to be bafflement: 'Loving Humphrey, I received your Letter, but know not well what to make on't; I perceived you think your self out of Order, but know not the Reason why; only you guess it to be Love: But what's that to me, if it be so?'[23] However again, as Margery did, Dorothy offers more encouragement as the letter continues:

> And if it shou'd be Love, and I am the Person, let me tell you for your Comfort, Humphrey, you are fallen into good Hands, for I am too tender-hearted to delight in any Man's Misery when I can help it, and especially yours, for whom I have always had a kind Respect, as a very civil young Man; and this Respect, when you and I come to meet, may be easily improv'd into Love, if you mean in an honest Way; but otherwise expect not any Kindness from me: And, if you are in Earnest, let me know more of your Mind in a little time, and you may expect such Returns from me as may be consistent with Modesty and Honesty.[24]

Dorothy appears to be more cautious than Margery, wanting to be sure that Humphrey means to address her 'in an honest Way'. Rather than offering a rendezvous at 'the next Wake', Dorothy invites Humphrey to explain himself further first: 'let me know more of your Mind in a little time, and you may expect such Returns from me as may be consistent with Modesty and Honesty'. As a result, and in a departure from Goodman's manual, the exchange continues. A 'second Love-Letter from Humphrey, in reply to Dorothy' opens 'I received your kind Letter Yesterday, which (to tell you the truth) rejoyced the very Cockles of my Heart'.[25] Humphrey declares that he is now convinced that what was troubling him was 'nothing but the Love of your fair self; and now it appears to me as plain as the Prong of a Pitch-fork' and says he is also reassured by 'the comfortable Hopes you gave me of a Cure' which have 'made me sleep better this last Night'.[26] He takes up the invitation to reveal his intentions with alacrity:

> And, Dorothy, because I wou'd remove all thy Doubts and Fears, I design nothing in making Love to thee, but to make thee my Wife; and having said this, you may assure your self I'll never go about to offer any thing that shall be rude or uncivil to you. I know you always go to St. Neot's Market [...], where I will not fail to meet you next Thursday; and then I will discourse things at large with you; but pray let me hear from you in the mean time ...[27]

It is thus the male lover who offers the assignation in *The Secretary's Guide*, rather than the maid as in *The Experienc'd Secretary*. Apparently confident in his success, Humphrey now signs himself 'your constant and faithful Lover'. Dorothy takes up his encouragement to write before they meet again on Thursday, opening her second letter in affectionate style: 'Dear Numph, I received your Letter, and am glad you are come to know the Cause of your

Disorder; for I have heard say, That a Disease once known, is half cur'd.'[28] Dorothy announces herself pleased with her suitor's protestations 'that your Courtship is only in a Way of Marriage', though she holds back from fully reciprocating his declarations: 'but for me now to give you an Assurance of my Love, wou'd be, I think, a little too forward in me; and wou'd trespass upon the Modesty of a Maid.'[29] Towards the end of the letter however, Dorothy cannot resist revealing her feelings for Humphrey further, in terms that go far beyond Margery's invitation to Roger:

> Yet for your Encouragement, I will let you know (tho' I cann't write it without Blushing) that ever since I receiv'd your Letters, I can never think of you but my Heart pants and beats, and makes me feel so featly all over, that I am even vext with my self at it; and begin to fear I am troubled with your Distemper. I have time to write no more, but that I intend to be at St. Neot's on Thursday next. And I remain Your unfained and constant Well-wisher, D. W.[30]

The overall tone of Dorothy's letter is again somewhat formal, not least in its rather stilted, formulaic sign-off. It would be going too far to suggest that it reveals a kind of distinctive personality, not least because it clearly forms part of a well-established exchange in letter manuals of the period. These exchanges are highly conventionalised, featuring the stock characters, if not stereotypes, of the awkward and confused male suitor and the apparently shy and innocent, yet also kind and encouraging maid. Again though, there are subtle hints of individuality in the passionate urgency of 'pants and beats' and in the unusual, now obsolete word 'featly', meaning 'Oddly, strangely' (*OED* 3). The extension of the exchange in *The Secretary's Guide*, whereby each of the lovers writes two letters each, rather than the one each of *The Experience'd Secretary*, has enabled the development of more narrative interest and suspense, and allowed, at least potentially, for more imputation of character.

A well-established critical tradition sees such interaction as crucial to the 'rise' or, perhaps less controversially, the development of the novel. For David Patterson, for example, 'novelistic discourse rests on meeting or encounter, on coexistence and interaction; in the novel, being there entails being with.'[31] Patterson is of course here referencing the theory of Mikhail Bakhtin, who in identifying Dostoevsky as 'the creator of the polyphonic novel', claims that 'the fundamental category in Dostoevsky's mode of artistic visualizing was not evolution, but *coexistence* and *interaction*'.[32] Although Bakhtin himself is relatively dismissive of what he calls 'the Sentimental psychological novel', which he associates with La Fayette, Richardson, and Rousseau, claiming that it fails to capture 'the actual heteroglossia of life' and remains trapped in a 'one-sided dialogism',[33] others have seen in the epistolary novels of Richardson and others a similar kind of 'coexistence and interaction' to that which he praises in Dostoevsky. Janet Altman, for example, notes as a key feature of epistolary discourse the '*Particularity of the I-you*', whereby 'the *I* of epistolary discourse always [has] as its (implicit or explicit) partner a specific *you* who stands in unique relationship to the *I*'.[34] For Altman, 'perhaps the most distinctive aspect of epistolary language is the extent to which it is colored by not one but two persons and by the specific relationship existing between them.'[35] This relationship is complicated when the epistolary discourse is read by others, as Altman acknowledges: 'we read any given letter from at least three points of view – that of the intended or actual recipient as well as that of the writer and our own.'[36] In such cases, Altman claims, the reader tends to align with the 'you' addressed by the letter: 'the external reader's experience is partially governed by the presence of his internal counterpart.'[37]

The late seventeenth- and early eighteenth-century letter-writing manual on occasion allows for the possibility of such epistolary relationships. Another exchange in G. F.'s *The Secretary's Guide* concerns a less successful love-affair than that which is promised by the exchange between Humphrey and Dorothy. It opens with a letter from a rejected lover to his 'scornful Mistress':

> Madam,
> You cannot but have heard a Worm will turn again on those that trample on it; and wou'd you have me more insensible? Have I not always paid all that Respect and Veneration to you, that cou'd be paid by any Lover to the charming Object of his Eyes and Heart, and taken all Occasions to declare the Greatness of the Passion I had for you? How oft have I neglected urgent Business, and made it to give way to what I thought the more important one, of serving you? And what has been the Guerdon of my Services, but Scorn and base contempt? Whilst others, who have merited far less, have reap'd far more: I grant you're at your liberty to smile on whom you please, and place your Favours there where you like best: But why did you deceive me then with those false Promises you made so fairly, and so foully alike?[38]

After more accusations against her, the letter concludes by angrily rejecting the whole sex: 'Farewel, then, base One, now no more my Mistress: For since you are False as you are Fair, and as Ingrateful as the Prince of Hell, I'll bid adieu to you and all your Sex; and henceforth do resolve to be *A Votary to Vertue, not to Women*, I. S.'[39] The 'Gentlewoman's Answer' begins half-apologetically but soon becomes equally enraged:

> Angry Sir,
> I am sorry to find you in such a Passion, when I know no Occasion you have for it: If you complain, that I reject Offers of your Love, I freely own it: And you your self acknowledge, that I'm at liberty to smile on whom I please, and place my Favours where I like best: And since I take that liberty you give me, what reason have you, Sir, to be so angry? O but it seems you have neglected your Business to serve me? Have you so? I assure you I like you never the better for that; nor did I ever desire it: Your Services you all pretended were all free and voluntary; and I as such accepted 'em, and thank'd you for 'em, and that was, in my judgement, Sir, as much as they deserv'd: But then, as my great Crime, you ask me, Why I deceiv'd you with false Promises? To which I truly answer, I never made you one.[40]

The Gentlewoman accuses her former lover of being unacquainted with 'the modern ways of Courtship', whereby 'we Women take a Part in many Lovers, and give 'em all good Words, that when we may take which we please', and ends by hoping that 'if your Mind shou'd alter, and you shou'd chance to court another mistress, you might know how to manage Matters better; for my part, I shall never be *Yours*, C.'[41]

This intemperate exchange suggests an intense engagement between the two correspondents, and a detailed attention on the part of the mistress to her scorned lover's letter, and the specific allegations against her. It is noticeable, for example, how she quotes his questions in her own letter. Thus, his 'How oft have I neglected urgent Business, and made it to give way to what I thought the more important one, of serving you?' becomes 'O but it seems you have neglected your Business to serve me? Have you so?'. The mistress uses the exact terms from his letter, while transposing the personal pronouns to reflect her own perspective (so 'I' becomes 'you' and 'you' becomes 'me'). Similarly, her rejected lover's 'But why did you deceive me then with those false Promises you made so fairly, and so foully alike?' becomes in her letter 'you ask me, Why I deceiv'd you with false Promises?', with 'you' becoming 'I' and 'me' translated to 'you'.

This example in *The Secretary's Guide* thus provides evidence for, in Altman's terms, the '*Particularity of the I-you*' in epistolary discourse, whereby 'the *I* [...] always [has] as its

(implicit or explicit) partner a specific *you* who stands in unique relationship to the *I*'.[42] The transposition of 'I' to 'you' and vice versa in the exchange illustrates the interconnectedness of the two in the letter form. As the mistress quotes her correspondent, she puts his words into her own voice, with pronouns aligned accordingly, thus creating a mixture of perspectives. Her new versions can thus be seen as an embryonic form of free indirect discourse, involving a blending of voices which many have seen as characteristic of the style.[43] More accurately, this is a form of free indirect writing, in which one letter-writer quotes from another while altering the deictic markers (including, for example, personal pronouns and indicators of space and time) to fit their own perspective. As I have argued elsewhere this is a widespread stylistic feature of the epistolary novel in the later eighteenth century, including Samuel Richardson's *The History of Sir Charles Grandison* (1753–54).[44] The angry 'you's in each letter ('And you your self acknowledge, that I'm at liberty to smile on whom I please') also invite the reader in to witness their dispute as a third party, uncomfortably observing from the sidelines, unavoidably drawn to the narrative of their quarrel.

3. *Familiar Letters and Pamela*

A similar blending of perspectives, in an embryonic form of free indirect writing, can be found in the letter-writing manual which provided the inspiration for *Pamela*. Valerie Myers pays attention to the ways in which *Familiar Letters* differs from previous examples of the genre, such as Hill's *The Young Secretary's Guide* and G.F.'s *The Secretary's Guide*, noting that 'the key to the difference between Richardson's manual and these others is their use of humour'. Pointing particularly to Letter XXXIX, which provides a model for 'Ridiculing a romantick Rhapsody in Courtship', Myers suggests that 'Richardson's refinements signal what will also be remarkable in his epistolary novels, the deliberate integration of distinctive voices and situations with deep plumbing of character'.[45] This development of character is made possible by the greater length of the exchanges between correspondents. As Susan Whyman observes, *Familiar Letters* contains several examples of 'mini-narratives about ordinary events'.[46] An example is the sequence from Letters XV to XXI, which starts with a letter from 'a Young Lady to her Father, acquainting him with a proposal of marriage made to her' and includes two possible treplies from the father, depending on whether he approves or not, the 'young Gentleman's letter to the Father, apprising him of his Affection for his Daughter', a letter from his cousin recommending him, the father's answer to the young Gentleman giving his approval, and finally a letter 'from the Young Gentleman to his Mistress, on her Arrival at her Father's'.

Such extended exchanges allow for more revelation of character than in previous letter-writing manuals and generate a degree of narrative suspense. As a consequence responding to and quoting other letters is also more common in *Familiar Letters*, leading to a more complex mixture of voices. An example is Letter LXXXIII, from 'a facetious young Lady to her Aunt', in which she 'ridicul[es] her serious Lover'. Having thanked her aunt for 'recommending Mr. *Leadbeater* to me for a Husband', the young Lady adds: 'But I must be so free as to tell you, he is a Man no way suited to my Inclination.'[47] Her satirical account of the first visit of this '*honest Man*' clarifies her feelings. She ridicules his awkward manner ('And then he shuffled a little further from the Fire, and after two or three Hems, and a long Pause ----'), as well as his eventual choice of the sermon as a topic for conversation, concluding:

> O, my good Aunt, what a Man is here for a Husband! At last came the happy Moment of his taking Leave; for I would not ask him to stay Supper: And, moreover, he talk's of going to a Lecture at *St. Helen's*. And then (tho' I had an Opportunity of saying little more than Yes, and No, for he took the Vapours he had put me into, for Devotion, or Gravity at least, I believe) he press'd my Hand, look'd *frightfully* kind, and gave me to understand, as a Mark of his Favour, that if, upon further Conversation, and Inquiry into my Character, he should happen to like me as well as he did from my Behaviour, and Person, why, truly, I need not fear, in time, being blessed with him for my Husband![48]

In her reply, the aunt takes a dim view of her niece's 'airy Wit', reprehending her 'ludicrous Turn of Mind'. The letter opens 'Cousin Jenny, I am sorry you think Mr. Leadbeater so unsuitable a Lover. He is a serious, sober, good Man'.[49] The aunt defends Mr Leadbeater's behaviour during his visit, claiming that even by her niece's account he 'acted like a prudent, a serious, and a worthy Man, as he is, and as one that thought flashy Compliments beneath him, in so serious an Affair as this':

> He gave you to understand, that if he liked your Character on Inquiry, as well as your Person and Behaviour, he should think himself very happy in such a Wife, for that, I dare say, was more like his Language than that you put in his Mouth: And, let me tell you, it would have been a much stranger Speech, had so cautious and serious a Man said, without a thorough Knowledge of your Character, that at the first Sight he was Head and Ears in love with you.[50]

There is a complex mixture of voices here. As in the earlier example in the angry exchange between ex-lovers from *The Secretary's Guide*, the aunt represents her niece's words in her own voice, with personal pronouns transposed, slightly revising them in Mr. Leadbeater's favour and taking out her niece's satirical exaggeration (so 'why, truly, I need not fear, in time, being blessed with him for my Husband!' becomes 'he should think himself very happy in such a Wife'). The added complication here is that each is representing the speech of a third person, Mr. Leadbeater. The aunt claims she is doing so more accurately ('for that, I dare say, was more like his Language than that you put in his Mouth') though of course as the original conversation is only given through the niece's perspective we will never know. Such exchanges in *Familiar Letters* remind the manual's readers then that the letter is a potentially unstable form, which, rather than representing any underlying truth, is open to the often competing self-fashioning impulses of its sender and receiver.

The letter becomes more complex still in Richardson's epistolary novels, which frequently exhibit a sophisticated polyphony. The correspondence in *Pamela* which had been inspired by the model letters in *Familiar Letters* is soon intercepted and forbidden by Mr B. and his associates, with the result that in her imprisonment Pamela is forced to keep a journal which she hopes they will one day read. There are thus few letters in which she and her parents respond directly to each other. A wide variety of other exchanges can be found in *Pamela; or, Virtue Rewarded* though, especially in the first volume, involving both the heroine and her pursuer. These often involve letters crossing with each other, going astray, or being read by the wrong person. One such example occurs when a messenger brings two letters from Mr B., one to Pamela and one to her keeper, Mrs Jewkes. As they are 'folded and sealed alike, that for me, was directed to Mrs. *Jewkes*; and that for her, was directed to me'.[51] Pamela thus reads first the letter intended for Mrs Jewkes, which opens by railing against 'this wretched *Fool's Plaything*' and calls her a number of other names throughout, including '*artful Creature*', '*painted Bauble*', '*amiable Gewgaw*', and '*speaking Picture*.'[52] The letter ends chillingly:

> Well, I think I now *hate her* perfectly; and tho' I will do nothing to her *myself*, yet I can bear, for the sake of my Revenge, and my *injur'd Honour*, and *slighted Love*, to see any thing, even what *she most fears*, be *done to her*; and then she may be turned loose to her evil Destiny, and echo to the Woods and Groves her piteous Lamentations for the Loss of her fantastical Innocence; which the romantick Idiot makes such a work about. I shall go to *London*, with my Sister *Davers*; and the Moment I can disengage myself, which perhaps may be in three Weeks from this time, I will be with you, and decide *her Fate*, and put an End to your Trouble.[53]

Though Mrs Jewkes instantly realizes the mistake and swaps the letters, Pamela has no immediate inclination to read the one meant for her, and instead sits ruminating 'upon the Terms of this wicked Letter'. Not surprisingly, she is particularly disturbed by its ending:

> But when I thought [...] about that fearful *Colbrand*, and what he could *see done to me*; for then I was ready to gasp for Breath, and my Spirits quite failed me. Then how dreadful are the Words, that he will *decide my Fate* in three Weeks! Gracious Heaven, said I, strike me dead before that time, with a Thunderbolt, or provide some way for my escaping these threaten'd Mischiefs![54]

Here, then Pamela engages closely with the letter meant for Mrs Jewkes, quoting from it directly, yet as we have seen in previous examples from the letter-writing manuals, with personal pronouns transposed. Mr B.'s 'I can bear [...] to see any thing [...] be *done to her*' becomes in Pamela's journal a fear of Mr B.'s servant Colbrand, and 'what he could *see done to me*', while 'I will be with you, and decide *her Fate*' becomes 'he will *decide my Fate*'. Again the switch of pronouns indicates a mingling of perspectives, though here the transfer is not directly between 'I' and 'you', since Mr B. was not writing to Pamela, and she is not writing back to him either. As a result 'her' becomes 'me' and 'my', and 'I' becomes 'he'. The desperate circumstances in which Pamela finds herself make epistolary exchange both more fraught and more stylistically complex. Again the reader is invited into the drama too, privy like Pamela to both the letter that was not intended for her as well as the one that was.

4. *The Stylistic Inventiveness of the Epistolary Novel*

In Richardson's later novels, epistolary interaction becomes even more varied and inventive. The heroine of *The History of Sir Charles Grandison* (1753–54) corresponds with, amongst others, her cousin Lucy Selby, her aunt Mrs Selby, and her grandmother Mrs Shirley, Sir Charles's sister Lady Grandison, and other members of his family. Sir Charles's correspondence is also presented, especially in volume III, where a series of letters to his friend Dr Bartlett detailing his adventures in Italy is shown by the latter to Harriet, who in turn incorporates and comments on them in her letters to Lucy. Her cousin Lucy is in fact the most frequent recipient of Harriet's letters, though none of her letters is presented in full. This does not mean, however, that we do not get a strong sense of Lucy's side of the correspondence, and of Lucy herself, from Harriet's letters. The latter often quotes directly from her cousin's letters and on occasion even anticipates what she would say in response to her own. As the addressee of most of Harriet's letters, Lucy also becomes a stand-in for the novel's reader, as the 'you' of this '*I-you*' epistolary discourse, in Altman's terms, extends outwards beyond the two correspondents.

An example occurs in the first volume after Harriet escapes the clutches of the rake Sir Hargrave Pollexfen, thanks to the intervention of Sir Charles and his sister. In Letter XXXVI, Harriet reports to Lucy that she has received a congratulatory packet of letters, from, amongst others, her aunt, her 'dearest grandmamma', her godfather, and Lucy's brother. The one from Lucy herself has pleased her the most though: 'But *your* letter, my Lucy! – What, I warrant, you thought I had forgot *your* letter in the enumeration of the contents of the precious pacquet! If I *had*, your goodness, your love, might have made you forgive me: But I never would have forgiven myself.'[55] Harriet proceeds to represent much of the content of Lucy's letter. The latter was, it appears, keen to hear more about Harriet's deliverers: 'And so you expect the particular character and description of the persons of this more than amiable brother and sister. Need you to have told me that you do?'[56] As Harriet details more of Lucy's insistence, she appears to quote directly from her letter:

> You don't question, you say, if I begin in their praises, but my gratitude will make me write in a *sublime stile*; so you phrase it; and are ready, you promise me, to take with allowance, all the fine things from me, which Mr. Reeves has already taught you to expect.[57]

The italicisation of '*sublime stile*', presumably reflecting underlining in Harriet's letter, indicates a direct quotation, as does 'so you phrase it' while the rest of the sentence also seems to represent Lucy's words closely, with personal pronouns changed. By changing 'you' to 'I' and vice versa, it is possible then to reconstruct this part of Lucy's letter as something like the following: 'I don't (or perhaps "will not") question if you begin in their praises, but (since?) your gratitude will make you write in a sublime stile. I am ready to take with allowance all the fine things (praises?) from you, which Mr. Reeves has already taught me to expect.' Although there is some speculation here, and one has to allow for Harriet making further changes to Lucy's words, her attentive engagement with her cousin's letter clearly demonstrates the closeness of their relationship.

Indeed as the letter continues, Harriet does more than quote from Lucy's existing letter, beginning to imagine what Lucy would, or will, say. This anticipation becomes particularly marked as Harriet finally reaches her description of Sir Charles:

> But now for her Brother – My deliverer! –
> But pray now, Lucy, don't you come with your sharp *look-out*: I warrant you will expect on this occasion to read the tumults of the poor girl's heart in her character and description of a man, to whom she is so much obliged! – But what if she disappoint you, and yet do justice to his manifold excellencies? What if she find some faults in him, that his sister has not?
> Parading Harriet, methinks you say? Teazing girl! Go on, go on, leave it to us to find you out: And take care that the very faults you pretend to discover, do not pass for a colour only, and lead to your detection.[58]

As Harriet turns to her description of her deliverer, she knows her friend will be reading her letter especially carefully, adopting a 'sharp *look-out*' as Lucy has apparently put it herself. Her raising of the possibility that she will find some faults leads her to imagine Lucy calling her 'Parading' and 'Teizing', and she even puts her cousin's supposed response in her own words, with the first person 'us' referring to Lucy and her family/friends and the 'you' referring to Harriet herself ('Go on, go, leave it to us to find you out'). Harriet thus represents Lucy's voice directly here, with pronouns not transposed, though of course this is what she anticipates Lucy saying rather than anything actually written, a further

reminder of the letter's non-mimetic potential. The two appear to know each other so well that each knows what the other will say; Harriet expects to be quizzed especially sharply on Sir Charles, perhaps reflecting not only her cousin's suspicions that she may already have feelings for him, but her own growing (if suppressed) awareness of these feelings. Her addresses to Lucy also again implicate the reader of the novel, who, thanks in part to the expectations of genre, will also be on a 'sharp *look-out*' for the development of Harriet's feelings for Sir Charles. The complex polyvocality here thus captures not only the close intertwining of Harriet's and Lucy's perspectives in their correspondence, but also the reader's engagement with both Harriet and Sir Charles and the prospect of their emerging relationship.

5. *Conclusion*

During his career as a novelist, Richardson develops stylistic techniques which demonstrate and expand the expressive possibilities of the letter and its capacity for creating multiple, interacting voices. The innovative use of the epistolary form in his three major novels is clearly far removed from that in the letter-writing manuals of the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries, which largely comprise stock letters to be used for practical, business purposes. Yet, nevertheless, at times, it is possible to trace in these manuals, not least in the one which Richardson himself was composing at the time of writing *Pamela*, the potential for exchange and interaction offered by the letter form. When investigated stylistically, and with appropriate caution, the Restoration letter-writing manual offers a glimpse of the ways in which character, emotion and narrative interest would be generated in the great epistolary novels of the eighteenth century.

NOTES

1. Godfrey Frank Singer, *The Epistolary Novel: Its Origin, Development, Decline, and Residuary Influence* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1933); Robert Adams Day, *Told in Letters: Epistolary Fiction Before Richardson* (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 1966). Bernard Bray, *L'Art de la letter amoureuse: Des manuels aux romans 1550–1700* (The Hague: Mouton, 1967); Laurent Versini, *Laclos et la tradition: essai sur les sources et la technique des Liaisons dangereuses* (Paris, Klincksieck, 1968).

2. James How, *Epistolary Spaces: English Letter Writing From the Foundation of the Post Office to Richardson's* Clarissa (Aldershot and Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2003).

Thomas O. Beebee, *Epistolary Fiction in Europe 1500–1850* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), pp. 3, 8.

3. Beebee, p. 9.

4. See *Letter-Writing Manuals and Instruction: From Antiquity to the Present*, ed. by Carol Poster and Linda C. Mitchell (Columbia: The University of South Carolina Press, 2007).

5. According to Linda C. Mitchell's bibliography in *Letter-Writing Manuals and Instruction* by Poster and Mitchell (eds) (2007), this was first published as *The Compleat Secretary* in 1704. Here, the version on ECCO titled *The Secretary's Guide*, dated tentatively to 1705, is referred to.

6. Beebee, pp. 18, 21.

7. On free indirect discourse and its flourishing in the nineteenth century, see, in particular, Roy Pascal, *The Dual Voice: Free Indirect Speech and Its Functioning in the Nineteenth-Century European Novel* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1977).

8. The extent to which the letter-writing manuals of the period represented and/or shaped actual epistolary practice is of course a further question, to which there is not space enough here to do justice. Linda C. Mitchell's view is that while the success of letter-writing manuals was down to their role as 'works of reference', the letters within them 'were often not intended literally as examples to be copied; instead they offered sample language and modeled correct stances to be taken in a range of situations' (Linda C. Mitchell, 'Entertainment and Instruction: Women's Roles in the English Epistolary Tradition', *Huntington Library Quarterly*, 79.3 (2016), 439–54 (p. 441)).

9. Linda C. Mitchell, 'Letter-Writing Manuals in Seventeenth- and Eighteenth-Century England', in *Letter-Writing Manuals and Instruction*, ed. by Poster and Mitchell, pp. 178–99 (p. 183).

10. Mitchell, pp. 183, 186.

11. James Hill, *The Young Secretary's Guide, or a Speedy Help to Learning. In Two Parts* (London: J. Clarke and A. Wilde, 1687), p. 61.

12. Hill, p. 61.

13. Hill, p. 87.

14. Hill, p. 87.

15. Thomas Goodman, *The Experience'd Secretary; or, Citizen and Country-Man's Companion* (London: N. Boddington, 1699), p. 37.

16. Goodman, p. 37.

17. Goodman, p. 38.

18. Goodman, p. 26.

19. Goodman, pp. 26–27.

20. Goodman, p. 27.

21. Mitchell, pp. 186, 193.

22. G. F., *The Secretary's Guide. In Four Parts* (London: W. O. and sold by the Booksellers, 1705), p. 16.

23. G. F., p. 17.

24. G. F., p. 17.

25. G. F., p. 18.

26. G. F., p. 18.

27. G. F., p. 18.

28. G. F., p. 18.

29. G. F., pp. 18–19.

30. G. F., p. 19.

31. David Patterson, 'Mikhail Bakhtin and the Dialogical Dimensions of the Novel', *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, 44.2 (1985), 131–39 (p. 132).

32. Mikhail Bakhtin, *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics*, ed. and trans. by Caryl Emerson (Minneapolis and London: University of Minnesota Press, 1984), p. 28.

33. M. M. Bakhtin, 'Discourse in the Novel', in *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays by M. M. Bakhtin*, ed. by Michael Holquist, trans. by Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1981), pp. 259–422 (p. 398).

34. Janet Altman, *Epistolarity: Approaches to a Form* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1982), p. 117.

35. Altman, p. 118.

36. Altman, p. 111.

37. Altman, p. 111.

38. G. F., pp. 42–43.

39. G. F., p. 43.

40. G. F., pp. 43–44.

41. G. F., p. 44.

42. Altman, p. 117.

43. See, for example, Katie Wales, *A Dictionary of Stylistics*, 2nd edn (Pearson: Harlow, 2001), p. 164, and Geoffrey Leech and Mick Short, *Style in Fiction: A Linguistic Introduction to English Fictional Prose*, 2nd edn (Pearson: Harlow, 2007), pp. 260–61.

44. See Joe Bray, 'Writing Presentation, the Epistolary Novel and Free Indirect Thought', in *Language and Style*, ed. by Beatrix Busse and Dan McIntyre (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), pp. 388–401. On free indirect discourse in Richardson's novels, see also John Dussinger, 'Samuel Richardson and the Epistolary Novel', *The Oxford Handbook of the Eighteenth-Century Novel*, ed. by James Alan Downie (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), pp. 221–36.

45. Victoria Myers, 'Model Letters, Moral Living: Letter-Writing Manuals by Daniel Defoe and Samuel Richardson', *The Huntington Library Quarterly*, 66.3 (2003), 373–91 (p. 386).

46. Susan E. Whyman, 'Letter Writing and the Rise of the Novel: The Epistolary Literacy of Jane Johnson and Samuel Richardson', *The Huntington Library Quarterly*, 70.4 (2007), 577–606 (p. 582).

47. Samuel Richardson, *Letters Written to and for Particular Friends, on the Most Important Occasions* (London: C. Rivington, J. Osborn and J. Leake, 1741), p. 114.

48. Richardson, *Familiar Letters* (1741), p. 116.

49. Richardson (1741), p. 117.

50. Richardson (1741), p. 118.

51. Samuel Richardson, *Pamela; or, Virtue Rewarded*, ed. by Thomas Keymer and Alice Wakely (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2001 [1741]), p. 161.

52. Richardson, *Pamela* (2001), p. 162.

53. Richardson (2001), p. 163.

54. Richardson (2001), p. 164.

55. Samuel Richardson, *The History of Sir Charles Grandison*, ed. by Jocelyn Harris (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1986 [1753–54]), p. 178.

56. Richardson, *Sir Charles Grandison* (1986), p. 178.

57. Richardson (1986), p. 178.

58. Richardson (1986), pp. 180–81.

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