Servants and Allocation of Narrative Space in the Eighteenth-Century English Novel

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ABSTRACT

Narrative struggles in the eighteenth-century English novel can be traced to the allocation of narrative space to a multiplicity of characters. The narrative positioning of the servant comes to embody the anxieties of the author and of the age. As servants are associated with the transmission of stories with varying degrees of reliability, they easily turn into stand-ins for authorial performance, especially in eighteenth-century novels, where the performance of reliability is a crucial aspect of authorial self-fashioning. Servants make up a large portion of the reading public in the period and their desire for upward social mobility inevitably finds both narrative and characterological representation. However, as exemplified by the "*Pamela* controversy," famously sparked by Samuel Richardson's novel, open depictions of the possibility of social mobility also engendered unease. This article studies the allocation of narrative space to servants in three novels: Samuel Richardson's *Pamela* is an epistolary novel narrated by the letters of a servant character. Therefore, the servant character is established as the center of narrative attention; however, it is this very centrality that unsettles her position and turns her into a figure in "service" of the novel's moral purpose. Henry Fielding's *Joseph Andrews* presents a more convoluted struggle over the claiming of narrative space since Joseph's ambivalent release from the servant position is continuously challenged by other servants. Finally, servants in Laurence Sterne's *Tristram Shandy* are situated at the margins of narrative space as parodical embodiments of the desire to rise to the level of narrative and public visibility.

Keywords: Wighteenth-century, the English novel, Samuel Richardson, Henry Fielding, Laurence Sterne

Introduction

Narration is a performance. Studying how novelists bend their narratives around certain characters and how those characters distribute our narrative attention inescapably unearths significant social, societal, and political tensions. In reading eighteenth-century novelists, this unveiling is even more pressing because the evolution of a new genre requires its early practitioners to make astute decisions regarding character distribution. In other words, these early novelists must decide which sort of character gets into the narrative and how much space they deserve. The study of how an author distributes narrative space among the major and minor characters in novels reveals the economic implications of narrative organization.

In the eighteenth century, the newly emerging genre of the novel was closely tied up with economic transformations and the consolidation of a consumerist lifestyle. Authors were invested in 'populating' their narratives with a multitude of characters and information for both pragmatic and narrative purposes. The novel also proved just the right genre for responding to swift increases in literacy and the dissemination of information. The narrative trope of digression, commonly observed in eighteenth century prose works and novels, is a strong testament to the perception of this genre as a generous container of information. At the same time, however, authors were aware of the fact that the allocation of narrative attention to different kinds of characters carried certain social and cultural implications.

Navigating this tension and managing narrative space to a multiplicity of characters in a balanced manner require assistance. This assistance is not merely an extratextual feature of narrative organization. It often finds echoes within the text as certain characters and character groups mimetically embody the authorial struggle to maintain narrative space. Servants, in particular, emerge as one of the most interesting character groups in these novels because they are often expected to spend their time assisting the master (i.e., the author) with the efficient organization of space. As a result, the question of how a narrator handles the servant figures in a novel inevitably holds a mirror to authorial anxieties over the management of narrative space.

The question of servants as narrative actors is especially important for studies of the early English novels for historical reasons as well. As Ian Watt mentions in *The Rise of the Novel,* "[s]ervant girls… constituted a fairly important part of the reading

public" (1957, p. 147). More important is Watt's commentary on the rising numbers and increasing visibility of servants in cultural consciousness: "… it must be remembered that [domestic servants] constituted a very large and conspicuous class, which in the eighteenth century probably constituted the largest single occupational group in the country… Pamela, then, may be regarded as the culture-heroine of a very powerful sisterhood of literate and leisured waiting-maids" (1957, p. 46). What makes servant characters so interesting in early English novels is the anxious struggle of the authors to situate servants within the narrative space and confine them into uneasy dialectics of visibility and invisibility, audibility and inaudibility, and strong presences and long absences. My comparative readings of three early novels, namely, Richardson's *Pamela*, Fielding's *Joseph Andrews*, and Sterne's *Tristram Shandy*, will trace how servants are placed and distributed in the narrative structure. How do we hear (or rather, overhear) their stories? How do the narratorial voices imagine servants' designs on primary characters and the overall narrative design? Most importantly, what continuities do the tensions emerging from the servants' awkward positioning within the narrative reveal between social logics of domesticity and the narrative structures of these early novels?

Before turning to these specific novels, however, let us get a better grasp of the factors which contributed to the ambiguity of the servants' position within narrative structure as well as in relation to the act of reading in the eighteenth-century context. After all, anxieties about the distribution of character space relate closely to concrete changes in household population and the socioeconomic backgrounds of domestic employees. As Gilly Lehmann shows, "[t]he rise of the housekeeper coincides with the retreat of the mistress in the grandest homes, but it also coincides with a shift in the status of upper servants in general, male and female, as the tradition of gentry service in aristocratic households withered… Women servants too were less recruited from the gentry than from their social inferiors" (2016, p. 17). The "retreat of the mistress" also begins to create gaps in the novelistic representation of domestic spaces. Servant characters, now in larger numbers and recruited from lower social classes, often compete to claim these gaps, at times even threatening to displace the mistress from the narrative. Maria-Claire Roueyer-Daney explains the tensions which resulted from the uncertainty surrounding the division of household chores: "Although household care featured among the natural assignments of the wealthier woman, it could not keep her occupied all the time, since the material chores were performed by servants" (2016, p. 28). Ambiguities in the division of domestic labor translate into narrative tensions when

authors attempt to allocate appropriate time and space to characters whose visibility in the household was in constant flux.

However, the "retreat[ed] mistress" is not the only basis of this new structural competition. Servant characters also share in the character spaces allocated to children. Especially in the fashionable bildungsroman narratives of the period, focusing on a child's growth and education, servants (if the protagonist is already a servant, other servants) encroach on the main character's space because they too partake in the pedagogical trajectories outlined by the narrative. Kristina Staub and Kristina Booker both call attention to this specific dynamic through different readings of the eighteenth-century household. Staub argues that "[t]he history of the eighteenth-century servant as a pedagogical subject runs a course parallel to but different from the history of the eighteenth-century child" (2009, p. 19). Families invest as "a moral and religious obligation" in the instruction of the servants beyond the skills required to carry out their daily duties. In addition to the cultivation of a cultured domestic environment, these pedagogical attempts aim to control free time and sexual activity in the household. As Staub demonstrates, "sexuality of both male and female domestics emerges across literary genres as a trouble spot in the shared leisure culture and affective bonds between masters and servants" (p. 34). The sexualization of servant figures acquires transgressive functions in narratives, threatening to claim those available character spaces occasioned by "the retreat of the mistress" or to overhaul the marriage plot. This sexualization also helps to distinguish the servants and the children, who might otherwise be mutual recipients of the family's pedagogical objectives.

In contrast, more recently in *Menials,* Kristina Booker argues that "the textual servant is represented as perpetually caught in a childhood subjectivity, unreasoning and in need of education, surveillance, and bodily control" (2018, p. 7). The alignment of the servant characters with the pedagogical activity, in turn, generates "a rhetoric of spiritualized obedience or duty that is used to maintain order and exploit the servant's image in service of the master's values" (p. 7). In many eighteenth-century novels, it is possible to observe a narrative dialectic between the two readings offered by Brooker and Staub. That is, the sexualization of the servant figure and their entrapment in a "childhood subjectivity" initiate a dialectical strategy which allows servants to overstep and for the narrative structure to punish them when they do. *Tristram Shandy* is especially relevant in this regard since the bildungsroman aspect of this novel is coupled with the active fashioning of an instructive narrator who makes pedagogical claims on the

reader. Therefore, the author enthusiastically recruits servants into the novel's digressive and pedagogical machinery. Servants partake in the pedagogical design, establishing parallels between digressions and their marginal character positions. Just as digressions threaten to take over the main plot of the novel, the marginalized characters symbolically encroach on Tristram's dominant character space through sexual transgression and emasculation.

The most symbolic domestic instance which captures the ambiguity of the servants' position is the scene of reading. Jacqueline Pearson shows how "[w]hen women read aloud among themselves, or when husband and wife read to each other, this reading could be shared by female servants" (1999, p. 174). The sociality of these reading arrangements situates servants along with the children listening as part of the family reading ritual. Their access to the pleasures of literary narrative also works to collapse the carefully-maintained distinctions between social classes based on literacy, causing additional anxieties about the status of the servants vis-à-vis their employers. Moreover, as Pearson shows, "[a]ccounts of servant literacy show anxiety; and not only about servants reading novels…" They also "lead to anxiety about the real privacy of the private sphere" (p. 187). By joining the reading rituals, servants also blur the carefully-managed boundaries between the public and the private domains of the household.

More importantly, perhaps, this blurring happens through a new medium – the novel - which allows readers privileged access to private voices and enhanced interiority. Accordingly, in many eighteenth-century novels, *Pamela* being the most obvious, servants' literacy emerges as a threatening or uncanny phenomenon: Not only does it foreshadow social mobility, it also compels the author into granting the servant characters interiority. When they overhear, overstep, or appear in passing, they now emerge as literate characters with the ability to instrumentalize the mannerisms and techniques acquired from the novels themselves. As a result, increasingly and paradoxically, authors find themselves unable to instrumentalize a social class that is uncannily capable of exposing the fictionality of their arrangements.

In novels such as *Pamela*, where social mobility gets realized for servant characters, the subversive aspects of servant literacy receive explicit attention. While some critics foreground the subversive aspects of Pamela's literacy, others consider it an authorial strategy to contain this subversive potential, breaking and then reinstituting the master's code. Nancy Armstrong, for example, centers her analysis on the linguistic construction

of Pamela and shows how her language becomes the foundation of the marital dynamics: "Mr. B still lacks the language to rationalize marrying someone of a position so far beneath him, a language which Pamela's letters will eventually supply" (1987, p. 117). This linguistic agency may, at times, be questionable since it maintains the focus on linguistic construction even in those scenes where Pamela is subjected to sexual violence. Ruth Bernard Yeazell calls attention to the limitations of Armstrong's "accord[ing] an implausibly monolithic power to language" (1991, p. 266). Joanna Maciulewicz reads Pamela's literacy and epistolary authorial performance as reflecting the general "anxiety about the effects of education on the lower strata of society" and as an "example of Certeau's notion of appropriating the culture of the dominant social group for the purposes of the one that is dominated" (2018, p.162). In other words, Pamela's literacy and performance of authorial self-actualization confirm literacy as a central tenet of class "privilege," while also strategically subverting this association to disrupt "the foundations of the existing social hierarchy" (p. 162).

Other critics such as Kristina Booker, however, demonstrate that the self which Pamela fashions through her epistolary practice and changing lifestyle proves one "that is curiously in line with master-class standards for servant behavior" (2018, p. 103). Angela Smallwood likewise argues that Pamela "rises from serving maid to mistress not by subverting femininity, but by embracing subordination, perpetuating humility from the moral high-ground" (2016, p. 143). Finally, in a similar reading of Pamela's transformation after the marriage, Bridget Hill shows that "[a]s servant she had angrily rejected the notion that she was her master's property. As wife she glories in his ownership of her" (1996, p. 224).

These contrasting critical responses to Pamela's representation are not entirely surprising and have more to do with the structural dynamics undergirding the dynamics of fictionality in early English novels than with social tensions involving class conflicts and social mobility. In fact, they echo the same epistemological crisis that came to the fore soon after *Pamela*'s publication, which witnessed the appearance of various critical and fictional responses to Richardson's novel. Henry Fielding, for instance, emerged as a vocal critic of *Pamela* for employing moralizing rhetoric to dramatize a plot which did not have a convincing basis in social reality. Thus, according to Fielding, Richardson's moral and sentimental attitude was hypocritical at its core. In *Joseph Andrews,* Fielding's parody of *Pamela,* he resolves to strike a more self-conscious, genre-aware, and overly performative authorial attitude to manage the representational economy of the narrative.

Fielding, then, creates a narrative space where authorial presence can keep the fictionality of its arrangement in check. However, even though Fielding's narrator introduces his characters and scenarios with heightened awareness of their fictionality, it cannot completely sacrifice the pleasures of empirical and concrete description which elicit readerly identification. In fact, as Michael McKeon demonstrates, Richardson and Fielding's seemingly divergent positions are not ultimately irreconcilable. The two authors, soon after the *Pamela* controversy, seem to have "spent the next decade edging closer to each other" (2002, p. 418). The apparent differences between these authors gradually collapse and establish the central dynamics "of our kind of fiction, which openly proclaims its fictionality against the backdrop of its apparent factuality" (2005, p. 109).

The titular characters of *Pamela* and *Joseph Andrews* absorb the authorial anxieties of their creators. Therefore, whichever critical perspective we take on the mimetic qualities of their representation - whether Pamela's social mobility is realistic or whether her subversive agency as a servant carries through into her marital life - they are doomed to convey the tensions resulting from unresolved protocols of the larger fictional arrangement. Even with the comedic layers protecting Fielding's narrative from overindulgent readerly responsiveness, Joseph Andrews inevitably absorbs the anxieties of authorial performance. As Judith Frank observes, "Fielding's ambivalence over lower-class literacy pushes this most genial of novels into a kind of melancholy… [that] may betray a certain ideological exertion: the effort it takes to police the boundaries between literacy and desire" (1997, pp. 60-61).

One way out of this epistemological bind is to focus on the representation of those servant characters which do not, and due to their minor position in the narrative, cannot receive such full-fledged authorial identification. These 'minor' servants, lurking around the peripheries of the narrative, prove more capable of revealing the intersections between authorial anxieties about the management of two types of hierarchical spaces: The novelistic character space and the domestic space. Such anxieties, I will argue, manifest most significantly after minor servant characters play their part, and the narrator has to find a way to "dismiss" them from the narrative. The arbitrariness of these dismissals often follows suit with the precarious social reality of a servant's life in the eighteenth century. As Bridget Hill shows, "if dismissal of servants was often arbitrary, so was the punishment some employers inflicted on them" (1996, p. 101). When they are dismissed from narrative space, however, signs of their work still linger. In fact,

narrators often capitalize on this work while offering concrete descriptions of objects and living spaces, organized by these invisible or marginal servant figures.

As a result, the question of servant's changing visibility in these early novels is not solely a question of narrative structure or authority. It is, rather, continuous with the emergent logic of industrial capitalism and, to quote Carolyn Steedman, the "industrial (or industrialising) mode of production" (2007, p. 228). Careful study of the representation of minor servant characters moves us out of the epistemological bind which results from the singular focus that these novels' protagonists have attracted from most authors and critics, as well as giving more insight into continuities between domestic and fictional arrangements. This kind of analysis reveals, in other words, compelling links between the indeterminate dynamics of domestic employment and the emergent dynamics of fictional narrative structures. The most interesting and subversive consequence of this relationship will be the way in which authorial style itself was formed, to echo Judith Frank's arguments about the construction of "the characters of gentlemen and gentlewomen" in eighteenth-century novels, "through acts of imitation of and identification with the poor" (1997, p. 4). After all, the history of the eighteenth-century novel, shows how verbal restraint, "a defining characteristic of the good servant in advice manuals," becomes an expectation that we gradually come to have of authors themselves (Fernandez, 2010, p. 2). As the protocols of fictionality settle over the course of the century, it will now be the readers' turn to monitor the amount of authorial interjection allowed of a novelist.

Samuel Richardson's *Pamela*

In *Pamela,* the question of servants sits at the forefront as the narrative revolves around a servant, and more importantly, it takes the form of a narrative relayed through a servant. Hence, a study of how this novel distributes its attention among different characters requires that we examine two different character networks: First, I will show why and how Richardson privileges Pamela and gives her the license to write her own story and to eventually leave her station as a servant. Second, I will illustrate what happens to the other servants in the novel throughout this process and how Richardson uses their dismissal or sidelining from the narrative as a way to justify Pamela's rising position. These discussions will pave way for my study of *Joseph Andrews* and *Tristram Shandy,* where I will demonstrate what happens when a crucial variable, the servant as protagonist, is removed from the narrative equation. *Joseph Andrews* bridges these two novels because its protagonist, although a servant at first, gets quickly dismissed

from this position, thus calling attention to the remaining servants and how their depiction responds to the transformed narrative organization. In *Tristram Shandy,* the variable of the servant as protagonist is entirely eliminated, and the servant figures are pushed to the margins of narrative space. Thus, it offers a character distribution at the latter end of the spectrum and enables a comparison that I will take up at the end to reflect back on the question of servants on the whole.

Richardson situates his readers in a hermeneutically liminal space by assigning authorial duties to a servant whose position also endures an interpretational ambiguity. In *The Servant's Hand*, Bruce Robbins develops a reader-response approach to talk about the "hermeneutic openness of *Pamela*…" as being a result of a "structural fact of servitude" (1993, p. 37). Giving a servant authority over the narrative is paradoxical to the role of a servant in the household. This inherent paradox adds a great degree of unreliability to the narratorial voice, for the readers cannot decide whether Pamela is "the inadvertent admissions of a dehumanized victim or the contrivances of a mask-wearing trickster" (1993, p. 37). The "hermeneutic openness" is not only external to the novel but also pivotal to Pamela's expression and self-identification. For example, After Mr. B. makes some inappropriate advances, Pamela starts crying, and Mr. B. anxiously asks if he has "done [her] any Harm." Pamela responds, "Yes, Sir, the greatest Harm in the world: You have taught me to forget myself, and what belongs to me, and have lessen'd the Distance that Fortune has made between us, by demeaning yourself, to be so free to a poor Servant" (Richardson, 2001, p. 23). Pamela considers it "greatest Harm" to lose a sense of one's self and social position. Ultimately, though, this is exactly what happens; Mr. B. *teaches* Pamela "to forget [herself]" through their marriage. Pamela's constant oscillation between two social strata (or "selves") accompanies that interpretational uncertainty: The difficulty of reading and responding to Pamela's character.

The novel responds to this synchronic complication through its distribution of the minor characters. This is exactly where the rest of the servants become (dys)functional. The rigidity of their social position amplifies Pamela's upward mobility and results in their disappearance. Pamela's first letter is like a manifesto of how the narrative treats minor servants. The novel opens to a temporary absence of household authority with the announcement of the death of Pamela's late mistress and the mournful reactions of "all her Servants." Pamela is instantly set apart from these Servants as her late Master was able to equip her with "Qualifications above [her] Degree" (2001, p. 10). Indeed, her parents' response calls more attention to this privilege, "But our chief Trouble is, and

indeed a very great one, for fear you should be brought to any thing dishonest or wicked, by being set so above yourself" (2001, p. 13). Through these exchanges, Richardson invests heavily in explaining why Pamela, and not the other servants, receives the main narrative attention. In other words, Richardson justifies his decision to make Pamela the author of her own story. Bruce Robbins shows that "according to common usage, servants did not look for work, like other members of their class, but for a 'place'. … To 'know' your place was to be put in your place" (1993, p. 53). Accordingly, authoring one's story and exposing the secrets of a household is the opposite: it is *not* to "know" one's place and to put other characters "in [their] space." That is, the simple act of distributing narrative attention runs against the conventional roles associated with servants.

Throughout *Pamela,* servants come into the narrative primarily to carry word around and expound on Pamela's character. In the twenty-ninth letter, Pamela talks about how good of an impression she has created in the members of Mr. B.'s Bedforshire estate and how she is "belov'd by" all servants (2001, p. 43). She mentions what Mr. Longman, the Steward, has "once [said] to Mrs. Jervis, the housekeeper:" "he wish'd he was a young Man for my sake, I should be his Wife, and he would settle all he had upon me on Marriage; and, you must know, he is reckon'd worth a Power of Money" (2001, p. 43). Notice the pace at which voice travels in the house: Mr. Longman makes a comment to Mrs. Jervis, who then gossips about it with Pamela, who finally writes to her parents about it. Mr. Longman's voice is disembodied thrice before it can reach the readers in indirect discourse. A similar depiction appears at the end of her letter, when Pamela overhears the dialogue between the Cook and the Butler in the kitchen, who never receive names. The cook says, "Why this *Pamela* of ours goes as fine as a Lady. See what it is to have a fine Face! - I wonder what the Girl will come to at last!" (2001, p. 43). The act of overhearing, which is often associated with servants, and the likening of Pamela to a "Lady" emphasize her in-between position in the household. She chooses to "trouble [herself] no more" about the Cook's comment and pushes her further into the sidelines of the story, though on a rhetorical level, the Cook's voice precipitates because it serves as a remarkably accurate and urgent foreshadowing device. What Pamela calls a "silly Prattle" is essentially the foremost problem of the novel: "I wonder what the girl will come to at last!"

Mrs. Jervis is one of the most important servants in the household and, because she also acts as a confidant of Pamela, enjoys a privileged space in the earlier part of the novel. Yet, the space she occupies does not match her development as a character. Just like the other servants, she carries word around and acts as an intermediary between

Pamela and Mr. B. The only thing we know about Mrs. Jervis's past is that she is "a Gentlewoman born, thou she has had Misfortunes" (2001, p. 17). On a larger scale, then, she is the reverse of Pamela: she has gone down in social status. In the beginning, the novel spends a lot of energy on establishing Mrs. Jervis as a reliable mother figure to Pamela: "For Mrs. Jervis uses me as if I were her own Daughter, and is a very good Woman" (2001, p. 17). Pamela's parents repeatedly state their full trust in Mrs. Jervis: "While you have Mrs. Jervis for an Advise, and Bedfellow, … we are easier than we should be" (2001, p. 27). Yet, these praises and expressions of reliance do not culminate in an event or action that would illustrate Mrs. Jervis's assigned role.

In fact, when given the chance, her efforts prove futile as they either have no influence on the narrative at all or, worse, lead to an undesirable conclusion. For instance, after Pamela has a verbal confrontation with Mr. B. as a result of the liberties he has attempted to take, Pamela hopes to find refuge in Mrs. Jervis's assistance: "… I hope you'll give me a Character as to my Honesty, as it may not look as if I was turn'd away for any Harm. Ay, that I will, said she; I will give thee such a Character as never Girl at thy Years deserv'd" (2001, p. 39). Mrs. Jervis's promises never materialize into a favorable outcome for Pamela, and once, when Pamela dresses in her "country apparel," Mrs. Jervis, by bringing her new style to Mr B.'s attention, ends up putting her into more trouble. In the above quoted passage, "to give a character," in a literal sense simply means to put in a good word for Pamela. However, as Bruce Robbins explains, "in the period of the novel… 'character' is assuming an ever more privileged critical position," and Pamela's request to be given "a character" inescapably carries deeper connotations (1993, p. 37). It assigns a level of malleability to character or assumes the absence of one. This enhances the "hermeneutical openness of the novel" as impressions, it seems, satiate Pamela's understanding of character. Mrs. Jervis is responsible for creating impressions for Pamela, but she is not allowed to create her *own* impression. Compared to the fluidity of Pamela's representation, Mrs. Jervis is not granted much interiority and remains on the level of a "type."

Mrs. Jervis's status as a "type" rather than a character becomes more apparent after she disappears from the novel for almost 350 pages and gets replaced by Mrs. Jewkes. In addition to serving similar roles and sharing curiously similar names, they become points of comparison for Pamela. The comparison itself confirms that the novel tries to respond to Mrs. Jervis' disappearance by introducing Ms. Jewkes, who, unlike Mrs. Jervis, "was an Inn-keeper's House-keeper before she came to [Pamela's] master" (2001, p. 108). Mrs. Jewkes, like other servants, fulfills a specific function and keeps Pamela in imprisonment

until Mr. B.'s arrival. She is immediately identified as a stronger character than Mrs. Jervis and ultimately ends up being more important to the plot because she successfully carries out her assignment to keep Pamela in place. Pamela describes her in the following manner: "She has a hoarse man-like Voice, and is as thick as she's long; and yet looks so deadly strong, that I am afraid she would dash me at her Foot in an instant, if I was to vex her" (2001, p. 114). This threatening description shows how greatly the disappearance of Mrs. Jervis destabilizes the story. More importantly, Mrs. Jewkes's introduction happens through a scene, featuring her attempts at a homoerotic interaction with Pamela:

> Every now-and-then she would be staring in my Face, in the Chariot, and squeezing my Hand, and saying, Why, you are very pretty, my silent Dear! and once she offer'd to kiss me. But I said, I don't like this sort of Carriage, Mrs. Jewkes; it is not like two Persons of one Sex… She fell a laughing very confidently, and said, That's prettily said, I vow, then thou hadst rather be kiss'd by the other Sex? (2001, p. 108)

Ruth Yeazell argues that this scene serves to absolve Mr. B. or, at least, to turn him into a relatively more desirable figure: "Pamela resists her 'wicked procuress,' as she calls Mrs. Jewkes. But note how Mrs. Jewkes exploits the situation by interpreting Pamela's rejection of homoeroticism as the positive sign of heterosexual desire" (1991, p. 270). This instance, then, serves as another example of a servant character getting pushed into the margins by serving as a point of comparison to illustrate an aspect of primary characters. On the other hand, Emma Donoghue highlights Pamela's purposeful language, specifically the phrase, "it is not like two Persons of one Sex" to show that "in an effort to show Pamela behaving morally, Richardson finds himself in a dilemma; he has to credit his heroine with a kind of knowledge [about same-sex desire] that casts doubts on her innocence" (1996, p. 185). The exchange between the two critics, Yeazell and Donoghue, once again reveals the hermeneutic openness of the novel: Mrs. Jewkes can be read both as a positive influence on the novel's development, accelerating Pamela's change of mind about Mr. B., or a negative influence on Pamela's characterization, destabilizing readers' response to her reliability as the narrator.

Henry Fielding's *Joseph Andrews*

This kind of rhetorical destabilization happens in *Joseph Andrews* on a verbal level when the servant Mrs. Slipslop invades her mistress's, Lady Booby, "character space," to

use Alex Woloch's narratological terminology, by conflating her own linguistic impairment with her mistress's speech. Mrs. Slipslop dislocates her mistress's voice while trying to locate her meaning in the Lady's diction. In doing so, she calls into question one of the most problematic notions about the servant-master relationship: Ownership. Her constant and selective repetition of the Lady's speech reveals a desire to destroy the established discourse of ownership, which, in turn, makes the Lady increasingly more anxious and her behavior unstable.

After the Lady decides to dismiss her other servant Joseph, she evaluates her decision through a conversation with Mrs. Slipslop. When Mrs. Slipslop calls her mistress's decision into question loquaciously, the Lady responds, "Do as I bid you, and don't shock my Ears with your beastly Language" (2008, p. 37). She is outright about communicating her discomfort with her servant's "beastly Language." Slipslop's response is implicitly threatening: "People's Ears are sometimes the nicest part about them" (2008, p. 37). This seemingly out-of-place reply indeed turns hearing into an active process, where meaning becomes mobile and plastic. In moving from the Lady's "ears" to the more general "People's ears", Slipslop raises questions about gossip and how the ear, as an active receptacle, can become a socially formative tool. That's why "the poor Lady could not reflect without Agony, that her dear Reputation was in the power of her Servants" (2008, p. 38). The narrator is evidently aware of the inversion of power relations that can result from their exchange.

Robbins reads this scene quite differently: "This foothold outside the dialogue raises her, if only briefly, to a higher level of discourse. Moreover, the repetition itself casts her in the superior role of commentator" (1993, p. 62). This analysis, however, assumes that Slipslop, like Pamela, is equipped enough to call attention to her mistress's language in a cunning or questioning way. However, Slipslop's repetitions are usually a result of her inability to understand her anger. These repetitions rarely, if ever, prompt the original speaker (Lady) to evaluate her speech. Rather, they initiate a loop which results in the tossing of insults back and forth.

So much of Fielding's delineation of this confrontational relationship depends on his narrator's canny orchestration of voices through free indirect style. In the first half of the chapter, the narrator privileges the Lady's perspective. After the characters' initial exchange, the narrator weighs in: "… [The Lady] called [Slipslop] back, and desired to know what she meant by that extraordinary degree of Freedom in which she thought

proper to indulge her Tongue" (2008, p. 37). Here, the narrator omits the Lady's voice and allows the readers to identify her diction through Slipslop's response: "Freedom! I don't know what you call Freedom, Madam; Servants have Tongues as well as their Mistresses."We are granted access to the Lady's voice *through* that of the Servant's; this indirect representation of voice puts more weight on the borrowed word "freedom." Slipslop's question about what the "extraordinary degree of Freedom" really means underlines the ambiguity of authority in the household. The scene continues with Slipslop's selective repetition and negation of her mistress's responses, so much so that when the Lady ushers her for reconciliation, she reasons by calling Slipslop's constant "repeating of [her mistress's] words" the "surest method to offend" her (2008, p. 38). The scene ends with the voice of the narrator, which, this time, communicates Slipslop's voice through indirect style, thereby giving her the last say over the confrontation and affirming the reversal of agency.

Ultimately, what matters is the change in the distribution of narrative attention that results from the aforementioned disappearance of authority in the master-servant relationship. Alex Woloch prompts readers to search for "the strange significance of characters… in the way that the characters disappear" and get "overshadowed or absorbed into someone else's story" (2003, p. 38). Fielding turns Lady Booby's lack of authority into an opportunity to bring Joseph back into the story as the primary character. The irony is in how the exiled character returns to the story with more power over the narrative structure and how the decision-maker gets stripped of her authority. Surely, this process comes about after the elimination of the major misunderstandings between Lady Booby and Joseph. Indeed, the narrator recognizes the unusual shift in narrative attention: "The disconsolate Joseph, would not have had an Understanding sufficient for the principal Subject of such a Book as this, if he had any longer misunderstood the Drift of his Mistress…" (Fielding, 2008, p. 39). Here Fielding explicitly acknowledges how, to use Woloch, Joseph "breaks out of his subordinate position in the narrative discourse" (2008, p. 37). Appropriately, this "breaking out of his subordination" is not only on a narrative level but also works within the narrative as Joseph gets dismissed from his position in the household, or rather from the dubious master-servant dialectic.

Laurence Sterne's *Tristram Shandy*

Obadiah and Susannah are the servants in *Tristram Shandy* who repeatedly disturb the narrative by threatening the narrator's satirized masculinity. This, however, does

not happen through their disappearance from the narrative but rather through how their stories and voices get rendered into the story. Volume III, Chapter VII opens with Dr. Slop, the incompetent physician, "cursing at Obadiah at a most dreadful rate," which in turn provokes the narrator to give us the backstory. The narrator orders the events in this way to make the readers ask what Obadiah could possibly have done wrong to deserve such cursing. That is, we are immediately conditioned to read backwards. In addition, at the end of Obadiah's narrative, cursing turns into a spectacle as Dr. Slop begins reading from a bishop's lengthy order of excommunication, and in our reading of it, we are provoked to participate. The organization of the narrative itself and Obadiah's resulting excommunication are revealing of the narrator's recurrent attempts to push servants into the margins of representation.

This sidelining stems from an incident that reveals Obadiah's desire to be heard and to make his voice rise to the surface of the text. What Obadiah does and what he causes are both explained through paradoxical and allegorical narratives. Dr. Slop orders Obadiah to go and get his bag of obstetric tools in order to begin labor. Obadiah not only arrives late but also has knotted the bag so tightly that it takes a long time, much effort, and some injury to untie his knot, which, in return postpones the labor and supposedly causes the "depression" of Tristram's nose. Although Tristram elsewhere goes out of his way to insist that the nose is not a metaphor for his penis, the connection is inevitable. This is after all a story of male castration and is caused partly by the fulfillment of male sexuality through the sexual innuendo that underlies Obadiah's interaction with Dr. Slop's maid. Even though the whole process is supposed to be about the maid helping Obadiah with the bag, the diction and the related descriptions are overtly sexual:

> … so undoing the bow-knot, to lengthen the strings from him, without anymore ado, she helped him on with it… However, as this, in some measure unguarded the mouth of the bag, lest any thing should bolt out in galloping back at the speed Obadiah threatened, they consulted to take it off again… (1980, p. 117)

In affirming Obadiah's masculinity, the narrative threatens to strip the unborn Tristram of his. This allegory is presented with a packaging, with the rationale that Obadiah had knotted the bag tightly so that the tools wouldn't make too much noise and allow him "to hear himself whistle" (1980, p. 117). This reasoning, as illuminated by

its sexual undertones, is ultimately about Obadiah's desire to be heard and rise above Tristram's narrative.

The language and punctuation used by the narrator in the next chapter reenacts both the narrative instability that ensues from Obadiah's "obstetrical, --- scrip-tical, squirtical, papistical, --- and as far as the coach-horse was concerned in it, --- cabal-istical --- and only partly musical" case and the actual attempts at untying the knots (1980, p. 118). The narrator speaks in fragments and the flow of his speech gets interrupted by an increasing number of relative clauses. Obadiah's carelessness destroys the coherence of Tristram's voice, as he struggles to indulge in a direct address to his readers: "… there is no man living who had seen the bag with all that Obadiah had done to it, --- and known likewise, the great speed the goddess can make when she thinks proper, who would have had the last doubt remaining in his mind --- which of the two would have carried off the prize" (1980, p. 118). The quoted half-sentence features six relative clauses, getting in the way of clear expression and replicating the experience of untying a knot. This stiffness in speech nothing new, however, as we are used to such incoherence on a general level, thanks to Tristram's never-ending digressions. It is fitting, then, that this metaphorical scene requires such a laborious process to conceive Tristram's intended meaning. In fact, as always, Tristram is there to confirm this association, "Sport of small accidents, *Tristram Shandy*! that thou art, and ever will be!" (1980, p. 118). We can now see why the surrounding narrative accommodates, or refuses to accommodate, Obadiah's story by placing it in between two curses. Tristram turns this unfortunate experience into a celebration of his digressive style by his uplifting self-address.

Tristram's accidental circumcision in Volume V, Chapter XVII assigns a similar socially threatening role to another servant, Susannah. This scene presents yet another instance of male castration. Tristram begins the chapter with a defensive line, "'T was nothing, - I did not lose two drops of blood by it - 'twas not worth calling in a surgeon…" (1980, p. 264). Just as in the aforementioned scene, in order to retain his masculinity, Tristram encourages his readers to read the ensuing series of reactions as excessive and unnecessary. The event comes close to banishing Susannah from the narrative, who goes so far as to assume that she will have to leave the country. "---- *Susannah* did not consider that nothing was well hung in our family, ---- so slap came the sash down like lightening upon us; ---- Nothing is left, ---- cried *Susannah,* ---- nothing is left ---- for me, but to run my country" (1980, p. 264). Undoubtedly, "nothing was well hung in our family" is a sexual and comical reference to the history of male castration that runs

through the family. In addition, one cannot help but read the repetition of "nothing is left" as Tristram's momentary entertainment of the possibility of *complete* castration. After Susannah's characterizations ("murder") and dreadful interjections unsettle the narration by introducing some frightening possibilities, Tristram reclaims his control by insisting, "'Tis my own affair: I'll explain it myself" (1980, p. 264). The controlling tone of Tristram's restored voice serves to repudiate Susannah's momentary claim over narrative authority.

Such instances of clumsily re-claimed narrative authority undermine Tristram's many invitations for, what Thomas Keymer calls, a "collaborative model." According to Keymer, these moments depict the transformation of "the relaxed convenor of collaborative meanings … into a control freak" (2006, p. 71). Tristram's controlling behavior can also be interpreted as reflective of the larger authorial anxiety regarding how much narrative space and agency to allocate to servants. Servants' language and voice are allowed as a form of diversion in *Tristram Shandy* where the narrative self-consciously travels into digressive routes. However, when the overall "progress" or ownership of the narrative is concerned, Tristram quicky shifts into a controlling attitude and frames the servants' voices as an attempt to mar the integrity of his narrative. That he should feel such a threat is altogether ironic given the restlessly digressive structure of the novel. By depicting Tristram's volatile handling of the servants in this manner, Sterne recognizes and satirically exposes the authorial nature of the anxiety that servants bring to the novel: Sterne shows how the narrative sidelining of servant figures is often used as a strategy for claiming narrative coherence or stable identity where there is none to begin with.

Conclusion

Bruce Robbins argues that "the making known outside the dialogue of what goes on within it" "is the servant's original sin" (1993, p. 83). All three novels studied here demonstrate that this "original sin" is not confined to dialogue and that it extends to the dynamics within the household and the narrative network. The narrative handling of the servant characters reveals the inner-workings of the authorial design. As in *Joseph Andrews,* the destabilization of the narrative in *Tristram Shandy* is not merely a temporary disorganization of language. It also serves as a self-referential explanation of the overall narrative structure. In *Joseph Andrews,* this destabilization accounts for how Joseph Andrews turns out to be the hero of his own narrative and, in *Tristram Shandy,* for

psychologizing the digressive quality of the writing style. In *Pamela,* because the narrator herself is a servant, the other servants' influence does not necessarily serve an explanatory function to the rhetorical devices employed by the narrator. They do, however, reveal much about the dynamics that govern the allocation of narrative attention (i.e., privileging the narrator) and displacement (e.g., Mrs. Jervis and Mrs. Jewkes). In so doing, they reinforce the interpretational ambiguity and risks of unreliability resulting from an epistolary style of narration.

Despite the differences, in all three novels, the space allocated to servants – whether central or marginal - is symptomatically problematized or destabilized in ways that are reflective of the overall authorial or cultural anxieties of the period. The servants' struggle for narrative space often subversively confirms the primacy of those characters which are in positions of authority. As a result, the sidelining and marginalization of servant characters or the ascription of degrees of unreliability to them become reflective of the anxieties of the authorial voice over its management of narrative space. As authors find themselves looking for help in organizing the narrative space efficiently by allocating sufficient attention to a multiplicity of characters, they instrumentalize servants. Hence, the oft-reiterated anxiety about the servants' voices potentially undermining the narrative structure. Servants manage the household, but they also *know* things about the household that they perhaps should not know. Likewise, in the novels, while they help authors manage the narrative, they are also capable of exposing the structural anxieties that undergird these very narratives.

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