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An epistolary narrative uses a series of documents such as diary entries, letters, blog entries or emails to tell a particular story. The story unfolds in the documents, giving the reader an intimate glimpse into the private lives of its characters. Epistolary writing was a popular technique used by numerous 18th and 19th century novelists. When the ideal of fiction turned away from the romance and towards the novel, it was with a demand for realism and a focus on the individual person rather than her actions. Moll Flanders represents a revolution in the English literary history because of Defoe's intimate portrayal of contemporary London, where his characters traverse the same streets as his readers – a stark difference to the classical romance, which would typically be set in the far past and exotic locations. When the novel of letters first appeared, the letter was filling a psychological function that the plain prose narrative had not yet developed any adequate techniques for. Written in first person and presumed to be

EPISTOLARY NARRATOLOGY AND CITATIONS FROM AN EPISTOLARY SOURCE: SAMUEL RICHARDSON'S PAMELA AND CLARISSA AND FRANCES BURNEY'S EVELINA

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ABSTRACT

The article analyzes that the term "epistolary novel" is traditionally associated with the oldest and most wellknown version of the form: fiction told through letters and how the intermediary act of writing affects the way the message passes from the narrator to the reader. This fictional device of writing a novel in letters relies upon effects involving authenticity, intimacy and immediacy.

so intimate that the writer hid nothing from the recipient, the private letter was a unique opportunity to gain access to the mind of another person; Perry remarks that third-person fiction often would insert letters written in moments of emotional turmoil under the assumption that no heterodiegetic narrator could satisfyingly convey the raw emotion of the characters in moments of passion.

The letter narrative is a first person narrative, but the temporal aspect makes it work on fundamentally different principles than the traditional I-story, and there are a number of associations with the form that often will colour how many readers approaches it. To analyse epistolary narratives, it is necessary to turn to more specific studies of how the intermediary act of writing affects the way the message passes from the narrator to the reader. The term "epistolary novel" is traditionally associated with the oldest and most wellknown version of the form: fiction told through letters. However, a number of



closely related narrative strategies are often listed within the genre, such as diaries and newspaper clippings, and more recently: blog entries, e-mails and entries posted on internet message boards. These have several narrative features in common: they consist of documents that are explicitly known to be written down, not narrated directly. Unlike autobiography (real or fictional), these documents are written down in intervals, often in the middle of the action where the writer does not know the outcome of events; epistolary novels are rarely retrospective, but rather focused on the present. Epistolary novels tell stories, but the only action taking place on the diegetic level is writing and reading.

Letters also influenced narrative form in the period. Epistolary fiction first appeared in the 17th century with works such as Aphra Behn's *Love-Letters between a Noble-Man and his Sister* (1684–87). It reached a peak of popularity in the 18th century with novels including Samuel Richardson's *Pamela* (1740) and *Clarissa* (1747–48), and Frances Burney's *Evelina* (1778). This fictional device of writing a novel in letters relies upon effects involving authenticity, intimacy and immediacy. Richardson frequently referred to this technique as 'writing to the moment', and his first foray into fiction had its roots in an earlier composition, a letter-writing manual called *Letters Written To and For Particular Friends, On the most Important Occasions* (1741).

Richardson's first novel *Pamela* often collapses the time of action with the time of narration. This sense of the novel's focus on temporality can be seen in the following moment when Pamela, a 15-year-old servant girl under threat from her master's sexual advances, wonders what her

ultimate fate will be in a letter to her parents:

I don't know what to think – nor how to judge; but I shall ne'er believe I am with you till I am on my Knees before you, begging both your Blessings. ... There is, I see, the Chariot drawn out ... What will be the End of all this!

Epistolary form encouraged a reading style that was emotional and immediate. Denis Diderot described reading Richardson's novels as akin to understanding not just his characters' thoughts, but their unconscious motives and desires: 'I had seen the secret springs of self-interest and self-love operating in a hundred different ways; I had become privy to a multitude of incidents and I felt I had gained in experience'. A later commentator remarked of Richardson's prose style that it enabled its readers to 'slip invisible, into the domestic privacy of [their] characters, and hear and see everything that is said and done'. On the title pages of each of his novels, Richardson identified himself as the 'Editor' of his works, not the author. In this sense, his protagonists write their own stories, inviting their readers to enter into the privacy of their closets and their thoughts.

Pamela's authenticity is established through the immediacy of her letters, as if they are emotional outbursts, with little separation between the tears she sheds at her lady's deathbed and those she weeps over the subsequent letter to her parents, right at the beginning of the novel. This aspect of its style divided Richardson's readers. His great literary rival Henry Fielding pointed to the impossibility of this claim to immediacy in his parody of Richardson's novel, *Shamela* (1741). *Shamela* contains scenes that ridicule



Pamela's scribbling fervour, such as this one describing Pamela lying in bed with her housekeeper and waiting for her master, Mr B, to find them:

Mrs Jervis and I are just in Bed, and the Door unlocked; if my Master should come – Odsbobs! I hear him just coming in at the Door. You see I write in the present Tense ... Well, he is in Bed between us, we both shamming a Sleep, he steals his Hand into my Bosom, which I, as if in my Sleep, press close to me with mine, and then pretend to awake.

Here Fielding mocks what he considered to be the sham virtue of Richardson's book and draws attention to its repeated scenes of titillation (most obviously, as here, Pamela lying in her bed in a state of undress). Fielding reminds us that there is inevitably a gap between action and writing, in which reflection takes place; a writer selects what they want to say, and may even assume a performative role.

In a similar way to Richardson's hidden authorship, Frances Burney's name was not printed with her first novel *Evelina* (1778). Instead, she frames herself as an anonymous 'Editor'. The letters are therefore presented as edited versions of real letters mostly written between *Evelina* and her guardian, the Reverend Mr Villars, which document the experiences and challenges of being a young woman. *Evelina*'s first letter from London to her guardian in the countryside has the breathlessness of real-time narration: Burney, though, is more aware of the challenges of immediacy and adapts her narration accordingly. Through letter writing, *Evelina* learns in the course of the novel how to best shape her history, becoming more constructive and less merely descriptive a storyteller:

I have a vast deal to say, and shall give all this morning to my pen. As to my plan of writing every evening the adventures of the day, I find it impracticable; for the versions here are so very late, that if I begin my letters after them, I could not go to bed at all.

In this passage, Burney, through the character of *Evelina* recognises the problems of realism and epistolarity that Richardson had encountered in his second work, *Clarissa*. Notoriously lengthy (it is one of the longest English novels ever written), it is doubtful whether *Clarissa* could have had enough time in her daily existence to produce the volumes of letters that she is depicted as writing. Yet the epistolary style is appealing in such works because it combines politeness with familiarity of expression. Such fiction both reflects an expanding social spectrum of readers, particularly female readers, in the 18th century, and is a move in the period towards cultivated informality. The letters that constitute both *Pamela* and *Evelina* authenticate women's domestic and urban experience, whether it is the justification of a servant girl's experience of virtue under threat, or the more poised letters of a young woman making her way in the world and seeking social legitimacy.

Epistolary invention blurs the line between fact and fiction in many actual letters of the period, too. Swift wrote a letter to Henrietta Howard (mistress to the future King George II) as if from the pen of his famous fictional creation, Lemuel Gulliver. Many of Frances Burney's letters read more as experiments in fictional form than straightforwardly personal missives in the way that they employ satiric techniques derived from fiction and the manner in which they use dialogue. The



example of Pope's publication of his letters earlier in the century influenced how authors viewed the value of their letters and epistolary renown more generally.

Conclusion. It is worth concluding that the epistolary novel, although it was not born in the eighteenth century, has great importance during the century of Enlightenment and it disappeared only gradually. Even if the origins of epistolary art come from classical literature (Ovid) and French modern literature (such as the novels *L'Astrée* and *Portuguese Letters*), the epistolary novel becomes one of the most successful genres in modern literature. So different novelists choose the epistolary technique to achieve some intentions. At the beginning of the eighteenth century the most famous French writers such as Montesquieu and Voltaire make use of epistolary novel to discuss several faults concerning absolutist France. Later novelists (such as Madame de Graffigny and Rousseau) use the epistolary technique to stress their characters' magnificence. Starting with the French masterpiece of the genre *La nouvelle*

Héloïse (1761) by Rousseau, the middle of the eighteenth century offers a series of libertine epistolary novels like *Lettres de la marquise de M*** au comte de R**** and *La Tourière des carmélites*: for instance, Meusnier of Querlon shows libertine career of a young girl who reveals herself through letters. Other libertine writers (such as Laclos and Crébillon) adopt the epistolary form as a sharp instrument to criticise certain social aspects such as aristocratic corruption: in 1782 Laclos writes *Les liaisons dangereuses*, celebrated as the last example of the genre. Other epistolary novels like *L'émigré* and *Aline et Valcour* appear during the revolutionary period with different purposes: in the case of Sénac de Meilhan the epistolary novel is used to denounce revolutionary excess. So the variety seen in the French epistolary novel shows the richness of the genre which is particularly loved by readers during the Enlightenment. In fact readers have loved this kind of narration for its charm of authenticity and for the fact that it allows them follow a story which has the appearance of a real life story.

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