

Social Power and the Eighteenth-Century Novel: Foucault and Transparent Literary History

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We must cease once and for all to describe the effects of power in negative terms: it “excludes,” it “represses,” it “censors,” it “abstracts,” it “masks,” it “conceals.” In fact, power produces; it produces reality; it produces domains of objects and rituals of truth.

Foucault, *The History of Sexuality*¹

In a series of recent studies of the origins and beginnings of the novel, power—as issue and problem, theme and enigma—has become the magnetic north for critical inquiry and historical research.² Two recent new historical studies of the early English novel—Nancy Armstrong’s *Desire and Domestic Fiction: A Political History of the Novel* and John Bender’s *Imagining the Penitentiary: Fiction and the Architecture of Mind in Eighteenth-Century England*—develop the Foucaultean premise about social power sketched in the quotation at the beginning of this essay. The novel, by inciting its readers into the pleasures of its narrative, becomes productively complicit with “power” in producing the modern subject and its most characteristic social forms—the domestic household and the penitentiary.

1 (New York: Random House, 1978), p. 194.

2 I am thinking especially of Lennard Davis, *Factual Fictions: The Origins of the English Novel* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1983); Michael McKeon, *The Origins of the English Novel (1600–1740)* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1987); Robert W. Uphaus, ed., *The Idea of the Novel in the Eighteenth Century* (East Lansing, MI: Colleagues Press, 1988); J. Paul Hunter, *Before Novels: The Cultural Contexts of Eighteenth Century English Fiction* (New York: Norton, 1990), as well as the two books by Armstrong and Bender discussed in this essay.

In a review essay in *Eighteenth-Century Fiction* entitled "Michael McKeon and Some Recent Studies of Eighteenth-Century Fiction," Alistair Duckworth schematizes the alternatives offered by recent studies of the novel this way: while the books of Michael McKeon and Leo Damrosch have demonstrated "the novel's serious and responsible role in the early modern crisis of secularization," those of Armstrong, and Bender "see the eighteenth-century novel performing a police or domesticating function in the service of a middle-class hegemony."³ Since Duckworth's review essay does not bring these alternative versions of the novel's social role into communication with one another, they appear as dogmatically held positions between which one can only choose. Duckworth's own preference for McKeon's approach to the novel seems less justified than professed.

Duckworth's starkly valuative contrast of these studies seems to pivot upon the comparative weight McKeon, Armstrong, and Bender give agency and system in early modern articulations of social power. Thus, McKeon's study, by providing a space for the working through of the questions of truth and virtue, allows the novel to be understood as a narrative practice which enables the cultural agency of its practitioners and readers. It becomes the means by which they can confront and mediate crisis, and improvise modern ideas of the social. By contrast, Armstrong and Bender, thinking of social power along the lines provided by Foucault, get us to see the insidious fashion in which the novel promotes systems of social control.

How does Foucaultian literary history alter our understanding of the novel's beginnings? By attempting a critical articulation of these two studies with the texts of Richardson and Fielding through which they develop their general thesis, this essay will seek to elucidate the question of power in eighteenth-century English culture, novelistic writing, and the criticism that seeks to interpret both. In doing so, I hope to elucidate the relationship between what each study demonstrates about the novel's role in producing and transforming social power, and what gets left out in narrating the novel's history this way. I will argue that the issue of the novel's social power opens onto matters which cannot be reduced or subordinated, in any simple way, to the issue of power—the novel's claim to represent ideal configurations of the social good, the novel's erotic potential for realizing fantasy and pleasure, and finally, the novel's

3 *Eighteenth-Century Fiction* 1 (1988), 66.

claim to aesthetic separateness and value. Each of these dimensions of the novel plays a part in the novel's elevation to a position of cultural centrality.

There are certain common methodological assumptions which guide these Foucaultean histories of social power and the novel. The studies of Armstrong and Bender, having passed through poststructuralist critiques of traditional history, are sceptical about the efficacy of a mimetic literary history, and alert to the artificiality of any historical narrative. For Armstrong and Bender analogy is an explicitly foregrounded trope in their analytical procedure. They do not claim so much to "tell what happened" in the terms or temporal frame of its happening, but instead to win a certain shock of recognition by demonstrating through analogy a deeper current of historical happening which effects the convergence of two things usually understood to be different—the novel and the penitentiary, or the novel and the domestic realm. Promoted to a constitutive role in the articulations of power, the novel becomes implicated in the foundation of something unlovely and determining—the state, the police, the social sciences, with all their attendant discursive systems for surveillance and control. Writing from within the realities of the modern disciplinary society, Armstrong and Bender assume a perspective which is implicitly retrospective. Little wonder that their histories imply a fateful view of the novel, power, and cultural change. This difference is a matter neither of temperament nor of personal inclination. While the prospective temporal standpoint of Watt's *Rise of the Novel* or McKeon's *Origins of the English Novel* gives a hopeful political valence to the novel's invention, the retrospective standpoint suggests the fatality of temporality closed off by history's orientation towards the disciplinary system it is becoming. In the iconoclastic movement of the Foucaultean literary history, the novel works, unbeknownst to its earliest inventors, to produce the society where the political is occulted, and disciplinary procedures can culminate in an institution like the penitentiary. In this way, these studies go beyond the earlier Marxist critique of traditional attempts to confer an unconditioned aesthetic value upon the novel. These narratives disenchant the novel.

Armstrong and Bender represent the novel as a reagent which, by opening a cultural space for the individual that becomes carceral, orients the individual towards modern systematic power. This cultural space is variously rendered as the panopticon, the penitentiary, the home, the analyst's couch, or the classroom. Concomitant with the opening of this space, a

subject is invented who is essential, self-evident, and invisible; she or he is thereby prepared for disciplinary enclosure. But Bender and Armstrong offer quite different stories of the way in which the novel facilitates, by rendering transparent to the subject, the workings of power. For Armstrong the invention of the "domestic woman" in the languages of the fiction and conduct books of the eighteenth century split the social world into masculine and feminine spheres of poetry and prose, politics and home, outside and inside, public and personal, state and family. This change focused desire and value so that the person's worth was internalized and psychologized. The invention of the modern subject gradually achieved cultural and social hegemony, and in doing so occulted the political power it expressed. Discursive systems as various as the therapeutic protocols of social science and literary close readings (among many others) would allow a domesticated subjectivity to appear to be a natural and universal truth about desire. Then, political thought and practice come to seem unreal and abstract, and the workings of power transparent. For John Bender, it is not the home but the prison, as it evolves into the penitentiary designed to reform the human subject, that functions as the novelistic matrix of the modern subject. Bender's literary history scandalizes literature by demonstrating, through a double history of the emergence of the novel and the penitentiary in England, those aspects of novelistic writing which contributed to the founding of the historical penitentiary.

The literary and cultural histories of Armstrong and Bender are guided by a Foucaultian conception of cultural change which foreshortens the locus of responsible agency. We might formulate the concept this way. Any new formation in culture could be adventitious or chance; it also might be the product of conscious agency. But there are factors which always produce a recuperative detour and a turning of any new formation of culture towards that system which is all the time forming into the modern bureaucratic state. Every new cultural invention comes to serve the expansion of the power of the system. Although different classes benefit in a differential fashion from these changes in the distribution of power, these changes unfold in a fashion which is finally authorless and autonomous. The most crucial cultural change is not guided by nuclear agents, motivated by legible intentions; the system's systematic centralization of power is a development in culture to which all contribute but none control. Since there is no localizable ego whose prescience could penetrate the changes that would make the novel so valuable for disciplining the modern subject, its early practitioners cannot be held responsible for the cultural changes that unfold in the novel's wake.

The Abstracting Power of Power

Armstrong and Bender allow us to see the way the early novels become remote literary tributaries of those discursive formations which emerge in the modern period to constrain and control social life. But it is the very openness of the political agenda of these studies which bears this ironic effect. The critical apparatus with which they interpret the novel winds up functioning as a simulacrum and supplement of the ideological apparatus—transparency and the penitentiary, the domestic and the apolitical—they would expose and challenge.⁴ A transparent literary history regulated by the issue of power incorporates the early novel into its narrative of the incremental emergence of the domestic and penitentiary. The transparency of these literary histories depends upon the clarifying celerity with which certain protocols for reading orient the novels towards the domestic and penitentiary. We can isolate these protocols for reading by watching how some of the literary texts of Richardson and Fielding are woven into Armstrong's and Bender's histories.

In *Desire and Domestic Fiction*, Armstrong's account of the emergence of the domestic is woven out of reference to those scenes in *Pamela* and *Emma* where the heroine engages in a particularly explicit fictive invention. When Pamela appears in country dress before Mr B, when Emma paints a portrait of Harriet for Elton's admiring eye, and when Emma invites and then misinterprets a charade by Elton—in all these scenes the invention of the domestic self becomes co-implicated with the heroine's mobile social position, her desire and desirability, and her participation in true and false representations. If we compare *Pamela* to Armstrong's use of that text, we can begin to calculate the reductions necessitated by Armstrong's transparent narrative. I will first consider Armstrong's oblique use of the scene where Pamela, "disguised" in her country dress, is brought by the housekeeper Mrs Jervis before Mr B. Armstrong finds that Pamela "creates a distinction between the Pamela Mr B desires and the female who exists prior to becoming this object of desire."⁵ This division between a physically desirable servant girl and a more essential self becomes the boundary where the politics of the

4 For an analogous discussion, see Edward Snow's "Theorizing the Male Gaze: Some Problems," *Representations* 25 (1989), 30–41.

5 *Desire and Domestic Fiction: A Political History of the Novel* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987), p. 116.

novel is fought out. Armstrong explains by citing Richardson in her own distinct fashion:

By means of a curious splitting of the female, Richardson represents the two of them—male and female—struggling for possession of Pamela: “He came up to me, and took me by the hand, and said, Whose pretty maiden are you?—I dare say you are Pamela’s sister, you are so like her. So neat, so clean, so pretty! ... I would not be so free with your sister, you may believe; but I must kiss *you*.” In characteristically Richardsonian style, the splitting that occurs whenever Mr. B tries to possess Pamela has a doubling effect by producing a subject who can claim possession of herself as an object. “O sir,” she replies, “I am Pamela, indeed I am: indeed I am Pamela, *her own self*” (p. 53). As it provides occasion for her to resist Mr. B’s attempts to possess her body, seduction becomes the means to dislocate female identity from the body and to define it as a metaphysical object. (pp. 116–17)

By omitting any reference to the context of the lines she cites, Armstrong makes Richardson’s “characteristic” “splitting of the female” seem more “curious,” that is, arbitrary and mystifying, than it need be. Here is the larger setting as Richardson unfolds it. By way of preparing for her return to her father’s modest home, Pamela has “trick’d” herself out in “homespun” country clothes. This metamorphosis from the silks she had been wearing is so striking that the housekeeper does not recognize Pamela when she appears in her new outfit. Mrs Jervis prevails upon Pamela to be introduced anonymously to Mr B, who calculatedly (Pamela thinks) uses the chance to speak the lines Armstrong quotes, and to steal a kiss from “Pamela’s sister.” This provokes Pamela’s emphatic assertion of her true identity. After her escape she is called back to receive Mr B’s accusations: since he had recently resolved to give Pamela no “Notice,” now “you must disguise yourself, to attract me.” She offers this defence: “I have put on no Disguise. ... I have been in Disguise indeed ever since my good Lady, your Mother, took me from my poor parents” (p. 63). After Pamela leaves the room, a servant overhears Mr B say, “By God I will have her!” This scene has decisive consequences. Rather than letting Pamela return home to her parents, Mr B makes plans to take Pamela, against her will, to his Lincolnshire estate.

The focus of my essay does not permit a full critical reading of this scene from *Pamela*, where so many of the novel’s central motifs are in play. However, such a reading would emphasize the following ideas. Pamela’s own pleasure in her new appearance—looking in “the Glass, as proud as any thing ... I never lik’d myself so well in my Life”—is presented in a risky and morally equivocal light. Pamela’s conduct-book self-assessment of her impending social decline—“O the Pleasure of de-

scending with Ease, Innocence and Resignation!"—is qualified by the way the scene echoes the narcissism of Eve's look into the pool in Paradise, or Belinda's into her mirror in *The Rape of the Lock*. Pamela's complicity in acquiescing to the masquerade staged by Mrs Jervis—Pamela admits "it looks too free *in me, and to him*"—means Pamela must submit to the kiss which she does not consciously seek. But this masquerade also solicits a more positive context—the games of disguise and love which regularly lead to the comic denouement in stage comedy. But what starts out in the naïve frolics of the teenage heroine turn, through the intensity of Mr B's desire, into the violence of Mr B's accusations, and his subsequent plots. Pamela's defensive insistence that her new dress is her truest clothing, and her recent dress a kind of disguise, does not restore Pamela's clothing to reliable signs of a stable social position. Instead, her clothes, manner, and language become equally arbitrary and non-natural, the instruments for dressing across and between classes. This problem of truth and error in dress—as it denotes or confuses class position, bars or provokes sexual exchange—complicates that aspect of the scene Armstrong stresses—Pamela's presentation of self. When Pamela says, "O Sir, said I, I am *Pamela*, indeed I am: Indeed I am *Pamela, her own self!*" (p. 61), the very repetition of the first person pronoun, the double chiasmic assertion, the intensifiers "indeed, indeed," the emphasis and overemphasis of this circular enunciation of identity betray the difficulty of stabilizing identity. The precariousness of this incipient selfhood results from factors operating elsewhere in the scene—the shifts of dress and class and language which enable the mobile erotic exchange Pamela and Mr B are having such a difficult time controlling.

I do not think that Armstrong's understanding of this scene of the novel is "wrong." Armstrong's account of Pamela's doubling, and the invention of new kind of self as the object of male desire, reads an aspect of Richardson better than ever before. But it is partial and selective in a fashion which has important consequences for Armstrong's larger argument. By emphasizing the motif of Pamela's self-invention, at the expense of the truth and error in representation and dress, and the erotic mobility that dressing produces, Armstrong does not only downplay those playful and comic aspects of this scene that enable its conflicts to issue in reconciliation and marriage. More crucially, Armstrong's grand narrative—of the middle-class invention of the domestic woman to do certain political work—orients every aspect of the novel towards the "big" question of power. A valuative and analytical hierarchy abstracts and simplifies language, truth/error, and desire so as to subordinate them to power, the political, and class struggle. The novel is always serving—often unbeknownst to itself—the goals and agenda of power. This hierarchy justifies

postulating a transparent instrumental relationship between text, author, and potential readers: what Armstrong calls the "strategic intention" (p. 148) of the author shapes a novel's characters, scenes, and language into a certain ideological formation, which in turn becomes the instrument and vehicle to carry certain effects into the world of readers, at the most global discursive level of Armstrong's history and argument. By separating, and then aligning text, author, and cultural formation as essentially homologous, the invention of the desirable domestic self—as that "metaphysical object" which appears to go beyond the political—becomes Pamela's fictive task, Richardson's authorial strategy, and their decisive contribution to the transformation of culture. This critical narrative has the effect of making the culture and its texts a homogenized and totalized space, a perfectly efficient medium, where the idea of the domestic woman, once produced, circulates freely. Lost in such a narrative are the intricate circuits of truth and error and the erotic, of epistemology and sexuality, as they produce disturbances and resistances in the exchanges among characters and ideas, text and author and readers, and the larger circuits of culture.

To suggest what complicates any attempt to make *Pamela* an efficient purveyor of ideology, I will consider the odd social and literary masquerade by which Richardson and Pamela become doubles of one another. In Richardson's novel, the production of Pamela's exemplary self depends upon the way dressing the heroine, in the clothes of language, produces effects of truth or unveiling out of the ruses of disguise. In writing and revising the novel, Richardson is implicated, like Mrs Jervis in the disguise scene we have considered, in the bawdy production of a sexy game of dressing across class lines. In the first edition of *Pamela*, Richardson disguises himself as an anonymous editor. Pamela's enormous success, by raising him from a successful printer to a literary figure with wide and important acquaintance, gave Pamela's creator an elevation in social position analogous with hers. The book's success has ramifications for the middle-aged printer's everyday practice of the sexual: Richardson now carries on eroticized exchanges, both in person and through correspondence, with young women with upper-class connections.⁶ Like Pamela, he only comes out from behind the editor's disguise to protect his text against harsh criticism and improper appropriation. By stepping out from behind an official anonymity, Richardson

⁶ See J.C. Duncan Eaves and Ben D. Kimpel, *Samuel Richardson: A Biography* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1971), pp. 198–204.

could counter critical travesties like Fielding's *Shamela* and discredit an opportunistic sequel, as well as authorize his own, *Pamela in her Exalted Condition* (1741). Newly sensitive to the charge of the "lowness" of the book's language and manner, he "dresses up" successive editions according to the decorum of more refined and upper-class literature. In this network of exchanges and resemblances, is Pamela like Richardson, or Richardson Pamela-like?

The implication of the parallel between Richardson, as author and social individual, and Pamela does not just complicate our understanding of who or what the novel's author or eponymous character are. Through its *mise en scène* of the text's writing, publication, and defensive revision, and by achieving an overdetermined expression of the author's psychology, social station, and positioning within the institutions of writing, this scene impedes and compromises the instrumental communication of the idea of the domestic woman it helps formulate. In other words, the scene suggests *Pamela's* opaquely overdetermined cultural function. As the first consumer of the rich sex and class fantasy he invented, Richardson is always more and other than the ingenious culture minister of his class. The sexual and language play of *Pamela* does more than produce an abstract but useful new ideology of sexuality around the eroticized consciousness of the domestic woman. The cultural power Richardson formulates and transmits through the invention of new forms of self continues to be enabled by, as well as compromised by, the confusing pleasures of clothes and language, sex and disguise. By contrast, Armstrong's study invariably translates the various determinations of sex into power. In this regard Armstrong follows quite closely Foucault's first volume of *The History of Sexuality*, in which he recounts the many ways the material practices of sex are translated into the discourses of "sexuality." These discourses then function as the means by which any resulting social practice or psychological experience of "sexuality" ends by subjecting the self to power (chap. 4).

In a fashion analogous with Foucault, within the terms of Armstrong's literary history, it is the abstracting power of power which enables Armstrong to exaggerate the achieved separation of the newly invented domestic self, as a "metaphysical object," from all the material terms—body, journal, story—that clothe and denote it. By contrast, my reading of Richardson's novel makes Mr B's and the reader's desire functions of the interplay between Pamela's physical beauty and her inner self, between her body and her private writings. Then desire results not just from the correspondence of, but also the illusive discrepancy between,

her story of adventure and the heroine, between the written language attributed to Pamela and the self it identifies.

The nonhierarchical plurality I am proposing for *Pamela* is in fact indispensable to the novel's cultural effects in the century of its emergence. The novel's popularity as a potentially serious form of entertainment involves a rather ingenious balance of pleasure and the didactic. The novelist's tactical rejoinder to accusations of a morally irresponsible eroticism, of fantasy irrelevant to things as they are, depends upon pursuing the "serious" ethical and epistemological questions. The novel therefore depends upon activating the full range of ideas and affective charges circulating in Pamela's changes of dress, and Emma's portrait and masquerade: a play with truth and error in language, of reality and fiction in social roles, as they produce effects of pleasure and desire in characters, author, and readers. Only by taking these into account, as fundamental in themselves, and thus more than the transparent rhetorical means for articulating the ideology of the domestic woman, can one understand what Armstrong's narrative reports—the way the domestic becomes an erotic space, where a certain idea of the self, as the standard for humanness, can circulate.

Applied Foucault: or Narrative Transparency and Narrative Authority in the Novel and Its Literary History

How do the literary histories of Armstrong and Bender achieve a controlling distance from the problematics of a depoliticizing transparency they seek to expose? Because the novel makes transparent to the subjectivity of the reader a certain species of subject—the unique interiority of the domestic women, the reformed consciousness of a reflective and incarcerated individual—Armstrong and Bender accuse the novel of blinding with false transparency. In each case, novelistic narrative becomes false by the way an arbitrary cultural construct is represented as natural and inevitable. As they demystify the novel, both literary histories become caught up in a paradoxical interplay of transparency and opacity. Exposing the novel's role in the development of the modern social system requires that each critic display the opacity of the novel's political role within the frame of a transparent literary historical narrative. But then, does Bender incarcerate the novel by exhibiting it so transparently? Does Armstrong domesticate the novel by the way she lays bare its depoliticizing ruses? How do they avoid creating for themselves and their reader the illusory position of omnipotence and omniscience which Foucault

and Bender associate with (the pernicious goal of) the invisible observer of the panopticon?

The focus of these narratives upon the political question *par excellence*—the workings of power in culture—justifies their narrative transparency. Within Bender's narrative, a cross section of the productions of Defoe, Gay, Hogarth, Fielding, Bentham, and Adam Smith allows him to follow the steps by which the penitentiary idea emerges in institutions and novels that strive for narrative transparency. Within Armstrong's account, the writings of Richardson, Austen, Brontë, Dickens, and Freud make their successive contributions to the ideology of the domestic woman. In both these narratives, there is the strong implication of an involuntary "flow of history" by which the domestic and penitentiary are, through the successively discriminated contribution of each writer or thinker, crystallized as power. Since the transparency and thematic unity of these narratives result from their inventive adaptation of Foucault to literary history, and since Foucault's use of the panopticon in *Discipline and Punish* offers a prototype for Bender's use of the penitentiary idea and Armstrong's use of the domestic woman, I will briefly sketch the leading traits of the Foucaultian narratives of the consolidation of social power.

In the plotting of *Discipline and Punish* the panopticon condenses all previous disciplinary projects into its total design; it then allows Foucault to read all subsequent projects aiming to expand power and knowledge of the social as extensions of its carceral intention. The panopticon becomes an expanding metonymy that evolves, in Foucault's account, from being a specific architectural plan, to being a more general technique, to being a texture of the whole society. Then it can stand as a visible icon of the most essential workings of many different social institutions of the modern period. Foucault's account of the panopticon suggests a possibility nowhere verified: as the "deep structure" of the disciplinary society, the panopticon totalizes society. This analysis according to power idealizes, simplifies, and rounds out the rough-edged historicity of happenings. It does *not* depend upon records of what happened when reforms of any disciplinary system were put into effect; *nor* does it attend to the microlevel of actual behaviour in any particular time and place. Instead it abstracts and summarizes the assumptions underlying prospective plans for systems of training or education. Any of the alterity or overdetermination of text or society is abstracted into the discursive geometry of power. A temporal discrepancy is supposed: while the disciplinary system works continuously to orient all events "in" the

system towards itself, anything that might come from "outside" to resist or interrupt this system is contingent and momentary, and therefore inconsequential. A history divested of time becomes a space now imagined as controllable—a synchronic scene of disciplinary supervision. Cast outside this abstract rational space is the temporality of history as it brings change, chance, deviations, motion, resistance, displacement, the unexpected, inertia, inefficiency, disorder.

The Foucaultean assumptions, borrowings, and tendencies of Armstrong's and Bender's literary histories involve them in some of the same reductions and simplifications I have briefly indexed in Foucault. At issue here is not the non-empirical focus of Armstrong and Bender's description of the domestic and the penitentiary. In fact Bender is more detailed and scrupulous than Foucault in his account of the relationship between the discourse of penitentiary reform and the emergence of actual penitentiaries. Instead, what is at issue is the abstraction of their literary matter—the novel—into the teleology of their narratives. As an instrumental cause in developing a larger, more influential cultural formations—the domestic, the penitentiary—the novel's openness to diverse futures is annulled. The domestic ideology and the penitentiary idea become the telos of novelistic writing. The transparency of this plotting of novel's emergence "finalizes" the times of the histories of the novel into the space of a system—the mind of the domestic woman at home, and the transparent penitentiary. I have noted the way Armstrong simplifies the operation of eros and epistemology in *Pamela*. Before a critical reconsideration of what resists the transparency of Bender's account of the emergence of transparency, it will be useful to note how Bender qualifies the power of transparency.

Bender's history of the development of the idea of "transparency" allows us to grasp the arbitrariness of this "convention" of novelistic and reformist thought in the late eighteenth century. In this conventional alignment of power and knowledge, one is invited to accept the premise that "both author and beholder are absent from a representation, the objects of which are rendered as if their externals were entirely visible and their internality fully accessible."⁷ Though this representational convention creates the illusion of translucent immediacy, an apparent absence of mediation, it is in fact the effect of forms of architecture and a certain style of narrative, "free indirect discourse." The omniscience of the

⁷ See Bender, *Imagining the Penitentiary: Fiction and the Architecture of Mind in Eighteenth-Century England* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987), p. 201.

warden or guard in the panopticon is never actually realized. Instead, in a fashion analogous with the novelist, the architecture of the panopticon seeks an authority commensurate with the idea of omniscience, by forcing the inmate to imagine the possibility of an all-seeing inspector (p. 198). The transparency of object to subject in the social spheres of the novel and penitentiary is an impossible theoretical ideal of those who seek an indefinite extension of knowledge and power.

In order to orient Fielding's novels towards a concentrated modern form of power like the penitentiary, Bender reduces the plurality of Fielding's strategies for marshalling narrative authority in *Tom Jones* and *Amelia*. Bender interprets Dr Harrison, the energetic, lively, sententious divine in Fielding's *Amelia* who manipulates the main characters with a view to their improvement, as a vestige of a satiric and moral sensibility that belongs to an early part of the century. Thus Dr Harrison is; by Bender's plotting, a figure in transition to the reforming judge and utopian reformer Fielding became in his last years, situated awkwardly between the voluble, beneficent narrator of *Tom Jones* and the nearly invisible authorities who preside in the novels of Austen or the panopticon of Bentham. Within such an historical narrative, the assumption of authority by Dr Harrison takes on a certain sinister coloration.

While situating Fielding in such a history helps to explain the provenance of the penitentiary idea, it also considerably simplifies the quality and function of the variously characterized agents of authority in Fielding's texts—Parson Adams, Mr Allworthy, Dr Harrison—as well as the succession of narrators to whom Fielding gives more or less clearly defined personalities. Humanized and personified, authority is not made to inhere in a diffuse representational system. It takes the form of an agent and maker who intercedes between subject and object, knower and what is known. These figures of authority—as both narrators and characters—purvey humour, philosophy, bungled efforts at explanation, and the many moral answers that never fully serve. This authority uses the resources of Renaissance rhetoric to display a verbal wit and ethical invention the action opens to correction. Because he aims to make his novel an entertainment as well as an improving test of moral wisdom, the Fielding narrator does not just tell and present. He is also habitually misleading the reader by withholding information—for example, about Tom Jones's paternity, or the identity of the mysterious intruder who rifles through the Booth apartment, or the switch of disguise that allows the reader as well as Booth to be fooled into thinking Amelia has gone to the masquerade. In these ways the narrator produces effects of opacity and mystery within a more general movement towards knowledge.

This perspective on Fielding's novels provokes a question: why does so much of Fielding's fiction *fail* to be what Bender finds emerging slowly through its profusion of artful mediations? Why, even in his last novel, is Fielding so *untransparent*? I will consider this question in relation to *Amelia*, as that is where Bender develops much of his argument. The brusque but benevolent father, priest, and teacher, Dr Harrison, one authorized to advise and admonish, manipulate and reward, may prefigure the social reformer who will, in a later day, diffuse authority through huge modern bureaucracies. But Bender's account of *Amelia* fails to account for the positive attractions of a figure who wields authority so openly. He is not the domineering father of Oedipal psychology, or the Lacanian "one supposed to know," or the silent and invisible contriver of the panopticon. A champion of a moral psychology based on sympathy, Dr Harrison is compassionate, understanding, and fun. Always a bit disruptive, he is a whimsical descendant of the master of the revels in a Saturnalia. As such, Dr Harrison provides a way to finesse the tension between authority and pleasure. In tandem with the narrator, he draws the boundaries—at once social and ethical—within which pleasure is authorized. Within this fictional space, piety can be mocked, the times can be condemned, hypocrisy plumbed, and a comic society of the good constructed. Though the fiction is full of surprising incidents, the consequences never seem to be disastrous. Within this narrative, the moral agent, lead character, and his beloved (Harrison, Booth, and Amelia) can, by being heroically sensible—at once feeling and thoughtful—produce a new standard of humanness. The narrator, as teller of the story, kindly guarantees Fortune's complicity in this design.

Bender's study is a valuable corrective to the tendency in humanist studies to presume the beneficent cultural influence of canonical writing. As part of an historical critique of contemporary liberal humanism, Bender's literary history forces us to confront the irony compatible with Armstrong's history of the domestic woman: that modern systems of social control, and technologies for expanding the internal supervision of the subject, may have had their beginnings in the projects of the most "enlightened" and well-meaning of eighteenth-century reformers and moralists—such as Fielding, for example. But Bender's account of the transparency towards which Fielding's literary and political projects developed becomes partial by its single culmination in the penitentiary. Because of the overdetermined polyvalence of authority that I have been reading in Fielding, because of the striated plurality of reserves carried in his texts, Fielding's works arrive at more than one historical destination.

I can demonstrate the plural progeny of Fielding's writing by describing two ways his novelistic narrative is translated into later narratives. It is Fielding's experimentation with authority and transparency that helps make the novel a form of writing which could pair the utopian sense of human pleasure in community, won by the comic design of the action, with an omniscient narrator's broad social and political critique. Novelists like Burney, Austen, Dickens, Eliot, and James develop this double possibility for the novel into various forms of socially critical narrative transparency. As the omniscient narrator goes through a fade-out, and social critique is displaced into character, action, setting, and tone, transparency reaches a maximum. Transparency of this sort may achieve its most influential development in the syntax of classical Hollywood cinema, where the organization of the whole cinematic apparatus—from establishing shots to the lead character, from camera position to the editing of lap-fades—is designed to turn the arbitrary determinants of camera, light, and sound into a spectacle transparent to the viewer. Surrender to this spectacle is easy, precisely because its controlling authority, having disappeared behind the forms of its artifice, and projected into sensuously pleasurable forms of sound and light, is made to appear spontaneous and unmotivated.⁸

But this sort of transparency can also be deceptive and manipulative. Here, Fielding, and others like Sterne, precisely because they are located near the beginning of the evolution of narrative transparency, offers a counter-balance to that system. In Fielding's novels, authority is limited by being expressed in the form of visible agents. This offers a model for the sort of narrator who comes out from behind the fiction to proclaim his or her illusion-engendering practice—in the Thackeray of the *Vanity Fair* puppeteer, in the James of the Prefaces, in Nabokov, in numberless examples of modernist metafiction. The appeal of this sort of narrative strategy comes from a rhetoric of honesty—"here, in this fiction, I, the author, expose the technical contrivances (and thus the limits) of my authority." In this kind of performed narrative, personal exchange foregrounds what Fielding's narrator makes most explicit—narrative's sociality. At the same time, by coming out from behind the author's artifice, and by permitting a self-reflection upon the grounds of his or her activity, this "honest" narrator may make more radical claims to truth.

⁸ For an exhaustive description of the representational ideals shaping Hollywood cinema, see David Bordwell, Janet Staiger, and Kristin Thompson, *Classical Hollywood Cinema: Film Style and Mode of Production to 1960* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1985), pp. 1–84.

If Armstrong's and Bender's dependence upon Foucault helps elucidate the attempted transparency of their sequential histories, then their deviations from Foucault result from the valuable equivocation of their histories upon the matter of agency. While Foucault scripts the many well-intentioned reformers he quotes in *Discipline and Punish* as the unwitting pawns of the global discursive shifts they effect but cannot shape or comprehend, in Armstrong and Bender, writers like Richardson, Fielding, Austen, and the Brontës are much more than reflectors of cultural change happening either elsewhere or everywhere. As the leading "characters" of these literary historical narratives, they are given the role of self-conscious inventors of cultural formations—ideas as well as techniques, novelistic forms as well as ideologies. Because these formations bring something distinct and different into culture, they appear new. Because these inventions are open to repetition, imitation, and appropriation, they become the well-springs of subsequent cultural influence. Both accounts of the early novel concede considerable awareness to their novel writing protagonists. Armstrong makes Brontë's text the locus of a political savvy Brontë possessed, we moderns have lost, but Armstrong's study would reclaim. "I do not believe we are as conscious of the politics of literary interpretation as [Brontë] was" (p. 215). Here the "we" is the politically naïve subject the "I" of Armstrong's narrative is ready to instruct. Bender's case history of Fielding's double participation as novelist and reforming judge brings a still more wide-ranging cultural agency into view.

These attributions of agency and awareness significantly attenuate the Foucaultianism of these two literary histories. The agents in their stories—Fielding, Richardson, and Brontë—like Dr Harrison in *Amelia*, disturb the discursive automatism of the Foucaultian history. Agency, with its implication of directed effort and a greater or lesser degree of awareness, renders less anonymous and unconscious, more eccentric and contingent, the emergence of the domestic and penitentiary Armstrong and Bender narrate. Then the agency attributed to cultural inventors of the early novel, as it implies both critical reflection and a writerly entanglement with inherited cultural topoi, makes these novel writers the players in a struggle for cultural hegemony.

Armstrong and Bender each tell the history of the emergence of the modern subject through an analogy which the cogency of other's account makes partial and novelistic. Every analogy, precisely because its explanatory power depends upon likening different terms, courts the risk of being forced and opaque, anecdotal and thus fictive. Armstrong concedes in her epilogue that she has engaged in a certain arbitrary choice of

discursive non-literary material—those conduct books directed at fashioning the ideal of the domestic woman—and that there are many other kinds of non-literary sources which need investigating (p. 257). But the whole illusion of her narrative is that it is precisely this body of discourse which is most crucial in depoliticizing culture. Bender makes an aside about the many other writers who could have been read in terms of the penitentiary idea, and greatly regrets the necessity, for reasons of length, of omitting discussion of Richardson, Sterne, Godwin. Armstrong tracks the main movement of her narrative through Richardson, Austen, Dickens, the Brontës, Freud, and Woolf; but not through Fielding, Burney, Thackeray, Eliot, Lawrence, and Joyce. The cogent transparency of each analytical narrative depends upon locating a certain shift in culture in these (and not other) texts. In each literary history it is quite difficult for the reader to make up the absence these critical narratives seem structured around.

The Novel as a Subtype of Print Media

In recounting the effects of the novel in culture, Armstrong's and Bender's analogical alignment of the novel with subsequent disciplinary systems does not develop a way to acknowledge the vast series of displacements and variegated historical happenings needed to allow Fielding's Bow Street Runners to develop into the modern London Police we know, or required for Richardson's domestic subject to become the psychoanalytic subject in *Dora*. These analogical histories obscure the way the early novels—as overdetermined cultural texts—disseminate cultural formations of a less disciplinary cast. One way to accommodate the range of the novel's cultural roles is to consider the novel as a subtype of print media. Then the novel will not appear as a literary or popular artifact which lends itself to isolated treatment, but as a medium always complicated with its networks of circulation, as they undergo rapid change in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. The notion of the novel as one form of society's informing media allows us to imagine the novel's cultural roles as amorphous, plural, and heterogenous. It is not sufficient to characterize the novel by the ideas that it mediates, or the social structures it may help institute. *As a type of media, the novel is not any single thing.* It no longer invites the effort to do its ontology, or locate its (true) origins. As that which enables the instituting trace of a narrating and narrated agency, and as that which can become the reservoir of instituted traces which articulate constraining systems of power,

the novel becomes an overdetermined cultural text, which develops diverse possibilities—for agency as well as system, pleasure as well as discipline, and much more.

The overdetermined particularity of its language forms and cultural coordinates enables the novel's diverse cultural effects. The novel as a type of print media can facilitate the formation of social systems like the domestic or the penitentiary, or open pathways for political agency in the form of Marxist, Foucaultian, and feminist cultural critique. None of these cultural formations are in any simple way *caused* by the novel. Rather they unfold in a novelistic matrix, and come under the influence of novelistic forms of writing and consciousness. Thus the novel is plural enough to be read in an oblique angle to that polarity of agency and system that plays so large a part in critical narratives oriented towards the question of power. The novel as a cultural matrix, as a subtype of print media, can have cultural roles which, while never fully separable from power, are nonetheless distinct from power, and not reducible to one of the modalities of power. Thus in my counter-readings of *Pamela* and *Amelia*, I argued the centrality to these texts, and any literary historical account of their popularity and cultural centrality, of that which Armstrong and Bender's studies consistently subordinate to power—epistemology, ethics, the erotic. Early novelists like Richardson and Fielding engaged in a programmatic effort to reform and elevate the novel. By incorporating the plots, situations, and subject matter of early popular novelists like Behn, Manley, Haywood, and Defoe, and then disavowing their debt to these earlier novelists, Richardson and Fielding sought, each in his distinct way, to give the novel a mimetic coherence, an ethical responsibility, and an aesthetic importance not previously claimed, or won, for the novel. Nineteenth-century novelists like Henry James and Flaubert, by promoting the idea of the novel as an aesthetic formation with cultural prestige on a par with poetry, drama, and epic, won the novel a canonical legitimacy which would enable critics like Percy Lubbock and F.R. Leavis to include the novel in the curriculum of the "Great Tradition." This conventional institutionalization of the novel, by grounding the novel's cultural authority in absolute aesthetic categories, not only effaces the diverse determinants and contingencies of the novel's beginnings; it also gives special pertinence to the new literary histories of the novel we have been reading.

As a subtype of print media, the novel may function in culture like that letter which never arrives at its supposed, just, and prescribed destination. Novels are open to a co-opting institutionalization of the kind

Armstrong analyses, where literature is taught in such a way as to train each reader or student to know him or her self as an apolitical fragment of a universal, essentially identical subjectivity. But, at the same time, that plural, overdetermined, and changing text and network designated by the phrase "the novel" is also capable of being the site of deviantly excessive, non-recuperable popular forms which resist canonization or institutionalization: pornography, romance, Gothic horror, and science fiction. The novel can be opened to new cultural addresses and functions because it has the qualities of writing: unique in each instance, it is also open to repetitions (in reading, and rewriting); it is structured in a systematic way, but it is also open to the history of displacements and revision; by the way it channels flows of possibility, the novel articulates power between writers and readers, producers and consumers. But the novel can also become detoured and destined to produce unexpected cultural and social effects. Thus the novel has played no small role in the evolution of sibling media like film and television. This essay has sought to gauge the novel's variety in another way: by considering how it has borne its effects into the discursive forms devised in this century to study the novel, like the novel histories of the novel's beginnings created by Armstrong and Bender.

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