

**AN HISTORICAL APPROACH TO SPEECH PRESENTATION:  
EMBEDDED QUOTATIONS IN EIGHTEENTH-CENTURY  
FICTION**

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In this paper I aim to show how a stylistic approach can both lend support to a literary-historical argument and shed new light on a notorious literary character. Recent discussion of the early eighteenth-century novel has focused on the ambiguity between fact and fiction that it has generated, especially in the minds of its first readers. It has often been claimed that it is hard to distinguish from more factual genres, especially journalism. I add a stylistic angle to this approach, showing how one eighteenth-century novel, *Clarissa*, employs a technique concerned with the representation of speech, the use of embedded quotations, which a recent corpus-based study at the University of Lancaster has revealed to be common in modern journalism. Examining this technique in detail, I demonstrate that it embodies the blurring of fact and fiction so often said to be characteristic of the early novel. Like the modern journalist, Lovelace has a particular fondness for this style. The blending of fact and fiction inherent in embedded quotations reveals the duality inherent in Lovelace himself; as someone who both dramatises and deceives, fictionalising fact, and also, as has less often been noticed, someone who records his own falsehoods with minute, detailed accuracy, factualising fiction.

Much recent criticism of the early eighteenth-century novel has stressed its connection with other, more factual kinds of writing. John Richetti wrote in 1996 that:

The divide between fact and fiction that we are pretty confident about is hard to locate in narratives from earlier centuries, and the eighteenth-century novel played with that still blurry division, often presenting fiction as fact and dramatising fact in ways we would find more appropriate to fiction. (2)

Since 1996 a number of other critics of the early novel have elaborated on this point. In a 1997 article entitled “The Making of the English Novel” Downie discusses the ways in which Defoe’s works blur the line between fact and fiction, claiming that his contemporary readers “not only did not know whether or not *A Journal of the Plague*

*Year*, *Moll Flanders*, and *Roxana* were fact or fiction - and Defoe's prefaces scarcely helped - they did not even know that they were written by the same man who had previously published *Robinson Crusoe* as fact!" (260). Two recent book-length studies by Mayer (1997) and Brown (1997) have explored this uncertainty further, also focusing on Defoe. Brown also notes that "The problem of Defoe, from the very beginning, has not been whether he wrote novels or romances, but whether what he wrote was fact or fiction - and even his writing at all." (189)

Both Brown and Mayer acknowledge the influence on their own work of Lennard J Davis's pioneering Factual Fictions: The Origins of the English Novel (1983). Like them, Davis identifies the "hallmark" of the early novel as "a special dynamic between fact and fiction." (19) He too states that readers of the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries would have had "an uncertainty to the factual or fictional reality of the work" (24). Davis traces the development of "novelistic discourse" from what he calls "the undifferentiated news/novels matrix". Even after the split of the news/novels matrix in the eighteenth century into fiction on the one hand and journalism and history on the other there was, according to Davis, a lingering interdependence of fact and fiction in the early novel. He claims that "it was not a coincidence that so many authors during the eighteenth century in England were directly associated with journalism" (101) and that such authors "saw themselves as writing about the events of the world as a reporter might see them." (101) Davis even goes as far as to assert that the early novel "is modelled on history and journalism." (40) Again Defoe is the central figure in Davis's argument; he describes him as "the journalist par excellence of the early eighteenth century" (15) who "muddles the waters frequently by writing about real events in his capacity as a journalist." (23). Discussing Defoe's political writings, his editorship of the Review, and his complicated career as agent and double agent, Davis concludes that, for Defoe, "fact was just another form of fiction, and fiction was just a particular category of fact" (173).

There can be little doubt that the line between fact and fiction is hard to draw in the early eighteenth-century novel, and that readers of Defoe's works, in particular, were often unsure which they were reading. Yet in this paper I wish to advance on what is becoming quite a repetitive critical line. Amidst a welter of discussion on the

eighteenth-century novel as “modelled on history and journalism”, no one has examined the exact nature of this “modelling”. No one has specified in what ways exactly the early novelists “(wrote) about the events of the world as a reporter might see them.” In particular, there has been an absence of a stylistic perspective on the “news/novels matrix” in the early novel; no sustained investigation of how the “special dynamic between fact and fiction” is reflected in, and created by, style.

I aim to rectify this by considering how one particular stylistic technique in Richardson’s novels, concerned with the representation of speech, may help to “blur” the division between fact and fiction. I pay particular attention to his second novel, Clarissa; or the History of a Young Lady, and its link with journalistic discourse, looking specifically at how one of the novel’s letter-writers “write(s) about the events of the world’ as a reporter.

An empirical, corpus-based project at the University of Lancaster aimed at testing and refining Leech and Short’s 1981 model of speech and thought presentation has come up with several new categories and sub-types of existing categories. These are outlined by Semino, Short and Culpeper in their 1997 paper “Using a corpus to test a model of speech and thought presentation.” I am in sympathy with the approach and arguments of both this paper and Short’s more recent “The faithfulness war: Revisiting the notion of faithfulness in discourse presentation” (1999), and endorse especially the authors’ rigorous separation of the vague category of “discourse” into speech, thought and writing, and the retention of “faithfulness” as a crucial concept in speech presentation in particular, as will become apparent below. One of the new sub-categories arising from the corpus is “embedded quotation phenomena”, or “Q”, defined by Semino, Short and Culpeper as “relatively small stretches of direct quotation [...] within more indirect report strings.” (31). The authors give the following as an example:

- (1) He said the decision to discipline the rebels was “certainly not a mistake.” (*The News of the World*, “Yule not be Forgiven”)

Semino, Short and Culpeper tag this sentence as “ISQ”; essentially Indirect Speech with a small stretch of direct quotation within the quotation marks: “certainly not a mistake”. The data from their corpus shows that such embedded quotations can occur not just in Indirect Speech, but also in Free Indirect Speech (FIS), Narrator’s

Representation of Speech Act (NRSA), and their new category, Narrator's Report of Voice (NV). Semino, Short and Culpeper report that "In our corpus, 15% of the total codings for NV, NRSA, IS and FIS include the "Q" marker." (31). Yet instances of "Q" are not spread evenly across text-types. The Lancaster corpus consists of 258 348 words of twentieth-century British English and is divided into three sections: prose fiction, newspaper news reports and autobiography. The "Q" category turns out to be much more common in the newspaper data than in the fiction and autobiography extracts. Semino, Short and Culpeper reveal that "out of a total of 134 instances in the corpus, 131 occur in the press." (31).

This should not surprise us. Examples of direct quotation within indirect speech, as in the above example from The News of the World, serve a clear journalistic purpose, highlighting the most significant part of the original speaker's speech. Semino, Short and Culpeper give another example from the Today newspaper (again from 1994) of the Q category within "Narrator's Representation of Speech Act" (or "NRSA"):

- (2) Comic Spike Milligan shocked millions of viewers by calling prince Charles a "little grovelling bastard" on live TV last night (*Today*, "Viewers Stunned by Spike Jibe at Charles")

Here the full extent of Spike Milligan's comments on Prince Charles is not given; instead the words "little grovelling bastard" is taken out and placed inside quotation marks within the reporter's account of Milligan's speech. These controversial words are the starting point for the newspaper's story, and the most important element within it. The embedded quotation, in Semino, Short and Culpeper's words, "allow(s) the reporter to foreground selected parts of the original utterance without having to provide a lengthy quotation. They achieve vividness and precision without sacrificing the need for brevity." (31).

Clearly "vividness", "precision" and "brevity" are all catchwords for the late twentieth century journalist, and it is not hard to see why the "Q" category is common in the press. In her 1995 article "Reported Speech in Journalistic Discourse: The Relation of Function and Text", Waugh notes cases of what she calls "combined direct/indirect speech" in Le Monde, and gives similar examples to Semino, Short and Culpeper. Like them she also finds that this phenomenon is "not used as widely in fiction or conversation as in journalism." (149). Her explanation also centres on

the need for “vividness”, “precision”, and “brevity”, as she points out that “often, what serves the journalist’s purpose is only a word, a few words, a noun phrase, a predicate [...] the journalist uses whatever is quote worthy and whatever is needed to build the text.” (146-7).

The journalist’s process of construction necessarily involves a blending of fact and fiction. A closer look at the form of embedded quotations reveals that they blur the very line which critics of the early English novel have found hard to draw. This is a result of the fact that they mix two different speech styles. Here I shall refer to the notion of “faithfulness” in speech presentation, agreeing with Short’s recent (1999) insistence on retaining the concept in the face of the recent anti-mimetic approaches of Tannen (1989), Fludernik (1993), and others. Spike Milligan again:

- (3) Comic Spike Milligan shocked millions of viewers by calling Prince Charles a “little grovelling bastard” on live TV last night (*Today*, “Viewers Stunned by Spike Jibe at Charles”)

This, to recall, is tagged by Semino, Short and Culpeper as NRSAQ; Narrator’s Representation of Speech Act with a small portion of direct quotation within the quotation marks. The category NRSA is essentially a summarising style; the actual words and propositional content of the original speech are lost and all that is left is the speech act; “Spike Milligan shocked millions of viewers”. In Semino, Short and Culpeper’s terms, only one “faithfulness claim” is made in NRSA; to the speech act. The direct quotation, “little grovelling bastard” would seem though to be absolutely faithful to the original utterance; the reader assumes that Spike Milligan did actually speak these words. The Q category seems to add an element of fact to the reporter’s otherwise relatively unconstrained license to embellish the speech event in whatever ways he or she sees fit.

Yet unfortunately it might not quite be as simple as this. As Semino, Short and Culpeper note, “it is well-known that not all instances of Direct Speech are accurate word-by-word representations of the original utterance” (22). Clark and Gerrig (1990), for example, argue that “the essence of quotation is demonstrating something rather than depicting it” (791), and set out to disprove the “verbatim assumption”: the “long tradition of assuming that quotations are NECESSARILY verbatim reproductions of what is being quoted” (795). They claim that when quoting speakers

commit themselves only to “the depiction of selected aspects of the referent”, not a reproduction of the sentences uttered. Just as a person demonstrating a limp “isn’t really or actually or literally limping” (766), so a quotation is not committed to “repeating the actual words spoken” (797): “almost every argument we have adduced for the demonstration theory is also an argument against the verbatim assumption.” (795).

A similar point is made by Short (1988), who reports a private communication by Norman Fairclough to the effect that:

... the reporting of speech is never mere reproduction, but a representation, even in the case of DS or FDS (Free Direct Speech), because the writer can choose “what parts of the speech reported to include, in what order, and within what discursal matrix.” (77)

Short makes the important point that this selection in the reporting of speech can occur not just in fiction, or supposedly “literary” language, but also in genres traditionally regarded as “non-literary”, including journalism. His analysis of a small corpus of modern newspaper texts reveals that reporters, and especially headline-writers, can “ignore the faithfulness maxims to some extent” (67). One of his examples is “UGH! GET RID OF MY SQUINT” (the headline of an article reporting Mrs Thatcher’s reaction to a new statue of herself in Madame Tussaud’s). Short notes that we can be fairly certain that these were not the words and structures used by the original speaker. Concern for factual accuracy in newspaper reporting is often overridden, according to Short, by what he calls “the striving for dramatic eye-catching headlines to attract readers.” (69). He even proposes a new Gricean maxim for such cases: “the maxim of strikingness” (69). Caldas-Coulthard (1994) makes a similar point, noting that in newspaper reporting “much of what is finally reported is filtered through the news process, in other words, through the re-interpretation and evaluation of many people” (303) and hence that “faithfulness to the words originally produced can always be challenged.” (304). When “factual reporters” “distort what was said in the first place”, according to Caldas-Coulthard, “the distinction between a factual and a fictional saying can be blurred.” (302). She concludes that “‘Quoting’ what people say is a very dangerous activity.” (307).

Yet even though the maxim of faithfulness can sometimes be overridden, especially in what purports to be DS, this is no reason, as Short himself has most recently argued,

for “throwing out the baby with the bath water.” As he observes, “faithfulness” remains a strong guiding principle in the reporting of both speech and writing, and indeed in real life people are often rather attached to the idea of faithfulness and act accordingly.

Semino, Short and Culpeper recognise the potential blurring of fact and fiction in their discussion of the Q category, noting that “Clearly, such forms also lend themselves to partial or slanted representations of other people’s voices, since the original speaker’s words are embedded, both grammatically and semantically, within the reporter’s own discourse.” (31). They point out that the Q category “is used extensively across the more indirect forms in both tabloid and broadsheet newspapers, usually to suggest veracity and immediacy.” (38), and it is this duality, between strict factual accuracy, “veracity”, on the one hand, and fictional license, “immediacy”, on the other, on which I will now focus.

Embedded quotations are not solely the preserve of the modern press. Examples can be found in earlier texts, including the novels of Samuel Richardson. Take these examples from *Clarissa*:

(3) She frankly owned that she had once thought of embarking  
*out of all our ways* for some one of our American colonies.  
(851)

(4) I desired that *no part of this conversation might be hinted to  
my spouse*; and looked still more bashfully. (805)

Both of these examples occur in letters from Lovelace to Belford in Volume V of the novel, as events speed towards Clarissa’s downfall in Hampstead. In the first example Lovelace is recounting to Belford a conversation with “my charmer” in Mrs Moore’s garden, in which Clarissa expresses her desperation and her wish to escape from him. In the second he is reporting an exchange with Mrs Moore, Miss Rawlins and the widow Bevis in which he falsely claims that he and Clarissa are married but have not yet consummated their union. He understandably does not want them to repeat this to his supposed bride.

In each case Lovelace highlights a section of the speech he is reporting; in (3) Clarissa’s and in (4) his own. The chosen extracts, “*out of all our ways*” and “*no part*

*of this conversation might be hinted to my spouse*” are for Lovelace the most significant, or “quoteworthy”; they are the words that he wishes to emphasise to Belford. He believes that they most aptly illustrate Clarissa’s stubborn refusal to yield to him and his own skilful cunning. In these examples then Lovelace employs “direct quotation within more indirect report”, or “embedded quotation.” In Semino, Short and Culpeper’s terms, each sentence is NRSAQ (“Narrator’s Representation of Speech Act with Embedded Quotation”); in both cases the reporting speaker spells out the speech act performed by the original speaker (“owned”, “desired”) and then summarises the utterance’s content including a snippet of direct quotation. In both cases too the embedded quotation mixes “veracity” with “immediacy”, as Lovelace blends Clarissa’s and his own words with his dramatic representation of the speech event to Belford.

Notice that in all the examples given so far from Clarissa the passages of embedded quotation are indicated not by quotation marks, as in the data from the Lancaster corpus, but by italics. One of the functions of italics in the mid-eighteenth century was to mark quotations in this way. Indeed historically this was their first role after their introduction in England in 1528. In the early eighteenth century italics also began to take on other functions, including the indication of contrastive stress and the modern emphatic usage. In his An Essay towards a Practical English Grammar (1711) Greenwood states that: “An *Emphasis* is used for the distinction of such Word or Words, wherein the force of the sense doth more peculiarly consist, and is usually expressed by putting such kind of Words into another Character, as the *Italick, &c.*” (242). The italics in some of Lovelace’s embedded quotations have this emphatic role alongside their quotative one. They both quote directly from the original speech and emphasise the significance of the words quoted. Take another example from Volume V:

- (5) But I desired that she would take no notice of what should  
pass between us, *not even to her aunt* ... (810)

Here Lovelace is reporting to Belford a clandestine agreement with Mrs Bevis, which he asks her to keep hidden from Mrs Moore. Again the sentence is essentially Narrator’s Representation of Speech Act (NRSA), in this case Lovelace recalling his own speech. Within this indirect report, the italics of “*not even to her aunt*” mark out



and emphasise a small snippet of direct quotation. Lovelace highlights what is “quoteworthy”, or, in Semino, Short and Culpeper’s words, he “foreground(s) as selected part of the original utterance without having to provide a lengthy quotation”. Notice though that Lovelace does not quite report his original utterance entirely accurately; there is a shift of person from second to third as “not even to your aunt” becomes “*not even to her aunt.*” This emphasises the slant that Lovelace is putting on his own words as he embeds them in his later account. The italicised embedded quotations in his reports of speech achieve, like those in the twentieth-century Lancaster corpus, both “veracity” and “immediacy”, as Lovelace, like a newspaper reporter, gives a “partial” representation of his own and others’ voices.

Lovelace’s concern for dramatic immediacy in his letters is often apparent; he has an obvious fondness for presenting fact as fiction. His frequent use of the present tense is one of the ways in which he achieves this “immediacy”; as for example in the final letter before the rape:

(6) Will is this moment returned - No coach to be got, *for love or money.*

Once more she urges - To Mrs Leeson’s let me go!

Lovelace! Good Lovelace! Let me go to Mrs Leeson’s! (882)

Here the present tenses of “is this moment returned” and “Once more she urges” clearly add “vividness” to Lovelace’s account to Belford of Clarissa’s desperation as she senses her fate. His highlighting of part of Will’s speech “*for love or money*” also helps to emphasise his thrill at having trapped “his beloved” at

last; for him these are the words which are most significant or “quoteworthy”. This is an example of Lovelace’s tendency throughout his letters to, in Richetti’s words, “dramatis(e) fact in ways we would find more appropriate to fiction.” Such dramatising is most clearly illustrated by his frequent setting out of conversations in the form of a play-script.

Lovelace’s endless capacity for deception and invention, for fictionalising fact, leaps off the pages of *Clarissa* and has been well documented. What has been less commonly observed though is his perhaps equally strong compulsion to, in Richetti’s

words, “present fiction as fact”, for factualising. In this last, frantic letter before the rape he breaks off to comment on his “lively *present-tense* manner”:

(7) Thou’lt observe, Belford, that though this was written afterwards, yet (as in other places) I write it as it was spoken, and happened; as if I had retired to put down every sentence as spoken.  
(882)

“I write it as it was spoken [...] as if I had retired to put down every sentence as spoken”: in the midst of “immediacy”, Lovelace insists on his “veracity”, on the accuracy and detail of his reports of speech. Embedded quotations are one of the ways by which he is able to achieve both “vividness”, and “precision”, seemingly representing speech “as it was spoken, and happened.” Lovelace in fact frequently defends to Belford and others his own “veracity”, as for example when “Captain Tomlinson” dares to suggest, in the presence of the Hampstead women, that he may not have been telling him the whole truth:

8) *Love!*. I hope, Captain Tomlinson, you do not question my veracity! (820)

This quotation encapsulates the blurring of fact and fiction which is at Lovelace’s core. He reports a conversation to Belford in the dramatised form of a play-script, in which he insists on his own “veracity” to the fictional “Captain Tomlinson”, who is actually a stooge designed to deceive Clarissa and the women at Hampstead. Fact and fiction merge in both Lovelace’s style of writing and his very identity. In this respect he resembles not only the modern newspaper reporter, but also the early “novelist” of the eighteenth century. To quote (dangerously) Davis, for Lovelace, as for Defoe and also Richardson “fact was just another form of fiction, and fiction was just a particular category of fact.”

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