Introduction

> And this makes me fear, that if the History of my Achievements, which they tell me is in Print, has been written by some Magician who is no Well-wisher to my Glory, he has undoubtedly deliver'd many things with Partiality, misrepresented my Life, inserting a hundred Falsehoods for one Truth, and diverting himself with the Relation of idle Stories, foreign from the Purpose, and obnoxious to the Continuation of a true History.
>
> Cervantes, *Don Quixote*, Part II, 1615[1]

Since the earliest days of the novel, people have been threatening to kick interpolated tales out of it. Dismissed as "Freckles" and "Blemishes," "excrescences," or, "idle Stories," these tales-within-a-tale serve as a proving ground for texts' and readers' ideas about what to do with plots and perspectives that might not matter.[2] Indeed, the history of sustained critical pique over the awkwardness of potentially surplus stories offers an entry point for analysis: They constitute moments when literary form becomes a legible problem. How should we negotiate the gap between novels and these seemingly unaccountable tales? How much attention do they deserve? By what methodology should they be read? How might they count? For Don Quixote, responding, as in the epigraph, to the narrower question of where these tales might belong, the unequivocal answer is, "Not in my novel." When the romance-addled knight laments that "some Magician" has defamed "the History of [his] Achievements" by fixing them "in Print," he offers the results of a speculative close reading as

[1] Miguel de Cervantes Saavedra, *The History of the Renowned Don Quixote de La Mancha* (London: Peter Motteux, 1725), 3: 74–75. Versions of this translation, "by several hands," were the most popular in the early eighteenth century.

[2] Francis Coventry, *An Essay on the New Species of Writing founded by Mr. Fielding: with a Word or Two upon the Modern State of Criticism* (London: W. Owen, 1751), 45; Richard Cumberland, *Henry: In Four Volumes* (London: Charles Dilly, 1795), 2:216, and *The Observer*, 27, 1785, in *Novel and Romance: A Documentary Record 1700–1800*, ed. Ioan Williams (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1970), 332.

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evidence that the text is corrupt: The unknown and illegitimate author has betrayed his roguery by "diverting himself with the Relation of idle Stories, foreign from the Purpose, and obnoxious to the Continuation of a true History." For Quixote, such "idle Stories" serve as markers both of narrative falsity and of formal incoherence. While truth is allied to possessive individualism ("my Life") and singularity ("one truth," "a true History"), fiction and even magic are associated with plurality ("many things with partiality," "a hundred Falsehoods") and relativism ("partiality," "idle Stories"). Such tales, both "foreign" and time-wasting, are "obnoxious" to the winking truth claim that undergirds Cervantes's fictional narrative.

Ironic as this scrap of literary criticism may be, it negatively evaluates interpolated tales on aesthetic and moral grounds. Their interruption of ostensibly individual and true perspectives is correlated with improbability, uselessness, and multiplicity. Under that construction, "idle Stories" enact, writ small, the suspension of disbelief that we now associate with fictionality, and which here emerges as one of the epiphenomena associated with print, the medium that has earned Quixote's opprobrium by circulating his "History" far and wide, without his consent or control. And yet, print is not the only narrative medium under discussion. The literary assessment being tendered by Quixote is, after all, the product of a specific reading practice, to wit, the age-old practice of not reading. To be more precise, Quixote is an avowed nonreader of the print texts circulating under his name. His determination is explicitly based on hearsay, "they tell me," the secondhand nature of which posits orality as a key player in this gossipy literary network, a medium of story circulation and an alternate knowledge formation whose distinctive value both counters print and is co-opted by it.[3]

"Idle Stories" like the ones dismissed by Don Quixote have perpetually elicited critical back-and-forth since the emergence of the modern novel, itself much-debated and variously time-stamped.[4] The obverse side of the

[3] Paula McDowell, *The Invention of the Oral: Print Commerce and Fugitive Voices in Eighteenth-Century Britain* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 2017), 4. See also her "Mediating Media Past and Present: Toward a Genealogy of 'Print Culture" and 'Oral Tradition,'" in *This is Enlightenment*, ed. Clifford Siskin and William Warner (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2010), 229–246, 246.

[4] For accounts of pushback against what Ian Watt branded "the rise of the novel," see Srinivas Aravamudan, Catherine Gallagher, Sarah Tindal Kareem, Katarzyna Bartoszyńska, and Leah Orr. Watt, *The Rise of the Novel: Studies in Defoe, Richardson, and Fielding* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2001); Aravamudan, *Enlightenment Orientalism: Resisting the Rise of the Novel* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2012); Gallagher, "The Rise of Fictionality," in *The*

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argument deems such interpolated tales to be a positive feature of novels, productive of diversion, polyvocality, and beauty. Despite the hero Quixote's derision, the text *Quixote* includes many short inset tales and three long ones, "The Curious Impertinent," "The Captive's Tale," and "The Notable Adventure of the Distressed Duenna,"[5] which the novel's fictional translator, Cid Hamet, defends as sites of aesthetic pleasure, for reader and author alike. He boasts that the beauties of his artful tales may one day be favored with a separate publication history. "To have his Fancy, his Hand and Pen bound up to a single Design, and his Sentiments confin'd to the Mouths of so few Persons" was "an insupportable Toil," partially relieved by inserting the device of "some Novels" whose elegance of composition "must have been obvious had they been publish'd by themselves, without the Interludes of Don *Quixote*'s Madness or *Sancho*'s Impertinence."[6] Over the past four centuries, that cantankerous prediction has been more than borne out by the remediation of Cervantes's "idle Stories" as independent narratives across an array of media, genres, and languages. In English, the height of their flourishing was the long eighteenth century, when a dazzling proliferation of afterlives reimagined the tales, most frequently as plays, including Shakespeare and Fletcher's *Cardenio* (1613), Aphra Behn's *Amorous Prince, or The Curious Husband* (1671), Nicholas Rowe's *The Fair Penitent* (1702, 1703), Lewis Theobald's *Double Falsehood* (1727), and Susanna Rowson's *Slaves in Algiers* (1794).[7]

Lost Plots approaches the legions of eighteenth-century "idle Stories" that follow Cervantes using three critical contexts: media studies, narratology, and gender studies. The media connection results from recognizing the barrage of afterlives listed here, and the discursive commentary they provoke, as events in a media history. According to John Guillory, the act of remediation is what makes medium visible.[8] Taking that argument as a warrant, this project attempts to integrate a heightened awareness of media into its feminist literary history, an effort that will combine methods

Novel: Volume 1, ed. by Franco Moretti (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006); Kareem, *Eighteenth-Century Fiction and the Reinvention of Wonder* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014); Bartoszynska, *Estranging the Novel: Poland, Ireland, and Theories of World Literature* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2021); Orr, *Novel Ventures: Fiction and Print Culture in England, 1690–1730* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2017).

[5] English translations vary. [6] Cervantes, chapter 44, IV: 84.

[7] Other examples include Francis Beaumont and John Fletcher's *Coxcomb* (c.1609), John Crowne's *The Married Beau; or, The Curious Impertinent* (1694), and, more recently, Stephen Greenblatt and Charles Mee's *Cardenio* (2003).

[8] John Guillory, "Genesis of the Media Concept," *Critical Inquiry* 36.2 (Winter 2010), 321–362, 324.

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derived from various schools of formalism, but especially narratology, alongside book history, gender and genre studies. The lens that focuses my formal analysis is the interpolated tale, somehow immediately graspable yet hazily defined as a tale-within-a-tale, and, in this Introduction, already accumulating a set of presumably synonymous substitutions: inset, embedded, intact, random, surplus, lost plots, and, of course, "idle Stories." Distilling a more precise definition of the interpolated tale is a large part of my argument, which aspires to develop a theory, historical survey, and reading method appropriate to this literary curiosity. In the above lineage of plays that originated as "idle Stories," the cluster of afterlives discloses the extent to which the tale-form, in its affordance of remediation, operates in a way that can productively be thought of as a "medium," both according to Guillory's contemporary definition as the means of communication, but also in the sense given by that quintessential Enlightenment project, Samuel Johnson's *Dictionary* (1755), as "any thing intervening."[9]

My choice of Johnson in this parsing of Cervantes is not accidental. Opening with the Spanish Golden Age serves as an entry point to the Anglophone eighteenth century, when the so-called rise of the novel coincides with and co-participates in the oral-literate transition. It is during this time of self-conscious media shift that the concepts of print and orality, as Paula McDowell has shown, came to be segregated into a binary relation in response to the "flood of print," amidst which the novel was one player.[10] In this context of growing appetite for leisure reading and the genres that arose to feed it, authors writing in English consciously adopted *Don Quixote* as their exemplar for novel form, and perhaps less consciously, for interpolated tales as a constitutive though stubbornly problematic part of that form. In so doing, they import the literary and epistemological debate I have used Cervantes to frame here. The specificity of the eighteenth-century media environment, mid-shift toward an increasingly dominant print culture, and the authority of Walter Benjamin provide additional warrants for my assertion that the modern novel, as the first literary genre to be fully alienated from the human voice,

[9] Guillory opens by positioning "media" as "the collective noun for our most advanced communication technologies," but he is less interested in providing a set definition than in tracing the prehistory of the concept, as thinkers like Bacon grasped for language to describe "the technical means of communication" (321, 328). *Dictionary of the English Language*, vol. 2. (London: W. Strahan, for J. and P. Knapton [etc.], 1755).

[10] Paula McDowell, "Media and Mediation," *Oxford Handbooks Online*, 2018, doi: 10.1093/oxfordhb/9780199935338.013.46, 1.

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emerges as an inherently print medium – but also my qualification: that the self-commentary of this "new" print medium, from its earliest days, identifies its print status as an elastic site of interrogation, critique, and play.[11] At the same moment that print and orality begin to slot into an ostensibly fixed abstract binary, eighteenth-century novels both draw on and reflect a messier arrangement, in which print, manuscript, and orality inhabit a fluid continuum, continuing to overlap and interact in ways that make the ideas of "manuscript" and "orality" available as enticing objects of print representation – all the while remaining available as operative media to readers looking for different ways to engage, reengage, and share texts.[12] Like the kindred tradition of the "found manuscript" conceit recently documented and theorized by Lindsay DiCuirci,[13] fictions of orality offer both breadcrumbs of evidence and keyholes for entering into debates about media culture and its assignment of various kinds of cultural authority and power.

Starting with the recognition that early novels used interpolated tales as vehicles for experimenting with different ways of telling the story, my intervention purports to integrate strategies championed by the so-called media and narrative turns. In what follows, I seek to combine a critical understanding of media with the foundational narrative theories of heteroglossia and embedding developed by Mikhail Bakhtin and Gérard Genette. Their frameworks for thinking about the centrality of how discourse operates in the novel acted as a cornerstone to the analytical approach undertaken by this book: first, in the way it conceives of the movement between novel and tale as a simultaneously perspectival and narrative shift, and, subsequently, to its proposed method for mapping those shifts by attending to the edge conditions that set the terms for their negotiation. In a broad sense, there is a case to be made for labeling interpolated tales as

[11] Walter Benjamin, "The Storyteller: Observations on the Works of Nikolai Leskov," *Selected Writings: Volume 3: 1935–1938*, ed., Michael W. Jennings and Howard Eiland (Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2002), 143–166.

[12] Abigail Williams demonstrates the critical role of reading aloud as a form of popular culture and domestic entertainment, one that created "audiences rather than readers" in its spoken performance, "By considering the life of books read out loud, we can also start to see and hear the orality in the history of the book." *The Social Life of Books: Reading Together in the Eighteenth-Century Home* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2017), 4, 3. See Aileen Douglas and Michelle Levy for accounts of the ongoing importance of manuscript circulation, in particular for women authors and readers. Douglas, *Work in Hand: Script, Print, and Writing, 1690–1840* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017); Levy, *Literary Manuscript Culture in Romantic Britain* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2020).

[13] Lindsay DiCuirci, "Found among the Papers: Fictions of Textual Discovery in Early America," *Early American Literature*, 56.3 (2021): 809–844.

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instantiations of heteroglossia and embedding. For Bakhtin, who identifies one of the defining "stylistics" of the novel as "the transfers and switchings of languages and voices" that generate "dialogical interrelationships," heteroglossia is the linguistic expression of "specific points of view on the world, forms for conceptualizing the world in words, specific world views, each characterized by its own objects, meanings and values."[14] For Genette, after beginning with the slenderest of parenthetical definitions for embedding – "the convention of narrative embeddings (X tells Y that)" – an elaborate theoretical framework organized around "narrative level" is in order to account for the boundary crossings that transfer the reader from one narrative level and one narrator to the next, whether from inside the storyworld (the diegetic level) to outside (extradiegetic), or from the primary storyworld (diegetic) to story-within-storyworld (metadiegetic). In Genette's terminology, all of these movements across narrative level are "transgressions" of the text's discursive system.[15]

In the case of both theories, of heteroglossia and embedding, I suggest, there is something to be gained by isolating the tale-form as a distinct subset within the overarching concept. From Bakhtin's centering of voice and, particularly, of multi-voicedness, I take license to center the non-dominant voices of variable consequence that are, despite whatever limitations to their individual standing, critical players in the polyphonic chorus or chatter that is Bakhtin's vision of the novel and my own. Where I strike out from Bakhtin is in my focus on discrete forms of voicing, the individual actors and narrative entities that contribute to the systems of carnivalesque language that are his concern. From Genette, and the theorists committed to working with his tools (more on them later), I take inspiration to center "the importance of the boundary. . .*a boundary that is precisely the narrating (or the performance) itself*: a shifting but sacred

[14] Mikhail Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays*, ed. Michael Holquist, trans. with Caryl Emerson (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1981), 50, 291–292.

[15] Gérard Genette, *Narrative Discourse*, trans. Jane E. Lewin (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1980), 46, 231, 235; and *Narrative Discourse Revisited*, trans. Jane E. Lewin, (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1988), 257. Genette's preferred terminology builds on Tzvetan Todorov's distinction between "narrative as discourse" and "narrative as story," importing the word "diegesis" from film studies to describe the latter (*Narrative Discourse*, 27, n2); see Todorov, "Narrative-Men," *The Poetics of Prose*, trans. Richard Howard (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1977), 66–79. In these terms, Genette defines metalepsis as "any intrusion by the extradiegetic narrator or narratee into the diegetic universe (or by diegetic characters into a metadiegetic universe, etc.), or the inverse" (*Narrative Discourse,* 234–235). Interpolated tales fall under the parenthetical part of the definition, which reflects Genette's lesser interest in this subset of embedded narrative; so, too, does the list of examples he provides, which privileges frame tales and intrusive narrators: *Manon Lescaut*, *Tristram Shandy*, *Jacques le fataliste*, and *Wuthering Heights* (*Narrative Discourse,* 232).

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frontier between two worlds, the world in which one tells, the world of which one tells."[16] However, I find analytical benefit in centering the category of form rather than narrative level. Diverging from Genette, I concentrate my inquiry on one subfield of embedding, itself one subfield of metalepsis (all crossing between narrative levels),[17] rather than the wider catchment of temporal and scene shifts that wriggle into his net. Indeed, the interpolated tales that constitute my object of study are the variant of embedding and metalepsis of least interest to Genette.[18] Also unlike him, in making these choices I am gleefully unbound by the disciplinary restraints that led him to sidestep assignments of "primary" and to express, in confronting "the tricky subject of the relations between narrator and author," one uncharacteristic doubt, "I am not sure whether I remain within the boundaries of the properly narratological."[19] Despite such areas of difference, these two narrative theorists are core not only to the method I propose, but, to varying degrees, to the sensibility with which I pursue it.[20] While drawing on these larger theoretical schools of thought, my focus clicks into place by identifying one type of apparently superfluous

[16] Genette, *Narrative Discourse,* 236.

[17] Metalepsis operates as the more inclusive term here: While all acts of embedding fit into the category of metalepsis because of the boundary transgressions they create, not all metalepses are the result of embedding: "We will extend the term *narrative metalepsis* to all these transgressions" (Genette, *Narrative Discourse,* 235). One of Genette's privileged citations offers a useful example of the distinction and of the theorist's priorities: In naming Fielding as a quintessential case for articulating the "functions of the narrator," it is the chatty editorializing of his intrusive primary narrators, rather than the interpolated tales voiced by a series of subnarrators – and which stipple all of Fielding's novels – that draws Genette's forensic scrutiny.

[18] Frame tales and especially intrusive narrators absorb Genette's focus. See also notes 69–71.

[19] Gérard Genette, Nitsa Ben-Ari, and Brian McHale, "Fictional Narrative, Factual Narrative," *Poetics Today* 11.4 (1990): 755–74, 764. Genette takes pains to separate his theory of "unquestionable narrative subordination," which he considers a matter of indisputable narrative order, from interpretive (disputable) assignments of "possible thematic precedence" – aka, the kinds of narrative primary-ness under investigation here. *Narrative Discourse Revisited*, 90.

[20] I regret the lack of stick figures and other diagrams under my approach (cf. Genette, *Revisited*, 85). However, in my chasing after afterlives, there is, perhaps, some affinity to be found among all three approaches, and what we might consider, using Bakhtin's term, as the carnivalesque quality of Genette's narratological quest for precision. His schema catalyzes a particularly boisterous proliferation of terminology, acronyms, diagrams, and even feuds over the appropriate prefix. Mieke Bal's proposal of replacing "meta" with "hypo-" ("hypo-unit," "hypo-narrative") met not only with Genette's rejection, but his positing of "hyperdiegesis" as a preferable emendation, had such a refinement of terms been necessary, which he refuted. Bal herself later turned away from this prefix-driven terminology, preferring the distinction between "narrator's text and actor's text." Mieke Bal, *Narratologie: Essais sur la signification narrative dans quatre romans modernes* (Paris: Klincksieck, 1977), 35; "Notes on Narrative Embedding," *Poetics Today* 2 (1981): 41–59; Genette, *Narrative Discourse Revisited*, 91–92; Bal, *Narratology: Introduction to the Theory of Narrative* (2009 Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1985; reissued 2009), 56.

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tales and their cumulative archive of lost plots, as historically located in early Anglophone novels. This narrowed approach opens up new angles of inquiry for exploring the role that literary form can play in diversifying novels' range of shareable voices – and their potential for enfranchising a new body of speakers.

It is here that I want to return to the third component of my methodological approach by thinking about the formal and media concepts discussed above in the context of the performance and negotiation of gender.[21] The pages that follow maintain that reckoning with the literary history of these lost plots provides a unique arena for thinking about gender in relation to the new print novel and its simultaneous distribution of literary attention and cultural authority. Structural disadvantage inflects the gender politics of the oral-literate transition and its literary representation: Women, like other marginalized groups, simultaneously enjoy less access to literacy and print and are associated with the oral culture, that is, like them, conceived of as backwards.[22] In the eighteenth century, not only are social inequities built into women's lack of access to public speech, but also into the emerging binary understandings of print and orality. As print culture became increasingly coded as masculine, women and the unlettered came to be viewed as the stewards of oral culture, as when the women of Laputa refuse to give up the use of their tongues in Part III of *Gulliver's Travels*.[23] In invoking this cluster of problematic associations and conflations, I hope to avoid reifying a fallacious binary or falling into any

[21] Judith Butler's framework of gender performance is central to my theoretical approach, which also depends on the work of a long line of feminist theorists and literary historians of the eighteenth century, in particular Felicity Nussbaum, Harriet Guest, Mary Louise Pratt, and Paula McDowell. The influence of feminist and queer narratologists is a particular boon, and one I engage later in this Introduction. See Warhol and Lanser; see also notes 24, 73–75. Attending "Bluestockings: The Social Network," in Swansea in June 2011, gave this project an early push. Butler, "Performative Acts and Gender Constitution: An Essay in Phenomenology and Feminist Theory," in *Performing Feminisms: Feminist Critical Theory and Theatre*, ed. Sue-Ellen Case (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1990); *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (United Kingdom: Routledge, 1990); Nussbaum, *The Autobiographical Subject: Gender and Ideology in Eighteenth-Century England* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1989); Guest, *Small Change: Women, Learning, Patriotism, 1750–1810* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000); Pratt, "Arts of the Contact Zone," *Profession* (1991): 33–40; McDowell, *Invention*. Robyn Warhol and Susan S. Lanser, *Narrative Theory Unbound: Queer and Feminist Interventions* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 2015); See also, *Reconsidering the Bluestockings*, ed. Nicole A. Pohl and Betty Schellenberg, (San Marino: Huntington Library Press, 2003).

[22] See McDowell, *Invention*, 33; Ruth Perry, "'The Finest Ballads': Women's Oral Traditions in Eighteenth-Century Scotland," *Eighteenth-Century Life* 32.2 (2008): 81–97; Taylor Walle, "'These Gentlemens Ill Treatment of Our Mother Tongue': Female Grammarians and the Power of the Vernacular," *Tulsa Studies in Women's Literature* 36.1 (2017): 17–43.

[23] Jonathan Swift, *Gulliver's Travels*, (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), 173.

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sort of formal determinism or gender essentialism. Rather, my aim is to tease out some of the complexity entailed by taking a feminist approach to this puzzling literary form, which is, as Susan Lanser argues in the broader context of point of view, produced within a nexus of "complex and changing conventions that are themselves produced in and by the relations of power that implicate writer, reader, and text."[24]

Working from these premises, to attend to the oral posture of an inset tale is not to claim that it gives access to orality, but that it engages the concept of orality as a useful fiction – which, in the cases centered by this project, is specifically useful in the service of the tale's representation, and potential deconstruction, of gender and other social differences understood as a part of a putative binary.[25] In this context, the irruption of orality operates as a doubled mediation or difference, yet another technical valve for attempting to modulate readers' sense of distance and proximity to the text and the various subjectivities it voices. In focusing on these instances of literary orality linked to gender, I make no claim of definitional necessity; interpolated tales need not be orally narrated in order to count, or spoken by fictional women to count. Similarly, to say that a form affords the representation of social differences is not to say that it forecloses other conceptual content, but rather, that it provides a set of preconditions friendly to that affordance. Positioned as second class, but also primed toward reversals of power, interpolated tales supply a relatively pliable space often assigned to women's voices, to subaltern speech and other kinds of non-dominant discourse – but in a way that can prize open a set of meanings less lopsided than the supposed novel/tale binary might otherwise suggest.[26]

Only after collecting a more adequate sample size did I come to the belated realization that interpolated tales are an anything-goes category, at least as far as content is concerned. From there, a sequence of implications followed. Any content can be interpolated, the very act of which draws attention to the context created by that embedding, including to the gap

[24] Susan S. Lanser, *Fictions of Authority: Women Writers and Narrative Voice* (Cornell: Cornell University Press, 1992), 5

[25] Under this approach, interpolated tales both inscribe and undermine the logocentric and phonocentric binary of speech and writing that Jacques Derrida warns us assumes the "absolute proximity of voice and being, of voice and the meaning of being, of voice and the ideality of meaning." *Of Grammatology*, trans. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, corrected edition. (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1997), 12.

[26] Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, "Can the Subaltern Speak?" in *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture*, ed. Cary Nelson and Lawrence Grossberg (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1988): 271–313.

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that both separates and joins perspectives in an awkward syzygy. For the purpose of interpretation, that gap matters, as does the relation between the speakers and the positions they inhabit. The oddity of their status, positioned as seemingly auxiliary but dynamic in a way that remains open to other arrangements, makes the tale-form useful as a versatile node of difference, the cue that we are shifting between standpoints, and with that shift, entering a new epistemological field – or, at least, the possibility of one. In my view, the overheated response these tales tend to elicit is a consequence of the fact that, in eighteenth-century novels, speech operates as an index for personhood and a precondition for various kinds of social legitimacy, political, legal, and cultural. If, as Chad Wellmon and Brad Pasanek have suggested, print is the medium through which thought becomes public,[27] I suggest that the print novel affords a space where speech becomes both public and pluralized, attachable to a variety of groups in a way that can promote the recognition of their social personhood. That potential, it bears saying, can also go unrealized or partially realized. None of these considerations is limited in any way to women speakers or to questions of gender. Rather, what I am suggesting is that the novel/tale structure generates a formal slippage conducive to the unsettling of, along with the A plot/B plot relation, other putative binaries, of primary/nonprimary, masculine/feminine, orality/print, X/Y.

As I hope this Introduction begins to make plain, the work of shifting between perspectives is frequently perceived as a vexing transaction; it is a game not all readers are willing to play. Interpolated tales provide readers with an opportunity to exercise empathy alongside perspective shift, but that is only one of a suite of options. Other responses of dismissal, nonengagement, and boredom are possible and, perhaps, equally possible. The fact that reader response determines how to reconcile a possible clash between perspectives – and, crucially, whether or not any such clash is heard – is the feature that keeps interpolated tales so alive to interpretation, remediation, and discursive commentary. Long before these tales had inspired a cottage industry of critical jousting, the work they do to represent and explore the concept of social difference was already, in the eighteenth century, of particular urgency as recurring interactions with strangers become the fabric of the nation state and emblem of

[27] Brad Pasanek and Chad Wellmon, "Enlightenment, Some Assembly Required," in *The Eighteenth Centuries: Global Networks of Enlightenment*, ed. David T. Gies and Cynthia Wall (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2018): 14–39.

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modernity.[28] The capsule narratives that document such random encounters can, in their ironizing disposition, take on a function of reflection and distortion similar to that of the "counter-sites" that Foucault theorized as heterotopias, "a kind of effectively enacted utopia in which the real sites . . . are simultaneously represented, contested, and inverted."[29] It is a similar, topsy-turvy quality and orientation, a slippy-ness to the point of now-you-see-them-now-you-don't, that can make interpolated tales a fascinating object of study for those inclined to pause long enough to consider the alternative stories that may strike others as an unwanted bonus.

Lost Plots argues that any given novel can construct what amounts to its own gender theory by means of this narrative form, and that attending to this forgotten body of evidence opens up new accounts of gendered speech and power. Collating these elusive tales and the flood of discourse they have generated repositions early novels as already engaged with the pluralization of concepts that currently defines eighteenth-century studies. In taking this angle of inquiry and focusing on English-language print culture, I participate in a line of research that moves away from exclusionary and consolidated definitions of the novel as a vehicle for formal realism (Watt) or a tool for shaping middle-class feminine subjectivity (Armstrong),[30] toward mobile concepts that emphasize the formal diversity of the early novel and characterize it as a collection of genres (Raven and Garside), of formal devices (Paige), or as an epistemological form that can productively be treated "as theory" (Lubey, Tierney-Hynes, Kramnick, Nersessian).[31] One advantage of this approach is its promotion of alternatives to binary thinking as central to the experience of novel reading.

[28] Michael Warner, *Publics and Counterpublics* (New York: Zone, 2002), 75; James Vernon, *Distant Strangers: How Britain Became Modern* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2014), 13; Janet Sorensen, *Strange Vernaculars: How Eighteenth-Century Slang, Cant, Provincial Languages, and Nautical Jargon Became English* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2017), 2.

[29] Michel Foucault, "Of Other Spaces," trans. Jay Miskowiec *Diacritics* 16.1 (1986): 22–27, 24. This text published a manuscript Foucault used to deliver a lecture, "Des espaces autres" (Conférence au Cercle d'études architecturales, March 14, 1967).

[30] Watt, *Rise of the Novel*; Nancy Armstrong, *Desire and Domestic Fiction: A Political History of the Novel* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987).

[31] James Raven and Antonia Forster, *The English Novel 1770–1829: A Bibliographical Survey of Prose Fiction Published in the British Isles. Volume I: 1770–1799* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000); Peter Garside and Rainer Schöwerling, *The English Novel, 1770–1829: A Bibliographical Survey of Prose Fiction Published in the British Isles. Volume II: 1800–1829*. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000); Nicholas Paige, *Before Fiction: The Ancien Régime of the Novel* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2011); Kathleen Lubey and Rebecca Tierney-Hynes, "Introduction: The Novel as Theory," *The Eighteenth Century: Theory and Interpretation* 61.2 (Summer 2020): 141–148; Jonathan Kramnick and Anahid Nersessian, "Form and Explanation," *Critical Inquiry* 43 (Spring 2017): 650–669.

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Interpolated tales, in their potential to act as whole narratives – narratives with the capacity to stand alone – split the ground of narrative authority and provide an opportunity for an elastic pluralization of point of view that remains open to rearrangement. They solicit, as I began to suggest in the Preface, an antibinarist reading process in which tales can be read in their own right, alongside the novel that contains them, and in the context of other settings in which they do or might appear – or, in the case of later abridgment or bowdlerization, no longer appear. Their critical contexts are immanently and I would argue, productively, more than two. Thus, the value of recuperating this archive lies, in part, in the less hierarchical methodology it invites us to practice and in its foregrounding of reader choice as always already pluralized. It is, indeed, baked into the formal structure of early novels in ways that had become invisible to us, despite our recurrent stumbling over them.

A Peculiar History: Interpolated Tales and Their Readers

What is the value of interruption? *Lost Plots* arrives at this question only after its catalyzing act of recognition: Construing interpolated tales as a formal category worthy of analysis allows us to map an unfamiliar landscape, in which such tales are all but omnipresent in eighteenth-century novels and yet singled out by their first readers and critics as an interpretive problem. Writing in the wake of Cervantes, a diverse constellation of early Anglophone novelists propagated stories-within-stories as a conventional part of the novel, a fact that didn't bar tale-authors like Henry Fielding from cudgeling the same form in their critical writing. Some readers, including John Cleland, Lady Mary Wortley Montagu, Elizabeth Montagu, and Thomas Gray, declared themselves fans of inset stories, sometimes preferring them to their containing novels.[32] Meanwhile, scholars since the eighteenth century have seized on the tales of Cervantes and of his disciples, but particularly of Henry Fielding, as what Foucault has termed (in quite a different context) an "incitement to discourse." Or, perhaps, more neutrally, they operate as what Jeffrey

[32] John Cleland, Review of Tobias Smollett, *The Adventures of Peregrine Pickle*, *The Monthly Review*, March 1751, iv, 355–364; Lady Mary Wortley Montagu to Lady Bute, February 16, 1752, *The Complete Letters of Lady Mary Wortley Montagu*, ed. Robert Halsband (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1967), 3:9; Elizabeth Montagu, *Elizabeth Montagu: The Queen of the Blue-Stockings, Her Correspondence from 1720 to 1761*, ed. Emily J. Climenson, 2 vols. (London: John Murray, 1906), 2:2; Thomas Gray to Horace Walpole, March 3, 1751, in *The Letters of Thomas Gray*, ed. Duncan C. Tovey, vol. 1 (London: G. Bell, 1900–1912), 212.

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Williams has identified as a "site for critical performance" that has yielded scores of publications, most of them focusing on a single author.[33] All three of these scenarios, of literary adaptation, reader response, and academic inquiry, prove that interpolated tales can function, "not as mere adjuncts," as Cid Hamet speculated, but as productive and potentially independent entities across many contexts.

This project, then, argues that interpolated tales, as a category, constitute a collection of stories that has tended to be unnoticed, dismissed, or outright discarded – but one that has, nonetheless, been accumulating since the earliest days of the novel, documenting a more inclusive range of now-recuperable perspectives and of formal experiments with different ways of telling the story. Acknowledging the validity and persistence of this category holds the potential to transform how we read not only these constitutionally overlookable tales, but also the novels in which they appear and the media environment in which both circulate. By providing a form for speaking across differences, these purportedly surplus narratives help to illuminate the role that novels can play in shaping how we understand the concepts of perspective, social personhood, and the unbounded diversity that characterizes both – but also the limitations and erasures that trouble that understanding.

Lost Plots makes no claim to locate the birthplace of interpolated tales in the eighteenth century, or anywhere else, for that matter. Though I begin this Introduction with an epigraph from *Don Quixote*, I do not mean to crown Cervantes as the inventor of this tale-form. Its association with orality gestures back toward the prehistoric in a way that can be seen as predating the novel. That an elemental form should have many progenitors at every scale, including oral storytelling, the classical novel, Biblical parables, *The Arabian Nights*, travelogues and traveller's tales of all sorts, and the episodic structure of the courtly romances both mocked and imitated by Cervantes is, perhaps, not surprising.[34] As suggested by the

[33] Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality Volume I: An Introduction*, trans. R. Hurley (London: Penguin Books, 1978), 33. For scholars' supposed over-attendance of Fielding's interpolated tales, see Williams and Hume. Jeffrey Williams, "The Narrative Circle: The Interpolated Tales in *Joseph Andrews*," *Studies in the Novel* 30 (1998): 473–488; Robert D. Hume, "Fielding at 300: Elusive, Confusing, Misappropriated, or (Perhaps) Obvious?" *Modern Philology* 108.2 (2010): 224–262, 257.

[34] Monika Fludernik's "natural narratology" centers oral forms in her literary history and narratological methodology, stating as one goal "situating conversational storytelling at the very heart" of her new approach. *Towards a "Natural" Narratology*. 1996. (Reprint, London and New York: Routledge, 2002), x. See also Mary Louise Pratt, *Toward a Speech Act Theory of Literary Discourse* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1977); Marina Warner, *Stranger Magic: Charmed States and the Arabian Nights* (London: Chatto & Windus, 2011); John J. Winkler, *Auctor and*

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example of *Arabian Nights* alone, embedded narratives, whether those tales are structured as frames or insets, occur across languages as well as historical periods such that there is a case to be made for the broader category to be considered a universal phenomenon; this is the case made by narratologist Werner Wolf when he describes the history of frame stories as coterminous with "literary storytelling (and storywriting) itself."[35] Viewed as one variant participating in this wider context, interpolated tales materialize as observably transhistorical; hence, I make no claim for them as originary forms or for their newness, a refusal to pinpoint formal conception historically that extends to my understanding of eighteenth-century novels. As Michael North has shown us in the context of modernism, claims to newness in aesthetics are themselves an artful pose.[36] In similar vein, I contend that ascribing newness to the novel form always reduces to a question of what counts as a novel; see also perseverating debates about novel *v.* romance.[37] For the purposes of this project, any claim to newness is historically, not formally, located in the media environment that provided the technology and markets to produce and consume print novels, part of a genre that stands in a different relation to both manuscript and orality than even the lengthy prose fictions that precede them.

It is in this context that Cervantes played a critical role in shaping how eighteenth-century authors and audiences conceptualized both the new media technology of the print novel and the inset tales – whether fictions of orality or found manuscripts – that dapple it and can travel beyond it. (Trust Cervantes to anticipate both the found manuscript and oral tale traditions!) As J. A. G. Ardila and others have shown, *Quixote* served as

Actor: A Narratological Reading of Apuleius's The Golden Ass (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1985); Paul Ricoeur, "Paul Ricoeur on Biblical Hermeneutics," *Semeia* 4 (1975): 29–145; J. Hillis Miller, "Parable and performative in the Gospels and in modern literature," in *The Postmodern Bible Reader* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2001); Susan E. Colón, *Victorian Parables* (London: Continuum International Publishing Group, 2012); Srinivas Aravamudan, *Enlightenment Orientalism*; Robert J. Clements and Joseph Gibaldi, *Anatomy of the Novella: The European Tale Collection from Boccaccio and Chaucer to Cervantes* (New York: New York University Press, 1977).

[35] Thanks to Paul Spickard for the timely reminder of embedding's global scope across languages. Werner Wolf, "Framing Borders in Frame Stories," in *Framing Borders in Literature and Other Media*, *Studies in Intermediality, 1* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2006), 179–206, 201.

[36] Michael North, *Novelty: A History of the New* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2013). "The complex nature of the new – its debt, even as revolution, to the past, and the way in which new works are often just recombinations of traditional elements – is not just confessed by this practice but insisted on" (169).

[37] Scott Black provides a thorough account of how these categories are used to define each other. *Without the Novel: Romance and the History of Prose Fiction* (Charlottesville, 2019), 1–6. See also note 38.

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"the gold standard of the novel" in English throughout the century,[38] "a sort of common property, a universal classic, equally tasted by the court and the cottage," in the eyes of Hester Lynch Piozzi, a "book of entertainment" that Samuel Johnson ranked second only to *The Iliad*, whose Book 10 is itself a grotesque interpolation of uncertain authorship.[39] Ranging from openly admiring adventures like *Joseph Andrews* (see Chapter 1) and *Tristram Shandy* (1759–1767) to the dozen explicitly quixotic novels published after *The Female Quixote* (1752),[40] many of these English *Quixotes* replicated the original's "idle Stories" and continued to ruminate upon their literary status in similar aesthetic terms, attacking them as false, inartistic, and single-minded, or defending them as artful, diverting, and diversifying.

What I hope will be a clarifying example demonstrates that this mutability, of the part that is capable of being a whole, has discomfited critics from the earliest days of novel theory. In a pamphlet-length exegesis, "An Essay on The New Species of Writing founded by Mr. Fielding" (1751), the anonymous author, most likely the belle-lettrist clergyman Francis Coventry, dismissed Henry Fielding's interpolated tales as "Freckles" and "Blemishes" that mar the otherwise "Fair Complexions" of his books.[41] His rhetoric of somatized disgust is a signal that makes plain how the formal boundary between novel and tale, print and orality, doubles as a social boundary between narrator and tale-teller, and that the invoked mutilation of "Fair Complexions" is directed most pointedly at female bodies. This is the logic that inspires my argument that interpolated tales, by providing an arena for conceptualizing and contesting literary form and social difference, also provide a privileged site for the investigation of gender. In the context of gender inequity, the unfixed nature of the tale-form unlocks an interpretive space that is particularly satisfying in its orientation toward reversals of power. In part, that openness is formally

[38] J. A. G. Ardila, *The Cervantean Heritage: Reception and Influence of Cervantes in Britain* (London: Legenda, 2009), 10. See also See also Ronald Paulson, *Don Quixote in England: The Aesthetics of Laughter* (Baltimore and London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1998); and John Skinner, "*Don Quixote* in 18th-Century England: A Study in Reader Response," *Cervantes: Bulletin of the Cervantes Society of America* 7.1 (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1987): 45–57.

[39] Hester Lynch Piozzi, *Anecdotes of the late Samuel Johnson, L.L.D. during the last twenty years of his life* (London: T. Cadell, 1786), 281. Daniel Mendelsohn, "Battle Lines: A Slimmer, Faster Iliad," *The New Yorker* (November 7, 2011). www.newyorker.com/magazine/2011/11/07/battle-lines-daniel-mendelsohn

[40] At least a dozen books with variants on *The [Modern, City, Country, Amicable, Benevolent, Infernal, or Political,* respectively*] Quixote* were published between 1752 and 1820. Ardila, *Cervantean Heritage*, 12.

[41] Coventry, *New Species of Writing*, 264.

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encoded because the edge that both separates and joins the two narrators' separate personhood also cleaves an explanatory gap – what is the relation between the two narrators, container and contained, big and small? By what principles might the reader discern that relation? The transitional zone between narratives recues the reader's choice, in terms of interpretation but also of reading method, whether to adopt a different mode of attention or to read on at all. In so doing, that gap, constituted in part by white space on the page, simultaneously risks the charismatic bond between narrator and reader and offers a sort of flexible cache for potential meanings, as subtext and affect flow into its negative space.[42] In this way, it instantiates the interference, or "static," that Michel Serres asserts is always part of the communicative environment.[43] That all of this "noise" buzzes around a negative space marks it as an "enigma" in the sense theorized by Roland Barthes, but one that aggravates many readers by its frequently overt lack of connection to narrative drive.[44] It is because interpolated tales are structured by an unresolveably enigmatic gap that they issue such a persistent call to interpretation, an invitation that abides, though it may go unheeded, or unheard.

The errors of taste singled out for censure by Coventry play an essential role in the formation of an evolutionary logic that privileges novels as an adaptive form that emerges out of the increasingly obsolete romance, a teleological approach to literary history of which I am skeptical but which casts light on the priorities of various readers. In the context of debates that developed what amounts to a stadial theory of pleasure reading, interrupting stories are dismissed as vehicles of the "temporal recursion" that Scott Black has more recently theorized to recuperate romance as the "alter ego" and "respondent" to the novel.[45] With conspicuous frequency, early novel critics point to Cervantes's and Fielding's tales as the exemplars of this poor form, which they argue is primitive and inappropriate to the novel as a modern genre. In 1795, Richard Cumberland posited the general rule,

[42] This connection between silence and subtext came out of Joseph Roach's virtual conference paper and the subsequent Q&A. "Phlogiston: The Stuff that Isn't There," video presentation, ASECS Convention 2021, April 8, 2021.

[43] Michel Serres, *The Parasite,* trans. Lawrence Schehr (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1983), 52. For Serres, encounters with the "noise" of difference are what keep language dynamic, "Positions change" (53).

[44] Roland Barthes, *S/Z: An Essay*. (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1974).

[45] Scott Black pushes back against by the retrospectively imposed bias toward realism by articulating "a different, less modern, less linear story of romance, in which romance isn't only the prehistory of the novel but also its alter ego, contemporary, complement – and its respondent" (*Without the Novel*, 19).

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"whatever makes a pause in the main business, and keeps the chief characters too long out of sight, must be a defect," thereby reasoning that "the adventures of *the Man of the Hill*, in the Foundling" comprise "an excrescence that offends against the grace and symmetry of the plot." Carrying this logic to its limit case led him to the conclusion that Cervantes's use of such "episodical stories" disqualifies *Don Quixote* as a novel, instead rendering it "of a middle species" in the presumed march of progress away from romance.[46] The word "excrescence," with its connotations of the ugly and unfit and tinge of the scatological, was later reiterated by Walter Scott and eventually Ian Watt, both of whom used it to attack the inset tales of Smollett and Fielding, respectively – texts which, not coincidentally, form the subjects of next two chapters.[47] In the influential *Biographical Memoirs* (1821), Scott codified a chain of transmission for the form he defined pejoratively as "a separate tale, thrust into the work, with which it has no sort of connexion, in the manner introduced by Cervantes, and followed by Le Sage and Fielding." In a theory/praxis wobble typical of this debate, Scott, like Cervantes and Fielding before him, damned such "separate" tales as a failure of form and yet continued to compose his own for inclusion in *The Antiquary* (1816) and *Redgauntlet* (1824), whose "Wandering Willie's Tale" is among Scott's most anthologized pieces of writing.[48] Over the course of the nineteenth century, such "episodical stories" came to be called interpolated tales, my preferred nomenclature despite the many complications to which I will return in the next section. Their status as "a pause in the main business" and an internal other to the novel spooks readers with the sense of having lost the plot, and their critical reception became a zone for contesting what to do with plots and perspectives that otherwise might not matter – or, at least might not matter according to our traditional methods of assessment.

Academic debates over the value of these formal curiosities date back to the founding of English Departments and the consolidation of literary analysis as a discipline. Beginning with the institutionalization of eighteenth-century studies by figures like Wilbur Cross, a series of scholars

[46] Cumberland, *Henry*, 216; *Observer*, 332.

[47] Walter Scott, "Tobias Smollett" in *Biographical Memoirs of Eminent Novelists and Other Distinguished Persons,* vol. 1 (Edinburgh: Robert Cadell, 1834), 132. Watt, 268.

[48] Thanks to Ian Duncan for alerting me to Scott's tales, which Daniel Cook has recently branded "Scott's wandering tales," as part of his argument that they "ought to be treated as separate stories." "Scott's Wandering Tales," *European Romantic Review* 34.1 (2023): 47–65, 47. Walter Scott, *The Antiquary*, ed. David Hewitt (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1995); Scott, *Redgauntlet*, ed. G. A. M. Wood and David Hewitt (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1997).

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have seized on interpolated tales as a body of evidence versatile enough to supply any methodology.[49] The foregrounding of form made these intact tales a boon first for the New Critics,[50] and then for structuralists and post-structuralists, especially classical narratologists, who accounted for the tales' splitting of narrative level as part of the broader theory of embedding.[51] Later, New Historians and novel theorists of all stripes, but especially postmodernists, identified them as a marker of ideological change or as a driver of literary desire.[52] These generations of twentieth- and twenty-first century scholars have used interpolated tales as a testing ground for formal and cultural debates that invoke terms strikingly like the ones Coventry established in 1751 – or Cervantes's, from 1615. Probability, formal unity, and the putative distinction between realism and romance all seem to hang in the balance. A sequence of fundamental questions arises: How do we define this evasive form? Once named, by what means, and to what extent, can we isolate its function? Almost always, formal exegeses conclude on an evaluative note: Is the novel's inclusion of these tales justified? If so, on what basis? From early days, an anxiety about falling into some sort of aesthetic ouroboros hangs over the scholarship. We can hear this unease when, by 1968, Douglas Brooks could, in an article that called for "a critical survey of the interpolated-episode device," voice faux exasperation in his title, "The Interpolated Tales in *Joseph Andrews* Again" or, in 1998, when the narratologist Jeffrey Williams speculated that the tales' "very irrelevance" acts as a "spur" to "disproportionate amounts of critical attention."[53] What this "disproportionate" critical reception can help us to see ("Again"!) is that inset tales of unknown consequence pose a specific set of interpretive dilemmas for

[49] Wilbur Cross, *The History of Henry Fielding* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1918), 352–353.

[50] For examples, see Irvin Ehrenpreis, "Fielding's Use of Fiction: The Autonomy of *Joseph Andrews*," in *Twelve Original Essays on Great English Novels*, ed. Charles Shapiro (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1960), 34.

[51] Genette, *Narrative Discourse* and *Narrative Discourse, Revisited*. See also note 69–76.

[52] See J. Paul Hunter, *Before Novels: The Cultural Contexts of Eighteenth-Century English Fiction* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1990), 47; Michael McKeon, *The Origins of the English Novel, 1600–1740* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1987), 279; John Barth, "Tales within Tales within Tales," *Antaeus* 43 (New York: Ecco Press, Autumn 1981): 45–63; William Nelles, *Frameworks: Narrative Levels and Embedded Narrative* (New York: Peter Lang, 1997), and "Stories within Stories: Narratives Levels and Embedded Narrative," in *Narrative Dynamics: Essays on Time, Plot, Closure, and Frames*, ed. Brian Richardson (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 2002): 339–353; Jeffrey J. Williams, *Theory and the Novel: Narrative Reflexivity in the British Tradition* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998): 51–98.

[53] Douglas Brooks, "The Interpolated Tales in *Joseph Andrews* Again," *Modern Philology* 65.3 (February 1968): 208–213, 208. Williams, "Narrative Circle," 473.

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readers without supplying fixed principles for resolving them. In this typical case, Brooks and Williams seem to stake out opposed positions. While Brooks suggests that something about the "device" eludes our scholarly detection, Williams argues that it ensnares us. In part, *Lost Plots* seeks to understand how the formal construction of interpolated tales affords both effects, fluttering on the edge or flooding our field of vision.

At base, *Lost Plots* argues that interpolated tales, once recognized as a formal category, can supply an as-yet unheeded archive that affords a particular political analysis useful for advancing less restrictive ideas about gender. This argument invites a dynamic reading process that considers its object at different levels of scale and in different contexts. As single units of analysis, interpolated tales hold value in their own right; indeed, their brevity and intactness make them catnip for close reading as well as textual readymades, prime for the lifting. At the same time, they offer insight into the novels and variety of afterlives in which they appear, the media environment that produced both novels and tales, and the reading practices by which they were consumed, whether interpreted, skimmed, or skipped entirely. While two centuries of critics have dismissed these tales as "excrescences" and questioned if they are "worth the telling," I argue that, in setting apart such moments as discrete narratives, early novels developed new techniques for representing various social differences and with them a more fluid structure for negotiating the shifting interrelation between speech and power.[54] Frequently figured as fictions of orality, interpolated tales stick out awkwardly in print texts otherwise invested in training readers to accept the nuts and bolts of fictionality, including techniques that would, by the nineteenth century, enable and privilege textual disembodiment, narratorial omniscience, and its diversifier, free indirect discourse.[55] Indeed, it is my suspicion that interpolated tales, by training

[54] Cumberland, *Henry*, 216; Martin Battestin, *The Moral Basis of Fielding's Art* (Middletown: Wesleyan University Press, 1959), 119.

[55] Fludernik raises similar concerns in her memorable phrasing, "pseudo-oral types of storytelling" (*Towards*, 3). For in-depth treatments of free indirect discourse, see Dorrit Cohn, *Transparent Minds: Narrative Modes for Presenting Consciousness in Fiction* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1978); Ann Banfield, *Unspeakable Sentences: Narration and Representation in the Language of Fiction* (Abingdon: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1982); Frances Ferguson, "Jane Austen, Emma, and the Impact of Form," *MLQ* 61.1 (March 2000): 157–180; D. A. Miller, *Jane Austen: Or, The Secret of Style* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2003); John Bender, *Imagining the Penitentiary: Fiction and the Architecture of Mind in Eighteenth-Century England* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987); Michael McKeon, *Theory of the Novel: A Historical Approach*, ed. Michael McKeon (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2000), 485–491; Anna Kornbluh, "Freeing Impersonality: The Objective Subject in Psychoanalysis and Sense & Sensibility," in *Knots: Post-Lacanian Psychoanalysis, Literature and Film*, ed. Jean-Michel Rabaté (New York and Abingdon:

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readers to be "hear" the shift between different fictional voices, act as a predecessor form that paves the way for the development of free indirect discourse, which in turn, largely but never entirely, supplants it. In experimenting with new techniques that expanded the range of hearable voices, early novels both explored and influenced the link between speech, social personhood, and cultural authority. Women speakers are particular beneficiaries of this experimentation.

To pan out from the history of the novel, interpolated tales offer a body of evidence relevant to two of the most active debates in eighteenth-century studies and in the field of literary analysis, debates that are themselves linked. First is the search for interpretive methods directed toward a more equitable version of plurality rather than a calcified vertical hierarchy, a movement necessitated by "the pluralization" of concepts entailed by the ethical imperative to acknowledge the eighteenth century as global and Enlightenments as nonsingular.[56] And second is the renewal of interest in literary form and the urgency of revisiting our different methods for approaching it, an imperative persuasively argued by New Formalism and its skeptics, a series of English Institutes c. 2009–2013, and more recently, Kathleen Lubey and Rebecca Tierney-Hynes's special issue of *The Eighteenth Century,* "The Novel as Theory" (2020).[57] These recent debates about the nature and hermeneutic value of form have evoked violent analogy to method war, in wry recognition that, academic as this conversation may be, its stakes seem to be nothing less than the justification of literary analysis as we know it and the continued funding of the English departments within which scholars perform its transmission. Part of this debate manifests as what Marjorie Levinson has called "form-talk," the regular flare ups of consternation over our field's lack of consensus about a definition of form, or even the possibility of its definition.[58] One influential response to these concerns has been Caroline Levine's deconstruction of the distinction between "the *formal* and the *social,*" with her

Routledge, 2019); Anna Kornbluh, *Immediacy, Or The Style of Too Late Capitalism* (London: Verso, 2023).

[56] David Gies and Cynthia Wall, *The Eighteenth Centuries: Global Networks of Enlightenment* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2018), 1.

[57] The introduction to that special issue contains a distilled account of the form debates. Kathleen Lubey and Rebecca Tierney-Hynes, "Introduction: The Novel as Theory," *The Eighteenth Century: Theory and Interpretation* 61.2 (Summer 2020): 141–148.

[58] See *Critical Inquiry* for an influential series of articles on the topic. Jonathan Kramnick and Anahid Nersessian, "Form and Explanation," *Critical Inquiry* 43 (Spring 2017); Marjorie Levinson, "Critical Response III: Response to Jonathan Kramnick and Anahid Nersessian, 'Form and Explanation,'" *Critical Inquiry* 44 (Autumn 2017): 144–155.

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subsequent aim to dissolve "the troubling gap between the form of the literary text and its content and context."[59] My approach differs from Levine's on this claim. To demur, the erasure of such gaps, however, "troubling" they may be, seems to me, exactly not the point. Instead, my project plunges into the exploration of the values at stake in the explanatory gaps constructed between tales and novels, one instantiation of the "troubling gap" that Levine's methodology aspires to splice. Attending to such moments of narrative static is all the more urgent because they are, so frequently in early novels, the space where questions of social difference are negotiated.

Accordingly, to gather insight into the contestation of cultural power, I focus on the tools that literary analysis provides for the clash between two narratives, including what amounts to a reckoning with and sometimes interpretation of negative space. This approach aspires to contribute to the ongoing refinement of the "working vocabulary" that Jonathan Kramnick and Anahid Nersessian have identified as a necessary precondition for the naming of form, which is, therefore, always "partially demonstrative," "ostensive," and "inquiry relative."[60] In the terms of my project, I will argue that form becomes meaningfully observable and definable as a concept in the presence of an embedded form that is analogous in kind. In this subset of embedding, a like-within-like form can, as a result of that likeness, both reduplicate and clarify by contrast the contour and attributes of the containing form. Taking inspiration from Barbara Johnson's crucial distinction of differences "between" and "within," interpolated tales can enact both operations as a result of their refusal to abide by fixed inside/outside, part/whole relations: "A difference *between* opposing forces presupposes that the entities in conflict be knowable. A difference *within* one of the entities in question is precisely what problematizes the very *idea* of

[59] Caroline Levine, *Forms: Whole, Rhythm, Hierarchy, Network* (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2015), 1, 2, 3, 6. Levine's exploded definition makes form synonymous with "all shapes and configurations, all ordering principles, all patterns of repetition and difference," each of which, "social or literary, lays claim to a limited range of potentialities." My own approach hews more closely to a feminist and queer narratological approach, articulated by Susan Lanser as the recognition that "form functions *as* textual, historical, and social content," and, moreover, of a long history for this way of thinking, "Literary theorists from Aristotle to Jameson have long acknowledged that form is a kind of content and, as such, socially meaningful" (36). "Toward (a Queerer and) More (Feminist) Narratology," *Narrative Theory Unbound: Queer and Feminist Interventions* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 2015).

[60] Jonathan Kramnick and Anahid Nersessian, "Form and Explanation," 661, 651, 652. In their argument, form is knowable only in the context of the field that provides a structure and vocabulary for its naming; it is inseparable from "the explanation through which it comes into view and whose ends it serves" (651).

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an entity in the first place, rendering the 'legal point of view' inapplicable."[61] Once we have named interpolated tales as significant forms and inventoried the components with which they are made, we can turn to questions of value and assessment, including how their redistribution of literary attention clears a space for legitimizing a wider range of points of view, while reminding us that the labor of hearing other perspectives is always unfinished business.

Nomenclature and Definition

What exactly counts as an interpolated tale? A working definition might describe the form simply as a "tale-within-a-tale" or a "twice-told tale," discourse generated within the storyworld that is first told by a fictional character to other fictional characters, and implicitly retold by the narrator to the reader. However, there is no critical consensus about definition or the related matter of nomenclature. For eighteenth-century critics, operating without our developed framework of literary terminology, the most common term is simply "Stories," a capacious usage that depended on context to denominate the inset stories being theorized but not yet named by Coventry, Cumberland, and Scott. While the noun phrase "interpolated tale" seems to be a nineteenth-century development, the verb "interpolate" was in common use by the eighteenth century, most often in reference to texts in one of two senses, either their assessed legitimacy or fraudulence or their revision and renewal. Edward Phillips's *New World of Words* (1706) defined "interpolate" as "(properly to bring old things to a new form), to new vamp ... to alter or falsify an Original."[62] Samuel Johnson's *Dictionary* (1755) participated in the familiar pro and con shuffle by assigning two definitions, the first of which invokes a spatial register and the second a temporal one: "to foist anything into a place to which it does not belong" and "to renew; to begin again; to carry on with intermissions."[63] Sometime in the nineteenth century, classical languages seem to have provided the context that introduced the phrasing "interpolated tale" into English. The earliest instances I have been able to locate date back to 1838, when the eccentric folklorist Thomas Keightley's

[61] Barbara Johnson, *The Critical Difference: Essays in the Contemporary Rhetoric of Reading* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1980), 106.
[62] Edward Phillips, *The New World of Words, or Universal English Dictionary*, 6th ed. (London: J. Phillips, etc., 1706), 369.
[63] Johnson, *Dictionary*, 1:1115. Like Phillips, Johnson gave entries for "interpolate," "interpolation," and "interpolator."

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Mythology of Ancient Greece and Italy used it to refer to an inset bard's tale from *The Odyssey*, and shortly thereafter, in 1841, when it appeared in Charles Anthon's *A Classical Dictionary*.[64]

Today, although the phrasing "interpolated tale" populates thousands of scholarly articles and monographs, it is omitted from many influential reference guides, notably the many editions of M. H. Abrams' *A Glossary of Literary Terms.* Others, like *The Oxford Dictionary of Literary Terms,* include "interpolation" under etymologically-driven, restrictive definitions, "A passage inserted into a text by some later writer, usually without the authority of the original author; or the act of introducing such additional material."[65] Although noticeably underrepresented in such reference guides, the term "interpolated tale" has been in frequent use throughout the twentieth century. Running an Ngram search of Googlebooks finds occurrences of the phrase escalating in the century's first decade and then booming since the late 1940s.[66] On top of that mismatch between usage and classification, the question of nomenclature is further complicated by the fact that generations of scholars have coined alternative formulations. As one might expect, narratologists have their own intricate – and disputed – terminology, largely building on or contesting Genette's theory of "embedding," a welter of critical perspectives I will discuss here while differentiating my own approach. In a thumbnail sketch of sorts, the definition of embedding is given by the influential encyclopedias and dictionaries that codify narratology as "the literary device of the 'story within a story,' the structure by which a character in a narrative text becomes the narrator of a second narrative text framed by the first one," and "embedded narrative" as "a narrative within a narrative; a metadiegetic narrative"; Mieke Bal's posited alternative, "hypodiegetic," also has its adherents.[67] But the quest for a more perfect phrasing is not limited to narratologists: J. Paul Hunter prefers

[64] Thomas Keightley, *The Mythology of Ancient Greece and Italy*, 2nd ed. (London: Whittaker and Co., 1838), 109; Charles Anthon, *A Classical Dictionary: containing an account of the principal proper names mentioned in ancient authors . . . Together with an account of coins, weights and measures, etc* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1841), 1394.

[65] Dan S. Norton and Peters Rushton, *A Glossary of Literary Terms* (New York: Farrar & Rinehart, Inc., 1941); M. H. Abrams, *A Glossary of Literary Terms: Based on the Original Version by Dan S. Norton and Peters Rushton* (New York: Rinehart, 1957); M. H. Abrams and Geoffrey Galt Harpham, *A Glossary of Literary Terms* (Stamford: Cengage Learning, 2015); Chris Baldick, ed. *The Oxford Dictionary of Literary Terms*, 3rd ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008).

[66] The results of the Ngram search: http://books.google.com/ngrams/graph?content=interpolated+tale&year_start=1800&year_end=2000&corpus=15&smoothing=3&share=

[67] *Routledge Encyclopedia of Narrative Theory*, ed. David Herman, Manfred Jahn, and Marie-Laure Ryan (London and New York: Routledge, 2005), *s.v.* "embedding," 134; Gerald Prince,

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"stories-within," Michael McKeon "digressive romance" and "digressive life story," Douglas Brooks "interpolated-episode device," and Yael Halevi-Wise "storytelling events."[68] These efforts to improve on existing terminology respond to the pressure of critics' different priorities: Plot relevance, formal unity, temporality, character depth, and speech act theory all present potential problems to be solved by a narrowed definition of "interpolated tales."

Now is perhaps the time to state explicitly what is already implied: "Interpolated tale" is not a narratological term. Rather, it is, as I will argue here, beneficial for describing a formally and, in this book at least, historically specific subtype of embedded narrative. As charted by Genette and furthered by Bal, John Barth, Shlomith Rimmon-Kenan, Fludernik, William Nelles, and Werner Wolf,[69] centering the umbrella term of "embedding" inspires many narratologists' attempts to identify a limited set of functions, often precisely numbered "types," to assign to embedded narratives, or to the act of embedding itself. With the subsuming of frame and inset tales under this overarching concept of embedding, it is perhaps unsurprising that most narratologists focus on the former subtype, with its observable structural function. This orientation toward framing persists even for those scholars who pay more attention to the difference between "frame and inset" variants, as in the case of Fludernik and Wolf.[70] Within this branch of narratology, Bal and Fludernik's refinements have been particularly influential to my approach, because, in a posited correction of Genette, they conceive of embedding as an inherently hierarchical relation, one that affords this book's claims about gender. For Bal, "an embedded unit is by definition subordinate to the unit which embeds it," while for Fludernik the two forms of embedded

A Dictionary of Narratology, revised ed. (Lincoln and London: University of Nebraska Press, 1987/2003), 25. Bal, *Narratologie*, 35; "Notes on Narrative Embedding," 48.

[68] Hunter, *Before Novels*, 47; McKeon, *Origins*, 279. Brooks, "Interpolated Tales . . . Again," 213; Yael Halevi-Wise, *Interactive Fictions: Scenes of Storytelling in the Novel* (Westport: Greenwood Publishing Group, 2003), 4.

[69] Genette, *Narrative Discourse* and *Narrative Discourse Revisited*. Bal, *Narratologie,* 35, "Notes on Narrative Embedding," 41–53; Barth, "Tales within Tales within Tales," 45–63; Shlomith Rimmon-Kenan, *Narrative Fiction: Contemporary Poetics* (London: Routledge, 1983; reissued 2002), 92–96 ; Fludernik, *Towards*, 343; William Nelles, *Frameworks* and "Stories within Stories," 339–353; Werner Wolf, "Introduction: Frames, Framings, and Framing Borders in Literature and Other Media," in *Framing Borders in Literature and Other Media*, Studies in Intermediality 1 (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2006), 1–42.

[70] Both scholars make a figure/ground distinction as part of a hierarchical interpretation. As Fludernik puts it, "If the tale is conceptualized as subsidiary to the primary story frame, a relationship of embedding obtains; if the primary story level serves as a mere introduction to the narrative proper, it will be perceived as a framing device" (343). *Towards*, 343; Werner Wolf, Introduction, 1–42.

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narrative under inspection, "frame and inset" are linked by their "subsidiary" role to a separate "primary story"; crucially, such identification of primary and non-primary narrative importance fall outside the "properly narratological" for Genette.[71] In something of a counter-narratological position, Fludernik's turn towards a "paradigm [that] is explicitly and deliberately *historical*" and her foregrounding of the narrative consequences of embodiment are analytical priorities I share.[72] They help provide a critical link between gender and form, especially when integrated with the work of feminist and queer narratologists, like Susan Lanser and Robyn Warhol, whose emphasis on standpoint theory inspires this project. For Lanser, building on the "sociological poetics" of Bakhtin and on Raymond Williams, that link occurs in the concept of "narrative voice," which is "situated at the juncture of 'social position and literary practice.'"[73] While Lanser, Warhol, and the field focus on The Narrator, and its formal mediation of ideology and authorship, rather than on the (mostly) fictional subnarrators under examination here,[74] their insights supply guiding principles for this book's approach to interpolated tales as a new body of literary evidence whose political significance for gender studies remains as-yet underexplored.[75]

Inspired in many ways by the complexity of that narratological apparatus, this book seeks to distinguish interpolated tales from that field's preferred categories, in descending order from broadest to narrowest, of metalepsis, embedding, and inset tales. One first step toward doing so is to isolate crucial differences between frame and inset that can be obscured by the umbrella term of embedding, namely 1) for frame and inset tales, their obverse roles as the subject that embeds or the object of embedding and 2)

[71] Bal, "Notes on Narrative Embedding," 48. Fludernik, *Towards*, 343. See also Genette's dismissal of "hierarchy" in a withering parenthetical, "'hierarchy' (a word I don't much care for)." *Revisited*, 91.

[72] Fludernik, *Towards*, xi.

[73] Lanser, *Fictions of Authority*, 5. See also Lanser, *The Narrative Act: Point of View in Prose Fiction* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1981), "Towards a Feminist Narratology," *Style* 20 (1986): 186–205; Robyn Warhol, *Gendered Interventions: Narrative Discourse in the Victorian Novel* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1989); Robyn Warhol and Susan S. Lanser. *Narrative Theory Unbound*. For another take on the narratological importance of "voice," see Jacob L. Mey, *When Voices Clash: A Study in Literary Pragmatics* (Berlin & New York: Mouton de Gruyter, 1999).

[74] Lanser explicitly excludes this book's (mostly) fictional tale-tellers from her study, citing Franz Stanzel's distinction between the "authorial" and "figural" modes; it is the "constructed authorial voice within and against the narrative and social conventions of her time and place" that is Lanser's object. *Fictions of Authority*, 16, 18. See also, Stanzel, *Narrative Situations in the Novel: Tom Jones, Moby-Dick, The Ambassadors, Ulysses* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1971).

[75] The terms "metalepsis" and "embedding" do not appear in the excellent index for Warhol and Lanser's comprehensive *Narrative Theory Unbound*.

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the coherent structural function always assigned to the frame, but not always assigned to the inset – or, to put it another way, a structural function that falls away in the case of inset tales that occur without a structuring frame. For narratologists, the emphasis rests on inset and frame tales that operate in paired relation as a dyad. But what about inset tales that appear without the explanatory structure of a legible framing device? In my view, this is the catalyzing difference between the inset tales theorized by narratologists and the kind of free-floating interpolated tales that populate so many eighteenth-century novels. In that usefully circumscribed context, it is the interpolated tales' lack of structural role, frequent nonnecessity, and occasional non-consequence that ignites the kind of overheated debates that first attracted my interest. While the distinction between inset and interpolated tale can, in some cases, be slender or ambiguous, it can also be analytically productive. At least, such is the argument of this book.

Despite the differences I have laid out between my project and various narratological approaches, I like to think that both Bal and Genette gesture toward the ground I am trying to occupy in moments that recognize the bounds of their own expansive projects. For Bal, the "the nature of the hypo-unit offers a very large field of research" which she "can only touch on," while making the intriguing assertion, "the more independent and complete the hypo-unit, the more problematic can its relation to the embedding unit become." Narrowing within this "large field," the interpolated tales I take as my object of study constitute one subset of what Bal "only" touches on – the intriguingly "independent and complete," and, therefore, "problematic," tales, or "hypo-units," she flags for further attention.[76] In a seemingly throwaway comment, Genette himself, invoking the long history of "second-degree narrative" as an example of metadiegetic practice, concedes that "the formal and historical study of this technique would go well beyond our intention."[77] Taking inspiration from these two comments, this book offers a "formal and historical study" of interpolated tales as one type of embedded, or "second-degree," narrative. In doing so, it aspires to mark "sufficiently" the contact zone between one formally and historically defined subset of embedded tales, and to explore the strange, or "problematic" in Bal's phrasing, power dynamic entailed by a subsidiary part whose presumed helper role is so often unexplained and sometimes absent altogether.

[76] Bal, "Notes on Narrative Embedding," 48.
[77] Genette, *Narrative Discourse*, 231–2; *Revisited,* 84.

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Lost Plots, then, recovers the history of how, from the eighteenth century onwards, readers have oscillated in their response to interpolated tales as ungainly literary forms that played out questions of who gets to speak and be heard, and which remain, to date, definitionally indistinct. In line with early critics, I propose taking a catholic approach to defining the term and indeed, prefer the plural, "interpolated tales." The tale-form's ability to inhabit oppositional positions – consonant or dissonant with the primary narrative, promoting character depth or flatness, relevant or irrelevant to the plot, and all of the shades of gray and rainbow in between – strikes me as one of its defining traits. Interpolated tales, then, are intact stories within a containing narrative that carry their own narrator, time, and space. The definition I am proposing excludes intact subnarratives that may be embedded but which entail no change in point of view; that perspective shift, in my reading, and shameless borrowing of Barbara Johnson's elegant formulation, constitutes "the critical difference" because it simultaneously entails a shift in narrative level and risks the psychological and affective bond with the established narrator.[78] Intact narratives that remain within the same point of view I would denominate episodes and place beyond the scope of this project. This distinction based on speaker is justified, I hope and suggest, by the simple fact that two centuries of readers have found such same-speaker episodes palatable in a way that clarifies the extent to which different-speaker tales stick in the throat. Intactness and perspective shift, then, are the essential properties for my working definition. As I have begun to explain, the task of defining interpolated tales is complicated by their dual status as both nonprimary parts of a main narrative and distinguishable wholes that are always at least potentially independent – potentially skippable and pluckable in a way that makes them both vulnerable and powerful.

Once we recognize how an interpolated tale's dual status as distinguishable part and intact whole allows it to move outside of its novel, we can begin to inquire how that dual status affects its function within that novel. Their positioning as secondary parts, assimilated but only partially so, makes for an awkward fit that authors, readers, and critics have greeted with condemnation, approval, confusion, and nonengagement. The fluctuation of responses to these tales and their partial assimilation as a novelistic device indicated something fundamental and anomalous about their form: The interpolated tale functions both as a device and as the form produced by that device. In this sense, the interpolated tale is a paradoxical

[78] Johnson, *Critical Difference*, 106.

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device that contains or can contain all of the other devices, including plot, character, dialogue, and even devices that we associate with novelistic scale, like chapters and paratexts. Frequently tagged, titled, and even titled-paged, like novel starter kits, these inset tales can resemble nothing so much as novels in miniature, but spawned from within the containing novel – yet another piece of evidence, if not quite proof, of the accuracy of Cid Hamet's prediction. The interpolated tale, as device and form, is thus meaningfully difficult to bring into focus because it conjures the same stuff of fiction that structures all novels. This paradox, of the part that can be a whole, of the device that contains all other devices, is the first part of my definition of interpolated tales.

The second part of my definition uncovers a connection between interpolated tales' dual status, as both part and whole, and the construction of social difference. The defining formal structure of the interpolated tale is the negative space it inscribes between itself and the novel, a seam that both separates and connects narratives, but which also represents the social boundary between subjects. Recognizing that boundary as both formal and social enables a new set of conclusions. By mediating alternative points of view and reorganizing attention, interpolated tales perform work that is crucial to the representation of difference and the recognition of the varieties of personhood.[79] They suggest that readers' attention can and should be distributed across a plurality of voices, even if this redistribution remains discomfiting and unequal. In directing literary attention to secondary speakers, often members of the lower classes, prisoners and enslaved persons, but especially women, these embedded stories promote the construction of difference as one of the animating impulses of the novel. They hold the potential, albeit sometimes unrealized, to dispute the role of nondominant voices in public discourse.

We can now also begin to understand why, after centuries of use and decades of criticism on interpolated tales, *Lost Plots* is the first full-length work to offer a critical survey of this particular subset of awkward forms and how they operate across authors during "the rise of the novel" in English. On the level of form, their dual status as part and whole makes them difficult to isolate as a category. Their near omnipresence in early novels, and their links to earlier romance forms, makes interpolated tales,

[79] Foucault and D. A. Miller remind us that the collection of such stories can also be used not to recognize personhood, but to exert "surveillance and control." Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, trans. Alan Sheridan (New York: Vintage Books, 1977), 198; D. A. Miller, *The Novel and the Police* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1988).

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perversely, harder to hold in focus. On the level of content, their association with disadvantaged groups makes them all the more susceptible to critical derision and dismissal, as well as to the yet-more insidious fate of being neither seen nor heard.

For scholars of the eighteenth century, much work remains to be done to theorize how novels promoted new reading practices and competencies, including new modes of attention. Throughout this project, I argue that interpolated tales confront readers with an interpretive dilemma: as parts that may not represent the whole, they hold and frequently wield the power to break the "law of non-contradiction" considered foundational to literary exegesis, without supplying a new principle to replace it.[80] By their nature dual and mobile, they refuse the "gentleman's agreement to take the parts of a work for the whole" that Leah Price has described as the operating premise of literary criticism.[81] Inspired by previous scholarship on the chapter, miscellanies, anthologies, anecdotes, and footnotes, this project attends to interpolated tales' status as formally set apart, unplaceable, or otherwise problematic forms, detachable pieces of the novel that operate outside established contracts between author and audience.[82] As so often the case with reader responses to this form, awkwardness encompasses both negative and positive valences: Good awkwardness is the crackle of sexual attraction, while bad awkwardness is a stone in your shoe. To assess how this clumsy form negotiates the transfer of attention, I take further inspiration from Genette, his concept of the paratext, and his narratological strategies for analyzing the edges of texts; working intratextually, I apply this method to parse the transition between the primary narrative and interpolated tale, what he would term a shift between diegetic levels.[83] Often elaborately and self-consciously constructed, these moments when attention is transferred from one speaker to another carry crucial information about how tales distinguish themselves and how pointedly their perspective differs from the primary narrative. Turning

[80] Aristotle articulated the law of non-contradiction as foundational to his method of and philosophy of analysis. *The Complete Works of Aristotle*, 2 vols, ed. Jonathan Barnes (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984).

[81] Leah Price, *The Anthology and the Rise of the Novel: From Richardson to George Eliot* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 2.

[82] Nicholas Dames, "The Chapter: A History," *The New Yorker* online (October 29, 2014), accessed March 24, 2016; Barbara M. Benedict, *Making the Modern Reader: Cultural Mediation in Early Modern Literary Anthologies* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996); Price, *Anthology*; James Robert Wood, *Anecdotes of Enlightenment: Human Nature from Locke to Wordsworth* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2019); Anthony Grafton, *The Footnote: A Curious History* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1997).

[83] Genette, *Paratexts*.

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the reader back to an awareness that narrative operates from a particular and limited standpoint,[84] interpolated tales remind us that narrative is contested by alternate perspectives or haunted by their absence.

Attention to reading practices comprises another part of this project. As a highly self-reflexive form, interpolated tales draw attention not only to the speaker but to their circle of interlocutors, a "narrative circle"[85] that includes the reader. While two centuries of literary critics have objected to inset tales for disturbing novels' flow, Peter Stallybrass offers us the fulcrum of a convincing counterargument in his assertion that the expectations of such flow, or forward propulsion, are retrospectively imposed. In the past, most reading has been a "discontinuous" practice that entailed dipping selectively into a text and skipping back and forth as directed by reader preference or practical purpose. According to Stallybrass, the notion of reading continuously from one page to the next is a modern phenomenon tethered to genre and, by the transitive property, to print: "The novel has only been a brilliantly perverse interlude in the long history of discontinuous reading."[86] I contend that interpolated tales perpetuate a kind of narrative discontinuity in harmony with this earlier mode of reading and out of key with the novel-centered expectations that were beginning to coalesce during the eighteenth century. Although many of the novels examined here are later criticized harshly for not abiding by the "continuity" that the genre of the novel itself helped to naturalize, this project seeks to demystify that naturalization and to use seemingly extraneous stories to scrutinize how novels, as part of a longer and more complex history, promote a diverse set of reading practices. Those, in turn, help to negotiate how different groups are assigned both cultural and narrative authority, here defined as the right to speak and be heard.

Chasing a Flickering Form

The six chapters of *Lost Plots* offer a literary history and survey of interpolated tales as well as a methodology for reading them. They make the case, not only that these heretofore lost plots constitute an intriguing archive, but one that offers a new perspective on novel development and

[84] Lanser, *Narrative Act, Fictions of Authority;* Warhol and Lanser, *Narrative Theory Unbound*.
[85] Williams, "Narrative Circle," 473.
[86] Peter Stallybrass, "Books and Scrolls: Navigating the Bible," in *Books and Readers in Early Modern England*, ed. Jennifer Andersen and Elizabeth Sauer (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2002), 42–79, 47.

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its push/pull relationship to shifting understandings of gender. Through a paradigmatic example from *Don Quixote*, this Introduction opened by recognizing interpolated tales as a form indigenous to the novel and yet dismissed as the negative exempla against which novels can be brought into critical focus. Similarly paradoxical impulses, of imbricated avowal and disavowal, of peevish exclamations that "too much has been written about this form!" or messianic declarations that "we are awaiting the full explanation of this form!" will continue to accumulate over the course of this book. Drawing on a diverse sampling of novels and tales by Sarah and Henry Fielding, Tobias Smollett, Sarah Scott, Frances Sheridan, Susanna Rowson, William Earle, and "Anonymous," the archive of interpolated tales assembled here testifies to a range of intricate experimentations with formal, social, and media differences. Each chapter presents a case study of a tale or set of tales that speak across or about the social difference of gender. Read together, these examples begin the process of suggestively documenting the generative complexity opened up by this particular form, which creates diverse interpretive zones around and about its narrative scenario, its relation to a containing novel, the formal techniques employed to move the reader between perspectives, the Sturm-und-Drang-to-silence polarity of reader response, and its hyper-generation of afterlives. First identifying and then theorizing interpolated tales as a category makes the complexity of these choices seeable and hearable in a way that can allow us to reconstruct a richer account of the relation between gendered speech and power, and serves as a reminder of the role that literary form can play in exposing, reinforcing, and unsettling social inequities.

My first set of case studies examine two of the most squabbled-about tales of the eighteenth century – not coincidentally, two of the tales that launched this project – and its two most securely canonized authors, Henry Fielding and Tobias Smollett. Not coincidentally, men. The controversial texts here are "The History of Leonora" from *Joseph Andrews* and *The Memoirs of a Lady of Quality* from *Peregrine Pickle*, tales that purport not only to speak across the gender binary but across an ossified, almost caricatured gender binary. In both tales, the voices of interrupting women offer jarring diversion from an overtly masculinist narrator, whose entrenched, recrudescent version of masculinity is otherwise nameable as misogyny. In the Chapter 1, I trace the long history of critical arguments that frame Fielding's interpolated tales as feminized "freckles" and "blemishes" that mar his otherwise masculine plots. That specific rhetoric of embodied revulsion is a clue that reveals how the boundary between tale

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and novel doubled as a social boundary between subjects, a realization that points toward the overlapping formal and social stakes of this project. In offering a close reading of "The History of Leonora" that contends with its intertextuality and its structuring around negative space, I argue that its singularly nuanced female subjectivity emerges from the clash of female narrator, heroine, and spiteful town gossips, all of them women whose talking about women enables a critique of the social possibilities open to them. The second chapter focuses on the problems of authorship that hover around *The Memoirs of a Lady of Quality*, and which have served as a proxy for critics' different accounts of the relation between gender and form. I demonstrate how the scandalous aristocrat Lady Vane uses her frank autobiography to voice her real marital complaints within Smollett's novel, which despite a predominating misogyny, endorses her bid to rewrite her fallen public character as a literary one. In both cases, the idea that a woman's speech could play a determinative role in conferring social legitimacy is treated as a conjectural privilege exercisable only in fiction . The resistant readings I offer here highlight the undeniable limitations of how these novels and authors think about gender, while finding room for modern readers to reengage meaningfully with these texts.

The next three chapters examine an array of novels that continue this rethinking of gender norms, but from positions that explicitly advocate for more equitable distribution of power to women and, in the final chapter, to enslaved people. These tales and novels, by Sarah Fielding, Sarah Scott, Frances Sheridan, and William Earle, propose new narrative and social possibilities that are far more radical than the resistant readings with which I began, including in their orientation toward practical and sometimes political application. Chapters 3 and 4 focus on novels by women that imagine reparative communal responses to gender-based harms, while Chapter 5 focuses on an abolitionist novel that uses the representation of gender difference as another tool for attacking chattel slavery and colonialism. Chapter 3 offers a new approach to the philosophical novels of Sarah Fielding and Sarah Scott, younger sisters to fame and zealous proponents of literary and social reform, though perhaps not in that order. Tracking their novels' trajectory away from the organizing singular narrator toward collective perspectives allows me to diagram a chain of formal experimentation that runs through Sarah Fielding's *The Adventures of David Simple* (1744) and *The Governess* (1749) through Sarah Scott's *Description of Millenium Hall* (1762). While these explicitly didactic novels seek to formulate women-centered alternatives to possessive individualism, there is a long history of other didactic novels whose

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agendas are far less liberatory. In the next chapter's case study, didacticism serves as an object of critique instead of its vehicle in Frances Sheridan's "The History of Miss Price," a captivity narrative about debt and consent embedded within *The Memoirs of Miss Sidney Bidulph* (1761). In a plot line more famously recirculated by Susanna Rowson in *Charlotte Temple* (1791; 1794) and Charles Dickens in *Nicholas Nickleby* (1838–1839), Sheridan provides a public forum for legitimating gendered harms previously silenced as too private to be shareable. As a successful speech act, the tale rebukes the novel heroine's supposedly exemplary model of female passivity and quiescence, and its form, message, and critique are reiterated in the sequel, *Conclusion of the Memoirs of Miss Sidney Bidulph*. In my final case study, William Earle's abolitionist novel *Obi; or, The History of Three-Fingered Jack* (1800) uses interpolated tales, along with other embedded forms, to vocalize multiple perspectives across cultural and racial difference, while acknowledging the vexed ethics of using a print text to speak for populations largely excluded from literacy and the literary marketplace. Interrupting the otherwise epistolary narrative, "Makro and Amri, An African Tale" allows an enslaved mother to transmit her native Feloop culture to her Jamaica-born son, inspiring him to lead the rebellion for which they both die fighting. Thus allying herself with violence and animating the plot, Amri emerges as one of the most powerful female speakers in late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century fiction. Under this approach, the colonial hierarchy of speaker and spoken for emerges as another lopsided power relation available to be acknowledged, denaturalized, and perhaps undermined once we observe and name the ironic breach between novel and tale.

Over the course of these chapters, I develop a collection of case studies that calls for ongoing reconsideration of interpolated tales as productively awkward forms that enrich and resist persistent teleological accounts like the "rise of the novel." Having observed the game of critical ping-pong that fixates on interpolated tales as a matter of pro or con, I have no desire to make that my pursuit. Instead, in deconstructing the binary approach that would segregate tale and novel into a stable relation, I seek to elucidate a nonbinary reading practice, in which the dialectic between tale and novel is further complicated by the third-level factor of the tales' ability to move beyond their original text. In the readings that follow, that potential for mobility combines with their frequent lack of consequence to the overall plot and their uneasy status as fictions of orality to make interpolated tales, productively disruptive and contextually oriented as they are, a technology for difference-making and open disputation. From the act of collecting

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evidence about how these tales provoke a continual rehashing of the contract between audience and author, new questions emerge: How do various texts and readers navigate the clash between narratives and perspectives? How does navigating that clash reorganize the construction of subjectivity, and thus, of difference? What about those novels that work to minimize that clash? Interpolated tales are everywhere in the eighteenth-century novel, materially present and recognizable in print, but as a concept they flicker in and out of our attention. Like "some watcher of the skies" similarly transfixed by poring over the solar system or Chapman's Homer, this project gazes on novels and chases after their flickering tales.[87] As I will hope to demonstrate across the ensuing chapters, analyzing the role of embedded narratives can help us to see how early novels normalize the possibility of inhabiting an alternate perspective, but without ignoring the attendant friction created by such perspective shifts. For all of the critical emphasis on how novels can operate as engines of interiority and, in their ability to immerse readers in what may seem like an alternate consciousness, as vehicles for empathy, attending to the peculiar history of interpolated tales can remind us that the task of hearing other perspectives can also be very hard work, part of a negotiation of difference that is always ongoing.

[87] John Keats, "On First Looking into Chapman's Homer," *Poems* (London: C. & J. Ollier, 1817).

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