Although Sarah Fielding’s *David Simple* (1744) abounds in narrative transactions, it rarely reflects explicitly on the financial aspects of literary commerce. However, the issue does surface briefly in an “Advertisement to the Reader” following the title page in the first edition, which was published anonymously. The notice addresses the reader as a customer, announcing plaintively that the book is “the Work of a Woman” hoping to remedy the “Distress in her Circumstances”—a justification that offers “[p]erhaps the best Excuse that can be made for a Woman’s venturing to write at all.” At the book’s threshold, someone calling herself the author introduces the novel as a sort of charity case, offering representations of sympathy and begging for sustenance, much as the characters do when they narrate their histories to David in the hope of enlisting his support. The same kind of mendicant narration reappears halfway through the novel, when Camilla tells David about her many calamities and explains how she was finally reduced to venturing out in a beggar’s rags and relating “as much of [her] story, as they would hear, to every Person that passed by” (130). In recounting the experience to David, she is telling her benefactor a story about how she once disguised herself and told autobiographical stories for a living, because of distress in her circumstances. Her tale’s sentimental appeal and its brief glimpse of narrative recursion could serve as an emblem of Fielding’s own association with sympathetic commerce.

The aftermath of Camilla’s effort explains why she does not repeat the experiment. Having accumulated “half a Crown” by repeating her tale to those who would listen, Camilla sets off for home only to be “surrounded by three or four Fellows” who hustle her away to a secluded area, where they relieve her of “every Farthing” and forbid her “to stand begging in their District” (131). The seemingly expansive thoroughfare cannot accommodate this newcomer, whose kidnappers inform her that what resembles a public domain actually remains subject to proprietary control: “[T]hey would have me to know, that Street belonged to them” (131). She needs their authorization, it seems, before she is entitled to tell her story. Where Camilla had believed that she was speaking for herself, the men who abduct her insist that
she has been speaking in their place. Their violence is prompted by an anxiety about limited resources; in a district where there are only so many farthings to go around, Camilla’s gain translates into their loss. The conclusion she draws could serve as an addendum to Fielding’s “Excuse” for “venturing to write”: as Camilla sees it, all avenues are closed to the “Gentlewoman in real Poverty” because “[i]f we were to attempt to get our living by any Trade, People in that Station would think we were endeavouring to take their Bread out of their Mouths” (132). When read in conjunction with this episode, the prefatory apology, similarly focused on a despondent woman’s foray into commerce, suggests that for Fielding this venture is fraught with anxiety.

In these two accounts of women venturing into the marketplace, narrative is produced under constraint, in an economy of scarcity. In both passages, the narratives on offer are linked to identity, albeit a hidden one: Camilla tells her own story (after donning “Rags and [a] borrowed Ugliness” [131]), and the preface makes a point of identifying the anonymous novel as a woman’s story, suggesting that *David Simple* presents a rare opportunity because women do not ordinarily “ventur[e] to write” at all. Thus it might seem that we are not in a marketplace of competitors, because both narrators are offering non-fungible goods. The woman who ventures to write provides something that is otherwise unavailable, and Camilla similarly observes that the gentlewoman in poverty is the person most likely to be excluded from the market, condemned for encroaching on others’ livelihoods even if she is trafficking in autobiography. How can there be a glut for these stories if nobody else will tell them? The constraint that threatens their production appears to reflect an artificial scarcity, stemming not from a limited demand but from a barrier to entry, set up by monopolists who claim the authority to decide who can speak.

One might imagine that the novel would seek to counteract this restrictive view by accommodating a variety of narratives and showing how each one ultimately finds its own audience. The novel’s narrator would provide the likeliest means of orchestrating this solution, exemplified in a plot with an array of narrative transactions and organized by a narrative perspective that conveys the characters’ perceptions so as to show that the tellers and hearers are not competitors but are mutual beneficiaries in an economy of plenitude. The novel sometimes gestures in this direction, both in its plot and its narration, but those efforts are remarkably feeble in light of a powerful countervailing strain.4 Fielding offers a narrator who is only intermittently present and who often dwells on problems involving compelled or manipulated
speech. Fears about not being able to speak, or being forced to mouth someone else's words, haunt the novel in passages that may sometimes be ascribed to the narrator and sometimes to the author of the prefatory “Advertisement.” Though ostensibly concerned with alternatives to the monopolistic mentality that Camilla decries, the novel is riven by tensions that compound this problem instead of resolving it.

The narrator is peculiarly volatile, sometimes unmistakably present but often absent for long periods of time. Like the narrator in Henry Fielding's *Joseph Andrews*, this one tends to comment obtrusively on the management of the plot and on our access to the characters' thoughts, though usually in more caustic tones. Declining to dwell on David's sorrow after his conflict with Daniel, the narrator jokily equates novelistic and social manners: “I will leave [David] to his own private Sufferings, lest it should be thought I am so ignorant of the World, as not to know the proper time of forsaking People” (16). When a husband's mistreatment of his devoted and obedient wife leaves David “perfectly amazed” (56), the narrator tartly observes that “[h]e never once reflected on what is perhaps really the Case, that to prevent a Husband's Surfeit or Satiety in the Matrimonial Feast, a little Acid is now and then very prudently thrown into the Dish by the Wife” (57). Given the frequent emphasis in these remarks on the distinctive problems facing women, most critics have assumed that the narrator is female, and I take the same view here.

Jeanine Barchas writes that “as the novel progresses, the omniscient narrator fades away,” but this is not exactly right, because we find her intruding again at the novel's close, in a series of remarks on narrative etiquette and female vanity, and once more in the novel's final comments on social harmony. Nevertheless, in observing that the “authorial persona is slowly supplanted by the voices of the characters themselves,” Barchas perceptively registers the narrator's contentious position vis-à-vis the other storytellers. The rivalry is even more pointed than this formulation suggests, because the supplanting goes in both directions, as the narrator occasionally invades the characters’ speech. This feat is less surprising than it may sound, because some of the novel's most dramatic scenes revolve around one character's expropriation of another's voice or words. I will try, in what follows, to distinguish between Fielding and the narrator, but the effort is doomed to fail because of Fielding's ambivalence about the dangers of outsourcing the task of narration. *David Simple* is unusually likely to provoke disagreement about what may be ascribed to the narrator as against the author, because the novel is marked by a fundamental
instability in its narrative mode, as if Fielding were intrigued by the uses of a surrogate but were also reluctant to trust in such a figure. Intervening between author and reader, the narrator might pose the same threats to the control of language that the novel rehearses in its plot. If she cannot be called unreliable, she is at least potentially untrustworthy.

Fielding repeats the problem once again in her management of quotation, another means of rendering language portable and therefore open to appropriation. The characters who take pains to quote themselves, or to make others quote them, are generally intent on using language maliciously, getting the words exactly right so as to make the speaker accountable in a register of credit or blame. Emphasis on accurate quotation often turns out to be a tool and symptom of a proprietary mindset, and this explains why the novel sometimes refuses to quote directly even when it describes confrontations that turn on this practice.

Efforts to control the speech of others, by silencing them or putting words in their mouths, abound in David Simple. Throughout the novel, conflicts over the citation, attribution, and withholding of others’ words are associated with property disputes and acts of impersonation, in which authorization to speak is, again, a central concern. Many of the novel’s villains, driven by anxieties about scarcity, seek to appropriate their victims’ material and verbal resources, reflexively categorizing them as a kind of property. Camilla’s tale of charity and extortion recapitulates this dynamic, showing how the act of storytelling may give rise to claims of ownership and exclusion, and may be controlled by a monopolistic framework; the episode is unusual only insofar as it makes this economic logic explicit. In reflecting on these problems, David Simple engages with some of the concerns animating the contemporary debate over literary property, but the novel displays considerable ambivalence about the turn to property as an explanatory concept. Its gravitational pull turns out to be irresistible for virtually all of the characters, the votaries of sentiment and their foes alike. In this sense, too, Camilla’s tale is suggestive: the beggars, in claiming to own the street, have turned a public good into a form of property (and by abducting Camilla they reenact the root sense of “plagiarism”), but she is already shown as acting from economic motives before their arrival, as we may see from her “Scheme” of first “put[ting] on Rags” to enhance her story’s pathos (130). In this novel, the difficulties of owning one’s words are twofold, involving both the problems associated
with converting them into property and the difficulty of controlling what happens to them as a result.

1.

Fielding's diffidence about the categorization of words as property is understandable, given the effects of this process in the contemporary literary marketplace. While the proprietary author played an important role in justifying claims about copyright protection in eighteenth-century England, authors rarely stood to benefit from those claims. Most writers could get their work published only by assigning the “copy” (the right to print) to a bookseller, who retained authority over all future printings. The 1710 Act of Anne gave “the sole liberty of printing and reprinting [a work]” to “the Author . . . and his assignee[s].” Whether the statute’s drafters saw this exclusive right as a form of property remains unclear; that term appears only once, in a clause that may have been an overlooked vestige from an earlier draft in which property rights had a central role. Around the middle of the century, the continuing debate over the statute’s provisions spawned various defenses and critiques of “literary property,” a new and conveniently elastic phrase that could support a broad range of rights beyond the prohibition on piracy. These might include, for example, a right to prevent others from publishing excerpts or condensations; from imitating the characters, or style, or plot, or any individual episodes; from publishing sequels or copying the title or the characters’ names; or from failing to give proper attribution for any of these. Talk of “literary property” focused attention on the text as an object with specifiable borders that must not be crossed without permission.

An undercurrent in this debate, often left implicit, was the idea of authors’ rights, involving most fundamentally the right to decide how to communicate in the first place. Proponents of the Act of Anne argued that the author “has certainly a Right to choose the Hand by which he will convey his Work to the Publick” and that “surreptitious and spurious” editions often include “innumerable Errors, by which the Design of the Author is . . . inverted, conceal’d, or destroy’d.” These are arguments against piracy, and in favor of a property right, but they start from the premise that authors have a right to determine how to convey their message to the public. In Burnet v. Chetwood (1721), the court drew on this principle to enjoin an English translation of the author’s “strange notions” about the Garden of Eden. Arguably the

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translation was a new work, not governed by the statute, but the Lord Chancellor avoided that question, instead deferring to the author’s desire that “no person . . . [should] presume to translate the book,” which he had sought to “conceal from the vulgar in the Latin language.” Yet while _Burnet_ ratified the author’s desire to restrict the text, for other jurists the right to decide on the initial form of expression did not entail any further right to control the message. In the 1760s, William Blackstone noted the author’s “right to dispose of [the] identical work as he pleases” and to prevent others from “varying the disposition he has made.” Blackstone speaks of control over the “identical” work to signal the law’s tolerance for variations such as abridgements. Nearly a decade later, in _Donaldson v. Becket_, Lord Chief Justice De Grey defended the author’s “sole Right to dispose of his Manuscript as he thinks proper,” while rejecting the idea that authors had any “Right or Property . . . detached from [the] Manuscript.” Thus De Grey saw no basis for prohibiting “Abridgements, . . . Translations, [and] Notes,” even if they “effectually deprive the original Author of the Fruit of his Labours.” The author’s right to decide how to speak to the public, then, was seen by some as conceptually distinct from a property right in the text.

The focus on piracy as an infringement may seem a very limited conception of authors’ rights, and was much too thin in the eyes of writers like Samuel Richardson, for whom various other kinds of imitation counted as objectionable “invasions” and “engraftments.” Others, however, had no interest in a view of authorial property that went beyond the express language of the statutory prohibition. Starting from the assumption that writing inevitably includes some imitative aspects, these writers assumed that a broader property claim would cordon off too much, leaving them without enough material to create new works. This perspective does not reflect a countervailing theory of literary property so much as an implicit theory of the public domain. On that view, any prohibition on copying was an exception, not the norm. Offensive adaptations of another’s work might be a dignitary harm (and this was an underlying concern in Richardson’s objections), but that could not explain why, as a general matter, writers should have any claim for more than the statute allowed.

If the 1710 statute was distinctive for introducing into English law the figure of the author as the source of the right to literary property, it bears emphasizing that by adding this figure, the drafters aimed to strengthen the public domain rather than to limit it. In the seventeenth century, printing rights were controlled by the Stationers’
Guild, whose members maintained copyright protection in perpetuity according to guild convention. Only Guild members had access to the Stationers’ Register Book, where copies were entered to establish priority of ownership. A central feature of the Act of Anne was its concern to terminate the guild’s monopoly.21 Guild members were now required to let authors use the Register to enter copies on their own behalf. The drafters also limited the term of protection to fourteen years, followed by another fourteen years if the author was still alive.

The statute thus sought to abolish the stationers’ monopoly by locating the author (not the guild) as the source of the property right, and by linking the term of protection to the author’s life. The first policy need not entail the second; a property right grounded in the author, rather than a guild member, might nevertheless last in perpetuity (and many authors have insisted that it should).22 Given the statute’s anti-monopoly impulses, however, this move made good sense. When the property right is derived from the author, it becomes easier to justify the limited term, because the right of exclusive publication may now be understood as a reward for the creator, and thus as a reward whose duration is linked to the creator’s ability to enjoy it.23 With the end of perpetual copyright—a result that took many decades of litigation to establish—the public domain was commensurately widened as old works, finally recognized as falling outside the term of protection, became freely available. Thus while in recent copyright legislation, the author has usually been invoked to justify stronger protection, in the early eighteenth century this figure provided the means of expanding the public domain.

Yet if this explanation shows why a limited term fit logically into the overall scheme, it does not explain the renewal provision. Why not just create a single term of protection, for whatever period seemed adequate? The two-term scheme was evidently designed to help writers, by putting the copy back in their hands at a time when they could judge the book’s commercial value.24 The booksellers, however, ignored the reversion requirement, and treated permanent assignment of the copy as a condition of sale. They also ignored the twenty-eight year term limit, behaving as if copyright lasted in perpetuity. Finally, given that few writers had any means of publishing their books if they did not transfer the copy, the booksellers’ monopoly on access to print also remained largely intact.

In 1737, legislators sought to tackle the problem of duration, in a bill that would have significantly improved writers’ ability to renegotiate their publishing contracts.25 Recognizing that “Authors, who are

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in Necessity, may often be tempted to sell and absolutely alienate their Right . . . to the original Copies of [their] Books, before the Value thereof is known,” the bill provided that “no Author shall have Power to sell, alienate, assign or transfer . . . the Right . . . to the original Copy of any Book . . . for any longer Time than Ten Years.” In case booksellers demanded that authors bargain away their right to the reversion, the bill also declared that “Covenants for any Sale . . . for any longer Time [than ten years] . . . shall be utterly void.”

Had it been enacted, the bill would have made good on the rhetoric about authors’ rights that often appeared in arguments for stronger copyright protection.

Concern for the welfare of writers was a distinctive feature of the 1737 bill; however, at least in its surviving draft form, the bill does not show the same solicitude for women writers. In a section aimed at anonymous writers, the bill provided that if an author wished “to have his Name concealed,” the title could be entered into the Stationer’s Register by a proxy, “expressing in such Entry, that he, she, or they claim the Property of the Book . . . for the Benefit of the real Author thereof,” with the deputy to be “deemed the Author . . . until the real Author shall . . . discover himself.” This is the only clause that expressly provides for the law’s application to women, in a bill that otherwise genders the author as male. The asymmetry may reflect contributions from different sources, and perhaps the language would have been revised if the bill had been sent forward. Neverthe less, the effect of the language, as it stands, is to treat women as surrogates anchoring an anonymous man’s property claim, visible placeholders awaiting the true owner’s arrival. Even though women may have had more reasons to choose anonymity at this time, their function here resembles that of a novelistic narrator who speaks in proprietary tones but who is understood as stating a claim on behalf of the author.

The bill also included a bar on unauthorized abridgements for three years after a book’s initial publication, to protect authors from being “injured by . . . hasty and incorrect Abridgements,” which could “les sen the Sale, . . . [and] sink the Reputation of the original Composition.” While this provision would have offered a temporary safe harbor against competition from abridgements, it would also have expressly permitted a practice that the booksellers’ lobby opposed. As with other questions about literary recycling, writers were more varied in their assessments: some objected that redaction would inevitably lead to distortion, while others saw abridgment as a useful means of spreading ideas and testing the soundness of the author’s arguments. The bill

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would have supported the latter view, creating a short-term exception while fundamentally holding to the position that copyright protection extended only to the exact form of words constituting the original text.

Taken together, these provisions again suggest that control over initial publication was an important substrate of the concerns that found expression in the author's property right. The ten-year reversion, which speaks to the author's economic rights, also helps to ensure that the author speaks voluntarily. An author who must part with the copy for good, and who lacks bargaining power, is in a sense compelled to speak—compelled, that is, to give up control over the text, perhaps for too low a price. With a sales record to point to, the author has more power to determine the conditions of publication. (It is no coincidence that Alexander Pope, who could negotiate aggressively with his booksellers, was also unusually attentive to the physical format of his publications.) The provision regarding anonymity, similarly, protects the author's decision about how to speak. Anonymous publications were common, and had not required any special legal provision. For these books, the copy was typically registered in the bookseller's name—a convenient practice if the copy lasts in perpetuity, but not if the copy reverts after ten years and the bookseller loses control over it. The use of a proxy then becomes necessary to protect the author's property while also preserving this mode of publication. The abridgment clause offers another way of managing the author's speech. It determines when others will be allowed to speak in the author's name, and by delaying production of that speech, it seeks to produce renditions that will better protect the author's reputation. Each of these provisions amplifies some aspect of the author's right to decide how to communicate, the last one most fully, because it is concerned with how others represent the author's ideas.

The bill's failure can probably be attributed to the booksellers' dismay at the proposed ten-year reversion. As Ronan Deazley notes, this provision "would have resulted in a dramatic restructuring of the relationship between bookseller and author that would have been nothing short of revolutionary." The reversion would have ensured that writers could shop for better terms, leading to bidding wars among booksellers. A rival, having obtained the right to publish a new edition, could be expected to keep a close eye on the publisher of the first edition. Members of the publishing industry could hardly have been enthusiastic about a provision that would have truncated the term of protection so drastically, through a mechanism that would
have further undermined their monopoly by making it in their own interest to enforce the ten-year limit against each other.

II.

The proposed legislation gives a practical sense of how far authors’ rights were thought to reach, and in what respects the available legal protections were seen as lacking. Writers were, of course, keenly aware of their disadvantageous position when negotiating the sale of their work. The difficulties they faced gave rise to frequent complaints throughout the eighteenth century. Fielding’s prefatory plea of distress makes her sound like a perfect candidate for the relief that failed to muster Parliamentary support—the relief designed for “Authors, who are in Necessity.” From that perspective, the plea to the reader comes too late, because the author has already alienated her property and the only direct beneficiary of the reader’s sympathy is the bookseller, Andrew Millar. Camilla’s tale, similarly, involves an appeal for aid that turns into a deflected transaction when her day’s earnings are appropriated by the gang who patrol the avenue where she has been peddling her tale. The fear that justifies the beggars’ restraint on trade—the problem of the limited marketplace—is one that pervades the novel, explaining the more aggressive characters’ monopolistic impulses and motivating their recurrent efforts at deceit and misappropriation.

Fielding’s emphasis on that fear is one of the features that makes *David Simple* such an unusual contribution to the literature of sentiment. To be sure, David exhibits many of the traits that would come to define the sentimental hero: a childlike innocence that renders him incapable of detecting others’ malevolent designs; a concern for social outcasts, coupled with the financial means to assist them; and a habitual reticence that prevents him from extolling his own virtues. Yet Fielding also devotes a remarkable amount of attention to the novel’s malicious egotists—so much that *David Simple* might almost seem to be a novel of resentment rather than a novel of sentiment. Indeed, some of Fielding’s readers dwelt more on the fruitlessness of David’s search than on the friendship of the four main characters. In the anonymous *Laura and Augustus* (1784), the heroine reflects on the “deceit” and “hypocrisy” she finds everywhere, and concludes that “they who flatter themselves with finding a friend in every acquaintance . . . will, like poor David Simple, be most woefully disappointed.” Similarly, in the preface to his novel *Pictures of the Heart* (1783), John Murdoch forgets about the friends whom David acquires, and recalls...
instead that “David Simple long laboured in vain to find a mortal in whom there was no guile.” These writers were not alone in concluding that David’s search yields little but deceit and frustration.

David’s labors are not completely “in vain,” but his friends are easily outnumbered by the novel’s malefactors. Those who deserve David’s benevolence are distributed sparsely among the many devious, calculating egotists who regard David and his kind as so much prey. This pattern begins when David loses his inheritance to his brother Daniel, whose “only Study,” on learning of their father’s fatal illness, is “how he should throw his Brother out of his Share of his Father’s Patrimony, and engross it wholly to himself” (9). This zero-sum perspective epitomizes the views of the majority of the novel’s populace, who seem intent on expanding their own domain by shunting aside their neighbors. In a plebiscite, these characters would easily steal the vote. At the beginning of his journey, David visits the Royal Exchange, where he sees “Men of all Ages . . . assembled, with no other View than to barter for Interest” (22). After a few more weeks of adventures, David amplifies his indictment without changing its basic tenor: “He found all the Women tearing one another to pieces from Envy, and the Men sacrificing each other for every trifling Interest” (36). David soon begins to fear for his own destruction, imagining himself “surrounded by Beasts of Prey . . . all equally desirous of pulling him to pieces” (55). For these sharks and egomaniacs, any awareness of another’s prosperity automatically triggers a feeling of loss, a feeling that can be assuaged only by rooting out the source and destroying it.

The self-immolating potential of these impulses becomes clear when David meets three sisters commiserating over their father’s death. Their common loss unites them, but not for long. Like Daniel, they turn combative when the question of dividing the estate arises. Bickering over their father’s imported carpet, each one claims a share, and “as none of them would give it up, the most resolute of them took a pair of Scissors, and cut it into three Parts. They were all vex’d to have it spoil’d, yet each was better pleas’d, than if either of their Sisters had had it whole” (37). As if the ruinous effects of their anti-Solomonic logic were not already plain enough, they repeat the procedure after noticing that one piece contains “a more remarkable fine Flower than the rest” (37). In rending the carpet, they reenact the fury that has already split them apart once before, when two of the sisters became “jealous Rivals” over “one of those fine Gentlemen, who make Love to every Woman they chance to be in company with” (38). The story of their rivalry (a perennial favorite with Fielding, who includes another
version just two chapters later) again illustrates the entropic principle that governs their universe: confronted with an indivisible quantity, the sisters turn on each other.

Fielding remains fascinated with the problem of scarcity throughout the *David Simple* trilogy; thus in *Volume the Last* Mrs. Orgueil worries that “every kind Word” uttered in praise of Cynthia’s daughter is a “Robbery” from her own child (271). Mrs. Orgueil joins the ever-growing ranks of Fielding’s monopolists, inhabiting a role that is succinctly summarized in *Familiar Letters*, when Cynthia hints at the solipsism driving her neighbors’ dictatorial behavior: “[E]very one affects to confine all the Senses to herself, and will not allow her Companions even to hear or see but in the same manner or degree, as she herself does” (1:175). In the grand economy of sensation, an unshared experience is another kind of robbery—it threatens to discredit one’s own perceptions. In order to forestall the imagined depreciation, the monopolists in Cynthia’s story strive to establish a new standard of value, “setting bounds to the Sensations of others by their own” (1:177). Cynthia treats the threat facetiously, associating these nonentities’ exaggerated sense of self-importance with the effort to prescribe others’ experiences—but her language hints at the dangers of mind-control and ventriloquism, dangers that accompany *David Simple*’s most paranoid anxieties about the dilemma of limited resources.

The fear of going unheard is one of the characters’ most basic fears, and it explains the breathless quality common to so many of *David Simple*’s dialogues and monologues. The sisters’ inheritance dispute expressly links verbal combat with squabbles over property, but this association usually remains implicit, because most of these chattering seem to feel that they must go on talking simply as a matter of survival. In the early phase of his journey, David is repeatedly exposed to scenes of urban life by cynical figures like Spatter and Varnish, who afterwards deliver a comprehensive critique of the participants, enumerating all their vices and follies. Orgueil, for example, after a typically thorough dissection, finds himself “quite exhausted with giving so many various Characters” (52). Fielding, who elsewhere refers to novels as “characteristic writings,” makes Orgueil’s lecture sound like the production of an overworked novelist wearily padding out his manuscript. Soon afterwards, at a gathering of female critics, David is startled to hear them erupt into sounds like “the Cackling of Geese, or the Gobbling of Turkeys” (67), while in the next scene, their male counterpart recites a haphazard compendium of critical *idées reçues*, ending only when he runs out of energy: “[O]ur Gentleman’s Breath
began to fail him, for he had utter’d all this as fast as he could speak” (71). Gossip, which allows the scandalmonger to serve as both conduit and authority, to rekindle her outrage simply by rebroadcasting it, seems especially likely to foster this sense of urgency, and hence, for example, the aunt who hastily swallows the story of Camilla’s and Valentine’s incestuous affair spits it out just as quickly, haranguing the siblings until she has “talked herself out of breath” (125).

Fielding isolates the propensity for verbal monopolism in its purest form when David, nonplussed by a group of drunkards, unwittingly consults a bystander who immediately launches into a rapid-fire character-assassination, hurriedly ticking off the faults of a “young Gentleman who . . . . would make a very fine Gentleman, if he did not drink so hard,” a “Hatchet-face Man who . . . . had better take care of his Wife and Children,” and various other associates (147). Like the garrulous critic, this professedly reluctant informant races through the monologue without “giv[ing] himself time to breathe,” but he also struggles desperately to detain his listeners, clinging to the door of David’s coach “as if he was afraid it would drive away from him” (147). David’s request evidently comes as an unanticipated gift to this backbiter, but once the opportunity presents itself, he treats it as a vital necessity. Just as David and his companions habitually search out new stories like addicts chasing after their daily supplement of narrative, the gossip disgorge himself as if a live audience were crucial to his well-being, as if filibustering were the only way to ensure his survival. In this novel the vicious and the fatuous, no less than the sympathetic, seem habitually anxious about losing their means of self-expression. If David cannot survive without regular opportunities for emotive response, the would-be narrators register an uneasy awareness that with so many others ready to unburden themselves, any given candidate must struggle to forestall the competition.

Cynthia, Camilla, and Valentine present the most salient exceptions to this rule, and their passivity means that each of them nearly suffocates from the constraints of the competitive world before finding the unimpeded space they need in order to tell their stories. Because the power of these narratives is registered mainly in the process of reciting or listening to them, they rarely generate a response that outlasts the telling. Even Isabelle’s unusually lengthy and dismal autobiography (which occupies nearly one-sixth of the novel) stays with David and his restless companions for only “two or three Days,” leaving an effect that can be summed up in one sentence: “This tragical Story left very melancholy Impressions on all their Minds, and was continually the

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Subject of their Conversation” (195). Then, “the Weather being fine” (195), the sympathists set off in search of new stories. The principle reaches its logical conclusion in the cacophony of the cackling female critics, all “engaged in admiring their own Sentiments so much, that they observed nothing else” (67). What these chatterboxes say matters less than the mere fact of their speaking, and so their static, phatic utterances do little more than testify to the speakers’ persistence. Underlying their combative discourse is the fear of going unheard, of being displaced by a competitor. The same aggressive orality reappears in *Familiar Letters*, which begins with Cynthia’s story of a pack of backbiters who “talked so fast, that their Breath, like that of dying Men, seem’d exhausted whilst yet they fancy’d they had much to utter” (1:54). Their “Fund of Venom,” Cynthia remarks, never dissipates, because their only pleasure consists in “the very Action of Biting” (1:55), a dangerous proclivity with potentially fatal results not only for the silent bystander but also for the backbiters themselves, as Cynthia hints in her remark about the moribund.

Posed against the aggressive, attention-grabbing patter of the egotists is the restrained and often completely silent communication of those whose capacity for sympathy allows them to interpret body language and facial expressions as readily as speech. Fielding’s efforts to prod the reader into this latter camp are among the novel’s best-known features, usually marked by the declaration that feelings of true sympathy are “not to be expressed” (14, 133, 181) or are “impossible to describe” (145, 221), and “can only be imagined by those” who already possess these traits (133, 135). This orientation towards ineffability helps to explain why some of the novel’s readers could remember the “deceit” and “guile” exhibited by the novel’s malevolent characters, and could forget about David’s friends. *David Simple* lavishes much of its attention on sentimental transactions, but the pleasures and raptures they produce are often merely noted rather than described. The narrator’s rhetoric of reticence nearly matches the subdued tones of the sentimental characters.

Their reserve does not, however, immunize them from the economic anxieties that trouble their enemies, as we see in a conversation between Valentine and Camilla, shortly after they have met David. Not yet certain that David is truly capable of sympathy, Valentine warns his sister not to marry a husband who lacks that trait, because a sentimentally mixed marriage would have the same catastrophic effects as the failure of a business with limited funds and unlimited liability: “[Y]ou will be as unwise to throw away all the Goodness you are mistress of
on [an insensible husband], as a Man would be, who had a great Stock in Trade, to join it with another, who not only was worth nothing of his own, but was a Spend-thrift” (121). The spendthrift is a stock figure in the novel’s dismal array of economically motivated actors, a species of monopolist who dissipates assets rather than hoarding them, but who shows the same predilection for appropriating others' goods. Valentine worries that without a similarly endowed partner (“a Man whose Temper is like your own” [121]), Camilla will become an emotional bankrupt. The analogy figures insensibility as a voraciously prodigal reflex, a siphon that would drain Camilla of the “Tenderness [she is] possessed of” (121). Even among the novel’s most ardent proponents of communal property, personality seems to be a limited resource that can collapse into personalty, its legal cognate. Though normally averse to the language of private property, Valentine compromises in this case by suggesting that sympathy should be allowed to circulate communally only among those who already have it. David never arrives at the same understanding, and we may wonder whether his absence from this scene—a rare event in the novel—is designed to shield him not only from Valentine’s doubts, but also from this explication of the economic paradigm that tacitly underwrites his own sympathetic commerce as well as Valentine’s.

Valentine’s lecture also sheds light on the narrator’s habit of refusing to share the attributes of sympathy with any reader not already equipped to identify them. This reserve signals the narrator’s penchant for the same economic logic that Valentine elucidates, and suggests that she, too, may be aware of the contradictions that govern sympathetic exchange—though if so, this is another lesson that she withholds from those readers who are not capable of finding it out for themselves. The narrator’s function also proves to be regulated by the same logic, as we may see in the characters’ tendency to speak in her place, or to be supplanted by her. Valentine is not alone in articulating a perspective that might seem likelier to come from the narrator. For example, her character portraits supply the model for Cynthia’s skilful diagnosis of her sisters’ flaws: “They . . . had both some small glimmering Rays of Parts and Wit. To this was owing all their Faults, for . . . they mistook this faint Dawn of Day, for the Sun in its Meridian; and from grasping at what they could not attain, obscured, and rendered useless all the Understanding they really had” (80). Though ostensibly less worldly, Camilla takes a similarly omniscient perspective in accounting for her father’s self-delusions: “[T]here is no knowing how far Passions . . . will carry People; they go to Lengths, which they at first would be

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perfectly startled at, and are guilty of Actions, which, [if ascribed to] a third Person, they would condemn” (117). If lacking the narrator’s usual acerbity, these comments nevertheless display a similar kind of detachment, in which the individual example functions primarily to serve an essayistic interest in generalization and comparison. The narrator may appear only intermittently, but the autobiographers within the novel keep acting as her delegates, taking an oddly disengaged stance on their own affairs. Just as the characters strive to commandeer each other’s resources in the plot’s zero-sum economy, the narrative economy is fueled by an unceasing demand to make human behavior legible on a grand scale, and if the narrator is not available, the characters may be pressed into service for the task. In moving so readily from a local perspective to an external one, they show that in the straitened circumstances envisioned in David Simple, those who act out of character are usually acting in someone else’s character, having been conscripted into a role that serves someone else’s ends.

III.

So far, we have been considering the competitive effects of David Simple’s economy of scarcity, but the novel’s most artful conspirators do not just elbow their victims aside; these characters set up as dictators of a more dangerous order, seeking to control their victims by putting words in their mouths. We see the same dynamic enacted three times, and in each instance the culprit’s efforts are linked to the misappropriation of property. At the novel’s outset, Daniel cheats David out of his inheritance and then leads him to incriminate himself in front of the servants. Livia, the second in this trio of manipulative playwrights, brings off much the same effect in a dispute with her stepdaughter Camilla; here the unwitting audience is Camilla’s father, who takes against both of his children and leaves himself entirely in his wife’s power. Third and last is Le Neuf, the villain of Isabelle’s interpolated story, who takes an even more visibly managerial role in an act yet again aimed at eliminating an economic competitor. Le Neuf makes the directorial procedure explicit by rehearsing his script with a confederate who impersonates Le Neuf’s rival; then the two of them arrange for the final product to be overheard by the wealthy, generous schoolmate whose friendship and finances Le Neuf hopes to monopolize. All three scenarios involve a battle over linguistic power, a battle in which the novel’s malefactors strive, if not to “set bounds to the Sensations” of the sympathetic characters (as in Familiar Letters),
then to influence how others perceive these characters, by controlling what the sympathists say and thus how their sentiments are credited.

Cynthia’s ordeal, though mild in comparison to her friends’ sufferings, provides a template for the more fully dramatized confrontations. Until David rescues her, Cynthia serves as a companion to an “ill-natured” aristocrat (94) who is never identified by name. Instead, she is called “my Lady———-,” a label that, by purporting to protect the guilty, renders her a generic instance of the overbearing dictator. The torment that she administers is as formulaic as her name. She engages in an endless sequence of flattery and abuse, designed to turn Cynthia into a reactive machine: “I was to have no Passions, no Inclinations of my own; but was to be turned into a piece of Clock-work, which her Ladyship was to wind up or let down, as she pleased” (91). Cynthia, in this example, has been subjected to another of the novel’s experiments in reduction, now demoted to the level of an automaton rather than torn to pieces. The pleasure Cynthia affords her aspiring puppet-master consists entirely in her adherence to the script, her submission in mouthing the words she has been induced to utter.

Cynthia reinforces the implication of oral obedience by dubbing herself a “Toad-eater,” a role whose degradation threatens to last indefinitely, “for most People have so much the Art of tormenting, that every time they have made the poor Creatures they have in their power swallow a Toad, they give them something to expel it again, that they may be ready to swallow the next they think proper to prepare for them” (89). Like the sad stories whose fleeting, sympathetic effects must constantly be renewed, and like the narrative opportunities that satisfy the chatterboxes only so long as they command the listener’s attention, Cynthia’s mechanistic torment affords “my Lady———-” no benefit but the pleasure of witnessing her victim’s misery in real time—and that pleasure can be sustained only by keeping Cynthia on a steady diet of rancor and purgatives. Lady———-’s menu of sadistic pleasures, like the backbiters’ endless “Fund of Venom” in Familiar Letters, is never in short supply, and yet the evanescence of those pleasures means that she must constantly operate under the threat of scarcity.

The same anxieties beset the novel’s more inventive schemers. Daniel, the first of these figures, exploits the written and spoken word in quick succession as he strives to monopolize the family estate. He efficiently dispatches David by provoking him, “aggravating his Passion, till it was raised to such a height, as to the unthinking World would make him appear in the wrong” (13). Daniel arranges for this result
by waiting until the argument grows heated, and then “set[ting] open the Door, that the Servants might hear how [David] used him, and be Witnesses he was not in fault” (13). Here Daniel exhibits his skill by conducting himself “with utmost Calmness” while ensuring that his brother is “not . . . able to command himself” (13). Daniel is left in command, and he engineers the dialogue to make himself appear the injured party. This is his second effort at scriptwriting, because he has already disinherited David by forging their father’s will. Usurping his father’s place, Daniel turns the document into a mouthpiece for his own ideas about the distribution of the estate.

The forgery is one of the novel’s most straightforward examples of impersonation, yet it nearly confounds the distinction between the fraudulent and the authentic. First Daniel pretends to mourn his father’s death, “counterfeit[ing]” the sorrow that for David is a “real Affliction” (10), and then Daniel replaces the will with his own version, substituting himself for David as the primary legatee: “As it was in his Father’s Hand, he [Daniel] could easily forge it, for he wrote very like him” (10). As the confusion of pronouns hints, this nearly effortless act reveals a talent for self-division. Daniel bequeaths the property to himself by writing in his own hand—an act rather like using a narrative persona to tell part of a story and abandoning it at other parts, or perhaps like donning a disguise to tell an autobiographical story. The will is barely even a forgery, because not only do father and son have the same handwriting, they have the same name.42

Daniel’s copy resembles the other examples of adapted self-quotation, camouflaged autobiography, and narrative impersonation that abound in the novel, insofar as the forgery very nearly is what it claims to be. The distance between the counterfeit and authentic versions is surprisingly narrow. To make the substitution look plausible, Fielding hardly needs to make Daniel’s name and handwriting fit so neatly; it would be sufficient to show him laboring away at a careful imitation. Fielding hints at an abundance of similar forgeries circulating in a world where such substitutions are so easy. That a will provides the avenue for this suggestion is fitting, because like a sentimental character’s body language, a last will and testament serves a performative function.43 In both instances, an impersonated performance, if undetected, has the power to reorder the world. Daniel’s forgery raises questions not only about the authenticity of the other characters’ professions of sentiment, but also about the whole array of social relations built on crediting those sentiments.44 The enormity of the threat that he poses is a function of his impersonation, which is made to appear effortless.
Pope reportedly said that “to alter a Book after the Author [is] dead, [is] like altering his Will.” Bent on embalming his literary corpus, Pope would treat the editor’s interpolation as an adulteration of the author’s sacred desires, an instance of compelled speech. Fielding keeps envisioning scenarios that might have been conjured up by this maxim: in addition to Daniel’s textual forgery, she also envisions a more meticulous form of verbal alteration, as we will see in Livia’s case. The question, then, is how to distinguish the authentic from the inauthentic, how to identify the truly worthy in a world of plausible counterfeits. Good or malicious intention is the factor that makes the difference, and the invisibility of intention accounts for most of David Simple’s scenes of duplicity.

It is on that basis, for example, that Daniel may be distinguished from the narrator, whom he rivals in his acumen. Out of all the characters in the novel, Daniel is the one who comes closest to practicing Fielding’s aesthetic of fiction, which emphasizes “Penetration into the inmost Recesses of . . . the Passions” and “the various Labyrinths of the human Mind”(70). David lacks this ability—indeed that is one of his merits. We are told at the outset that he “never had any ill Designs on others,” and so he “never thought of their having any upon him” (8). Like Parson Adams (who exhibits the same naïveté), David has a single-minded idealism that permits him to see only what he expects. Daniel, ever alive to others’ assignment of “Motive” (11), is “what the World calls a much sharper Boy,” and his schemes display a mind skilled at assessing others’ weaknesses. His conspiracy to banish David proves almost as easy—and seems hardly more fabricated—than the forgery that initiates this process. Where the forgery proves effortless because Daniel writes his own name in his own handwriting, the conspiracy proves effortless because David is implicated by his own words.

The same logic guides the second of the novel’s melodramatic confrontations, which pits the ingenuous Camilla against her malicious stepmother, Livia. Cast from the same mold as Daniel, Livia takes no pleasure in the communal gratification of the family, but resolutely indulges herself at her stepchildren’s expense. “[S]he thought her Interest incompatible with ours,” Camilla recalls, “and that the only way to spend all her Husband’s Fortune, was to make him believe we were his greatest Enemies. . . . [T]he only Article in which she ever thought of saving, was in denying my Brother and me what we wanted” (111). Like Cynthia’s ill-natured mistress, Livia begins by playing on her stepchildren’s “Tempers” and then “com[ing] into the best Humour in the World,” so that, as Camilla explains, “[Livia] might have
the pleasure when I was almost healed and well, to torture me again” (112–13). These theatricals, always conducted with Livia’s husband within earshot, inevitably cause Camilla (like David before her) to “appear in the wrong” (112; see also 13), and nowhere is this more apparent than in the scene that brings on the final break between Camilla and her father, the moment of Livia’s fullest triumph.

Recounting this event, Camilla says that she lost her temper when Livia “fell into a Discourse on our private Affairs, . . . saying all the most shocking Things she could think of” (119), but the insinuations themselves go unrecorded (only in the following chapter is the charge of incest spelled out). Sharing Daniel’s fondness for the properly appointed audience, Livia has ascertained that her husband is reading in the next room, and after having “worked [Camilla] up to a Rage,” Livia “exalt[s] her Voice to such a pitch” as to make it “impossible for him not to hear her” (119). The overwrought Camilla is “quite unguarded” and finds herself “prompted . . . by [her] Rage”—which is to say, compelled by Livia—to speak in “virulent” tones (120). When her father storms in, Camilla gets a frog in her throat (“He found me . . . unable to utter my Words” [119]). It falls to Livia to speak for both of them, and once again, in narrating the events to David, Camilla remains vague, saying only that Livia exploited the strategic ambiguities implicit in her own insulting language:

By this time [Livia] had enough recollected herself to think of an Answer proper for her Purpose, and told [her husband], . . . ‘I had been in a violent Passion, only because [Camilla] said,——.’ And then she repeated some trifling thing, which however had two Meanings, and the different Manner she now spoke it in, from what she had done before, gave it quite another Turn (120).

Camilla, unwilling to endure such impositions, soon persuades her brother to flee with her, leaving Livia in control of their father and his wealth.

Livia is clearly capable of uttering a direct lie, and by doing so could silence Camilla quite effectively, but instead Livia quotes herself verbatim while altering the tone to lend her aspersions a more “favourable Sense” (120). She takes the same kind of scrupulous care that cushions Daniel’s tamperings with his father’s will: both forgeries are so faithful in mimicking the original speech, or speech act, as to produce a remarkably equivocal result. That Fielding can make her readers see the dishonesty so easily, while making it virtually impossible for the victims to expose it, serves to underscore the distance
between our awareness of the characters’ motives and the knowledge available to other characters within the novel.

At the same time, Camilla’s narrative method blends immediacy and distance, creating an incongruous effect that runs through the whole episode. On the one hand, she skillfully describes a scene of rising emotional intensity. Describing the confrontation itself, for instance, she exhibits the various characters’ perspectives in a sequence that might appeal to students of cognitive narrative theory:

[T]he Torments I had suffered . . . rushed at once upon my Thoughts, and quite over-power’d me. Livia looked pale as Death, for thus provoked, I could not help telling her what I thought of her Behaviour. Her Pride could not bear to think I knew her, so that I think at last she was in as great a Passion as she could be; but she never was carried so far, as to forget her main View. My Father looked wild, at seeing us in this condition (119).

Camilla deftly rotates among the characters and their perceptions, recalling her own thoughts, Livia’s reaction to Camilla’s exposure of her, Camilla’s assessment of that reaction and of what it conceals, and her father’s response to the whole turn of events, a response that reveals to Camilla his failure to see what she discerns in Livia’s behavior. At the same time, however, Camilla keeps blocking our access to the scene. She turns down the emotional wattage by interrupting the story to generalize about Livia’s observance of the “strictest Rules of Civility”: “she valued herself much upon her Politeness: and I have observed several People value themselves greatly on their own good Breeding, whose Politeness consists in nothing more, than an Art of hurting others, without making Use of vulgar Terms” (119). Camilla also disconnects us from the events by mentioning Livia’s “shocking insinuations” without specifying them, and most notably, by building up a story about Livia’s mendacious self-quotatio and then failing to quote the deceitful turn of phrase. The story has the narrative arc of a joke with no punch line, even as it describes a masterful verbal plotter who knows exactly how to manipulate her audience.

Camilla’s vagueness about Livia’s language is significant, and I will take it up later when discussing the novel’s management of quotation; what bears emphasizing here is the way Camilla keeps reducing the scene’s emotional power by interjecting features that remind us of its writtenness. The long dash representing Livia’s self-exculpating equivocation is the most obvious of these features, but the description that substitutes for her crafty answer, and the digression about people
with a mistaken view of “good Breeding,” have much the same effect: they disrupt the orality of Camilla’s narrative, adding details associated with printed texts, such as a typographical sign for Livia’s omitted words and a leisurely indictment of false manners, of the kind that we might find in a periodical essay. This last example offers yet another enactment of the narrator’s role, performed in the cadences of one of her tart observations about the delusions that riddle polite society. Just as the novel’s backbiters compete for conversational space, here it may seem the narrator, reluctant to cede too much room even to the sympathetic characters, insists on reasserting herself at the cost of removing us from the emotional involvement that Camilla cultivates. Fielding’s ambivalence about entrusting a surrogate, who might wrest more control than she has been assigned, seems to be well justified. Like an overreaching version of the authorial placeholder envisioned in the 1737 copyright bill, the narrator appears unwilling to step aside. Resort to a narrator may solve certain technical problems in Fielding’s handling of the story, but this tactic also turns out to reproduce the problems that arise when words are treated as property, making them eligible for expropriation and claims of exclusionary right.

The association of ventriloquism, violence, and property takes an especially dramatic form in the last and most gratuitous of David Simple’s three conflicts involving malicious impersonation. In a novel whose characters are always striving to satisfy their hunger for vicarious experience, Isabelle creates what is surely the strangest relationship of all between speaker and audience when she tells the quasi-autobiographical story of her brother (the Marquis de Stainville), his friend the Chevalier Dumont, and Le Neuf, a classmate who covets Stainville’s liberal purse. Isabelle tells Stainville’s story in the first person, voicing his thoughts without any reminder that they belong to someone else. Her narration raises the same problems of reference and self-address raised by Daniel’s forgery, now made more explicit when, for example, she says, “[Y]ou must know, Isabelle, . . . I am naturally excessively passionate” (160)—though having deputized herself in this manner, she cannot supply her own response. Speaking in the “I” of her brother’s voice, she has displaced herself as his interlocutor. Again, as with the forged will, the sense of self-division is readily apparent, even though Fielding does nothing to call attention to Isabella’s odd narrative posture. Yet if Isabelle’s impersonation of her brother is presumptively defensible or even admirable, Le Neuf relies on impersonation for more sinister ends.
Isabelle’s claim to articulate her brother’s thoughts and feelings is premised on a perfect interchangeability between the two. A similar affinity connects Stainville and Dumont: as Isabelle explains (speaking as Stainville), “[T]he sympathy of our Tempers was so very strong, that Nature seemed to have pointed us out as Companions to each other” (159). Enter Le Neuf, who schemes (again in Isabelle’s words) to “make a Quarrel between Dumont and me, that he might possess me wholly himself” (159–60). Le Neuf’s ambition and his substitutive strategy readily evoke Daniel’s plan to engross David’s patrimony “wholly to himself” (9). Not only does the new boy hope to take Dumont’s place in Stainville’s affections, but he relies on impersonation as the very means of deceit. His plot—a variation on the puppeteer ploy we have already seen—involves a carefully rehearsed dialogue with a classmate who can imitate Dumont’s voice perfectly. Once Le Neuf and his mimic accomplice have mastered their lines, they await Stainville’s approach and then retreat behind a locked door. Thus Stainville believes he is overhearing Dumont ridicule him as a gullible spendthrift, while Le Neuf angrily retorts in the role of Stainville’s loyal friend. This mini-drama of deception and betrayal initially succeeds, leading Stainville to disavow Dumont as a hypocrite, but Dumont quickly discovers the contrivance and forces Le Neuf to confess. Stainville and Dumont resume their friendship, and Le Neuf disappears forever.

Though Le Neuf copies the tactics of Daniel and Livia, for once the fraud is easily defused. Whereas Daniel and Livia would be prepared to face down their accusers, and perhaps to rattle them further, Le Neuf proves far more pliant. The “mean Creature” readily obeys when Dumont confronts him, forces him to admit the truth, and demands that he confess to Stainville (162). The two friends then banish their enemy: “As to Le Neuf, we published his Infamy, which obliged him to leave the Academy” (163).

The villain’s distinctively textual fate—having his infamy “published”—matches the literary implications of his name, which translates literally as “the new one” and by extension “the novel.” Like Daniel’s machinations, Le Neuf’s elaborate contrivance hints at the novelist’s talents. Le Neuf displays his authorial talents even during his initial overtures to Stainville and Dumont, whom he befriends with his “entertaining manner of telling Stories” (160). He is more narratively inventive than Daniel and Livia, but less masterful in his ability to control others. As the latter two know, a self-incriminating victim is an unwitting ally. Le Neuf must resort to an accomplice because he cannot manipulate his prey, and this failure ultimately leads to his downfall,
showing that he does not belong in the same class as the other villains. Le Neuf fails to recognize that the most effective impersonation is the one that is partially true. The specious accuracy of Daniel’s and Livia’s words is the feature that makes these characters so threatening, and that puts them squarely into competition with the sympathists and the narrator, whose impersonations may be distinguished on the basis of their indescribable motive rather than their all too easily imitated form.

Like Daniel, Le Neuf stands as a foil to the narrator, a faux sympathist whose dishonesty, for once, is easily revealed to the other characters in the same way it is revealed to the reader—through publication. Le Neuf’s attempt to put words in another’s mouth is aptly punished when Dumont extracts a series of *viva voce* demonstrations from him. First, in a move that counters the effect of Livia’s duplicitous self-quotation, Dumont gets the truth out of Le Neuf and forces him to “repeat the same Confession” to Stainville (162), and then the reunited friends demand that Le Neuf produce his accomplice. The mimic gives a performance that must be seen to be believed, because the “Imposition . . . [would] have deceived all the World” (163). Verbatim quotation thus proves to be the key to Le Neuf’s exposure. Quotation serves in the plot as another means of misappropriation, and Le Neuf demonstrates its captivating power before its workings are finally displayed for all to see.

**IV.**

Claiming to attribute words correctly, it turns out, is yet another way of allocating resources, and Fielding engages with this problem at various levels of the novel’s construction. Just as the dangers of verbal monopolization resurface in *David Simple*’s narrative mode, we see an ambivalence about quotation both in the narrator’s remarks to the reader and in Fielding’s technical handling of dialogue. In the first chapter, the narrator names David as the novel’s source, explaining that “this History is all taken from his own Mouth” (7). The warranty recalls Henry Fielding’s ironic quips about his strict adherence to fact in *Joseph Andrews*, but here the effect is harder to gauge. It signals an interest in attribution and authentication without clearly advancing either a claim to historical truth or a mockery of that pretense. The fanfare about David’s narrative role never achieves the magnitude of a full-fledged parody: a parodist, after all, would underscore the irrelevance of such punctilio by certifying some absurdly implausible or trivial datum. *Joseph Andrews* typically vouches for its authenticity.
while concocting a muddled genealogy for Joseph or keeping track of his meals, but when *David Simple* cites the hero as informant, it dwells on the sincerity of his love—first for his brother Daniel (7), and later for Nanny Johnson, the fiancée who abandons David for a wealthier suitor (“he has often said since, that if he had staid five Minutes longer his Love would have vanquished his Reason” [31]). These warranties seem to reflect a serious interest in accurate quotation and first-hand narration, if not a permanent commitment to these practices.

Fielding’s concern with quotation explains why she includes a scene that briefly turns the novel into a play, in order to let the reader listen to the characters themselves—just as Daniel and his fellow plotters arrange for their dialogues to be overheard. The casual reference to the narrator’s frequent conversations with David provides a kind of coda to this extended dialogue, which features Nanny Johnson in the lead role. Hesitating to abandon David, but attracted by her other suitor’s wealth, Nanny takes the problem to her confidante, Betty Trusty—and though the narrator has, up to this point, often committed the heresies of hearsay and paraphrase, here the conversation is presented in the form of a dramatic script, “set . . . down word for word,” because “every body’s own Words give the most lively Representations of their Meaning” (27). But if quotation is the best way to avoid misunderstanding (or dullness), why doesn’t the novel quote more often? Moreover, this rationale fails to explain why the script lacks any narrative commentary. After all, “represent[ing]” one’s meaning is hardly the same thing as conveying it directly. We are told in a footnote that Betty recommends love over money because she secretly harbors “a Desire of having the rich old Man to herself” (27). Acerbically deflating Betty’s pretensions, this explanation achieves the same effect as the commentary that usually saturates the novel’s dialogues, enveloping the characters’ speech far more persuasively than the quotation marks that appear only sporadically in the text. Consigned for once to the periphery, the narrator’s clarification reminds us that typically, such assessments do not merely supplement our understanding of the characters, but constitute its very basis.

The script and its footnote remind us how rarely Fielding uses quotation, by itself, to delineate her characters, how often she summarizes their words instead of quoting them. When Daniel quarrels with David, in one of the novel’s more fully detailed conflicts, most of David’s speech is merely described (for example, “he alternately broke into Reproaches, and melted into Softness” [13]). When Livia protects herself by repeating the “trifling” phrase with “two Meanings,” she takes
care to reproduce her words exactly, but Fielding does not reproduce them at all. Even as the plot depends on Livia’s precision in quoting herself, the novel declines to follow her example, so that we have no opportunity to observe Livia’s ploy, and may grasp it only through its effect. In the dialogue between Nanny and Betty, for once, the characters incriminate themselves so directly as (nearly) to obviate any need for explanation. Fielding’s rationale for quoting—her professed intention to let us overhear the interlocutors—answers a demand that evidently is not very urgent in this novel. If the narrator exaggerates her concern about representing her characters’ ideas accurately, the questions of authenticity and unmediated access nevertheless remain central in this episode, as they do in her summary of what David “has often said” when recounting it (31).

The novel’s ambivalence about the value and power of verbatim quotation, its ostensible commitment to fidelity and its more than occasional abandonment of that principle, may remind us that in the eighteenth century, quotation marks were still a developing technology whose use varied widely. Their basic function might be characterized as the assignment of verbal property. As Margreta de Grazia puts it, “In the same way that copyright legislation and textual criticism ascribe works to their authors, so too quotation marks ascribe words to their utterers”; “they enclose discursive regions.” When *David Simple* was published, quotation marks had only recently become capable of enclosing discursive regions, if that phrase is taken to describe a group of words bounded at both ends: closing quotes did not begin to appear regularly in English fiction until the late 1730s, and it would take another fifty years before English printers finally abandoned other markers of quoted material, such as dashes and italics. Even novels that distinguished between quotation and narrative often did so inconsistently, and like many of its contemporaries, *David Simple* often ignores the distinction, shifting into dialogue with nothing more than a comma and a capital letter. Further, it was not assumed that the quoted words would match the utterance they recorded: reported speech and free indirect discourse would continue to appear in quotation marks at least until Austen’s time.

*David Simple* may resemble other contemporaneous novels in its haphazard use of the typography for quotation, but its management of the quoted word is more unusual. Fielding keeps returning to the importance of accurate quotation—in the exchange between Nanny and Trusty, in the exposure of Le Neuf, in the talk about David as a source—even though the novel rarely tries to achieve such accuracy.
The novel's attention to the effects of verbal precision, coupled with the lack of concern to produce it for the reader, is of a piece with the novel's recurrent scenarios of impersonation. At the outset we saw how ideas of literary property in eighteenth-century England were derived from the author's right to decide how to communicate, and we observed that some commentators accepted the latter as a premise, but doubted that it could generate a property right. The novel's impersonators could not be counted among those doubters. Just as the chatterboxes try to monopolize every conversation they join, the impersonators want to be sure that the words they write, the words their victims utter, are quoted accurately, because the villains are eager to translate speech into property. Daniel puts his own words in his father's will, and then in David's mouth; Livia renders Camilla speechless and then speaks in her place; Le Neuf scripts the lines he wants ascribed to Dumont. The playwrights seek to advance their monopolistic ambitions by commandeering the voices of their victims and depriving them of the ability to communicate. Isabelle is the most prominent counterexample: she is authorized to speak for her brother, and when she narrates his story in his voice, she has no designs on anyone's property. She does not even seek David's aid when her tale is done, but instead announces her "Intention of taking the veil" because "a religious Life [is] the only Relief" she can imagine (194). As narrator of the novel's longest inset story, forming an interpolated novel of its own, Isabelle shows that it may be legitimate to tell someone else's story and to inhabit someone else's perspective, but she stands in contrast to a host of grimly paranoid misers with an enthusiasm for quotation marks as a device for enclosing others' words and engrossing others' property.56

David Simple is not a brief against copyright law and its treatment of words as property. As Valentine recognizes, when he speaks of trade and spendthrifts, the economy of sentiment is regulated by restriction as well as generosity, and therefore depends in part on the exclusionary capacity of property. The author's dilemma, in an age when copyright protection has a very limited reach, involves the sense that authorial property exists only for a brief window, lasting from completion of the manuscript to its sale. The treatment of the text as property serves an instrumental value for writers, and yet that classification seems to imply a more robust and durable property right than the law recognizes; yet again, any articulation of that more extensive right poses a threat to the public domain. David Simple repeatedly stages scenarios in which the novel's villains come dangerously close to the novelist. Their fondness for composing dialogues in which others are compelled to incriminate
themselves recalls Fielding’s use of dramatic form for much the same purpose. Fielding’s gestures towards ineffability occasionally prove, if not to align her reader with the egotists, at least to screen the language that would document the latter’s abuse and deceit—and by putting the evidence out of reach, she might almost be thought to aid in the contrivances of Daniel and Livia. In the production and concealment of her characters’ language, Fielding rehearses the strategies, if not the motives, of those who use their words to dispossess their competitors and to maximize their own profits. The uneasy kinship between the novelist and these characters reflects the tensions created by a legal device that turns words into property, in a move that seems to do either too little or too much.

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NOTES

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1 The second edition, published two months later, replaced the “Advertisement” with a preface by Henry Fielding, who identified the author as a close relative. Contemporary readers seem to have understood that he was speaking of his sister.


3 That linkage is also raised in the preceding chapter, when Camilla starts describing her stepmother’s machinations and then breaks off because a full account “would fill Volumes” (115). This demurral, on the first page of the novel’s second volume, reminds us that the story is filling volumes, and highlights Fielding’s involvement in the activity from which Camilla resiles. The effect is especially notable in the eighteenth-century editions of *David Simple*, in which volume two was a physically separate book.


6 Barchas, 641. The narrator chooses not to “dwell minutely” on David’s engagement to Camilla, having “too much Regard for my Readers to make them third Persons to Lovers” (230); then likens David’s “Raptures” to those of Pretty Miss . . . when her
Parents wisely prefer her in their Applause” (230); and ends with a vision of “Tenderness and Benevolence . . . which I most heartily wish to all my Readers” (238).

7 Barchas, 641.
9 An Act for the Encouragement of Learning, 8 Anne c.19 (1710), s.1.
10 An Act for the Encouragement of Learning, s.2. On revisions to the statute, see Deazley, 46–49; and Simon Stern, “From Author’s Right to Property Right,” University of Toronto Law Journal 62 (2012): 47.
11 The phrase gained currency in the 1740s, following William Warburton’s Letter from an Author to a Member of Parliament, Concerning Literary Property (London: Knaplock, 1747). Earlier discussions referred to booksellers’ “property in the copy,” or “property in their copies.” See Stern, “From Author's Right to Property Right,” 69–70.
17 The Cases of the Appellants and Respondents in the Cause of Literary Property (London: Bew, 1774), 44, 45, 46.
20 See Rose, 38–41.
23 As Blackstone observed, the limited–term provision seems to be modeled on the term of protection for inventors in the Statute of Monopolies (1624). See Blackstone, 2:407.
24 See Deazley, 42–43.
25 See An Act for the Encouragement of Learning, by the more Effectual Securing the sole Right of Printing Books to the Authors (1737), British Library shelfmark (SPR) 357.c.7(41).


30 While the bill was pending, Richard Russell complained that the Gentleman’s and London magazines, competing with his Grub-Street Journal, were “stuffed almost with the spoils of Weekly Papers and of Pamphlets; the longer Pieces in prose being most miserably mangled, under pretence of abridging them” (Memoirs of the Society of Grub-Street, 2 vol. [London: Wilford, 1737], 1:xvii). The advocates of this “piratical traffic,” Russell fumed, “restrain the signification of Law solely to the Law of the land; by which if the reprinting of another person’s Copy be not expressly forbidden, they imagine themselves at liberty to do it” (1: xviii). The result was such an increase in piracy “within these four or five years, that, unless the Bill now depending [will] put an effectual stop to it, the chief business of Book-selling will consist in the execution of piratical projects” (1:xvi–xvii).


33 Deazley, 107.


36 Laura and Augustus, an Authentic Story, 3 vol. (London: Cass, 1784), 2:82.


38 For example, in The Husband’s Resentment, 2 vol. (London: Lowndes, 1776), the heroine declares that she has not been “as unsuccessful in the Search of [her] Companions, as honest David Simple was in that of a true Friend” (1:78); and in Elizabeth Gunning’s The Packet, 2 vol. (London: Bell, 1794), the narrator observes that “others, besides David Simple, . . . have travelled farther than over London and Westminster, in search of a true friend, and come back without one” (2:138).
A decade later, Margaret Collier would recycle the image of the flower in the carpet as a metaphor for the fabrication of fiction, when describing her sister Jane's collaboration with Sarah Fielding in writing *The Cry*. Casting the two authors as “weavers,” Margaret Collier writes that when one of them thinks of a “pretty pattern for a flower'd Silk,” the other one, “struck with the description,” hurries to buy the material to produce it. When one has turned the “raw Silk” into a “flowered brocade,” the other “takes her Scizzars in hand; cuts it, fits it, and makes the flowers all Joyn.” Quoted in Michael Londry, “Our Dear Miss Jenny Collier: A Common-place Book Reveals How *The Cry* Was Written,” Times Literary Supplement 5266 (March 5, 2004): 13–14.

Sarah Fielding, *The Cry: A New Dramatic Fable* (London: Dodsley, 1754), 18; see also Volume the Last’s “Preface” (usually attributed to Jane Collier), which describes the book as the “characteristic sort of Writing” (310), and Fielding’s *The History of the Countess of Dellcyn*, 2 vol. (London: Millar, 1759), which speaks of novelists as “the Writers of Characters” (1:i).}


42 We are told in the novel’s first sentence that “David Simple was the eldest son of Mr. Daniel Simple” (7). Though Fielding does not call attention to this point when describing the forgery, she evidently took care to create the identity of names that Daniel exploits.


44 In the same year that *David Simple* was published, a treatise against “Proof by Similitude of Hands” could rehearse Fielding’s argument more ominously, declaring that “Forger[s] are encouraged” by the law’s willingness to regard handwriting as evidence of authenticity. Rather than relying on such questionable proof, the author suggests, jurists should acknowledge that the world is filled with near-duplicates; after all, no one would insist that “two Persons are the same, because they have many resembling Features.” Rolland Le Vayer de Boutigny, *A Dissertation Shewing the Invalidity of All Proof by Similitude of Hands* (1704; English trans., London: Cooper, 1744), iv, 56. Later eighteenth-century writers would turn this argument around, noting that minor physical differences are sufficient to distinguish one person from another, and arguing that by analogy, even similar literary compositions are distinguishable enough to be regarded as “original” for purposes of copyright law. Francis Hargrave, *An Argument in Defence of Literary Property, 2nd ed.* (London: Printed for the Author, 1774), 7.


46 Henry Fielding praises *David Simple* for the same reasons in his introduction to the second edition: “[T]he Merit of this Work consists in a vast Penetration into human Nature, a deep and profound Discernment of all the Mazes, Windings, and Labyrinths, which perplex the Heart of Man” (5). Similarly, in *Remarks on Clarissa* (London: Robinson, 1749), Sarah Fielding praises Richardson for “penetrating into the Motives that actuate . . . Persons” and providing “a Clue to guide us through all

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the winding Labyrinths into which they turn themselves" (7). Again, in *The Lives of Cleopatra and Octavia* (London: Millar, 1757), Sarah Fielding promises to disclose "the secret Springs and Motives of [the characters'] Actions" (ii). Several decades later Mary Scott would write that Fielding's talent was "to trace the secret mazes of the Heart" (Mary Scott, *The Female Advocate* [1774], quoted in Sabor, vii).


48 In the preface to *The Countess of Delfwyn*, Fielding would warn against this kind of ambiguity as a violation of the rules of good writing, a failure to achieve "Purity of Language," but perhaps her warning also bespeaks some concern about the ethics of misquotation: "Terms . . . applied to whatsoever is deservedly laudable, should on no account be used so equivocally, as to be made applicable indifferently to what is either vicious or virtuous" (1:xx).

49 On the intersubjectivity produced by showing reverberating perceptions among characters, see George Butte, *I Know That You Know That I Know: Narrating Subjects from Moll Flanders to Marnie* (Columbus: Ohio State Univ. Press, 2004).

50 For example, in addition to her comments about what "the World" might think of her manners, the narrator declines to describe a marital quarrel because, "as I hope to be read by the polite World, I would avoid every thing, of which they can have no Idea" (16).

51 Publication already, by this time, carried the sense of textual circulation; for example, Joseph Andrews's literary genealogy includes "two Books lately published, which represent an admirable Pattern of the Amiable in either Sex." Henry Fielding, *Joseph Andrews*, 2 vol. (London: Millar, 1742), 1:3.


54 See Mylne, 55; and Mitchell, 377.
