



"I hope I shall please my readers": Negotiating the Author-Reader Relationship in Two Corpora of British Novels, 1778-1814

Juliette Misset
University of Strasbourg

If all literary texts fundamentally involve acts of communication (Phelan, preface), it seems intuitive that communicativeness should be particularly relevant for novels noted for their didactic intent, where the authors aim to exert influence over others through fiction (Warhol 18). The eighteenth-century novel is known for playing with the boundaries of the author, editor, and narrator, regularly using direct addresses to the reader in ways that reinforce the communicative nature of the text (Stewart 27). Didactic novels of the turn of the nineteenth century in Great Britain used the novel genre to make an ideological point that could otherwise have been—and often was—made in conduct books (Havens 5), begging the question of what the novelistic form brings to the didactic agenda. This paper will explore the ways in which didactic novels of the turn of the nineteenth century use direct addresses to readers to establish a link with the narratee conducive to making a didactic point. In order to determine the specificities of the text-reader relationship that didactic novels build in the text and paratext, I will compare a corpus of 18 novels deemed didactic by critics upon their publication—including Lady Mary Hamilton's *Munster Village* (1778), Maria Edgeworth's *Belinda* (1801) and *Patronage* (1814), and Sarah Green's *Romance Readers and Romance Writers* (1810)—to another corpus of equal size, representative of novels of similar narrative frameworks in the same time span (1778-1814), that were not defined as didactic in intent by critics at the time of publication. I will use computer-aided textual analysis as well as close reading of particular instances of narrator interventions in order to explore the kinds of relationship that this sort of overt authoriality (Lanser 16) establishes with narratees, building on and complicating Robyn Warhol's engaging/distancing framework through the asymmetrical relationship that overt didacticism often implies.

References

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