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A Study of the Language of *Lover's Vows*

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I

Elizabeth Inchbald was born in Suffolk in 1753 and died in 1821. An early ambition led her to London to act, where she married Joseph Inchbald, an actor and fellow Catholic. The couple acted together in various companies in Scotland, Liverpool, and York. After her husband's death in 1779, she lived mainly in London acting at Covent Garden and so on. Her first play, *The Mogul Tale*, was performed at the Haymarket in 1784 and was followed by more farces and comedies, as well as translations and adaptations for the stage. Allardyce Nicoll notes especially, "her forte lies in the writing of that peculiar type of sentimental play...the humanitarian comedy."[1] Nicoll continues "Many of her works, certainly, are but alterations of contemporary French or German sentimental plays."[2] After 1789 she gave up regular acting engagements to concentrate on her writing. Her later career brought her financial success and popularity.

Lovers' Vows, performed at the Covent Garden in 1798, is a free rendering of the German dramatist August von Kotzebue's[3] *Das Kind der Liebe* (*Child of Love*) with sentimental lines.[4] Avrom Fleishman says, "German influence on the English stage reached its peak at the turn of the century."[5] Margarete Rubik notes the play "retained enough objectionable passion and sympathy for the baron's poor deserted mistress to shock a conservative audience."[6] Also, the drama has been well known to readers of Jane Austen as the play that all the fuss was about in *Mansfield Park*.[7] Surely, the plot of the play was sentimental enough to draw tears from the audience, for the readers as well as the audience were fond of cloying sentimentality. Nicoll points out "the fact that the whole of the dramatic literature of this time is influenced, directly or indirectly, by sentimentalism."[8] After the mid-eighteenth century, what is remarkable is the recognition increasingly given to feeling.[9]

Maximillian E. Novak traces the tendency of *sensibility* in the late

eighteenth-century's English literature to Jean-Jacques Rousseau's philosophy: "Rousseau gave priority to natural feeling and emotion above any official code of morality and the private self above anything."[10] Following Rousseau, the doctrine of the sentimentalists insisted on the fundamental importance of feeling and innate ideas. "Education to these philosophers seemed chiefly important as the means of guarding and developing man's innate virtue."[11] The heroes of the sentimental literature are endowed with true sensibility and humanitarian sympathies.

This thesis is a study of the language of *Lovers' Vows* in the light of sentimental literature. We will also see the colloquial English language of the eighteenth-century London. There are several characters of different social ranks in the play. We will see the individual characters' language sociolinguistically.

II

In this section, we will explore several remarkable examples of sentimental language in the play.

Sentimental literature emphasized the importance of the individual's emotional state and benevolence to the weak at the beginning of the 18th century, and was criticized as a soap opera at the end of the century. First of all, the thought is reflected in the vocabulary of the sentimental works. The language of the literature is characterized by certain linguistic categories: vocabulary, emotive expression, and emotive punctuation.

1. Vocabulary

In the first half of the eighteenth century, the vocabulary of eighteenth-century English literature is related to didacticism: "virtue," "virtuous," "honest," "good," "sentiment," "charming," "elegant," "grace" and so on. Roger P. McCutcheon says, "The culture dominant in England from 1700 to 1789 is frequently called 'neo-classical.'... The virtues of the neo-classic creed were reason, judgement, good sense—terms well-nigh synonymous...."[12]

Baron Wildehaim and his daughter Amelia discuss her suitor Count Cassel's merits.

> Baron: But I think proper to acquaint you he is rich and of great consequence: rich, and of consequence; do you hear?
> Amelia: Yes, dear papa. But my tutor has always told me that birth and fortune are inconsiderable things, and cannot give happiness.
> Baron: There he is right—But if it happens that birth and fortune are joined with sense and virtue—

Amelia: But is it so with Count Cassel? (2.2)[13]

The baron advises Amelia to marry Cassel owing to his wealth and social position, and believes birth and fortune are joined with sense and virtue. Actually, the baron married "a woman of virtue—of noble birth and immense fortune"(1).[14] However, Amelia is not satisfied with her father's proposal and belief. Her rejection comes from her philosophy, which comes from her tutor's teaching. Amelia's philosophy conflicts with her father's. The scene asks us what gave happiness in late eighteenth-century England.

When Anhalt meets Frederick in prison, he is surprised at the prisoner's education and manner associated with "sensibility." It is as if the chaplain found a noble savage in the cell. The rector asks of the young soldier where his education comes from.

> Anhalt: I wish to bring comfort and avoid upbraidings; for your won conscience will reproach you more than the voice of a preacher. From the sensibility of your countenance, together with a language, and address superior to the vulgar, it appears, young man, you have had an education, which should have preserved you from a state like this.
> Frederick: My education I owe to my mother. Filial love, in return, has plunged me into the state you see. A civil magistrate will condemn according to the law—A priest, in judgment, is not to consider the act itself, but the impulse which led to the act. (4.1)

The soldier attributes his education to "Filial love" and values the impulse over the law. Here we see the new merits *sensibility* and *love* through the young characters' speeches.

The ideals are to be found in the key words: innocence, simplicity, benevolence and love. The reader is directed to see the proper moral road by satire against the vanity of the rich and complete admiration for the unsophisticated life of gardening.[15]

Amelia is very generous by birth. She sees Frederick flung into prison, and feels pity for his situation:

> Look! As I live, so he does—They come nearer; he's a young man, and has something interesting in his figure. An honest countenance, with grief and sorrow in his face. No, he is no robber—I pity him! Oh! Look how the keepers drag him unmercifully into the tower—Now they lock it—Oh! How that poor, unfortunate man must feel! (3.2)

She utters some words emotionally as if she saw a tragedy. The cottager regards the

young lady as a good-natured girl by saying "good, and friendly to everybody" (2.1). Frederick and his sick mother are taken good care of by the cottager and his wife. After Frederick's great appreciation, the benevolent wife naturally says, "Thanks and blessings! here's a piece of work indeed about nothing! Good sick lady, lean on my shoulder" (1). Her husband is moral and reproves her slander by saying "Wife, wife, never speak ill of the dead" (2.1). These adjectives "kind, benevolent, honest, generous" (4.2) are the very necessities for becoming a sentimental person. The sentimental characters must display natural goodness in a social relationship.[16]

We often see "sensibility," "simplicity," "grief," "sorrow," "pity," "unmercifully," "poor," "unfortunate" and so on in sentimental literature. Those words tend to be used too frequently to be taken seriously. The following are some examples:

Landlord: one must be charitable. (1)
Agatha: hard, unfeeling man, have pity. (1)
Agatha: A woman of virtue (1)
Count: A charming thought! This will give me an opportunity to use my elegant[17] gun (2.2)
Baron: The Count wants a little of my daughter's simplicity and sensibility. (2.2)
Amelia: An honest countenance, with grief and sorrow in his face. (3.2)
Baron: she was always virtuous and good. (5.2)
Baron: Amazing insensibility! (4.2)
Count: from the extreme delicacy of your honour (4.2)

2. Emotive expression

The characters often are very emotional when they encounter emotive affairs and events in the play. There are several varieties of emotive expression: exclamatory sentences, swearing, hyperbolical words and phrases, and repetition.

(1) Exclamatory sentences

In sentimental literature, naturally, there are a lot of scenes where the characters are overwhelmed with emotion. There are varieties of exclamatory sentences. The typical sentences which are exclamatory in function have an initial *wh*-phrase containing *what* or *how*.[18] There are other exclamatory sentences: affirmatives, interrogatives, and modes of address. The following are some examples:

Baron: What a pity she is not a boy! (2.2)
Frederick: my hair stands on end! (4.1)
Amelia: Good heaven, how he looks! (4.1)
Frederick: What have I done! (3.1)

Wife: Oh, dear me! (2.1)[19]
Frederick: Ha! halloo! Who is there? (1)
Agatha: That you have been in search of! (5.1)

(2) Swearing

Swearing is uttered with exclamation when the characters are emotional. Almost all the swear-words in the play are clichés. Among them, the *OED* defines the swear-word "'Sdeath": "A euphemistic abbreviation of God's death used in oaths and asseverations." The word "providence" and the phrase "Almighty powers" are also applied to the Deity and joined to *God*. The following are some examples:

Agatha: Oh providence! (1)
Frederick: oh, merciful providence! have I deserved all this? (4.1)
Frederick: For God's sake what is this! (1)
Frederick: Good heavens! (1)
Frederick: For Heaven's sake, mother, tell me what's the matter? (1)
Amelia: Good heaven, how he looks! (4.1)
Frederick: Thank Heaven! (4.1)
Anhalt: Oh! Heavens! (3.2)
Frederick: Your father! heaven forbid. (4.1)
Frederick: Baron Wildenhaim!—Almighty powers! (4.1)
Baron: 'Sdeath! (5.2)

(3) Hyperbolical words and phrases

The *OED* mentions the numbers "thousand" and "hundred" are "Often used vaguely or hyperbolically for a large number."[20] The following are some examples:

Frederick: Ten thousand thanks (1)
Amelia: A thousand congratulations, my dear papa. (3.2)
Frederick: A thousand thanks, dear stranger. (4.1)
Amelia: a hundred female hearts will at least be broken. (4.2)

The phrases "in the world," "for the world," "in my life," and "a syllable of" intensify their negation. The following are some examples:

Girl: I have not a farthing in the world. (1)
Amelia: I never told an untruth in my life. (2.2)
Amelia: he would not marry me without your consent for the world. (4.2)
Amelia: I do not remember a syllable of it. (2.2)

Metaphors are effectively used to intensify the speaker's message. The following are some examples:

Agatha: your wild looks are daggers to my heart (1)
Frederick: Be quick with your narrative, or you'll break my heart. (1)
Frederick: make haste, or I'll break every window in your house. (1)

(4) Repetition

The characters often repeat their words, phrases, or clauses when they are very emotional. Repetition is a kind of device easily available to express one's feelings.[21] The verbal device has a sort of wildness and forcefulness like hammering or like a dog barking. The following are some examples:

Landlord: Patience! Patience! (1)
Frederick: I will, I will. (1)
Frederick: Proceed, proceed! Give me full information—(1)
Cottager: Why could not you say all this in fewer words? Why such a long preamble? Why for mercy's sake, and heaven's reward? Why talk about reward for such trifles as these? (1)
Baron: Haste! Haste! Bring her in. (5.2)
Baron: Agatha, Agatha, do you know this voice? (5.2)

3. Emotive punctuation

Markman Ellis describes "the repertoire of conventions associated with sentimental rhetoric of the body: fainting, weeping, sighing, handholding, mute gestures, the beat of the pulse, blushing—and so on."[22]

Just after confessing who Frederick's father is, Agatha almost faints. Frederick is worried: "Oh! you are near fainting. Your eyes are cast down. What's the matter? Speak, mother!" (1).

The rhetoric is reflected in the way of speaking. There are several scenes where the characters are too emotional to speak smoothly. Then their emotive speech is expressed by the effective use of dashes. After being told that Frederick is his son, Baron Wildenhaim is very upset:

"He is my son!—He is my son!—Go, Anhalt,--advise me—help me—Go to the poor woman, his mother—He can show you the way—make haste—speed to protect her— (4.2)

The following are some examples:

Anhalt: I—I—me—I—I am out of the question. (3.2)
Frederick: Oh where shall I—no money—not a farthing left. (2.1)
Baron: He is—he—in a word I don't like him. (2.2)
Anhalt: I will—But—I—Miss Wildenhaim—I—I shall—I—I shall obey your commands. (2.2)

III

In this section, we will explore other remarkable examples of language in the play: archaism and solecism and phatic communion.

1. Archaism and solecism

Carey McIntosh points out that "lower-class English in the eighteenth century has three traits: colloquialism, incorrectness, and old-fashioned-ness".[23] In the play, the characters of the lower class use archaic and ungrammatical expressions. The landlord is surprised at Frederick's request for a bottle of wine.

Frederick: A bottle of wine—quick, quick!
Landlord: A bottle of wine! For who?
Frederick: For me. Why do you ask? Why don't you make haste? (1)

Here the interrogative "who" is ungrammatical in the landlord's speech. The interrogative *who* is often used in talk where grammar demands *whom*.[24]

The archaic second person pronoun "thou" and "ye" and the archaic verbal forms combine in creating a style that is far more regal and far more oratorical than the accents of real life.[25]

Agatha: Oh Providence! Thou hast till this hour protected me (1)
Frederick: My father! Eternal judge! Thou do'st not slumber! (4.1)
Agatha: may ye enjoy continued happiness. (5.1)

The unusual combination "she don't" is found in the play. David Denison says, "From the mid-eighteenth century until roughly the 1860s, *don't* was common in dialogue as negative third person singular present tense of the auxiliary DO."[26] The auxiliary sounds vulgar. There are an irregular past tense "sung" and an irregular past participle "drank" in the play. By late Modern English, standard English had settled on fixed choices for most of the doubtful cases, but Jane Austen could still in the early nineteenth century use past tense *shrunk*, *sprung*, *sunk*.[27] The following are some examples:

Farmer: Why don't she work? (1)
Frederick: She don't beg (1)
Frederick: I sung with joy. (4.1)[28]
Frederick: she has drank some of it (2.1)

Exceptionally, we find an example uttered by the upper-class character. Baron Wildemhaim uses *a-verbing* construction "should we like to go out a shooting with me for an hour before dinner?" (2.2). The construction was archaism and was "confined to the representation of non-standard speech."[29]

2. Language of phatic communion

Speech communication is frequently used to establish social relationships rather than impart information by a mere exchange of words. This kind of speech communication was given the name *phatic communion* by the anthropologist Bronislaw Malinowski.[30] The topic of the speech communication centers on comments about the weather, on personal appearance, enquiries about health, or affirmations about everyday things. Greeting is one type of phatic communion, and the greetings of the play indicate the conventional greeting of the day.

The characters choose greetings according to their addressees. The landlord greets a passing country man by saying "Good day, neighbour Nicholas" and a passing rich farmer by saying "Good morning to you, Sir." Frederick greets Anhalt by saying "Welcome, Sir! ... You are most welcome, Sir" (4.1).

There are examples of greetings between the upper-class and lower-class characters:

Amelia: Good morning, dear my lord. (2.2)
Baron: Good morning, Amelia. (2.2)
Amelia: Ah! good morning, my dear Sir—Mr. Anhalt (3.2)
Anhalt: Good evening, friends. (5.1)

There are examples of greetings between the lower-class characters:

Agatha: Good bye. (5.1)
Cottager: Fare you well—fare you well. (5.1)
Cottager: Good day, young soldier. (1)
Frederick: Ha! Haloo! Landlord! (1)

Thus, we see the language of *Lovers' Vows* in the light of sentimental literature, and find interesting linguistic items in the play. To think of sentimentality, Inchbald's appeal is mainly to greater love and sympathy, and she takes some of the best aspects of

the literature of sensibility to fashion a work that is more charming and didactic.[31] We find the woman writer's genius for making an epoch in sentimental literature through her use of the language of the play as well as the message. We also find the woman dramatist's skillful choice of the characters' words and phrases according to their social position. She was no less a representative playwright than other great ones like Oliver Goldsmith in the eighteenth century.

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[1] Allardyce Nicoll, *Late Eighteenth Century Drama 1750-1800*, vol. 3 *A History of English Drama 1660-1900* (Cambridge: Cambridge at the University Prs., 1961) 144.
[2] Nicoll 144.
[3] August Kotzebue (1761-1819)
[4] Nicoll notes Inchbald produced *The Wise Man of the East* (1799) as another free rendering of a Kotzebue play. (Nicoll 145)
[5] Avrom Fleishman, *A Reading of Mansfield Park* (Minneapolis: Univ. of Minnesota Prs., 1967) 26.
[6] Margarete Rubik, *Early Women Dramatists 1500-1800* (Houndmills: Macmillan Prs. Ltd., 1998) 184.
[7] The name of the play appears in chapter 13 of Jane Austen's *Mansfield Park*.
[8] Nicoll 124.
[9] Arthur Humphreys, "The Social Setting," *From Dryden to Johnson*, vol. 4 *The New Pelican Guide to English Literature*, ed. Boris Ford (London: Penguin Books, 1982) 45.
[10] Maximillian E. Novak, *Eighteenth-Century English Literature* (London: The Macmillan Press Ltd, 1983) 143-44.
[11] Rovert Morss Lovett and Helen Sard Hughes, *The History of the Novel in England* (London: George G. Harrap & Co. Ltd.,) 133
[12] Roger P. McCutcheon, *Eighteenth-Century English Literature* (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Prs., 1950) 2.
[13] Elizabeth Inchbald, *Lovers' Vows*, ed. Thomas R. Preston (Athen: the Univ. of George Prs., 1990). Hereafter the numbers of the acts and scenes are cited parenthetically.
[14] This speech is Agatha's. In scene one, she confesses to Frederick that his father married another woman.
[15] Novak 190-91.
[16] McCutcheon 89.
[17] The *OED* notes "Vulgarly 'excellent, first-rate'"(s.v. *elegant* 8).
[18] David Denison, "Syntax" *The Cambridge History of the English Language*, vol. 4 ed. Suzanne Romaine (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Prs., 1998) 254.
[19] N.F. Blake notes in the seventeenth-century dramas, a wife addresses her husband as *dear* which is a form of address not employed by the fashionable. N.F. Blake, *Non-standard Language in English Literature* (London: Andre Deutsch, 1981) 99.
[20] The *OED* (*thousand* 2.a.).
[21] Geoffrey Leech comments on *repetition*: "if we turn to the ordinary emotive use of language, we see that repetition is a fundamental if primitive device of intensification. To call it a 'device,' indeed, is to mislead, for repetition is almost involuntary to a person in a state of extreme emotional excitation." Geoffrey Leech, *A linguistic Guide to English Poetry* (London: Longman, 1969) 78.

[22] Markman Ellis, *The Politics of Sensibility* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Prs., 1996) 19

[23] Carey McIntosh, *Common and Courtly Language: The Stylistics of Social Class in 18th –Century English Literature* (Philadelphia: Univ. of Pennsylvania Prs., 1986)12.

[24] Edward Finegan, "English Grammar and Usage" *The Cambridge History of the English Language*, vol. 4 ed. Suzanne Romaine (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Prs., 1998) 578.

[25] William J. Farrell, "The Style and the Action in Clarissa," in S*amuel Richardson: A Collection of Critical Essays* ed. John Carroll (Englewood Cliff: Prentice-Hall Inc., 1969) 98.

[26] Denison 196.

[27] Denison 135.

[28] About the morphological complexity of irregular verbs, Manfred Gorlach notes "Extension of the participle to the preterite gave *fling, flung, flung*." Manfred Gorlach, *Eighteenth-Century English* (Heidelberg: Univ. C. Winter, 2001) 103.

[29] Joan C. Beal, *English in Modern Times 1700-1945* (London: Arnold, 2004) 80.

[30] David Crystal, *The Cambridge Encyclopedia of language* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Prs., 1987) 10.

[31] Novak 190.