

**THE HEROINES OF ELIZA HAYWOOD:
A SPECTRUM OF EIGHTEENTH-CENTURY
MORALITY AND SUBVERSION**

BY

NICOLE LEE KOTELO

A Thesis
Submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies
In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of

MASTER OF ARTS

Department of English
University of Manitoba
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ABSTRACT

As the most popular English woman writer of the first half of the eighteenth century, Eliza Haywood authored notorious romantic fictions in the 1720s and conservative didactic fictions in the 1740s and '50s. In her early seduction tales and amatory plots, Haywood reconfigured the role of the submissive literary heroine. In her later domestic writing, Haywood both endorsed conservative standards of morality and parenthetically questioned the social codes that restricted women's behaviour. In all her works, Haywood engaged in a process that scholar Mary Anne Schofield has identified as "double writing" (1985)—using traditional forms to mask a radical subtext.

In this study, a selection of Haywood's romantic and didactic fiction is considered, and the wide spectrum of heroines within it is analyzed. Building upon the work of Haywood scholar Ros Ballaster—who, in 1992 positioned Haywood's seduced heroines in a feminist register of desire—I further explore ways in which both feminine bodily representation (hysteria, disguise) and bodily action (virtuous versus erotic behaviour) deconstruct and reconstruct eighteenth-century images of femininity and identity. Additionally, I examine the manner in which Haywood's (un)restrained heroines and plots alternately converge with expectation and diverge from tradition. In turn, I find that when Haywood's various heroines—be they chaste, sexual, subversive or reformed—are punished, rewarded or indulged in non-traditional ways, they challenge literary, gender and social norms. Consequently, Haywood's rendering of multifaceted heroines not only broadens the limited space of subjectivity normally allotted to the eighteenth-century female, but makes her an important voice in women's literary history and the creation of the English novel.

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For my late Father,
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who always taught me to
climb the highest mountains
because the view is better from the top.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Introduction.....	1
Chapter One	
“Morality, Subversion and the Mind-Body Connection in <i>Love in Excess</i> ”	12
Chapter Two	
“Creative Heroines and Counter-plots in <i>The British Recluse</i> and <i>Fantomina</i> .”	45
Chapter Three	
“Ain’t Misbehavin’: Feminine Resistance and Reform in <i>The History of Miss Betsy Thoughtless</i> ”	78
Conclusion.....	113
Works Cited.....	119
Works Consulted.....	123

Introduction

In England during the 1720s only one author could boast a success and popularity that rivalled that of fiction writers Jonathan Swift and Daniel Defoe; her name was Eliza Haywood, and until quite recently few other than specialists in literary history had even heard of her. Author of notorious scandal romances and (by the 1740s) more conservative, domestic and didactic fictions, Haywood challenged the conventional standards of morality imposed upon eighteenth-century women, and even in her more 'restrained' writing underscored the inadequacy of traditional precepts of feminine virtue. However, it was in her seduction plots and amatory fiction that Haywood most pointedly reconfigured the role of the submissive literary heroine, and most powerfully criticised the patriarchal society that disallowed female desire. Although Haywood "all but disappeared from histories of the novel during the nineteenth century, when her works also disappeared from print," (Nestor, v), she became the subject of renewed critical interest in the late twentieth century.

Today, Haywood's novels are valuable not only in the realm of popular fiction and social commentary, but in the sphere of feminist literature – specifically, that branch which considers the rewriting of the female body and indeed "femininity" as necessary to an equitable division of power along gender lines. As Haywood's works are being increasingly reprinted and continue to find a larger readership, the significance of her authorship is also being recognised. Even as a so-called "minor writer", Eliza Haywood is now appreciated as a "major contributor to the history of the early [novel—one whose] work is a sustained critique of her society, male-female relationships and class politics" (Backscheider & Richetti, xiii).

In her own era, Eliza Haywood was identified as being much more than a novelist. As a professional writer and working actress, Haywood was known for the “variety” and “striking quantity” (Oakleaf, 6) of her works, as well as her scandalous reputation. Since Haywood was the “most popular and prolific of English eighteenth-century women novelists” (Schofield, *Eliza*, 5), a survey of her background and career accomplishments certainly merits our attention.

Although several gaps exist in Haywood’s biography, we do know something of her personal life and a good deal about her professional life.¹ It is believed that Haywood was born Elizabeth Fowler in London in 1693.² She died in 1756. As to her life, Haywood herself “informs us in *The Female Spectator* . . . that she received an education ‘more liberal than is ordinarily allowed to Persons of [her] Sex’” (Blouch, 537). She was likely taught by male family members of the merchant class. Subsequently, Haywood left home for the stage, acted, and was married, but the “identification of [her] husband . . . [and the] fate of her marriage . . . remain an open question” (Blouch, 539). This ambiguity led to much speculation, fuelled rumours that Haywood may have run out on her husband, and contributed to her notorious reputation. We do know that Haywood’s marriage ended prematurely, that her writing career was based upon financial necessity, and that her two children were almost certainly illegitimate. The latter point ensured that Haywood’s morality was continually called into question. However, “it was her textual production [that]

¹ In 1991, Haywood researcher Christine Blouch began to correct inaccuracies found in George Whicher’s 1915 Haywood biography, *The Life and Romances of Mrs. Eliza Haywood*—the source on which “[most 20th century] accounts of Haywood are generally based” (Blouch, 536). See Blouch’s article “Eliza Haywood and the Romance of Obscurity.”

² In her article, Blouch traces three feasible possibilities for Haywood’s birth date and family of origin.

was most consistently identified with sexual promiscuity” (Ballaster, 158).

While Haywood was labelled an erotic romance writer first and foremost, her literary catalogue boasts much more. Throughout her career, Haywood “published over eighty works, including at least sixty prose fictions” (Backsheider, 153). Although “the full extent of her publications is not known” (Blouch, 594), we are certain that Haywood wrote novels, verses, plays, political essays, scandalous allegories, secret histories and conduct material. She was an editor, translator and author of periodicals; in fact, her monthly journal *The Female Spectator* (1744-46), was the “first magazine by and for women” (Schofield, *Eliza*, 109). Although Haywood’s catalogue was diverse, the bulk of her works were prose fictions that fell into one of two categories: romantic or pious texts. More specifically, Haywood’s “writing career can be divided into two distinct periods and corresponding genres: the amatory novel of the 1720s and ’30s, and the moralistic, didactic works of the 1740s and ’50s” (Wilputte, 7). Haywood’s career shift was dramatic and highly scrutinised by eighteenth- and twentieth-century critics alike. However, her “conversion” (and its probable cause) cannot be considered until it is situated in the context of Haywood’s early success and scandalous career.

It was Haywood’s role as popular romance novelist that first won her fame and infamy. Her debut novel, the enormously successful *Love in Excess* (published in three parts during 1719-20) was a racy ‘bodice-ripper’ that was “one of the three [best-selling] works before *Pamela*” (London, 111).³ It was also just the first of many amatory fictions written by Haywood. To clarify, the term “amatory fiction” is one of compromise between “love

³ Only Defoe’s *Robinson Crusoe* (1719), and Swift’s *Gulliver’s Travels* (1726) were as successful pre-Richardson.

story” (which on its own lacks a certain critical dignity), and “erotic fiction” (which leans too much toward women’s objectification.)⁴ More than in romantic fiction, “critics like Ros Ballaster find in women’s amatory fiction...a powerful articulation of female identity and self-consciousness...which revises and subverts traditional masculinist constructions of the feminine” (Baksheider & Richetti, xiv). This model “forms a kind of deliberate counter-statement or alternative tradition to the measured social realism and moral analysis of the male novel” (xiv). It is important to note that while Haywood mastered this “alternative tradition”, the form (and the scandal it begot) did not originate with her.

When Haywood adopted the amatory form and wrote *Love in Excess*, she was inheriting a style employed by literary predecessors Aphra Behn and Delarivier Manley. (In turn, “the precursors of Behn, Manley and Haywood in the field of love fiction were primarily French and female” [Ballaster, 41], and secondarily British Restoration playwrights.)⁵ Alongside Behn and the particularly risqué Manley, Haywood was recognised as completing a “notorious trio” (Spencer, 76). Consequently, not only Haywood’s amorous discourse but the author herself became “synonymous with the excesses of romance” (Ballaster, 158). And, as an object of satire and reproach, Haywood, like many early women writers “faced an obvious double bind, ‘Cursed if you fail, and scorned though you succeed’” (Rochester in Pearson, 7).

Although Haywood wrote more than thirty fictions in the decade which followed

⁴ It is David Oakleaf who makes these distinctions in his *Introduction to Love in Excess*. See p.21 of his commentary for further detail.

⁵ For a discussion of the French forms adapted and revised in British amatory fiction—including the heroic romance, little history and scandal chronicle—see Ballaster’s chapter “Observing the Forms: Amatory Fiction and the Construction of a Female Reader” in *Seductive Forms*. Pp. 31-66.

Love in Excess, it was not her work that galvanised her reputation; instead, satire and moral slander “procured [Haywood] an unenviable and distorted place in literary history” (Turner, 47). Recent critics have been fascinated by the ways in which Haywood was attacked by her male contemporaries—including Pope, Swift and Savage. Although there is some discrepancy as to whether the satires affected Haywood’s subsequent literary output, it seems universally agreed that the most damaging commentary came from Alexander Pope. In book two of *The Dunciad* (1728),— a “major satire of Grub-Street writing” (Oakleaf, 5) —Pope wrote:

See in the circle next, Eliza plac’d,
Two babes of love close clinging to her waist;
Fair as before her works she stands confess’d,
In flow’rs and pearls by bounteous Kirkall dress’d.
The Goddess then: “Who best can send on high
The salient spout, far-streaming to the sky;
His be yon Juno of majestic size,
With cow-like udders, and with ox-like eyes.”
(II.ii 157-166)⁶

Critic Ros Ballaster analyses the infamous stanza and explains that Haywood is portrayed as the prize in a urinating contest between two booksellers. The goddess Dulness oversees the competition, and Pope mocks both Kirkall’s painting of Haywood and Haywood’s “two babes of love.” The “babes” represent not only Haywood’s illegitimate children but her “two scandal novels, figured as the offspring of [an] unsavoury mercenary alliance between female writer and male [publisher]” (Ballaster, 161). The implication became that Haywood prostituted her authorship and person in trying to get the best possible price for her novels. The jibes continued when Jonathan Swift belittled Haywood for attacking

⁶ This passage from *The Poems of Alexander Pope* appears in Ballaster’s *Seductive Forms*.

one of his female friends in print. Like Pope, Swift “[dismissed] Haywood as ‘a stupid, infamous, scribbling woman,’ although he had ‘not seen any of her productions’” (Ballaster, 161).⁷ Additionally, Richard Savage publicly satirised Haywood’s licentiousness in his pieces *The Authors of the Town* (1725), and *An Author to be Let* (1732). Overall, even as the jibes brought attention to Haywood’s writing, they cost her a certain amount of critical acclaim; however, “these satiric arrows testify to her importance in the history of the novel” (Backsheider, 153).

Following the *Dunciad* satire, Haywood’s literary output first markedly declined and then underwent a major shift. Since, Haywood published relatively little in the 1730s, a “cause-and-effect relationship has often been assumed” (Blouch, 540) between Pope’s attack and Haywood’s least prolific decade. Furthermore, since the 1740s saw Haywood return to full-time writing far tamer than her racy, 1720s popular novels, many believed Haywood was “atoning” for her early works that courted scandal. Conversely, others felt that Haywood’s shift to writing long, didactic, domestic fictions, advice periodicals and conduct material was not based in moral conversion or reaction to her damaged reputation; rather, Haywood’s adherence to the domestic genre in the 1740s and ’50s seemed to signify a strategic move to remain marketable in the changing literary scene.⁸

⁷ Ballaster tells us that Swift’s comments appeared not in his public writing but in his correspondence.

⁸ Whereas Haywood critics writing in the 1980s (Schofield, Todd) largely subscribe to the theory that Haywood was “silenced temporarily” by Pope, 1990s critics (Ballaster, Wilputte, Oakleaf) believe Haywood’s disappearance “could be interpreted as the response of a professional writer to the exhaustion of one lucrative fictional vein before another had appeared” (Turner, 52). Further, whereas the belief of the ’80s critics turns Haywood into something of a feminist martyr—unfairly perhaps, given the notoriously harsh climate experienced by *both* genders within the early eighteenth-century literary community—the ’90s perception turns Haywood into a savvy businesswoman. I am unable to account for the shift in critical opinion, yet find it very interesting that Haywood’s temporary disappearance—and not just her writing—remains so controversial.

(Just as recent critics affirm that “Haywood’s explicitly didactic style demonstrates her business acumen” [Wilputte, 5], they are quick to defend the “dry spell” that preceded her switch to a “mode of sentiment and propriety” [Todd, 147]. Blouch has postulated that the 1730s Haywood may have either: decided to capitalize on her fame by returning to the theatre, or simply experienced a period of “critical inattention”). In any case, when Haywood re-emerged as a 1740s domestic writer, “didacticism became profitable” (Turner, 120), and Haywood’s currency rose once again. Her new moral works were celebrated for their focus on the “reformed heroine,” while her earlier, risqué novels were downplayed. Although Haywood is now synonymous with the eighteenth-century seduction tale, history tried to likewise “reform” her: Haywood’s 1756 “obituary [completely] ignored the erotic” (Wilputte, 8).

Haywood’s literary heroines are as varied as responses to her writing were. Just as Haywood was both marginalized and praised for writing with ““manly Vigour and...Woman’s Wit”” (Haywood in Pearson, 8-9), her female characters exhibit both qualities of feminine virtue and “unfeminine” rebellion. In this thesis I focus on studying a spectrum of Haywood’s heroines—characters who range from passive, seduced maidens to subversive, desire-filled mistresses. Since some of the players appear clear-cut and conventional while others serve to challenge eighteenth-century ideals, Haywood’s various constructions collectively reconfigure typical female identities and subjectivities. Also, since Haywood uses and disregards the codes of amatory and domestic fiction in equal measure, she succeeds in defying expectations and questioning women’s social position even as she entertains the reader. Although I recognise that there is a difference

between eighteenth-century feminism and feminism today, the following three chapters illustrate that Eliza Haywood, “champion of her sex” (Williamson, 239), fully earns her title.⁹

In the first chapter I examine Haywood’s three part seduction novel *Love In Excess*. The first “two parts of the novel relate the aristocratic intrigues of D’elmont and his friends; the third shows him...reform’d and a model of constancy” (Scholfield, *Eliza*, 18). Although the charming libertine Count D’elmont is at the centre of the story, my focus is on the many female characters who surround him and dominate the narrative by turns. I consider these virtuous and vengeful women alongside a selection of early eighteenth-century conduct writing. The exemplars offer a snapshot of the period’s values of femininity—a discourse that Haywood alternately adheres to and questions.

A few of the novel’s heroines exemplify “virtue in distress,” the amatory staple that finds “women at the mercy of men depicted as liars, cheats...rogues and sadists” (Barker-Benfield, 221). However, instead of experiencing only hysteria—the “nervous disorder [typically] brought on to virtuous [women] by predatory males” (Barker-Benfield, 32)—some threatened females, like the ingenue Melliora, also feel subconscious longing or “somatic desire” when seduced while sleeping.¹⁰ Furthermore, whereas a number of the other women characters feel similar secret longings—urges

⁹ In the *Prostituted Muse*, Jacqueline Pearson builds upon Moira Ferguson’s concept of feminism being “dependent upon changes within different historical periods.” Pearson emphasizes that few early feminists promoted “women’s right to sexual freedom” even though they fought against women’s oppression and exploitation. (14)

¹⁰ Several Haywood critics, including Spacks, Ballaster and Schofield have examined elements of this form of desire in their research. Although the exploration of this topic does not originate with me, I aim to contribute to (and expand upon) the discussion of Haywood’s desiring heroines.

exhibited through hysteria or hidden behind masquerade—certain heroines are sexually aggressive. As a group, the heroines “are both indulged and punished for succumbing to sexual desire” (Ballaster, 170), and are often left un-rewarded for remaining chaste or virtuous. Consequently, in her first novel, Haywood begins to challenge convention and the social restraints placed upon women. (The unexpected also happens when Haywood tackles the issue of women’s reading material and its effect on their sexual susceptibility). Most importantly, in *Love In Excess* we see how “women who wrote [amatory] novels used conduct book construction to [question authority even as they took] forbidden authority over the body and the language used to describe it” (Michie, 5).

With *Love in Excess* Haywood established herself as a popular writer; with subsequent works she demonstrated a staggering degree of productivity. Between 1720 and 1730 Eliza Haywood authored thirty-eight works, including “at least 35 novels or approximately 70% of the total output of [writing by] women in that period” (Turner, 38).¹¹ She was so prolific that “the level and consistency of her output in the 1720’s was unequalled by any other woman throughout the century, although it is worth noting that many of Haywood’s works consisted of 100 pages or less whilst a typical late 18th century novel comprised 3 volumes of about 200 pages each” (Turner, 38). While my third chapter centres on just such a long novel, the second chapter deals with a pair of Haywood’s shorter works.

In my study of *The British Recluse* (1722) and *Fantomina* (1725), I continue to explore the ways in which Haywood’s heroines unsettle fixed categories of eighteenth-

¹¹ From Cheryl Turner’s statistical analysis of the growth of 18th c. women’s fiction.

century “womanhood.” Specifically, whereas the co-heroines of *The British Recluse* initially appear to be passive victims of seduction, they find empowering ways to share narrative and escape their oppressive society. In turn, the women challenge and subvert the stereotypical role of feminine submission. The aggressive and creative heroine of *Fantomina* goes even further; in using masquerade to fulfil her sexual needs, she finds a way to privilege desire, and overturn both gender norms and conventional constructions of feminine identity. As a group, these heroines contribute much to Haywood’s canon of women. Consequently, like *Love in Excess*, these two seduction tales become intriguing and important amatory fictions. While virtue in distress is still very much the focus, these narratives further illustrate that where Haywood’s women characters are concerned, “the conclusion is not always the expected and predictable one” (Schofield, *Eliza*, 43).

My final chapter focuses on the title heroine of Haywood’s didactic novel, *The History of Miss Betsy Thoughtless* (1751). After examining the conventions of the “reformed heroine” plot in Mary Davys’ novella *The Reformed Coquet* (1724), I consider Haywood’s contribution to the reformed heroine genre. Although *Betsy Thoughtless* is explicitly prescriptive in tone, Haywood’s study in female vanity, coquetry, power and morality, is infused with feminist elements. Further, as Betsy Thoughtless is far from a model of reformation, she is Haywood’s vehicle to question both the issue of feminine reputation and the eighteenth-century marriage tradition. Since Haywood offers snippets of protest alongside doses of instruction, it becomes clear that she did not entirely “convert” when she donned the mantle of respectable author. Instead, Haywood continued to be as topical and multifaceted as her vast array of literary heroines. It is this quality—

the ability to infuse her novels with variety, social criticism and the opportunities for both entertainment and reader power—that makes Haywood an author not just worth reading, but also worth remembering.

Chapter One:
“Morality, Subversion and the Mind-Body Connection in *Love in Excess*”

She that listens, with pleasure, to wanton discourse, defiles her ears; she that speaks it, defiles her tongue; and immodest glances pollute the eyes. As nothing is more clean and spotless, than pure virginity, so the least recession from it is the more discernible.

(Wetenhall Wilkes - 18th c. conduct writer).

Censor the body and you censor breath and speech at the same time.

(Helene Cixous - 20th c. French feminist).

Initially it would appear that these two statements are wholly at odds with one another. After all, the two viewpoints are separated by more than two hundred years of history, and by two seemingly incongruous attitudes toward imposing bodily and linguistic constraints upon women. However, the assertions do in fact have two important elements in common. First, even though one stance implicitly endorses sexual control and the other condemns censorship, the issue of restraint is the crux of both statements. Second, and more importantly to this thesis, each position is relevant to a discussion of virtue and female gender issues in Eliza Haywood's *Love in Excess*.

In the world of Haywood's most notorious scandal romance, “female virtue” often appears to mirror definitive, conventional, eighteenth-century standards of morality and chastity. However, as taboos are broken, borders blur, and the ‘mirror’ clouds, Haywood points to the inadequacy of traditional standards of feminine virtue. More specifically, Haywood implicitly challenges the “conduct-book construction of femininity” (Jones, 98), by placing conventional heroines alongside ones who are allowed a modicum of

sexual freedom. While a few of Haywood's many female characters are punished for their sexual experiences, some maintain reputation after sex, and still others remain chaste but face severe consequences. Paradoxically, Haywood plays with conventional perceptions of virtue to undermine convention itself.

Haywood also uses the convention of character doubling to reinforce her critique of traditional stereotypes. In other words—those of Haywood scholar Mary Anne Schofield—“Haywood uses a mirror or double-inversion technique with [her] characters ...thus emphasizing the rape/virtue-in-distress theme that highlights her constant topic of feminine exploitation” (*Eliza*, 20). Even though Haywood adapts the theatrical convention of character doubling and relies on standard devices of amatory fiction, she still employs convention to subversive ends. Overall, it is this strategy that complements Haywood's (un)conventional treatment of virtue and allows her to be as ironic as she is emphatic.

If one is to uncover Haywood's sub-textual, ironic commentary on female subordination, there are several axes to consider in dealing with her virtuous and villainous female characters. For example, Haywood's treatment of one heroine's novel-reading is not only a nod to convention but a critique of a punishing patriarchal society. Similarly, Haywood's focus on raging, swooning, masked and hysterical bodies feeds both contingencies of the romantic plot and her subtle criticism of the feminine social position. Finally, as the female body becomes a site for physical signification of both feminine desire and sexual reluctance, Haywood positions her heroines both conventionally and outside of convention. That said, in order to position **Haywood** as

more than a “fence-sitting” equivocal champion, one must recognize that her writing works on several levels.

Although *Love in Excess* contains seemingly irreconcilable paradoxes, these signify not carelessness but undoubted calculation. Haywood’s talent for doubling meaning and layering her text allows her to be commercial, conventional, subversive and entertaining. In fact, Haywood’s self-reflexivity and willingness to spoof convention make for some very comic moments in her novel. It is this diversity that makes *Love in Excess* both a successful romance and an intriguing social commentary. In turn, a look at another form of social commentary—conduct literature—informs a reading of Haywood’s novel.

In the eighteenth century, female conduct literature contained models of socially appropriate behaviour for young women and described the requisite qualities for maintaining virtue. The standards set in these prescriptive writings represent an extreme and idealized femininity. As such, one might be tempted to dismiss them as the moral imperatives of a zealous few. However, even though it is difficult to determine the degree to which women followed conduct models of virtue, it is important to acknowledge the considerable role that conduct dicta played in shaping and upholding gender norms. Indeed, “It has been argued that [the] dominant ideal of femininity [presented in conduct literature]...was one of the most powerful factors not only in establishing a sense of middle-class identity, but in bringing about a general ‘feminization’ of culture” (Jones, 10-11). While in these terms “the role of conduct literature...[may be seen as potentially]... enabling for women” (Jones, 10), the reverse was normally true. Since

most prescribed “discourses of femininity” (Jones, 7), served to reinforce the *dominant discourse* of female chastity and passivity, conduct models of virtue were actually more restrictive than empowering.¹

Contributing to constructions of female identity, “conduct literature equated ‘natural’ femininity with passive asexual virtue” (Jones, 57). Accordingly, a proper and virtuous young lady was expected to be modest, obedient, and most importantly chaste, but also had to appear desirable to men. (One instantly sees the difficulty of navigating such an ironic double standard.) Although coquetry was considered incongruous with the character of the stereotypical virtuous female, many conduct manuals implicitly endorsed it. Popular conduct writer Lord Halifax advocated that women ought to either use their “gentleness to soften, and entertain [their masters] “ (18), or choose to adopt an “*affected Ignorance*” (20) when a husband erred. While it was in the province of a virtuous woman to forgive a villainous man, there was no parity in making allowances for feminine affronts to virtue. Even when guided by their fathers, young women were fully responsible for exercising caution and censoring their own unacceptable behaviour. As Halifax reminds his daughter (and other female readers): “Want of *Care* therefore, my dear Child, is never to be excus’d; since as to *this* World, it hath the same effect as want of *Vertue*” (17). If careless behaviour was “inexcusable” in an unmarried female, sexual behaviour was unforgivable.

Chastity was so important to eighteenth-century perceptions of female virtue that

¹ For a further discussion of eighteenth-century prescriptive writing, chastity and rebel girls see Margaret Hunt’s “To Read, Knit and Spin: Middling Daughters’ and the Family Economy,” Pp. 73-100.

its absence negated all other admirable feminine qualities. Conduct writer Wetenhall

Wilkes explains:

Chastity is the next virtue, that is to fall under your consideration; no charm can supply its place; without it beauty is unlovely, wit is mean and wanton; quality contemptible, and good-breeding worthless. She, who forfeits her chastity, withers by degrees into scorn and contrition. ...Chastity is the great point of female honour, and the least slip in a woman's honour is never to be recovered. (29)

From this patriarchal vantage point one sees not only how synonymous chastity was with "honour" and hence virtue itself, but how utterly incompatible unregulated, female sexuality was with conventional ideals. Clearly then, if we accept conduct literature as being one site that holds the mirror up to society and reflects the prescriptive attitudes of Haywood's day, we find that the conduct-book construction of virtue leaves no room for feminine desire. In turn, as Eliza Haywood explores facets of female desire in her "scandalous" writing, we find her implicitly challenging conduct ideology. Thus, Haywood participates in an ongoing dialogue with a dominant discourse of the early eighteenth century.

In *Love in Excess* Eliza Haywood lives up to her title "Arbitress of passion" (Whicher, xx), by crafting a romance that explores female sexuality even as it considers feminine virtue. Her story is conventional simply because it is a "seduction tale," but unconventional because here "the novel with a seduced heroine [becomes] a vehicle for feminism" (Spencer, 112). In fact, to build upon Mary Anne Schofield's idea of "doubling" as method to reinforce the theme of exploitation, it is the sheer number of seductions, the multiplicity of female characters, and the repeated focus on questions of

(im)morality that allow Haywood to explore the issue of female subordination in great depth and from many viewpoints. Notably, Haywood does not stop at showing the exploitation of women but allows her characters the power of choice and the experience of desire. However, Haywood's individual female players are allotted varying degrees of power and exhibit varying degrees of virtue—be it sexual or otherwise. While this moral/power imbalance seemingly colours Haywood as inconsistent, a closer look at her characters actually suggests alternate possibilities.

Haywood scholars often classify the female characters in *Love in Excess* according to patterns of role “doubling” or personality typing. These groupings prove initially useful in sorting and tracking the multitude of women players; however, the categories are also somewhat limited. First, to explain the commonly identified patterns: Scholars such as Schofield and Oakleaf group the females both in terms of their “alliterative doubling” in segments of the novel, and their relationships to Count D’elmont—the central figure who is the seductive and seducing “hub” in the circle of women. For example, in the first of the three volumes, both the scheming Alovisa and the sincere Amena desire D’elmont; thus, they become the doubled sides of a metaphorical two-way mirror. Similarly, in the second volume, both the rabidly desirous Melantha and the reluctant Melliora long for D’elmont, and are thus comparable yet opposite. To further categorize the “antithetical female pairings” (Schofield, *Eliza*, 20), critics such as Ros Ballaster and Jane Spencer favour grouping these women and the third volume’s remaining significant female characters (Camilla, Ciamara and Violetta) according to the archetypes “virago,” “victim” and “virgin.” Although the labels do represent facets of the

women's identities, they are also reductive and misleading.

Even though Haywood's characters are largely stereotypes, they are unconventionally complex in regards to questions of virtue and of their ultimate fates. First, as the orphaned, innocent ward of D'elmont, Melliora is cast as both the *virgin* and *victim* of the Count's advances. However, Melliora also participates in her sexuality on some level, and is not a model of conventional asexual virtue even though she appears to be on her "matchless" (*LE*, 92) surface. Melliora—like Camilla in her parallel plot line—is a desiring character who maintains reputation and is not publicly castigated for indiscretion, but rather rewarded with a happy marital ending. Conversely, the unknowing, seduced Amena is punished for tarnishing her virtue; she receives a very conventional sentence of monastic life, when in fact her actions mirror those of Melliora and Camilla. To further complicate matters, spiteful Alovisa appears to be every inch the man-hunting *virago* but is unexpectedly virtuous in the conventional sexual sense. However, Alovisa is nonetheless punished with death, while Melantha, who is both villainous and promiscuous is eventually rewarded. Only lusty Ciamara dies the death that would conventionally be warranted for her lack of sexual virtue, but her suicide is still unconventional because of her lack of penitence. Lastly, the minor but dramatically presented Violetta embodies the oddest inversion of expected character typing. She is a *victim* yet never traditionally seduced, and her shining virtue is 'rewarded' with a most maudlin death. As we move towards reconciling these strange surprises and seeming inconsistencies we must find a way to consider all of the characters' similarities and differences, not just those of the sub-groups. Only then will it be possible to reach some

conclusion about Haywood's treatment of female virtue.

Obviously, attempts to label Haywood's characters with specific, sexual archetypes are only useful if said characters fully meet archetypal specifications. Yes, Haywood's heroines appear conventional on the most superficial of levels. However, these "virtuous" and "villainous" females become Haywood's means to subvert traditional moral precepts and question society. For example, Haywood seems to ask: "Why must a seduced maiden always be pathetic?" It is a question that Haywood underscores more than two hundred years ago, and one still being asked today. According to Susan Staves:

[Eighteenth-century literary seduced maidens] need not be seen as sweetly pathetic. Instead, they may be seen as loathsome temptresses damned sinners, sordid criminals, pioneers of sexual freedom, boring fools, or simply as normal. The response to such young women, furthermore, certainly need not be the eighteenth-century response of tears. (109)

Judging from Haywood's own "response to such young women" in her varied cast of characters, one guesses she would agree. While Haywood *does* use the convention of the persecuted seduced maiden to show how women are exploited by the men of her patriarchal culture, she also demonstrates that seductive or sexual women need not be pariahs mournfully robbed of all virtue. Consequently, I find it useful to consider the women in *Love in Excess* as comprising a spectrum of virtue. Since the characters criss-cross lines of moral and sexual virtue and slip in and out of conventional expectations, there are many gray areas and few black and white absolutes. Each character has some degree of virtue however small, and each is like a facet of a prism reflecting an image

back to the reader. Since the amount of perceived virtue each woman has depends largely on societal judgments and circumstances, Haywood's spectrum implicitly contains the patriarchal moral planes that she is so adept at subversively "refracting."

In providing sites that examine female virtue and challenge convention, Haywood directs her reader to the female mind and the question of reading itself. Melliora is found reading or with a book nearby just before D'elmont makes his first two attempts at seducing her. The inclusion of a heroine reading is by no means unique, but Haywood manages to surround her literary lady with symbolic import. However, before we scrutinize the issue in detail, it is useful to consider what kind of reading material would have been deemed (in)appropriate for an ingénue like Melliora.

Eighteenth-century society believed novel reading to be highly dangerous to the female mind. Witness the warning offered by writer George Colman:

'Tis NOVEL most beguiles the female heart
Miss reads – she melts – she sighs –
Love steals upon her –
And then – Alas, poor girl! – good night, poor Honor!
(from Barker-Benfield, 327)

Like countless others expressing similar sentiment, this cautionary snippet connects novel reading with "love" or rather *lust* and subsequent loss of virtue. If not subject to outright deflowering or lured towards prostitution, females who read scandalous writing were thought at the very least to be primed for erotic sensations and sinful encounters. Conduct literature—which alongside the Bible, books of religious instruction, and respectable poetry was considered suitable fare for women—contained particularly severe criticism of immoral writings and immodest readers. While both sexes disapproved of female novel

reading, it is an interesting testament to the powers of patriarchy that many of the conduct writers were men, and the maligned novel writers women. Even more intriguing is the fact that so-called “immoral” writers like Eliza Haywood and her notorious precursor Delarivier Manley entertain convention and point to the issue of improper fiction in their own torrid works. As we shall see, it is ironically the scandalous authors who provide their female audience with true cautionary tales.

Delarivier Manley's *New Atalantis* (1709) contains a moral vignette about an ill-fated heroine that informs a discussion of Haywood's *Melliora* and the consequences of novel reading. Like *Melliora*, Manley's heroine Charlot is a naïve, newly orphaned (but long motherless) girl left to the care of a nobleman/friend by her dying father. Also like *Melliora*, Charlot has received a good rudimentary education, but arrives entirely ignorant of worldly and amorous affairs. While Charlot is “no great beauty” (Manley, 30), and lacks *Melliora*'s divine physical charms, her guardian, the Duke is drawn to her innate sense of virtue. However, unlike Haywood's Count D'elmont, Manley's Duke is unmarried and is not immediately love-struck by his young charge. Instead, he initially assumes the role of tutor/moral advisor and decides “young Charlot [is] to be educated in the high road to applause and virtue” (Manley, 30). As a model of irreproachable conduct, Charlot is denied access to “whatever would not edify, airy romances, plays, dangerous novels, loose and insinuating poetry, artificial introductions of love, [and] well-painted landscapes of the dangerous poison” (Manley, 30). However, it is the Duke who proves “poisonous” when he suddenly feels a great passion for Charlot. The heroine's virtue and mind are soon threatened by exposure to both sexual advances and racy reading material.

Although Charlot is initially oblivious to the Duke's desire and the disintegration of his reason, the reader is privy to both the Duke's plotting and Manley's strong reproach of it. As the Duke reads and adopts Machiavellian maxims, he begins to fixate solely on "the manner how to corrupt [Charlot]" (Manley, 35). Here, Manley gets in a clever dig – not only young girls but grown men might internalize what they read! Subsequently, when the Duke abruptly decides to offer Charlot the authors he formerly forbid her, Manley likewise offers a telling metaphor. As the Duke presents Charlot with "the key of that gallery to improve her mind and seek her diversion" (Manley, 35), one cannot fail to see his implicit 'unlocking' of Charlot's hold on her virtue. Further, as the Duke directs Charlot to the seductive words of Ovid and "by this dangerous reading...[pretends] to show her that there were pleasures her sex were born for, and which she might consequently long to taste" (Manley, 35), he really ushers her into the metaphorical "gallery" of sexual temptation.

Just as a conduct writer might predict, once Charlot has read inappropriately, she is overcome by an excess of feeling and sensibility. However, she not only suffers the kisses and liberties taken by the Duke, but slides into debauchery with almost comic speed, inflaming desire by a near addiction to erotic literature. As the Duke provides the "poisonous" Ovid, Petrarch and Tibullus, Charlot spends nights reading stories "abominable for virgins...and which rather ought to pass the fire than the press" (Manley, 37). Consequently, in a scene ironically filled with the conventional trappings of the romantic fiction she would probably love, a lovesick Charlot is "undone" despite her prayers and tears. Afterwards, the love affair wanes, and the Duke tires of Charlot and

marries a Countess. The end of Charlot's story drips with contempt, pity, and blame:

The remainder of her life was one continued scene of horror, sorrow and repentance. She died a true landmark to warn all believing virgins from shipwrecking their honour upon (that dangerous coast of rocks) the vows and pretended passion of mankind. (Manley, 45)

The passage speaks for itself but leaves this reader asking if Manley's allegiance truly lies with the *unbelieving* virgins instead.

Manley's tale of Charlot's undoing is certainly an exemplum and warning to young women who read injudiciously. However, because the tale is *so* overwrought one is tempted to read the tale ironically or comically—and maybe that is what is intended. Even though Manley crafts a very conventional moral lesson complete with the expected corrupting literature, vulnerable ingenue and wolfish, lusty villain, she adds an incestuous twist, and fully caters to the scandal-thirsty readers her own story would condemn. It is an interesting move that finds Manley seemingly satirizing convention even as she replicates it. It is also quite brilliant and in league with Haywood's multi-layered writing. Manley not only pokes self-deprecating fun at her own role as romance writer, but manages to write a piece that both vindicates the moralists—if they'd deign to read it—and entertains lovers of seduction tales. Since Manley would have been appealing to the romance fans first and foremost, one wonders if her blatantly conventional cautionary tale in fact mocks the sanctimonious moralists who themselves warned against reading romances. Perhaps Manley recognized that it was not the scandal stories that endangered female minds and virtue, but rather that it was her society—one that 'protected' girls into utter ignorance and vulnerability—that put women at risk. Again, even though Charlot takes the fall,

Manley goes out of her way to implicate the Duke as the real thief of virtue. As a result, Manley's story of the follies of improper reading moves beyond the level of convention to subversive social critique.

In Haywood's equally subversive *Love in Excess*, Melliora is first found reading in the garden—the traditional *locus amoenus* for courtly romance and a frequent metaphor for the female body.² Since Melliora is in the garden, one would expect her to be consumed by tales of love. However, she reads not romance but respected French philosopher Fontenelle. Even in this small detail, Haywood immediately inverts convention and subtly juxtaposes an unexpected glimpse of Melliora's mental depth with a site that is stereotypically amorous. (Normally the only thing being studied in a romantic literary garden is one's lover, not a book.) Additionally, when the reading Melliora is first perceived “lying on a green bank in a melancholy but charming posture” (*LE*, 108), she *is* the object of the male gaze but is not described in the expected, rapturous, head-to-toe effictio often used to portray romantic heroines. Since Haywood crafts a picture of Melliora's refined yet intelligent innocence, her heroine is shown to have mental virtues outside of sexual appeal. Though that may make Melliora all the more enticing to D'elmont, she is not (by conventional standards) setting herself up for seduction with improper reading material. Instead, Haywood defies elements of the traditional garden seduction set-up in such a way that implies Melliora ought to be safe.

² April London discusses the tradition of heroine seduction and the garden enclosure. See her article “Placing the Female: The Metonymic Garden in Amatory and Pious Narrative, 1700-1740,” from Schofield and Macheski's *Fetter'd or free?* (1986).

Hence, the subtext of the garden scenario is slightly reconfigured in this sketch—neither lush setting nor physical beauty need mark Melliora as ripe for deflowering.

After D'elmont approaches the reading Melliora, it is possible to read an increasingly scathing subtext between the proverbial “lines” of Haywood’s scene. D'elmont is greatly surprised to find Melliora reading philosophy. However, he does not restrict himself to praising her wit, but rather uses the discovery of her ambitious study as a launching pad to gush over her “other excellencies” (*LE*, 109). Obviously, D'elmont does not enter the garden to talk philosophy but to engage in the game of love. To that end, D'elmont’s brief focus on Melliora’s reading functions as sexual foreplay, and any consideration of her mental virtue is quickly eclipsed by attention to her desirability. Why would Haywood do this? Two reasons: the focal shift serves to likewise tease the reader, and to suggest on a more serious level that not even Melliora’s intellectual precociousness will shelter her from inappropriate sexual advances. Recall that D'elmont takes Melliora’s hands, finds love in her eyes, gives in to lust, and captures her in an embrace of “ungovernable passion” (*LE*, 110). In this, Haywood foregrounds not Melliora’s response to the passion, but D'elmont’s perception of it, **his** longings, and **his** refusal to be held accountable for his actions: “Impute not crime to me, but that unavoidable impulse” (*LE*, 110). If D'elmont has little self-control in this scene, Melliora has even less control over being made a seductive object of desire. Haywood demonstrates that Melliora, her well-read subject, is nonetheless a susceptible “text” herself – one being ‘written’ upon by male desire. Thus, even the question of reading itself becomes subsumed by and encoded in a bodily register. Once again, the whole issue

of female virtue becomes largely based on sexuality in a very traditional way.

However, within the subtext surrounding the issues of reading, sexuality, and morality, it becomes apparent in subsequent scenes that it is necessary for Haywood to exploit convention to show how women are themselves exploited.

Haywood creates a second encounter between D'elmont and Melliora that strongly mirrors the initial encounter. In an undoubted effort to ensure that sexual tension reflects thematic textual tension, the companion episode follows scant pages after the first. Although the deferral is brief, it is rhetorically significant. The "telling of a story of seduction [becomes] a mode of seduction" (Ballaster, 24). Moreover, Haywood uses the gap between seduction scenes to reintroduce the issue of appropriate reading material. As such, sexuality and "textuality" intersect on yet another level. This time we find the flirtatious Melantha reading love poetry to company, and an adamant Melliora exercising her wit in "all opportunities of condemning that passion" (*LE*, 116). Although Melliora is a convincing orator and "everybody [agrees] that she was born only to create desire, not be susceptible of it herself" (*LE*, 117), there is an unsettling undercurrent in the very fact that her "becoming fierceness" (*LE*, 116) of speech invokes so much pleasure in her audience. Here, Haywood allows questions of objectification to resurface. One wonders: Is Melliora truly being heard or is she, like a book herself, only being judged by her 'cover'? Since she is so beautiful, desirable, and "matchless," does anyone even care if she knows how to read, let alone what she reads? As Haywood abruptly repositions Melliora with Ovid's love *Epistles* she seemingly underscores these very questions.

At the beginning of the second reading encounter, D'elmont finds Melliora "lying

on a couch in a most charming dissabillee” (*LE*, 117)—one that does not predict the reversal of gender roles to follow. (Notably, in a later scene, Ciamara reclines in a similar posture when she tries to seduce D’elmont but finds him repulsed by her. Clearly desire, like the origin of the gaze, depends on male viewpoint.) In contrast to the earlier garden scenario, Melliora is sketched in a very intimate description. Her body “of a thousand beauties” is the focus of D’elmont’s attention, and her “reading” choice—“on which she had reclined her head” (*LE*, 117)—is initially a mere prop in the setting. However, since the book is pleasure reading, D’elmont happily points to Melliora’s possible hypocrisy, and makes gentle accusations that not only reiterate Melliora’s fear of the “softning” (*LE*, 116) influence of romantic literature, but are an ironic, meta-lingual prelude to **his** attempt to “soften” and seduce her.

As Melliora defends herself and shares her belief in virtuous love and friendship, conversation turns away from the issue of reading itself. However, for Melliora the exchange does not become foreplay but remains in the realm of moral and cerebral debate. Clearly, a peek at Ovid and some talk of love have not primed her for lusty activity but instead inflamed **D’elmont**. It is D’elmont who kisses Melliora’s hand, inventories her body parts—lip, neck, and breast—and accuses her of “feigning an ignorance to distract [him] more” (*LE*, 122). Melliora may have read a little romance, as convention suggests females are apt to do, but it is D’elmont who is slave to romantic clichés and pleading. Haywood inverts and subverts convention by refusing to let Melliora sacrifice virtue, and gives her the (typically male) voice of reason while the Count falls prostrate at her feet. Although Melliora sheds a few sympathetic tears for

D'elmont, she is "fired with a virtuous indignation" (*LE*, 122), and is by no means about to instantly yield. Thus, Haywood begins to reconfigure the "pathetic seduced maiden" construct, and to deconstruct the convention that dictates romance-reading females turn automatically promiscuous. She also makes both her readers and D'elmont—who relished the passionate discourse—settle for textual fulfillment over sexual fulfillment. In this, Haywood not only meets the "delayed-gratification-requirement" of amatory fiction, but gets to remove her heroine from a position of possible exploitation to one of feminine power.

It is notable that Haywood chooses to introduce Melantha's character in between the two companion reading scenes. As mentioned, Melantha appears and "diverts the company with some verses on love" (*LE*, 116). Strikingly, this first glimpse of Melantha contains no description of her appearance or character but only her choice of reading material. Inevitably a reader must base first impressions on what is provided, and hence, one links Melantha's character with the "pocket book poetry" she takes everywhere. While the brief focus on her chosen reading initially paints Melantha as frivolous and less scholarly than Melliora, it also serves to comment on her eventual behaviour and virtue. If reading material can predict behaviour as eighteenth-century convention suggests, Melantha certainly embodies the traditional formula that equates "seducible verse reader" with seductive woman. However, although Haywood follows the equation with Melantha, she does not see it through to its traditional end of moral punishment and ruin.

Defying conventional expectation, Haywood does not penalize Melantha for the plotting, impersonating and coquetry that define her throughout the novel. Even though

Melantha schemes to become D'elmont's lover, and succeeds in seducing him, she is not exposed or made an outcast. Unlike Amena—who is sentenced to monastic life for her brief and relatively innocent garden encounter with D'elmont—Melantha suffers no loss of honour. Proving the truth in Joseph Dorman's poetic line: "She is virtuous who is never caught" (from Jones, 70), Haywood's coquette is rewarded with happy obscurity, married life, and the secret of D'elmont's bastard child buried safely in her womb. The unconventional twist is intriguing and is also ironically typical of Haywood. Whereas we might expect Haywood to follow the status quo with a "virtue-challenged heroine," in this case she does not. Instead, to her credit, Haywood refrains from propagating the moral judgments of a patriarchal society and asks her readers to question them.

Alongside her explorations of reading and the female mind, Haywood repeatedly directs her readers to the physicality and bodily expressions of her female characters in *Love in Excess*. While a bodily focus is conventionally necessary to uphold the titillation quotient of scandal romance, Haywood's focus is "scandalous" for more political reasons. Haywood's attention to bodies highlights the traditionally un-sanctioned sexual desires of women. Additionally, emphasis on the issue of the female form gives Haywood a forum to criticize men for sexually exploiting women. Consequently, Haywood exposes the female body in a way that both challenges typical ideals of virtue and attempts to 'strip' the patriarchy.

Haywood's first symbolic bodily portrayal characterizes the very physical Alovisa. It also criticizes typical constructions of femininity. Alovisa is the first female to enter the novel, but surprisingly there is no initial focus on her outer appearance. Instead,

in an immediate reversal of conventional gender presentation, a reference to “the beauty of [D’elmont’s] person” (*LE*, 39), is prelude to a description of Alovisa’s bodily actions in regard to him. It is a very small twist but it subtly implies that females need not always be the objects of an exploitative gaze. Further, as Haywood paints Alovisa as an aggressor and woman of passion, she challenges traditional portrayals of female virtue.

Haywood writes:

Aloisa, [sic] if her passion was not greater than the rest, her pride, and the good opinion she had of herself, made her the less able to support it; she sighed, she burned, she raged, when she perceived the charming D’elmont behaved himself toward her with no mark of distinguishing affection. (40)

Though this passage might have been nothing more than an exaggerated expression of a romantic crush, Haywood purposefully follows through on the bodily characterization.

Alovisa ‘sighs,’ ‘burns’ and ‘rages’ for much of her time in the novel. She tears her hair, paces, and pulls at her face whenever ardour or jealousy of her rivals overtakes her.

Alovisa’s energetic bodily expressions may be distasteful, melodramatic, and a mark of her villainy, but they are unquestionably also emblematic of her desire. At the same time, Alovisa’s bodily posturing is a function of her restrictive environment. On this topic

Laura Fasick is succinct: “If eighteenth-century social norms constrained women’s verbal expression, they endorsed another form of ‘speech’: the language of the body” (51).

Accordingly, while Alovisa may “[curse] that custom which forbids women to make a declaration of their thoughts” (*LE*, 40), her corporeality communicates her passion. Even as Alovisa appears a near caricature of the conventional “hysterical virgin figure,”

Haywood explodes convention. “She strikingly crafts a public space for [the] subjectivity

...[of] the desiring female subject “ (Oakleaf, 8), and uses Alovisa to indicate the potential depth of that feminine desire. Consequently, the fact that Alovisa’s passion is so destructive becomes a criticism of the “female-subjugating society” that only supports the passively virtuous. In other words, Haywood would seem to suggest that female desire is not destructive in and of itself, but becomes so for the woman whose society condemns it.

It is significant that Alovisa’s physical posturing begins to change after she marries D’elmont. While she has a new unknown rival in Melliora and still rages bodily, she also assumes more typically “womanly” subservient positions. She falls on her knees in supplication to D’elmont—making amends for her (justifiable) jealousy—and falls into a conventional “swoon” just as she is about to learn who D’elmont has been seducing. As Alovisa sinks into these increasingly clichéd and demeaning physical positions, she is implicitly exploited and reduced by a husband who is indifferent to her passion. (Notably, readers are not privy to the consummation of this marriage of convenience). For all her plotting and longing to expose D’elmont’s infidelity, Alovisa “love(s) [her] husband still” (*LE*, 164), and decides against quitting virtue and “[sully[ng] her] yet unspotted name with endless infamy” (*LE*, 172). Although Alovisa is manipulative herself, she is still exploited by both D’elmont who marries her money, and the Baron D’Espernay who demands sex in exchange for revealing the name of her rival. In keeping with this, Alovisa’s final body posture—pierced in death on a symbolically phallogentric sword—marks her as a body controlled by patriarchy. While her death is necessary to further the romantic plot, it can also be read as a critique of the male-dominated society that dictated sexual roles and rendered women so powerless that they turned aggressive.

Haywood addresses the issues of female bodies, sexuality, and virtue more explicitly in the seduction scenes that pair D'elmont with Amena, Melliora and Ciamara respectively. (These scenes occur before, during and after D'elmont's marriage to Alovisa.) In the first seduction scenario, the Count's sweet talk, Amena's temporary "insensibility" to her "rash action," and the "pleasantness" of the exotic garden surroundings seemingly conspire to destroy maidenly virtue:

What now could poor Amena do, surrounded with so many powers, attacked by such a charming force without, betrayed by tenderness within? Vertue and pride, the guardians of her honour fled from her breast, and left her to her foe. (63)

Amena is presented as being both exploited by her suitor and powerless to resist desire. "She does not initiate action and so becomes sacrificial 'prey' to her own dangerous passions, the advances of [D'elmont], and the atmosphere of the garden" (London, 109). Since Amena is all but bewitched, her nightgown "flies open" seemingly of its own accord and "her spirits all [dissolving sink] in lethargy of love" (*LE*, 63). (When Ciamara willingly seduces D'elmont she is fully aware of her actions, yet her robes "fly open" in a similarly madcap manner.) Even though D'elmont perceives that Amena's "every pulse [confesses] a wish to yield" (*LE*, 63), Amena is portrayed as being unaware of her sensual participation. While an interruption "soon [rouses] Amena from her dream of happiness" (*LE*, 64), she spirals into "shame", and abruptly falls "quite senseless" (65) at finding herself locked out of her house. Before considering the implications of this female somaticism let us examine Melliora in a similar circumstance.

After D'elmont's first two attempts at seducing Melliora are thwarted, he secretly

steals into her chamber and watches her sleep. Melliora is dreaming, and because “Desire, with watchful diligence repelled, returns with greater violence in unguarded sleep” (*LE*, 127), she rapturously cries out and embraces the “too, too lovely Count – extatick ruiner!” (*LE*, 127). Although she has expressed desire, Melliora awakes confused and shocked to find D’elmont fondling her and prays to the Angels to save her virtue. As the lust-filled D’elmont accuses Melliora of coy teasing, only the familiar “interruption trope” saves her honour. Like Amena, Melliora is seemingly betrayed by both her body and the Count who was “on the point of making good what he had vowed” (*LE*, 129).

What is Haywood trying to signify in the desire-filled yet reluctant bodies of her female characters? She certainly plays upon the eighteenth-century belief in female hysteria.³ According to *A Medicinal Dictionary* (1743), this disorder “which more particularly [seized] Virgins,” could cause anything from “commotions of mind to severe convulsions of the nervous parts” (James, 86). Further, “women subject to exorbitant sullies of lawless Passion [were] in greater Danger of this Disease” that was only “removed” with marriage (James, 86). As Ros Ballaster states: “Haywood’s texts put popular contemporary theories of madness to use in her attempt to represent and justify female desire” (172). Both Amena and Melliora reveal such desire in dream states just as they are about to be ravished. This allows them some degree of sexual freedom not condoned in waking life. While Ballaster claims “that the hysterical symptom is in and of itself ambivalent” (173), and also underscores the powerlessness of the female, I think it

³ It is Ros Ballaster who first discussed hysteria in conjunction with Haywood’s heroines. For more background information, see her excellent discussion in *Seductive Forms* (1992).

is just this attention to powerlessness that is meant to empower Haywood's reader.

In *Amena and Melliora*, Haywood is able to demonstrate that feminine passion is a real force that is easily exploited by men; thus, she offers her readers a warning. Similarly, in her other amatory fictions, Haywood repeatedly recasts the heroine-as-victim role—emphasizing the perils of seduction, and warning even while titillating the readers of romance. For instance, in *The Fatal Secret: OR, Constancy in Distress*, (1725), Haywood portrays Anadea's seduction by Blessure. This scene offers the power of female fantasy alongside a threatening reality:

THE Lethargy [Anadea] was in, was not, however so strong, as to have the Power o'er Fancy: ---Her dear *Blessure* was ever in her Thoughts; and at this Moment, watchful Imagination brought him to her Arms. --- In Sleep she prest him to her panting Breast; and the real Warmth of those Caresses she received, making her Dream more lively, she returned his Ardours with an Extasy too potent for the dull God's Restraint. ----Unbounded Rapture broke thro' the Power of Art; All her Senses regained at once their Liberty, and she awoke, to sleep no more. (*FS*, 250)⁴

Like Haywood's other somatic heroines, Anadea awakens a "most wretched Creature" (*FS*, 250) who mourns her loss of virtue. This loss is presented in intimate detail to ensure a reader's gain. It functions as a warning but also holds sheer voyeuristic appeal for the scandal-thirsty consumer. Likewise, a potent snippet from *The Adventures of Eovaii* (1736), contains Haywood's intriguing brand of cautionary eroticism. She writes:

[He] snatch'd her to his Breast, printed unnumbered Kisses on her Lips, then held her off to feast his Eyes upon her yielding Charms: Beauties which till then he knew but in Idea, her treacherous Robes too loosly girt revealed: his eager Hands were Seconds to his Sight, and travell'd over all. (*AE*, 79)

⁴ Haywood scholar Earla Wilputte cites this passage in her Introduction to Haywood's *Three Novellas* (1995).

Although this reads as somewhat explicit by eighteenth-century standards, Haywood is “not [offering] mere gratuitous sex and feminine fantasy. She [has] an important moral and social message to convey” (Wilputte, 4). Ironically enough, in passages like these, Haywood exploits the female body to signal her own protest against women’s exploitation. In turn, she is to be credited for giving her readers more than a vicarious thrill. As Ballaster states: “Haywood’s romances of the 1720s...locate a feminine resistance precisely in the compulsive re-inscription and display of the hysterical female body” (169). In turn, the figure of the hysterical yet desiring heroine becomes potentially empowering. Although empowerment via hysteria sounds unlikely, Haywood makes it possible by continuing to manipulate amatory convention.

Whereas the vulnerable “sleeping heroine” who lacks bodily control is often configured as experiencing “a metaphorical death—[an] absorption into an economy of signifiers as fatal to her body” (Michie, 89) as it is threatening to her virtue—a number of Haywood’s seduced heroines hold a measure of power in their subconscious desire. Specifically, even as Melliora and other “hysterical” heroines are repeatedly subject to predatory advances, their lack of awareness ensures that they may lust while remaining exempt from censure. As Ballaster points out: “under cover of the dream state, Haywood can even bring her heroines to orgasm without undermining the conviction of their virtuous principles” (171). Melliora may be “unable to control her dream life “ (Ballaster, 171) and her “extatick ruiner” D’Elmont, but she holds considerable social control in being a desiring character who is not held accountable for her erotic longing. Melliora demonstrates that “Haywood’s heroines though [seduced or even potentially] ruined are

‘innocent’ because of their inability to resist sexual passion” (Ballaster, 170).

By way of comparison, another of Haywood’s heroines, Belinda, from the novella *The British Recluse*, is also portrayed as being hysterically unable to resist desire. In a garden seduction scene that echoes Amena’s in *Love in Excess*, Belinda does not slumber while virtue is threatened. However, when she finds herself “trapped within [an] eroticized landscape [where] the female body gives up the unequal struggle,” (Spender, 58), her passion speaks through her “trembling Limbs [that] refused to oppose the lovely Tyrant’s Will!” (*BR*, 211). Just as Melliora’s somaticism exemplifies “a vision of irresponsibility, expressing female sexuality without being subject to judgment” (Spacks in Spender, 58), Belinda’s desire-fueled paralysis—and the very forces of Nature—likewise absolve her. In each case, “Haywood develops an effective strategy for relieving female guilt about sexual desire by insisting that the women are not responsible” (Spender, 58). She also inverts the binary that traditionally finds male seducers unaccountable for their sexual urges. In doing so, Haywood reverses conventional gender roles and thus begins to challenge them. At the same time, Haywood continues to craft a space where her “female readers can...indulge the pleasures of sexual fantasy while [she as] author vindicates them” (Spender, 58).

Just as Haywood “won praise for finding a language through which to express passion” (Oakleaf, 14), she deserves praise for representing the desires of the so-called “hysteric.” That said, I must make something clear. I do not wish to paint Haywood’s somatic heroines with a sweeping feminist brush, or one that colours them as being overly liberated. Unconscious desire, or conflicted desire—like Melliora’s—is certainly limited.

However, Melliora and her somatic counterparts provide a fascinating study in the representation of female sexuality and its erasure. Before elaborating on this point, some familiarity with Helena Michie's work will prove helpful.

In *The Flesh Made Word* (1987), Michie focuses on novels and the female body, “look[ing] for the sexual in what has always been assumed to be the place of its erasure” (Michie, 4)—the Victorian period. In part, Michie's feminist, deconstructive analysis involves the study of tropes or “codes” that “[shape and confine] the heroine's body” (Michie, 86), as well as our reading of it. For instance, Michie looks at the portrayal of literary heroines in art and the ways in which paintings become a “metatropé” that creates a “double frame” (87). This type of frame not only doubles the signifying potential of the body of the codex heroine, but can be further layered to depict or deny female sexuality.⁵ Although Michie concentrates on Victorian codes and representations, I find her theories applicable to the writing Haywood did more than a century earlier. Like Michie's subjects, Haywood's hysterical figures allow for the “erotic and empowering interplay of sexual possibility with its absence” (Michie, 11).

Haywood's depiction of hysterically desiring heroines exploits and relies upon one dynamic: the shifting of symbolic absence and presence within the female mind and body. As established, a somatic, seduced Melliora is beyond reproach; she lacks both conscious desire and the full-bodied sexuality that characterizes a willing, physical

⁵In the next thesis chapter I will consider how masquerade serves a similar function in Haywood's short story “Fantomina.”

participant. However, the absence of her sensual awareness, that which attempts to “enact erasure” (Michie, 73), for virtue’s sake, actually highlights her latent desire, and accentuates her impassioned body. The posture of psychological absence affords a strong physical presence. It furnishes the sanctioned hysterical action that must stand in for more blatant eroticism. In this sense, hysteria becomes a textual code for much more than conventional nervous disorder.

Like the metatropes Michie discusses, the hysteria trope used by Haywood acts as a double frame. On the surface it restricts the female mind and body, announcing the heroines’ lack of autonomy. On another level, it allows the heroines “an alternative ‘voice’ through the expressive body” (Fasick, 41), and hints at the depths of their unconscious longing. While postmodern feminists do not privilege the hysteric’s position, some, like Helene Cixous, do “[insist] on the primacy of multiple, specifically female libidinal impulses in women’s unconscious and in the writing of ...liberating female discourses” (Rosalind Jones, 366). As Haywood writes her somatic heroines we get a brief view of similar “libidinal impulses” at work behind the hysterical frame. Thus, “[far] removed as the jouissance that Cixous celebrates is from the moralistic tenets [and codes] of eighteenth-century writings on women, nonetheless those earlier writings [like Haywood’s fiction] also emphasize the extent to which women’s bodies speak” (Fasick, 54).

Haywood did not “cop out” in placing Melliora’s greatest passion in a subconscious dream register instead of in a conscious and overt bodily register. In Haywood’s day, feminine mental desire was thought to be every bit as dangerous as

physical desire. Ruth Yeazell explains:

When [conduct writer Allestree] announced that ‘every indecent curiosity, or impure fancy is a deflowering of the mind,’ he [and the rest of society] simultaneously imagined the virgin’s consciousness as inviolate as her body and argued that one kind of deflowering would lead by imperceptible stages to the other. (52)

Given that Melliora’s erotic dreaming is a potential mental “deflowerment,” it becomes clear that Haywood was not simply playing it safe in making Melliora lust unconsciously. Even though dream desire is less punishable than physical desire, and even though Melliora does maintain virginity, Haywood ensures that the threat of subversion of virtuous norms still ripples beneath the textual surface. There remains the lurking potential that an ingénue like Melliora might wake up to her desire and become a “Melantha” – then look out! As Yeazell states: “under the cover of modesty... a woman who knows her own desires always threatens to take secret charge of the scene” (51).

In examining women’s bodies and sexuality Haywood goes further undercover by incorporating literal masquerade into *Love in Excess*. By novel’s end, the amatory tropes of masking and disguise figure into the romantic plots of almost every female character in the narrative. For example, when Melantha seduces D’elmont—who thinks he is seducing Melliora—she masquerades as her rival under a mantle of darkness. Similarly, Camilla poses as Violetta to determine Frankville’s level of interest before she reveals her true identity. (Even though Frankville recognizes her and foils the plan, Camilla does choose to wear a mask of sorts). Additionally, when D’elmont thinks he delivers Frankville’s letter to Camilla, he is received by Ciamara who conceals her identity, and tries to seduce him in full veil and vizard mask. In all three cases, masking affords the women a level of

power over men that would otherwise be politically unattainable and socially unthinkable. More specifically, for Melantha and Ciamara, a mask permits each of them to aggressively entertain desire for D'elmont. In Camilla's case, the mask of assuming Violetta's identity affords her choice in deciding her fate. (Had she not won Frankville's approval she would have quit the marriage arrangement for a convent.) Thus here, and especially in the seduction scenes, masking facilitates a power inversion; the heroines rise from a position of conventional female subservience to one of temporary control in a male dominated society. This calculated role reversal enables Haywood to ensure that the women are not being entirely exploited by men, and to underscore the danger of such exploitation through female mimicry. Becoming a figurative "masquerader" herself, Haywood again uses convention for the purpose of subversion.⁶

Since Haywood's disguised heroines face a wide range of consequences, Haywood can also challenge conventions of sexual vice and virtue via masquerade. In *Love in Excess*, Ciamara is the only one of Haywood's masked characters who wears a literal vizard. She is also the most sexually forward character and her behaviour bears out the societal fear of masking and the perceived impropriety of masquerade balls. As Terry Castle states, "the masquerade diffused a novel spirit of sensual liberty; disguise and anonymity granted a license for erotic experimentation" (*Eros*, 159). Thus, masking grants Ciamara a kind of sexual freedom and 'experimentation' even though her

⁶ It was Mary Anne Schofield who first discussed Haywood's role as "masquerading" author. See Schofield's *Eliza Haywood* (1985).

seduction of D'elmont does not succeed. However, it is not Ciamara but Melantha who becomes the only masquerader to successfully veil herself and maintain both the appearance of virtue throughout the novel and her very life at novel's end. The distinction is telling. Haywood seems to imply that it is only acceptable for women to claim their sexuality secretly or subversively, at least until rigid standards of virtue change. To emphasize this point, Violetta, who disguises herself as a male and masks not only her sexuality but her gender itself ends up dying. When "Fidelio" (a.k.a. Violetta) is unmasked she gains everyone's esteem for her faithful love of D'elmont, but her passive asexual virtue—conventionally the highest type of all—is not much rewarded by death. One is again reminded of modern day theorist Cixous who says "censor the body and you censor breath and speech at the same time" (*Laugh*, 1093). Clearly, Violetta's complete "body censoring" and refusal to reveal her desire lead to death. At the same time, Melantha, much like the somatic heroine, must censor her identity to live out her desires. Either alternative is hardly an ideal situation. However, while Haywood must partially censor female desire and partially excuse unfeminine passion by explaining "perfection is not to be expected on this side of the grave" (*LE*, 206), she also suggests that female passion is very real and that eighteenth-century standards of virtue were simply not working.

Very briefly, Haywood also uses comedy to both cover and enrich her feminist criticism in *Love in Excess*. The self-reflexiveness of Melliora's romantic reading in a romance novel must be seen as partially ironic and comical even as it comments on virtue and female behaviour. Similarly, Haywood's attention to bodies in certain instances—

mistaken identities, Alovisa's death on a phallic sword, clothes magically opening themselves—provides irony even as it informs the deeper issue of female subjugation. (Once gowns begin opening themselves, a reader also gets a strong sense that Haywood is mocking the whole hysteria question.) Additionally, seemingly offhand narrative comments that mock male enslavement by passion and the way “most husbands [think] it best to keep up [their] resentments [of their wives]” (*LE*, 113), have a comical yet unsettling double edge. After all, something is only funny when there exists a kernel of truth to lampoon. The use of irony and humour makes Haywood accessible to a wider readership and offsets her powerful subtext even as it draws attention to it. Proving that a little satire goes a long way in making a serious point, Haywood ensures *Love in Excess* is “excessively” overwrought but also subversive and genuinely thought provoking.

In *Love in Excess*, Eliza Haywood offers up a spectrum of female characters to demonstrate that female virtue is often unexpectedly rewarded, or unfairly undone. In referring to the issue of proper feminine reading material, Haywood highlights her society's belief in the “infallible” connection between a good education and good behaviour. However, as she distorts the mirror image of this premise, showing that scandalous reading does not always beget scandalous behaviour, she exposes a crack in the supposedly solid link between female mentality and female morality. Further, as Haywood illustrates that higher knowledge does not necessarily vouchsafe virtue, or guard against seduction, she begins to criticize both the men who sexually exploit women, and the patriarchal society that brands women with ill-repute.

At the other end of her spectrum, Haywood illuminates the female body in order

to expose women's desire and passion. Here too, her writing is layered and bi-directional. When her heroines only have access to latent sexual desire, Haywood shows that their virtue is exploitable, and that their sexuality is so potentially uncontrollable that it may empower or destroy them. Moreover, as Haywood couches female passion in dreams and somaticism we can surmise that she had a double purpose: First, she could satisfy a reader who might identify with a heroine who was outwardly conscious of virtue but secretly harboured sexual fantasies. Second, she could attempt to break some taboos by showing society just how real female appetites were. Even when Haywood begins to show that overtly sexual females are empowered, albeit on limited terms, her subtext is clear: she urges her reader to "forget...social judgment and instead accept the authority of desire" (Oakleaf, 14).

When all is said and done in *Love in Excess*, virtue is still equated with sexuality. However, the use of the conventional equation is paramount in allowing Haywood to be able to criticize it. As some of her characters are undone while others are rewarded for similar behaviour, Haywood points to the inadequacy of traditional standards of female virtue. It is not necessarily Haywood's place to redefine virtue as she writes a very conventional "bodice-ripping" romance. In the 1720s it is feminist enough that she parenthetically questions eighteenth-century morality, and leaves us to contemplate the sexism in her patriarchal society. As Janet Todd states in regard to eighteenth-century female authorship, there is "the need for understanding the feminine predicament in the early writers and of compensating for it in the later" (Todd, *Sign*, 51). Had Haywood been writing during the *fin de siècle* she may well have taken her work to even greater

subversive, feminist heights. In any case, *Love in Excess* remains remarkable for its range and its simultaneous adherence to, and explosion of, convention. (Even when Haywood marries off Melliora and Camilla in traditional romantic fashion, and seemingly resolves the virtue question, her anti-marriage/counter-patriarchal sentiments resonate under her own [extra-textual] assertion that: “whenever [women] would truly conquer [they] must seem to yield” (qtd. in Schofield, *Descending*, 189). By way of contrast, several of Haywood’s subsequent fictions blatantly rewrite typical constructions of femininity and female objectivity. In the next thesis chapter, a study in Haywood’s short fictions, we will find that “although in romance women are [often] represented as sexual objects, there might be a sense in which women are also offered unique opportunities for reader power” (Light, 142)—especially when the amatory heroine is cast not as victim but as victor.

Chapter Two:
“Creative Heroines and Counter-plots in *The British Recluse* and *Fantomina*”

Novel: “A small tale, generally of love.”

—Samuel Johnson, *Dictionary of the English Language* (1755).

According to Backsheider and Richetti, “what [Johnson] had in mind was precisely the shorter fiction produced by Behn, Manley, Haywood, Aubin, Davys, Barker, and many [other English women writers of the early eighteenth century]” (xi). In the first chapter we saw how even a small piece of Manley’s writing complemented that of Haywood. In the third chapter, we shall see how Haywood’s didactic fiction is enriched by a reading of a Mary Davys ‘novel.’ In this chapter however, the focus will be solely on two of Eliza Haywood’s amatory novellas—*The British Recluse* and *Fantomina*. Both of these works are seduction tales that collectively feature the conventional amatory tropes of “love in excess,” “virtue in distress,” imprisonment and masquerade. However, neither story is fully conventional when it comes to the construction of the heroine’s identity or plot detail. Although the vast majority of Haywood’s amatory heroines are persecuted, exploited or abandoned by men, the few who “clamor for recognition and justice” (Schofield, *Eliza*, 44) are far more interesting and enlightening. The three heroines studied here—Cleomira, Belinda and Fantomina—are remarkable because they turn early victimization into ultimate survival. In so doing, they provide subversive alternatives to the conventional “seduced maiden” construct, and deconstruct traditional gender norms

and subjectivities. Consequently, these two ‘novels’ are not only engaging ‘tales of love,’ but compelling sites of feminine protest.

In *The British Recluse; or The Secret History of Cleomira, Supposed Dead* (1722), Haywood depicts co-heroines exchanging similar stories of seduction, exploitation and betrayal. As soon as the cloistered Cleomira relays her tale of woe to a commiserating Belinda, the roles are reversed so that Cleomira, The Recluse, becomes the listener. The doubling of character and plot circumstance is key to the novella; it serves to heighten the warnings that the women (and Haywood) provide against the dangers of love, female naiveté and unscrupulous men. Although bleak patterns emerge in the story’s representation of female abandonment, resignation and exile, these are subverted by positive alternatives at the story’s end. As Cleomira and Belinda choose female friendship and retirement over life in a patriarchal society, Haywood’s co-heroines assert their supremacy and de-centre the rake who dominated them.

In revealing their Secret Histories to each other, Cleomira and Belinda appear to be hapless victims—the initially naïve, seduced maidens typical of amatory fiction. As such, their narratives (and Haywood’s entire novella) become an extended warning against female naiveté. However, long before the women’s stories fully unfold, certain conventional details within the early text “encode” the heroines as being susceptible to victimization. As per convention, these codes are found within the heroines’ backgrounds. For example, Cleomira explains that she was an “only child” (*BR*, 161), who lost her father at thirteen. Although Cleomira’s family was “descended from Ancestors whose noble Actions merited titles” (*BR*, 161), her mother, upon being

widowed and left with little fortune, “quit the court” (*BR*, 161), and removed Cleomira to the country in a bid to protect the girl’s honour. On the narrative flipside, Belinda “cannot...boast either of a [titled] family or any natural or acquired Endowments” (*BR*, 200), and received an education that “was only such as the Country affords” (*BR*, 200). While she did have siblings, she “had the Misfortune to lose both...Parents within a year of one another” (*BR*, 200), and to gain a pre-arranged fiancé to whom she felt “indifferent” (*BR*, 200). The tropes of a lost parent, a lack of mothering and an increased tendency toward sentiment all mark an eighteenth-century heroine as being vulnerable to exploitation by men. Also, as Susan Staves points out, “[a rake’s] unfair advantage [over a female] was usually underscored by differences of age, of education, of country versus town, and of social class” (116). Since Haywood characterizes her players according to this formula, one expects *The British Recluse* to read as a standard tale of virtue undone. (And, on a basic level it does indeed read that way.) However, like *Love in Excess* before it, Haywood’s second seduction tale also becomes a site of cautioning and social protest.

Although Cleomira and Belinda relay their stories from the position of bitter experience, a reader is cautioned that it was their lack of knowledge of the danger of love which brought them hence. Specifically, Cleomira recalls her innocence before attending a ball and setting eyes on Lysander. She says: “Love was a Passion I had so little Notion of that I considered it no more than as a Fiction...dressed up by the Poets” (*BR*, 163). Similarly, Belinda confesses that although she was engaged to Worthy, she “felt no Hopes, no Fears, no Wishes, no Impatience, nor knew what it was to be *uneasy* or *transported*” (*BR*, 200) until Courtal rescued her from an overturned coach. As their

stories evolve, both women bemoan the harmful effects of “love in excess.” For instance, Cleomira admits that “Love taught [her] a cunning which before [she] was stranger to” (*BR*, 165); it led her to secretly exchange letters and garden meetings with Lysander. Cleomira further divulges that upon seeing Lysander on horseback she was “Transplanted – Ravished” (*BR*, 170), and wondered “that the violent Emotions of [her] *soul* did not bear [her] *Body* out of the window” (*BR*, 170).¹ Belinda reveals that she too was jolted by love—a force “which...suddenly, and without Reason [took] Possession of [her] Soul” (*BR*, 203), and left her to feel “a mixture of Delight and Pain, a kind of racking Joy and Pleasing Anguish” (*BR*, 203). Fleeting pleasure aside, love is not lauded but cursed on both sides. It is love that makes Cleomira a recluse and leaves her to say that “[no oppressive ill is] half so ruinous, so destructive [to women] as this one Passion!” (*BR*, 160). It is love that prompts Belinda to agree that “Nothing, indeed...is to [our] Sex so fatal [as this] gilded Poison” (*BR*, 160). Consequently, the heroines become Haywood’s spokeswomen in warning others against “[plunging into] a wild Sea of Passion before [they have] time to *know* or stem the Danger” (*BR*, 164).

The British Recluse also functions as an extensive warning against male dishonour and duplicity. Although the “Painters might have copied an *Adonis* from” (*BR*, 169) Cleomira’s Lysander, we are told that “Never was any so formed to *Charm* and to *Betray* – never was such foul Deceit, Hypocrisy, and Villainy couched in such Sweetness, Softness and Sincerity” (*BR*, 175). As a mark of his villainy, Lysander showers Cleomira with affection and promises, yet “[proceeds] from one Freedom to another, till there was

¹ The horseback scene echoes the two similar courtly love scenes between the title characters in Chaucer’s *Troilus and Criseyde*.

nothing left for him to ask or [her] to grant” (*BR*, 178). Once Lysander has seduced Cleomira, “the Soul-enslaving Lover” (*BR*, 180) visits his victim less and less frequently and repels Cleomira’s spoken and written protests with his “[Mastery]...in the Art of feigning” (*BR*, 179). Since Lysander is also unmoved by both Cleomira’s pregnancy—“the Grief-killed infant never [sees] the light” (*BR*, 188)—and the suicide attempt she makes when he marries another woman, Haywood is stringent in her portrayal of male immorality. Lysander represents the “Perfidiousness of Mankind” (*BR*, 191), while Marvir—Cleomira’s appointed guardian who robs the family fortune— epitomizes the mercenary manhood that threatens resources beyond female virtue.

Belinda’s Courtal is equally deceitful and “[dresses] the foulest Vice in all the Beauties of the of the fairest Virtue” (*BR*, 221). Although Courtal does not take Belinda’s virginity he conceals his true identity and betrays her with at least three other women. It becomes almost incomprehensible that Belinda and Cleomira both manage to maintain some tender feeling for the one(s) who betrayed them. However, there is no mistaking Haywood’s rancour at men who entrap, exploit and abandon women. While “taking violent and exploitative males very seriously is a distinguishing characteristic of wholeheartedly sentimental fiction” (Barker-Benfield, 242), it is also a trademark of Haywood’s amatory tales. Although Cleomira’s and Belinda’s story—fraught with tears and regret—does read as a rather ‘sentimentalized’ amatory fiction, Haywood’s melancholy tale is punctuated with bursts of extreme bitterness. For example, as Cleomira expounds on and curses Lysander’s falsity—“with what a counterfeited vehemence has he exclaimed against the Inconstancy of his Sex!--With what an appearance of Sanctity and

Truth has he invoked the Saints and Angels to be a Witness to his Vows” (*BR*, 175)—her position changes from one of quiet regret to one of festering resentment. Calling on the “blessed spirits” to testify to Lysander’s crimes and “force his black, his leprous Soul to own Conviction!” (*BR*, 176), Cleomira (and Haywood) display a palpable rage. Although this show of protest becomes a way to momentarily condemn the seducer and avenge the heroine, it is important to realize that Cleomira is not yet capable of fully vindicating herself.

In keeping with the paradigm of the traditional victimized female, the Recluse exhibits remorse for her part in her undoing. With the sting of unforgiving hindsight she laments her past actions and blames herself even more than she does her seducer. Cleomira insists that just “as none like [her] has ever *suffered*, so also none ever has like [her] *deserved* to suffer” (*BR*, 159). She says “Anybody but [*her*] would have been too much alarmed” (*BR*, 168) to answer Lysander’s first flaming epistles, and that “[she should have] needed no other Proof than the Style and...Shortness of [his later billets] to inform [her] that [she] was indeed as wretched as [she] could be” (*BR*, 182). As Cleomira recalls how she recanted and begged pardon for reproaching the absent Lysander, she continues to punish herself, saying: “I ought to blush at the Memory of so shameful a Weakness” (*BR*, 186). Although Lysander is the villain, Cleomira “must join in his Barbarity and be [her] own Tormentor” (*BR*, 182). This brings up an interesting point. Even though eighteenth-century “seduced maidens were guilty of fornication, a crime punishable in the ecclesiastical courts,” (Staves, 123), few fictionalized maidens appear doing public penance. The reader is “given to understand that the girl’s shame and guilt

are already so extreme that no external punishment could add to them” (Staves, 125). Since the self-exiled Cleomira does ‘add punishment’ to the “Shame, Remorse and...Vultures of conscious Guilt [that already] gnaw [her]” (*BR*, 193), she would seem to be a complete embodiment of persecuted virtue. However, as Jane Spencer points out, “there is more to the ethos of the seduction tale than this. In close and uneasy relationship to the picture of woman as victim, we find attacks on the social code which makes her one” (113).

When the abandoned Cleomira decides “[she] could not endure to...appear publicly in the world again” (*BR*, 199), her actions are reactive and her options are limited; nonetheless, there is something to be said for the fact that the seclusion is her *own* choice. By way of contrast, Haywood underscores that female cloistering is rarely chosen. More specifically, we learn that a young Cleomira was moved to the country “to learn to play the good Housewife and forget that there ever were such Things as Balls, Plays, Masquerades, or Assemblies” (*BR*, 162). Although as the adult Recluse, Cleomira deems the move “prudent” in retrospect, the “Affront to [her] understanding” (*BR*, 162) remains significant. Cleomira tells Belinda that the “sudden Change from all the Liberties in the World, to the most strict Confinement, is all the Excuse [she] can make for [her later] ill Conduct” (*BR*, 162). A reader is witness to this early “confinement”—an event that renders the young Cleomira comically overwrought upon release. She says: “Never was any Prisoner, who long had languished in a Dungeon, more rejoiced to see the Open Air than I to find myself once more in Court” (*BR*, 163). Melodrama aside, the grim

reference to imprisonment is very unsettling—especially when one realizes that it foreshadows Cleomira's future.

Both heroines in *The British Recluse* experience forced confinements that serve to emphasize the oppressive nature of their society. First, we are told that the young, love-struck Cleomira is confined to her chamber for days so that she might “[learn] the Lesson of Humiliation” (*BR*, 171). Although the punishment is harsh, the overprotective bidding of a mother cannot compare to the severe restrictions imposed by the men in the story. More specifically, Cleomira's guardian physically banishes her to the country to be “delivered of [her nine month] Burden” (*BR*, 183)—the “Witness of [her] Shame” (*BR*, 187) and seduction. In turn, by abandoning Cleomira when she has no other support, Lysander sentences her to months of psychological enslavement and wretched desperation. Unlike Cleomira, Belinda is not physically confined by the two men in her life, Courtal and Worthly. However, she endures another form of mental entrapment. Were she to marry Worthly, the one she does not love, she would be “Condemned to loathed Embraces and the detested Task of forced Civility—by painful Duty restrained from even the wish of better Fortune” (*BR*, 208). Clearly, to an eighteenth-century female the threat of emotional and social constriction is as potentially stifling as literal confinement. While Haywood points to the lack of autonomy and options that define a woman's social reality she does not construct an entirely dismal portrait. She also offers her heroines opportunities that bind them together. Unlike patriarchal ties however, these feminine bonds liberate instead of shackle.

Cleomira and Belinda connect primarily through shared narrative and doubled experience. Within this larger framework, the calculated sharing of epistles and notes becomes especially important. Letter writing is a fictional device that appears often in Haywood's works; it is a mode of communication used by both her heroines and their seducers. Moreover, "the letter appears as a fictional device in virtually every amatory narrative in Britain in the period 1680 to 1740, both as means of seduction and an expression of complaint" (Ballaster, 61). As per convention, seducers Lysander and Courtal send several, exaggerated, written pleas to win favour with Cleomira and Belinda. A few impassioned lines from Lysander give us the gist:

To be permitted to adore you, is Ecstasy too great to bear in Silence...let, on that happy Earth you tread on, my humble Body avow the lower Prostration of my devoted Soul...Absence from Cleomira is a Hell,...Within [my] burning Breast ten thousand real Furies rage, and tear me with Variety of Anguish—Mad with desire, and Winged with daring Hopes.... (168, 173)

The overwrought missive signifies Lysander's supposed devotion, and is a classic example of the amatory billet. However, whereas the "fictional love-letter [came to be regarded as] the trope of absolute sincerity" (Ballaster, 61), Haywood and Cleomira ensure that Belinda and the amatory reader know otherwise.

In conveying such an elaborately stylized letter—one wherein the phrasing seems the height of pretence and artificiality—Haywood invites us to consider both styles of male writing and our own styles of reading. As established, Cleomira may have been fooled by Lysander's purple prose, but the reproduction of his effusive hackneyed text serves to warn us that the male-authored document can be as insincere as its sender. Further, although Cleomira does "not pretend to tell [us] what her Transports were" (*BR*, 167) upon first reading Lysander's florid displays, she is explicit in her reason for sharing

the letter's contents. She says: "I thought it proper to let you see the mighty Difference 'twixt *Hoping* and *Possessing*; to what an elevated Height the wings of Fancy soar, while in Pursuit; and how low, how faint, and drooping is their Flight when there is nothing farther to be obtained" (*BR*, 167). Here, Cleomira's own rather elaborate phrasing seems to replicate and gently parody the ornate style of Lysander's composition. However, it is within Cleomira's own adamant letters that we see the 'mighty difference' between the male and female amatory epistle.

Whereas Cleomira first replied to Lysander with cautious and soft-hearted billets, she responds to his abuse with letters of protest and unbridled resentment. She writes:

Poisons and Daggers are the Upbraidings you should receive from me. Yet I, fond Wretch! have still subjected my very Will to yours, wrung my *own* Hands, while you have wrung my Heart...Not one Particular of your Baseness is unknown to me—Cold—cold Betrayer! --Dark designing Villain! Your Neglect, your Absence, your Silence all sprang but from one Cause, that cursed Mutability of Temper, which damns half your Sex,Now that I find you are for ever lost...Now, I grow, indeed, like you, a very Fiend! (191)

Cleomira's furious message and somewhat cleaner style make it clear that women's letter writing differs intrinsically from male authorship. In the context of this story, the male's letter is a forum for desire and the female's letter a site of wrath. However, beyond the obvious differences in textual content, it is crucial to understand that in this and most seduction tales, women's written complaints do not have the same power as men's lies. More pointedly, while Cleomira's life is radically changed by Lysander's deceitful declaration of 'love in excess,' her letter means little to him. After receiving Cleomira's message, Lysander delays his response, ridicules her "odious fondness" and says: "The little Storms of Fury which appear in your letter, are too frequently met with in Stories, to

be wondered at, and are of...little Consequence to move me, to either Fear or Pity" (*BR*, 192-3). Thus, although Cleomira (initially) believes she has "no other way to revenge [herself than to] use her Pen [against Lysander]" (*BR*, 189), this form of 'revenge' is actually ineffectual. It is only through sharing the letters—and sharing her story—that Cleomira can truly vindicate herself and find something better.

Even before Cleomira shares her letters, she and Belinda are united through the act of written exchange. When the women first meet and discover "Sympathy in their Afflictions" (*BR*, 159), each longs to hear the other's story and wishes to tell her own. However, "each is still afraid both to expose herself first and to offend the other by making an unequal narrative demand" (Alliston, 96). Given this, and the women's shared suspicion that "the Cause of both [their] Sorrows is the same" (*BR*, 160), the duo "put it [safely] to the Trial" (*BR*, 160). They "[take] Pens and Paper" (*BR*, 160) to document the origins of their melancholy, and upon "Exchange of the Papers, Belinda [reads] that which the Recluse had writ and the Recluse" (*BR*, 160) reads Belinda's words. This act not only advances the narrative but "structure[s]...the sympathetic relation between women as an exchange, not simply of narrated secret histories, but specifically of written histories" (Alliston, 95). This is significant because the transaction occurs within an empowering, equitable and distinctly feminine textual landscape—one that is outside the male-driven "seducer/victim" textual relation that marginalizes or ignores the seduced woman's writing. Further, as Alliston keenly observes, the sympathetic transaction anticipates a later trend in eighteenth-century women's writing; specifically, the handing down of advice and "exemplary history" from one woman to another in "textual (letter)

form” (96).² Thus, when Cleomira and Belinda trade papers and learn they were similarly “Undone by Love and the Ingratitude of faithless Man” (*BR*, 160), Haywood furnishes more than mere coincidence. Both the heroines’ words and the very process of their written interchange serve to challenge the patriarchal order that restricts them.

As the two women share their narratives they find both sympathetic validation and a means to partially diffuse their victim status. Although in relaying particulars of her story Cleomira claims “no tongue can express the Emotions of [her] soul” (*BR*, 171), “no Word, no Accents...can give [us] any Idea...” (*BR*, 174), both she and Belinda are effective orators. Even as they tell stories that detail their victimization and weaknesses, their exchange of verbal text is paradoxically empowering. The protests that were dismissed by Lysander and Courtal are heard by each other and the reader. The love letters that duped and endangered the women when kept secret, are made somewhat innocuous in their public airing. (Similarly, the slightly hysterical prose of Cleomira’s complaint letter accomplishes more when enclosed within the relatively low-key language that she uses to communicate with Belinda.) Most of all, the process of exchange affords the women more empowering subject positions. They are not only victims; they are listeners and consolers: Belinda “[conceives] the highest Esteem and Friendship imaginable for [the] fair Unfortunate, and [upon hearing her story, is] willing to offer everything in her Power for her Consolation” (*BR*, 199). Finally, whereas Deborah Nestor says the use of “free indirect discourse” in Haywood’s didactic fiction “provides an independent authority to concur with the injustice of [the heroine’s] situation” (584), it is

² In the next chapter we will see Haywood’s Betsy Thoughtless “inherit” such written advice from her guardian’s wife, Lady Trusty.

each woman who becomes that authority for her friend in *The British Recluse*. Since the women “[agree] so perfectly in their Sentiments concerning the Instability of . . . Happiness” (*BR*, 159), they find that much more power in turning their discourse into action.

Haywood’s use of plot doubling and coincidence proves integral to the co-heroines’ narrative; it is a very particular shared circumstance that prompts the women to “rewrite” their fates. As it turns out, the Recluse and Belinda are not only sisters in seduction and betrayal. “The punch line of the novel is that they are victim of one and the same rake” (Alliston, 96). Further, the “one fatal Source [of] both [women’s] Woes” (*BR*, 222) is neither “Lysander” nor “Courtal,” but the “faithless [and multi-faced] Bellamy” (*BR*, 223). The “wildly improbable coincidence adds greatly to the story’s moral point” (Spencer, 117); namely, ill-equipped women will be subject to ruthless and relentless exploitation by men. The point is emphasized all the more when, in a side plot, the reader learns that Bellamy also used and betrayed the heroines’ contemporaries, Semanthe, Melissa, and Miranda. Amid these women, Haywood’s “doubled characters and thematically reinforcing reiterations, . . . Bellamy [represents] the phallic master signifier as it doubles Cleomira, then doubles her again in Melissa, Miranda, Belinda and more” (Backsheider & Richetti, xiii).³ However, the final resolution made by Cleomira and Belinda deconstructs and dissolves the patriarchal chain.

Cleomira and Belinda “do not allow themselves to be destroyed by [Bellamy]; although initially victimized, they do not remain so” (Schofield, *Eliza*, 23). The women’s

³ In the signifying chain of Bellamy’s seduced women, Miranda alone is unmoved by Bellamy’s charms. She “shunned him as a Monster” (*BR*, 221), and is the first “link” to effect a break in the metaphorical chain.

thoughts of the “Justice of Revenging” (*BR*, 223), themselves, give way to “so entire a Friendship” (*BR*, 223), that Bellamy becomes completely marginalized by story’s end. This reversal of power is only possible because Cleomira and Belinda have a unique bond. Unlike the frequent rivalries and manipulative female friendships so prevalent in amatory fiction, the co-heroines have an atypical sentimental connection that allows them to recover from being betrayed. Further, “unlike the Sentimental romance which so often ruins, [the Sentimental friendship] aids and saves, providing close emotional support in a patriarchal world” (Todd, *Friendship*, 3). As we have seen, the shared recognition between the Recluse and Belinda provides a better means of affirming themselves than does a vengeful pen. The women’s bond not only eclipses the story’s sphere of male dominance, but propels them to alter their own narrative ending. In the dramatic, feminist conclusion, the couple “decides to perpetuate[their] sympathetic pact by living the rest of their lives together in rural ‘retirement’” (Alliston, 96):

both their Resolutions of abandoning the World continuing, the Recluse and [Belinda] took a House about seventy Miles distant from *London*, where they still live in a perfect Tranquillity, happy in the real Friendship of each other, despising the uncertain *Pleasures* and free from all the *Hurries* and *Disquiets* which attend the *Gaieties* of the town. (224)

Here, “the marginality of the female community becomes a metaphoric center, providing an alternative environment where [the] protagonists [can] learn to sustain themselves through mutual bonds that look beyond men and marriage” (Boone, 280-81).

The heroines’ brand of seclusion “becomes a metaphoric center” for two reasons. First, as Joseph Boone implies, the retirement de-centres the supremacy of patriarchal institutions. Second, the act of a chosen retirement becomes a counter-strike against the actions Bellamy (and Marvir) took in forcibly and emotionally confining the women. In

this, Haywood's subtext is clear: there is a great difference between a woman choosing the margin and her being forced to the periphery. In all likelihood, this distinction also explains why Cleomira and Belinda do not join the conventional form of female community—a convent. Although the convent of eighteenth-century British literature became the “definitive...refuge for thwarted feeling” (Oakleaf, 11), Belinda and Cleomira are not interested in perpetuating their early agonies. Since they wish to rise above their losses, the traditional convent ‘haven’ would not provide their “centre” but only marginalize them further. It is also telling that Belinda chooses the country retirement even though she has maintained virginity and could well return home, reputation intact. Her choice suggests not only a calculated avoidance of a marriage community, but the possibility of her entering into a homo-erotic relationship with Cleomira. (Notably, Belinda is “desired by the Recluse to take part of her Bed” (BR, 224). That said, the issue of sexuality is largely unimportant here. For Cleomira and Belinda, what matters most is that their “solitary Life is the effect of Choice” (BR, 224). And, in a society where women have few choices, Haywood's heroines prove something. Living well is the best revenge indeed.

In Eliza Haywood's short story *Fantomina: Or, Love in a Maze* (1725), we find another amatory heroine who subverts the typical role of passive seduced maiden. Like Cleomira and Belinda before her, Fantomina exhibits traits that mark her as a stock romance character and would-be victim. However, Fantomina proves to be both a master of disguise and the mistress of her own desires. More specifically, Fantomina uses masquerade and cunning to obtain sexual pleasure and feminine power. As one of

Haywood's most aggressive heroines, Fantomina not only deconstructs gender norms but complicates issues of female subjectivity and eighteenth-century identity.

At its start, Fantomina's story is set against a backdrop of standard romance patterns—those that would normally prefigure a straightforward seduction tale. First, like many amatory fictions, *Fantomina* is constructed to read as an 'authentic' account of a young woman's love affair. Since the text is presented as "*Being a Secret History of an Amour Between Two Persons of Condition*" (*F*, 226), Haywood explicitly promises readers a tale of clandestine desire—one whose "secrecy" is bound to cloak either seduction or betrayal. Second, like Cleomira, Fantomina's character is built around the tropes that suggest she is a likely target for abuse. For instance, Fantomina is a "young lady of distinguished birth, beauty, wit, and spirit...who had been bred for the most part in the country" (*F*, 227). She is "a stranger to the world, and consequently to the dangers of it; and often [has] nobody in town...to whom she is obliged to be accountable for her actions" (*F*, 227). Further, since Fantomina "[does] in everything as her inclination or humors [render] most agreeable to her" (*F*, 227), it is easy to predict that her initial "frolic"—disguising herself as a "supposed prostitute" at a London Playhouse—will turn from the "Gratification [of] an innocent Curiosity" (*F*, 227), to an eventual attack on her sexual innocence. Such an assault seems specially likely as Haywood hints at men having stereotypically base desires. While an awestruck, as-of-yet undisguised Fantomina marvels that "Men, some of whom she knew were accounted to have wit, should [favour prostitutes and] have tastes...very depraved" (*F*, 227), Haywood positions her heroine for a conventional fall, and her reader for feelings of expectancy and dread.

Before Haywood (and Fantomina) can stage a counter-plot to the conventional seduction tale, the conventional must in fact occur. Since disguise is key to both Fantomina's sexual undoing and eventual rebellion, we are offered an early glimpse of the dangerous and transformative power of masquerade.⁴ As a girl of quality posing as a prostitute, Fantomina enacts a class inversion typical of eighteenth-century masquerade. Terry Castle explains: "If one may speak of the rhetoric of masquerade, . . . the controlling figure was the antithesis: one [who donned a costume] was obliged to impersonate a being opposite in some essential feature, to oneself" (*Masquerade*, 5). Although Fantomina is not "obliged" to adopt her disguise at the Playhouse—as she would be at a masked ball—she nonetheless finds "her disguise had answered the ends she wore it for:—a crowd of purchasers of all degrees and capacities were in a moment gathered about her" (*F*, 227). However, since a seduction tale requires only one charming rake, Fantomina's interest lies with only "the accomplished [and aptly named] *Beauplaisir*" (*F*, 228),—a fellow who "addressed her at first with the usual salutations of her pretended Profession" (*F*, 228), but "was [later] transported to find so much Beauty and Wit in a Woman, who he doubted not but on very easy Terms he might enjoy" (*F*, 228). Since Fantomina finds a "vast deal of Pleasure in conversing with [*Beauplaisir*] in this free and unrestrained Manner" (*F*, 228), she enjoys the liberty that disguise affords, but is ill-prepared to deal with the consequences of assuming such a sexually potent persona. Consequently, the roles of potential seducer and victim are quickly cast. *Beauplaisir* "resolves not to part from [*Fantomina*] without the Gratification of those Desires she had

⁴ In using masquerade, Haywood undoubtedly owes a debt to Aphra Behn – who strategically employed the disguise topos in her Restoration plays.

inspired" (*F*, 228), and the virtuous (if misguided) Fantomina finds herself horrified to face "such a [naïvely unimagined] Dilemma" (*F*, 228).

As Haywood chooses to slightly delay the story's inevitable seduction scene, she can manipulate the reader along with the text and portray her heroine's **real** dilemma. Since Fantomina pleads a prior engagement and puts off Beauplaisir until the next evening, a reader is likewise teased by Haywood's use of the familiar "delayed gratification trope" of amatory fiction. Even more intriguing is Haywood's suggestion that an innocent heroine who "depended on the Strength of her Virtue" (*F*, 229), might feel sexual desire. While Fantomina leaves the Playhouse in a mood of self-congratulation for remaining "undiscovered," her "cogitations are but of short Continuance" (*F*, 229). Soon, "all the charms of Beauplaisir came fresh into her mind; she languished, she almost died for another Opportunity of conversing with him; and not all the Admonitions of her Discretion were effectual to oblige her to deny laying hold of that which offered itself the next Night" (*F*, 229). Fantomina may claim it is future conversation she craves, but the words 'languish,' 'dying,' 'denying,' and 'laying hold' do not belong in the register of verbal communication. Fantomina is not as unaware of her passions as subconsciously desiring Melliora—see chapter one—but she is still unable to understand her heated feelings: "Strange and unaccountable were the Whimsies she was possessed of, —wild and incoherent her Desires" (*F*, 229). Fantomina's perplexity underscores her innocence and signals that she shall be in for either an ecstatic or rude awakening. However, since she looks forward to "observing the surprise

[Beauplaisir] would be in to find himself refused by a [Town-Mistress]" (*F*, 229), it is clear that Fantomina is neither yet mistress of her desires nor of common sense.

Although Fantomina takes the ironic "precaution" to secure lodgings where she can invite Beauplaisir without risking "either...her Virtue or Reputation" (*F*, 230), she is too naïve to recognize she has actually secured her own undoing.⁵ After a prelude of "amorous Conversation" (*F*, 230), Beauplaisir makes persistent sexual advances and the shocked, struggling Fantomina realizes "she had now gone too far to retreat" (*F*, 230). While Fantomina tries to save herself by pleading virginity and partially admitting to her disguise, "the Exuberance of [Beauplaisir's] luxurious wishes" (*F*, 230) is unstoppable and she is raped. Since the deflowered Fantomina insists that Beauplaisir's sincere and constant "Love alone can compensate for the Shame [he has] involved [her] in" (*F*, 231), one expects Fantomina will be ultimately reduced to the state of desperation and abandonment typical of the seduced maiden construct. However, that would be an extension of "the male version of the story" (Schofield, *Descending*, 191) just told. Masquerading like her heroine, Haywood renders a female counter-plot that is far more effective.

Fantomina is stripped of her virginity by Beauplaisir, but she is not stripped of her ability to protect or empower herself through disguise. When Fantomina confesses that she is not a real prostitute she does not entirely throw off her mask. She says she is the "Daughter of a Country Gentleman...and that she [is] called Fantomina" (*F*, 231), but

⁵ The topic of the careless and poorly educated heroine will be taken up in Haywood's *The History of Miss Betsy Thoughtless*, discussed in chapter three.

conceals her “true Name and Quality, for the Reasons she had done before, resolving if he boasted of this Affair, he should not have it in his Power to touch her character” (*F*, 231). The charade not only safeguards ‘Fantomina’s’ reputation—even the reader never learns her real name—but allows Fantomina to control Beauplaisir without his knowledge. While he pities her and expects she will become the “[prostituting] Thing she so artfully counterfeited” (*F*, 231), he is the one deceived when Fantomina draws him into an ongoing affair of her own secret design. In the “Business of her Love” (*F*, 233), — “business” signifying a typically male domain and an impending reversal of expected gender roles — Fantomina leads a double life to gratify her desires. She meets with Beauplaisir in the garb of Fantomina in the afternoon, and “before Seven is dressed in a different Habit” (*F*, 233), that of the “virtuous reserved Lady” (*F*, 233). This lady is never missed at public assemblies, and leaves Beauplaisir “amazed at the prodigious Likeness between his little Mistress and [the] Court beauty” (*F*, 233). Since Beauplaisir is as blind to her disguise as the outside world is to her passionate indulgence, Fantomina holds a power that is rarely given to amatory heroines; she will not be destroyed if her love affair fails. She says: “If [Beauplaisir] is really...the faithful, the constant Lover he has sworn to be, how charming will be our Amour?--And if he should be false, grow satiated like other Men, I shall but, at the worst, have [no public disgrace, only] the private Vexation of knowing I have lost him” (*F*, 232). That said, Fantomina will go to great and creative lengths to avoid even such ‘private vexation.’

Once Beauplaisir tires of Fantomina’s charms, Fantomina continues to subvert the model of the cast off and victimized amatory heroine. Specifically, when Beauplaisir

makes excuses to holiday alone in Bath, Fantomina foregoes the typical reaction of feminine hysteria. Wisely “considering that Complaints, Tears, Swooning, and all the Extravagancies which Women make use of in such Cases have little Prevalence over a heart inclined to rove” (*F*, 233), Fantomina “lays a scheme” to ensnare her “fugitive lover” (*F*, 234). She travels to Bath, blackens her hair and eyebrows, dons a “round eared Cap, a short Red Petticoat and a little jacket” (*F*, 234), and adopts both a “broad Country dialect [and] a rude unpolished air” (*F*, 234). Posing as a country lass named Celia, Fantomina takes a servant’s post in Beauplaisir’s lodgings and waits to be noticed. Since Celia receives Beauplaisir’s hearty kisses and “now [understands] that Language but too well” (*F*, 235), Fantomina is no longer controlled by her own (or others’) strange, foreign desires; instead, she is in control of them. While this turnaround begins to counter her role as a victimized heroine, it is the ensuing rendezvous scene that confirms her change of character.

The sexual encounter between Celia and Beauplaisir reads as an especially racy ‘seduction’:

His wild Desires burst out in all his words and Actions: he called her little Angel, Cherubim, swore he must enjoy her, though Death were to be the Consequence, devoured her Lips, her Breasts with greedy Kisses, held to his burning Bosom her half-yielding, half-reluctant Body, nor suffered her to get loose, till he had ravaged all and glutted each rapacious Sense with the Sweet Beauties of the pretty *Celia*. (235)

Although such an impassioned assault normally signifies feminine ruin, Haywood “inverts and subverts the rape-of-innocence theme through her use of the mask” (Schofield, *Masquerade*, 8). Acting as Celia, Fantomina can experience and relish a liberating duality akin to that enjoyed by participants in the eighteenth-century

Masquerade: “The pleasure of the masquerade attended on the experience of double-ness, the alienation of inner from outer, a fantasy of two bodies simultaneously and thrillingly present, self and other together, the two-in-one” (Castle, *Masquerade*, 4). It is the ethos of the ‘two-in-one’ that renders the body(ies) of Celia/Fantomina not only ‘half-reluctant’ to sexual ravishment but also ‘half-yielding.’ In the guise of Celia, Fantomina can affect “seeming innocence” (*F*, 235), yet be “compelled [and] sweetly forced to what she wished with equal Ardour” (*F*, 234). As the mask permits both covert aggression and the pretence of chastity, the disguised heroine can freely enjoy socially unthinkable carnal pleasures—throwing off modesty without throwing off the appearance of it. Alternately, (and as we will inevitably see with Fantomina), modesty can be discarded entirely, so long as the mask protects the desiring female subject within. Thus, even while disguise obscures, it empowers and contributes to the reconfiguration of the amatory heroine.

Fantomina is further empowered by assuming a third identity, and her role as a serial seductress brings *Fantomina* into the realm of deconstruction. After a month passes and Beauplaisir “[grows] more weary of [Celia] than he had been of Fantomina” (*F*, 234), Fantomina finds “another Disguise to carry on a third Plot...[and] renew his twice-decayed Ardours” (*F*, 235). Pulling back her loose hair and donning the “melancholy Garb” and countenance of a “Sorrowful Widow” (*F*, 236), she intercepts Beauplaisir on his way to London, feigning an injury and a need for a ride. As the two converse on the topic of love, “Widow Bloomer” describes the “unspeakable Ecstasy of those who meet with equal Ardency” (*F*, 237), and Beauplaisir plots to use “a thousand little softening Artifices” (*F*, 237) to ignite the “Seeds of Fire” (*F*, 237) he perceives “in this fair

Widow's Soul" (F, 237). What he does not perceive however, is that he is the victim of so-called 'feminine' artifice—a failing that men are no less guilty of committing and vulnerable to than women. However, as Fantomina adopts her three successive disguises—with a fourth yet to come—she becomes increasingly proficient in the “dissembler” role normally given to the male rakes of amatory fiction. At the same time, the fact that there is an established pattern and frequency to Fantomina's seductive plots—as opposed to an isolated contrivance—mirrors the standard set by the artful men of seduction narratives. Further, since Fantomina's ongoing design is to continually “engage [Beauplaisir], to hear him sigh, to see him languish” (F, 234), she enacts a gender reversal both in wishing to dominate her sexual partner and in wanting to prolong her sexual power. This reversal is the key component to the deconstructive side of Haywood's story.

To even choose to use the masquerade topos in amatory fiction is to invite the potential for reassigning identities and deconstructing gender norms. In the same way that masquerade permits class reversal, it also allows the “exquisite destabilization” and “intoxicating reversal of normal sexual, social and metaphysical hierarchies” (Castle, *Eros*, 159). In Fantomina's case, costume and incomparable acting skills enable her to invert the normal eighteenth-century hierarchy of sexual power. More specifically, as Fantomina's blatant and effective sexuality privileges “female” over “male”, it transposes the binaries of “seducer”/ “seduced” and “victor”/ “victim” along atypical gender lines. It is Fantomina, the woman, who becomes “subject” and Beauplaisir, the man, who becomes “object.” In turn, female subjectivity is privileged and the rake's text is

marginalized. That said, I recognize that it is not entirely popular to commend a writer's manipulation of binary oppositions, especially when said writer—like Haywood—does not move far beyond the space of an inverted hierarchy, or offer new alternatives outside the current power structure. Many postmodern feminists contend that “what we need to do is to move outside [of a] male-centered, binary logic altogether” (Rosalind Jones, 369). However, one does well to remember that Haywood is not a postmodern feminist and to consider the words of Mary Poovey. She says: “because the practice of deconstruction transforms binary oppositions into an economy in which terms circulate rather than remain fixed, it could (although it does not usually or necessarily) mobilize another ordering system” (Poovey, 263). Thus, while it might have been preferable for Haywood to construct an alternate reality for her heroine—as she does at the end of *The British Recluse*—it is not “necessary.” In *Fantomina*, the fact that she allows traditional gender constructions to ‘circulate rather than remain fixed’, is deconstructive enough for 1725.

Fantomina also proves deconstructive in a less formal and non-theoretical sense. Like in many of her amatory fictions, Haywood challenges the mistreatment of women through the use of textual repetition, irony and outright complaint. First, since *Fantomina* manages to continually outwit, successively seduce and persistently engage Beauplaisir, the act of repetition magnifies Haywood's protest against men who sexually overpower women and perpetually seek new conquests. Second, Haywood's use of subversion through inversion ensures that a reader is privy to the deconstructive irony of a man—not a woman—being fooled by the opposite sex. Specifically, when Beauplaisir

writes to the “Charming Mrs. Bloomer,” saying, “Never was Women [sic] formed to charm like you: Never did any look like you --write like you --bless like you” (*F*, 239), his remarkable, blatantly ironic and almost comical lack of awareness serve to further diminish the power of the stereotypically controlling, manipulative amatory male. Finally, as Beauplaisir’s effusive love note to Widow Bloomer is followed by his deceit-filled letter to Fantomina, Haywood invests her heroine with the voice of emphatic protest.

Fantomina says:

Traitor! ...’tis thus our silly, fond, believing Sex are served when they put Faith in Man: So had I been deceived and cheated, had I like the rest believed, and sat down mourning in Absence, and vainly waiting recovered Tendernesses. - -How do some women (*continued she*) make their Life a Hell, burning in fruitless Expectations and dreaming out their Days in Hopes and Fears, then wake at last to all the Horror of Despair? --But I have outwitted even the most Subtle of the deceiving Kind, and while he thinks to fool me is himself the only beguiled Person. (239)

Here, Fantomina objects to not only men’s duplicity in love affairs, but the feminine naiveté and passivity that attend it. Even though Fantomina is likewise deceptive, her forceful complaints—registered with extreme resentment—do not come off as ironic. They—and the proof Fantomina finds when she is neglected as Fantomina and welcomed as Widow Bloomer, though “they were the same Person” (*F*, 240),—imply a woman is wise to dissemble before she is made victim.

In her final plot, Fantomina is more explicit in her belief that women can subvert victimization through disguise. She also enjoys her triumph over Beauplaisir and adopts a facade that re-frames the nature of her sexual appeal. Although “the Widow Bloomer triumphed some Time...over the Heart...of Inconstant [Beauplaisir], ...at length her sway was at an End, and she sunk in [that] Character, to the Degree of Tastelessness

as she had done [twice] before” (*F*, 240). To recapture her power, Fantomina rents a house, pays men to pose as servants and sends Beauplaisir a letter—declaring love and extending an invitation—from the masked “Incognita.” Since Beauplaisir is intrigued and complies with her summons, Fantomina celebrates her solution to her “Lover’s Inconstancy” (*F*, 243). She says:

Had he been faithful to me, ...either as Fantomina or Celia or the Widow Bloomer, the most violent Passion, if it does not change its Object, in Time will wither: Possession naturally abates the Vigour of Desire, and I should have had, at best, but a cold, insipid husband-like Lover in my Arms; but by these Arts of passing on him as a new Mistress whenever the Ardour, which alone makes Love a Blessing begins to diminish, ...I have him always raving, wild, impatient, longing, dying -- O that all neglected Wives and abandoned Nymphs would take this Method!-- Men would be caught in their own snare, and have no Cause to scorn our... Sex. (243)

Fantomina’s portrait of the fleeting nature of passion and the inevitability of flagging male desire removes any last semblance of a ‘veil’ from Haywood’s story. *Fantomina* is not just a topsy-turvy romance narrative; it is a sustained critique of male infidelity and female exploitation.⁶ Further, as Fantomina expresses her pleasure in tormenting Beauplaisir (above), she lets her own mask fall. Within the doubled persona that Schofield identifies as being divided between “virgin” and “virago,” (*Masking*, 24), Fantomina’s aggressive side has fully eclipsed the virginal. It is the virago who scorns the prospect of a ‘cold, husband-like lover’ and the virago who directs her sex to follow her lead. This does not make Fantomina a man-hater, but rather a woman in control of her desires.⁷ Nor does the fact that Fantomina is in control of her desires mean that she is

⁶ The idea of romantic fiction as masquerade comes from Mary Anne Schofield. In the book *Masking and Unmasking the Female Mind* (1990), Schofield explores the ways in which eighteenth-century women novelists purposefully hide their power behind the forms of romance and disguise.

⁷ Eliza Haywood’s novella *The City Jilt* (1726), is a portrayal of a far more aggressive, disguised virago—the prostitute heroine *Glicera*. See Haywood’s *The Three Novellas* edited by Earla Wilputte, (1995).

willing to lift her veil for Beuplaisir. As she urges women to ‘take her method’ Fantomina is very determined to keep using it herself.

In taking on the role of Incognita, Fantomina’s disguise is a literal mask. The vizard enables Fantomina to brazenly express her sexuality and captivate Beuplaisir in an entirely new way. When Fantomina’s face is concealed, “her fine Shape and Air and Neck [appear] to great Advantage” (*F*, 244). This leaves Beuplaisir “prodigiously charmed... with her Appearance, ...and wild with Impatience for the Sight of a Face which belonged to so exquisite a Body” (*F*, 244). Here, although the ‘exquisite Body’ is mentioned, it is not specifically revealed or detailed beyond ‘shape’ and ‘neck.’ Helena Michie points out that in the act of synecdochal description— where parts must stand in for the whole—“marked and selected attributes of the...female body construct an imaginary body in the space between” (97). In turn, the gap and imaginary body permit the “production of sexual fantasy” (Michie, 97). In keeping with this, it is what cannot be seen—beneath and apart from the mask—that inflames Beuplaisir and renders him ‘wildly impatient.’ Since Fantomina is emboldened by her cover and aware that “it would have been a ridiculous Piece of Affection...to [seem] coy in complying with what she herself had been the first in desiring” (*F*, 244), she “[yields] without even a show of Reluctance” (*F*, 244). Even though it is “Incognita” who initiates the couple’s “mutual Raptures” (*F*, 244), she does not lose power in being assertive. This is because she keeps her disguise intact—leaving Beuplaisir not only eager to know her identity, but (presumably) unable to resist the sexuality that masquerade “[projects] on to the veil” (Michie, 71). (As we shall see, a plot twist prevents any future encounters.)

Whereas Ros Ballaster thinks that the “infinite significatory possibilities of [Incognita]” amount to an “empty sign” that “presents the nadir of feminine representation” (191), I feel it is just this vast expanse of ‘significatory possibility’ that is liberating. While it *is* true that Beauplaisir might project his desire into the ‘open space’ created by Incognita’s unseen face or hidden body parts, such projection plays right into Fantomina’s hands. She wants to be desired, and it is her complicity that keeps her from being objectified. When she does become the object of the male gaze, it is within a controlled space and entirely by design. Moreover, it is precisely the ‘blankness’ of the sign and anonymity of the mask that free Fantomina to claim her sexuality and reconfigure herself as a robustly desiring subject. (She too can project anything she wishes ‘on to the veil.’) Thus, the openness and ambiguity of the disguised woman’s signifying mask, engenders not so much an erasing of female identity but the creation of an alternate—and often more authentic—self.

It is Fantomina’s role as creator that makes Haywood’s novella a constructivist tale—as opposed to a solely deconstructive or essentialist one. *Fantomina* is constructive not only because its heroine “creates her own fiction” (Schofield, *Descending*, 191), but because Haywood rewrites typical constructions of feminine identity. Since Fantomina becomes both an actress and the author of her own text, it is fitting that “the novella opens in the playhouse” (Schofield, *Masking*, 48). The “script” Fantomina writes after she is raped is effective because it is serialized; each of the seduction episodes contribute to revising the ‘victimized heroine’ role and reconfiguring the male rake’s text. However, it is crucial to realize that Fantomina does not merely write a copycat ‘female rake’ story.

Even though Fantomina's role as serial (and serialized) seductress seems to encode a male-oriented norm of sexuality, there is a key difference—one, that to my knowledge, has never been articulated in any Haywood criticism. Fantomina is not driven to pursue Beauplaisir by sexual desire alone, or even revenge. Specifically, “she **loved** Beauplaisir [emphasis mine]; it was only he whose Solicitations could give her Pleasure” (*F*, 234).

While it is not unusual for a male seducer to initially love—or at least claim to love—the woman he desires, in amatory fiction it is almost unheard for him to stick with the woman after seducing her. In contrast, whereas Fantomina eventually grows angry over Beauplaisir's inconstancy, she herself is never unfaithful to him. She abandons her successive personas, but never abandons Beauplaisir himself. This is but one way that Haywood rewrites the male and female texts.

Fantomina's brand of ‘authorship’ and self-representation also broadens the traditionally narrow realm of eighteenth-century feminine subjectivity. “Instead of being subjected by the [standard] romance [tale], [Fantomina makes herself] the subject of her own romances” (Spender, 59). While this is significant in and of itself, Fantomina's creative play with her alter-egos is even more important. As Fantomina ‘writes’ each of her new personas into being, she gives herself a corresponding number of new subject positions. Further, in choosing different disguises and crafting different plots for each of her new selves, Fantomina does more than make herself a multifaceted subject. Her wide cast of characters—from prostitute, to country girl, to widow and domino—not only gives the story a broader appeal, but implies that women of all stripes are desiring subjects. The fact that the woman behind the Fantomina guise is forever anonymous to us only

increases the 'every woman' quality in the seemingly many-sided tale. (It is true that the heroine is of a privileged class; however, her diverse roles foster the same sense of all-inclusive, feminine possibility that lies in her wish to see all women adopt her method.) Although it may seem strange that anonymity is more empowering for "Fantomina" than a candid reality, there is a large share of feminine power in withholding her identity instead of having it erased by a predatory male 'scribe.' Since Fantomina authors her own text, she refutes the position of the one-dimensional heroine, and takes pains to ensure she is not scrolled upon again.

At the end of Haywood's story however, Fantomina becomes a body written upon. She finds herself pregnant and the "Consequences of her amorous Follies" (*F*, 246) difficult to conceal. Unable to leave town due to her mother's sudden arrival, Fantomina again turns to disguise:

By eating little, lacing prodigious strait, and the Advantage of a great Hoop-Petticoat, ... her Bigness was not taken notice of, and, perhaps, she would not have been suspected till her Time of going into the country, where her Mother designed to send her, and from whence she intended to make her escape to some Place where she might be delivered with Secrecy, if the Time of it had not happened much sooner than she expected. (246)

Fantomina's masquerading prowess cannot compete with the "Rack of Nature" (*F*, 247), and she goes into labour at a court ball. "Her wildly rolling Eyes, the Distortion of her Features, and the Convulsions which shook her whole Frame, in spite of her" (*F*, 246), lead observers and her mother to believe "she was struck with the Hand of Death" (*F*, 246). In this display of physical hysteria —also cited by Ballaster—and in Fantomina's pregnancy itself, "the indomitable materialism of the body defeats the woman's play with the ambiguity of signification" (Ballaster, 191). When Fantomina is carried home and a

doctor declares the need for a midwife, no mask can protect her; Fantomina's astonished mother makes her reveal the name of her un-doer. A baffled Beauplaisir is sent for, and his claims of innocence leave Fantomina's mother asking if she has been "deceived...by [her daughter telling] a fictitious Tale" (*F*, 247). Since Fantomina delivers a baby girl just before she is forced to reveal the truth of her identity-altering fiction, the realms of biological essentialism and constructivism collide. However, as Fantomina has become a text who is defined bodily, no creative act of mental acuity can transform her circumstance or re-signify the reality of her gender. She owns up to "her Artifices" (*F*, 248), astounds her two listeners, and renders her mother at a loss to ask anything more of Beauplaisir than secrecy. Since "Beauplaisir goes unpunished" (Schofield, *Eliza*, 51), and Fantomina is sent to a monastery, there is a sense that Haywood's "structure proves inadequate" (Schofield, *Eliza*, 51). That said, given Fantomina's earlier show of power, it is hard to accuse Haywood of entirely betraying her heroine.

Even though Haywood's masquerade tale closes with her laying bare the typical amatory tropes of unwanted pregnancy and banishment, these conventions point to a stark eighteenth-century reality. In 1725, it does appear that anatomy is destiny for a woman. Since Fantomina—like Cleomira and many other Haywood heroines—is betrayed by not only her lover but also her own body, Haywood may well be lamenting the fact that women in her era are defined largely according to their corporeality. No form of disguise or rebellion can fully change that. On the other hand, not even the biological reality of pregnancy can completely undercut Fantomina's power in challenging the social codes that contribute to the construction of female identity. In light of this, the

“conclusion of *Fantomina* is [actually] one of the least melancholy of Haywood’s endings” (Ballaster, 192). As Haywood critics have well established, when *Fantomina* is exposed and sent away to France, she is neither penitent nor vanquished. Since “the reader is left with the impression that *Fantomina* will continue her wiles on that continent as well” (Schofield, *Descending*, 192), one feels certain that even in Haywood’s day, *some* gender constraints can be overcome.

As Paula Backscheider points out, *The British Recluse* (1722) and *Fantomina* (1725) are “representative compositions from [Haywood’s most prolific and] amazing decade” (154). They are ‘representative’ in that they are amatory tales, but unusual in that they feature heroines who find significant ways to empower themselves and counteract the effects of seduction, rape and betrayal. More specifically, as Mary Anne Schofield establishes, “most of the novels of [Haywood’s] first period depict the troubled heroine who is [so] unable to reconcile contradictory elements within herself [and her exploitative, oppressive] society...[that] she ends her struggle in [hopeless] exile or death” (*Eliza*, 8). The heroines of *The British Recluse* and *Fantomina* distinguish themselves through their ability to transcend victimization and create alternative lifestyles and modes of self-representation. Even though this occurs within an eighteenth-century framework, it prefigures a form used by postmodern women writers.

In contemporary feminist writing, “women’s self-representation most often proceeds by a double movement: simultaneously *against* normative constructions of Woman that are continually produced by hegemonic discourses and *towards* new forms of representation that disrupt those normative constructions” (Robinson, 11).

Accordingly, through Haywood, Fantomina becomes a feminine author whose use of disguise precipitates a ‘double movement’ within her own text. Fantomina (and Haywood) simultaneously represent female passion as being as potent as male desire, and disrupt the ‘normative construction’ of the asexual (and sexually manipulated) eighteenth-century woman. Further, “Fantomina’s energy and passion are a marked contrast to the anguished submission to the feminine role, and her lack of remorse reveals the contradictions in definitions of ‘woman’” (Baksheider and Richetti, xx).⁸ The double movement enacted by Cleomira and Belinda is less obvious and less of an ongoing force in their co-narrative. Nonetheless, as they turn their grim experiences with love and men into an opportunity to form a unique friendship and community, they too seek a new mode of representation, and manage to subvert the stereotype of feminine passivity. In turn, and alongside Fantomina, the women’s bid to reinvent their circumstances (and themselves) restores some of the power they have lost to the men of their patriarchal society. (I say “some” in recognition of the fact that “the relations of domination and subordination do not simply go away when they are deconstructed” [Robinson, 3]). The control the women do gain serves to likewise empower the amatory reader, and confirm Haywood’s role as vindicator of women. Although the next chapter—a study in didacticism, coquetry and reform—marks Haywood’s “conversion” to moral novelist, we shall see her remain a reformer herself.

⁸ It should be noted that not all of Haywood’s masquerading heroines are this radical or empowered. In several of Haywood’s short fictions, women become entrapped by their own disguises and completely ruined by men. For an example, see Haywood’s story of *Erminia* in *The Female Spectator* (1744).

Chapter Three:
“Ain’t Misbehavin’”: Feminine Resistance and Reform
in *The History of Miss Betsy Thoughtless*”

An excerpt from Clara Reeve’s *The Progress of Romance* (1785):

Sophonra. It must be confessed that these books of the last age, were of worse tendency than any of those of the present.

Euphrasia. My dear friend, there were bad books at all times, for those who sought for them. – Let us pass over them in silence.

Hortensius. No not yet. – Let me help your memory to one more lady- Author of the same class. – Mrs. *Heywood* [sic]. – She has the same claim upon you as those you have last mentioned.

Euphrasia. I had intended to have mentioned Mrs. *Heywood* though in a different way, but I find you will not suffer any part of her character to escape you.

Hortensius. Why should she be spared any more than the others?

Euphrasia. Because she repented of her faults, and employed the latter part of her life in expiating the offences of the former. – There is reason to believe that the examples of the two ladies we have spoken of, [Aphra Behn and Delariviere Manley] seduced Mrs. *Heywood* into the same track; she certainly wrote some amorous novels in her youth, and also two books of the same kind as Mrs. *Manley*’s capital work, all of which I hope are forgotten.

Hortensius. I fear they will not be so fortunate, they will be known to posterity by the infamous immortality conferred upon them by *Pope* in his *Dunciad*.

Euphrasia. Mr. *Pope* was severe in his castigations, but let us be just to merit of every kind. Mrs. *Heywood* had the singular good fortune to recover a lost reputation, and the yet greater honour to atone for her errors. – She devoted the remainder of her life and labours to service of virtue. Mrs. *Heywood* was one of the most voluminous female writers that England ever produced; none of her latter works are destitute of merit, though they do not rise to the highest pitch of excellence. – *Betsy Thoughtless* [sic] is reckoned her best Novel...

Sophonra. I have heard it often said that Mr. *Pope* was too severe in his treatment of this lady...

Euphrasia. Truth is sometimes severe. – Mrs. *Heywood*’s wit and ingenuity were never denied. I would be the last to vindicate her faults, but the first to celebrate her return to virtue, and her atonement for them.

Sophonra. May her first writings be forgotten, and the last survive to do her honour!
(Reeve in Jones, 185-6)

Although this exchange comes from a late eighteenth-century critic who uses a fictionalized dialogue to convey her commentary, many of Haywood's contemporaries (and even some twentieth-century Haywood critics) shared the view of Clara Reeve. Indeed, it was long assumed that Haywood's choice to forego seductive tales and pen domestic narratives signified not only a genre switch but a bid for personal redemption. Haywood's second career as didactic novelist does in fact mark a paradigm shift in her writing; however, it does not signal the wholesale "conversion" celebrated by Clara Reeve's dramatic personae. If we consider *Betsy Thoughtless*—the subject of this chapter and the work Reeve's *Euphrasia* "[reckons Haywood's] best Novel"—we will not find its author singularly "devoted...to service of virtue...and atonement." The very claim is refuted by even a snapshot of the novel's titular character. Haywood's Betsy Thoughtless is both a vain coquette and a covert voice of protest against the subjection of women. She eventually regrets her youthful folly but does not entirely repent her actions. She is the vehicle for Haywood's rage at the fetters of eighteenth-century matrimony and a nascent reformer before she reforms herself. Since Haywood's "adherence to conventional morality applies only to the surface of the text" (Nestor, 579), the site of her own so-called reform is instead a place of considerable resistance.

On one level, *The History of Miss Betsy Thoughtless* (1751), is a didactic text that details the improvement of a coquettish young woman. It is also the "first major English novel to focus on the plot of female education or the 'reformed heroine plot'" (Nestor, 580). Although a watershed novel in this regard, Haywood's text expands upon a burgeoning tradition. The "moral plot of the reformed coquette existed in the 1690's and

was taken up in the eighteenth century by Pope in *The Rape of the Lock*' (Todd, *Sign*, 147). The subject was further considered in Mary Davys' highly popular novella *The Reformed Coquet* (1724). Davys' text "shows the influence of Restoration and eighteenth-century marriage comedies" (Baksheider, 251), and with its lighthearted tone, lacks both the substance and sobering subtext of *Betsy Thoughtless* (BT). Nonetheless, *The Reformed Coquet* (RC) offers a useful introduction to the reformed heroine genre. A brief study of Davys' novella will enrich a discussion of *Betsy Thoughtless*, and provide the context necessary to situate Haywood's novel.

As the heroine of *The Reformed Coquet*, Amoranda displays the vanity and poor judgment that are hallmarks of an improper eighteenth-century upbringing. As a pampered child who "was no sooner told she was pretty than she believed it" (RC, 256), Amoranda grows up a slave to her looking-glass, "admiring all those Graces with which she was... sure she was surrounded" (RC, 256). An orphaned, monied beauty by sixteen, she is left to an absent uncle and to court shallow flatteries—entertaining a string of rakish admirers who find no "Fault to be joined to [her] three thousand Pounds a Year" (RC, 256). Her conduct is lamented in turn by an intrusive narrator and the author of an anonymous warning letter:

What an unhappy Creature is a beautiful young Girl left to her own Management, who is so fond of Adoration that Reason and Prudence are thrust out to make way for it; ...how unhappy that woman is, who finds herself daily hedged in with self-ended Flatterers, who make it their business to keep a Vanity in [her], which may one day prove [her] ruin. (264-65)

The didactic appeals mean little to their target. For the unheeding Amoranda then (and the similarly careless Betsy Thoughtless), the "heroine's basic fault is...identified as the natural concomitant of her femaleness—her vanity, her coquettishness are nearly always

specifically described as female foibles” (Spencer, 147). In a didactic text, such “Vanity, which is most Women’s Foible might be overlooked or winked at, would it live alone; but alack! It loves a long Train of Attendants, and calls in Pride, Affectation, Ill-Nature, and often Ill-Manners too for its Companions” (*RC*, 257). Accordingly, Amoranda has several ‘attendants’ that render her behaviour “unsuitable” and make her the object of scrutiny.

As a coquette who finds having just one suitor unthinkable, Amoranda is able to enjoy her flirtations but has limited control over her fate. With three suitors vying for her affection, Amoranda’s “Heart [is] like a great Inn, which finds room for all that come, and she [can] not but think it very foolish to be beloved by five hundred, and return it only to one; she [finds] herself inclined to please them all” (*RC*, 261). She laughs off the idea of marriage—“Why marry I have so fresh a Bloom upon my Cheeks?” (*RC*, 262)—and declares: “everything loves Liberty, and so do I” (*RC*, 264). However, even as she claims, “once a Woman’s married, nobody cares for her but her Husband...we must live single in our own defence” (*RC*, 264), her tone is merely light and cheeky. She is not firm in her anti-marriage sentiment and seems ill-equipped to live a single life. Since she refuses to “banish the Bees and live in the Hive by [herself]” (*RC*, 266), there is a subtle implication that Amoranda’s lack of proper education has rendered her not only coquettish but incapable. Her tendency to court danger and need rescuing confirms her lack of sufficiency and shows her inability to control her destiny like she controls her men.

Since Amoranda will not “brave the hive alone,” it might be tempting to

extrapolate and conclude that Davys hints at the social near impossibility of an eighteenth-century female living a functional and sanctioned single life. In reality, Davys does not go that far. (Conversely, in a study far less frothy than the *The Reformed Coquet*, Haywood will squarely tackle the issue with her Betsy Thoughtless character.) Alongside Amoranda's story however, Davys does insert a lengthy sub-plot that points to the lack of justice available to a woman spurned. Specifically, in the jilting of Altemira by her lover Lord Lofty—who is also Amoranda's suitor—we find a twist on the typical seduction tale. Lofty gives Altemira a written “promise to marry [her] with a Bond of ten thousand Pound if ever he receded from his Word” (*RC*, 280). Ultimately, Lofty reneges on Altemira's contract and hopes to gain Amoranda by “scratching out one name, and interlining another” (*RC*, 288) on the marriage license “he had purchased to bamboozle poor Altemira” (*RC*, 288). In this, Davys touches on the issue of women's legal rights and the ease with which they are corrupted. Specifically, even though a “woman seduced by means of a promise of marriage...had a civil remedy in the form of a suit for monetary damages” (Staves, 126), and could rely on the “ecclesiastical courts to compel marriage on the ground of pre-contract” (Staves, 127), 1720's Altemira would have had little recourse when her written contract went missing and her would-be license was altered. (Stricter marriage laws and the outlawing of clandestine unions would not occur in England until The Marriage Act was passed in 1753). However, whereas Haywood will delve deeply into the marital legalities that oppress Betsy Thoughtless, Davys' nod to the topic is very brief. In Altemira's case, all is quickly remedied with a marriage to Lofty—

achieved through a masquerading plot and Amoranda's assistance.¹ Although Amoranda helps change Altemira's circumstances, she is not so adept in navigating her own course. For Amoranda, "Masculine guidance and protection are the [only] answer to [a] heroine's problems" (Spencer, 147).

To furnish Amoranda's reform, the aptly named Formator is appointed guardian and mentor. Formator counter-plots against the rakes who try to accost Amoranda, and after "[clearing] the House of the Caterpillars that infested it...[begins] to divert [Amoranda] from all the Follies of Life" (*RC*, 275). Since Amoranda has "a Soul capable of Improvement...[Formator believes] one day he should see her the most accomplished of her sex: in order to which he [provides] a choice Collection of Books for her [and spends] most of his time with her" (*RC*, 275). This echoes not only the didactic tenets of conduct literature but also Delariviere Manley's story of Charlot and the Duke (as discussed in chapter one). Like the Duke, Formator falls in love with his charge. However, as Jane Spencer points out, "The ideological implications of [Davys'] novel are clearly very different from those of [Manley's] seduction tale" (146). Even though Formator deceives Amoranda—proving to be not an old man but the disguised, young gallant "Alanthus" whom her uncle arranged for her to marry—he does not exploit his position of power. More pointedly:

Whereas Manley portrays the guardian as corrupt, the abuser of his patriarchal authority, Davys makes the guardian the lover and supports his programme of courtship-by-reform. The father substitute instead

¹ The so-called "bed-trick" in which a woman helps her abandoned friend ensnare the man who betrayed her, has a literary precedent in Shakespearean comedies and Restoration theatre. When it is practiced by Amoranda and Altemira it moves *The Reformed Coquet* that much further into the realm of light-hearted fantasy—a domain far different from the domestic realism Haywood achieves late in her novel.

of being a quasi-incestuous ravisher, is the legitimate mate for a thoughtless young heroine. (Spencer, 147)

Consequently, Amoranda's conversion can take place with her dignity intact.

Amoranda's reform comes easily; it is simplified and convenient to ensure a tidy didactic end to her story. Although she disregards the anonymous conduct warning she receives before Formator's arrival, Amoranda quickly "[promises] to be governed in a great measure by [her new guardian]" (*RC*, 268). She is alarmed when she disobeys Formator and "expresses the greatest inclination in the world to please him" (*RC*, 271). Further, she accepts her mentor's lectures against coquetry without rebellion, "resolved [to] never think [flattery] a pleasure again because [he dislikes] it in [her]" (*RC*, 292). Notably, (and unlike Betsy Thoughtless) Amoranda experiences no great dilemma in giving herself over to change. She simply agrees that "we foolish Girls are not to be trusted with ourselves, [saying,] Formator has taught me to believe we are the worst Guardians we can possibly have" (*RC*, 292). This makes Amoranda a rather two-dimensional character—a stock figure reformed heroine. She disobeys Formator only once, quickly regrets her error and is turned "from Folly and Madness to that Behaviour so ornamental to her Sex" (*RC*, 316). This is classic didacticism at work. Unlike Eliza Haywood, Mary Davys is not interested in exploring a subtly complex heroine. Consequently, alongside Betsy Thoughtless, Amoranda might seem a rather bland coquette.

As we enter the world of Betsy Thoughtless let us return to Jane Spencer's concept of ideological difference between the didactic and seduction genres. Writing on the rise of the eighteenth-century woman novelist, Spencer says:

A novel written about the reformation of a coquette, who learns to give up her power and become a dutiful wife, has very different ideological implications from the story of the seduced and abandoned heroine, with its usual message of protest about the treatment of women. Novels with reformed heroines were about learning to repudiate faults seen as specially feminine, and accepting male authority instead of challenging it. (143)

Indeed, as a coquette in the didactic and domestic history that bears her name, Betsy Thoughtless is the object of moral scrutiny and reformation; unlike the heroines of Haywood's earlier seduction tales she cannot be a sustained voice of social protest. However, Betsy Thoughtless is far from a meek, submissive female who blindly 'accepts male authority.' Although she appears initially superficial, Betsy is a complex heroine who resents the marriage tradition and does not easily conform. Hence, a qualifying statement made by Jane Spencer better reflects the scope of Haywood's didactic novel: "It should also be noted that the tradition of conformity is hardly ever simply that: some protest about female subordination could be mingled with it" (143). It is just such 'mingling' that takes the reader to a level beyond expectation and makes *The History of Miss Betsy Thoughtless (BT)* truly instructive.

At first glance, Betsy Thoughtless is similar to other Haywood heroines. The privileged only daughter of a "a gentleman of good family and fortune" (*BT*, 3), young, motherless Betsy attends boarding school and lacks a strong female role model. Innocent Miss Betsy has "a great deal of good-nature" (*BT*, 4), but upon observing the coquettish behaviours of her friend Miss Forward, gains an early insight "into the art and mystery of courtship, and consequently a relish for admiration" (*BT*, 4). Betsy is orphaned at fourteen and is made ward of not her two older brothers but of two male guardians, Mr. Goodman and Sir Trusty. Here and throughout the novel "the character's names and qualities

represent the stock figures of Restoration drama” (Schofield, *Eliza*, 92). Kind Mr. Goodman welcomes Betsy into the home he shares with wife Lady Mellasin and stepdaughter Flora, and Betsy is “quite transported” (*BT*, 10), at being sent to live in London. Of course, guardianship (particularly in the big city) does not safeguard a young girl’s reputation, and Betsy’s second female guardian, the virtuous Lady Trusty, is “extremely troubled [to learn] that Miss Betsy was sent from the country to live under such tuition” (*BT*, 11). Certain that Lady Mellasin is a very “unfit” caretaker, Lady Trusty resolves “within herself to take [every opportunity] of giving Miss Betsy such [conduct] instructions as she thought necessary” (*BT*, 11). In turn, Betsy proves to be greatly in need of the guidance.

As a didactic heroine who will shift from a model of misconduct to a model of reform, Betsy Thoughtless is necessarily flawed. Her transgressions are serious enough to threaten her reputation and impede her happiness, but in keeping with the didactic code of morality, cannot be so severe as to be unforgivable or impossible to overcome. More specifically, like any traditional “erring heroine” (Spencer, 142), her mistakes “must not include the great error, unchastity, especially considering the perennial tendency to identify a woman writer’s heroine with her creator” (Spencer, 142). While I dare say few of Haywood’s risqué narratives would have been written had she worried about such comparisons, Haywood does ensure that Betsy’s cover story is a didactic one.² She follows her proven formula of portraying the conventional before questioning acceptable standards and depicts a heroine who is very forgivable. Accordingly, Betsy’s greatest

² It is Schofield who first used the term “cover story” to refer to Haywood’s basic plot structures—those that screen an often subversive subtext.

weakness—her vanity—is presented as a natural, youthful foible, albeit a potentially dangerous one.

From the moment the novel opens with the portentous words of a outspoken narrator, it is apparent that feminine self regard is an inherent hazard, especially when accompanied by carelessness: “It was always my opinion, that fewer women were undone by love than vanity; and that those mistakes the sex are sometimes guilty of, proceed, for the most part, rather from inadvertency, than a vicious inclination” (*BT*, 3). Given that our heroine has ‘inadvertency’ within her very name, it is not surprising that Betsy Thoughtless will exhibit very poor judgment in perilous situations. These episodes and the role that Betsy’s vanity plays in furnishing them will soon be given their due. However, first, it is interesting to note that Betsy’s defining negative characteristics are attributed to both nature and custom. Further, the same narrator who becomes a moral compass within the history, and eventually bemoans Betsy’s near fatal flaw, is quick to forgive the heroine’s early mistakes and suggest that Betsy’s vanity is as much a factor of environment as carelessness.

In the social circle of Lady Mellasin, Betsy is exposed to entertainments and suitors that feed both her vanity and burgeoning coquetry:

Never did the mistress of a private family indulge herself, and those about her, with such a continual round of publick diversions! The court, the play, the ball and opera, with giving and receiving visits, engrossed all the time that could be spared from the toilette. It cannot, therefore, seem strange that Miss Betsy, to whom all these things were entirely new, should have her head turned with the promiscuous enjoyment, and the power of reflection lost amidst the giddy whirl. (12)

Like Davys’ Amoranda and Haywood’s Fantomina, Betsy is dazzled by the ‘head-turning’ trappings of the *beau monde* and her growing ability to captivate its male ranks.

Since Lady Mellasin's home is a "Babel of mixed company" (*BT*, 34), where Betsy and Flora hear "heaven and earth ransacked for comparisons in favour of [their] beauty" (*BT*, 12), Betsy learns to "[excel in the art of raillery]" (*BT*, 12), and bask in the glow of flattery. Here, and throughout the novel, it is clear that Betsy's vanity is promoted by a shallow social circle and the supplicating company she keeps. However, the actual frivolous events she partakes in receive milder criticism than do the "diversions" in earlier Haywood works. The temptations of the ball or masquerade are not the greatest threats to Betsy's virtue; instead, her own character weaknesses are.

As far as Betsy's vanity is concerned, Haywood makes a radical shift in the way she portrays a heroine: she appears to accept the conduct-book values that naturalize feminine inferiority. When the "first victim of [Betsy's] charms" (*BT*, 12) professes his love, "at length convincing her of the conquest she had made" (*BT*, 13), we are told his transports "awakened in her breast that vanity so natural to a youthful mind" (*BT*, 13). This "naturalness" cannot be dismissed as the province of simple, adolescent naiveté. The reason being is, at the moment Betsy's vanity "awakens," her character is transformed:

She exulted, she plumed herself, she used him ill and well by turns, taking an equal pleasure in raising or depressing his hopes; and, in spite of her good-nature, felt no satisfaction superior to that of the consciousness of a power of giving pain to the man who loved her. (13)

In choosing to establish a powerful link between Betsy's vanity and the dawn of her feminine coquetry, the quality of "natural vanity" changes; a supposedly un-gendered trait becomes infused with (and coloured by) feminine stereotypes. However, a writer of Haywood's calibre does not fall accidentally into stereotyping—she uses it strategically. In implying that natural vanity is indeed both distinctly female and bound to corrupt,

Haywood opens her text to a deluge of didactic possibilities. Further, since she readily accepts a traditional, feminine construct for Betsy, she again follows the moral code that a 1750's text requires.³ By following convention, Haywood is also able to express a certain amount of ambivalence toward the code (and traditional female roles) within safe parameters. We shall see this as we explore the different facets of Betsy's coquetry.

Although a number of suitors pursue Betsy and compete for her attention, she proves herself a coquette by treating their courtship as a game. She encourages the suit of her first faithful adorer, Young Saving, but once she has "reason to believe she [has] engaged [his heart] too far for him to recall it, [begins] to take a pride in [indifferent] tormenting" (*BT*, 14). Betsy also relishes the thought of making new conquests, and early on, establishes a pattern of pitting rival admirers against each other:

Mr. Truworth was strongly recommended by her brother, Mr. Staple by her guardian; yet all the ideas she had of either of them, served only to excite in her the pleasing imagination, how, when they both came to address her, she should play the one against the other, and give herself a constant round of diversion, by their alternate contentment or disquiet. (75)

Since it is the pleasure of playing the courtship game that inspires Betsy, it is initially the sport and not the players who are important to her.⁴ Consequently, the competition for the heroine's love will replay itself in subsequent matches: Truworth versus Munden, and Munden versus Fineer. Even when a new contender like the aging, stuffy Captain Hysom is deemed laughably unworthy, Betsy is reluctant to give up the entertainment value he provides. She keeps him in false hopes because the truth, she tells Flora, would cause

³By the 1750's there was an expectation that women's writing be modest and respectable, didactic or sentimental, romantic and un-sensationalized. For further study consult the chapter: "The Modest Muse: Women Writers of the Mid-Eighteenth Century" in Janet Todd's *The Sign of Angellica* (1989).

⁴ Later in the novel, Betsy will deeply regret rebuffing Truworth, the most worthy opponent.

them to “lose all [their] sport” (*BT*, 103). Treating “all her lovers...as subjects of mere amusement” (*BT*, 315), Betsy is “wholly regardless of who hoped, or who despaired, [and has] no aim in any thing she [does] but merely to divert herself” (*BT*, 126). Thus, on one level, Betsy is configured as a shallow coquette who, if traditional moral judgments and punishments are to be applied, appears destined to lose at her own game.

Betsy’s coquetry affords her more than just frivolous diversion; it gives her a share of power that marriage cannot. Betsy has “rather an aversion than inclination [to a wedded state]” (*BT*, 101), and declares that “to become a matron at [her] years is what [she] cannot brook the thought of” (*BT*, 183). Although Betsy has no desire to give up her autonomy, she thinks it would not be “a fault in her to hear the proposals of a hundred lovers [should] as many offer themselves” (*BT*, 97). Ironically, for all that the most dedicated swains promise Betsy, hearing and dismissing their proposals allows her much more sway than accepting one would. Betsy may laugh that “one never sees this [gushing, deferential] madness in [lovers] after they become husbands” (*BT*, 302), but she is well aware that she can trade on the power that only comes with being single and desired by many. She answers Munden’s declarations “with a sort of raillery, in order to put him to the more expence of oaths and asservations” (*BT*, 265), and in spite of the equal delight she takes in the “respectful passion of Mr. Truworth” (*BT*, 110), will not part with the addresses of other men “at least till she [exercises] all the power her beauty [gives] over them” (*BT*, 110). In an environment where her male guardian and brother not only press her to embrace promising offers but chastise her for trifling with honourable suitors, Betsy’s refusal to be monogamous is both a bid to maintain the only rank that affords her

true status, and a jab at the confines of her controlling, prescriptive society. In turn, as Betsy contemptuously dismisses the romanticized role of a rural wife—“What, to be cooped up like a tame dove, only to coo, and bill and breed?” (*BT*, 196)—she is the voice of Haywood’s anti-marriage sentiment. (Later, we shall see this sentiment at its strongest in Betsy’s unfortunate union with Munden.) So it is, that the same vain coquette who “triumphs in the pains she [gives],” (*BT*, 115), expresses not just a wish to enslave lovers, but a very logical response to the limits her society places on women: “[Surely] one may allow a man to have merit, and be pleased with his conversation, without desiring to be tacked to him forever” (*BT*, 101). However, the nature of coquetry (and the dictates of a conduct novel) demand that Betsy’s moments of reason be fleeting.

Betsy’s quest for diversion and power comes at the expense of common sense, and her string of suitors is almost matched by a string of unwelcome, accosting rogues. Proving that “vanity and **unsteadiness** [emphasis mine] are the coquette’s distinguishing characteristics” (Spencer, 142), Betsy displays an alarming lack of self-awareness and foresight when entering into situations that could compromise her virtue. Although she “[hates] any thing that [has] the least tincture of indecency” (*BT*, 38), Betsy is “not of a disposition to think too much or too deeply, on those things which the most nearly [concern] herself” (*BT*, 69). As such, her namesake “thoughtlessness” denotes not selfishness but a tendency to be literally unthinking at the precise moments she should be protecting her reputation. Furthermore, even when Betsy’s first instincts are good, her better judgment inevitably falls away, especially if vanity takes over. For example, when Betsy visits Oxford with Flora, they are squired to a dark garden by two sparks of her

brother's acquaintance. Initially, Betsy has sense enough to realize the setting is "fit for nothing but for people to do what they are ashamed of in the light" (*BT*, 45). However, as the men seize the girls and take the liberty of stealing kisses, "neither of these ladies [gives] themselves the trouble to reflect what consequences might...attend [such] a prelude" (*BT*, 45). Accordingly, when the couples enter a house and Betsy is so distracted at being compared to Venus that she fails to realize she is alone with a villain, the results are predictable. She is seized roughly, kept from leaving and rescued at the last second: "her ruin had certainly been completed, if a loud knocking at the door had not prevented him from prosecuting his design" (*BT*, 47). In this, and subsequent "close call" scenes, Haywood offers her reader both the virtue-saving tropes of a seduction narrative and the melodrama so crucial to a didactic story. At the same time, her "unthinking" heroine is made to consider questions of feminine virtue.

As Betsy struggles with the aftermath of her near rape episodes, the issues of the heroine's accountability and reputation become important. After the Oxford incident, Betsy's brother is shot while defending her honour, and both the scandal "and the occasion of it [are] blazed over the whole town" (*BT*, 56). Since Betsy and Flora are shunned in public and "satires and lampoons [fly] about like hail" (*BT*, 57), it is clear to the reader that feminine ill-conduct—be it real or presumed—has social repercussions. However, it is too soon in the scheme of a didactic narrative for a heroine like Betsy to accept any responsibility. Hence, while Betsy is certain she wants to leave the place where "innocence is no defence against scandal and the show of virtue [is] more considered than the reality" (*BT*, 58), her trademark vanity and carelessness render her

oblivious to her part in the mishap. Further, since her coquetry has given her a form of limited power, she harbors the illusion that her virtue is untouchable and she is immune to ruin. The narrator explains:

It is certain this young lady had the highest notions of honour and virtue, [and detested encroachment on them]. She had the good nature...to pity those faults in others, [yet] thought it impossible for her to be once guilty of herself...Amidst [her noble sentiments], vanity, that foible of her soul crept in and would have its share. ...In [rebuffing the Oxford commoner] she secretly exulted, and had that dependence on her power of repelling all the efforts, come they in what shape soever, that should be made against her virtue, that she thought it beneath her to behave so as not to be in danger of incurring them. (94)

Betsy's bizarre, conceit-fueled logic not only sets the scene for a grand, didactic reprimand—"How great a pity it is that an [otherwise excellent] mind...should be tainted with so [fatal a frailty]" (*BT*, 94)—but virtually guarantees future attacks on her honour.

In the misadventures that follow the Oxford fiasco, we see Betsy both unaware of the true nature of her sexual vulnerability, and capable of the self-realization that marks her potential for growth. Betsy's second serious scrape finds her narrowly escaping a kidnapping plot by two men in a coach. Since she is left "strangely perplexed at the meaning of [the] adventure" (*BT*, 133), her lack of self-awareness continues to define her. Betsy's naïve perplexity also suggests something about the perilous nature of her overly protective, modest culture. Since Betsy does not recognize—or else cannot name—the fact that she is vulnerable to rape, it is clear that Betsy—like Haywood's seduction tale heroines—is just as endangered by enforced ignorance as by predatory men. Haywood's writing illustrates that eighteenth-century women are not only "denied [the] language for both self-defense and accusation" (Fasick, 58), but the very education that would protect them from assault in the first place. However, even though Betsy's improvement is at the

crux of the novel, she receives no such beneficial instruction. She must learn her lessons the hard way, and begin to understand that her own careless behaviour renders her susceptible to attack.

When Betsy finds her virtue threatened a third time, she starts to realize she may be to blame. Specifically, after she is warned about appearing in public with her old school friend, Miss Forward—who, unbeknownst to Betsy, has fallen into prostitution—Betsy ventures out, becomes trapped in a coach and is taken for a whore herself. As she desperately fights off a determined libertine, the truth of her error consumes her:

at that instant recollecting that no help was near, that she was in the power of a man whose aim was her eternal ruin; and that it was by her own indiscretion alone this mischief had fallen on her, [Betsy was] so overcome, with the dread, the shame, the horror, as she then supposed, of her inevitable fate, that she was very near falling into a swoon. (211)

Although, as in Haywood's early works, it is the threat of physical violation that brings the heroine to the verge of bodily hysteria, Betsy's sudden awareness of her 'own indiscretion' is almost equally paralyzing. She escapes with her virtue intact, but in a subsequent "fit of humiliation and repentance" (*BT*, 213), is forced to stop and consider the connection between the "the precipice she had fallen into" and the "levity of her conduct" (*BT*, 213). The fact that she reflects on her honour and "resolve[s] to take all possible precautions not to fall into the like danger again" (*BT*, 222), signals that in didactic terms, Betsy may be capable of "redemption." However, given Betsy's tendency toward erratic behaviour, there is no reason to suppose she shall make changes that are instant or absolute.

In *Betsy Thoughtless*, Haywood establishes a specific, repetitive, narrative pattern that shapes Betsy's character and move towards reform: First, Betsy engages in behavior

that is risky or morally risqué. Second, Betsy is either chastised for her errors or warned against the dangers that attend ill-conduct. Third, Betsy regrets her transgressions, vows to improve herself and makes temporary ‘changes’, before the cycle resumes. To break down the novel’s pattern this way is neither to reduce Haywood’s storytelling skills, nor minimize Betsy’s struggle; indeed, it is precisely this seemingly static pattern that makes Betsy one of Haywood’s most realistic heroines, and makes her history compelling. To illustrate this, let us take a closer look at Betsy’s battle with her own transient resolve.

As Betsy’s character alternates between periods of extreme haughtiness and penitent resolve, she becomes a complicated and multi-dimensional, didactic heroine. In the first third of the novel, one finds Betsy frequently “vexed, that anything she did should be liable to censure” (*BT*, 146), and occasionally “ashamed of, the many inadvertencies [she has] been guilty of” (*BT*, 184). Characteristically inconsistent, Betsy is rankled when Mr. Goodman gently reproves the “inconsiderateness of her conduct” (*BT*, 145), but moved when Lady Trusty urges her to marry Truworth—specifically, before “repeated inadvertencies...make Heaven weary of continuing it’s protection” (*BT*, 178). Since Betsy’s ego is considerable, and her “spirit, yet unbroke [and unable to] bear controul” (*BT*, 146), she bristles when her behaviour is directly challenged but softens when she has time to reflect in private. This is particularly true where Truworth is concerned. Betsy outwardly rebukes Truworth for “[prescribing conduct rules when he has no claim over her]” (*BT*, 203), but later, in her heart, wishes she had followed his advice and “[confesses] that his admonitions testified the most zealous and tender care” (*BT*, 207). When Betsy is alone, her haughtiness recedes, and (as the text progresses) she

experiences increasingly frequent moments of recognition and contrition. In one such instance, she “condemns the vanity of being pleased with...shadowy things—such fleeting unsubstantial delights...[as wrongly encouraging] a multitude of admirers” (*BT*, 183). In another case, she recalls past escapes, and vows to ensure that the memories will prevent her “from falling into the like ugly accidents again” (*BT*, 313). However, Betsy’s short-lived resolve keeps her only briefly safe from harm; as per her fluctuating pattern of reform and folly, reason and lack, she soon “relapses into her former self” (*BT*, 207).

Although Betsy’s ongoing, behavioural tug-of-war may sound tedious, Haywood ensures that the battle never grows tiresome. Betsy’s stubborn reluctance to change makes her a far more believable (and likable) heroine than Davys’ stock coquette Amoranda—whose quick, easy and convenient transformation seems ridiculously unlikely by comparison. Since Betsy is “very well convinced of her errors...yet [so loves] those [pretty] errors in herself” (*BT*, 264), that she finds it hard to take leave of them, she must learn the same lessons again and again, until they stick. This affords Haywood’s target eighteenth-century reader—young, female and vulnerable—a like number of vicarious learning opportunities, and the potential to benefit from “[exemplar teaching] rather than precept” (Nestor, 581). Further, since a reader (of any century) is not only educated but entertained by Betsy’s follies and lapses, Haywood’s didactic style is rhetorically similar to her manner of conveying seduction. Just as Haywood’s scandal readers were teased with the repeated, unconsummated, amorous encounters of her amatory heroines, her didactic readers, like her erring heroine, are taught only by degrees. The desired effect—titillation versus conduct modification—may be different, but the methodology is the

same. For Betsy specifically, the fact that we see the “dictates of a truly reasonable woman, and the idle humour of a vain coquette, prevail by turns over her fluctuating mind” (*BT*, 246), makes her a realistic “mixed” heroine—neither perfect nor hopeless in didactic terms. As Deborah Ross explains, it also secures both Betsy and her creator a significant place in the history of women’s writing:

By using “mixed” heroines despite [some] readers’ sense that they were poor vehicles for instruction, Haywood [and her contemporary, Charlotte Lennox] asserted a fairly revolutionary moral principle: that young women, as well as young men such as Tom Jones, learn virtue through experience.⁵ (70)

Yet, if Betsy’s road to reform is built upon ‘learning virtue through experience,’ it is important to understand that in her realm, virtue is constructed on appearances and upheld by double standards.

In Betsy’s deepest moments of introspection and regret, we are told “the most bitter of her enemies could not have passed censure more severe than she did on herself” (*BT*, 212). However, both friend and foe are quick to condemn Betsy’s reckless and flirtatious conduct, and offer warnings that adhere to a strict and sexist moral code. For example, consider Mr. Goodman’s cautionary remarks to Betsy:

I doubt not of your innocence, but would have you consider, that reputation is also of some value; that the honour of a young maid, like you, is a flower of so tender and delicate a nature, that the least breath of scandal withers and destroys it. In fine, that it is not enough to be good, without behaving in such a manner as to make others acknowledge us to be so. (146)

It is immediately obvious that Goodman’s conventional, patriarchal “reputation is a flower” analogy could have come directly from an eighteenth-century conduct manual.

⁵ For a sketch of the eighteenth-century debate over blending romance and realism in didactic fiction, see the chapter “Betsy Thoughtless and Harriot Stuart” in Ross’ *The Excellence of Falsehood* (1991).

(See chapter one.) Less obvious, but even more important is his use of the word “us” in his lecture. The fact that Goodman includes himself—and implicitly both genders—in the requisites for acceptable conduct, belies the double standard that anchors much of the novel. Although, true to his name, Goodman does display honourable behaviour—he is the rare guardian figure who neither seduces nor woos his charge—it is very clear that the moral standards prescribed for Betsy by the men around her, do not apply to them.

Haywood’s novel is filled with instances where Betsy’s male ‘betters’ engage in behaviour that is equal to (or worse than) the unbecoming “female conduct” they condemn in her. More specifically, whereas Truworth is violently opposed to Betsy’s potentially damning association with Miss Forward—“[infamous friendships ought to be broke off] as reputation in [women] once lost is never to be retrieved” (*BT*, 203)—he fails to consider that it is his **own** friend, Sir Bazil Loveit, who enjoys Miss Forward’s wares and helps maintain her position as “one of those unhappy creatures, who make traffick of their beauty” (*BT*, 198). Similarly, while Betsy’s eldest brother denounces the coquettish behaviour that threatens his sister’s reputation and the Thoughtless family name, there is no such scandal in his refusal to marry and legitimize his long kept mistress.⁶ Finally, in what may be the novel’s most glaring example of both male hypocrisy and the unjust, divisive, nature of the eighteenth-century moral code, Betsy, (in the coach entrapment scene) receives conduct advice from her would-be-rapist: “He then took the liberty of reminding her, that a young lady more endangered her reputation by an acquaintance of one woman of ill fame, than by receiving the visits of twenty men, though professed

⁶ Notably, only Betsy protests against the disparity, saying that if she must be married she “hopes she shall soon see him follow the example.” (*BT*, 448)

libertines” (*BT*, 211). Since even Betsy’s own attacker condemns the company she keeps, there is no doubt that Haywood “accepts a double standard she had attacked in her earlier work” (Spencer, 149). However, since the latter episode is so blatantly ironic, and Betsy replies to her unlikely advisor by saying “[in future] she would be very careful what company she kept of **both** sexes” (*BT*, 212), it is hard to entirely accept Spencer’s claim that “Haywood’s earlier feminist protest has been lost in her recreation of herself as a new ‘moral’ novelist” (149).

In *Betsy Thoughtless*, Haywood’s voice of protest is not lost; it is simply quieter and less prevalent than in her non-didactic works. To be sure, subversive moments are disproportionately few in a realm where the heroine is not only perpetually criticized for her feminine flaws, but—in a striking inversion for Haywood—more frequently blamed for risking her virtue than are the men who assault it. However, within this didactic and often sexist milieu, there are instances where Haywood shows her reluctance to fully condemn Betsy’s misbehaviour. For example, when the narrator declares “it was the fate of Miss Betsy to attract a great number of admirers but never [keep the flame alive]” (*BT*, 250), we are told that it “cannot be absolutely determined [whether this was owing to the inconstancy of the addressers, or the ill-conduct of the person addressed]” (*BT*, 250). Several such comments serve to deflect attention from Betsy’s moral weaknesses, and to subtly implicate male characters for their ill-treatment of women. Even when Haywood refrains from directly criticizing male conduct or social inequality, she nonetheless “illustrates the difficulty the sexual double standard creates for eighteenth-century women” (Nestor, 582). This is especially evident when she continually

revisits the issues of female virtue and reputation.

Haywood's intense focus on Betsy's reputation serves not just a didactic purpose but also an occasionally feminist one. Frequent conduct warnings afford Betsy (and the reader) both a steady dose of moral instruction, and some embedded 'lessons within the lessons.' In one instance, Lady Trusty (like Mr. Goodman) warns Betsy that an "innate principle of virtue is not always...sufficient; ...the world is censorious...so that reputation may suffer, though virtue triumphs" (*BT*, 33). Here, in the guise of advice, Haywood offers a soupçon of protest and underscores a serious dilemma facing women of her era: hard-won honour can be undone by even a whiff of supposed infamy. (Although the issue was raised in the Oxford incident, the profound severity of the problem is not apparent until Betsy loses Truworth.)⁷ Haywood points to an even harsher reality when Betsy is made aware of her brother's ideas about female honour. In a diatribe often cited by Haywood critics—including Spencer and Nestor—Francis Thoughtless declares that: "[Betsy's] reputation is of more consequence to [her] family [than her virginity]; the loss of the [latter] might be concealed, but a blemish on the other brings certain infamy [to her kin]" (*BT*, 352). Although there is nothing feminist about this passage, it provides a striking lesson. Betsy's "social world ...privileges unvirtuous disguise over genuine morality" (Nestor, 583), and family honour over individual virtue. This leaves one asking

⁷ Truworth abruptly dismisses Betsy and marries saintly Harriot Loveit, largely because he believes Flora's spiteful rumour—that the rural toddler Betsy quietly maintains is not an orphan, but her own bastard child. While Truworth later learns of his error and deeply regrets wronging Betsy, Betsy never knows Truworth's reason for leaving. Though far too proud to confess any feeling for Truworth, Betsy admits that she "should, with less regret, submit to the yoke of wedlock with him than any other" (*BT*, 423). Having decided that if Truworth returns she "ought, in gratitude, to reward his love" (*BT*, 313), Betsy finds the news of his marriage "the most poignant shock her soul could possibly sustain" (*BT*, 437).

what Haywood is **really** trying to teach. Is she merely exposing a double standard, or using it to subversively imply that since even truly virtuous women are unsafe and undervalued, there is little point complying with her society's strict code of feminine virtue? Since Betsy—unlike early Haywood heroines—is given no opportunity to rewrite or successfully evade the code, Haywood seems to stop short of advocating non-compliance. However, since even naïve Betsy hotly rejects her brother's "unjust reasoning" (*BT*, 352) about female reputation, it is clear that Haywood likewise rejects "the notion that...virtue exists for its use to [a] woman's family" (Spencer, 150).

It is family however, that forces Betsy to commit to the wedded state she has so long dreaded. Specifically, after Mr. Goodman falls ill and voices the "dying admonition" that Betsy "[be well married and protected from the temptations fatal to reputation]" (*BT*, 306), we see Betsy go from a "young lady...at her own disposal" (*BT*, 137), to one her brothers want safely **disposed** of. It is not that Betsy's brothers are overly concerned for her happiness; rather, they are horrified that Betsy has continued to endanger the family name. (In short order, Betsy is soundly reprimanded for losing Truworth, for almost getting raped and tricked into marriage by Frederick Fineer, and for leaving Munden waiting for an answer to his proposal.) Although Betsy's brothers initially respect her decisions that "she doesn't care to marry yet awhile" (*BT*, 310), or "consent to be kept in [her family's] leading strings" (*BT*, 310), they ultimately pressure her to reward Munden's persistence and "[put] herself into a different mode of life" (*BT*, 409). In a seeming nod to the eighteenth-century maiden's lack of options in the face of social pressure, Betsy only complies since "[her] marriage is a thing so much desired by those to

whose will [she] shall always...submit" (*BT*, 447). Dismayed by her situation but unable to resist those "who[would] have it so" (*BT*, 452), Betsy can only wish it were "her inclination [that] dictated the consent her lips had uttered" (*BT*, 451).

Although Betsy is unable to go against her brothers' wishes, she questions the social custom that both attracts and limits her sex:

‘I wonder,’ [said] she, ‘what can make the generality of women so fond of marrying? It looks to me like an infatuation; just as if it were not a greater pleasure to be courted, complimented, admired, and addressed, by a number, than to be confined to one, who, from a slave, becomes a master; and perhaps, uses his authority in a manner disagreeable...And yet it is expected from us. One has no sooner left off one’s bib and apron, than people cry - “Miss will soon be married!” - and this man, and that man, is presently picked out for a husband. Mighty Ridiculous!’ (451-2)

Betsy’s protest is both peevish and potent. On one level, we hear the “splenetic fancies” (*BT*, 451) of a coquette sorry to lose her sport, on another, the unsettling suggestion that a woman bound by social expectation and deprived of choice, may well be subject to marital tyranny. (Since Munden views courtship as nothing more than a tedious precursor to an eventual state of marital dominion, Betsy has good reason to be worried.) While it is unsurprising that coquettish Betsy would rather prolong the courtship phase that affords her limited power, it is telling that Betsy—unlike the typical heroine with a boarding school education—never warms to the idea of becoming a wife or tries “seeking social advancement through marriage.” (Barker-Benfield, 164). Although Betsy makes a last-minute, pre-marital demand that Munden equip her with a coach, it is not an act of gold-digging but a desperate attempt to goad Munden into calling off the proceedings. For all her manipulative prowess, Betsy is not one of those coy ladies “who listen very contentedly to the...amorous addresses made to them, yet will not suffer the least word of

marriage till a long, tedious preparation is made for a sound they pretend to think dreadful" (*BT*, 344). For Betsy, the sound of wedding bells is dreadful. It means losing not only autonomy but her sense of self. Since Betsy (and Haywood) seem to recognize that the "event of marriage confers on the heroine her entire personal identity" (Boone, 74), it is understandable that Betsy is afraid to disobey her family and risk losing them too. Perhaps Haywood limits Betsy's stance against marital custom to quiet protest—and not impudent action—to likewise avoid alienating her didactic readers. Or, it could be that the portrayal of Betsy as a "divided heroine"—one Schofield characterizes as "[outwardly submissive and inwardly rebellious]" (*Eliza*, 5)—affords Haywood the best of two genres and the best secret weapon: the ability to disarm her readers when they least expect it.

The marriage that was expected to be the "only sure refuge for a young woman of Miss Betsy's disposition" (*BT*, 307), proves anything but a sanctuary. Although Betsy is an accommodating wife who "[seriously considers] the duties of her place" (*BT*, 460), and attempts to "make the bonds she had entered into easy to herself" (*BT*, 461), her efforts are not long appreciated by Munden. As soon as the "golden dream" (*BT*, 461) of the honeymoon vanishes, "the man who was once kind, [and as mundane as his name implied], begins to take pride in the power he had obtained of thwarting Betsy's humour" (*BT*, 469). Niggardly and churlish, Munden severely limits Betsy's household funds and then blames her that his table is ill-supplied. Further, he begrudges Betsy her modest allowance of pin-money and tries to encroach upon "what was her due by contract" (*BT*, 469). His attempts to control Betsy leave "her good-nature abused" (*BT*, 467), and render

her stunned: “ ‘Good Heavens!’ cried she, ‘to what have I reduced myself! -Is this to be a wife!- Is this the state of wedlock! - Call it rather an Egyptian bondage!’” (*BT*, 463).

Even more disturbing is Munden’s tendency toward physical violence. In a vengeful fit of rage he murders Betsy’s beloved pet squirrel, throwing it against the chimney so that its “tender frame was dashed to pieces” (*BT*, 470). The act of cruelty—made worse by the fact that it was perpetrated to ensure Betsy’s suffering—leaves Betsy determined “that she would never eat, or sleep with [Munden] again” (*BT*, 471). As dismal a picture of married life as this is, Haywood suggests that the consequences of leaving are even bleaker.

As Betsy considers leaving Munden, Haywood makes it clear that neither society nor the law adequately supports a separated woman. Although Lady Trusty acts as Betsy’s confidante and advocate, she repeatedly counsels Betsy to forgive Munden’s faults and insists there is no place for female rebellion in a contemptuous world. She says:

You must not think nor talk in this fashion, all you can accuse him of will not amount to a separation; besides, consider how odd a figure a woman makes who lives apart from her husband; there is an absolute necessity for a reconciliation. (474)

The claim that Betsy’s charges would not ‘amount to a separation’ is documented as legal fact. According to historian Lawrence Stone, a 1750’s English woman could sue for judicial separation but would be deterred by the “probability of destitution” (13), and—as in Betsy’s case—stymied by a narrow legal definition of cruelty that until 1860, did not recognize “verbal abuse and insults” (10). As Betsy would have been “much better satisfied [if] there had been a possibility of being separated for ever, from a person who she was now convinced had neither love nor esteem for her” (*BT*, 475), Haywood hints at

the need for legal reform.⁸ However, given Lady Trusty's comments, it is apparent that even if the laws were in Betsy's favour, becoming a separated 'odd woman' meant facing life as a potential pariah.

As Betsy weighs her limited options, the issues of female identity and public opinion intersect with the question of marital privacy—or rather, the eighteenth-century lack thereof. In Betsy's day, the rare woman who gained legal separation would have faced a backlash caused by terrible publicity, “thanks to [the] widespread [and well-read] reporting after 1740 of the sordid details of intimate married life [in a flood of court-published pamphlets.]” (Stone, 14). At the same time, choosing **not** to separate offered an abused woman no guarantee of sidestepping public scrutiny. As Haywood establishes, Betsy risks censure even by staying in a marriage publicly known to be troubled. Once again, Lady Trusty elaborates: “The unhappy brulée has lasted too long -your servants must certainly know it - the whole affair, [with large additions] will soon become the talk of the town...[and] you cannot hope to escape your share in the censure” (*BT*, 492). Thus, the issue of reputation that was an albatross to the maiden Betsy is still an enormous concern after marriage—whether she leaves or whether she remains.⁹ Although Betsy eventually leaves Munden, the threat of scandal and the allegiance to her vows are enough to keep her temporarily trapped in a loveless marriage. The fact that Betsy can find support only in patching up the rift and doing her best “to make the [marital] yoke...sit as

⁸ Since it is widely believed that Haywood abandoned a bad marriage, she may well be speaking from experience. Notably, England would not “acquire an official system of legalized divorce followed by remarriage until 1857” (Stone, 11).

⁹ The point is emphasized when Lady Mellasin— who has been publicly exposed to be a reprehensible wife and widow—must move to Jamaica because reputation is “little regarded” there.

lightly upon her as possible" (*BT*, 492), serves to underscore the oppressive reality of Haywood's society.

During the Munden's temporary and uneasy reconciliation, Betsy becomes a genuinely reformed heroine who displays psychological depth, but finds her virtuous behaviour little rewarded. For a short while, Betsy's virtue is not tested and the Munden's marriage—the picture of shared indifference—continues to quietly contradict the eighteenth-century ideal of companionate, conjugal affection. However, an event that should have increased Munden's esteem and concern for Betsy, ultimately does the reverse. Specifically, when Betsy is tricked by Munden's benefactor, nearly raped and told that "in blessing me [with sexual favours], you fix the happiness [and fortune] of your husband" (*BT*, 513), she escapes, informs Munden and finds him angry at her for offending his patron. As unjust as Munden's reproaches are, Betsy realizes both her fault in meeting with a man she feared corrupt, and more importantly, the folly of all her questionable past conduct. She thinks:

'The vanities of my virgin state...might plead some excuse; but nothing now can be urged in my defense for preserving them...How strange a creature have I been!' 'How inconsiderate with myself! I knew the character of a coquet both silly and insignificant; yet did every thing in my power to acquire it. I aimed to inspire awe and reverence in the men; yet, by my imprudence, emboldened them to the most unbecoming freedoms with me. I have sense enough to discern real merit in those who professed themselves my lovers; yet affected to treat most ill those in whom I found the greatest share of it. Nature has made me no fool; yet not one action of my life has given any proof of common reason....I rejected Mr. Truworth only because I thought I didn't love him enough; yet gave my hand to Mr. Munden, whom at that time, I did not love at all; and who has since, alas, taken little care to cultivate that affection I have laboured to feel for him.' (519-20)

Although Haywood has been criticized for creating simplistic characters who lack psychological intensity, Betsy's epiphany confirms that her author is very capable of

conveying psychological realism. Further, “Haywood’s rendering of Betsy’s consciousness at work foreshadows...the achievements of Jane Austen, whose heroines go through comparable moments of self-knowledge” (Spencer, 152). This interior monologue is also different than Betsy’s earlier musings on conduct. Betsy not only accepts responsibility for her past mistakes but truly understands why they are wrong. Her change of humour is “not a transient one” (*BT*, 520), and as Betsy sets about improving herself one expects that her virtue will be rewarded. However, as Munden curses his marriage and begins an affair, it is obvious that for the moment, virtue must be its own reward.

As Haywood delays rewarding Betsy’s good behaviour, she returns to the issue of women’s legal rights. In doing so she accomplishes two things. She reemphasizes the lack of resources available to eighteenth-century women, and indicates that a woman who dons the mantle of virtuous conduct should not have to shoulder abuse to secure her good name. Betsy may be conforming to a more socially acceptable standard of feminine behaviour but she needn’t turn a blind eye to Munden’s infidelity or submissively accept the conduct-book-style advice that has the ultimate objective of “social stability based on the subjection of women within marriage” (Jones, 9). That being said, it is not easy for Betsy to leave Munden, or more accurately, to face the ensuing consequences. Surprisingly, the roadblocks do not come from Betsy’s immediate social circle. When Betsy “flies for ever from [Munden’s] ill-usage” (*BT*, 556), her brother offers her refuge and her friend, Mable Loveit, —channeling Haywood—says: “if [Betsy] had acted otherwise, it would have been an injustice not only to [Betsy] herself, but all wives in

general, by setting them an example of submitting to things required of them neither by law nor nature” (*BT*, 557). However, as Betsy consults lawyer Mr. Markland, she learns (again) that the law does not protect women in her situation.

Even though Munden enjoys Betsy’s whole fortune, “the law will not enforce him to [allow her financial maintenance]” (*BT*, 559). Neither will the law protect Betsy from her husband’s cruelty. For his part, Munden decides that “if Betsy would not return to her duty, she ought to be starved into a more just sense of it” (*BT*, 561). Since Munden does not love Betsy but “[looks] upon her as a necessary appendix to his house” (*BT*, 562), he attempts to “terrify [her] into a submission to his will” (*BT*, 566). Specifically, Munden declares he “will never forego the right marriage gives [him] over [Betsy]” (*BT*, 565), and threatens that if Betsy does not return in twenty-four hours, he “shall take such measures as the law directs, to force [her] back to [his] embraces” (*BT*, 565). Katherine Ackley explains: “Because wives were their husbands’ legal property, husbands had the right to order their wives home—and into their beds—with the full backing of law officers to ensure their compliance” (219). Thus, in depriving Munden of her person and his ‘property’ Betsy actually violates the law. What the reader is meant to understand however, is how Munden’s tyrannical treatment violates Betsy. She is forced into hiding—conveniently at a rural locale next to a home visited by Mr. Truworth. Since a guilt-stricken Munden falls deathly ill before he can carry out his threats, Haywood “avoids following through on the more radical implications of this story” (Spencer, 151). It is true that Munden’s convenient death saves Haywood from exposing Betsy to further hardship or the potential social death that would attend never returning to her husband.

However, Haywood's plot-advancing strategy cannot dilute the protest she has made against the legal and spousal mistreatment of women.

Munden's illness and sudden death are not only necessary to secure Betsy's happiness but to further confirm her change of character. Betsy's reformed nature is pointedly showcased twice before she is widowed. On the first occasion, Betsy sits in the harbour of her safe haven, lovingly contemplating a purloined likeness of Truworth—who has lost his wife to smallpox. When Truworth happens upon her, sees the picture and guesses Betsy's true feelings, he declares his adoration and envelops Betsy in an impassioned embrace. As Betsy conceals her tender thoughts and rebuffs him, saying, "I am a wife; and, being such, ought never to see you [again]" (*BT*, 572), Truworth loves her all the more for her virtue, and the narrator proclaims: "all, in general, must applaud the conduct of Mrs. Munden" (*BT*, 572). Since Betsy proceeds to nurse her dying husband, accept his sincere apologies and genuinely grieve his death, it is clear that she is completely reformed, and worthy of the name "Truworth." Consequently, Betsy can finally be rewarded.

Haywood ends the novel in a traditional and didactic fashion. This ensures that Betsy's conversion is well celebrated and that the reader is both entertained and well instructed. Since Betsy becomes a respectable widow who not only observes a year long mourning period, but prefers country life and exchanging modest letters with Truworth to being courted and admired, she is shown to have earned a happy marital ending. Further, since Betsy transcends a bad marriage to desire (and attain) one wherein "'love, an infinity of love, shall be the chief inducement'" (*BT*, 590), we see Haywood privilege a

more traditional marital ideal. This is in keeping with the conventional code of a mid-eighteenth century novel—a code Haywood must return to if her moral and didactic text is going to succeed. However, as Haywood hints, this does not mean her reformed heroine must become a pushover. Betsy can only be happy as Truworth's wife, if she is never again “a sacrifice to [her friends and family's] persuasions.” (*BT*, 589). That said, there is no mistaking the strong didactic message delivered in the last lines of the novel. Betsy gains her happiness because “[the follies that defaced her virtues are finally] fully corrected” (*BT*, 594). Since Betsy has learned from her errors and is “thoughtless” no more, it falls to the reader to heed her example.

In her 1740's women's periodical, *The Female Spectator*, Haywood writes:

I shall also acknowledge that I have run through as many scenes of vanity and folly as the greatest coquet of them all. Dress, equipage, and flattery were the idols of my heart. I should have thought that day lost which did not present me with some new opportunity of showing myself. My life, for some years, was a continued round of what I then called pleasure, and my whole time engrossed by a hurry of promiscuous diversions. But whatever inconveniences such a manner of conduct has brought upon myself, I have this consolation; to think that the public may reap some benefit from it.¹⁰ (*TFS*, 2)

Although we cannot be certain if this confession is truly autobiographical or an instance of Haywood assuming “the persona of the [journal's] mature Lady Editor” (Ballaster, 159), the comments certainly speak to the character of Betsy Thoughtless. Indeed, it is easy to imagine the reformed Mrs. Truworth uttering the same sentiments herself. Betsy *was* vain, frivolous and careless about her reputation. Betsy *is* a didactic model of unbecoming, feminine conduct. However, as a heroine, Betsy Thoughtless—and her

¹⁰ Several critics, including Ballaster cite portions of this passage when discussing Haywood's biography.

history itself—are very much more. Some Haywood critics lament the fact that Haywood’s later, moral writings “lack the rush of passion and joie de vivre of the early works” (Schofield, *Eliza*, 7), but their complaint is only partially valid. For the period that she remains a coquette, Betsy stands as arguably Haywood’s most fun, lively and playful heroine. At the same time, despite the censure that surrounds her, she facilitates and reflects “an openness in [women’s] writing...that would be out of place a decade or two later” (Todd, *Sign*, 148). More specifically, “in the process of learning [Betsy] takes considerable liberties and she scandalously hints at a distinction between the woman and the image of femininity” (Todd, *Sign*, 148). Of course, this amounts to Haywood as author taking liberties.

For all that Haywood employs convention in *Betsy Thoughtless*, she bends and twists it too. Although Betsy must listen to a patriarchal chorus telling her how she should behave, she, unlike Amoranda in Davys’ *The Reformed Coquet*, does not learn from a male authority figure. Instead, she “eventually reforms herself” (Spencer, 151), and the lesson is all the more valuable. Likewise, the modern reader is taught the most when Haywood finds ways to shake up predictable patterns. With regards to the issue of marriage, we see Haywood use a “pattern that is to become common in eighteenth- and nineteenth-century fiction that is too chaste for love affairs: the mistaken first marriage in which one learns one’s identity and that of one’s beloved, whom one marries after the first marriage mercifully ends” (Williamson, 230). Most instructive however, is the focus on women’s rights that accompanies Betsy’s union with Munden. Since Haywood invites controversy into her largely prescriptive novel, it is difficult to believe the claim Clara

Reeve made at the start of this chapter. Haywood the author, cannot have fully “reformed.” As she blends elements of protest with sections of morality, Haywood demonstrates that she is eminently indeed ‘the greatest coquet of all.’

Conclusion

Having now studied a selection of Haywood's prose in great detail, we see a number of certainties and patterns emerge. Although this study is far from exhaustive—with space constraints prohibiting the exploration of Haywood's plays, poetry and political satires—it illuminates Haywood's immense contribution to the genres of amatory and didactic fiction. In examining Haywood's early seduction tales alongside her later pious writing, it is apparent that the texts have more in common than just their authorship. The two genres have not only a "shared concern with authority" (London, 101), but also a shared concern with feminine representation and eighteenth-century social issues. Given those similarities, I very much agree with Christine Blouch's assertion that "the relationship of [Haywood's] later, deliberately "moral" works to the early romances is more dialogical than dialectical" (544). Further, just as the two forms of writing are dialogical, so too are Haywood's individual texts within the genres, and the heroines within the texts themselves. Since the women in Haywood's fictions collectively contribute to an ongoing dialogue on morality, sexuality, subjectivity, education and marriage, they offer more than we might expect from the characters of a writer who was, until recently, dismissed as writing minor romances. In drawing our attention to highly modern feminist concerns, Haywood's heroines not only highlight the eighteenth-century 'woman question,' but tap into a relevant twenty-first century sensibility.

Haywood's intense focus on female bodies and women's sexuality positions her as more than a popular writer selling voyeuristic appeal. It also speaks to her role as an early feminist. Although Haywood presents a number of chaste, asexual heroines who

embody traditional standards of eighteenth-century morality and passivity, it is her hysterical and masked heroines who make her amatory (sub)texts subversive. While it is not immediately obvious that innocent Melliora and aggressive Fantomina have something in common, the hysteria and masquerade that help define them are very similar. Both the hystericized, somatic state of the sleeping yet desirous heroine, and the ideology of disguise encode a doubleness that can announce or erase sexuality. Just as the double frame of hysteria can restrict the feminine body or give it the 'voice' of sexual longing, so too can the duality of the mask limit or liberate. Through the anonymity of the mask and the safety zone of subconscious passion, the real desiring woman can emerge—proclaiming her sexuality while escaping judgment. Although a heroine who exhibits dream desire or masked desire is less bold and empowered than a fully conscious, unveiled woman, she is still remarkable for a character of this period.

Heroines like Melliora and Fantomina allow Haywood to privilege the impassioned woman's subject position—a position far more liberating than the one gained in being an object of male desire. Further, the depiction of passionate women characters enables Haywood to challenge the assumption that an "[eighteenth-century] heroine can become a heroine only by [extinguishing] desire, remaining "virtuous" and thereby subordinating herself to prevailing social norms and customs" (Freeman, 77). Although some critics might argue that Haywood's portrayal of covertly sexual women does not go far enough in challenging traditional feminine representation, I would answer them by echoing Helena Michie's perspective on feminism. She says: "Anything that foregrounds the inequities of representation, even if this is an admission of the

impossibility of moving into a safe space beyond it, is feminist; anything that struggles against these inequities is essential” (150). Thus, as anachronistic as the “feminist” designation may seem for an eighteenth-century woman, Eliza Haywood merits the title.

Haywood is not so much an early version of a twenty-first-century feminist as a writer who offers much to the twenty-first-century feminist. That being said, as Haywood constructs a voice for women within the limitations imposed by their social order, her writing is very much in league with that of contemporary feminist authors. More specifically, “contemporary women’s fiction strategically engages with official narratives—of history, sexual difference, subjectivity—in order to deconstruct them and forge new narratives” (Robinson, 17). Likewise, as Haywood’s fiction strategically incorporates, exploits and rejects traditional codes and ideologies, it deconstructs gender norms, reconfigures identities and challenges dominant discourses of feminine sexuality and subjectivity. Although Haywood’s narratives are not *always* new—many of her women characters remain exploited and many of her plots appear formulaic—her heroines are often unconventionally multifaceted. As such, Haywood’s representation of feminine identity goes beyond crafting the static character types of *virgin*, *victim*, *virago*, *coquette*, *rebel*, and *martyr*. Even when her female players initially appear to be easily classifiable, they seldom remain so. However, as Haywood does create a broad spectrum of heroines, she can explore a multitude of female subject positions. In turn, in their multiplicity, Haywood’s heroines speak to a sense of empowering “endlessness”—one that not only challenges a universal feminine subjectivity, but is distinctly postmodern in feel.

Although I have said that some of Haywood's plots are formulaic, others—particularly those that deal with marriage—are far from conventional. In his discussion of narrative structure in the marriage tradition, Joseph Allen Boone identifies two plots that counter the eighteenth-century marital ideal. He says:

One [mode] has involved attacking the tradition from within, exposing the dangers of its socially constructed myths by following the course of wedlock beyond its expected close and into the uncertain textual realm of marital stalemate and impasse. The other [mode] has been to invent fictional trajectories for the single protagonist, male or female, whose successful existence outside the convention calls into question the viability of marital roles and arrangements. (19)

Both forms of marital counter-plotting appear in Haywood texts discussed here. As we have seen, in *The British Recluse*, Belinda and Cleomira choose to retire to a female-only enclave of their own making. Since they attain and enjoy a 'successful existence outside of convention,' they do indeed 'call into question' marital arrangements and patriarchal ideology. Additionally, in the supposedly conformist *Betsy Thoughtless*, we see Haywood 'attacking the marital tradition from within.' As readers witness the abuse of Betsy by Munden, Haywood thoroughly 'exposes the dangers' lurking behind the myth of conjugal affection. (Although *Love in Excess* features a small attack on the eighteenth-century marriage of convenience, the ill-fated coupling of Alovisa and D'elmont cannot compare to the disastrous union of Betsy and Munden.) Haywood's portrait of the Munden's loveless indifference ushers the reader well into the 'realm of marital stalemate and impasse' described by Boone. Most provocative however, is Haywood's exposé of the falsity of the culturally created feminine domestic ideal.

"Although Nancy Armstrong has argued that the [fictionalized] domestic woman gained power through the cult of virtuous femininity" (Fasick, 4), that is not the case with

Betsy. Even when she adopts the role of the perfectly virtuous wife, Betsy gains no power in marriage. Since her marital devotion is completely un-rewarded, the ideology of the empowered domestic woman is strongly disputed by Haywood. At the same time, as Haywood has Betsy flee her bad marriage, she rejects the martyr-heroine figure in favour of a radical one. While there was “some suggestion in [Fielding’s mid-] eighteenth-century fiction that the educated woman threatened to subvert the class system as well as male authority in marriage” (Barker-Benfield, 323), Haywood’s Betsy demonstrates that even an “improperly educated” female will act ‘subversively’ if mistreated in marriage. Given Haywood’s strong anti-marriage stance in large sections of both *Betsy Thoughtless* and *Love in Excess*, it is interesting that the respective novels are transformed from tales of reform and seduction to those with happy marital endings. Undoubtedly, the shift is not a sign of Haywood’s ultimate faith in marriage, but rather an attempt to please an audience who, in their book-buying choices, supported the idealized portrait of marriage for love.

In the preface to one of her amatory fictions, Haywood acknowledges having been criticized for “endeavouring to *divert* more than *improve* the Minds of [her] Readers” (Haywood in Jones, 153). Although she justifiably disputes the accusation, her talent for ‘diverting the reader’ should not be overlooked. Haywood’s writing does offer many entertaining moments and many opportunities for escapist indulgence. However, it is also thought-provoking, instructive, political and subversive. Haywood’s diversity makes her texts widely appealing and strategically sound. Today, as in the eighteenth century, what one gets from her texts depends not only on what one brings to them, but what one wishes

to take away. Nonetheless, whether the reader embraces Haywood the popular novelist or Haywood the social critic, (s)he will be richly rewarded, and will give an important literary figure her due. Since Eliza Haywood contributed so much to the evolution and history of the English novel, her writing deserves to be preserved, respected and most of all, read.

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