

**Women and the Framed-Novelle Sequence in Eighteenth-Century England:  
Clothing Instruction with Delight**

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English women writers of the eighteenth century manifested enthusiasm for a form best described as a framed-novelle sequence, that is, a form in which conversations between characters/narrators are interspersed with embedded narratives. This thesis argues that the framed-novelle, with its distinctive juxtaposition of narrative and critical conversation facilitated feminine intervention in the period's political, social, and literary debates. It demonstrates that Delarivier Manley, Jane Barker, Eliza Haywood, Sarah Scott, Sarah Fielding and Jane Collier used the framed-novelle sequence to develop a feminine but nonetheless authoritative socio-critical voice which allowed them not only to intervene in contemporary literary debates about the risks and rewards of reading fictions (especially with regards to the wider significance of the feminocentric and apparently trivial matter of amatory, romantic tales) but also to construct timely argument about the effect of fictional exemplarity on readers. Consideration of the literary and cultural contexts of the framed-novelle's production, specifically its relation to other forms of narrative sequences such as the oriental tale and the fairy tale collection and to the period's ideals of sociable conversation and critical practice also allows this thesis to identify the framed-novelle's importance within the larger field of eighteenth-century literary development. Through close readings in each main chapter of an earlier and later framed-novelle by each author, this thesis explores the distinctiveness and internal

cohesion of the framed-nouvelle as a subgenre, while also recognizing the particularity of each writer's protofeminist perspective on their accumulation of feminocentric tales.

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## Chapter 1

### Introduction

In *The Progress of Romance* (1785), Clara Reeve complains that Delarivier Manley “hoarded up all the public and private scandal within her reach, and poured it forth, in a work too well known in the last age ... a work that partakes of the style of the Romance, and the Novel.”<sup>1</sup> Reeve’s representation of Manley’s work helps to set the stage for the reading offered in this thesis of the framed-novelle sequence as a specific, feminocentric subgenre that created distinct opportunities for women’s intervention in the cultural discourses and literary developments of eighteenth-century England. Reeve’s characterization of Manley’s work as a hoarding of scandals public and private also points to the framed-novelle style as an accumulation of tales from diverse sources. Her claim that Manley partakes of the romance and the novel acknowledges the framed-novelle as a distinctive form, similar to both romance and novel, but identical to neither. This thesis approaches the framed-novelle sequence in a similar manner, assessing the social and critical significance of its accumulated tales and seeking to understand how its cumulative, conversational form interacts with other forms of fiction current in the period.

Two of the authors discussed in this thesis have already been identified as innovators in fictional genres of the period. Delarivier Manley’s *New Atalantis* (1709) turns the secret history into a mode for women’s political writing, while Sarah Scott’s *Description of Millenium Hall* (1762) is a familiar example of a new utopian brand of conduct fiction.<sup>2</sup> Consideration of experimentation with fictional forms in this period is also prevalent in modern criticism, as

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<sup>1</sup> Clara Reeve, *The Progress of Romance, and The History of Charoba, Queen of Aegypt* (New York: The Facsimile Text Society, 1930), 119.

<sup>2</sup> See Rebecca Bullard, *The Politics of Disclosure, 1674-1725: Secret History Narratives* (London: Pickering & Chatto, 2009), 90-94 and Alessa Johns, *Women’s Utopias of the Eighteenth-Century* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2003), 91-109.

evidenced by the two highly influential critical works discussed below, Ian Watt's and Michael Mckean's, both of which locate the consolidation of the novel as a genre in the eighteenth century. Examination of Scott's and Manley's work along with less familiar texts as examples of the same fictional form—as framed-novelle sequences—may however elucidate how the structural elements of serial narration, representations of conversation, and juxtaposition of narration with self-conscious criticism can facilitate female intervention in political, social, and literary debates. Although this is fundamentally a generic study, it is not a history of influence or allusion; it does not proceed on the assumption that the women writers discussed here knew of each other or chose the framed-novelle sequence in order to participate in a tradition of women's writing. Instead, this discussion demonstrates how the structural elements of the framed-novelle coalesce in productive ways with the literary values and gendered norms of the period, thus constituting an advantageous choice for the woman writer wishing to develop a gender-inflected socio-literary critique. For this reason, this study proceeds primarily through close reading of selected texts and consideration of how they intervene in the period's political/cultural debates and its developing literary environment.

The fictional texts discussed here are not an exhaustive sampling of the framed-novelle sequence, but they are rather representative in that they consistently display patterns of combining narration with intratextual criticism and they use this distinctive structure to interrogate the conditions of women's lives. The framed-novelle sequence is here considered as a form that embeds multiple discrete narratives within a single framing narrative as a constant, rather than occasional, structuring device. For this reason, Sarah Fielding and Jane Collier's *The Cry: a new dramatic fable* (1754) is included while other of Fielding's fictions, such as *The Adventures of David Simple* (1744), are not. Because the framed-novelle is characterized by embedding its short narratives into a framing narrative, those texts that embed short fictions

into essays, such as Eliza Haywood's *Reflections on the Various Effects of Love* (1726) or most periodicals, are also excluded. The framed-novelle sequences discussed here are also significant and distinctive for their deliberate use of intratextual discussion and criticism to explain and, sometimes, to justify the meaning and importance of their embedded narratives. For this reason, fictional forms that share many of the framed-novelle's characteristics but generally do not contain self-conscious narrative criticism, such as the oriental tale or fairy tale collection, are discussed as corollary forms rather than as framed-novelles themselves.

These distinctions are not as self-serving as they sound; they also enable us to identify the distinctive relations between the framed-novelle's structure and its content. There is no obvious reason for women writers of framed-novelles to concern themselves primarily with women's lives and amatory tales, and yet they do. In addition to exploring how the framed-novelle's structure facilitated the development of an authoritative socio-critical voice for women writers, this study will also consider how the framed-novelle constituted an intervention in specifically literary concerns over the risks and rewards of reading fictions (especially with regards to the wider significance of the feminocentric and apparently trivial matter of amatory, romantic tales) as well as timely argument about the effect of fictional exemplarity on its readers. The framed-novelle has not had much discussion as an independent sub-genre in accounts of eighteenth-century fiction. In the following discussion of those critical accounts I indicate its frequent omission but also demonstrate that its structure— the combination of illustrative narrative and critical comment— is in fact integral to the critical narratives of the history of narrative themselves. In telling the history of the formation of a genre, the novel, those histories imitate the structure of a popular and influential manifestation of the genre while they tend to ignore or overlook individual examples. They write out of their history the

very texts that might illuminate the complex relationship between historical cause and literary effect they seek to specify which is fundamental to the development of the novel as a genre.

Chapters two and three examine the literary and cultural contexts of the framed-novelle's production, considering its relation in chapter two to other forms of narrative sequences, such as the oriental tale and the fairy tale collection and to the period's ideals of conversation and sociable and critical practice in chapter three. The five chapters that follow perform close readings of framed-novelle sequences by five authors—Delarivier Manley, Jane Barker, Eliza Haywood, Sarah Scott, and Sarah Fielding in collaboration with Jane Collier—in order to understand how their works demonstrate the distinctiveness and internal cohesion of the framed-novelle as a subgenre, while also recognizing the particularity of each writer's proto-feminist perspective on their accumulation of feminocentric tales. In each of these five chapters, I consider two works by the author to trace the development of their use of the framed-novelle. Across all five chapters I identify recurring themes and tropes: the presentation of text as textile peculiarly suited to female creativity; the allusion to other literary texts as a means of laying claim to reforming authority as a writer; the use of limit cases within the sequence to indicate where textuality can fail to model social cohesion and the transcendence of difference.

### **1. Narratives of the Novel and the (omission of the) Framed-Novelle**

All of the critical texts addressed in this section, different as they are, have significant structural similarities with each other and with the framed-novelles that they help illuminate. These accounts of the cultural influences on the development of prose fiction all use multiple narratives as exemplary arguments to advance a broad, overarching narrative of social and literary change, just as framed-novelles rely on individual tales to provide plot-based interest and evidence for a social or moral critique. So, the critical texts examined here demonstrate the interdependence of narrative and criticism through the structure of their arguments while they

apply critical methods to others' narratives. In addition to providing a framework for understanding the development of prose fiction, then, these texts also provide a basis for interpreting narrative as a vehicle for criticism, whether social or strictly literary. In these texts, narratives become teleological projects, designed to lead to broad social and cultural conclusions where the relationship of narrative selection to critical purpose is truly reciprocal. Ian Watt, for example, makes the dominant cultural force of individualism his narrative goal, and then carefully selects those novels that point towards that conclusion. Michael McKeon, in his *The Origins of the English Novel 1600-1740* (1987), sets out to uncover the influence of empiricism and religious changes on fiction, and so sees the influence of empiricism in every narrative he considers. The critical texts discussed here are all highly relevant to any discussion of the eighteenth-century English framed-novelle not just because they offer some of the most influential and nuanced ways of understanding the literary environment of the time, but also because they demonstrate the interdependence of frame narrative, embedded tales, and critical purpose that distinguishes the framed-novelle's structure.

The interdependence of critical aims and use of narratives in these texts also sheds light on the importance of sequencing, both in the texts discussed below and the fictional texts with which they are concerned. When a framing or master narrative depends on embedded narratives for its justification, the order in which those embedded narratives are presented can have a serious impact on the strength of the whole. For example, Betty Schellenberg's *The Conversational Circle: rereading the English novel, 1740-1775* (1996) presents a master narrative of conversation in eighteenth century literature in which conversational groups have a necessary relationship to the structure and formation of family units, and the conversations in which they participate are oriented towards some exterior goal. Her analysis of fictional texts begins with Sarah Fielding's *David Simple*, where the conversational group eventually forms

family units and conversation itself has the goal of finding a real friend. So, *David Simple* provides the standards of conversation by which the rest of the fictional texts are judged. This is not to say that Watt, McKeon, or any of the other critics discussed here are not right in the narratives they construct, or that the fictional narratives they rely on do not really contain the qualities they find in them. However, their approach to understanding the development of fiction does demonstrate a problem that is rarely explicitly addressed; that narrative and criticism are inseparable, and that most critical acts construct their own narratives. Recognition that the act of criticizing a text also constructs a narrative about the purposes and techniques of such criticism may help us, as critics, be aware of how our critical narratives about literary development are also always telling a story about the cultural assumptions and priorities that shape those narratives.

**Ian Watt, *The Rise of the Novel: studies in Defoe, Richardson, and Fielding* (1957) and the rise of the individual**

Some of the problems in Watt's classic account of the development of the novel, such as his now-infamous omission of women writers, are obvious. Others, such as his insistence on the centrality of cultural individualism in the rise of the novel and his equation of realism with a focus on the individual, require more consideration. Using Daniel Defoe's *The life and strange surprizing adventures of Robinson Crusoe* (1719) as his example, Watt claims that the new genre's focus on ordinary, that is, private and non-political, people reflects a growing social tendency to "value every individual highly enough to consider him the proper subject of its serious literature" and recognize "enough variety of belief and actions among ordinary people for a detailed account of them to be of interest."<sup>3</sup> Even without the questions raised by Watt's assumption that novels from *Crusoe* onwards were seen as serious literature, his equation of

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<sup>3</sup> Ian Watt, *The Rise of the Novel: Studies in Defoe, Richardson, and Fielding* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1983), 62.

stories of ordinary people with a widespread cultural focus on individuals as opposed to society is problematic.

Watt's selection of *Robinson Crusoe* as the first fiction in his history of the novel allows it to shape Watt's definition of the novel as distinguished, early in its development, by realism. Finding one of the earliest instances of realism in a tale of man stranded on an island for most of his adult life leads to an equation of realism with an intense focus on the solitary individual. This equation overlooks the fact that social interactions and cultural changes are as real as individual experiences, and so there is no actual need to locate the development of realism in the archetypal myth of the solitary individual against or outside of his society. When Watt turns to *The Fortunes and Misfortunes of the Famous Moll Flanders* (1722), he acknowledges that *Robinson Crusoe* is probably not the best representative of "what Defoe could achieve in the way of the novel proper" (98), but the emphasis on the solitary individual that *Robinson Crusoe* has already established colours Watt's reading of *Moll Flanders* and his vision of what "the novel proper" should be. The lingering influence of *Robinson Crusoe* on Watt's vision of the novel is demonstrated by his claim that *Moll Flanders* is not "fundamentally different in subject and attitude from *Robinson Crusoe*" (98). While *Moll Flanders* has her own brand of individualism, this statement ignores the fundamental differences between a character who acts in real solitude, and a character who acts in her own interest while constructing a string of relationships reliant on social interaction.

Watt's understanding of the novel as defined by its focus on stories of individuals may, then, draw too strict a line between stories of individuals and stories of a changing society. This strict division beautifully demonstrates a problem that Margaret Doody identifies in her *True Story of the Novel* (1996) while discussing the role of religion in the novel's origins, the problem

of identifying and recognizing cultural simultaneity.<sup>4</sup> Doody explains that identifying one cultural element as significant in literary development often blinds us, as critics, to the significance of other cultural elements existing and exerting their influence at the same time. This problem of simultaneity affects Watt's perception of the changing shapes of social interaction in the eighteenth century and their equally important influence on the development of prose fiction, and so shapes his master narrative of the novel's origins into a narrative that is almost exclusively concerned with individualism. The structure of Watt's critical narrative, which locates the beginnings of the novel in a tale of uniquely uncomplicated individualism, affects his perception of individualism in other works, such as *Moll Flanders*, the story of a selfish individual who is still caught up in various forms of society and so reactive to social changes.

Examination of the framed-novelle sequence and its position in the literary environment can prompt reexamination of the relationships between the individual, society, and the stories of ordinariness that Watt identifies as critical to the development of the novel. The framed-novelle offers a different perspective on incorporating the ordinary into the period's serious literature, an approach based not on individualism and variety, but on collectivity and commonality. As we will discuss, the framed-novelle sequence works to revalue the literary significance of the predictable and apparently trivial tales of women's lives by collecting them in texts structured to encourage comparative evaluation, where individual tales acquire significance and literary value by recognizing shared, generally applicable patterns. Examination of the framed-novelle sequence as a corollary and contemporary example of prose development has the potential, then, to expand our critical narratives, emphasizing the importance of commonality and comparison in the period's fiction, and in its approach to examining the relationship between the individual and his society.

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<sup>4</sup> Margaret Doody, *The True Story of the Novel* (London: Harper Collins, 1997), 3.

**Michael McKeon, *The Origins of the English Novel (1987)* and the problematic of empiricism**

One striking feature of the early novel, its frequent claim to historicity, also forms a significant part of McKeon's search into the origins of the novel. As McKeon explains, apparently distinct matters, such as writing style and trustworthiness, were often conflated in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, so that a plain style that made use of the empirical evidence of the senses could act as evidence of literal or moral truth, even for such incredible tales as apparition narratives.<sup>5</sup> McKeon's connection of the importance of real or perceived truth in narrative with the influence of natural history, science, and Puritan traditions of representation explains the cultural links between truth, empiricism, and cultural value, but does not fully address the cultural devaluing of untruth. Part of the reason for this explanatory gap may be that McKeon does not have much to say on the difference between factual untruths (lies or falsifications) and imaginative untruths (fiction). The Royal Society, an important element in McKeon's account of epistemological crisis and its relation to narrative, apparently criticized ancient historians as "romancing 'novelists' intent on falsifying ancient history" (71), that is, intent on telling inaccurate versions of stories with a real-world referent. This example of criticizing narratives for their truth value explains why the writers of narratives that had real-world referents would feel the need to support their historicity, but does not deconstruct the need of writers of pure fictions, like Richardson, to pretend that their fictional narratives had a basis in verifiable truth.

What is missing from McKeon's account of the importance of perceived historicity and the equation of truth with virtue or value, then, is an explanation of why fiction as such needed a truth claim as much as fanciful or falsified accounts with real-world referents. This omission is partially filled by William Warner in *Licensing Entertainment: the Elevation of Novel Reading in*

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<sup>5</sup> Michael McKeon, *The Origins of the English Novel, 1600-1740* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1987), 86.

*Britain, 1684-1750* (1998), as his discussion of anti-novel discourse illuminates the cultural anxiety surrounding fiction's role as an example, and the imitation it inspires in its readers. Warner quotes Samuel Johnson on *Clarissa, or the history of a young lady* (1747-48) who claimed that "if the power of example is so great, as to take possession of the memory by a kind of violence, and produce effects almost without the intervention of the will, care ought to be taken that...the best examples only should be exhibited."<sup>6</sup> This argument about the importance of fictional examples may help explain why the writers of pure fictions continued to put forth truth claims; if a writer is simply telling a truth, or can put forth a plausible claim to truth, then his work is less vulnerable to criticism for creating a bad example as he is simply telling a real story as it was told to him rather than deliberately creating a socially dangerous narrative. So, attempts to consider the importance of empiricism on the development of prose fiction may require a fuller recognition of the fact that the novel and the prose forms to which it is most closely related developed alongside and simultaneously with other forms of prose narrative that were not strictly fictional. McKeon's explanation of the novel's origins in epistemological crises and questions of truth may, then, need a more thorough discussion of the differences between writing lies and writing fiction, and how cultural anxieties about both could produce similar responses.

**Michael McKeon, *The Secret History of Domesticity: Public, Private, and the Division of Knowledge* (2005), or, how the novel makes the private public**

McKeon's exhaustive unravelling of the many variations and continual devolutions inherent in any discussion of "public" and "private" life as concepts in the eighteenth century wonderfully demonstrates the potential for ambiguity and ironic self-reflexivity in texts of the period, particularly through his discussion of publicity, virtuality, and print culture. However, this

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<sup>6</sup> William Warner, *Licensing Entertainment: The Elevation of Novel Reading in Britain, 1684-1750* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998), 5.

perspective alters when applied to texts that are self-consciously engaged with the public nature of private acts, such as the works of Delarivier Manley and Jane Barker. In discussing the ideological work involved in “publishing the private”, and so creating a public sphere of discourse, McKeon defends Habermas’s understanding of the eighteenth-century public sphere as a place of relatively open access by claiming that “the public sphere’s impulse toward universality bespeaks...the will to act upon the notion of a discursive and virtual calculus capable of adjudicating between an indefinite number of inherently legitimate interests. This was to be by definition an explicit exercise in conflict.”<sup>7</sup> McKeon’s recognition that an open public sphere was a matter of ideology and discursive process rather than an actuality does much to defend Habermas’s thesis from feminist and class-based criticism, but is complicated by his claim that the interests competing for precedence in the public sphere were thought to be inherently legitimate. Eighteenth-century writers on the norms of discourse and conversation, such as the Earl of Shaftesbury (who will be discussed in more detail in chapter 3), put so much stress on the process of reasoning in support of one’s opinions that it seems optimistic to claim that competing interests in public sphere discourse were all assumed to be legitimate, rather than required to demonstrate their legitimacy. In fact, the explicit exercise in conflict that McKeon refers to may be both the conflict of varying interests participating in the public sphere and the conflict involved in demonstrating, through reasoned discourse, the relevance or legitimacy of an interest in the ongoing formation of public knowledge.

McKeon’s perspective on legitimacy in the public sphere may be partially explained by his pervasive interpretation of the public sphere as a space that, while not officially political, was constantly engaged with political concerns. In discussing how the relationship of public and private spheres affected patterns of narration, McKeon bases much of his argument concerning

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<sup>7</sup> Michael McKeon, *The Secret History of Domesticity: Public, Private, and the Division of Knowledge* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2005), 75.

the difference between narrating public crisis and narrating private life on blatantly political works, such as *The Kings Cabinet Opened* (correspondence of Charles I, published 1645), John Gauden's *Eikon Basilike*, purportedly compiled from Charles I's papers (1649) and various pamphlets about the Warming-Pan Scandal of 1688. In fact, McKeon's broad thematic concern with the devolution of absolutism in the period is highly reliant on the changing nature of monarchy as an impetus for increasing domestication. McKeon's master narrative on the development of the public sphere is largely about the changing nature of distinctly political discourse, so that the participating interests he refers to are best interpreted as political voices or political groups, with their legitimacy stemming from the right, whether real or perceived, to comment on the running of the country. However, the public sphere could also make room for discourses that were not political in a direct sense, as demonstrated by the frequent discussions of manners, morals, literature, and other topics that have an indirect relationship to politics in vehicles for public sphere discourse like *The Tatler* (1709-11) or *The Spectator* (1711-12, 1714). Such discourses would have had a greater need to prove their legitimacy, as the connection they created between private acts and public interest was less clear and less immediate. Placing a greater emphasis on demonstrating the legitimacy of interest groups in the public sphere may seem to close down eighteenth-century public discourse as a site for productive debate, but it also may help to illuminate the rationale behind multiple levels of public meaning in texts of the period; by both discussing private acts in a public way and insisting on the inherent public importance of all such private acts through universalist moralizing, writers of the period can provide a rationale for their entrance into the public sphere through personal stories of a private nature, whether real or fictional.

McKeon's insistence, in his general discussion of the secret history as a literary form, that secrecy is not the same as privacy, that "secrecy is first of all a category of traditional

knowledge, not a privative privacy but that which distinguishes an elite from the deprived majority" (469) guides his discussion of the connections between secrecy, privacy, and publicity in Manley's *New Atalantis*. Claiming that the idea of secrecy is inherently and qualitatively different from other forms of privacy makes it easy to miss the distinct conception of privacy and public relevance involved in a narrative that turns acts secret and private into public knowledge. McKeon recognizes Manley's technique of emphasizing and insisting on her work's fictionality by giving the allegorical level of her narrative the depth and complexity to capture interest as enjoyable fiction, but he neglects Manley's self-conscious attempt to offer multiple levels of social meaning by saying that such a technique alludes to the narratives' "merely signifying status" (589-90). Here, as in his master narrative on the separation of the public and the private, McKeon equates public meaning with political meaning, and so misses Manley's participation in other forms of public opinion. By calling Manley's narratives mere signifiers, McKeon is apparently referring to the narratives as allegorical vehicles for the disclosure of secrets about public persons, but the embedded narratives are also signifying other forms of knowledge. As we shall see in more detail in chapter four, by making her embedded narratives engaging and self-sustaining fictions, Manley allows the characters in them to act as signifiers not just for their real-world referents, but also for the virtues, vices, and social types that they embody, much as later writers like Richardson made their exemplary characters act as both believable persons and universalized images of appropriate behaviour. The signifying status of Manley's narratives, then, creates tension between two levels of the public sphere as they court and confirm public opinion on social issues such as sex and marriage by offering continual variations on a general theme of vice, virtue, and their social consequences.

McKeon's less detailed assessment of Jane Barker's work reflects his master narrative's concern with political meaning in similar ways. In countering the suggestion that Jane Barker's

narratives are primarily Jacobite propaganda, McKeon claims that Barker's embedded narratives "tell the stories of private people whose relation to public events is one of tenuous evocation rather than tangible signification" (627). This is a self-evident assessment if we consider public events to be strictly political events, but many of McKeon's own previous discussions of the changing understanding of the family's relation to the state makes such an assumption hard to maintain. Barker told tales of "thwarted love, familial conflicts, forced and chosen marriages, bigamy, spinsterhood" (627) and these are not political events but, in a world where authority resides in ongoing public discourses that cover everything from high politics to standards of personal behavior, they are, in a sense, public events. Barker's narratives tell stories of private people, but they also use those stories to abstract broad principles of sexual, romantic, and social behaviour, and so their connection to a public (though not directly political) world, is not necessarily tenuous. Recognizing that the discursive public sphere could support multiple levels of meaning and communal relevance, and that public opinion could address everything from high politics to everyday social interactions may help us, as critics, see that the politically motivated secret history or scandal story could act in conjunction with other forms of public discourse as one of many possible ways to assign public relevance to private acts.

**William Warner, *Licensing Entertainment* (1998) and the moralizing of pleasure**

Warner's work on the development and origins of the novel stands out by contrast with the other works of criticism discussed here by virtue of its self-consciousness in constructing a critical narrative. Warner himself identifies his predecessors' works as "heroic, progressive, teleological 'rise of the novel' narrative" (xii) and describes his own project as "the full alternative story of the novel" (xv). What is most interesting about these two descriptions is that even though Warner is consciously positioning himself as a new and unconventional voice in the history of the novel, he recognizes a fundamental similarity in his work and that of critics like

Watt and McKeon by referring to them, respectively, as stories and narratives. He implies that his particular narrative is less heroic and teleological than theirs, but the underlying sameness of critical practice as a form of narrative remains. Warner is also unusual because of his explicit recognition of the interaction between critical discourses and literary development. Because Warner is always aware of the inseparability of criticism and narrative, he is able to see the narratives he discusses as consistently engaged in various forms of cultural critique, and so his critical approach is an exemplary guide for understanding fictional texts that, like framed-novelles, are a self-conscious blend of narrative interest and critical purpose.

One particular area of interest in Warner's alternative story of the novel, however, is the strict dichotomous relationship he sees between reading and writing for entertainment, and reading and writing for more legitimate literary purposes. Warner's argument that novels were controversial because they were thought to provoke indiscriminate, fanciful reading practices, and so had to gain cultural approval as acceptable forms of entertainment, is persuasive in its description of novel-readers of the period and the cultural watchdogs who disapproved of them. However, the implied equation of early novels with self-conscious forms of entertainment may miss their instructive potential. Warner describes novels "of amorous intrigue" (94) and specifically the works of Behn, Manley, and Haywood, as encouraging the pleasure-seeking reader "through the plotting of their pleasure-seeking protagonists" (94). These writers certainly do offer a pleasure-seeking reader enjoyable material, but Warner's evaluation of their popular appeal should not imply that is all they do. As McKeon demonstrated in his discussion of some of these writers in *The Secret History of Domesticity*, they weave a level of radical political meaning into their entertainment, so that, at times, the entertainment value is significant because it can disguise seditious ideas. It is also possible to read these works as self-conscious blends of direct political meaning, social and moral criticism, and entertainment. Given the

multiple interpretive layers in texts that have as many possible referents as, for example, Manley's *New Atalantis*, it seems unlikely that their only purpose, real or perceived, was to give pleasure to pleasure-seeking readers. So, Warner's use of entertainment as a foil for serious literary purpose may be enhanced by more attention to the middle ground between the two, and the ways in which texts can make use of that middle ground.

The most striking aspect of Warner's cultural history of the novel is his argument that novels, from their inception, coexisted with and responded to wide-ranging anti-novel discourse. Warner gives significant attention to the strategies deployed by writers like Samuel Richardson and Henry Fielding to rescue the novel by manipulating its function as a valuable example for moral and sociable behaviour, but does not go as far in his discussion of earlier writers' responses to anti-novel criticism. Writers such as Haywood and Manley did, as Warner recognizes, put forth claims to truth that were sometimes laughable and sometimes fairly plausible (8), but they also were able to distance themselves from direct attacks on novel reading as a pernicious habit by incorporating similar attitudes towards reading and reader's credulity in their own texts. In fact, women writers of the period, particularly those working in the framed-novelle form, often seem addicted to embedded narratives about women who lack the capacity to engage in a critical evaluation of the things they read and hear and so are ready to believe and emulate every story to which they are exposed.

Warner does discuss the importance of images of dangerous reading through reference to the tale of Charlot and the Duke in Manley's *New Atalantis*, but does not discuss how the format of the tale's presentation allows Manley, and writers working in a similar style, both to present and resolve the dangers of reading. Writers before Richardson and Fielding were able to co-exist with anti-novel discourse by acknowledging its force and providing a solution through the structure of their own texts. In Jane Barker's *A Patchwork-Screen for the Ladies* (1723), for

example, embedded narratives often involve young women who lack critical abilities and so are easily persuaded to believe all the lies, half-truths, and fictions they hear or read, but their failings are counteracted by Galesia and the unnamed lady. Their careful consideration of how discrete narratives relate to each other, and where they should be placed on the screen, allows them to model reading practices that are deliberate and focused on abstracting broadly applicable meaning. Their reading practices protect readers from the absorptive effects of dangerously provocative fictions. As a recollection of writers like Barker demonstrates, more discussion of anti-novel discourse before Richardson and Fielding might help explain alternative reactions to it and how it influenced forms of prose fiction that are not easily definable as novels.

**Josephine Donovan, *Women and the Rise of the Novel 1405-1726* (1999); limitations of the long view of genre**

Although a wide range of critics have addressed the popularity of the framed-novelle among women writers and their skilful use of the ideas surrounding conversation and sociability, few explicitly discuss the connection between the two. Josephine Donovan's *Women and the Rise of the Novel* focuses on the framed-novelle's role in establishing a protofeminist critical standpoint for women writers. In discussing critical irony and standpoint theory, Donovan claims that writers such as Barker and Manley display "a feminist critical irony that is rooted in a women's standpoint of resistance to the reification forced upon them by patriarchal exchange systems...only with the emergence of the framed-novelle does one have the possibility of the expression of a standpoint."<sup>8</sup> Donovan's claim that the framed-novelle is essential in allowing women to articulate their own social critiques is convincing, and implies that women's critical activities within the framed-novelle genre were somehow outside or opposed to opportunities for female discourse and criticism in the broader culture. This may be an accurate assessment

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<sup>8</sup> Josephine Donovan, *Women and the Rise of the Novel, 1405-1726* (London: MacMillan Press, 1999), 27.

for the early end of the period Donovan considers but is questionable as applied to eighteenth-century English writers. While it is hard to dispute the claim that eighteenth-century society treated women as objects in the marriage marketplace, the new valuation of polite conversation in eighteenth-century England did make room for women as speaking subjects in a conversational public sphere. Female participation in polite conversation may not have been strictly egalitarian, but it gave women an approved place in socially significant discussion and, therefore, a socially sanctioned means of entering into a critical public sphere. Since some of the English writers Donovan considers structured their framed-novelles through ongoing conversations, their choice of the framed-novelle may have been a way of situating their articulation of a female standpoint within a discursive context that was already open to female participation, rather than a means of creating a discursive space for women that was at odds with their place in the broader culture.

Donovan's study of the framed-novelle is most important for its examination of the close interaction between gender and genre, and for its willingness to look closely at the social and cultural realities that shape women's voices and their access to audiences. However, that strength is also, in a sense, its weakness. Donovan addresses a large number of writers, working during a long period of time in several different countries. Because of the large scale of this study, Donovan's work is colored by an underlying assumption that the cultural forces that made women writers gravitate towards the framed-novelle were substantially similar for all of the writers she considers, which may or may not be a reasonable assumption. There may well be a great deal of cultural distance between, for example, French women in the fifteenth century and English women in the eighteenth. The broad scope of Donovan's study also seems to separate women's response to their cultural environment from their responsiveness to their period's literary values and developments, so that the significance of the framed-novelle

sequence in its relationship to the ongoing development of prose fiction, the perceived moral status of reading romantic tales, and popular perceptions of reading practices require further study. So, Donovan's work seems, on the whole, to be an excellent starting point for understanding the framed-novelle as a unique form amenable to feminist use, but could benefit from more consideration of how that form adapted itself to changing cultural and literary conditions.

**Betty Schellenberg, *The Conversational Circle* (1996); conversation and conflict in eighteenth-century fiction**

Betty Schellenberg's use of an intimate, speaking circle of people as a figure for understanding eighteenth-century fiction is extraordinarily valuable because of its recognition of the role that ideas of conversation and sociability played in fiction of the time, but it may also put too much emphasis on conversation as a way to remove conflict and improve family structures. In her analysis of *David Simple*, *Millenium Hall*, and *The History of Sir Charles Grandison* (1753-54), Schellenberg makes the relationships between family structures and conversation in these texts one of their main points of difference. Schellenberg judges these texts not on the quality of the conversations they present, but on the role of conversation in leading to a stable, family-oriented resolution of the plot, as demonstrated by interpretation of *The Adventues of David Simple, Volume the Last* (1753) as a failed conversational circle. Schellenberg's reading practices, then, view the conversational circle as a tool, rather than an end in itself, and so may be somewhat at odds with eighteenth-century understandings of conversation as a continuous and relatively open-ended process. Her discussion of conflict and its relation to conversation also seems, at times, to gloss over the incidents of conflict that have motivated the formation of conversational circles in the texts she considers, and so her understanding of conversation as a relatively conflict-free form of narration may be a little optimistic.

Schellenberg claims that “when the plot structured upon the dualistic framework of a self-society conflict is replaced by a plot of consensus, the diminished drive towards resolution is felt in a greater focus on individual units of structure.”<sup>9</sup> The works she discusses, such as *David Simple* and *Millenium Hall* certainly do pay great attention to individual units of structure, but are not always plots of consensus and do not consistently replace self-society conflicts. *David Simple*, which receives extended treatment in Schellenberg’s work, is very much a plot of consensus in relation to the central characters of David, Cynthia, Valentine, and Camilla, but that does not mean that the conflict between society and the self is absent. David’s shockingly bad treatment at the hands of his broader society, as represented by his brother and his betrothed, leads him voluntarily to remove himself from his original circle of friends and acquaintances in order to seek a real friend. David is, then, in conflict with his society as evidenced by his voluntary banishment. The difference between *David Simple* and more obvious examples of self-society conflict is that David does not give up on the idea of society entirely, but seeks to found a new one on better principles, one that, by its very nature, will be in a sort of ideological conflict with the broader society surrounding it. The persistent conflict between David’s society and the rest of the world is explained in Schellenberg’s discussion of *David Simple, Volume the Last*, where David’s carefully constructed circle disintegrates because of interference from the broader society. This interference, however, is not really a failure of the conversational plot, as Schellenberg implies, as much as it is the almost expected result of ongoing ideological conflict between the self and society and varying forms of societies. *David Simple*, then, begins with a pronounced sense of conflict between the self and society that is only temporarily resolved through the formation of a conversational circle embodying a high degree of consensus, and so the potential for revived self-society conflict is always present. Schellenberg’s original

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<sup>9</sup> Betty A. Schellenberg, *The Conversational Circle: Re-reading the English Novel, 1740-1775* (Lexington: The University Press of Kentucky, 1996), 20.

understanding of the conversational circle as a way to avoid social conflict in fiction allows us to see the potential for fictional emphasis on sociability and social group formation created by the conversational form, and may also benefit from attention to the continuing importance of conflict in forming conversable societies and emphasizing their distinctness from the outside world.

**Moyra Haslett, *Pope to Burney, 1714-1779: Scriblerians to Bluestockings* (2003) and the context of female narratives**

In discussing imagined female communities in eighteenth-century literature, Moyra Haslett recognizes the significance of the framed-novelle format by describing the frame of idyllic female communities as “at once backdrops to the narratives and enabling contexts in which these female narratives can be told”<sup>10</sup> but does not articulate why, exactly, female narratives need such an enabling context. Haslett’s sustained exploration of women’s participation in the public sphere leads to the conclusion that fictional female communities offered an alternative to the coffee-house model, where women could be present only in a potentially transgressive way, but does not explain how a woman’s acknowledged but limited role in mixed conversation left a lingering need for different contexts for female narratives. Haslett describes the naturalization of perceived gender differences, with men as naturally coarse or coldly rational and women as too soft, as leading to endorsements of both mixed and segregated conversational spheres (159-60) and explores how such conflicting messages affected women’s positions in the literary marketplace, but does not articulate how such messages encouraged the creation of female-dominated conversational spheres in actual literary texts. More significantly, however, she does not explore how primarily female conversations could enhance female participation in the public sphere by giving women a space

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<sup>10</sup> Moyra Haslett, *Pope to Burney, 1714-1779 Scriblerians to Bluestockings* (New York: MacMillan, 2003), 149.

in which all conversational roles, soft and hyper-rational, were open to them. Haslett's recognition of the social conceptions that endorsed both mixed and segregated conversational groups could, then, be expanded to further address how gender differences in conversation affected women's roles as critical speakers in the literary texts themselves.

## 2. The Critical Potential of the Framed-Novelle Sequence

As a whole, criticism of women writers during this period seems to be in need of a more explicit discussion of how conversational ideals, sociability, the cultural and literary status of amatory narratives and the novel, and genre choice informed each other. Debbie McVitty's discussion of the importance of familiar collaboration in her thesis on eighteenth-century British writers offers perhaps the most useful model for understanding the importance of collectivity and conversation in constructing women's voices of the period. As McVitty points out, by displaying their works as collaborative efforts with familiar relations, women writers demonstrate their awareness of the strategic possibilities within eighteenth-century understandings of sociability and conversation.<sup>11</sup> In her treatment of Sarah Fielding and Jane Collier's collaborative work *The Cry*, McVitty points to the actual authorial collaboration between Fielding and Collier, and their self-conscious exploration of themes of friendship within the text, as means to claim cultural visibility for women and their relationships (185). A more detailed examination of female collaborations and discursive interactions within texts themselves, such as the interaction of Portia's and Cylinda's stories and the role Una plays in enabling the narrative process, could use McVitty's assessment of collaboration as a social and critical tool to demonstrate how Fielding, Collier, and other writers of framed-novelle sequences used its structural features to gain visibility and critical authority for themselves as authors, for

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<sup>11</sup> Debbie McVitty, "Familiar Collaboration and Women Writers in Eighteenth-Century Britain: Elizabeth Griffith, Sarah Fielding, and Susannah and Margaret Minifie (Dphil thesis, Oxford University, 2007), 9.

their female characters as critical subjects, and for the stories they tell as significant sources, worthy of inclusion in the period's cultural and literary discourse.

This thesis attempts to create a layered approach to understanding the framed-novelle sequence in eighteenth-century England as a distinct, culturally responsive fictional subgenre that emphasizes the social significance of feminocentric tales and enables the construction of authoritative critical voices for women. In the next chapter, we will look to other, roughly contemporaneous forms of tale collections in order to understand how combinations of narratives and critical reactions within a single work provide intra- and extra- diegetic readers with exemplary critical materials and intratextual commentary on productive reading practices. We will see that the intratextual commentary on narrative enabled by the framed-novelle's structure seeks to neutralize the perceived dangers, current in our period, of absorption in and emulation of imaginative narratives. Exploring other types of tale collections will also help to establish the importance of accumulating and comparing distinct but thematically similar narratives in the framed-novelle, a technique that allows writers of the framed-novelle to emphasize experiences common even to socially diverse women, thereby hinting at a proto-feminist vision of women as a coherent class with shared social interests. We will then proceed to an examination of the period's ideals of sociable conversation, discursive authority, and how they are reflected in conversationally constructed texts like the framed-novelle. Consideration of conversation as a sociable ideal allows us to see how the combination of rationality, accessibility, and cultural significance thought to inhere in the process of conversation enabled women writers to amplify their claims to cultural and literary importance by mimicking such a process in the construction of their texts.

The detailed readings of specific framed-novelles that follow address a range of critical and cultural issues, such as how our different authors use the form's balance of narrative and

critical reaction to encourage readers to learn from narrative and discussion, extrapolating life lessons from the virtual experience of engaging with and critiquing narratives of women's experiences. Author-based chapters also consider how the framed-novelle's structure allows women writers to insist on the cultural and literary value of the feminocentric, amatory tale by using it as an exemplary and instructive basis for critical discussion of broadly relevant social problems like the status of single women, the social consequences of seductions and unhappy marriages, and women's access to educational and financial resources. In the process of examining accumulation and comparison of women's tales as a method of cultural criticism we will also consider how the framed-novelle sequence emphasizes affective bonds between its female characters/narrators, exploring the form's representations of female intimacy, interdependence, and even the occasional same-sex romantic attachment. The relationships between women represented in these works offer sustained commentary on alternatives to marriage, social and emotional fulfilment for women outside the domesticated family, and the possible dangers of such non-normative relations. This thesis tries to show that use of the framed-novelle sequence in eighteenth-century England provided a distinctly productive pathway for women to write as self-conscious literary innovators, as authoritative critical agents and, most importantly, as women deeply concerned with the cultural status and well-being of women as a group.

## Chapter 2

### The Framed-Novelle and Serial Narration

Sarah Scott's *A Journey Through Every Stage of Life* (1754) depicts the relationship between a young girl and her storytelling old nurse. The tales she tells teach the girl how to modify her desires and learn from the wisdom of age and experience.<sup>12</sup> It is a familiar relationship and a familiar approach to narrating and learning, reflecting the bond between an old nurse and her young charge represented in François Pétis de la Croix's *The Thousand and One Days* (1710-12) and the instructive potential of fantastic fairytales. Scott's work exemplifies the thematic and structural similarities between the framed-novelle and the other genres discussed here. Our consideration of similar, roughly contemporaneous textual forms in this chapter is an attempt to connect the framed-novelle to other narrative methods for examining and responding to social power structures, with the goal of understanding how the writers of framed-novelles worked with the literary tools at their disposal to construct socially engaged analyses of femininity and its cultural role.

This chapter begins with discussion of cultural conceptions of reading practices, and especially women's reading practices, in our period. We will address examples of accounts of women's reading, its benefits and dangers, from contemporary commentators such as François de Fénelon, author of *Education of a Young Gentlewoman* (1699) and the authors of *The Spectator* (1711-12, 1714). Examination of what we can deduce of reading practices and contemporary fears about the dangers of emulation and absorption in romantic narrative allows us to understand the period's ideas on the cultural roles of reading, and how readers were

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<sup>12</sup> Sarah Scott, *A Journey Through Every Stage of Life* (London: A. Millar, 1754), 1:4-5.

thought to learn from narratives. Then, we consider how narrative forms similar to the framed-nouvelle—the secret history, the biography of exemplary women, the fairy tale, and oriental tale collection—guide and discipline readers’ approach to narrative into self-aware, educative forms. Finally, this chapter argues that the framed-nouvelle expands on our other genres’ methods of guiding readers’ textual practices through its purposeful blend of narrative with explicit critical discussion.

Secret histories, biographies of exemplary women, oriental tales and fairy tales all share — with each other and with the framed-nouvelle— preoccupations with a number of literary concerns. First, they all demonstrate self-conscious engagement with the function and potential of storytelling. All of the literary forms discussed here use storytelling for a persuasive or instructional purpose. In the secret history, the revelation of secret scandals and political machinations encourages the construction of oppositional political opinions, instructing the reader in how much they do not know. The persuasive project of the catalogue of exemplary women is clear; stories of exceptional women’s lives act as arguments for the individual woman’s cultural importance, and as they accumulate, form a collective argument for women’s capacity to exercise political and intellectual influence, a reading that the authors generally do not hesitate to explain.

In fairy tales and oriental tales, persuasive projects are multi-layered and less immediately accessible.<sup>13</sup> Both forms can take the form of instructions in morals and manners, drawing together tales of vices punished and trials overcome to present a cumulative picture of how to interact with power structures in the form of fates, fairies, or rulers. Both forms,

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<sup>13</sup> For the purposes of this discussion, the most relevant collections of Oriental tales are Antoine Galland’s *Arabian Nights Entertainment* (first published in French 1704-17) and its early English translations and François Pétis de la Croix’s *The Thousand and One Days* (first published in French 1710-12) and its early English translations. Although these two examples are by no means the only collections of Oriental tales that could be discussed, their early appearance on the literary scene in France and England and widespread dissemination makes them good actual and founding examples of the models of exotic/fabulous storytelling circulating in the cultural environment that also gave birth to the framed-nouvelle.

occupying as they do a position somewhere between the written and the oral, offer an implicit argument for the cultural significance of potentially slighted or overlooked knowledge bases. They acknowledge the instructive potential of the improbable but emotionally resonant experiences of orphans, wandering merchants, criminals, and victims. Both privilege the fascination and absorptive potential of a tale over its direct intellectual significance and, by doing so, transform the tale sequence into large-scale arguments for the power of absorption and imaginative engagement to act on a listener/reader, instructing through enjoyment.

Genres that are manifestly concerned with the relationships between instruction, enjoyment, and a text's moral and social effects on its readers are also necessarily concerned with reading practices, guiding and commenting on the ways in which a reader approaches a text. The genres discussed here encourage varying but similar approaches to critical reading that push the reader into a self-reflective relationship with the text. Discussion of reading practices in this context will focus on the ways in which these genres strive to reform or contain interpretive dangers imagined to be associated with women's reading and the ways in which cumulative narration is peculiarly able to discipline readers into self-aware reading strategies that acknowledge a vexed but reflective relationship between textual narration and social realities.

### **1. Watching Readers Read: the risks of textual engagement**

In Eliza Haywood's *Love in Excess* (1719), the heroine meets her married lover as she lies on the grass reading philosophy, "the works of Monsieur L'Fontenelle."<sup>14</sup> While her posture and absorption in her book make her vulnerable, her reading material itself defends her by provoking her lover's esteem. Arabella, the eminent misreader of *The Female Quixote* (1752), exposes herself to ridicule through her unrestrained belief in the ideals of the French romance, but her romantic knowledge also allows her to embarrass a pompous man in a historical

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<sup>14</sup> See Eliza Haywood's *Love in Excess*, ed. David Oakleaf (Ontario: Broadview, 2000), 100.

discussion and disrupt the plans of the men around her. She is shaken in her romantic commitments by forming the acquaintance of a woman who has learned to read productively, and is eventually cured through reasoned discourse on the nature and purpose of fiction.<sup>15</sup> Later, we will meet Portia and Cylinda of *The Cry*, two heroines who read many of the same things, one to virtuous and one to vicious effect. In these images of fictional women readers, there is a collective ambivalence about women's literary activity, creating a picture of the woman reader as one who, like Arabella, misreads by assuming a naively simplistic correspondence between narrative and life and one who, like Cylinda, can become corrupted through reading, as literary experience leads her to believe she knows more of life than she really does. However, reading can also preserve and elevate the female reader, as demonstrated by Portia.

From *The Cry* and the example of *The Female Quixote*, we deduce some of the benefits and dangers of reading in this period, especially for women. Women's reading is not necessarily dangerous or corrupting. Two discussions from the beginning and middle of our period, Fénelon's *Education of Young Gentlewomen* and Eliza Haywood's strictures on female education from *The Female Spectator* (1744-46), highlight the benefits to feminine character to be gained from reading. Fénelon, although happy to banish romance, does not deny women literate education. Haywood favours reading history and natural philosophy, on the grounds that such reading will enhance women's domestic femininity, encouraging them to perform wifely duties out of principle, rather than simply custom.<sup>16</sup> Early periodicals sometimes venture into a broader endorsement of reading for privileged women, arguing that leisured women are in need of some

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<sup>15</sup> Charlotte Lennox, *The Female Quixote*, ed. Margaret Dalziel (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 264-67, 324-26 and 367-81. See also Joe Bray's *The Female Reader in the English Novel: From Burney to Austen* (New York: Routledge, 2009), 20-21.

<sup>16</sup> See Eliza Haywood, *The Female Spectator*, in *Selected Works of Eliza Haywood II*, ed. Alexander Pettit and Kathryn King (London: Pickering & Chatto, 2001), 2: 356-60.

innocent and instructive use of their abundant free time. Addison in the *Guardian* (1713) goes so far as to argue that “Learning seems more adapted to the female world...As in the first place, because they have more spare Time upon their Hands.”<sup>17</sup> Addison shows less concern than Fénelon and Haywood to define and restrict appropriate female reading matter, and imagines reading as not just a desirable improvement, but a positive preservative from other leisure activities, such as gaming.

When the question of reading is narrowed to the reading of romances, the discourse alters. Fénelon argues that women without serious matter to occupy their minds become too invested in romance reading and will “spoil themselves for ordinary life, for all these fine, but airy, sentiments, these noble passions, these adventures which the fiction-writer invents in order to please have no relation to the motives which hold sway in real life.”<sup>18</sup> The idea of motives swaying real life is key to understanding the problem of women reading romance. As the case of *Arabella* demonstrates so admirably, romances risk ‘teaching’ their readers too much; they risk teaching their readers to behave like romantic heroines, and to confuse the ethos of romance writing with the moral consequences of real social action. Fénelon’s concern that romances will cause readers to mistake the truth of their social situation persists, reappearing in Francis Coventry’s insistence that romances of an earlier period were so in vogue, that “Every Beau was an *Oroondates* and all the Belles were *Statiras*,”<sup>19</sup> a claim that imagines the old romance distorting an entire generation through emulation. Johnson continues the theme in *Rambler* no. 4 (Saturday 31 March 1750) complaining that the drive to emulate

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<sup>17</sup> Joseph Addison, *The Guardian*, ed. John Calhoun Stephens (Lexington: The University Press of Kentucky, 1982), 504. See Kathryn Shevelow’s *Women and Print Culture: The construction of femininity in the early periodical* (London: Routledge, 1989), 49-57, for a fuller discussion of the periodical’s role in differentiating between entertaining and instructive reading for women.

<sup>18</sup> Francois de Fénelon, *The Education of Girls in Fénelon on Education*, ed. and trans. H.C. Barnard (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1966), 1-97, 5.

<sup>19</sup> Francis Coventry, “An Essay on the New Species of Writing Founded by Mr. Fielding”, ed. Alan D. McKillop (Los Angeles, Williams Andrew Clark Memorial Library, 1962), 14.

fiction can “take possession of the memory by a kind of violence, and produce effects almost without the intervention of the will.”<sup>20</sup> The claim that emulating fictions can take place without the intervention of the will echoes Fénelon’s belief that romance reading distorts the reader’s understanding of motives in real life. Near-automatic emulation of romance overrides thought and judgment and romance reading is dangerous because the examples it provides are adopted unthinkingly, without being tested against other forms of knowledge or observation of social realities.

Emulation is not the only risk of reading romance. Fénelon’s belief that romance reading will spoil readers for reality finds an echo in Reeve’s *Progress of Romance*, where one of her disputants worries that reading romances sows “the seeds of vice and folly in the heart – the passions are awakened – false expectations are raised” and also distorts the readers’ judgment of themselves so that they “fancy themselves capable of judging of men and manners and...believe themselves wiser than their parents and guardians” (78-79). This criticism encapsulates a concern that romance reading can cause the reader to replace knowledge with imaginative engagement with narrative, to such an extent that narrative engagement replaces the ability and willingness to learn. The disputant’s criticism of romance reading creates a strict dichotomy between reading for imaginative engagement and reading for instruction, fearing that appeals to the imagination will disable the ability, or the perceived need, to learn. Reeve’s work as a whole, however, adheres to a conversational structure that quietly undermines the participants’ tendency to separate imaginative and instructive reading. Reeve incorporates criticism of specific romances into her participants’ ongoing argument over the status of various forms of fiction, so that her work reclaims at least some romance tales as serious and instructive literature. In general, Reeve’s work adopts a structure similar to that of the framed-novelle

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<sup>20</sup> Samuel Johnson, *The Rambler*, ed. W.J. Bate and Albrecht B. Strauss (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1969), 3:22.

sequence to achieve a similar end, albeit one more limited to specific, worthy romances and decidedly less interested in the connection between romance and commentary on women's lives.

The dangers of romance reading stem, however, not only from the reading material itself, but from the way it is read. Romances cause their readers to mistake motives in real life if they are read credulously, as representations of actual behaviour. Imaginative absorption in narrative may enflame the passions, but the danger is reliant on the assumption that inflammation will tend towards a bad end, confirming young readers in autonomy and arrogance and making them believe they have little left to learn. Romance read in a more moderated way presents a subtly different picture, especially in the case of *The Spectator's* Leonora. Mr. Spectator's Leonora displays her passion for romances in a library suited both "to the Lady and the Scholar."<sup>21</sup> In Leonora's library from *Spectator* no.37 (12 April 1711), Scudéry's *Clelia* (1654-60), and *The Grand Cyrus* (1649-53) are listed along with the works of Dryden and Isaac Newton, but the whole is organized by volume size and books are interspersed with fanciful decoration to such an extent that Mr. Spectator is not sure if he is in a library, or a grotto (154). Books and decoration become indistinguishable to the unwary eye, as Leonora also possesses "all the classic authors in wood" (156). The mix of the romantic and the classic, the frivolous and the serious in Leonora's library reflects her reading practices. With all that is comic in Leonora's library, Mr. Spectator does not allow himself to mock her; his description is condescending, but also sadly compassionate. Leonora has converted "all the passions of her Sex into a love of Books and Retirement" so that she converses "chiefly with Men...but it is only in their Writings" (158). This is a description of reading practices and sexual potential that acknowledges a connection but also, oddly, interprets textual romance as a preservative from

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<sup>21</sup> Joseph Addison and Richard Steele, *The Spectator*, ed. Donald F. Bond (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1965), 1:154.

real romance. The passions of her sex find an imaginative life in books, and the retirement that enables her reading existence also disables the possibility of physical passions. Leonora's absorption in romance does not harm her, but Mr. Spectator still laments that a mind like hers – that has at least chosen reading over more frivolous entertainments and can read even romances without becoming truly corrupted – should not try the benefits of more solid and serious reading (158). For all his condescension, Mr. Spectator's acknowledgement of the ways in which Leonora is improved and disadvantaged by her reading comments powerfully on the perceived consequences of women's reading, and especially reading romances, in this period.

Leonora's reading has beneficial effects on her physical surroundings. Mr. Spectator tells us that she made her country house a romantic image, as "the rocks about her are shaped into artificial grottoes...The woods are cut into shady walks, twisted into bowers, and filled with cages of turtles. The springs are made to run among pebbles, and by that means taught to murmur very agreeably" (158). In addition, romantic fascination has made Leonora one of the best preservers of her game, not because she cares about hunting, but because "every bird that is killed in her grounds will spoil a consort, and she shall certainly miss him next year" (158). In considering the visible effects of Leonora's reading, we should not forget that this romantic idyll is also a domestic idyll; Leonora's reading inspires her to beautify her home and preserve its resources in the form of game birds. If we compare Leonora's behaviour to that described by Eliza Haywood in her argument for increased reading in women's education from *The Female Spectator*, we see that romance reading has caused her to behave admirably, even if she does it for foolish reasons. Haywood recommends serious reading on the grounds that it will inspire women to take a more mindful approach to their domestic duties (Haywood, *Female Spectator*, 2: 356-58). Serious reading, in Haywood's account, will make women into better domestic economists, as they act primarily out of principle. Leonora's domestic activities may not be very

rational, but they are principled. In her beautification of her grounds and care for her game, she has acquired a set of suitable feminine improvements from her reading, though in an amusingly indirect fashion. Her fanciful assignment of love and devotion to her birds also, however, reflects the kind of overcommitment to romantic principles and simplistic transposition of fictional examples onto the real world expressed more directly in *The Female Quixote* and chimes also with Fénelon's worry over discerning the motives that sway real life.

In its sexual resonance, its mixture of improvement and domestic virtue with frivolity, its simplistic transposition of romantic aesthetics onto the real world, and confusion of the differences between reading to acquire knowledge and reading for entertainment, Leonora's library encapsulates the dangers and flaws of women's reading as perceived in our period. In Jacqueline Pearson's account of women readers, both historical and intratextual, we are told that misreading was figured as feminine in the period's literary culture,<sup>22</sup> because women readers tended to show poor taste, reading in desultory, superficial fashions that undermined the author's purpose or obscured the moral and instructive value of texts. Credulous, emulative reading, though not exclusively associated with women, was a special risk to them, as their lack of exposure to classical education made them vulnerable to the fascination of novels and risked confusing their literary values by turning their tastes against more improving works.<sup>23</sup> Credulousness and emulation in reading are closely allied dangers, with both springing from a naïve or simplified assumed relation between texts and reality; both require the assumption that there is a direct relationship between reading and living, that what works in fictions will work the same way in life. Misreading as absorption and imaginative seduction is also a

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<sup>22</sup> See Jacqueline Pearson, *Dangerous Recreations: Women's Reading in Britain, 1750-1835* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 5.

<sup>23</sup> Warner, *Licensing Entertainment*, 5. In this section, Warner examines and compares objections to novels and romances propounded by Johnson's 1750 *Rambler* no. 4, Francis Coventry's "An Essay on the New Species of Writing Founded by Mr. Fielding" of 1751 and Clara Reeve's *Progress of Romance* of 1785.

primarily female risk, as women, with their relative lack of counterbalancing real-world experience, are made more vulnerable to fiction's inflammatory effect on the passions. Absorption and seduction through fiction are also closely allied to credulous reading, as both are a function of over-investment in the imaginary worlds of fiction, and both depend on an excessively direct transposition of the values of fiction onto social life. The danger of romance depends on particular reading habits – credulity, emulation, and refusal of instruction in favour of imaginative engagement– that threaten to corrupt readers.

Overall, Leonora and her library exhibit many of the dangers of reading in the wrong way and for the wrong reasons. Much of this study focuses on how the framed-novelle, with its serial narration and incorporated evaluations of narratives' moral or instructive potential, recuperates the social and literary value of the romantic tale by changing the ways in which it can be read, encouraging reading strategies that make such tales critically productive. The genres discussed here are less concerned with recuperating the romance, but equally concerned with examining the relationships between reading and knowledge and engaging with narrative and learning from it. True, Leonora, Schahriar in *The Arabian Nights*, and the other intratextual readers to be discussed in this and the following chapters, are only fictions themselves. Their reading practices may not have much relationship to the actual practices of historical readers. Even so, their presence still tells us how censorious minds of the period feared readers might read, and so they embody the ideas of flawed and dangerous reading that authors often seek to counteract. The reading strategies depicted and encouraged in the story sequences discussed in this chapter may not have been adopted by historical readers. However, in considering why the framed-novelle became an appealing vehicle for women writers during this period, its actual effects on the reading public may be less important than the potential it seemed to offer. Even if episodic narration combined with intratextual critical reaction did not succeed in disciplining

readers' interpretive strategies, the goal of doing so, and the possibilities for such discipline created by the framed-novelle's distinctive structure, can still illuminate its significance as a formal choice for women writers.

This chapter details the practices advocated for reading narrative in forms which, like the framed-novelle, used illustrative narratives to encourage similar forms of morally engaged and instructive reading, forms well-suited to correcting those flaws in reading practices, such as excessive reliance on fictional examples or corruption of the judgment through imaginative absorption in narrative of which women were often thought to be guilty. Some of the genres discussed here, such as the secret history and the oriental tale, display many similarities to the romance, while others do not, but all encourage reading practices that rework the relationships between reading and credulity, instruction and entertainment, and so address popular concerns about the dangers of learning from books.

Since the framed-novelle uses discrete narratives to prompt reconsideration of the significance of women's lives and stories of private, often scandalous, affairs in understanding widely relevant social issues, we will begin with two forms that, in turn, relate scandal and private stories to public events and frame women's lives in a new context; the secret history, and the catalogue of exemplary women. Of course the framed-novelle sequence can also sometimes be classified within these genres. The earliest published text included in this study, Delariver Manley's *New Atalantis* (1709) can be read not only as an example of the secret history tradition, but also as a framed-novelle sequence. We will begin then with a consideration of the interaction between secrecy, scandal, and storytelling.

## **2. Secrets and Histories: creating the sceptical reader**

Rebecca Bullard's study of the secret history as a distinctive mode characterizes it as a written defence of political liberty against absolutism, revising received accounts of political

intrigue to expose different and highly partisan versions of what really happened (Bullard, *Politics of Disclosure*, 1-6). Knowledge is power in the secret history, as it uses highly critical narratives of known events to allow the reader access to the (real or perceived) corruption of the political world, thereby supporting and constructing oppositional opinion and public political debate. Bullard emphasizes, however, that the secrets of the secret history are not always true secrets, but can also reframe familiar scandals as new information (Bullard, *Politics of Disclosure*, 91-93). That the form capitalizes on the repackaging of familiar secrets indicates that its political and literary significance lies not just in its disclosure of privileged information, but in its creation of alternative models for reading familiar facts and interrogating the relationships between scandal and political action.

The framed-novelle is sometimes concerned with political machinations, and is always engaged in the process of reframing the scandals and received narratives of women's lives. Narratives here means the often unspoken but always understood cultural stories of how women become enmeshed in courtship/seduction plots, how they can or ought to behave in romantic and domestic situations, and the possibilities for them when the life script of marriage and domesticity fails. Framed-novelles tell the secret stories of marginalized women, revealing what really goes wrong in women's stories of marriage and home and outlining new endings for failed women's stories. They create a revisionist historiography of private life and so, like the secret history, use the revelation and reframing of untold stories to question the authority structures that first create, and then silence, the systemic social flaws that in turn inform a distinctly female social experience.

Part of the appeal of the secret history for the eighteenth-century writer may lie in its use of revelation and secrecy to encourage reassessment of established power relationships. Kate Loveman argues that narrative interpretation in this period was thought to consist largely

of the ability to detect falsehood.<sup>24</sup> Bullard in her *Politics of Disclosure* similarly claims that the secret history's political importance depends on its expansion of the limits of public knowledge through broad circulation of privileged information (4-5). The framed-novelle, with its complicated layering of narrators, listeners, and readers — all working with narrative material that is, in some sense, privileged—brings together the literary pleasure and power of reading, writing, and interpreting secrets. As in the secret history, the reader's knowing and sceptical interpretation of information is a key theme of the framed-novelle, one that enables and justifies its focus on women's lives and interest in constituting women as a distinctive group.

In one framed-novelle where secrecy plays an important role, Eliza Haywood's *The Fruitless Enquiry* (1727), the development of sceptical reading is indissolubly linked with women's social power. The central character/listener, Miramillia, is an extremely naïve reader. She believes in the surface narratives of her friends' lives, the contented versions of themselves that they present to the world, and so believes that they might qualify as the perfectly happy woman she seeks. She is able to help the female narrators she meets, and only resolves her own story when she learns to read sceptically and to understand that there may be dark secrets beneath the happy appearances around her. Hearing her friends' secret stories destabilizes her own complacency and implied belief in the fitness of her social environment. Miramillia learns to expect to find hidden narratives of distress and disaster and to appreciate the importance of secret-keeping in making the world appear well. Learning to read sceptically and to appreciate secrets continues the secret history's practice of questioning power structures in the framed-novelle as a lingering and conceptual, rather than political, connection between disclosing secrets, interpreting them, and using them to understand and evaluate the authority inherent in established social norms.

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<sup>24</sup> Kate Loveman, *Reading Fictions, 1660-1740: Deception in English Literary and Political Culture* (Hampshire: Ashgate, 2008), 1-3.

In comparing the secret history with the framed-novelle, we can see a similar concern with reading practices; by reconceptualizing the relationship between secret narratives and their relationship to social and political realities, both forms create a sceptical reader who understands that all is not as it seems, and that official narratives may conceal pervasive social/political problems. Such interpretive tactics— necessary to the construction of political opposition— are equally appropriate to the construction of social critique; the questioning of ordinary social behaviour also requires the ability to notice and evaluate the possibilities for injustice and misery contained in broad cultural expectations, possibilities that risk going unnoticed by readers who think only of a social system as it should work, rather than as it actually does. Critiquing the conditions of women’s lives is much like critiquing the conditions of government; both require the reader to look past the socially-sanctioned narratives of how things ought to work to see the corrupt and abusive reality.

The link between the framed-novelle and the secret history is more obvious in some cases than in others; Manley’s *New Atalantis*, for example, connects the two because of the intense contemporaneity of its Tory satire. In fact, *New Atalantis*’s blatant targeting of contemporary political figures may make it easier to read as a primarily political tract, rather than as a feminocentric fiction. However, as Bullard explains, Manley used the secret history in distinctive ways, reworking “secret history’s characteristic rhetoric of disclosure in order to cultivate an impression of shared understanding or even complicity between her implied author and reader” (Bullard, *Politics of Disclosure*, 86). Manley’s need to write a version of secret history based on a new kind of bond where author and reader are complicit stems in part, no doubt, from the text’s function as an argument for a Tory party, as well as Tory policies, using the disclosure of secret history to accommodate a wide range of opinion present within the sometimes poorly organized boundaries of Tory affiliation (Bullard, *Politics of Disclosure*, 88).

However, in using the power plays of secrecy and disclosure to encourage and enable group affiliation of one sort (Tory party politics), *New Atalantis* also posits the creation and ideological (semi)coherence of another group: those who understand and can read for the significance of private lives to public affairs and the status of women's issues and women's stories as grounds for serious social debate.

In understanding how Manley's work creates a bridge between the party-motivated secret history and the feminocentric framed-novelle, it is useful to turn to some examples of her intersections between political actors and sexual scandals. Manley's repetitive use of sexual vice as code for political irresponsibility allows her characters to function on two critical-satirical levels. In addition to being real political targets, the persons she satirizes can also be near-caricatures of themselves,<sup>25</sup> and their particular vices can stand in for the wide-spread exercise of similar vices. We deduce that the Duke who seduces his young ward, Charlot, is a bad and dangerous politician because his sexual exploits indicate the joy he takes in exploiting those in his care; thus their mutual story reflects on the vulnerability of political subjects to decadent governors, but also on the vulnerability of young women to rapacious and powerful men. By making seduction a versatile vehicle for political criticism, *New Atalantis* really cannot help but start to consider and criticize seduction as a social phenomenon itself. In so doing, it constitutes seducers and their victims as distinct classes with common experiences and common interests. Manley's embedded narratives tell both the secret truths of political intrigue and the secret truths of the conventions of seduction and romantic manipulation that, in her version of history, make those political scandals possible. While Manley's use of political secrets and scandals interprets the current power plays between Whigs and Tories in such a way as to accommodate

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<sup>25</sup> Rachel Carnell also sees Manley as creating a kind of "liminal genre between political satire and proto-novel" due to the tension in her work between villains as caricatures and as real political enemies. Rachel Carnell, *Partisan Politics, Narrative Realism, and the Rise of the British Novel* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006), 38.

a wide range of Tory opinion, helping them acquire cohesiveness as a party, her revelations of the secrets and scandals that make seduction and marginalization a common thread in women's narratives allow for the imagination of women as a group: with shared and specific interests, and with a unique relationship to the authority structures that determine expectations of social/sexual behaviour. On both levels, the revelation of secrets questions the efficacy and fitness of established authorities so that the secret history, whether the secrets in question are political, sexual, or both, is a tool for giving potentially marginalized groups a shared narrative and knowledge base from which they can articulate their challenge to the powers that be.

Orienting texts around themes of secrecy and disclosure also demands a particular type of engaged reading. Secrecy requires decoding, and readers are pushed to examine correlations between the (sometimes thinly) fictionalized narratives they read and what they already know of the real world, or can discover through reading keys or guides to the secret history in question. Secret histories demand both scepticism and complicity on the part of the reader. The readers must remain alert to the sometimes flimsy fictionalizing devices adopted by such texts, and actively engage in searching for their real-life referents and be complicit in the secret history's implied project of reshaping the reader's opinion of the persons and institutions exposed through the text. In requiring readers to interrogate the text's fictional poses, explore possibilities for real-life referents, and then shape their thinking accordingly, the secret history complicates perceived relationships between texts and social realities as readers realize that understanding the link between what they read and what they experience outside the text requires active, deliberate interpretation. The secret history needs to be read as a form which requires interaction, with a great deal of the interpretive burden shifted onto the reader, who must decode and apply representational tales. In counteracting the official narratives of political developments, secret histories also require the reader to recognize that narratives can be

deceitful, and can cover up social realities just as much they reveal them. The idea of secret history encourages readers to interrogate the truth value of what they read, its possible referents in the exterior world, and its applications to the formation of their own opinions. In the secret history, the lesson of the text operates on two interpretive levels: the actual secrets of the real-life characters satirized within the text, and the political implications of those secrets for readers. In reading the secret history, readers are asked to read in two registers at once, one of inquisitive or prurient interest and one of social concern, so that they must progress through several steps in order to understand the application of their reading material to their lives. The secret history responds to prevailing beliefs about how readers evaluate life through reading by using its combination of scandal and social importance to discourage naïve reading and uncomplicated transposition of textual examples onto social action.

### **3. Collecting Women: femininity, exemplarity, and the biographical compilation**

The framed-novelle is connected with another literary tradition where narration encourages deliberative interpretation of texts and their social meanings; the catalogue of exemplary women. The best, most appealing example appears in the middle of our period, George Ballard's *Memoirs of Several Ladies of Great Britain* (1752) which recovers and preserves the lives of a heterogeneous collection of admirable women. Harriet Guest sees Ballard's *Memoirs* as the origin of a distinctly English brand of feminocentric cataloguing, which together with similar works create a national catalogue of "celebrated women."<sup>26</sup> Ballard's work is certainly important as an homage to distinctly British and scholarly women, but the idea for catalogues defending women was not wholly his own.<sup>27</sup> Ballard's predecessors include, for

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<sup>26</sup> Harriet Guest, *Small Change: Women, Learning, Patriotism, 1750-1810* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 49-50.

<sup>27</sup> See Norma Clarke, *The Rise and Fall of the Woman of Letters* (London: Pimlico, 2004), 73-76, for a discussion of how Ballard's project was largely inspired by his association with and friendship for Elizabeth Elstob, a fact that may illuminate Ballard's passionate focus on demonstrating the illustriousness and serious accomplishments of women who have been little known or neglected in their time.

example *Female Excellency, or, The Ladies' Glory* by R.B. from 1688. Examining differences between Ballard's *Memoirs* and the earlier memoir may help us examine the developing conception of female exemplarity, literary engagement, and gender roles within the framed-novelle.

*Female Excellency* seems like the outpourings of a poorly organized and annoyingly digressive writer. R.B. can take more than a dozen pages to get to his subject and begin to describe the exploits of one of the nine women he has singled out for historical attention. What seems like the effect of inadequate planning in *Female Excellency* may, however, conceal a genuine persuasive purpose. R.B.'s long-winded beginnings to his entries are also thoughtful and detailed analysis of the political and historical events leading up to each woman's moment of significance; as such, they ensure that his notable women are thoroughly embedded within their circumstances, the events, conflicts, and other actors who created the conditions of their displays of excellency.

In the introduction to his story of Voadicia (Boudicca), R.B. attempts to trace British history back to the Flood, and provides a long recounting of Roman activities in Britain before finally introducing Voadicia herself, her suffering at the hands of Romans, and her assumption of military and political authority.<sup>28</sup> Accuracy aside, R.B.'s long introduction to Voadicia positions her as a genuine and functional part of British history, rather than an aberration or interloper, Voadicia, the heroic woman ruler, is an explainable and natural outgrowth of her historical/political surroundings. Instead of imagining Voadicia as exemplary because she is an unexpected, once-in-a-millennium exception to women's general character, R.B.'s assessment insures Voadicia her appropriate place as a significant part of a larger historical narrative, totally intertwined with the events that came both before and after.

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<sup>28</sup> R.B., *Female Excellency, or, the Ladies Glory* (London: Nath. Crouch, 1688), 53-125.

The significance of R.B.'s exhaustive backgrounds to his narratives of exemplary women is illustrated by the fact that many of the women he chooses are already familiar. Deborah and Esther are still well-known to most frequent church-goers, Judith is one of the best known figures of Christian apocrypha, and Lucretia is a familiar part of Roman history. Their stories do not really need retelling, but R.B.'s work recasts their significance. Painstaking examinations of the events surrounding the women's memorable actions display their deliberate, intelligent responsiveness to political needs. R.B.'s Deborah, for example, is not just suddenly and inexplicably chosen by God to lead Israel, but is a self-aware and valued intercessor between God and the disobedient Israelites, and an effective military commander (10-11). By showing exemplary women enmeshed in ongoing political strife, R.B. reconnects these women, whose stories have assumed the status of near-fables, with the very real development of power politics and so insists on their status as significant political actors differentiated only by their gender, rather than the aura of exceptionality that has sprung up around them. R.B. argues for an enhanced appreciation of women in contemporary society by showing how women can change and have changed their societies while acting through the male means of war and deliberative political manoeuvring.

Ballard's *Memoirs* takes a different path to argue for appreciation of women's potential. Harriet Guest emphasizes that Ballard's work is truly a catalogue, in that it imagines the significance and memorability of women's lives as "directly concerned with the notion that their existence is a matter of national pride, which will be gratified by the number, the quantity of women worth writing about, rather than by their particular achievements" (Guest, 51- 52). Where R.B. sought to remind the world that it is easy to find historical examples of noteworthy, effective women, Ballard argues for women's learning, piety and virtue as a national resource, claiming that "we may justly be surprised at this neglect [of memoirs of women] by writers of

this nation, more especially as it is pretty certain that England has produced more women famous for literary accomplishments than any other nation in Europe.”<sup>29</sup> Ballard’s *Memoirs* constructs learned ladies as a class that demonstrates female accomplishment and intelligence. With several notable exceptions, Ballard also focuses on women who appear to have been little known in his time rather than, like R.B, reframing the importance of women who are already famous. Ballard is also far more interested in connecting his ladies’ achievements to their domestic lives, examining their direct political/public significance in only a few cases where, as with his entry on the monarch Mary I, such examination is obviously unavoidable. Where R.B. seeks to uncover the forgotten elements of deliberate political action in already-significant women’s stories, Ballard seeks to find significance in forgotten women’s stories. Ballard is also consistently concerned with women who write, and with the relationship between women’s writing, women’s virtue, and the significance of both to the culture as a whole. In Ballard’s account, women are admirable for their piety and virtue, their learning, classically defined, and writing, qualities that are often equated where one is allowed to imply the existence of the others. Women who write are women who are able to create, and bequeath to posterity, records and proofs of their intellectual and moral excellence, and so effectively participate in Ballard’s project of constructing them as moral exemplars. He is able to equate women’s writing with their virtue and their worth as moral/cultural exemplars because their writings, individually and collectively, demonstrate his argument that women as individuals and as a class are capable of shaping the nation’s characters and participating in its literary development.

Ballard defends women’s literary and scholarly accomplishments with great spirit but also with a lingering sense of the close connection, for a woman, between literary skill and

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<sup>29</sup> George Ballard, *Memoirs of Several Ladies of Great Britain who have been celebrated for their writings or skill in the learned languages, arts, and sciences*, ed. Ruth Perry (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1985), 53.

feminine propriety. In Ballard's account, women's writing is not only good because of its literary value, but also because it demonstrates that women can be, simultaneously, writers, scholars, and virtuous females. In his discussion of Anne, Countess of Pembroke, Ballard says little about her own scholarly achievements except that "she was enriched by nature with very extraordinary endowments...she made a considerable progress in many parts of literature" (283), and devotes the rest of his entry to discussion of her piety, charity, and gratitude towards her tutor and other scholarly men (286). His entry on Mary Astell praises her actual writing, and enthusiastically endorses *The Christian Religion as Professed by a Daughter of the Church of England* (1705) as instructive material for young people (388), but also devotes substantial space to her modesty and what he calls her "severe strictness of holy discipline" (391). Ballard examines women's literary and scholarly achievements alongside their less-obvious forms of importance, such as piety and charity, yet allows piety and charity nearly to supersede scholarly interest. In presenting both women's achievements and virtues as a source of national pride, Ballard reworks the cultural importance of women's work, both written and philanthropic/domestic.

Ballard's association of a woman's literary skills with her feminine skills, therefore, seeks to create a new critical and social space for women's intellectual work; in writing women back into literary history he also performs a thorough reassessment of women's lives and feminine virtues as fit subjects for historical speculation and community pride. Ballard is working towards a presentation of female scholarship and learning that is not unlike that created by Galesia in Jane Barker's *A Patchwork Screen for the Ladies* (1723). Barker's fictions consistently reinforce that Galesia's construction of herself as a poet, and perhaps even her poetic talent, is dependent on her continued virginity. Her intellectual gifts are closely tied to her capacity for restraint, self-denial and, as imagined through her vow to the muses to live single, her capacity

for devotion to a superior cause/being. Her texts reflecting on her own life are, of course, all sewn up into an object for domestic decoration. While literary skill is one of her chief goals and a constant source of pride, it is associated with a prototypical product of women's work. Her patches create a composite picture of herself as a skilled writer and virtuous woman and valorise the incidents of women's lives as appropriate material for either emulation or social criticism. Barker, then, predicts Ballard's association of women's writing with women's feminine activities and virtues; thus, framed-nouvelles and the catalogue of exemplary women share a presentation of women's literary activities as evidence of their feminine virtues, even while the skill with which they are written presents a compelling argument for a more positive understanding of women's intellectual potential. In his conflation of women's writing with women's lives, where both are made to be exemplary, Ballard implicitly recognizes a productive link between women's literature and women's history, a link that spills into and informs the critical and didactic projects of the framed-nouvelle.

The catalogue of exemplary women encourages comparative reading practices. It works through compilation, resuscitating familiar stories and juxtaposing them with the tales of forgotten women to push readers to see how unusual women's life histories, when brought together and incorporated into a single text, can generate new conclusions about femininity through their combination. Orienting texts around the revival of neglected aspects of women's lives demands a particular type of engaged reading—a multi-step interpretive approach in which readers are required to compare textual narratives with each other and with pre-existing beliefs, and then determine how what they have read can or should modify their opinions.

The catalogue of exemplary women asks readers to engage with it in a process of class-construction. Some women discussed in these works, like Elizabeth I and Judith, would have been familiar to many, while others, especially in Ballard's work, are obscure. The reader is

asked to recognize elements of commonality between unlike persons and form an understanding of them as a group, and from that to extrapolate the conclusion that women as a group share the capacity for significant social and intellectual achievements. The catalogue is, in this sense, much like the secret history, as both forms rework familiar stories to push the reader to new conclusions. Whether it is retelling the story of the Duke of Marlborough's involvement in the early years of William and Mary's reign as a record of betrayal and self-centred corruption in order to promote Tory support, or retelling the story of Elizabeth I's reign alongside the unknown lives of unfamiliar women in order to validate female intellectual work, both forms demand reading practices that recognize a complicated relationship between textual narratives and life, requiring readers to weigh narrative against previous knowledge to form new opinions. Both forms encourage reading practices centred on comparison and application, functioning much like the framed-novelle sequence will be seen to do, through their request to the reader to participate in the process of combining narratives and weighing them against each other to generate desirable social actions and/or beliefs. In directing readers' attention to the importance of comparing narratives and situating them within their historical contexts, the catalogue of exemplary women responds to the question of how readers can learn from texts by encouraging thoughtful interpretation. The significance of the catalogue depends on the comparison of its version of often-familiar narratives with the reader's prior knowledge and with similar but unfamiliar examples.

#### **4. Scheherazade and Sleeping Beauties: instruction in the oriental tale and fairytales**

Oriental tale collections relate to the framed-novelle through the structural device of framing narratives within an ongoing instructional and critical relationship between narrator and listener. Scheherazade's stories save her life and recreate her, for Schahriar, from someone who has passive value as a placeholder in the sequence of women occupying nightly his bed, to

someone who has ongoing value as a source of information and entertainment. Scheherazade's stories take the place of Schahriar's women; like his wives, they are different but also the same every night. As in the framed-novelle, Scheherazade uses difference with repetition in sequential tales to create her own status as a source for instruction intertwined with entertainment. Scheherazade illustrates that narration can effect a dramatic change in both teller and listener, transforming the listener into a better and more nuanced judge and the teller into a valuable source of guidance, so that the entertainer/audience and instructor/student relationship can supersede the ruler/subject and judge/offender relationship.

Narratives in Galland's *Arabian Nights* are often multiply-embedded, as Scheherazade's tales contain other tales, which contain still more tales, folded within each other. More importantly, stories within stories within stories often act as overt attempts at persuasion or at shifting the balance of power between teller and listener. Repeatedly, persons condemned to some kind of punishment are promised a reprieve if they can tell a tale more fabulous than their own or that in which they are embedded. In the cluster of stories originating in the "Story of the Little Hunch-back,"<sup>30</sup> for example, three accused murderers will all be pardoned together if one of them can tell a story more wonderful than that of how the hunchback met his death and will all hang together if they cannot (240). The accused weave several tales into each other as they entertain the sultan with their own histories and the narratives of others, which were also told to excuse or alleviate some offence. Layering stories this way has the effect of a revelation, explaining the real motivations and unseen actions behind the teller's offensive behaviour. It is worth pointing out that, in most cases where a character in one of Scheherezade's tales becomes a storyteller himself, his tale is his own history. In the "Hunchback" group, the three

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<sup>30</sup> See *Arabian Nights Entertainment*, ed. Robert L. Mack (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), 222. This edition reproduces entirely the first anonymous Grub Street translation of Antoine Galland's *Arabian Nights*.

narrators are only required to tell a story, any story, that is more fabulous than that of the hunchback's death. They all tell stories of a time they were offended and pardoned the offender because he disclosed the history of his sufferings and the reasons behind his offensive behaviour.

Storytelling, in these ultra-embedded tales, is a tool to uncover motivation and give it its due weight in judging action. Mia Gerhardt claims that a storyteller's explanations in multiply embedded tales in the *Nights* are key to each narrative's coherence and internal logic,<sup>31</sup> a claim supported by the frequency with which stories about motivations and explanations of offensive behaviour fundamentally alter consequences for the offending person. Storytelling in the *Nights'* multiply-embedded narratives is an indispensable part of judgment, a reminder that people and their actions are not always what they appear. It is significant that when multiply-embedded tales in the *Nights* are used to avert punishment, it is often on the condition that they are surprising or fantastic. They are notably not excuses or attempts to establish actual innocence. The storytellers, in effect, argue that they should be spared not because they are innocent, but because they can entertain, instruct, and offer a new perspective on life through their stories, compensating for their offence. Wrong actions, then, are excusable when they give rise to engaging and/or instructive discourse.

This deployment of storytelling is reminiscent of justifications for morally questionable storytelling found in some framed-novelles. In Sarah Scott's *Millenium Hall*, a fallen woman, Lady Emilia, is recoverable as a source of value because by telling her story, she is able to instruct her daughter in how she returned to a pious way of life, and so supports her daughter's virtuous inclinations. She is guilty, but also valued because of the monitory effect of her story. Turning to *The Cry*, the example of Cylinda also demonstrates how narration can function as

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<sup>31</sup> Mia I. Gerhardt, *The Art of Storytelling: A Literary Study of the Thousand and One Nights* (Leiden: E.J.Brill, 1963), 45.

social recuperation. There, a fallen woman, Cylinda, is treated sympathetically because she gives an account of her offenses that delves deep into their emotional and psychological roots, thereby becoming instructive and negatively exemplary. She too is guilty but valuable because of the instructive potential of her narrative. In both genres, then, we see a constant search for social and critical value in the types of stories and persons that could be dismissed on the basis of their possible immorality; thus, both forms refuse to dismiss criminals, social offenders, and scandals as valueless, focusing instead on their continuing importance to the community as material for instruction.

The preface to Ambrose Phillip's 1714 translation of Pétis de la Croix's *Thousand and One Days* creates a picture of what audiences of the time might have sought in oriental tale collections and how their perceived literary purpose allies them to the framed-novelle. Phillips approves the work because in it "the most exalted notions of virtue...are everywhere insinuated in the most engaging manner."<sup>32</sup> The tales, however, contain more than just notions of virtue. Sutlemême persuades the princess that she is wrong in her rejection of marriage because her tales also contain lessons on the formation of knowledge and appropriate interpretation of ideas surrounding love and romance. It is important to note that Sutlemême starts her narrations in response to the princess's vision. The princess is opposed to marriage because of a dream that makes her believe love brings destruction and death, but she has no experiential basis for interpreting romance so harshly. Through her stories, Sutlemême gives the princess vicarious access to the experiential knowledge she lacks, letting her live through the experience of loving and marrying over and over again, compensating for her lack of real knowledge and

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<sup>32</sup> François Pétis de la Croix, *The Thousand and One Days*, trans. Ambrose Phillips (London: J. Tonson, 1714), 13-14. See also Peter L. Caracciolo, *The Arabian Nights in English Literature: Studies in the Reception of the The Thousand and One Nights into British Culture* (London: Macmillan Press, 1988), 4-6 for a discussion of how English writers could tame what came to them from an exotic source and find their desired virtues in it.

correcting her imagination. Sutlemême's stories demonstrate exalted notions of virtue, but also enable the process of learning and acquiring an informed and realistic perspective on life and love.

In this sense, Sarah Scott's *A Journey Through Every Stage of Life* is a near-perfect reversal of *The Thousand and One Days*. There too, a princess who lacks any experiential basis for evaluating life and romance is carried away by what she imagines her future to be like and longs for the romance she cannot have. Her governess amplifies her imagination just as Sutlemême does; telling her stories about how romance really works, and guiding her through one catastrophic courtship after another to compensate for her uninformed judgment. The concluding message is different, but the method is the same. Storytelling and absorption into vicarious experience replace the uninformed imagination, and turn black-and-white interpretations of life into nuanced understanding. Like framed-novelles, oriental tale collections use narrative to bring about change by engaging the imagination. Narratives change the course of punishment by giving an offender a chance to explain himself and demonstrate his continuing value to the community, recreating him as a valuable source of instruction and entertainment. Narratives change those who attend to them as well by replacing the uninformed imagination with vicariously acquired experiential wisdom. The tendency in these texts to layer narratives into each other in variable sequences creates repeated opportunities to examine how the conditions of narration alter the relationships between tellers, listeners, and their social environment, an approach they share with the framed-novelle in its self-conscious didacticism and ambition to reform through the use of narrative and critical discussion.

Marina Warner's examination of fairy tales and their transmission starts with an examination of their tellers. She traces tales of transformations and semi-magical worlds through their lingering associations with female figures who take on their own mystical

properties through their insistence on engaging in storytelling. Although the framed-nouvelles discussed in this study sometimes display links to fairy tales themselves, as will be discussed later, their more provocative association with fairy tales and, through them, with a body of folkloric culture that moves both intricately and easily across printed and oral forms may be through the figure of the female tale teller. One of the common elements of the framed-nouvelles examined here is that their stories, although they are being accessed through the medium of print, are presented as if they were, or are being, told through the medium of speech. Although they are sometimes embedded in a complicated chain of transmission that includes male letter-writer or editor figures, as is the case with Sarah Scott's *Millenium Hall*, for example, there is always a woman acting as the original teller. Sometimes she tells her own story, and sometimes she becomes a conduit for other women's stories, but she is always functioning as a source of narrative. Understanding the links that embedded the framed-nouvelle within its literary culture requires an examination of the female storyteller as an instructive and potentially powerful image.

The link between the framed-nouvelle, the fairy tale, and the critical role of the narrating woman becomes evident in the presentation of early literary versions of fairy tales. Even though it is genuinely difficult to determine a precise originating point for fairy tales themselves, they were often described or imagined as coming from a female source. Giambattista Basile's collection of wonder tales *Lo cunto de li cunti* from 1634 postulates a group of old women as the source. Although Perrault's 1697 fairy tale collection may be the most famous, the vogue for literary fairy tales was arguably rooted in femininity, with Marie-Catherine D'Aulnoy publishing her *Contes des fées* in 1697, and Catherine Bernard's *Riquet à la Houppe* in 1696.<sup>33</sup> Lewis Seifert

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<sup>33</sup> We should note that D'Aulnoy's work was also translated into English before Perrault's. Her *Tales of the Fairies* was published in English in 1699, well before Robert Samber's first translation of Perrault in 1729.

argues that the origin of the literary fairy tale in the female-directed discursive arena of the salon has important implications for unravelling the cultural functions of the genre; fairy tales advocated the creative and literary productivity of salon gatherings and, by identifying the writers as what he calls ‘*conteuses*’, allowed them to “refer to the intertextual network that connects them as storytellers and writers.”<sup>34</sup> Circulation of literary fairy tales aided in the construction of these women as part of a distinct, and distinctively creative, discursive group. Because it arose from the particular environment of the female-directed salon, the literary fairy tale as a genre exemplifies the cultural productivity and creativity inherent in domains of female discourse. As a genre with few ties to classical literary traditions, however, the fairy tale simultaneously avoided direct or large-scale antagonism towards the idea of a male-dominated literary sphere.<sup>35</sup> Association of fairy tales with ambiguously authoritative tellers appears in the dedication to Perrault’s *Contes du temps passé* (1697), which claims that the tales reflect “the practice of the humblest families, in which a praiseworthy desire to instruct the children leads to the invention of stories devoid of reason,” but that such stories are still valuable to readers like the dedicatee, Elisabeth-Charlotte d’Orléans, because “whom would it touch more nearly to learn how their peoples live than those whom heaven has singled out to lead them”?<sup>36</sup> The humble origins of the fairy tale vouch for the significance of the genre, as the tales are presented as representing an authentic source of information about the interests of ordinary

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See Marina Warner, *From the Beast to the Blonde: on fairy tales and their tellers* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1994), 165.

<sup>34</sup> Lewis C. Seifert, *Fairy Tales, Sexuality, and Gender in France: 1690-1715 Nostalgic Utopias* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 8-9.

<sup>35</sup> See Seifert, 7-9 for a discussion of the fairy tale’s role in the ‘Quarrel of the Ancients and the Moderns’, and its gendered implications. Seifert also reads the appeal of the fairy tale for women writers as associated with Madame de Maintenon and Fénelon’s disapproval of women’s absorption in polite society and the cultivation of wit, advocating instead for a female responsibility to uphold the social order through domestic virtues, a position that the fairy tale collection can counteract by associating women’s writing with their sociable interactions, and position such writing as a potential source of moral, socially affirming instruction, see 85-87.

<sup>36</sup> Charles Perrault, *The Complete Fairy Tales*, trans. Christopher Betts (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 81.

people. Fairy tales are a source of instruction for both lower-status children and the aristocrats who wish to understand their people's folk customs and wisdom and an eminently accessible genre, elevating tales imagined to be humble and traditional so as to provide a cross-class discursive field. Women's stories and women's talk, then, do not have to be denigrated as trivial or malicious gossip in our period; they can also be valorised as passing down social criticism and life lessons, reshaping and enhancing social bonds rather than disrupting them. In their use of story-telling as an educative and community forming tool, the female storytellers that populate the framed-novelle— particularly those presented as older or wiser guides to the young or foolish, such as Sabrina in *A Journey through every Stage of Life*— are associated with figures like Mother Goose in their loquacity and their capacity to nurture, instruct, and entertain all at once without drawing any clear conceptual distinctions between these narrative functions, just as the fairy tale instructs, warns, and protests against inappropriate authority.

Framed-novelles' explorations of similar themes carry similar didactic messages to those found in fairy tales. The tale of Beauty and the Beast, that Warner traces all the way back to Apuleius's "Cupid and Psyche" (Warner, *Beast to Blonde*, 274-75), is a striking case in point. Versions of the tale circulating in our period allow for productive readings of thematic associations between fairy tales and the feminocentric social vision of the framed-novelle. In Henriette-Julie de Murat's version of a beast-husband tale, "Bearskin" from *Les Lutins du Chateau de Kernosy* (1710), a princess threatened with marriage to the King of the Ogres is sewn into a bearskin rug, whereupon she is transformed into a bear, allowing her to run away and meet her Prince Charming. He admires her grace and beauty as a bear, and falls in love with her after realizing that she is really a woman. Perrault's tale "Donkeyskin" follows a similar pattern. A young woman is threatened with marriage to her own father and her nurse advises her to delay by requesting impossible gifts; a dress as beautiful as the moon, another as beautiful as

the sun, and finally, the skin of her father's magic donkey. When the father surprises them by actually giving her the skin, her nurse advises her to put it on and run away, secure in the ugliness of the tattered donkey hide. She finds employment as a maid at a palace, where she is mocked and mistreated because of how well the donkeyskin conceals her real beauty (Perrault, 59-63). A prince falls in love with her after seeing her in one of her remarkable dresses; they marry and live happily ever after (67,76).

The image of a woman forced into marriage with an obviously unsuitable man is everywhere in the framed-novelle. The perverse, beastly nature of the intended groom in the fairytale version seems to be a parody and exaggeration of forced marriages, whether real or fictional. It also suggests the ever-present fear of young women that they could be coerced, manipulated, or badgered into unappealing marriages. The change that the beast-husband has undergone from Apuleius's version, where the monster is actually Cupid, to a true beast who can be truly threatening, fictionalizes and contains the possibility of marriage to genuinely awful men. The most interesting aspect of Murat's version and Perrault's 'Donkeyskin' however, is probably the effect the beastly groom has on his intended bride: she becomes beast-like as well. In both versions, the runaway girl attracts the attention of an appropriate, desirable groom through her beauty, and their marriage is enabled by the revelation of her true identity. Becoming beast-like is a beneficial move for young women in danger; with their true identity concealed, they are free to move about the fairy-tale universe and find a safe place to wait out their persecution.

In Jane Barker's *The Lining of the Patchwork Screen* (1726), the story of the lady gypsy adopts remarkably similar themes. The lady gypsy, horrified by her father's choice of a husband

who is “perfectly country-bred like herself”<sup>37</sup> runs away and joins a troop of gypsies who disguise her skin so that she is unrecognizable (228). The lady gypsy is also inspired by all the novels she has read, which encourage a love of romance and adventure. Her flight is only half-enforced and her return to her true station is only half-fortuitous, as the lady gypsy earns respect and affection in her new life; *Donkeyskin* and *Bearskin*, by contrast, had it granted them because of their involuntarily revealed beauty. Tiring of the gypsies, the lady eventually finds work in a wealthy household where her domestic talents and irreproachable behaviour attract admiration and the love of her employer’s son (235). When the lady gypsy’s real parentage is revealed, her employer and her father consent to the match, and the gypsy and the heir are able to marry.

In this tale, disguise enables the heroine’s escape from a bad marriage, just as it does for *Bearskin* and *Donkeyskin*, but in a different manner. Where they used their disguise to escape and then wait, and are treated as beast-like creatures until their real beauty is discovered, the lady gypsy uses her disguise to escape and then work. She captures her employer’s respect long before her identity becomes known. She is not, like *Donkeyskin*, mocked by the other servants, but admired. The lady gypsy is, in fact, successfully creating an entirely new life, if on a different social plane. For the lady gypsy, disguise is an opportunity, whereas for *Bearskin* and *Donkeyskin* it is a miserable refuge. All three tales use dramatic disguises to interrogate the unhappiness and sense of persecution inherent in forced marriages and to posit a total relinquishment of marriageable identity (that is, the identity of a beautiful, desirable young woman) as a possible solution. The lady gypsy goes further, however, examining the desirable aspects of the disguise itself, and imagining that a new identity can allow a young woman to find a completely different kind of love and admiration. She can earn admiration through her talents and virtues, rather

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<sup>37</sup> Jane Barker, *The Galesia Trilogy and Selected Manuscript Poems of Jane Barker*, ed. Carol Shiner Wilson, *Women Writers in English, 1350-1850 series* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), 227.

than relying on romantic attachments inspired by her beauty. In 'Bearskin' and 'Donkeyskin', there is no resolution to the runaway girl's suffering without the desirable husband, but the lady gypsy begins crafting her own solution and her own social place before she is resolved into marriage.

The oriental tale and the fairy tale revalue the role of absorption and imaginative engagement in the reading experience. The pattern of absorption, persuasion, and creation of a privileged relationship with the primary narrator in oriental tale collections encourages an approach to reading best conceptualized as reformation or recuperation working through imaginative absorption and transforming it into an instructive tool. If secret histories and catalogues of exemplary women comment on reading practices by drawing attention to the necessity of self-consciously interactive and multi-layered interpretive approaches, oriental tales revalue reading practices by repositioning imaginative engagement as a correction to judgment and a way to enhance an intratextual reader's knowledge of social realities. In both the *Thousand and One Days* and *Arabian Nights Entertainment*, stories act as replacements and correctives for the flawed lessons of limited experience. Schahriar is a bad reader of life experiences, extrapolating inappropriately from one tale of his wife's infidelity to all women, and forming a response that is absurd in its excess. The princess of the *Thousand and One Days* is equally flawed as a reader, unable to comprehend the differences between reality and the tale told by her own imagination, through her dream. The episodic, cumulative quality of the oriental tale collection is ideally suited to correcting their reading practices; their judgment is flawed, and their interpretation of events, and life-tales, is faulty because they have not read enough. They lack positive examples, of forgiveness, mercy, or fidelity, to counterbalance their negative experiences. The tales they hear are designed to undo their folly by providing imaginative absorption in a surrogate life experience, filling in the gaps of their actual

experience and correcting its flaws. In their use of serial narration to establish imaginative identification with characters and emotional connections with intratextual narrators, oriental tale collections rework the distinction between instruction and entertainment. Schahriar is deterred from his murderous purposes both because he is instructed in mercy and sophisticated judgment through Scheherazade's tales and because he falls in love with her. Absorption, in her narratives and in her, is instruction. The episodic construction of the oriental tale collection provides a continuous but variable set of imaginative experiences that rewrites the misconceptions and prejudices that Schahriar and the princess have imbibed from their limited experiential references. These types of tales neutralize the perceived dangers of imaginative over-investment in narration and fictions by demonstrating its positive, corrective value. Readers are encouraged to reinterpret imaginative absorption as an antidote for the limitations of learning from real-life experiences, and the oriental tale actively engages with the perils of imaginative reading by transforming the imagination into a vehicle for reformative instruction.

Like the oriental tale, the fairy tale collection encourages reading oriented towards absorption and imaginative engagement, but in a different direction. Instead of urging readers to lose themselves in fantastic universes in order to correct what they have mislearned in reality, the fairy tale asks readers to accept the unreality of a fictional universe and find in it a moral truth, requiring willingness to see examination of serious principles within the fantastic or apparently trivial. In reading fairy tales, the reader learns how to locate socio-critical value in narratives that appear to be entirely divorced from reality and that, in their fantastic nature, do not seem to possess much potential for sophisticated social instruction. Absorption in fairy tales and imaginative acceptance of their fantastical universe allows them to embody broad exemplarity and thickly veiled cultural significance. Like the framed-novelle sequence, the fairy tale collection engages its readers by directing their attention to the socially important examples

residing in frivolous stories. In their reliance on fantasy and exaggerated images of good and evil, fairy tales encourage the reader to see narrative, and absorption within it, not as a directly applicable set of life lessons, but as an imaginative laboratory in which to discover and experiment with the moral problems of real social situations. If we remember Leonora's library, we can see hints that absorption in narrative can become a valuable instructive and preservative tool. Leonora's absorption in her romance narratives allowed her to converse primarily with men, but through their writings; that is, it allowed her to converse with men safely, and learn the causes and consequences of romantic adventures within an imaginary universe. Fairy tales work in much the same way, but deliberately and without the ridiculousness of Leonora's reading. A fairy tale collection containing multiple examples of the value and consequences of rebellion, honesty, and resistance to inappropriately exercised authority prepares its readers to understand the moral significance of their real-world challenges, allowing them to observe and engage with similar social situations in an imagined universe. In considering the instructive role of imaginative engagement in oriental tales and fairy tales, one is reminded of an oddity in Fénelon's objection, that imaginative reading will corrupt the reader's (and especially a young girl's) perception of the true motives of actions in the world. In the oriental tale and the fairy tale, nothing is true except motives. While the romance might distort its reader's judgment of the motives of real actions, as for example in a courtship situation, the oriental tale and the fairy tale can, through their very unreality, embody the psychological and moral truths of motives and characters without creating fanciful expectations of realistic behaviour.

The theme of disguises, such as those of *Donkeyskin* and the lady gypsy, indicates both the differences and similarities between the framed-novelles by women I discuss in this thesis and the dominant forms of tale sequences that preceded or were contemporaneous with them. Oriental collections and fairy tales operate in a dream world. They make unapologetic use of

magic and fancy, and so transpose their real critical concerns onto another plane, where bad husbands are ogres and palaces conceal piles of magic treasure. Secret histories disguise their political critiques with fake names and the creation of a complicated correspondence between fictionalized versions of scandals and the instructional effect their tales are meant to have on readers. The catalogue of exemplary women also manipulates the idea of disguise, packaging overarching arguments about femininity and its social role as a series of discrete encyclopaedic entries and, especially in Ballard's case, effectively hiding its broad and transformative perspective on the cultural significance of women's work within a series of narratives that, taken individually, seem to deal with uneventful women's lives. There is a connection here with a recurrent moralizing theme of the fairy tale – that plainness or ugliness can work to display moral significance and beauty, that a princess can be recognized for her true worth only after she has first disguised herself as a servant. Narrative experimentation in all of the genres discussed here and also in the framed-novelle leads to the conclusions that narrative instructs best when it embeds the culturally significant within the apparently trivial. However, as we go forward, we will discuss one crucial difference in the framed-novelle's use of narrative and instruction, critical arguments and apparently trivial narrative. In the framed-novelle, this kind of disguise is only temporary. The constant presence of intradiegetic readers and their reflections on the tales they encounter removes the narratives' disguise of frivolity to insist on the literary and socio-critical importance within. As a result, framed-novelles are able to participate with the genres discussed here in their reaction to and attempted guidance of contemporary beliefs on reading practices, but also to create a more forceful and self-conscious argument for the continuing literary significance and instructive exemplarity of romantic or fanciful stories and their tellers.

## Chapter 3

### The Framed-Nouvelle and the Conversational Ideal

The framed-nouvelle sequences discussed here all contain spoken narratives and a series of critical conversations, hence, consideration of their socio-literary significance and generic distinctiveness requires consideration of the types of speech they portray. Speech within the framed-nouvelle can be divided into two basic types; conversation, reasoned discussion of significant social, moral, and/or literary themes, and gossip, the exchange of anecdotes about individuals, usually with amatory, scandalous themes. Both speech types meet in the framed-nouvelle to create its distinctive synergy of narration and self-conscious criticism. Examination of conversation, gossip, and the status of both within other contemporary writings in this chapter helps to illuminate the framed-nouvelle's structure and its role in facilitating women writers' interventions in the period's literary and social debates.

#### 1. The Conversational Ideal

Henry Fielding's "Essay on Conversation" from his *Miscellanies* (1743) defines "conversation" as "to *Turn round together*."<sup>38</sup> The period's writings on conversation habitually stress such inclusiveness and responsiveness. Inclusiveness is a major theme in the conversational descriptions and guides discussed below, as all but Jonathan Swift's *Complete Collection of Genteel and Ingenious Conversation* (1738) devote significant space to discussing conversational participants, and the need to bring diverse people together into a speaking group. Swift reveals the importance of inclusiveness in the ideal in his satire of the principle — depicting a diverse assortment of characters going through the motions of communication. Responsiveness, too, plays a central role, as the texts discussed below demonstrate through

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<sup>38</sup> Henry Fielding, "Essay on Conversation" in *Miscellanies by Henry Fielding*, ed. Henry Knight Miller (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1972), 1:119-53,120.

their repeated condemnation of domineering speakers.<sup>39</sup> Conversation is beneficial and gives rise to social and cultural improvement because it creates a space for polite strife, where ideas and opinions can collide to produce new and improved perspectives. In the kinds of polite conversation these writers describe, the things that are addressed (other people) respond by following the convention of sharing speaking time and participating in a continuous exchange of ideas.

The image of turning round also implies circularity and repetitiveness, paradoxically also important in ideals of conversation. Theorists of conversation do not imagine any definite end to the act they describe. Hannah More, for example, praises a real-life conversational group that met repeatedly for a significant period, the circle that gathered around Elizabeth Vesey.<sup>40</sup> Although particular conversational sessions would have ended when the group dispersed, they would have done so in the knowledge that the group was going to meet and converse again, making the habit of conversation More praises one of punctuated continuity. Benjamin Stillingfleet, also associated with Vesey's circle, writes of conversations more generally, but his emphasis on conversational engagement as necessary to continued happiness and virtue clearly positions conversation as something that one should always be doing, not something that can ever really be done.

Thinking of conversation as turning round illustrates contemporary understandings of conversations as repetitive and non-teleological. Conversation is a constant exploration and variation on associated themes, rather than a linear progression from one idea to another, heading towards a definite end. In order to capture these qualities, I have not discussed writings

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<sup>39</sup> For a brief discussion of the importance of responsiveness or talking back as a part of conversation in this period, see Katie Halsey and Jane Slinn's introduction to *The Concept and Practice of Conversation in the Long Eighteenth Century 1688-1848* (Cambridge, Cambridge Scholar Press, 2008), xix-xx.

<sup>40</sup> See Sylvia Harstark Myers, *The Bluestocking Circle: Women, Friendship, and the Life of the Mind in Eighteenth-Century England* (Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1990), 250-53 for a discussion of Vesey's role as a bluestocking hostess.

on conversation in this chapter in chronological order. Since they all address a repetitive and circular, rather than a linear, process and often incorporate bits and examples of conversations into the explanatory text itself, it seems appropriate to follow their lead and structure this discussion as an exploration of themes with variations, turning round the ideals that supported the cultural centrality of conversation instead of trying to track them from one chronological point to another. Anthony Ashley Cooper, Earl of Shaftesbury's general discussion of conversation's beneficial effects, David Hume's broad division of conversational participants into types that should cooperate, and Henry Fielding's basic rules for conversational engagement set our theme, while Jonathan Swift's satiric portrayal, Benjamin Stillingfleet's rules in verse, and Hannah More's focus on an exemplary group provide us with variations.

## 2. The Social Benefits of Sociable Conversations

In one of many references to the value of discursive interaction as a guide to judgment, Anthony Ashley Cooper, the third Earl of Shaftesbury, explains the authority inherent in a rational, sociable conversation by claiming "neither the written treatises of the learned nor the set discourses of the eloquent are able of themselves to teach the use of [reason]. It is the habit alone of reasoning which can make a reasoner."<sup>41</sup> The process of conversation, by instructing its participants in rationality, lends the authoritative weight of reason to the judgments formed by a conversing public. In discussing Shaftesbury's position in the theories of eighteenth-century sociability, Lawrence Klein writes that, for Shaftesbury, the sociable nature he praised in *Sensus Communis* (1709) was a means for natural affections to draw people into fruitful connections with others. Klein also writes that the interrupted critical conversation Shaftesbury describes in *Sensus Communis* is ideal because it was highly rational, in the sense that it did not allow

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<sup>41</sup> Anthony Ashley Cooper, "Sensus Communis, An Essay on the Freedom of Wit and Humour" in *Characteristics of Men, Manners, Opinions, Times* ed. Lawrence Klein (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 29-70, 33.

participants to advance unsupported assertions and because it was able to act as a “moral framework for public interchange, since its conventions embodied the norms of freedom, equality, activity, and pleasure. In allowing individuals to become more rational and more autonomous, it fit into an emancipatory program.”<sup>42</sup> Shaftesbury’s enthusiasm for conversation as a framework for public interaction has a variety of causes, from a desire to cultivate rationality to a more idealistic ethos of equality and discursive freedom. His grounding of sociability in the affections, considered in light of Klein’s interpretation of his emphasis on activity and distribution of discursive pleasure in constructing an ideal conversation, reveals his understanding of conversation as highly affective, oriented towards the creation and maintenance of interpersonal relationships as well as the encouragement of rationality. Shaftesbury’s example shows us that the ideal and practice of conversation as a cornerstone of social life in the eighteenth century is intertwined with contemporary praise of rationality and of sociability. The ideal of polite conversation forms a distinct but inseparable part of sociable life, as it is capable of both demonstrating social interaction and, at its best, enhancing participants’ capacity for such interaction, making an ideal conversation simultaneously a goal and a tool for reaching that goal.

The most definite statement that polite conversation ought to benefit participants is David Hume’s opening to “On Essay-Writing” from his 1742 *Essays Moral and Political*, in which he distinguishes between the “learned” and the “conversable” parts of mankind and claims that a social league between them will be “still farther improved to their mutual Advantage.”<sup>43</sup> The conversable world suffers when it is separated from the learned because there is no possibility of “finding Topics of Conversation fit for the entertainment of rational creatures, without having

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<sup>42</sup> Lawrence Klein, *Shaftesbury and the Culture of Politeness* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 57, 99.

<sup>43</sup> David Hume, “Of Essay-Writing” in *Essays Moral and Political and Literary*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1963), 568-73, 568-69.

Recourse sometimes to History, Poetry, Politics, and the more obvious Principles, at least, of Philosophy.” Without the participation of the learned, however, conversation will be “a continued series of gossiping stories and idle remarks” (569). The learned world also suffers when it is divided from the conversible; Hume claims that, when the learned world was constantly confined to colleges and cells, “every Thing of what we call *belles lettres* became totally barbarous, being cultivated by men without any taste of life or manners, and without that liberty and facility of thought and conversation, which can only be acquired by conversation” (569). Indicting the cloistered scholar privileges the benefits of sociable interaction for learning and reveals Hume’s expectations regarding conversation’s purpose. He expects conversation to have an impact on scholarship and literary culture, and expects also that sustained contact with learned people and access to the literary culture that they represent will substantially improve the quality of sociable conversation.

Serious, productive conversation also widens the net of potential participants. When conversation is more than just “a continued series of gossiping stories”, and instead involves reflection on consequential topics, it accommodates both the learned and the conversible worlds, and so conversation becomes a vehicle to bring the two together. Formal aspects of idealized conversation, such as its inclusiveness and incorporation of diverse people, enhance the quality of conversational content by encouraging rational discussion of significant topics. A commitment to productive content and rationality also enables and encourages such inclusiveness. Conversation’s formal policy of inclusion and incorporation of differences allows it to address significant issues in a productive way; this, in turn, makes the content of a conversation more widely beneficial. The form and the content of an ideal conversation together make up a carefully balanced equation of social relevance, rational discussion, and an overarching inclusiveness and accommodation of differences.

### 3. Describing Ideal Conversations

Hume's division of conversational participants into the learned and the conversible is reflected in other writers of the period, often themselves in conversation with each other. Four such writers —Henry Fielding, Jonathan Swift, Benjamin Stillingfleet, and Hannah More— produced critiques of conversational practices that, read together, illustrate a coherent picture of idealized conversational practices. Since these writers span most of the century and represent literary giants and their less famous colleagues, reading them together emphasizes the broad and persistent appeal of conversation as a sociable practice and a literary theme. All of these writers are part of the cultural mainstream. While they were not all wealthy or powerful, they are all close enough to a social/literary elite that they cannot be expected to reflect the conversational practices of people on the social margins, and so the picture they create of polite conversation is not universal or unchallengeable. However, when attempting to identify and explore widespread and influential social ideals, prominent, mainstream writers are possibly the best resource, as they are better placed to both guide and reflect their cultural environment than people writing from a marginalized position. Focusing on conversational guides produced from a position of cultural dominance and (relatively) elite status cannot tell us everything about the ideals and practices of conversation in the eighteenth century, but it can tell us what conversational ideals socially conscious persons and writers of conversational fictions would have encountered and, in many cases, tried to reflect.

Fielding's "An Essay on Conversation" calls conversation "that reciprocal Interchange of Ideas, by which Truth is examined...and all our Knowledge communicated to each other" (120). In his rules for conversation, he complains that social interaction is often faulty because men can be happiest in conversation with those whose "Understanding is pretty near on an Equality with our own", but as social rank is determined by qualities other than understanding, such a

perfect conversing group rarely exists (142). He proposes to alleviate this imperfection by finding topics on which everyone can converse. For example, in his imagined conversational group of philosophers and dancing-masters, he recognizes that the philosophers cannot very well begin a discussion on ethics, but asks, "Hath not *Socrates* heard of harmony? ... and hath not *Aristotle* himself written a book on Motion?" (143). His questions point towards the possibility of unequal conversational participants simultaneously raising or lowering their conversational topics so that all can participate with equality and shared interests. Through this example, along with his advice to avoid conversing on the details of professions or personal affairs, Fielding recommends attention to everyone's comfort as the hallmark of a good conversational participant.

Fielding encourages speakers not only to share interest but also to share time, cautioning against the tendency every man feels to "rather please others by what he says, than to be pleased by what they say" (145). Instead, discursive time should be shared and participants should avoid displaying any "violent Impetuosity of Temper...any Loudness of Voice" (146) so that their conversation will inform the group, rather than indulge their pride in their discursive abilities. Motives, then, are also an important factor in Fielding's conception of good conversation. Participants should be disinterested, in that they are actuated by a genuine desire to advance the knowledge and understanding of the group, and should have little personal stake in winning an argument. Taken together, Fielding's regulations for conversation minimize all types of domination and subordination within a speaking group, as he tries to create a seeming unity of ability, opportunity, and the discursive authority that comes with the feeling of being a welcomed and valued member of the group.

Fielding's recommendations on inclusiveness, speaking time, and subtler aspects of speech such as tone and manner also, as in Hume's essay, create a persistent, reciprocal

connection between the form of a conversation and its content. A conscious effort to include speakers and avoid dominating the conversation will lead to a selection of topics that, as with the philosophers and dancing masters, makes such an inclusion possible and minimizes the temptation for one person to deliver a monologue by ensuring that all can take advantage of the speaking time made available to them. Content will influence the form of a conversation as well, as is demonstrated by Fielding's discussion of topics to avoid. When speakers avoid slander, blasphemy, sweeping condemnations of religions, and the practices of specific professions, they also avoid intimidating the sensitive or the uninformed into silence. Careful topic selection enables inclusiveness and shared speaking time, while attention to inclusiveness and shared speaking encourages appropriate topics. In Fielding's vision of polite conversation, value resides in both theme and manner, so that neither is, by itself, sufficient to create a polite and productive conversation.

Fielding's advice on sharing interests and sharing speaking time also shares space with an unattainable ideal of equality. His rules for conversation condense into recognition that, although conversational participants will not be equal in terms of intelligence, opinion, or social rank, they should act as if they (almost) are. His conversational guidelines fit well with his remarks on other forms of social interaction, which may help explain his unwillingness or inability to separate deliberate discourse from the rest of social life. Just as he recommends behaviour that acknowledges differences in social rank without giving them undue importance, he recognizes that very few groups can ever embody a true equality of understanding but insists that conversational participants can cultivate egalitarian relationships anyway. In both instances, he advises people to be as equal as they can; gentlemen should not be over-deferential to their social superiors or haughty to their inferiors, and conversational participants should not talk over their audience, in theme or in tone. Fielding's social world, where

conversational groups act as prime testing ground for appropriate behaviour, is one in which people should act as if they are roughly equal without ever thinking that they are really so. His much-referenced good breeding is primarily an ability to accommodate and acknowledge all sorts of differences, but set them aside for the purpose of comfortable interaction.

Swift's *Complete Collection of Genteel and Ingenious Conversation* (1738) instructs by demonstrating what good conversation is not. Structuring his text as a dialogue necessarily causes Swift to pay greater attention to the details of how conversation can be practiced. Swift's satire depicts every sin Fielding addresses; indeed, we might speculate, knowing Fielding's enthusiasm for his Scriblerian predecessors, that Swift creates a set of conversational failures from which Fielding can extrapolate his rules for conversational success. The opening scene with the arriviste conversationalists Colonel Atwitt, Neverout, and Lord Sparkish is full of jests that are really not funny; the reader laughs at inept conversationalists delivering jokes by the book. The men fill their speech with clichés and proverbial sayings ("can't see the wood for the trees", "it's an ill wind that blows nobody good") and joke about starting a duel.<sup>44</sup> They think they are humorous, but we read them as pompous and unoriginal. Their attempted jests embody the warnings against raillery that Fielding incorporates into his essay. Fielding cautioned that attempts at raillery tend to fall flat, and criticized the practice on the grounds that jesting, even when funny, was likely to become offensive and sometimes lead to violence. Although Swift's jocular gentlemen have no real intention of fighting a duel, their reference to the possibility naturalizes it as a legitimate response to a jest gone wrong, so that the implied threat lingers through their interaction. Swift, too, questions the wisdom of attempting to be markedly humorous in conversation as he demonstrates just how ineffective, pointless, and disruptive jesting can be. None of the conversational participants advance a substantive theme for

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<sup>44</sup> Jonathan Swift, *A Collection of Genteel and Ingenious Conversation*, ed. Michael Foot (Bristol: Thoemmes Press, 1995), 154.

discussion. Instead, their conversation is confined to clichés, bits of gossip, and sexual innuendo. It is hard to imagine anyone improving in rationality, politeness, or sociable feeling from listening to this speaking group.

In Swift's model, engaging in conversation does nothing for the participants because they do it badly. Their focus on trivial and ineffective jests leaves them no wiser or more polite than they would be without such interaction. Swift's dialogue demonstrates what conversation should not be but sometimes is; a social activity that, while significant because it brings people together, misses its opportunity to take on serious cultural value. This depiction of genteel conversation identifies many of the same conversational faults and failings as Fielding's work, but without his optimism. By laying down positive rules for how people should engage in conversation, Fielding displays a belief that they can help others tap into the potential of conversational engagement to effect positive social change. Swift's guide, however, is an entirely negative one. While he accepts conversation's central role in social life, his mocking of ordinary conversational practices displays deep scepticism about the real cultural value of such interaction. Swift's analysis of conversational practices reflects values and conversational ideals similar to other writers, differentiated by his satirical attitude towards the real practice of conversation.

Before examining Benjamin Stillingfleet's "An Essay on Conversation" (1737) and Hannah More's "The Bas Bleu, or, conversation" (1786) in detail, one similarity is immediately obvious, which is that they are both written in couplets. This is unsurprising, considering the popularity of the couplet as a poetic form in the eighteenth century, but it has significant implications for the relationship of form and content in these two works and in the idealized conversations they describe. J. Paul Hunter attributes the couplet's dominance to what he calls "the building block possibilities of two-line units – their gathering, ruminative, cumulative

functions,”<sup>45</sup> by which he means that the basic unit of two lines making up a substantial work created the possibility of both brevity and sustained examination. Groups of two lines, just long enough to state an idea, could, when carried on for a lengthy poem, build upon each other to present an entire argument in unobtrusive units; they turn together to build an image of conversational exchange. The use of couplets reflects and demonstrates the ethos of polite conversations. By being both brief and extensive, using nuggets of thought to build a sustained examination of a topic, they mirror a conversational practice based on shared speaking time, where a series of short remarks from different speakers acts together to develop a complex examination of their conversational theme.

Stillingfleet, whose unusual dress gave the bluestocking circle its name, also reflected on such gatherings’ speaking style through his poem, “An Essay on Conversation.”<sup>46</sup> Stillingfleet’s poem is more detailed than Fielding’s treatise, but follows a markedly similar ideological path. Like Fielding, Stillingfleet recommends moderation in behaviour and subject selection, in order to include all of one’s audience. Recognizing that most of mankind is actuated by the desire for praise,<sup>47</sup> Stillingfleet still recommends complaisance and pleasing behaviour to everyone.

Remarking that a lover is:

humble, not mean; disputing and yet sweet  
 In Rivalship not fierce, nor yet unmoved  
 ...For ever cheerful, though not always witty  
 And never giving cause for hate or pity...  
 What he does to gain a vulgar End  
 Shall we neglect to make mankind our friend? (7)

Stillingfleet reflects Fielding in his recognition of the importance of avoiding offence and cultivating moderation, but his motives for such moderation are subtly different. While

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<sup>45</sup> J. Paul Hunter, “Couplets and Conversation”, in *The Cambridge Companion to Eighteenth-Century Poetry*, ed. John Sitter (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 11-37, 22.

<sup>46</sup> For a discussion of Stillingfleet’s connections with Elizabeth Montagu, the bluestockings, and his stockings, see Myers, 6, 179.

<sup>47</sup> Benjamin Stillingfleet, *An Essay on Conversation* (London: L. Gilliver and J. Clarke 1737), 9.

Fielding's advice is oriented towards becoming a good conversational participant in order to preserve social harmony, Stillingfleet's recommendation to "make mankind our friend" implies a closer, more intimate relationship. Stillingfleet encourages readers to acknowledge their own faults first, reminding them that "he who hopes a Victory to win/ o'er other men, must with himself begin" (6). Such advice, coupled with Stillingfleet's long catalogue of variations on conversational topics such as tastes in music, leisure activities and the like (he lists possible preferences without any attempt to rank them), encourages readers to recognize their own tastes and foibles as being as arbitrary and flawed as everyone else's, and so see a reflection of their own limitations in those of other people. Although Fielding encourages readers to avoid conspicuous pride or display of their own wisdom, Stillingfleet's advice goes farther and encourages genuine identification with those who might be inferior in taste or understanding, so that his call to make a friend of mankind encourages affective relationships that extend past the preservation of social harmony.

Stillingfleet's variations from Fielding's advocacy of harmonious social intercourse may be explained by changing views on the need for sociability. While Fielding views man's propensity for conversation as a kind of talent, Stillingfleet thinks of socialization as a positive need and is noticeably concerned about the consequences of solitude. He begins by considering the apparent contradictions between man's supposedly selfish nature and his hatred of solitude, asking why if:

...we think, we act, we move  
 By the strong springs of selfish love  
 Yet among all the species is there one  
 Whom, with more caution than ourselves, we shun? (1-2)

The question leads him to conclude that "we find at home our greatest foe" and we "court society, and hate Mankind" (2). People are inclined to both look down on and fear intimate knowledge of others, creating a situation where we seek the society of others without

really appreciating it. His perception of a contradiction between people's behaviour, in which they seek society, and their internal perspectives, in which they dislike others, leads Stillingfleet to place great importance on conversationalists identifying with and understanding others' flaws in order to cultivate a genuine relationship with them.

Comparing Stillingfleet's treatise with Fielding's illustrates the ways in which appropriate conversational behaviour could be imagined to further different but related goals. The two essays recommend similar conversational tactics, such as controlling pride and adapting one's theme to the audience, but Stillingfleet's advice tends towards the creation of genuinely emotive and benevolent ties, while Fielding's essay remains primarily concerned with preserving social harmony. The two goals are not incompatible or unrelated. Stillingfleet argues throughout that good relations with others and friendship with mankind are impossible without the art of polite conversation. The primary difference between the two seems to be that, in Fielding's essay, enjoyable social interaction is a sufficient and worthwhile end in itself, while for Stillingfleet it is a means to develop more positive virtues and more active relationships. Stillingfleet's essay, then, represents a belief that conversation can bring about substantive social improvement by creating genuine social sympathy.

Hannah More's "The Bas Bleu" differs from the examinations of conversation previously discussed in that it is dedicated to one conversing group, but her reasons for praising the conversations Elizabeth Vesey encouraged reflect the more abstract writings of her near-contemporaries. More goes to greater lengths to differentiate conversation from other forms of sociable interaction, complaining that:

Long was Society o'er-run  
By Whist, that desolating Hun;  
Long did Quadrille despotic sit

That Vandal of colloquial wit.<sup>48</sup>

The advent of social leaders such as Elizabeth Montagu and Horace Walpole causes others better to appreciate conversational interaction. More's description of Vesey's group as a perfect conversational model echoes previous writers' dictates on conversational engagement, as she claims that men were no longer "bound by pedant rules/ Nor ladies *precieuses ridicules*" (70). Her claim that men are no longer pedants recalls both Fielding's and Stillingfleet's injunctions to adjust conversational topics to the audience and avoid discussion of specialized themes that alienate participants. In this sense, More continues to celebrate the ethos of broad participation and performed equality that Fielding and Stillingfleet have described. Her reference to Molière's *Précieuses Ridicules* (1659), although it does not criticize any specific behaviour, imports the image of the French salon as a point of contrast, an image that she will return to when she claims that Vesey's group is dramatically:

...unlike the wit that fell,  
Rambouillet, at thy quaint Hotel;  
Where point and turn and equivoque,  
Distorted every word they spoke! (70-71)

A footnote insists that the society at the Hotel de Rambouillet was characterized by "affectation and false taste" (70). While More's characterization of the most famous of French salons and by extension salon culture in general is certainly questionable,<sup>49</sup> her perception emphasizes the qualities that she valorises in Vesey's group. In More's description, the "Good sense" of Vesey's group (70) is opposed to the deliberate wittiness of other conversational models, indicating her preference for a type of instructive, non-competitive conversation that discourages attempts to outshine other speakers.

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<sup>48</sup> Hannah More, "The Bas Bleu; or Conversation" in *Poems*, ed., Caroline Franklin (Chippenham: Routledge/Thoemmes Press, 1996), 65-89, 69.

<sup>49</sup> See Benedetta Craveri, *The Age of Conversation*, trans. Teresa Waugh (New York, New York Review of Books, 2005), 11-16 and 337-42, which connects the salon culture's focus on conspicuous wit and amusement with the self-redefinition of the French aristocracy prior to the revolution, and the transformation of women's social position into highly significant teachers of *politesse*.

Her reference to the presence of female intellectuals, such as Elizabeth Carter, also hints at the benefits of conversation that can be specific to women. More focuses on Carter's impact on other women, in her claim that she "taught the female train/The deeply wise are never vain" (70). In claiming that a female intellectual has, through her exceptional conversational abilities, created herself as an object of emulation for other women, she implies that conversational engagement can enhance women's intellectual abilities and legitimacy.

More also praises Vesey's group because it moderates individual characters and smoothes out differences. She describes participants as:

Chaste Wits, and Critics void of spleen;  
 ...Poets, fulfilling Christian duties,  
 Just Lawyers, reasonable Beauties...  
 Learn'd Antiquaries, who, from college,  
 Reject the rust, and bring the knowledge. (77)

This catalogue of conversational participants describes a varied array of people who have all rid themselves of their stereotypical faults in order to become ideally sociable. By eliminating the faults expected of various people, such as rustiness in antiquaries or unreasonableness among beautiful women, More implies that all have come close to embodying a group norm, which enhances their ability to join in a productive conversation. By ridding themselves of their stereotypical faults, all of these people make positive contributions to the group, bringing their wit or knowledge into the discussion without the drawbacks of unchastity or pedantry. More's list praises a conversational environment in which a group of markedly different people are all able to participate in a valuable way because they do not adhere too closely to social stereotypes and have learned to work well with others who are not like them. This list of people embodies the adaptability and impulse towards performed equality that Fielding and Stillingfleet also praise. More's enthusiasm for the Vesey group is predicated on its embodiment of those admirable qualities that all of these writers identify as hallmarks of idealized

conversation, ideals such as instructive discourse, lack of vanity or competitiveness, and approximate equality of access to conversational themes.

#### 4. Connecting Conversation and Literature

David Hume proves once again the best starting point for understanding the reciprocal relationships between idealized conversations and the period's literary culture because he addresses such relationships explicitly. "Of Essay-Writing" says nothing about essay writing until Hume has presented his ideas on bringing together the learned and conversible worlds. In order to foster the union between the learned and conversible worlds he then proposes, "I know nothing more advantageous than such Essays as those" and describes himself as an "Ambassador from the Dominions of Learning to those of Conversation" (569-70). The learned world is identified with literate culture in Hume's text, as demonstrated by his previous complaint that "what we call *belles lettres*" has suffered by the learned's isolation from the conversible; thus, his proposal to form a bridge between the learned and the conversible world is also a bridge between conversationalists and writers. The best candidate for "such Essays" is probably the collection of other essays included in the same volume, essays covering topics such as "Of Moral Prejudices" and "Of Polygamy and Divorces." Hume's belief in the utility of "such Essays" in improving conversation, and the collection in which "Of Essay-writing" is embedded, demonstrate the close interaction he wants to encourage in conversation and literate culture.

Topics such as moral prejudices or divorce are perfect fits for the interaction between the learned and the conversible worlds that he praises; they are serious subjects amenable to reasoned discussion, where the conversible could benefit from the learned's contextualization of the topic in its historical and philosophical background, and the learned could gain a new perspective from the conversible's examination of such topics as they are expressed in daily life. Hume's provision of essays on diverse significant subjects, and his suggestion that they be used

as conversational fodder, is a method of bridging gaps between the learned and the conversible and creating the inclusive conversing world that he encourages. Grounding a conversation in an essay provides all participants with a shared frame of reference, as they are discussing a text to which they all, presumably, have access, hence eliminating the kind of educational or experiential gaps that could keep the learned and conversible worlds apart. Hume sees the interaction between the literary environment and the practice of conversation as a means to further his goal of inclusiveness and mutual aid between scholarly and sociable groups. As Hume has also demonstrated in *Essays Moral and Political*, such topics work equally well when written and printed as part of learned discourse. His straightforward suggestion that his essays be used as conversational matter, together with his image of himself as an ambassador importing and exporting perspectives between the learned and the conversible worlds, argue for a near-complete dissolution of boundaries between literate culture and the world of sociable conversation. He expects that the materials of conversation and of literature will migrate back and forth between the two, creating a situation in which the conversible and the learned worlds express their opinions and exercise their rationality in different mediums but on the same things.

Hume also solicits the assistance of women in encouraging union between the learned and conversible worlds, claiming that they are “Sovereigns of the Empire of Conversation” and will be able to guide discussions on texts like his essays because they are “much better judges of all polite Writing than men of the same Degree of Understanding” and so he has a great deal of confidence in “the delicacy of their taste” (570-71). Hume’s inclusion of women demonstrates that interaction between the conversational world and literate culture allows for a kind of literary authority in those who were not expected to be writers themselves. When literary products are examined in conversations, things like taste, and the avoidance of pedantry, are

valued because they are a critical element in maintaining a productive conversation. A conversationalist who could offer polite and delicate judgments of a written work would be participating in the period's literary development because, in Hume's vision, such conversations are expected to feed back into the literary world. Polite and delicate judgment of writing contributes the life and manners that Hume thinks are lacking when conversationalists and writers are isolated from each other. Imagining constant interaction between the conversable and the literary world gives good, tasteful conversationalists a position within the literate culture, as legitimate and valued critics, even if they are not themselves involved in the production of texts. The effect of Hume's perceived interaction between learned and conversable worlds, where improving texts form the basis of conversation and conversations improve writers, is to make the roles of a good conversationalist, an astute critic, and a writer very close to each other and very nearly interchangeable. Despite the inestimable value of Hume's essay to this consideration of eighteenth-century conversation, he did not always see it as valuable. "Of Essay-Writing" was removed for the 1748 edition of *Essays Moral and Political* on the grounds that it, along with two others was too "frivolous and finical" for such a work.<sup>50</sup> Hume's fear that his own, undeniably important, work on conversation might be frivolous reflects the problem with seeing open, accessible, and sociable talk as a culturally significant form of sociable interaction; with all its potential for egalitarian social critique, conversation's idealized openness and accessibility carries with it a risk of devolving into another type of discourse that, while also accessible and critical, lacks conversation's ideological weight.

### **5. Reading and Writing Gossip**

There are less laudatory terms for discursive interactions, in both the eighteenth century and our own time. Gossip is an important counterpoint to the conversational ideal and

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<sup>50</sup> See Hume's letter of 13 February 1748 to Charles Erskine, Lord Tinwald in *The Letters of David Hume*, ed. J.Y.T. Greig (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1969) 1:112.

complicates the apparently beneficial use of inset stories within critical discussion because gossip demands narrative. Conversation, in the sense discussed above, can theoretically happen without narration or discussion of persons. Gossip, however, is always the story of who did what to whom. The *Oxford English Dictionary's* third definition of gossip as a verb (current in our period) is 'to talk idly, mostly about other people's affairs' making it almost a perverse rewriting of conversation.<sup>51</sup> Gossip often injects itself into the rational-critical domain of sociable conversation (and literary culture) through the eighteenth-century periodical, a form that combines a stated socio-critical purpose conformable to the ideals of conversation with an array of amusing, salacious, and sometimes scandalous anecdotes about individuals. The periodical's reliance on correspondence with readers creates a distinctly interactive and intimate relationship between readers, editorial figures, and the text; it claims to engage in some of the techniques of gossip by sharing other people's private or privileged information, and it displays a marked tendency to address the social and moral consequences of gossip and scandal-spreading directly.

While gossip takes pleasure in revealing scandals that others do not yet know, conversation requires accessibility of topic as well as of process. It asks the participants to choose a discursive field in which everyone can join with comparable knowledge and insists that such discussion is never idle. Participants are also supposed to bear in mind a lofty aim – of bringing about a union between the learned and conversible worlds. Part of the appeal of gossip, by contrast, is pure enjoyment, the excitement of scandal. Patricia Spacks tells us that gossip in communities is "aggression and defense, self-assertion and communal repression, social exchange."<sup>52</sup> As her description suggests, gossip has innate potential for varying forms of social disruption and social discipline, creating its complicated status within both the periodical

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<sup>51</sup> *Oxford English Dictionary Online* <http://www.oed.com>, s.v. "gossip."

<sup>52</sup> Patricia Spacks, *Gossip* (New York: Knopf, 1985), 56.

and the framed-novelle. As verbal aggression, gossip can be profoundly destructive, circulating unflattering tales about others in order to undermine their reputations or relationships. As a form of defence or communal repression, gossip can punish social outliers, telling stories of their failings in order to promote the expulsion of unacceptable or dangerous elements from a community. Specks also argues that gossip's use of tales about other people as a source of social knowledge establishes a link between gossip and authorship, where "abstracted from the link with malice, gossip's trivia can generate literary power" (Spacks, *Gossip*, 153). The trivia of gossip is closely associated with literary power and authorship because the act of telling another person's story is also a redeployment of that story for the writer's own purposes. In the early periodical, gossiping stories of individualized persons are redeployed for the editors' purposes of creating convincing commentary on a wealth of moral and social ills.

The title of the early eighteenth-century periodical that first sought to raise the form to new literary pretensions, *The Tatler* (first number published 12 April 1709), both bows to the fair sex and invokes a feminine discursive mode that invites participation and constructs speakers/listeners as members of an intimate group, sharers in secrets. Nicola Parsons argues that *The Tatler*, often read as social and political gossip by its contemporary audience, uses the eidolon of Bickerstaff to suggest that "individual particularities must be subsumed by general exemplarity in order for a public voice to be legitimated" so that Bickerstaff's claim to satirize "general characters [which] stand for a whole Species" clashes with readers' desires to decode the paper and associate its characters with particular persons.<sup>53</sup> Despite his title, and the temptation of reading his paper as a specified scandal sheet, Bickerstaff claims that he is not gossiping; he is commenting on "general characters, which stand for a whole species"; therefore, he is not talking idly about other's affairs, but talking about everyone's affairs, telling

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<sup>53</sup> Nicola Parsons, *Reading Gossip in Early Eighteenth-Century England* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), 95-97.

stories that concern the “whole species”. This claim refuses the particular, scandal-based nature of gossiping, a refusal that is repeatedly performed throughout periodical literature, but also makes room for courting a kind of non-malicious gossip. For example, in *The Tatler* no. 3 of 16 April 1709, Bickerstaff announces himself to be “of the Society for *Reformation of Manners*...Therefore, as I design to have Notices from all Publick Assemblies, I shall take upon me only Indecorums, Improprieties, and Negligences, in such as should give us better Examples. After this Declaration, if a Fine Lady thinks fit to Giggle at Church or a Great Beau to come in Drunk to a Play, either shall be sure to hear of it in my ensuing Paper.”<sup>54</sup> In this warning, Bickerstaff appears to embark on a particular, gossiping project for the benefit of a general public; fine ladies and great beaus will hear of themselves specifically, but Bickerstaff will direct his attention to the broad categories of indecorums and improprieties.

*The Tatler's* method is considered in more detail in nos. 71(22 September 1709) and 76 (4 October 1709), where Bickerstaff receives a letter complaining that “you are not content with lashing the many Vices of the Age without illustrating each with particular characters” (1:490) and so advising him to have the greatest regard to the quality of his information, being wary of the risk of falsely damaging someone’s reputation. In no. 76, a letter from another reader defends Bickerstaff’s method by asserting that satire is “the best Friend to Reformation” as long as its targets are sufficiently generalized, and that Bickerstaff lives up to this standard because “it is not a circumstantial Guessing will serve turn, for there are more than one to pretend to your Characters...Here can then be no Injustice, where no one is injur’d, for ‘tis themselves must appropriate the Saddle, before Scandal can ride them” (1:520-21). This presents gossip as justified and elevated through general applicability; Bickerstaff’s satires can adopt a gossiping mode without injuring anyone as long as there is more than one plausible target for his

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<sup>54</sup> Joseph Addison and Richard Steele, *The Tatler*. ed. Donald F. Bond (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1987) 1: 32.

mockery; he avoids slander through carefully courting a minimum level of generality that emphasizes the universal, rather than the individual, nature of his criticisms.

The pseudo-anonymity of Bickerstaff's gossip here does still retain individual significance; *The Tatler's* epistolary defender points out that readers must "appropriate the saddle, before scandal can ride them." By referring the application of scandalous gossip to individual readers' consciences, the letter writer recognizes that gossip encourages social discipline by promoting self-evaluation. The presentation of disguised but exemplary gossiping stories does not only show readers their neighbour's failings but also prompts them to examine their own behaviour in order to position themselves against the periodical's images of social types. When gossip functions as satire and social exemplar, it performs covert social discipline, inspiring personal awareness of failings similar to that reported in scandal tales and so contributing to the periodical's goal of moral censorship. Gossip, the disclosure of particular persons' secrets, has both legitimate uses and dangers in *The Tatler*, as it is a discursive mode requiring both careful negotiation between public service and private harm. Associating himself with gossip while refusing its scandal-oriented, particularized nature allows Bickerstaff to use gossip as social discipline while avoiding its reputation for social destruction.

Periodicals also draw on the benefits of gossip as a possible form of social discipline through its reliance on letters from readers. The creation of an interactive group that talks about and judges other people's lives means that gossip functions as a multi-layered and sometimes self-contradictory discursive phenomenon; it is able to foster the pleasure of scandal and the conviction of moralizing evaluation simultaneously. In the personal letter in the early periodical, all of gossip's functions are used to serve the periodical's expressed goal of reforming and entertaining the people. For example, a man writes to Mr. Spectator to say that he believes he is entitled to a divorce because his wife wears cosmetics and concealed her face so well that the

deceived husband feels that “when she wakes in a morning she scarce seems young enough to be the Mother of her whom I carried to Bed the Night before” (*The Spectator*, 1:174). Mr. Spectator treats the letter as an opportunity for a discourse on painting, classing all painted ladies together as ‘Picts’, relating his friend Will Honeycomb’s adventure in watching a celebrated beauty paint her face, and concluding by praising the example of another woman, the “agreeable Statira”, whose “features are enlivened by the Cheerfulness of her Mind, and good Humour gives an alacrity to her Eyes” (1:176). The husband’s letter is undoubtedly a kind of gossip. It draws Mr. Spectator (and so his readers) into the intimacy of the marital bedroom and strips the wife of disguises, exposing her real but secret face to all the world. Moreover, the letter informs the readers of scandal brewing in a private family, not of concern for the rest of the world except insofar as it provides the pleasures of revealing secrets and engaging in censure to its readers. Mr. Spectator’s response is also decidedly gossip-like in tone and nature. He responds to the letter-writer’s confidence with a story of his own, detailing Will Honeycomb’s adventure hiding himself in a Pict’s dressing room and his shock at her grooming ritual. Gossip is reshaped, however, in the close of this issue. Mr. Spectator’s suggestion that women model themselves on the “agreeable Statira” lacks the personalizing detail of the letter or Honeycomb’s story. Statira, and her natural charms, are presented as a generalized model, rather than an identifiable account of an individual. The particularized women presented in the two gossip sources—the letter and Honeycomb’s story—are measured against a general ideal of female appearance. The combination of gossip about individuals and a generalized ideal gives readers both a set of failings to criticize and a standard to measure themselves against. The movement from individual satire to praise of a general exemplar allows this number to combine the criticism and secret-spreading of personal gossip with broadly applicable advice; readers are

first given individualized gossip and then a positive counterexample in order to urge them to put the particular tales they have heard to productive, and generally applicable, purposes.

*The Female Tatler* (1709-10) complicates the periodical's relationship to gossip, creating an association of gossip with discursive authority due, in no small part, to the text's cultivation of a feminine voice. Mrs. Crackenthorpe's alliance with gossip is closer than that of Bickerstaff or Mr. Spectator because she is more dependent on gossip's methods for her store of social knowledge, and so for her writing project. Unlike Mr. Spectator, who can vanish into the London crowds and so see and report everything from everywhere, Mrs. Crackenthorpe would, because she is a woman, be a more conspicuous figure, not admitted indeed to Will's or the Exchange. She cannot go to the heart of the city, but it nonetheless comes to her through her skill as a gossip, a skill that also allows her to revise *The Tatler's* separation of its topics into categories and sources. She will "date from my Own Apartment, which comprehends White's, Will's, the Grecian, Garroway's in Exchange Alley, and all the India Houses within the Bills of Mortality... grave statesmen, airy beaus, lawyers, cits, poets and parsons, and Ladies of all degrees assemble there, each person delivers himself according to his talent, which gives me a superficial smattering for all of 'em."<sup>55</sup> Bickerstaff relinquished the device of dating his numbers from varying locations relatively early in *The Tatler*, but Mrs. Crackenthorpe's references to physical locations meeting in the gossip of her apartments nonetheless establish a deliberate reworking of a recognizable trope for periodical writing and access to information.

Combining all venues for information-gathering in London into her apartment allows Mrs. Crackenthorpe to revalue gossip in two ways. She emphasizes the social role of gossip as a source of information, and so of discursive authority, to the confined or disempowered. Mrs. Crackenthorpe's garrulousness, her ability to be "intimate with everybody at first sight" (1),

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<sup>55</sup> *The Female Tatler*. ed. Fidelis Morgan (London: J.M.Dent & Sons, 1992), 2.

allows her to recreate Will's and Exchange Alley in her own apartments, through the medium of intimate talk. Mrs. Crackenthorpe is a lady who knows everything because she is a lady who gossips with everyone. Her conflation of so many different places within her own apartment also furthers the periodical's project of recasting the relationship between gossip, advice, and news. Bickerstaff draws clear lines of separation between gallantry from White's, poetry from Will's, and everything else he comments on from his own apartment. Mrs. Crackenthorpe sees few differences. All of these places, and their associated topics, mingle in her apartment as persons discussing them mingle, and she has access to all through her intimacy with all she meets and the revelatory talk she encourages in her apartments—through her talent for gossip. Refusing to distinguish topics by space or originating source also constitutes a refusal to position them in a hierarchy. In this text, gallantry, learning, and news all become suitable subjects for the same kind of confidential chat taking place in Mrs. Crackenthorpe's apartments. All originate from the same place and the same means, so that the thin line between gossip, social speculation, and news in *The Tatler* disappears entirely in *The Female Tatler*. Mrs. Crackenthorpe's purported aim in writing her periodical is much the same as Bickerstaff's; like him she claims to direct satire toward the whole species. Thus, she quotes a friend who defends her project on the grounds that she intends "divertingly to lead people into good moral instruction, whose intent in reading this paper might be only to find out some invidious reflection" (4). Here, gossip acts as a lure, guiding readers into moral instruction with the possibility of invidious reflection. Mrs. Crackenthorpe's project constructs a refusal of gossip's malice and adherence to its material and methods that allows her to engage in the same kind of moral reflection as *The Tatler* while also eliding the differences between gossip, news, and social criticism.

In the early numbers of *The Tatler*, entries from St. James's are visibly separated from the rest of the issue in which they appear. The page breaks to mark the different source and, moreover, foreign and domestic news is treated in a straightforward, summary fashion, with markedly less commentary from Bickerstaff and a great deal less discussion of how readers ought to interpret and apply what they read. The summary style of entries from St. James's implies that their importance is self-explanatory, while discussions of gallantry and pleasure – traditional materials for gossip – require a guide to their significance. This hierarchy is undone in *The Female Tatler*. Since all of Mrs. Crackenthorpe's information comes from the same place and the same gossiping process, it is all relayed in the same manner, as part of a wide-ranging attempt to use news and gossip as leads into moral instruction.

Parsons complains that, while the relative lack of real-life referents in *The Female Tatler* and its preference for domestic topics over directly political issues may contribute to its narrative interest, "as its title suggests, *The Female Tatler* denotes a diminution of the scope of gossip" (Parsons, *Reading Gossip*, 117). Parsons is right to note that *The Female Tatler* displays considerably less enthusiasm for directly political material than other periodicals, but diminution is a harsh term, and suggests that the domestic and social concerns *The Female Tatler* tends to address are somehow smaller, less significant, and of less importance to civic life than political arguments or real scandals about identifiable persons. Mrs. Crackenthorpe's bold opening claim, that Exchange Alley and Will's are all in her apartment, offers another reading, one of expansion and conflation rather than diminishment. In the conceptual ethos of *The Female Tatler*, gossip about domestic matters and particular persons, developed in a woman's space, may in fact grow in potential importance because Mrs. Crackenthorpe deliberately frames her gossiping exchanges as a sufficient source for the moral improvement of her society as a whole; just as her drawing room can contain every important place within the bills of mortality, gossip,

when indulged in for moral instruction rather than just the pleasure of scandal, can contain and exemplify every important topic of interest or improvement to its citizens.

Haywood's *The Female Spectator* (1744-46) takes an approach to engagement with gossip and criticism that echoes Mrs. Crackenthorpe's model of containing the world within her drawing room. In the first issue, the female spectator claims that she has "spies...placed not only in all the Places of Resort in and about this great Metropolis, but at *Bath, Tunbridge*, and the *Spaw*, and means found out to extend my Speculations even as far as *France, Rome, Germany*, and other foreign Parts, so that nothing curious or worthy of Remark can escape me; and this I look upon to be a more effectual way of penetrating into the Mysteries of the Alcove, the Cabinet, or Field, than if I had the Power of Invisibility"(2: 19). Although the editorial voice alludes to foreign parts and the field in such a way as to encourage expectations of political or military news, readers are also told "I would by no means...have what I say be construed into a Design of gratifying a vicious Propensity of propagating Scandal; – Whoever sits down to read me with this View, will find themselves mistaken; for tho' I shall bring real Facts on the Stage, I shall conceal the Actors names under such as will be conformable to their Characters; my Intention being only to expose the Vice, not the Person" (2:20). The editor's juxtaposition of cabinets and fields to scandal and vice upsets the readers' expectations and casts a new light on her description of her intelligence network. Tales that are curious and worthy of remark in this calculation are those of individuals and of personal life.

This description of the paper's aims also challenges the reader's expectations and perception of the reading process. It is noteworthy that the editor does not deny the paper's status as a voice and a source for gossip; instead she openly admits that she does indeed intend to tell scandalous stories of particular persons brought to her by her network. In her description, there will be a real-life referent for the tales she tells, and she merely asks her readers not to be

too eager in seeking them out. Hiding identities behind names suited to the real person's character instructs the reader in how they ought to respond to the periodical. They ought to rise above the search for real identities and allow themselves to be guided by the editor in focusing instead on moral character. Through this combination of admitting gossiping content while encouraging readers to interpret it for a broader moralizing purpose, *The Female Spectator* adheres to the claims, of Bickerstaff and Mr. Spectator, to satirize the species rather than persons, but also engages in a recuperation of gossip like Mrs. Crackenthorpe's, insisting that the process of gossiping can be indulged and can be an effective means of learning about the world when used for a moralizing end.

In the story of Fillamour and Zimene from book XIII, the *Female Spectator* takes gossip and scandal as both its form and its message. Zimene's scandal-loving friend, Ariana, tells her that another young woman, Sophronia, is involved in a secret liaison with a man. Zimene and Ariana concoct an elaborate plan to discover Sophronia's mystery lover, who proves to be Fillamour, Zimene's husband. Zimene erupts into rage, provoking her husband into a deeper estrangement, and the tale ends with their marriage ruined and Sophronia exiled. The editor's greatest scorn, however, is reserved for the original sins of gossip and curiosity – not adultery. She blames Ariana for “that inquisitive talking Humour which had occasioned all this Confusion” (3: 16) and ends lamenting that “the whole Transaction...soon became the Talk of the Town” and hoping it will be “a Warning to others, neither to busy themselves with Affairs in which they have no Concern, nor to be too fond of reporting what Chance may discover to them” (3:17).

The editor herself is passionately fond of reporting what chance (or spies) discover to her, as she has done here. In this tale, where gossip is deployed to demonstrate the troublesome consequences of gossip, we are given a holistic picture of what harm gossip can cause in careless hands and what benefits when used judiciously. Ariana's gossip is destructive

because she loves it; she tells Zimene her news about Sophronia gleefully and they embark on their ill-conceived spying project because they take such pleasure in knowing other people's failings. There is a connection between their enthusiastic hunting after Sophronia's secrets and the type of reading the female spectator warned against at the beginning of her first issue. They could have taken Sophronia's moral laxity and her character as "a great Pretender to Virtue" (3:12) as a moralizing lesson in the perils of forming social judgments, but choose instead to read deeper into her story, seeking to uncover the specific nature of her failing by discovering her partner. Ariana's gossip is destructive because it tends to a malicious end and is motivated by a desire to know the scandalous particulars of another person's behaviour, rather than its moral meaning.

The female spectator's gossip is quite different. She tells the same story that Ariana told, but her relation leads to a clear set of instructions to her reader on how to read the story and why it is worth considering. Ariana's example teaches readers not to be too inquisitive or to gossip carelessly, Zimene shows them how ineffective rage and indignation are in resolving marital problems. The tale is told to help the innocent, not to revel in guilt and scandal, and so the female spectator demonstrates how the materials of gossip, when relayed for a clear, benevolent purpose can be transmuted into an effective tool for public-spirited moralizing. Gossip in *The Female Spectator* depends largely on motivation for its moral value and uses exemplification and instruction to demonstrate its potential worth as a form of social discipline.

Gossip in the periodical functions as both form and source, with the periodical editors avoiding the maliciousness and love of scandal associated with particularized gossip in order to draw on its potential as a source of exemplarity and a mechanism of social discipline. In revaluing gossip as a starting point for critical reflection and a means of reforming or educating the audience's social perspectives, the periodical seeks to break the link of gossip with malice

and integrate the materials of gossip within the rational-critical ethos of idealized conversation. The periodical's attempt to generalize gossip into representative stories also allows gossip to function as non-punitive social discipline. By providing a negative standard of behaviour, gossiping tales can expose others' faults and prompt the reader into self-evaluation, leading them to monitor their own behaviour, lest they too find themselves become negative exemplars in the pages of a periodical. The periodical's approach to gossip works to create and clarify distinctions between gossip circulated for malicious or for moralizing purposes, concerning itself with the varying critical significance of tales told under real or assumed names and reading for salacious import or for moral meaning. Gossip as a discursive form and as a source of information is both invoked and negated in the periodical as a means of negotiating the relationships between individual incidents, general exemplarity, discursive intimacy, and the interactivity between readers and texts.

Gossip functions in a similar way in the framed-novelle sequence, with one crucial difference: that gossip in the framed-novelle always unfolds and is analyzed within a represented conversation. Although the periodicals discussed here tend to present themselves as the deliberations of a discursive group, introducing members other than the primary editor and referring to their contributions in the periodical's development, the idea of group-based discursive creation is not consistently maintained and is rarely represented. The framed-novelle sequence is driven entirely by detailed representation of a discursive group's process of narration and conversational deliberation. The difference is significant in its effect on the two forms' portrayal of gossip as a legitimate source of instructive material. Although the periodical demonstrates that the materials of gossip can be used as socio-critical, reformative exemplars, the framed-novelle shows its readers exactly how the transformation from scandal to social exemplar is accomplished. Readers are led through the process of extrapolating moralizing

lessons from gossip along with the intradiegetic narrators. As a result, the framed-novelle is directly engaged with shaping and disciplining readers' reading and critical practices, showing them exactly how the rational-critical process of conversation can be productively applied to scandalous material.

The demonstrative aspect of the framed-novelle also allows it to use gossip without apology and to interpret actual gossip with real-life referents and fictional exemplars in similar ways. Periodicals have a tendency to denounce gossip even while they use it, to insist that their goal is not to defame individual persons while telling gossiping stories that may have real referents. In the periodical, disclaiming scandalous intent is necessary in order to remind readers that gossip is included to guide the social judgment, not to satisfy prurient interests. In the framed-novelle, readers do not have to be told that gossip has potential for moral exemplarity because they are shown how it is extracted. There will be considerable discussion in the rest of this study about how the structure of the framed-novelle encourages the reevaluation of romantic and amatory tales by subjecting them to a process of rational-critical conversation. The same structure works to revalue gossip in those tales that include real-life referents (such as Manley's *New Atalantis*) or that blend fictions with allusions to real persons and events, such as Barker's *Patchwork* fictions. Real gossip and fictional stories can occupy the same space and work in the same way because both are presented via the same method – as the exchange of scandalous and/or personal stories within the context of critical conversation. Gossip, fictional tales that resemble gossip, and gossip as a discursive method all become aids to developing moral exemplarity by being incorporated into a self-conscious process of reasoned social critique.

## 6. Women Writing Speech

The close and persistent connections between literary culture, ideals of conversation, and the exemplary use of gossip may be the source of the framed-novelle's appeal as a literary form for women writers. Writing in the form of conversation allows the writer to appear to engage in or transcribe conversation, and to distribute the socio-critical content of the text between different voices participating in that conversation. The writer does not have to adopt an obviously authoritative position in order to present and examine socially important issues. Instead, the critical message of the text can emerge from the interaction between the speaking characters. A conversational form that embeds gossip-like narratives into moralizing discussion also encourages the reader to engage in the process of interpreting the narratives and applying their message, while showing him how to do so, making the text seem to be interactive both internally and externally.

By mimicking interaction and the development of critical positions through discussion, a discursively structured text recreates the inclusion and presumed egalitarianism that informs the ideal of conversation as a social practice. The goal of performed equality as a hallmark of polite conversation helps explain the persistent appeal of the conversational trope to women writers. Part of its appeal is certainly due to way in which social valorisation of conversation could provide a significant cultural role for women, as politeness-facilitators and moderating influences, a position that Lawrence Klein discusses at length in his "Gender, Conversation and the Public Sphere" (1993).<sup>56</sup> However, a larger part of the appeal of conversational forms for women may lie in their creation of a discursive space for women that was *not* special or overtly gendered. The conversational guides discussed above advocate accommodating differences

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<sup>56</sup> Lawrence Klein, "Gender, Conversation and the Public Sphere" in *Textuality and Sexuality: Reading theories and practices*, ed. Judith Still and Michael Worton (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1993), 100-116, 105-7.

without specific reference to gender differences, so that the careful selection of topics and efforts at inclusivity is not imagined as a social duty that pedantic men owed towards women, but as a social duty that applies to everyone. A social commitment to pretended equality allows women to position themselves as valid participants in group discourse without reference to any presumed sources of feminine inferiority, such as inadequate education. The cultural injunction that polite conversation be substantive and improve its participants creates a space where women can legitimately question and engage with important intellectual or cultural subjects. Writing in a conversational form allows a woman writer in the eighteenth century to take advantage of the already acknowledged propriety of women's participation in conversations, and to use that participation as a basis for her literary agency.

Using a conversational form could also be appealing to women writers because the criticism that is supposed to happen in conversations is particularly accessible to women. As all of the conversational guides discussed here emphasize, productive conversations are supposed to be rational and tasteful rather than scholarly. A body of specialized knowledge is not a substantive advantage for a conversational participant because conversations are not supposed to engage with topics that are likely to be inaccessible to a broad cross-section of participants. Instead, conversations are supposed to find critical value and material for rational exercise in topics that everyone can approach. Writing in a form that models itself after the conventions of polite conversation imports this ethos of accessibility into the text, and so allows women to explore serious issues without any disadvantage arising from their presumptively inferior education or lack of specialized knowledge.

Because ideals of conversation require participants to examine and try to find critical value in accessible topics, conversationally constructed fictions are also well-suited to the presentation of femino-centric narratives, the exchange of particular and often scandalous tales

dealing with individuals' vices and failings that bear such a strong resemblance to the materials and processes of gossip. The image of a group of women telling amatory stories is inevitably reminiscent of the themes and relationships of gossip. However, when the gossip-like narratives and exchanges of the framed-novelle are embedded within a rational-critical discursive form and include self-conscious reflection on the moral meaning of particular tales, texts can effectively sever the association of gossip with malice and trivia, constructing scandalous tales as exemplary materials, in much the same way as periodicals. The narratives embedded in the texts discussed in this study are all turned round by the speaking characters, examined for the social perspectives and moral exempla they contain. Conversational forms provide an in-text venue for interpretation of embedded narratives, and so show the reader how to locate significant cultural or political issues in the materials of gossip. By providing an immediate method for demonstrating the significance of embedded narratives, conversationally constructed fictions are uniquely capable of enhancing the social value of tales dealing with issues such as seductions and marriages and breaking the link between gossip and malice, and so contain obvious appeal for writers wishing to explore proto-feminist issues and uncover the social significance of women's private lives.

## Chapter 4

### Delarivier Manley

*The New Atalantis* of 1709 has a reputation as political satire attacking contemporary Whigs that makes it tempting to read Manley's work as an argument for divisions, separating its characters into corrupt Whigs and their much-deceived victims. The secret history tradition, which Rebecca Bullard describes as pitting "the populist medium of print" against "the clandestine world of the backstairs and closet" (Bullard, *Politics of Disclosure*, 6), also divides the world into those who would hide governmental corruption and those who seek to undermine political power by exposing its roots in scandal and rulers' whims. In Manley's hands, however, the motif of disclosure operates also as a critical argument for multiple levels of social identification. Bullard describes one such level by explaining that Manley used the typically Whig form of the secret history to create political criticisms that were "generous to a wide range of Tory opinion" and so encourage internal coherence within the party (Bullard, *Politics of Disclosure*, 88). Manley's work also identifies coherence and connections of other kinds, between social and sexual flaws and political corruption, between widespread mistreatment of women and systemic social abuses, and between women as such on the basis of their shared social vulnerabilities. The structural tactic of narrating scandals through and about women, and creating narrators who also provide in-text interpretations and critical reactions, also allows Manley's work to engage in self-conscious consideration of the social and political value of recounting feminocentric narratives and interpretive strategies, so that the text as a whole constructs an authoritative, feminocentric voice. It does so by deliberately questioning the uses of narrative and the relationship of amatory disasters to systemic political failure.

Manley's work also connects the materials of gossip, the methods of critical conversation, and the framed-novelle's creation of a critical standpoint. Her claim that *Atalantis* was made up of

“old Stories that all the World had long since reported” written only for “her own Amusement and Diversion”<sup>57</sup> defines her work as gossip, and the fact that she was threatened with prosecution for her writing indicates the possibility of reading it as an expression of malice. Manley’s defence, that her tales were amorous trifles written only for amusement, gestures towards another possible, but reprehensible, purpose of gossip: the pure pleasure of spreading shocking stories. However, modern and contemporary interpretations of Manley’s work as malicious gossip, prurient scandal, or a purely political intervention all err in the same way; they focus primarily or exclusively on the materials of Manley’s interpolated narratives and the persons represented therein, and too little on the methods and organizational principles of Manley’s practice of narration. Many readings of Manley’s framed-novelle are too interested in the novelle and undermine the importance of the frame. It is a tempting failing. Manley’s work does not achieve the continuity of narrative interest and character development between frame and embedded narrative that will be displayed by other writers addressed in this study. Her use of interaction between narration and self-conscious criticism does not produce the kind of bold, experimental socio-critical perspectives found in Sarah Scott’s *Millenium Hall*. Manley’s frame narrators are dull at best and irritating at worst and their critical conclusions are sometimes so facile as to make the reader suspect Manley of peculiarly sophisticated self-parody. The appeal of *New Atalantis* is and always has been between its individual narratives and its key.

If we are willing to look past the dullness and socio-critical predictability, however, we can see that Manley’s methods nonetheless create an interaction between the subjects of narrative, intradiegetic narrators, and the process of narrative criticism that creates possibilities for productive, socially useful readings of both feminocentric narrative and gossip as a critical practice. Although the goddess’s critical judgments are naïve at times, they are also a model for

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<sup>57</sup> Delarivier Manley, *The Adventures of Rivella*, in *The Selected Works of Delarivier Manley*, ed. Rachel Carnell and Ruth Herman (London: Pickering & Chatto, 2005), 4:1-94, 53,55.

how scandalous stories can become material for moralizing judgment, and how readers can interpret amatory tales for their exemplary potential. The interaction between gossip-like narration, moralizing conversation, and readers' responses disciplines both amatory tales and readers' engagement with the text into a framework of self-conscious criticism and moral awareness. In so doing, Manley rehearses the reclamation of women's stories and women's speech through their incorporation in rational-critical conversational processes that will be exercised, to better effect, in later examples of the framed-novelle. This chapter considers the satirical and feminocentric viewpoint established by the work's female narrators/commentators, the relationship between femininity and the interactive, critical reading practices encouraged by the text, the accumulation of woman-oriented embedded narratives, and finally the importance of Manley's *Memoirs of Europe* (1711) as a counterpoint to and commentary on the feminocentric focus of *New Atalantis*.

### 1. Scandals by and about Women

Although a narrator-goddess who stands for a gender-neutral quality, such as Justice, could be seen as fundamentally ungendered and a way for the author to align her work with more decidedly scholarly literary traditions,<sup>58</sup> it should be remembered that Astrea and her cohorts are still engaged in feminine patterns of social interaction. *New Atalantis* is presented as a series of unsavory stories put about by a female, Intelligence, who takes great pleasure in her role. As "first Lady of the *Bedchamber* to the *Princess Fame*,"<sup>59</sup> Intelligence is simultaneously crucial to the course of political events, and marginalized. Being first lady of the bedchamber, Intelligence occupies a powerful position, with a great deal of contact with Fame, but the name, with its reference to the intimate spaces and behaviours of another woman's bed, also grounds

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<sup>58</sup> Aaron Santesso, "The New Atalantis and Varronian Satire," *Philological Quarterly* 79:2 (Spring 2000): 177-204.

<sup>59</sup> Delarivier Manley, *The New Atalantis* in *The Selected Works of Delarivier Manley*, ed. Rachel Carnell and Ruth Herman (London: Pickering & Chatto, 2005), 2:18.

Intelligence in a frame of domestic reference. Serving the Princess Fame has a similar effect — her title gestures towards her significance in public life, while her name, Fame, registers an amorphous concept, rooted in this text in the secrets and scandals of sexuality and intimate relationships, but guiding and determining political developments. Intelligence unifies the intimate and the overtly public, the marginalized feminine and the centrally political, which makes her role a deliberate exploration of the connections between intimacy, relations between women, and public power.

The text's emphasis on relations between women is reinforced when Intelligence is summoned to help "two Strangers of your own Sex" (18) learn about Atalantis, emphasizing the feminine channels of talk, secrecy, and disclosure through which she performs her role. As the three goddesses travel through Atalantis, all but one of their interactions with others are with women. By focusing on female sources, subjects, and listeners, Intelligence establishes a women's network of those who, like herself, learn to influence events through talk. As Nicola Parsons describes in her discussion of how *New Atalantis* used the dissemination of secrets to complicate the line between political secrecy and openness, Intelligence's status as a gossip is connected to other forms of information dissemination. Parsons points out that from the civil wars through to the eighteenth century, many newsbooks, newspapers and broadsheets included "intelligence" or "intelligencer" in the title.<sup>60</sup> Intelligence is imaginatively linked with the world of print publication and news writing, so that her preference for romantic scandal stories underscores their status within the text as real intelligence, that is, as politically and socially valuable information. Intelligence's gossip operates on the border between official channels of power and female socializing, and so creates a world where, since "all the Monarchs on the Earth stand in awe" (18)

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<sup>60</sup> Nicola Parsons, "Secrecy and Enlightenment: Delarivier Manley's *New Atalantis*," in *Libertine Enlightenment: Sex, Liberty and Licence in the Eighteenth Century*, ed. Peter Cryle and Lisa O'Connell (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004), 145-61, 148.

of the Princess Fame, feminine constructions of social influence sway everything. Manley's insertion of a poem by another female writer, Anne Finch's "The Progress of Life" (311) also grounds the text as a whole in an ethos of female social and literary cooperation; she uses her own text to praise another woman's work, which in turn helps her illuminate her character's moral and social evaluations. Discursive interchange between women benefits both and enhances their critical resources. Manley's use of female narrative sources to drive her text performs a profeminist argument for women's authorial agency by locating socio-critical value in the tales that women tell each other.

Intelligence's link to the Princess Fame also reflects some of the purposes of gossiping narration that we have encountered in the periodical. The Princess Fame and her servants exercise influence through manipulation of report and social reputation, affecting political developments by affecting people's fame. The great significance of fame and reputation in Manley's text recalls the role of gossip as social discipline displayed in the periodical, a means to punish vice and encourage (apparent) virtue by making a person's success or failure dependent on the world's opinion of them. Intelligence's consciousness of her mission, reflected in the importance she places on either concealing or revealing gossip at the most opportune time, also conceives of gossip as a deliberative, goal-oriented activity. Understanding that her narratives have the power to either harm or help the persons concerned, Intelligence is also highly aware of when and how she reveals what she knows, tattling not indiscriminately, but at the best times and to the right people (19).

The role of gossip in this text is also shaped by Astrea's claim that she undertakes her journey through Atalantis in order to provide matter to educate her prince in virtue (13), even though he seems to slip out of the text fairly easily. Although he drives her decision to revisit Atalantis, Astrea only mentions the prince in passing once there (see 93 and 260). We should not,

however, allow the prince to slip out of our minds in evaluating the structure and critical potential of Manley's text. The prince may not make much of an impression on the politically-motivated reader, but his presence gives concrete direction to the possibilities of reading for exemplarity and transforming narration into an instructional tool. By claiming to direct the exchange and evaluation of gossiping stories towards the moral and social education of a prince, Manley's text encourages the development of an exemplary, educative approach to relating and reading amatory gossip. The prince is also the reason or (if we are feeling uncharitable) the pretext for incorporating the materials of gossip into the procedures and goals of conversation in Manley's work. His lingering presence gives Astrea and Virtue a reason to evaluate the tales they hear in a generalizing, moralizing manner, and consider how scandalous stories can be turned into widely applicable social conclusions. It is for this reason that Manley's work is thus able to create a blueprint for breaking the link between gossip and malice and so transform gossip into a source of literary and critical power (Spacks, *Gossip*, 153), an approach that will be elaborated and fulfilled by later framed-nouvelles.

Incorporating networks of female talk and female narrative/textual sources within a plan for educating a political leader allows Manley to move towards a significant reevaluation of women as sources for and relayers of specific types of information. Female networks become socially consequential, as the fate of Atalantis rests in the Princess Fame and Intelligence's selective concealment and revelation of what she knows. It should be noted that, while secret histories as a genre do tend to privilege the role of private scandal in defining and exposing abuses of political power, Manley's work is distinctive and important to this study because it firmly locates scandals and discursive networks within a feminocentric world. If we compare *New Atalantis* with Daniel Defoe's *Secret History of the White Staff* (1714) for example, we can see how Manley's shift into feminocentric networks of talk and influence reshapes her text's capacity for simultaneous

articulation of political and proto-feminist critique. Defoe's secret history presents its criticisms of party politics as a history of how "Schemes of Administration," have been "overturn'd by the Agency of those Instruments who acting with different Views from those under whose Conduct, and by whose Authority, they were introduc'd; have set up Schemes of their own,"<sup>61</sup> and focuses on little-known political intrigues following the trial of Dr. Sacheverell. Defoe does not, however, pay much attention to his sources. The channels of circulation for discovering and relating secretive political intrigues are not specified, and so the tale Defoe tells remains firmly rooted in the public world of Parliament and the court. In Manley's text, however, Intelligence's gleeful immersion in the process of hearing and relating scandal stories highlights the importance of the text's procedures as well as its scandalous content, and so allows *New Atalantis* to situate its political criticisms firmly within the practice of woman-dominated narration, collapsing the distinction between political scandal and gossip as a feminized discursive practice. The close interplay between story and source, content and discursive process in Manley's work locates socio-critical power not just in amatory scandals, but in the ways they are told: among groups of women. By doing so, Manley begins the development of an argument for the political, cultural, and literary significance of female discursive interaction, as well as the instructive potential of amatory tales. Manley's transformation of women's talk into political power functions, then, as an incomplete version of the culturally-critical potential in women's discursive interactions developed in later framed-novelles, as will be best demonstrated in the work of Eliza Haywood and Sarah Scott.

## 2. Femininity and Critical Reading

Manley's introduction depicts Astrea returning to the earth after leaving it in disgust, beginning her novelle where Juvenal's Satire 6, "On Women", in which the speaker raves against

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<sup>61</sup> Daniel Defoe, *The Secret History of the White Staff*, in *Political and Economic Writings of Daniel Defoe*, edited by W.R. Owens and P.N. Furbank (London: Pickering & Chatto, 2000) 2:263-95,266.

the vices of the typical women of his day, left off.<sup>62</sup> Ros Ballaster describes Manley's use of women's enforced disassociation from politics as a means to claim a special, observatory position from which women writers can create effective satire; Astrea is an already familiar figure who is transformed from a powerless observer "into a written 'witness' who seeks to bring about social and political change in order to influence the "masculine' sphere."<sup>63</sup>

On earth, Astrea's disgust with women's behaviour is turned towards a productive purpose; by watching and critiquing scenes of scandal and betrayal, Astrea can improve her own abilities as a moralizing, social critic and, through her plan of using her newfound knowledge to guide her prince, contribute to a better, more responsible system of government. Astrea's reengagement with the world and women's scandalous stories performs an argument for female social agency by locating critical, educational value in even their most stereotypically foolish actions. The exemplary potential of scandalous tales in *New Atalantis* revalues the process of telling such tales – of gossiping – but also examines and redirects the process of reading such tales. Astrea, Virtue, and other intradiegetic readers function as examples for how extradiegetic readers can engage with scandalous tales safely and productively, as they do, and so Manley's work is able to comment simultaneously on the social and literary value of telling and reading amatory, feminocentric tales.

Part of Astrea and Virtue's efficacy as judges springs from the productive interpretations they deliver of the narratives they hear. Astrea and Virtue are always invisible, and Intelligence only reveals herself occasionally, so that their relationship to the society around them is

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<sup>62</sup> See Warren S. Smith, "Satiric Advice: Serious or not?" in *Satiric Advice on Women and Marriage: From Plautus to Chaucer*, ed. Warren S. Smith (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2005), 1-12, 12-13, for a description of Juvenal's misogynistic attitudes.

<sup>63</sup> Ros Ballaster, "Manl(e)y Forms: Sex and the Female Satirist" in *Women, Texts, and Histories: 1575-1760*, ed. Clare Brant and Diane Purkiss (London; Routledge, 1992), 217-42, 227. See also Melinda Alliker Rabb's essay "The Manl(e)y Style: Delariviere Manley and Jonathan Swift" in *Pope, Swift, and Women Writers*, ed. Donald C. Mell (Newark; University of Delaware Press, 1996), 125-54, for a discussion of the interaction of romance plots and the goals of political satire in *New Atalantis*.

deliberately disengaged. Their referral of their critical practices towards Astrea's prince reflects a purpose for reading that explains their status as productive critics and readers. Astrea and Virtue do not intend to use the narratives they hear to engage with politics in Atalantis or with any of the narrative subjects. Their intention is to teach the prince about earthly society and what he can do to limit its corruptions, rather than to teach him about who did what to whom and how he can use such specific information. They are, in effect, reading for trends and examples, and so display a consistent tendency to treat particular narratives as comments on general social conditions. Their treatment of scandal stories as exemplary material displays productive, idealized reading practices; when amatory tales are consciously read as a means to understand and contain widespread social failings, they stop being licentious and corrupting influences and become instructive resources.

The self-conscious, exemplary critical practices modelled by the frame narrators are endorsed by many of the inset narratives, which are often concerned with the dangers of reading and depict characters that are antithetical, as readers, to the critically astute narrators. The primary danger in narrative becomes its potential for absorbing the reader, thereby undermining his capacity to think critically about the ideas, images, and passions presented by the narrative. The tale of Charlot and the Duke offers two examples of the dangers of absorptive reading and, through the character of Isabelle, a model for reflective, critically-oriented reading that preserves the readers' capacity for astute reaction to absorbing narrative.

The Duke and Charlot's susceptibility to the absorptive effects of narrative is first identified when the Duke watches Charlot acting as Diana. The Duke becomes obsessed with Charlot because "she Acted with so animated a Spirit, and cast such Rays of Divinity about her, gave every Word so twanging, yet so sweet an Accent" (40). It is her remarkable representation of a character embedded in a narrative that sparks his passion. While a dramatic presentation is not

read in the way that a printed text is read, it is still a narrative and so can pose similar dangers. Furthermore, the act of watching a play can, in some respects, mimic the dangerous absorption of reading. When the Duke watches Charlot become Diana, his fascination with her portrayal of the character overpowers his sense of responsibility to the real Charlot. Because the Duke initially falls in love with his ward as a fictional character, not as herself, it seems that an intimacy based on the real is no safeguard against the dangerous intimacy of narrative absorption. His obsession with her is intrinsically related to her performance, and so to his desire to read her as an imaginary character. As long as he saw Charlot merely as herself, in the banality of real life, she was only his ward and not a focus for his sexual and/or romantic fantasies. When she becomes a character, embedded in a narrative of love and lust, he is unable to separate the person from the narrative she enacts, and so becomes obsessed with her. The Duke's intense reaction to the vision of Charlot as a character in a narrative demonstrates his susceptibility to imaginative absorption, as well as the dangers narratives create for both the reader and the persons around him.

Charlot's faulty reading practices are simpler. When given access to the Duke's library she abandons her critical faculties, as demonstrated by her automatic and uncritical reactions to her new books. Reading Ovid acts on her body, not her mind, as her "young swelling Breasts...were gently heav'd at the Impression *Myrra's* Sufferings made upon her Heart" (43-44). Charlot identifies with the daughter who desires her father, and so begins the journey towards emulating its dangers. Charlot's body also becomes, like those of so many other fictional women, both an object and subject of narrative,<sup>64</sup> as she physically reacts to narratives and becomes a physical representation of men's narrative fantasies, so that her body itself is a sign of the dangerous passivity of narrative absorption.

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<sup>64</sup> See Paula Backscheider "The Rise of Gender as a Political Category" in *Revising Women: Eighteenth-Century "Women's Fiction" and Social Engagement*, ed. Paula Backscheider (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2000), 31-58, 46, for discussion of critiques of courtship and the representation of alternatives in women's writing of the period.

Isabelle, Charlot's mature confidante, proves able to experience a sensual narrative without becoming so identified with its particulars that she cannot reach a generalized judgment. When Charlot relays her own narrative to Isabelle, the latter quickly recognizes the pattern of a betrayed-maiden story and accurately assesses the likely outcome. Isabelle's accurate assessment of the situation demonstrates that she can read a particular narrative as an example of a general social truth. Isabelle is an effective critical reader because she understands how to relate Charlot's particular story to its type of amatory narratives, and reads Charlot's experiences for their instructive and critical potential. Isabelle attempts to reform Charlotte's reading practices by offering her examples from different kinds of literature of powerful women that could show her an alternative pattern for women's lives,<sup>65</sup> and so help her deparicularize her own story by associating it with broader female experience, but that attempt fails and Isabelle is left as the only character with the critical abilities necessary to evaluate Charlot's story as an exemplary lesson.

It is significant that the conditions of Isabelle's reading force her to maintain a reflective, critical approach towards the narrative in question. Charlot's dangerously absorbed readings took place alone in a library, where there was nothing to hinder the prospect of over-identification with narrative. Isabelle, however, reads Charlot's story through the medium of conversation. Charlot tells her narrative as it happens, and Isabelle continuously reacts to it. Isabelle is not tempted to identify with the sensual appeal of the story because she is always asked to react to it verbally, which means she is always required to evaluate, rather than simply appreciate. It seems that interacting with a narrative, rather than receiving it in silence, is the best way to undermine its absorptive dangers. The process of verbally reacting to a narrative, making it the basis for an evaluative, generalizing conversation, neutralizes its dangers. Isabelle's interactive experience of Charlot's narrative also encourages her to see the story as it relates to her broader social

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<sup>65</sup> Janet Todd, *The Sign of Angelica: Women, Writing, and Fiction, 1660-1800* (London: Virago Press, 1989), 94-95.

knowledge. In advising Charlot, Isabelle is able to draw on her knowledge of romantic interactions and their consequences, and so she can understand Charlot's particular dangers and vulnerabilities as an example of general female vulnerabilities. Charlot's story has critical value for Isabelle because she knows how to use it to inform her understanding of dangerous sexual conduct for women. The reading practices modelled by Charlot, the Duke, and Isabelle, help explain the interplay of narrative and conversation in *New Atalantis* by demonstrating the need for purposeful, exemplary reading in forming critical judgments. As examples of varying reading practices and their consequences, the Duke, Charlot, and Isabelle support Manley's choice of the framed-novelle, with its complex weaving of narrative with conversation, as a vehicle for sustained social criticism articulated through reclaimed romantic narratives and tool for developing self-consciously critical reading practices. Of course, Isabelle's astute reading is somewhat self-serving. She uses her knowledge of the relationship between Charlot and the Duke to win the Duke's affection and marry him herself (52-54). Isabelle turns her reading skills to a manipulative, grasping end, but they are nonetheless preservative and instructive for her. Charlot becomes a prey to a rapacious man like the Duke because of her naïve reading; she mistakes seduction for love and an intrigue for a relationship leading towards marriage, and so she is absorbed and destroyed by her amatory tale. Isabelle can interact with amatory tales safely because she recognizes the themes of seduction and betrayal with which she has become involved and uses her knowledge and critical perception to give this story an ending that is beneficial to her, although destructive to Charlot. In this embedded tale, Manley gives a satirical portrait of two women reading the same story different ways, one to a destructive and one to an instructive if self-serving end, and so presents the amatory tale as either corrupting or preservative material, depending on the reader's interpretation and contextualization of its themes.

### 3. Scandals, Secrets, and Femininity

The centrality of female connection in Manley's work is not confined to its narrative networks, but is also reflected in the text's creation of thematic resonances between the manipulated women who populate its embedded tales. The significance of exposing thematic similarities between female characters is illustrated by the odd sympathy sometimes extended to women, in their capacity as women, who are also political targets. For example, in the episode of Mrs. Nightwork, the gossipy midwife interrupts her circumstantial account of attending on "the lovely Dutchess" (Barbara Palmers) who was mistress to Sigismund II (160) by referring to a number of other women she has treated under similar conditions, one of whom is identified as Sarah Churchill. The Churchills are among Manley's favourite satirical targets, but in this episode, Mrs. Nightwork describes Sarah only as a "certain, *now* great, Lady" who "fell in Labour when she was at Court in waiting and was forced to appear the next Day at Dinner in Quality of *Maid*" (162). In this incident, nothing is said of Sarah Churchill's political manoeuvring or the Churchills' ambition. Churchill, here, is portrayed as a sexually flawed woman whose story illustrates her similarities to other women on the grounds of their shared sexual vulnerability. Reference to Sarah Churchill also follows Mrs. Nightwork's description of how Sigismund II's wife revenged herself on the Duchess by insisting that the entire court remove to another location shortly after the birth, demanding that the Duchess accompany her on horseback, thereby suffering all the pain of a long jolting ride in a vulnerable condition. Intelligence expresses considerable sympathy for the Duchess despite her moral laxity, claiming that this decision was "something *Ill-natur'd* and *Cruel* in her *Majesty*" (161).

The goddess's discussion with Mrs. Nightwork is contained by the story of Harriat, who deliberately provoked her cousin into sexual misconduct while publicly parading her own virtue, only to be seduced herself after destroying other women's reputations. Guilty as she is, Harriat

provokes sympathy from the goddesses, who hear her crying with labour pains before Mrs. Nightwork arrives. Virtue exclaims “will it not be necessary to offer our assistance to the Lady in pain? Charity forbids me to enquire too nicely into the Circumstance...but *Mercy* weighs nothing in comparison with itself. Shall we not appear and offer her our assistance in her Misery?” Astrea, too, announces that she is “not satisfied however at not assisting the lady” (159) and even Intelligence, in her eagerness to share the scandal, asks the goddesses to “be pleas’d to follow me to a convenient distance...lest we more afflict and confound her” (158). In their concern for Harriat, the goddesses express sympathy for her suffering along with and in spite of their duty to condemn her moral failings. As she does with the Duchess, Intelligence shows sympathy, condemning the cruelty of making her suffer even though she recognizes how she has wronged the angry queen.

In this context, the presentation of Sarah Churchill as another woman treated by Mrs. Nightwork includes her in a climate of sympathy for suffering women as women despite their moral and/or political flaws. The representation of Barbara Palmers as the Duchess has nothing to do with her political meddling and focuses only on her danger, suffering, and desperation to preserve her reputation. In Nightwork’s mention of Churchill, she too is just another suffering woman. After hearing the story of Harriat, even though it has exposed her malice and obsessive need to shame others, Intelligence acknowledges that she has been “irresistibly betray[ed]” by her “darling Passion”(177) and a man who concocted a deliberate scheme to ruin her. So, she who has been a kind of villain in her interactions with others, ends up a victim like them because of their shared, gendered, vulnerabilities. The goddesses’ simultaneous condemnation of and commiseration with Harriat demonstrates how femininity can become a bond between enemies. Harriat, despite being a force for social mischief, becomes another sufferer because she is a woman with a woman’s liability to sexual danger, and so shares something distinctive and

essential with the other women, like the cousin that she has mistreated, so that the final purpose of her narrative is to demonstrate just how much she shares with the women to whom she once believed herself superior.

Seduction and pregnancy, in this series of vignettes, act as great levelers of women. Harriat, the Duchess, and Churchill are all entrants in Mrs. Nightwork's catalogue of female suffering and all illustrate her underlying argument that women are often led, through their folly and misfortune, to perform things "*dangerous to Life, and disagreeable to our Tastes, and even Interests, to preserve that Idol of the World, Reputation*", which she calls "the only Rival that Love can have" (160). The political significance of these women plays only a supporting role, for the moment, to the illustration of their shared vulnerability to sexual risk and the need to preserve an acceptable reputation. In this section, Manley's exposure of the secret dangers of women's lives makes political satire accompany a developing view of women as a group, whose shared vulnerabilities can unite them across other dividing lines.

The use of satirical narratives to perform both political criticisms and the creation of women as a class is most in evidence when Manley inserts her own story into her work. The story of Delia is an allusion to and defence of Manley's own bigamous marriage to her cousin John Manley. Delia, after her father's death, is left to the care of her relation Don Marcus. Don Marcus confines Delia with an elderly aunt where she spends her time reading, and believing, chivalric romances. He then persuades Delia to marry him, concealing the fact that his wife is still living. Delia is virtually imprisoned by her husband and unable to leave him for several years because of her poverty and damaged reputation (257-58). Astrea meets the conclusion of this tale with narrative exhaustion. She exclaims "I am weary of being entertained with the Fopperies of the Fair...How is it possible to hinder the Women from *believing* or the Men from *deceiving*?" She goes on to consider how her prince can punish seducers, perhaps even imposing the death penalty on

those who are found to seduce with “*false-deluding-Praise, Heart-breaking Sacrifice, or fond Complaints of Cruelty and Charms*” (259-60). Astrea’s complaint about the series of fopperies of the fair imposes retroactive interpretive unity on all of the narratives up to this point. In bringing all of the text’s previous narratives together under the designation fopperies of the fair and proposing legal harshness with seducers as a method of social reform, she enables a reading of the text that centres on its narratives’ common elements of delusion and seduction.

Intelligence expands this interpretive framework by explaining how the social problem of seduction illustrates the failings inherent in Atlantis’s legal and social systems. She tells us that although there are laws in force to punish bigamists “they have found an easy *Evasion* from the *Penalty*” by using money and favour to sway the corrupted courts. She also interprets Don Marcus’s seduction of his ward as an example of both sexual corruption and ingratitude, supporting her observation that “the Race of Men are arrived to that Perfection in *Arts, Sciences, Villainy* and *Penetration* that there can be no Laws contrived, how binding soever...but what they can extenuate” (261). Astrea and Intelligence’s reactions to the fopperies of the fair identify romantic corruption as both a shared, gendered danger and an indication of systemic flaws and abuses of power in Atlantis.

Intelligence’s reaction accepts the pervasive social force of sexual corruption and associates it with other legal and social failings, so that women’s shared catastrophes can be read as elements of and participants in broad cultural flaws. In her reading, the problem of bigamy illustrates quasi-legal abuses of power. Because the courts are corrupt, accused persons can avoid justice by using their “arts to prolong and spin out to prodigious length what they fear will be determined against them” (260). Women are thus vulnerable to lengthy marriage suits which illustrate that systemic corruption can inhibit the administration of justice and disadvantage the poor or unconnected. In interpreting Don Marcus’s sexual crimes as part of his ingratitude to

Delia's father, Intelligence associates romantic scandal and sexual misbehaviour with the broad tendency to self-interest, ingratitude, and lack of loyalty that characterizes the text's descriptions of more directly political scandals. Intelligence's assessment of Delia's story as a part of the text's ongoing focus on the fopperies of the fair integrates romantic and political scandals into a broad social critique where betrayal and corruption on both political and personal levels are created and enabled by the same systemic social tendencies towards self-interest and ingratitude.

*New Atalantis's* recognition and evaluation of the female vulnerability shared by its satirical targets and the interdependence of romantic and political scandal enables a multi-layered approach to the use and exposure of secrets as a narrative tactic. As discussed above, Manley's wide-ranging attacks on Whig figures are a means to encourage internal Tory coherence. Similarly, her equally broad survey of women and their catastrophes encourages a form of internal female coherence, recognition that women despite their differences face a set of common enemies, just as Tories, however divided, are all ranged against Whiggish threat. Reading Manley's combination of femininity and political satire in this way means that neither is a screen for the other. Feminocentric catastrophes do not hide or encode political failings. Instead, political dangers and women's dangers reflect each other, with each positing the existence of an embattled group needing to defend itself against a set of manipulative and morally bankrupt ill-wishers.

The dual messages of Manley's disclosures also work towards another kind of coherence, between political topics, female vulnerability, and the kinds of social corruption that create both political and sexual dangers. The story of Volpone and Lousia is the best example of how Manley reclaims amatory tales for critically useful purposes by exposing this connection to widespread abuses of power and moral failure. Intelligence introduces their narrative by considering the corruption of the legal system, of which Volpone is a part. She asks Astrea how

she would react to “two People (eminent for Dignity and Fortune) contending Years together, for an Estate, to which neither of ‘em have a right? ... What would *Astrea* have said, to have seen in one Cause and at one Tryal, seventy Witnesses go away perjur’d, most of them so well manag’d, as to believe themselves in the right? ... And yet the Redress they pretend to give us for the Grievances of the inferior Courts of Justice, is in its Nature the highest Grievance”(130). This initial complaint addresses justice in its strictest sense, focusing on overtly litigious people, perjury, and a flawed appeals system, but Intelligence only gestures towards and summarizes these problems. When Manley shifts into her typically detailed narration, of Louisa’s story, she describes instead the romantic scandals of a former Grand President, Volpone. Although this shift seems to abandon the discussion of justice, the story and its framing criticism acts as a carefully crafted attempt to insist on the interpersonal side of legal relationships and to question broad social failings by using a specific amatory narrative as a critical lens.

Intelligence tells the goddesses that a wise litigant refrained from prosecuting his suit “whilst the *Grand- President* that then was, officiated; he knew he mortally hated him and could not enough confide in his Principles, to secure himself from being oppressed by his Resentment and Power” (130). A prudent litigant, and by extension, prudent member of Atalantian society, understands that legal argument and personal relationships are inextricable, and so negotiates the space between official institutions and private relationships for his advantage. Although Volpone’s seduction of and continued relationship with Louisa is not a legal matter in any formal or institutional sense, the story of his interaction with her revolves around themes of self-serving argument and perverted justice. Volpone’s infatuation with Louisa proceeds along a similar pattern to the Duke’s obsession with Charlot, with the main conflict arising from Volpone’s desire, her apparently unassailable virtue, and his responsibilities as her guardian, until their night at the opera gives an opening into potentially effective argument. Volpone is

able to transform the opera and its presentation of bigamy into what is almost a legal argument, introducing a “learned Discourse of the lawfulness of double Marriages”(133) and going on to justify his assertion through various appeals to social precedents and arguments on the relative weight of natural and social laws. Volpone uses the time it takes women to carry a child to term to prove to his wife and Louisa that it is acceptable and even beneficial for a man to have multiple wives, according to the laws of nature. Later, when alone with Louisa at the country house, he returns to his previous arguments on polygamy and expands on them until “at length he almost convinc’d her that the Law of Nature was prior, and ought to take place” (137). Having done so, Volpone and Louisa call themselves married and continue their affair in apparent tranquillity for a considerable period.

Volpone’s use of legalistic argument in his relationship with Louisa allows him to combine sexual predation with corruption as a judge and legal agent.<sup>66</sup> The romance story, with its dependence on a blend of self-serving seduction and equally corrupt but plausible legalistic argument, is a cognate to the flaws of *Atalantis*’s court system and its judges. Like the Grand President who uses legal methods to satisfy his hatred for litigants, Volpone uses legal argument to satisfy his lust and, by doing so, demonstrates both the relevance of apparently frivolous stories (the stories that make up the matter of the *Atalantis*) to public affairs and the moral failures — unscrupulousness and manipulation of power — that enable miscarriages of justice and romance. This story also demonstrates the crucial importance of the type of intelligence that Intelligence possesses; unlike the unwary litigants who have been mistreated in court because of the judge’s personal interests, Intelligence understands how private actions drive legal and political decisions,

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<sup>66</sup> See Kathryn Temple, “Manley’s ‘Feigned Scene: The Fiction of Law at Westminster Hall,” *Eighteenth-Century Fiction* 22 (2010): 573-598 for a discussion of how *Atalantis* and *Rivella* work to expose the law’s relation to affective desire, 578.

and her illumination of a political actor's private character is essential to understanding their performance of their official roles.

By articulating political satire through an expansive network of female sources and subjects, *New Atalantis* manipulates the relationship between the political world and feminocentric concerns. In this gossip-driven climate, where Intelligence, Virtue, and Astrea criticize the dark underside of political actors and actions to demonstrate how corrupt politicians are also corrupt as persons, they are able to move easily between discussing such overtly political problems as monarchical succession and allegiance and seduction, fidelity, and romantic betrayals, the ingredients of feminocentric romance narratives. The text as a whole refuses to see any clear or coherent distinction between systemic political corruption and widespread social failure. In consistently conflating the two and viewing both through a lens of female connection, *New Atalantis* is able to make political satire and the exposure of systemic, gendered social failings coterminous. In so doing, Manley also rehabilitates amatory narratives by demonstrating how they can be used to provoke consideration of universally relevant political corruption. Using amatory tales to reflect on the causes behind both personal and political corruption creates an interdependent relationship between the two, and so produces literary value and critical authority out of the materials of sexual scandal.

#### **4. The Limits of Female Connections**

The text's formation of social judgments through female talk and shared experiences shows a potentially darker side when used to interpret Intelligence's description of the New Cabal. Although, as David Robinson persuasively argues in "For How Can They be Guilty?: Lesbian and Bisexual Women in Manley's *New Atalantis*" (2001), Intelligence's refusal to offer a definitively sexual interpretation of the women's relationships may well be an attempt to use playful

ambiguity to express criticism of lesbianism,<sup>67</sup> it stands out from all her other recitations of gossip and scandal precisely because it is the only instance in which she acknowledges an inconsistency between public gossip and speculation and her own detailed knowledge of scandal. Intelligence claims that the New Cabal “a Sect (however innocent in itself)...does not fail from meeting its share of Censure from the World” (177). She goes on to claim that such censors “must carry their Imaginations a much greater length than I am able to do mine” (177) in order to think of the possibility of lesbian activity, despite the fact that she does describe women whose relationships have romantic and erotic overtones, such as the Marchioness of Sandomire who, with her favorite lanthe, “used to Mask her Diversions in the Habit of the other Sex and...wander through the Gallant Quarter of *Atalantis* in search of Adventures” (180). Intelligence’s vehemence in asserting that the women of the Cabal must be innocent, such as her exclamation that the Marchioness’s adventures were “none that could in *reality* wound her Chastity!” (180), merely demonstrates that she can indeed imagine the contrary.

What is lacking to make the Cabal a portrait of lesbian activity is Intelligence’s recognition of what she is describing, which she refuses to give. It seems too simplistic to attribute this refusal to the fact that erotic relationships between women could not be openly narrated given that the author otherwise did not shrink from openly and salaciously describing virtually every imaginable variation on seduction. The purpose of Intelligence’s ambiguous descriptions may then be to create a gap or lack of connection between the implications of the stories she tells and her stated opinions of them, rather than to avoid acknowledging lesbian activity; they reflect unwillingness or inability to evaluate, rather than an unwillingness to narrate.

The Cabal is in some ways the unintended fulfilment of Astrea’s social criticisms, as when she determines that it is not possible to hinder women from believing or men from deceiving

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<sup>67</sup> David Michael Robinson, “For How can they be guilty?: Lesbian and Bisexual Women in Manley’s *New Atalantis*,” *Nineteenth-Century Contexts* 23 (2001): 187-220, 192, 193.

(259-60). Astrea's attack on covetousness (she asserts that "It creates an habitual *hardness* of Nature! ... by which they see the *Miseries* and *Wants* of others, not only without *relieving*, but not daring to compassionate 'em, lest that Compassion reach to a lessening of their Store" (240) also resonates with the construction and practices of the Cabal. Although the text does come close to narrating amorous attachments between the women, it is explicit in describing how their relationships are subsumed within an ideology promoted by the Cabal, "their tender *Amity*" (179). The Cabal creates guidelines for those members who are married or who must marry to ensure that their "soft passions" are not allowed to triumph over their endeavours to secure acceptable social positions for themselves. Although some members of the Cabal have had damaging interactions with men, such as Daphne and the comedian, they are removed from the community, either implicitly through Daphne's retirement to the country with her husband (182) or, in the comedian's case, through emphatic ejection (178). Other women, such as the Marchioness of Sandomire, use their relationships to men to enable their adventures with women without harm to themselves, so that the Cabal's practices apparently do create a space where some women are hindered from believing, and some men from deceiving. Furthermore, "in this little *Commonwealth* is no *Property*; whatever a Lady possesses is, *sans ceremonie*, at the service and for the use of her *Fair Friend*, without the vain *nice* scruple of being oblig'd" (185). The women of the Cabal are unique among Atalantian society in their use of their fortunes as a common fund, to support and cement friendship, and so are almost the exact reverse of Astrea's complaint about the covetousness that destroys compassion. In some ways the Cabal is the extreme but logical response to the social ills that Astrea has identified. The Cabal has created a safe space where their exclusion of men and ideology of female friendships pre-empt heterosexual seduction and scandal, and they seem to have completely transcended that obsession with improving their fortunes that has driven so many other scandals in Atalantis.

The women of the Cabal fill a social need that the text as a whole has implicitly created, that of a haven of affection and generosity for women, and Astrea acknowledges their value in this respect when she claims that “tender *Friendship*, inviolable and sincere” is “the nearest approach they can make, a *Feint*, a distant *Landshape* of immortal *Joys*” (185). With all its benefits, however, the Cabal is still not presented as an answer to the seductions and romantic catastrophes that plague the women of Atalantis. Instead, it is like a limit-case for the female cooperation and vision of female commonality that the work as a whole implicitly endorses. Astrea is unable to truly praise the Cabal because as she points out, their relationships could allow them to “*fortifie* themselves...against the *Hymenial Union*” (185). Women who refuse to marry, or who marry solely to have an acceptable cover for their devotion to female relationships, avoid their acknowledged (if faulty) social role, which Astrea describes as “to adorn the *Husband’s* reign, perfect his *Happiness*, and propagate the *Kind*” (185).

It may also be the possibility of exclusivity in romantic relationships among women that prevents Astrea from endorsing them, and allows the Cabal to function as an internal limit on Manley’s use of female networks through the work as a whole; in describing the deep affections between the Cabal’s women, Intelligence claims that they are known to “reserve their *Heart*, their tender *Amity* for their *Fair Friend*” (179). If a woman reserves her heart, her emotional energy and capacity for commitment, for her fair friend, then she has withdrawn it from the heteronormative world at large. If we argue, as this thesis does, that the framed-novelle identifies women as a class with shared gendered vulnerabilities, then the lesbian is a complication and a disruption of that identification. We have seen in the cluster of tales surrounding Mrs. Nightwork above, that women’s gendered vulnerabilities are sexual and reproductive. Throughout this thesis, we will see women identified as a coherent class on the basis of heteronormative and domestic/familial dangers. Simply put, women in the framed-novelle are a coherent class because they are

endangered by men and familial structures. The lesbian, the woman who truly reserves her heart for her fair friend, participates in a different sexual and social economy. She is not vulnerable to male seduction and her dangers, whatever they may be, are not the same as those of a woman participating in ordinary domestic and familial relations. Lesbians may threaten the framed-novelle's feminocentric perspectives because they are women separated from men and domesticity, and so separated from other, more typical women. They are women who do not fit neatly within a generalizing argument about how contemporary society systemically endangers women. We will see, when discussing Jane Barker's work, that sometimes the lesbian is not even clearly gendered as a woman. Lesbianism, as a bond between women that separates them from the heteronormative and domestic world, actually tends to undermine broad female commonality in these works because it creates distinct classes of women with different interests and vulnerabilities. Thus, lesbianism undermines the function of accumulated anecdotes in creating a generalized argument about female experience and its flaws. The Cabal's hints of lesbianism, and Intelligence and Astrea's reaction to those hints, are the text's own answer to objections about the dangers of its implicit, profeminist argument for female cooperation and distrust of men.

##### **5. *Memoirs of Europe***

In discussing Manley, Behn, and Haywood, William Warner questions the "feminocentric" nature of their works by claiming that they were read by a mixed-gender audience and emphasizes that attempts to intervene in political life must necessarily address men (Warner, *Licensing Entertainment*, 91). What he fails to address is the significance of female narrators and feminine narrative patterns in creating a text that is feminocentric while performing a political intervention. In *Memoirs of Europe*, Manley uses the framed-novelle to depict a narrative project and approach to reading that are distinctly different from that of *New Atalantis*. *Memoirs* uses contrasts between male and female narrators/listeners to explore the interpretive consequences

of reading a narrative for the particular information it contains, and reading it as exemplary matter from which the reader can deduce generally applicable social principles.

The importance of gendered narrators and narrative patterns is apparent in the different functions of the combination of narrative and frame in *New Atalantis* and *Memoirs of Europe*. The central project is different in *Memoirs* because Horatio's plan of retirement is disrupted by Wisdom, who insists: "let thy active Soul rush again into the Field of Glory."<sup>68</sup> Wisdom modifies his expressed plan to "make himself the Judge of that Renown...so profusely bestow'd upon this Prince [Theodorick]" (16), a project that, in its tendency to evaluate rather than participate, is reminiscent of Astrea's return to earth to judge mankind's moral condition. Wisdom substitutes a project of rushing into glory, which is insistently active and, with its implications of military leadership, suggests an official, political role. Horatio has the option of rushing "into the Field of Glory" because he is a man and an experienced political actor, and so he does not need to rely on feminized tactics like talk, observation, and the transformation of personal, sexual influence into political power, making this difference in purpose gender-dependent.

Wisdom's intervention also disrupts Horatio's involvement with two goddesses, Sincerity and Solitude, whose reading habits resemble those of Astrea and Virtue. Horatio eavesdrops on Sincerity and Solitude as they discuss a widespread lack of sincerity and its interconnected social ills such as pervasive romantic betrayal and political chicanery; like Astrea and Virtue, Sincerity and Solitude read interconnected social flaws as evidence of a shared, underlying problem. Horatio wishes to join them in this socio-critical discussion, begging them not to reject a votary who "in all things relating to himself reveres and follows what you dictate" (23). Wisdom has other plans for him, claiming that "it is not for such a Hero such as *Horatio* to resign himself to Indolence and Solitude...implore assistance of the *Vandal* King to transport thee to *Constantinople*" (24). The

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<sup>68</sup> Delarivier Manley, *Memoirs of Europe*, in *Selected Works of Delarivier Manley*, ed. Rachel Carnell and Ruth Herman (London, Pickering & Chatto, 2005), 3: 23.

most significant aspect of Wisdom's intervention is her claim that "indolence and solitude" are unacceptable for "a hero such as Horatio". It is hard to see how Solitude and Sincerity's critical practices are indolent. Although their tone is sometimes self-pitying, they are engaged in significant social diagnostics as they use their observations of human society to arrive at a comprehensive explanation of the reasons behind systemic social flaws. The real trouble with Sincerity and Solitude's discursive practices is that they can be seen as indolent for a hero such as Horatio, meaning, for a reader who can use his observations for more immediate and concrete purposes. Making himself a judge of Theodorick or of the social ills caused by a lack of sincerity is inadequate because he has the option to implore Theodorick for assistance and change political affairs instead. Wisdom's implication seems to be that a focus on generalizing evaluation will undermine Horatio's participation in guiding his country's political fate.

When Horatio interacts with other men, he is again redirected from a generalizing moralistic discussion into politically useful narration. At first, Monsieur L'Envoye and Horatio engage in a broad discussion of love: its irresistibility, the relationships between passion and desire, and different effects on different persons (24-26). Although this discussion could be linked by Astrea or Sincerity to themes of social and political problems as it touches on the underlying qualities of constancy, changeability, and self-interest, Horatio and L'Envoye do not identify any way in which romantic love can be an exemplary tool for understanding social conditions. Instead, Horatio calls their discussion a "dry Dispute" and recommends that they "forbear to discourse of what we feel" (27). Instead, he asks L'Envoye to give a narration of recent events in Sarmatia, with the implication that he expects such a topic to be politically useful. L'Envoye even articulates the possibility that what he is about to tell Horatio could, if he were less honourable, be used to fuel the fighting between their masters, and so keeps the discussion firmly grounded in Horatio's specific mission of seeking assistance from Theodorick.

Rather than observing, comparing, and judging, Horatio is ordered actively to engage with Theodorick and use him to return to political activity. Therefore, he favours directly useful narrations in his interactions with L'Envoye. The central project in *Memoirs* is transformed from critical observation to direct use of the particular information learned through narratives, which may explain why the conversational structure of *Memoirs* fails to help Horatio achieve his ends. Horatio has not reached Theodorick by the end of the text. He has not gone very far at all, and so *Memoirs* ends with the sense that his mission is just beginning and the conversations contained in it read more like digressions, diversions, and occasional self-glorifications than consciously critical acts. The difference in the use of and response to narratives between *New Atalantis* and *Memoirs of Europe* reflects the different use-value, for male and female readers/listeners, of particular scandal narratives. For a female reader/listener, like the two texts' goddess figures, the particulars of how a specific person has meddled in political affairs are not useful alone. They generally cannot punish offenders or assist the virtuous by themselves, and so the details of a particular person's behaviour are not useful alone. Because they only have the capacity to effect social change by indirect means, such as instructing the prince in virtue and justice, they do not need to know only who has done what and to whom, but how a widespread tolerance for corruption creates systemic political and social flaws. A female reader/listener has a strong incentive to read scandal stories for their exemplary potential because the best way for her to stay safe herself in society and encourage reform is to identify the common causes and warning signs of injustice and misuse of power.

Horatio, and other male readers, have a different set of incentives. As Wisdom reminds him, Horatio can assist or plague particular political actors. Horatio does not need to read for exemplarity in order to combat broad social flaws because he has the option of combating particular instances of political abuses. The trouble with Horatio's reading model is the effect it

has on the socio-critical value of the types of narratives in both of Manley's texts. In *New Atalantis*, the use of licentious stories is justified because their very dirtiness is used to extract generally applicable lessons about the consequences of immorality and advice on how to avoid repeating the narrative subjects' fates. Narratives in *Memoirs* are just as licentious but, when read for specifically political rather than moralizing purposes, they are not as effectively justified as tools for social instruction. Horatio and the other men who exchange scandalous narratives for entertainment or for their own advantage are not modelling the reflective reading practices that enhance an amatory narrative's literary and critical value and so their gendered reading goals can, in effect, undermine the framed-novelle's ability to blend narration and critical reaction in order to demonstrate the social value of femino-centric stories and experiences.

Considering the differences in central purpose between *Atalantis* and *Memoirs*, it is significant that all of the people Horatio meets are themselves heavily involved in real politics and most of them are men. Involvement in real politics is explicitly presented as a barrier to effective conversation and narrative evaluation, as when Monsieur L'Envoye tells Horatio that he must "Forget you have been a General for the *Emperor* and by your great Capacity the most formidable enemy of my Master: I will also forbear to remember that I am Envoy from the King of the *Franks*" (27) in order to entertain him properly. This statement may be the most salient point of difference from *Atalantis*. Astrea and Virtue, after all, never suggest forgetting their identity or their roles as embodiments of positive qualities. Intelligence certainly never forgets her function as a servant of Fame. Their identities are never imagined as a barrier to their productive conversation, and the differences between them may, in fact, enhance their discussions. Although L'Envoye and Horatio are able to put their political opposition aside long enough to have a civil interaction, their narratives do not enable sustained social criticism, as when L'Envoye begins a story of the Samaritans but abruptly breaks into the decidedly vague

allegory of his love for an idiot (30-37). L'Envoye justifies this very abrupt break in his relation by saying that "even in Reading (where we generally bring more Attention than in Discourse) we love a Relief" (30), a claim that, when combined with his apparent desire to avoid truly challenging discourse, questions the efficacy of conversation as a critical tool for political actors like himself and Horatio.

The problem persists, and becomes more obvious, when the Count St. Gironne is introduced as an additional frame narrator. After being asked to discuss the current state of affairs in Constantinople, St. Gironne realizes that "Horatio's Discretion wou'd not suffer him to say things of the *Constantinopolitan* Court, which might reflect upon the Weakness of the Emperor, since in speaking of him, one cou'd not forget his Indolence...Therefore to oblige both, he began with telling 'em thus" (85), and St. Gironne goes on to focus his criticism on Irene, her favorite general and, in fact, anyone except the emperor himself. Here, the intense involvement of the narrators in the tales they relate handicaps not only their capacity for critical reaction, but the honesty and reliability of their narratives.

St. Gironne must censor himself depending on his addressee, which means that his awareness of his listeners' interest in his subject matter limits his willingness to offer material for criticism. These difficulties in blending actual politics with critical discourse are, in their own way, a restatement of the dangers of narrative absorption. Just as Charlot in *Atalantis* struggled to read her situation properly because she was too identified with the narrative to perceive the relationship of her particular situation to general social ills, Horatio and St. Gironne struggle to integrate their stories in productive discourse, and have to take extreme and disingenuous distancing measures, such as claiming to forget who they are, in order to build a conversation. Horatio and the other men treat their tales as an interlude in their direct political activity; they can and presumably will use specific information contained in specific narratives to interact with

the actual persons involved. Because the men could engage with political scandals and their narrative subjects on an individual, personalized level, they do not read for trends and exemplary lessons the way Astrea and the goddesses do. They do not try to understand tales of political scandals as examples of social failings or shared human flaws. Hence, their critical reactions do not extend past the particular circumstances of individual narratives. So, Horatio's capacity for critical conversation is, like Charlot's, handicapped by his over-involvement in the particular circumstances of the tales he tells and hears; because he and his conversational circle are themselves active political subjects, their political tales cannot take on the broad social resonance of *Atalantis*.

The connections between narrative and conversation in *Memoirs* are also complicated by the differences in source material between *Memoirs* and *Atalantis*. As Manley claimed, *Atalantis* was based on old gossip that all of London had long discussed, so that the text itself was, as Rebecca Bullard describes it, "a textualized version of oral gossip."<sup>69</sup> *Memoirs*, however, is born out of other printed sources on Roman history and allegorized to fit contemporary British politics, so that orality and reliance on conversation for judgment are not organic parts of the text. The difference in sources, which introduces the theme of conversation after the fact, as it were, also fits with the two texts' presentations of the relationship between political scandal and the dangers of private life and romantic activity. *Atalantis's* reliance on oral gossip uses scandal as a political tool while it exposes the widespread social flaws of betrayal, ingratitude, and abuse of power that reflect and enable both political and romantic corruption. *Memoirs* also uses scandal as a political tool. Its scandals, however, are based in sources presented as if a part of a duly recorded history of political events. Even if they are not factually true, the presentation of scandals in *Memoirs* remains rooted in the world of military manoeuvring and political office-

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<sup>69</sup> Rebecca Bullard, "Secret History: The Politics of Narrative Form, 1674-1725" (DPhil thesis, Oxford University, 2007), 73.

holding, so that they are never as effective at identifying and reacting to general social problems. The narratives of *Memoirs* have great difficulty in achieving the level of critical efficacy of *Atalantis* because they do not rise to the same level of generality and exemplarity – a difference that may be largely explained by the two works' differing uses of gendered interaction and interpretation.

## 6. Male Narration and Narrative Absorption

Male frame narrators complicate the critical efficacy of the conversational model. Male narrators do not, like the women of *Atalantis*, have to identify warning signs of romantic and political corruption in order safely to negotiate their social environment. Their political activity does not have to be redirected or obscured, as it is for women, and so they have fewer incentives to explore the ties between personal and political failings. Because male narrators are not necessarily tied to the unofficial world of secretive social manoeuvring, they do not have the same incentive to read particular stories as evidence and examples of systemic social ills. The frame narrators of *Atalantis* are, like most of the female characters they discuss, on the fringes of political power. For them, the act of revealing secrets and enacting criticism through narration and conversation is the best means at their disposal for effecting change. Their criticism is an end in itself and is oriented towards the identification of broad social issues and the underlying connections between romantic and political corruption. The frame narrators of *Memoirs*, however, are situated firmly within political power. Critical conversation and consideration of social conditions cannot be an end in itself for them because they always have the capacity to act in response to particular tales, rather than merely to speak and evaluate. Their critical discussion is, therefore, both less purposeful and less broadly applicable than the narrators of *Atalantis*. *L'Envoye's* tendency to move abruptly between strictly political themes and personal stories demonstrates the difficulty that the narrators of *Memoirs* experience in

expressing wide social themes through particular stories. L'Envoye's narrative style is quite the opposite of the skillful blend of sex and politics in *Atalantis*. When Horatio asks L'Envoye to tell him of the Princess of Samartia's wedding, he claims that he "aims to be diverted as well as instructed" and L'Envoye responds by admitting that "I was just step'd into Politicks" (45). Horatio and L'Envoye, then, see a clear distinction between diversion and instruction, romance and politics, and so are not as skilled as the narrators of *Atalantis* in recognizing the critical power contained in a supposedly personal tale.

When L'Envoye does attempt to tell scandalous personal stories as a means of political discourse, his manner of blending the two also hints at a relationship to social criticism that is very different from that presented in *Atalantis*. After recounting the long story of Honoria's suicide over Prince Alexis's betrayal, L'Envoye says, simply, that "it was no longer a Mystery to me, why he was not belov'd by the *Samartians*" (65) and goes on to describe, in much greater detail, how he used his new relationship with the High-Priest to further his political purposes. It seems here that the story of Honoria is significant primarily because the process of hearing it gives L'Envoye a connection to the High-Priest. It does not act as a catalyst for a critical conversation concerning Samartian society and the consequences of sexual failings, as it could have in *Atalantis*. L'Envoye's lack of any broad, socio-critical reaction to the story itself indicates that, for him, narrative and discussion are directly political tools, rather than an educative, evaluative process as they are for the frame narrators of *Atalantis*.

Because L'Envoye understands the individual narratives he hears and retells as tools for political action rather than sites for critical discourse, his role as a frame narrator lacks the sense of wide, socio-critical purpose displayed by *Atalantis*'s goddesses and female sources. The differing purposes of conversation in *Atalantis* and *Memoirs* are also demonstrated by the lack of any real critical reaction to the embedded narratives, and lingering implications that story-

telling in *Memoirs* is often undertaken for the primary purpose of entertainment. After Count St. Gironne finishes his story of Alarick and the Princess Annagilda, Horatio and L'Envoye's reaction is to "return him their Acknowledgments, with Expressions how much they were pleas'd; at the same time tenderly regretting the Fate of the lovely Princess *Annagilda*, detesting *Rodegund's* Gunning and dextrous Malice. They amused themselves for some time, at guessing...at the Destiny of Count *Alarick*" (83). Although Horatio and L'Envoye do "tenderly regret" Annagilda's fate, their willingness to be pleased by the story despite its dismal end and their enjoyment of non-critical speculation on Alarick's fate indicate that their regret is a function of uncritical sympathy, not a reasoned, moralizing reaction. It is worth remembering that Astrea and Virtue never express "how much they were pleas'd" with any of the tales they hear. Horatio and L'Envoye's pleasure demonstrates their understanding of the story as entertainment first and moral fable second, if at all. This understanding of an embedded narrative's purpose simplifies and undermines the relationship of the frame to its stories. When critical commentary on embedded narratives is minimized, it becomes unnecessary to try to tease out the way in which narrative enables the critical process, but it also seems to render the frame itself unnecessary because the frame narrators contribute so little to the socio-political message of the embedded narratives. All three of the primary narrators – Horatio, L'Envoye, and St. Gironne – repeatedly claim that their interest in telling and hearing stories springs from either a desire for entertainment or a desire to confirm facts with which they are already familiar, as when St. Gironne asks "Will not *Horatio* the Immortal, give some Account of the *Iberian War*, and of those Adventures that have made him dear to Fame?" (142). Hence, the critical function of *Memoirs* as a whole is displaced from the motif of conversation into the embedded narratives themselves.

The entertainment function of the embedded narratives in *Memoirs* is, however, threatened by the narrators' involvement in the tales they tell. When St. Gironne finishes his long discussion of Irene, the general, and their manipulation of the emperor, Horatio's reaction is not an exclamation against the power-hungry persons who have caused such damage to his country, but the claim that "Monsieur *le Count*...you are a bitter Enemy" (118). Here, Horatio uses the narrative as neither a form of entertainment nor an opportunity for criticism, but a diagnostic tool. The narrative tells him little about abuses of power, but a great deal about the narrator. St. Gironne is backed into defending himself, saying that he speaks harshly of the court at Constantinople "not that I am unfair, but because that they are notoriously foul" (120), but Horatio does not respond, and so that opportunity for objective dialogue is passed over. Here involvement in a narrative and an intention to use it to critique particular persons, instead of social tendencies, endangers not just critical capacity but the narrative itself, as it breeds mistrust and resentment towards the narrator, and so undermines the narrative's status as a useful critical tool.

### **7. Feminine Fascination and Critical Redirection**

The only female narrator in *Memoirs*, Ethelinda, occupies a position similar to her male counterparts in that she has taken on an explicit role within established power structures. As an emissary to Theodorick, Ethelinda is a political actor and so resembles the men in their involvement with the political stories she tells. Her personal history with Theodorick also colours her narration, as demonstrated by her tacit admission that Theodorick's supposed coldness and crudeness are caused by "*Ethelinda's Eyes, and her Inconstancy*" (182). Ethelinda's interaction with Theodorick is explained by L'Envoye but, as she never disputes the charge of bias, the implication that she told her story without any desire for creating constructive criticism is unavoidable.

So, while Ethelinda occupies a role similar to her male counterparts, as a political actor with a personal stake in the stories she tells, her conversation is as unconcerned with critical reaction as theirs. However, Ethelinda does not always speak as an involved, absorbed narrator. When she requests a full relation of Stauracius's history, she both asks for information with which she is not already familiar and expresses a broad critical motive. She says that she would "fain know how that man performs so many great Things, yet is so little esteem'd...Is it not because he is sent as a Plague and Scourge to the falling *Persian*?" (183). Ethelinda's desire to draw broad meaning out of what she hears allows her to detach herself from particular narratives long enough to use them as genuine sites for enlarged critical discourse, and so makes the ensuing conversation more like the moralistic project of *Atalantis*. In using a narrative to understand the relationship between achievement and popular esteem, Ethelinda reads for exemplary value, rather than for particular political ends. Her reaction to the story of Stauracius, that "it is not...*Stauracius* that has taught his Legions to Conquer, but his Legions that have made a Conqueror of him...now hard is it, she answer'd, that *Stauracius* must have all the glory? Methinks I am concern'd at the unequal Distribution," (188) also sounds more like a deliberate socio-critical reaction than previous responses to embedded narratives. In addition to recognizing the flaws of specific persons (that it is not Stauracius that has taught his legions to conquer), Ethelinda recognizes broad injustice (in the unequal distribution of glory amongst generals and their soldiers) and so begins to move towards a use of narratives as exemplary material for generally applicable social criticism.

In addition to modelling a critical process that is fairly similar to that exercised by Astrea and Virtue, Ethelinda exercises an erotic fascination on the male narrators that restrains them in her tent, as they spend considerably more time with her than they had originally planned, and alters the kinds of stories they tell. By keeping the men with her through the appeal of her body

and her conversation, Ethelinda acts as a female force for delay and digression,<sup>70</sup> and introduces an element of eroticism that distracts the men from their overtly political purposes. In this respect, Ethelinda's role is not unlike the episode in *The Adventures of Rivella*, in which Rivella uses her feminine appeal to restrain and distract one of the parties to a long-running law suit (Tim Double) for the benefit of the other party, thereby using femininity as a means to both derail and influence male action. Rivella's actions are decidedly influential, both in the effect they have on the legal action and in the opportunity they create to expose and critique Tim's character (Manley, *Rivella*, 47-50). In a similar manner, Ethelinda's restraint and redirection of the male narrators encourages them to interact with her as men rather than as political beings, as demonstrated by the shift in the stories they tell, and so makes generalized issues of character and morality a more significant part of the discussion than they were before.

The male narrators tell stories involving sexuality before meeting with Ethelinda, but sexuality and relationships are never questioned or examined for a critical purpose in their tales. They imagine sexuality as a political tool, and little else. In Ethelinda's company, however, themes of sex and romance become more present, and are more likely to function as sites for broad social discussion than politically-motivated attacks on specific persons. Ethelinda's presence also has a positive critical effect on the male frame narrators as they begin to tell more narratives that express a more generally applicable critical purpose. St. Gironne prefaces the story of Rufus and Erminia with discussion of jealousy and its varying effects on different persons (248). The story he then tells focuses on a peculiar manifestation of jealousy, and so his preface is a clear attempt to use a specific tale to draw wide ranging critical conclusions. Telling a story in order to use it as an example improves St. Gironne's ability to extract general critical conclusions from a specific tale. The introduction of a female narrator reinvigorates the interplay between narrative and

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<sup>70</sup> See Patricia Parker, *Literary Fat Ladies: Rhetoric, Gender, Property* (London: Methuen, 1987), 8-36, for a discussion of female literary figures who act as forces for delay and expansion in other texts.

conversation in *Memoirs* by encouraging more feminine (in the sense of more exemplary and generally applicable) narrative patterns, so that *Memoirs*, with its focus on male frame characters, actually demonstrates the central importance of femininity in making Manley's narrative form an effective vehicle for socio-critical commentary and deliberate revaluation of the literary and cultural value of women's talk and female-centred romantic tales.

## Chapter 5

### Jane Barker

Galesia, the heroine of *A Patchwork Screen for the Ladies* (1723) and *The Lining of the Patchwork Screen* (1726) calls herself “a kind of *Solitary* in the midst of Throngs and great Congregations” (Barker, 115). Her sense of suffocating loneliness applies equally to her creator. As a Catholic, a Jacobite, and a literary spinster, Jane Barker’s life and work are a nexus of alienation that makes it seem counterintuitive to approach her work in terms of sociability and discursive interaction. Themes of social and political disenfranchisement are consistently explored in her fiction. She views her cultural environment from its boundaries. Kathryn King describes a preoccupation with exile as “a marked feature of her work”<sup>71</sup> and claims that her perspective was that of an outsider, emphasizing her irreducible difference from emerging constructions of national identity. Her two *Patchwork* texts, however, promote community even while they engage with ideas of difference and isolation. Galesia is a lonely figure, deprived of close friends and most of her relations, but she is also constantly interacting with a diverse stream of people who tell her their life stories and, by doing so, inform and influence her perception of her own social role. Galesia constructs her screen and her life story from these experiences and hence positions herself as a narrative connection point between the stories she has collected from diverse sources; the act of bringing them all together in the screen and in the texts allows the isolated Galesia to compress a lifetime of brief incidents into sustained critical engagement with her broader cultural environment.

Barker’s fictions are explorations of alienation, social connection, and the spaces between the two; hence, this discussion considers the patchwork aesthetic as a method for expressing interpersonal connection across social or ideological boundaries. We will also read

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<sup>71</sup> Kathryn King, *Jane Barker, Exile: A Literary Career 1675-1725* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2000), 16-17.

Barker's compilation of diverse but thematically similar woman-centred narratives as a tactic for identifying commonalities of female experience and so positing the existence of women as members of a distinct social class. This chapter concludes with a focused discussion of *The Lining of the Patchwork Screen* in order to illustrate how Barker extends her practices of connecting diverse individuals through their thematically related narratives in order to reincorporate alienated narrators with their broader society. *The Lining's* evaluation of tales with a series of familiar proverbs that combine folk wisdom and individual meaning also enhances and emphasizes the continuing socio-critical significance of its alienated narrators. Similarly, her practice of integrating her own manuscript poetry into Galesia's narratives and critical conversations to create a single, coherent text develops, in *The Lining*, into an integration of Barker's original writing with the work of more prominent fellows and forerunners (most notably Aphra Behn), so that the framed-novelle structure supports Barker's ongoing consideration of her own work's significance within its broader literary moment.

Barker's patchworks are valuable among the texts presented here because they offer the most sustained, detailed explanation of their form. Comparing the prefaces and textile metaphors of these two works also illuminates the range of social connections that the framed-novelle in this period can explore. The prologue to *A Patchwork Screen* displays an astute awareness of Barker's literary environment, as she deliberately contrasts her genre choices with other forms of prose fiction imagining that the reader will ask "why a History reduc'd into Patches? Especially since HISTORIES at Large are so Fashionable in this Age; viz. Robinson Crusoe, and Moll Flanders: Colonel Jack, and Sally Salisbury; with many other Heroes and Heroines?" (51) Identifying differences between her text and well-known examples of "histories at large", Barker demonstrates her awareness of the generic choices available to her, and goes

on to describe her use of the framed-novelle as not only a conscious choice but a conscious intervention in the development of prose fiction.

Cheryl Nixon argues that prefaces in women's writing of this period "become a space in which the woman author self-consciously constructs the relationship of "self to self" – her gender to her role as a writer."<sup>72</sup> Gender is an important factor in Barker's prefatory material to *A Patchwork Screen*, as she addresses herself directly to ladies in both her title and her introduction. In her preface, she is unabashed in linking femininity to a new and heightened form of discursive authority. She first claims to have chosen to construct her text as a patchwork because "the Uncommonness of any Fashion, renders it acceptable to the Ladies", but goes on to offer a more substantive explanation, which is that "whenever one sees a Set of Ladies together, their Sentiments are as differently mix'd as the Patches in their Work: To wit, Whigs and Tories, High-Church and Low-Church, Jacobites and Williamites, and many more distinctions, which they divide and sub-divide, 'till at last they make this Dis-union meet in an harmonious Tea-Table Entertainment" (52). This description, which equates the process of stitching patches with that of bringing together different "sentiments" hints at how patchwork and, by extension, a text constructed on similar lines – that is, by discrete tales woven together through critical response – can undermine otherness and create productive discourse in a diverse group. Linking this kind of discursive work with the gendered image of sewing presents feminine work as able to remodel social relations and their representation in writing, as well as alleviating the anxiety of a woman's entrance into print by associating it with recognized forms of women's work.<sup>73</sup>

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<sup>72</sup> Cheryl L. Nixon, "Stop a Moment at this Preface: The Gendered Paratexts of Fielding, Barker, and Haywood," *Journal of Narrative Theory* 32 (2002): 123-54, 127.

<sup>73</sup> Kathryn King, "Of Needles and Pens and Women's Work," *Tulsa Studies in Women's Literature* 14 (1995): 77-93, 80.

The ladies, like their patches, are all potentially clashing and isolated. As Whigs and Tories, Jacobites and Williamites, they are an ill-assorted group and not likely to communicate effectively with each other. Their differences are divided and subdivided to produce harmony, a description of a conversational process that forges alliances out of unlikely components. Dividing and subdividing creates an almost mathematical image of reducing differences to their lowest common denominator to find an equivalence among ladies concealed beneath all of their otherness. Even those ladies, like Williamites, who belong to the dominant group of the moment, can potentially find themselves in situations where they are outsiders, and so have to speak from a disadvantaged position. Describing all of these imagined ladies as mixed patches acknowledges the fact that they are all possible outsiders, and the idea of stitching them together posits the creation of a community of outsiders, where potentially disadvantaged speakers gain communicative ability and authority by their inclusion in a functional discursive group.

The preface to *The Lining* differentiates this work from its predecessor, focusing on tensions between utility and adornment and emphasizing differences in the *Lining's* controlling text/textile comparison. It is significant that it is a lining, rather than an extension or new section of the screen, as a lining serves a different function from the textile to which it is attached. A lining is not necessarily decorative, or even meant to be displayed. Instead, a lining is protective and supportive, shielding the back of an ornamental textile from damage and protecting its structure. Calling this text a lining may signal to the reader that it is meant to solidify the critical message of the *Patchwork Screen*. The supportive nature of the *Lining* is itself reinforced by the preface's claim that the text's structure "bears some resemblance to Old London, when the Buildings were of Wood and Plaister" (178). Comparing the construction of the text to a building instead of, as in *A Patchwork Screen*, to a sociable group of ladies, insists on its utilitarian

character. The specific image of a wood and plaster building also sets the stage for the text's focus on differentiation and connection. In wood and plaster buildings, the different materials used are clearly visible; the building is divided into sections of plaster, with wooden beams marking their boundaries. The beams that form boundaries, however, also form connections and bind the sections of plaster together into a whole. A textile lining made of pane-work, as the preface describes it, would present a similar visual prospect. When different pieces of material are stitched together, the seams form a visible boundary, but also connect the pieces into a functional unity. Comparing the text to wood and plaster buildings and pane-work linings focuses the readers' attention on the liminal spaces of support beams and seams, spaces that divide and unite simultaneously, and so establishes the theme that will be explored in the text's embedded narratives, of locating potential for social connection within social divisions.

### **1. Patchwork, Feminine Collaboration, and Galesia's Literary Self**

When, in *A Patchwork Screen*, Galesia brings her diverse patches together into a single piece of patchwork/text, she positions herself in an imagined conversational circle; her careful recounting of past conversations allows her absent narrators to speak through her and so to each other, in that their reported speech works to build a communal indictment of social issues. Telling her story through others' narratives also encourages Galesia imaginatively to identify with them, and find commonalities between herself and the people whose stories she tells. Drawing others into her story through use of their independent narratives and identifying with them allows Galesia to position herself as part of a critical, discursive group and so alleviates the alienation and lack of social stature that accompanies being a single, Jacobite, suspiciously intellectual woman, just as dividing and subdividing differences allows a patchwork-like group of ladies to reduce their political bickering into unlikely alliances. The decision to write a history

reduced into patches offers a model for overcoming alienation and allows the text's central figure to make use of that model.

Marta Kvande analyzes Barker's prose primarily through her earlier *Amours of Bosvil and Galesia* (1713) to argue that Barker's fiction insists that social and political particularity authorizes the authorial/narratorial voice and that it appeals to a pre-Habermasian conception of publicity, "representative publicness" that "roots public authority in markers of private identity."<sup>74</sup> While this argument is accurate in relation to *Bosvil and Galesia* and Barker's earlier poetry, which was originally circulated in manuscript and – according to both Kvande and Kathryn King – designed to be read by a primarily Jacobite audience (Kvande, 152 and King, *Jane Barker*, 185), Barker's decision to write directly for the print market with *A Patchwork Screen* prompted a different conception of social and political specificity. By 1723, when *A Patchwork Screen* was published, Barker would have been sadly aware of the uncertain state of the Jacobite cause, and so her decision to write in a form that can acknowledge social and political particularity without using it to limit a text's potential readership may be an experiment in repositioning a political outsider in the larger community, without disregarding or undermining that outsider's specific identity. As discussed above, *A Patchwork Screen's* prologue imagines a text in this form as a pattern for bringing all kinds of political/social identities together into harmony, so that their discourse is authorized not by their difference, but by their ability to find common ground and become relevant to each other despite their differences.

Galesia's life story becomes an occasion for telling other women's stories and is the thread that brings them all together, creating a narrative pattern that insistently links the process of hearing stories with the imaginative act of relating to their tellers. Galesia's ongoing search for social connection is thus enabled and almost required by the textual structure she

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<sup>74</sup> Marta Kvande, "Jane Barker and Delariviere Manley: Public Women against the Public Sphere," *The Eighteenth-Century Novel* 5 (2006): 143-75, 146.

generates. In Galesia's first encounter with the lady, Galesia is sitting alone in the woods and therefore is a solitary and unexpected figure, whose lack of any obvious association makes her socially ambiguous. When Galesia meets the unnamed lady who helps her construct her screen, most of the early patches she offers are not others' narratives, but bits and pieces of her own life story, as told through her correspondence and poems circulated amongst her acquaintances. These patches reinscribe the isolated Galesia in a number of discursive communities and social positions for the reader's, and the lady's, benefit, making her socially intelligible again. The early patches aim at overcoming Galesia's discursive isolation by enabling her to construct herself as part of a discursive community despite her differences.

The listening lady makes use of the information Galesia gives her about her various associations and social roles when she acts as an arranger of Galesia's textual fragments, determining which should be included in the screen and how each should be positioned in relation to the others. For example, the lady endorses Galesia's landscape in verse (79) and mitigates the gloominess of her poems on her brother's death by explaining that "these melancholy *dark Patches* set off the light Colours; making the Mixture the more agreeable" (92). Galesia's presentation of her history through patches that are collaboratively arranged gives her a sympathetic, participatory audience, and so constructs her life story as an ongoing conversation within the female boundaries of personal narratives, gossip, and needlework.

Some of Galesia's early patches hint at her exclusion from the discursive worlds that she wishes to be a part of, particularly the group of Cambridge students. In "An Invitation to my Learned Friends at Cambridge," Galesia displays her attempts to connect with the learned world represented by her Cambridge friends and criticizes her exclusion from it. Her poem opens with attempts to persuade her friends into appreciating her country isolation, praising its freedom from pride and ambition, but quickly devolves into a plaintive comparison of disparate access to

intellectual stimulation. Galesia claims that she would think her country life a recreation of paradise:

But that the *Tree of Knowledge* won't grow here  
 Though in its Culture I have spent some Time,  
 Yet it disdains to grow in *our cold Clime*,  
 Where it can neither Fruit nor Leaves produce,  
 Good for its Owner, or the publick Use. (94-95)

This self-deprecatory complaint about access to knowledge is followed by a panegyric on the students' achievements, with Galesia claiming that:

you in *Wit*, grow, as its *Branches*, high,  
 Deep as its *Root*, too, in *Philosophy*.  
 Large as its *spreading Arms*, your *Reasons* show. (95)

Using the tree of knowledge and its appropriate climate to differentiate between Galesia's intellectual experiences and those of the students implies that those differences are the result of arbitrary circumstances, accidents of geography and temperature. This poetic patch, then, performs a subtle but significant indictment of gender disparity in intellectual experience by gesturing towards a lack of rational basis for that disparity.

Though she is engaged with the students through manuscript exchange, Galesia is generally cut off from interacting with them in real time and barred from full participation in their intellectual life because of her sex. Galesia has to accept an outsider's position and let her manuscripts function as a replacement for her physical presence. Reusing her manuscripts as patches in her conversationally constructed screen reinscribes them in a discursive world where Galesia can be present as both a writer and a woman. Thus, creating her screen in a sympathetic, feminocentric setting retells and revises the gender-based exclusion she has experienced in other settings.<sup>75</sup> The anxiety of being an outsider expressed in the poem itself

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<sup>75</sup> Kathryn R. King, "Galesia, Jane Barker, and a Coming to Authorship" in *Anxious Power: Reading, Writing, and Ambivalence in Narrative by Women*, ed. Carol J. Singley and Susan Elizabeth Sweeney (Albany: SUNY Press, 1993), 91-107, 97.

becomes, when read to the lady and sewn into the screen, a tool for building the relationship between the women and material for their collaboratively arranged textile. The pain of difference, when retold as part of a collaborative reflection on Galesia's life and relationships, becomes a means of encouraging participatory creation. Setting her poetic accomplishments in the screen, and in her conversation with the lady, mitigates Galesia's gendered exclusion from the literary community by giving her a discursive space, and an audience, who will listen to her as a poet and a woman.

Similarly, Barker's decision to recycle some of her poems previously circulated in manuscript form allows them to link the lonely Galesia with the sociable, circulatory process of manuscript publication and gives the poems' Jacobite connotations an acceptable, non-threatening presence in the text as a whole. Leigh Eicke's description of Barker as a significant link between an older manuscript culture and new forms of print culture emphasizes the sociable nature of manuscript publication. Eicke cites the listening lady's promise to show Galesia, "a Poem that was presented me on New-Year's Day last, by an Excellent Hand" (166), which means that the lady, who owns a copy of a manuscript she did not author, can directly contribute to expanding its audience.<sup>76</sup> Including poems originally written for manuscript publication gestures towards Galesia's involvement in both literary and political societies. Resituating these poems within the screen mitigates the political suspicion a decidedly Jacobite writer would have experienced by transforming Jacobite sentiments into only one element of a broader story of literary and personal development. Poems appearing early in *A Patchwork Screen*, including "The Grove," "The Rivulet," "An Invocation of her Muse," and "An Invitation to my Learned Friends at Cambridge," are all revised versions of poems first published in *Poetical*

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<sup>76</sup> Leigh A. Eicke, "Jane Barker's Jacobite Writings", in *Women's Writing and the Circulation of Ideas*, ed. George L. Justice and Nathan Tinker (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 137-58, 142. See also Toni Bowers, "Jacobite Difference and the Poetry of Jane Barker," *ELH* 64 (1997): 857-869 for discussion of political ambivalence in Barker's Jacobite writing.

*Recreations, Part 1* (1687) (Eicke, 138), a manuscript work probably published without her permission (King, *Jane Barker*, 31). These poems were also reused in Barker's *Poems on several occasions in three parts* (1704), where they were mingled with poems from her most overtly Jacobite work, *Poems referring to the times of 1700/01* (Eicke, 138). Taken out of their original contexts, however, these poems do not have to be obnoxious to a non-Jacobite reader, as they function equally well as examples of the author's commitment to poetry and her sense of exclusion from the intellectual world. The use of these poems enables Galesia to both introduce and overcome her Jacobite difference. Situated within the patchwork screen, they gain inoffensive meaning for all readers, and so help Galesia gesture towards her Jacobite identity and simultaneously demonstrate how aspects of that identity can inform, without overwhelming, her connection to politically unspecified others, like the listening lady.

## **2. In the Midst of Great Throngs: isolation and female connection through narrative**

In leaf two, after Galesia has gone to London with her mother, her use of patches shifts to include a greater proportion of the feminocentric, romantic narratives typical of other framed-nouvelles in this study. At the same time, Galesia's critical reactions to her patches become more explicitly focused on identifying with the people whose stories she narrates. If the earlier patches gain critical authority for Galesia's speech by allowing her to identify with various discursive groups despite the disadvantages of her femininity, political peculiarity, and physical isolation, leaf two shows Galesia using similar methods to associate herself with other disadvantaged speakers and find a critical purpose in their tales. This part of *A Patchwork Screen* shows Galesia using the process of "dividing and sub-dividing" differences to construct feminocentric social perspectives.

Galesia's description of her life in London emphasizes her mental isolation and difficulties with sociable interaction. She describes herself as "as unfit for the Town, as a

Tarpaulin for a States-man" (107) and explains the sources of her perpetual loneliness. When in London society, she finds that "my Country Dialect, to them, was unintelligible" and:

some or other of the Company, either out of Malice to expose me, or Complaisance to entertain me in my own Way, would enter into the Praise of a Country Life... 'till by Degrees, these bright *Angels* would make the *Ass* open its Mouth, and upon their Demand, tell how many Pounds of butter a good *Cow* would make in a Week, or how many Bushels of *Wheat* a good *Acre* of *Land* would produce. (107-8)

In town, Galesia is socially vulnerable; she is unable to decide if the people who question her are genuinely interested, or merely mocking her, and so responds ingenuously, uncertain of whether she is making a friend or making herself a public joke. The first embedded narrative in this section depicts a woman who is vulnerable for similar reasons, specifically her inability to decode people's motivations, and is persistently linked with Galesia's own social blindness.

At church, Galesia encounters a young woman, also recently transplanted from the country, who misreads an elderly man's praise of her piety and offer of fallacious "marriage", and so finds herself ruined. The young woman seems to have gone to church, like Galesia, out of piety and in a belief that the other attendees are there for equally laudable motives. As the man who seduces her rightly points out, she has "hardly yet any Acquaintance, to ingage [her] to meet upon an Intrigue or Cabal" (113), and the rest of the story gives no indication of licentious or opportunistic motives on her part. Her seduction and distress, then, are caused primarily by her inability to decode the old man's motives, an inability that leaves her without friends and without any kind of defence against his trickery. Galesia's social naiveté causes her to expose herself only in the sense of making foolish or embarrassing remarks in company, while the young woman's social cluelessness causes her to expose herself in a much more dangerous way, but the story leads Galesia to a conclusion that applies equally well to both. After the story, Galesia reflects that "in all Places, and at all Times, my Country Innocence render'd me a kind of a *Solitary* in the midst of Throngs and great Congregations" (115). Both Galesia and the young

woman are friendless because they are unfamiliar with life in town, and unable to make friends because of their inability to interpret other's motives in addressing them. Galesia proves able, despite their dramatic social disparity, to identify with the young woman and find common elements of vulnerability in their experience; she locates her perception of social danger in the fact of being an inexperienced and unprotected woman, a perception that cuts across social particularity to focus on the commonalities of female experience. Galesia's use of the young woman's story to shape and inform her own, then, demonstrates her growing recognition of specifically female identities and experiences.

The embedded narrative of the nurse that Galesia meets after moving to London is a forceful example of Galesia's ability to use narrative as a tool for identifying with others and thereby establish a shared form of distinctly feminine identity. The nurse faints at the sight of her former lover's carriage and then tells Galesia a sad story of her disappointed love, filial obedience, and consequent misfortune. Although the details of the story itself bear little resemblance to Galesia's life, as the latter is still single and reasonably well-off, she ends her retelling by praising the nurse's resignation and patience and applying one of her own couplets to her, saying that "where *Fortune* wou'd not with her *Wish* comply,/ She made her *Wish* bear *Fortune* Company" (122). This story, and the approving couplet, is soon followed by Galesia's mother's decision to forbid her daughter's practice of secluding herself in her garret to write and contemplate, a restriction that Galesia finds irksome. Galesia complies, however, and expresses her obedience in words very similar to the couplet applied to the nurse. In obeying her mother, Galesia "made Inclination submit to Duty; and so endeavour'd to make a Vertue of this Necessity" (132) and recognizes that "Fortune seem[ed] at that Time to concur with my Mother's Counsel" (133). These closely linked tales express similar themes of filial obedience ending in unhappiness and thwarted desire, and are analyzed and approved through a similar

moral framework. Though the specific requirements of obedience, and its specific effects, could not be more different, Galesia's critical reaction to her situation and that of the nurse is the same; both lead her to praise obedience and resignation and recognize them as even more valuable than happiness or satisfied ambition. She uses similar language to endorse similar qualities in herself and the nurse, and so expresses a deep identification with her that transcends differences of circumstance and social position.

Galesia, in this episode, understands both herself and the nurse as obedient daughters first and foremost, and so sees herself as connected to the nurse by feminine experience and feminine virtues. Her identification with the nurse is, then, a step towards conceptualizing a uniquely feminine identity that does not ignore, but accommodates, other social distinctions. Basing her identification with the nurse on explicitly feminine experiences and sufferings allows Galesia to imagine an authoritative, female discursive group. Because the shared themes in the two women's narratives build a collaborative indictment of some feminine experiences and endorsement of some feminine virtues, their conceptual identification alleviates Galesia's critical isolation and helps her establish experiential, communal authority for her feminocentric social criticisms.

The nurse's tale gives way to the story of Belinda, a young woman who bursts into Galesia's garret from the roof, and begs to hide. Belinda, the daughter of a prosperous country gentleman, was seduced by a family friend under the guise of platonic love and chaste affection (131). Pregnant and alone in London, she fears being investigated by the parish officers, and so clammers across the rooftops to take refuge in Galesia's attic. Galesia, of course, is never seduced or impregnated, but the next tale in her screen incorporates her within a similar climate of sexual threat. The themes of social naiveté, filial duty, and sexual manipulation expressed in the preceding tales coalesce into the tale of Galesia's last marriage prospect.

Galesia's mother encourages her to think seriously about marriage and Galesia recognizes that "fortune seem[ed] at that time to concur with my Mother's Counsel" (133). Fortune concurs with her mother's counsel through the figure of Lysander, the son of a family friend who persuades him to consider marrying Galesia. Like the nurse, who is turned from her first love into a bad match out of obedience, Galesia is distracted from her real poetic vocation and directed towards a potentially disastrous match because of her sense of filial obligation, and Lysander really is a romantic disaster in the making. He is entangled with a married woman whose extravagance has ruined her own husband and who will drive Lysander to ruin and suicide himself, as revenge for his attempt to redeem his life by marrying a virtuous woman (138). Although Galesia remains in the background of this romantic disaster, it still has significant effects on the text's rendering of women's romantic experiences. Galesia's personal association with this tale, and with an unreliable suitor of questionable motives, incorporates her into the narrative environment of sexual vulnerability and romantic failure created by the stories of the young woman, the nurse, and Belinda. Like them, she encounters a romance that cannot possibly end well and exposes the dangers of relying on what men appear to be. Galesia emerges unharmed but her experience of listening to other women's disaster stories and coming close to one of her own also brings about an alteration in her assessment of marriage as a cognate for feminine social and sexual vulnerability.

After this episode, Galesia expresses her disagreement with marriage in stronger terms than she has before, saying that she has developed "a secret Disgust against Matrimony" (133). She claims that this opinion has been formed by reflection on her failed love affair with Bosvil (described in *The Amours of Bosvil and Galesia* of 1713) but *A Patchwork Screen* does not recount her relationship with Bosvil or explain the specific reflections it inspired and so her disgust for marriage and for romantic relationships in this work seems to proceed primarily from

her interaction with women who have been disappointed, seduced, and betrayed. Her endorsement of spinsterhood is more self-assured than her ambivalent attitude in the beginning of the text, and the only real alteration in her experience is her collection of disappointed women's stories; thus, we can conclude that her newly unequivocal disgust for matrimony is inspired by her identification with their experiences. Her two poetic patches that specifically address matrimony support this conclusion; the first, "To my Friend *Exilius*, On his persuading me to marry Old *Damon*", focuses on Galesia's fears of what she as an individual would lose in the proposed marriage, saying that she is unwilling to marry because a husband would grow jealous of her male friendships and "If I but look on *thee*, I *him* neglect" (111). Her comments on the poem to the listening lady emphasize her reluctance to marry the particular man, saying that he "was not much capable of raising a Passion in a Heart not hospitable...Wherefore this Affair pass'd by, with Indifferency on both sides" (112). Galesia's early objections to marriage, then, focus on her attachment to her own version of single life and her male friends, and are rooted in indifference to a particular suitor.

Her next poem that specifically addresses marriage appears after the embedded narratives of the young girl, the nurse, and Belinda, and demonstrates a conceptual shift in her endorsement of celibacy. "A Virgin Life" is intent on praising virginity as such, rather than Galesia's specific version of a virgin life, and her references to the dangers of "Man's almost Omnipotent Amours" (139) and comparisons of women to "harmless *Kids*, who when pursu'd by *Men*/ For safety, run into a *Lyon's Den*" (140) serve to present men as universally dangerous to women as a class. Galesia's unwillingness to marry has found a new rationale; rather than focusing on her own personal preference for independence and her dislike of the men available to her, Galesia points towards women's universal vulnerability and the danger of involvement with men. Galesia's sustained engagement and identification with a variety of disappointed

women has, then, made it possible for her to construct a principled, rather than a personal, refusal of marriage and romantic relationships. The process of identifying with other women through the common themes of their narratives is, then, essential to Galesia's construction of a femino-centric critical position and so reminds us of the claim in the prologue, that a text or textile created out of patches is essential to broadening and preserving female social vision.

### 3. An Unaccountable Passion: the limits of feminine identification

If *A Patchwork Screen*, as a whole, argues for a model of critical discourse that can overcome social and political particularity without ignoring it, the strangely alluring tale of "The Unaccountable Wife", may present the limit case of that process. The story of the unaccountable wife possesses a homoerotic subtext of lesbian desire that is obvious to modern readers, but goes unnoticed by Galesia and the listening lady. Kathryn King uses the story of the unaccountable wife to examine the development of modern sex/gender identities and claims that "class difference may have disposed Barker's contemporaries to imagine (or assume) sexual involvement on the part of the two women"<sup>77</sup> because work on male homoerotic relationships of the period posits a causal connection between homoerotic desire and class difference. So, although we cannot claim any conscious or explicit queer purpose for this embedded narrative we can, following King, assume that it might have had a loose aura of homoerotic desire for Barker, Galesia, and contemporaneous readers.

King speculates that Barker's purpose in including this tale might have been to develop a moralizing narrative that dramatized "the dangerous consequences of following one's own will" (King, "Unaccountable Wife", 167) that got out of hand and unintentionally became a piece of queer resistance to the dominant culture, but such a reading seems strained and unlikely. There

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<sup>77</sup> Kathryn King, "The Unaccountable Wife and Other Tales of Female Desire in Jane Barker's *A Patchwork Screen for the Ladies*," *The Eighteenth Century: Theory and Interpretation* 35 (1994): 155-173, 161-62.

are much easier and more straightforward fictional models for narratives that condemn following one's own will at all costs. Galesia expresses "great Amazement" at hearing the story from her mother and "the greatest Amazement possible" after observing the wife's behaviour for herself (146). The listening lady echoes Galesia's incomprehension of the story by claiming that the "poor Creature was under some Spell or Inchantment" (149). Such expressions of astonishment, along with the evident inability to decode the wife's motives indicate awareness, by Barker, Galesia, and the listening lady, that there is something strange and unusually transgressive about this tale, even if they do not know or do not describe the nature of the transgression. So, the unaccountable wife must be meant to represent more, in both Barker's text and Galesia's screen, than just another headstrong and socially culpable woman.

The unaccountable wife may, instead, mark the boundary of Galesia's attempts to identify with others across social differences and draw them into her critical world. As King's article also describes, the unaccountable wife is a class traitor, voluntarily abandoning her position of privilege not only to form an intense bond with a servant, but to assume the duties and appearance of a servant herself. When Galesia's mother visits the house at the husband's request, she finds "the Servant sitting in a handsome Velvet Chair, dress'd up in very good Lac'd Linnen, having clean Gloves on her Hands, and the Wife washing the Dishes" (145-46). This cross-class masquerade provokes Galesia's mother into a fit of rage, and Galesia's own reaction, while non-violent, is only slightly less outraged. Neither Galesia nor her mother can accept or identify with the impulse to set aside or overturn class distinctions. Galesia is not, however, unable to identify with persons of different classes, as demonstrated by her sympathetic and approving reaction to the nurse, and her decisions to associate the nurse's filial misfortunes with her own. Galesia's problem is not, then, insensitivity to the lower classes, but an inability to

understand any desire voluntarily to relinquish social position and, by doing so, to relinquish a coherent social identity.

Galesia's inability to identify with the unaccountable wife across her sexual difference may be, as with her class position, due to the indeterminacy of that sexual difference. As King points out, there are indications that the romantically unaccountable wife may be physically unaccountable as well, and might have a subtle flavor of gender indeterminacy (King, "Unaccountable Wife" 169). Although she is originally described as only having a person "not at all agreeable" (144), her complacency about her husband's infidelity leads Galesia to speculate that the wife might have acquiesced because of her own "Imperfections, and Deformity" (145). Deformity is a much stronger physical marker than disagreeableness, and implies something actually wrong with the wife that goes beyond mere ugliness.

The husband's reasons for wishing to get rid of the servant are also oddly expressed. He tells Galesia's mother that he needs her to "endeavour to persuade [the wife] to part with this Woman; For, said he, she has already Three Children living, and God knows how many more she may have" (145). The husband's concern over the woman's fertility, and his apparent helplessness to limit it, creates an aura of uncertainty about the children's actual parentage. After all, if the husband is really fathering these children, it is within his power to avoid another pregnancy even if the woman stayed in the house and continued to sleep with the wife. This is not to say that the unaccountable wife is actually a man, capable of fathering children, but only that references to her ugliness, her positive deformity, and the husband's apparent inability to restrain the servant's fertility create hints of pseudo-masculinity around the unaccountable wife. Galesia may be unable to identify with the unaccountable wife on grounds of shared female experience, as she did with the nurse, because she cannot read the wife as unequivocally female.

Galesia's interpretive paralysis is understandable. The wife does not seem to gain anything from her escapades and, by most standards, loses much. Her devotion to the servant woman leads her out of her class privileges, her marital home, and into poverty. The wife refuses all offers of assistance that are in any way conditional on abandoning her companion and, when criticized, defends their relationship with "such an Air of Vehemency, that there was no Room left to doubt the Sincerity of her Words" (146). There can be no rational explanation for such behaviour – other than an all-consuming love for another woman. Galesia tries, however, to fit the wife into some recognizable heteronormative narrative. She speculates that the wife might tolerate the servant's presence in her home out of shame at her own ugliness and inadequacy, and after the husband's death expects the wife to reveal the "Promises, Flatteries, or Threatenings [that] had made her act the foresaid Scene" (148). So, Galesia expects the wife to fit into a recognizable narrative trajectory of a vulnerable woman manipulated into immoral actions by an unscrupulous man. When no such narrative is revealed, and the wife's passion is undeniable, Galesia loses any remnants of sympathy for the wife, and can only react with astonishment and incomprehension.<sup>78</sup>

With all Galesia's astonishment, there is still a tense intimacy between the story of the unaccountable wife and aspects of her own story. We should note the positioning of the wife's tale in the text; after recounting her last suitor's suicide, Galesia's reads her poem, "A Virgin's Life", and so claims her contented celibacy as a positive good. She then tells the lady how her mother began to accept her single future and reads another of her own works, "The *Necessity of Fate*". This inset poem describes Galesia as devoted to the muses from childhood, at the

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<sup>78</sup> See chapter 4, section 4 to compare the unaccountable wife's tale to the image of lesbianism as a limit on feminine connection in the Cabal of Manley's *New Atalantis*. In both cases, exclusivity and separation from heteronormative, romantic narrative trajectories make lesbians an exception or internal limit on Manley's and Barker's overarching endorsement of cooperation and group cohesion among women.

expense of all else. She calls herself a “Slave to Rime” and says that she has tried to break its hold over her with:

Obedience, and sometimes a Book;  
 Company, and sometimes Love:  
 All which, still proves in vain;  
 For I can only shake, but not cast off my Chain. (142)

Galesia’s mother, on hearing this, accepts both her celibacy and her writing as destiny, saying “if there be a *fatal Necessity* that it must be so, e’en go on, and make thyself easy with thy fantastic Companions the Muses...one of the ancient Poets says: Thrust *Nature* off, with Fork, by Force, She’ll still return to her old Course” (143). The unaccountable wife’s tale puts a period to this episode and there is no more talk of marriage for Galesia. In this exchange with her mother, Galesia’s celibacy and poetic devotion are interpreted as an unavoidable destiny that, however undesirable, have their roots in a “nature” that will always return to its “old course”. Though the mother describes Galesia’s devotion to the muses as “foolish Vapours that thus intoxicate thy Brain” (143), there is no help for it. The language used to describe Galesia’s situation in both the poem and the mother’s reaction is fatalistic and seeks to accept Galesia’s destiny without really trying to understand it.

The unaccountable wife is also a woman who appears to act out of a fatal necessity and perhaps, like Galesia, becomes a slave to a fantastic companion. In associating the wife’s disagreeableness and deformity with her relationship to the servant, Galesia also gives us hints that her behaviour may have its roots in a nature that cannot be turned from its course. Galesia’s devotion to the muses and the wife’s devotion to the servant generate questions of female interdependency, separatism, and their social consequences. The wife’s unaccountable necessity or nature results in a radical separation from her class and the heteronormative world and binds her to another woman. This unbreakable female chain links the two women, making them reliant on each other for economic and emotional survival, but also independent of all

else. With the servant and their blended family, the wife is free to reject marriage, her family of origin, and sovereign authority as embodied by the queen's offer of a pension. Her nature or fate makes her need another woman, but she emphatically does not need men or social approval – they are, in fact, incompatible with the fulfilment of her unaccountable desires.

Galesia's own fatal necessity may force her into a similar relationship with the heteronormative world. She needs other women to live out her dedication to the muses. Her writing may begin with her devotion to her brother and involvement with the Cambridge students, but it is only in the isolated, female-driven space of the listening lady's country house and sewing circle that her poetic patches acquire the coherence and discursive significance of a narrative of literary development. The lady is a receptive, compassionate audience and collaborator, inviting Galesia to take up the textile project that produces her text and engaging with Galesia in the process of comparing and evaluating narratives and textual fragments that allows isolated narratives to form a pattern of female identification and to theorize Galesia's embrace of virginity. The prose portions of her screen are also reliant on other women who bring her their stories and, by doing so, give her the materials to interpret her own alienated life through a framework of female commonality. Galesia's writing and self-conscious development of an authorial persona is enmeshed with and dependent on the bonds between women. Galesia's authorial vocation is also incompatible with participation in a heterosexual romantic economy. "*The Necessity of Fate*" explicitly considers love as an inaccessible alternative to writing and some of Galesia's other patches, especially "To my friend *Exilius*, on his persuading me to marry Old *Damon*" imply that marriage would disable Galesia's poetic correspondence with the Cambridge group. Galesia's devotion to the muses, the fatal necessity that makes her a slave to rhyme, also separates her from marriage and conventional domesticity.

Galesia and the unaccountable wife are both pushed out of the marital and domestic sphere and into relations of dependence with other women by their unusual longings – the “foolish vapours” or “spells and enchantments” that drive them along a socially disfavoured and risky life path. The unaccountable wife’s tale and its relationship to the text’s vexed representation of Galesia’s poetic vocation indicate that the fatal necessity of being a celibate female writer and of being a lesbian lover are not, essentially, very different. Muses and female servants are both fantastic companions for women of their class, and in both cases, devotion to these companions makes them distinctly different from their social circle. The essential difference between the two is that, while Galesia accepts her fatal necessity and slowly learns in “A Virgin’s Life” to see it as a positive good, the unaccountable wife determinedly embraces her fantastic companion and female interdependence. Galesia gradually uncovers a benefit in separation from the heteronormative economy; the unaccountable wife’s tale unabashedly renounces men and marriage in favour of a female bond, but it is a special bond with one woman rather than the identification with women as a class that the work as a whole develops. The unaccountable wife’s portrayal of female interdependence reminds us of similar themes in Manley’s *New Atalantis*. Manley’s *New Cabal* (see chapter 4, section 4) depicts women who, relying on each other for emotional and financial support, are able to create a separatist female community, where men and domesticity are very nearly irrelevant. The unaccountable wife, like the *New Cabal*, pushes female identification to a breaking point by using it as a means to escape, rather than understand and reform, the heterosocial world. In a sense, then, the unaccountable wife is Galesia’s frightening double—the socially threatening face of her own slow rejection of marriage and domesticity and immersion in a female community.

#### 4. Lining and Supporting the Screen

*The Lining of the Patchwork Screen* occupies a special place in this study because its use of proverbs to encapsulate the interaction between embedded narrative and critical response presents the clearest, most emphatic illustration of how the framed-novelle can be used to mediate between an isolated individual and her social environment. Barker's claim that this text is "*Pane-work*" (177) rather than patchwork because the pieces are larger also indicates a grander scale for this framed-novelle's exploration of commonality within difference and the exemplary significance of isolated figures. The enhanced scale of this text resides in its more explicit focus on the moral problems of Jacobite loyalty and its ongoing effort, through the use of proverbs, to find in tales of highly individualized moral dilemmas elements of universally applicable moral exemplarity. In this sense, *The Lining* marks a critical progression from *The Patchwork Screen*. Galesia's first patchwork uses the framed-novelle to incorporate her alienated authorial voice within a process of female collaboration and to uncover commonalties among women; this patchwork, although it does not abandon themes of feminine commonality, uses the same techniques to uncover the generally applicable ideas of loyalty and ambiguity embodied by a mixed-gender array of alienated protagonists and to situate Barker's writing alongside other, more prominent authors and within the developing print market.

In telling stories to Galesia, the embedded narrators in this text bring themselves into interactive critical discourse; their repetitive exploration of themes of loyalty and betrayal function as Jacobite allegory and work out, in the context of their personal adventures, the ideological and ethical superiority of their political stance, constituting themselves as a kind of subaltern counterpublic, that is, as a particularized and subordinated social group that engages

in critical discourse to interpret their own identities and needs.<sup>79</sup> However, evaluation of embedded narratives through proverbs forms a bridge between the counterpublic created by politically disadvantaged narrators and their broad cultural environment, as the proverbs locate generally applicable social and ethical principles within the narratives' exploration of politically driven ideological struggles. In her discussion of modernity, the fractured subject, and the Galesia trilogy, Rivka Swenson argues (at this point with primary reference to *A Patchwork Screen*) that Barker's patchwork aesthetic explores the fractured modern condition "by implying that apparently differing subjects may have an unacknowledged common point;" multiple narrators, narratives, and genres help the reader to look for such common points.<sup>80</sup> In *The Lining*, the quest for common points among apparently differing subjects becomes more obvious, more insistent, and the evaluative proverbs that close each tale show the reader where those common points should be. The patchwork is showing its seams, as the critical judgments framing each narrative demand that the reader start reading for the universal applicability of each tale of particular moral conflict. For this reason, *The Lining* is, perhaps, the paradigmatic example of the framed-novelle; it creates a rapprochement between the individual and society, as it forces the reader to note the interaction between a narrative and its critical frame and to follow the text's habit of extracting broad critical relevance out of a series of individuated tales.

### 5. Evaluative Proverbs and Social Engagement

Like *A Patchwork Screen*, *The Lining* is oriented towards the social reintegration of isolated individuals, and accomplishes such reintegration through a constant alternation between narrative and critical evaluations of narratives. What is remarkable about *The Lining* is

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<sup>79</sup> Nancy Fraser, "Rethinking the Public Sphere: A Contribution to the Critique of Actually Existing Democracy" in *Habermas and the Public Sphere*, ed. Craig Calhoun (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1992), 109-43, 123.

<sup>80</sup> Rivka Swenson, "Representing Modernity in Jane Barker's *Galesia Trilogy*: Jacobite Allegory and the Patch-Work Aesthetic," *Studies in Eighteenth-Century Culture* 34 (2004): 55-81, 65.

that most of the text's critical reactions to narratives take the form of a one or two line proverb. The proverb, as a coherent unit that is both functional within the larger text and conceptually separate from it, serves a distinctly intertextual purpose. In their discussion of proverbs and intertextuality, Roger Abrahams and Barbara Babcock describe what they call the game of "stacking" proverbs, where two or more are incorporated into the same literary frame thus creating a complex series of cross-references to both "the social uses of such sayings but also to previous literary uses of the proverb."<sup>81</sup> The literary use of the proverb both comments on and complicates the interactions between the written and the spoken word, the individual speaker/narrator, the reader, and the social environment they both inhabit.

The use of proverbs to evaluate a story recasts the relationship between the speaker and the cultural milieu from which the proverb has been drawn. Part of what makes a proverb distinct is that it is an impersonal, authoritative statement. When the embedded narrators in this text incorporate a proverb into the end of their tales, they generally introduce it and mark it off from the rest of their speech with a reference to its derivation from others, its distinctness from their own spontaneous speech, a framing convention that the speaker's "words are not his own, but those of the community or common sense speaking through him."<sup>82</sup> Proverbs represent a wisdom or critical authority that belongs to no one, but is accessible to all, communal in the truest sense.

In Barker's text, however, speakers who evaluate tales through proverbs are doing more than letting the community speak through them. They must first choose the particular proverb that sums up their tale, which is often about their own actions, and so their use of universally accessible proverbs still allows them to decide how their tale ought to be interpreted

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<sup>81</sup> Roger D. Abrahams and Barbara A. Babcock, "The Literary Use of Proverbs," in *Wise Words: Essays on the Proverb*, ed. Wolfgang Mieder (New York: Garland Publishing, 1994), 415-39, 431.

<sup>82</sup> James Obelkevich, "Proverbs and Social History," in *Wise Words*, 211-53, 214.

and argue for that interpretation. Speakers who evaluate their narratives through proverbs in *The Lining* talk *with* their community, joining their voice to the voice of received wisdom and common sense so that the act of telling their highly idiosyncratic tales becomes a way to reconnect them with the communal norms and standards of behaviour that the tales themselves tend to question.

Carol Wilson asserts that Barker consulted Oswald Dykes' *Moral Reflexions upon Select English Proverbs* (1708) in preparing *The Lining*, among other works, and two of Barker's proverbs appear also in Dykes' *Moral Reflexions*.<sup>83</sup> Dykes' introduction to *Moral Reflexions* resonates with Barker's text on multiple levels, especially in his discussion of proverbs as hallmarks of social bonds. Dykes claims that the value of proverbs, and their role in productive speech, is that they "are of universal Credit, and so well known every where for their Veracity, that they need not a Justice of Peace his Pass, to carry them through the whole World. They have pass'd through so many Ages already...that they are allowed on all Hands, and confirm'd by a General Voice, to be everlasting Standards of Truth."<sup>84</sup> Dykes' focus on proverbs being carried through the whole world and being confirmed by a general voice emphasizes their status as shared cultural property, accessible to all speakers. Repeatedly incorporating proverbs into the text as interpretive devices enhances the conversational nature of the text as a whole; in addition to conversing with each other, the narrators and listeners of *The Lining* are in conversation with the society as a whole. The text's proverbs interact with and question standardized social judgments, so that using these proverbs to evaluate tales creates a collaborative, roughly egalitarian construction of cultural criticisms taking place between

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<sup>83</sup> Carol Wilson, ed., *The Galesia Trilogy and Selected Manuscript Poems of Jane Barker*, 272, note 1.

<sup>84</sup> Oswald Dykes, *Moral Reflexions upon select English proverbs, Familiarly Accommodated to the Humour and Manners of the present Age* (London: H. Meere, 1708), xxi. Interestingly, Dykes' preface uses similar imagery to Barker's preface for *The Lining*. In both texts, the reader is imagined as a carver who will slice up and taste the text as if it were food. See Dykes, ii and Barker, 178.

narrators, readers/listeners, and the voice of the community. The proverb represents a kind of inclusive conversation in absentia.

#### **6. Return of the Rejected: Jacobite uncertainty and moral exemplarity**

When Galesia's old friends tell her their stories, the act of narration represents a reintegration with their social world as a whole, making Galesia a focal point for rebuilding relationships. As an audience for old friends' explanatory tales, Galesia is a bridge between these returning narrators and the society from which they have been separated. She provides an opportunity for them to forge a link, through their narratives, between their past and their present, their individual lives and their place in the larger world. Many of these embedded narrators have been either active or implicit Jacobite supporters, and many have suffered financially and personally as a result. Those who are not obviously described as having experienced alienation from their social world because of political adherences are isolated or exiled in other ways, through bad marriages, seductions, or, in one case, through truly malicious gossip.

Toni Bowers, in arguing against the long-standing presumption of "Jacobite certainty, ideological clarity, and unquenchable optimism" uses Barker's poetry, and particularly "The Virgin's paradise: a dream" to examine ambivalence, doubt and regret as parts of the period's Jacobite sensibility (Bowers, 865-66). Barker's poetry and her ambivalence about her vow of chastity to the muses in "The Virgin's paradise", Bowers claims, display a capacity for ideological self-doubt and compromise even within staunch Jacobite principles. In *The Lining*, embedded narratives examine themes of ideological commitment, doubt, and conflicts between principles and personal desires again and again, generally as thinly veiled political commentary. Claire Pickard's thesis on literary Jacobitism similarly argues that writing in a Jacobite context worked to explore moral and ethical implications of its ideology, and reconcile a sense of moral and

religious rightness with the fear and appearance of political failure,<sup>85</sup> a blend of particular political issues and wider ethical implications that appears constantly in *The Lining's* embedded narratives. In Barker's version of "The Story of the *Portuguese Nun*", for example, a young nun who was at first committed to her religious life is drawn away by passion for a Huguenot soldier. She sets fire to the convent, endangering the other nuns, and sneaks away in the ensuing diversion. She then marries the soldier breaking "her solemn Religious Vow of Chastity, and the Laws of her Country, betray'd the Honour of her Family; and disgrac'd her Sex and Quality" (225). The nun lives with the soldier and has several children, but at their deaths, they both express regret for their impetuous actions. Their children, who are illegitimate because the nun's religious vows made a legal marriage impossible, are left impoverished and they try to sue for their parents' estate. Their lawyer fears that their attempts will cause them to "lose that Charity they might hope for amongst their Friends, by humble Supplication," and so the narrative closes with the proverb "*All covet, all lose*" (226).

In this version of the Portuguese nun, where a woman bound by solemn vows is foolishly led away by a foreigner, placing her sisters in grave danger and eventually regretting her own betrayal, the allegory of an England seduced from its loyalties by a foreign invader is clear. However, the nun's extreme passion and original intention of converting the soldier to Catholicism provide some emotional, if not ideological, excuse, and the audience's unanimous expression of sympathy for the innocent children (226) displays reluctance to follow the principles of loyalty and betrayal to their obvious conclusion. Read as political commentary, the story of the Portuguese nun expresses compassion for those who violate oaths, uncertainty about what the consequences ought to be, and a reluctance to adhere to strict legal principles in

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<sup>85</sup> Claire Pickard, "Literary Jacobitism: the writing of Jane Barker, Mary Caesar, and Anne Finch" (Dphil thesis, Oxford, 2006), 9-10. Also see Pickard for a discussion of how operating from an ideologically Jacobite stance helped Barker construct an authorial voice that was not circumscribed by gender, 10-11.

the aftermath of betrayals, illegitimate alliances, and violated commitments. The evaluative proverb, “all covet, all lose” applies to the children seeking their inheritance, to their parents, who lost their peace of mind by coveting love and personal freedom and, presumably, to any Jacobite sympathizers who may lose whatever influence and ideological superiority they still have by coveting a return to absolute power and perfect adherence to their lofty standards of loyalty. The tale of the Portuguese nun is able to connect its political commentary with broad social ideals about the danger of over-reaching and attempts to gain too much. The tale’s compassion for the transgressors and the uncertainty it expresses over appropriate outcomes acquires universal social meaning because of its exploration of the problems plaguing an alienated group. Admitting Jacobite uncertainty, then, enhances the narratives’ ability to find wide critical relevance within Jacobite-inflected tales, so that the distinct ideological struggles of a particular social group can gain broad cultural relevance.

In addition to conveying doubt over Jacobite commitments, many of the tales and their evaluative proverbs also express significant moral ambiguity. As Neal Norrick points out, the saying “a rolling stone gathers no moss” has been traditionally interpreted in two ways, as meaning either that a person constantly on the move stays young, or a person constantly on the move stays poor.<sup>86</sup> As this example indicates, use of proverbs as evaluative devices requires both a choice of a workable proverb for each tale and a choice of a range of possible current meanings for the proverb. This form of narrative evaluation, then, can accommodate both alliance with communal wisdom and subtle questioning of received opinions. Captain Manley’s tale, of a wild young man, always on the move, who loses his fortune and experiences great difficulties but ends up comfortable and unencumbered, seems equally amenable to both

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<sup>86</sup> Neal Norrick, *How Proverbs Mean: Semantic Studies in English Proverbs* (New York: Mouton Publishers, 1985), 28. Also see Norrick for a discussion of the inherently conversational nature of proverbs, 12-15.

readings of “a rolling stone gathers no moss.” His use of it to close a tale in which he criticizes his impetuous youth and attributes his eventual reform and good fortune to his one attempt at constancy, however, encourages interpretation of the proverb as disparaging his early unsettled ways. The other possible meaning of the proverb lingers nevertheless, providing a back door through which to read politically motivated endorsement of Manley’s voluntary departure from England after the Glorious Revolution, and expressed desire to follow James II into France.

Manley is an excellent example of Jacobite uncertainty; he is, at first, unsure of where his political allegiances should lie. He tells Galesia, that his wife, “perceiving that I had some inclination to close with the new Government, and my Miss on the other hand, thinking I would go away, they both made their respective Interest according to their Fancies, my Wife to have me disobliged, that I might get me gone” (194), while his mistress pushes him to acquiesce in William and Mary’s usurpation and stay in England. His uncertainty somehow lands him in Newgate, so that when he is released, he leaves for St. Germain after all. Once there, he realizes that James II is unable to support all of his followers, and so he decides in the end to sail for Martinico (195). That decision leads to his enslavement but also to his ultimate social rehabilitation. Prior to and during his enslavement, Manley is nothing if not an isolated and alienated figure. His ethical confusion over how to approach the current political situation means that he cannot really claim a place on either side, and is not welcome or useful to either Jacobites or Hanoverians. His enslavement in the Madeira Islands cuts him off not only from political allegiance and his country, but also from his religion and status as an independent gentleman, so that Manley is effectually alienated from his own identity.

However, the alienation he experiences through foreign enslavement also provides the method by which he is restored to an acceptable social position. While in the Madeira Islands, Manley becomes friendly with a fellow slave, Father Barnard, and they persuade the Muslim

woman who owns them to convert to Christianity and leave with them for Italy. She fears travelling with two men and proposes marriage to Manley. He refuses, admitting that he is married in England. Once safely returned to London, Manley discovers that his wife made a will leaving everything to him on the day that he admitted his marriage to the Muslim woman, and then obligingly died before his return. In the context of foreign enslavement, Manley is given an opportunity to demonstrate the kind of ethical consistency and certainty that he failed to exercise before leaving England, and his wife's will, which allows him to reassume a comfortable social position, is explicitly presented as the reward for that act. Manley claims that "it proceeded from the Hand of Heaven, for my just Dealings toward that good Lady, at a time when Necessity urged me to transgress the rules of Honesty and Honour" (202). Manley's experience of alienation paves the way for his return as a reformed speaker with a morally instructive story to tell. His original political indecision indirectly provides an avenue for him to express moral rectitude in a different context, and so reenter his social world. His claim that "*a Rolling Stone never gathers Moss*" (202) refers, then, not just to the loss of his own fortune, but to the rejuvenation and recreation he experiences as a result of his wandering, making him into an exemplary, rather than merely a cautionary, tale.

The story of Bellamien also plays with the tension between the moral absolute as expressed by the concluding proverb, and the ethical ambiguity within the tale itself. Bellamien thinks she is married to Palemon, but discovers, after he leaves her, that he was already married to Favorella, who is still living, and for whom he has abandoned her and their child. Favorella and Palemon both chose to marry richer spouses after deciding that their marriage to each other limited their financial prospects, but were unhappy in their new marriages, and so reunited, but without revealing that they had been legally married all along. The tale is evaluated with the proverb "*Tis better, to sit still, than rise up, and fall*" (260). Favorella offers

this bit of wisdom to Bellamien to dissuade her from seeking a divorce, and so the apparent application of the proverb is that Bellamien will suffer more if the invalidity of her marriage is revealed than if she accepts Palemon's departure. However, the proverb's message of acquiescence applies equally to everyone in this tale. Favorella became a "fallen" woman by "marrying" another man after her marriage to Palemon, and now that she lives with Palemon in the guise of a mistress, she is widely known to be so fallen. It would have been better for her to sit still, either with Palemon in their original marriage, or with her second husband. One course would have protected her virtue, and the other her reputation. Instead, the tale closes with an irresolvable conflict between truth and appearances, where the legal wife appears to be a mistress, the apparently legal wife has actually never been married, and both parties would be better off if they sat still and accepted their respective situations. The proverb, applicable to both women, elides differences in their conduct, confusing the presumably strict boundary between wife and mistress. The tale, then, and its proverb's message of acquiescence, avoid making strict moral distinctions between the two women and instead interpret them as mirrors of each other, so that their differences in marital status become a point of conceptual connection, and both illustrate the tale's didactic message of acceptance. Both women occupy a disenfranchised position, as their indeterminate marital status makes it impossible to incorporate either neatly into social ideals governing female chastity, but that alienation is what allows them to reflect each other's status, and to connect with cultural ideals of prudence and acceptance in misfortune as illustrated by the proverb that sums up their narrative. Their outcast positions actually enhance their critical relevance and capacity to engage with social standards in a productive, exemplary way.

## 7. Galesia, Feminocentric Discourse, and the Recuperation of Romance

Mary Anne Schofield has argued that Barker's body of fictional works is an attempt to "anatomize *the* female form – the romance – to help her readers understand themselves", creating a "scathing analysis" of the romance tradition and its depiction of femininity through the ambivalence and lack of satisfactory closure that she demonstrates in, especially, *Love Intrigues* and *A Patchwork Screen*.<sup>87</sup> Schofield sees Barker's critique of and reaction to the romance as expressed primarily through her sustained exploration of female powerlessness in the *Patchwork* texts, and through the creation of Galesia the virgin poet as a type of heroine without the disasters of participating in romance (Schofield, 67-68). While *The Lining* certainly does question the romance tradition through its refusal of satisfactory marital endings and complication of the vice punished/virtue rewarded tradition, it may also engage with the romance tradition on a literary level, incorporating it into a pattern of productive reading.

In "The History of Dorinda", Dorinda describes her catastrophic life experiences as caused by "romantick whimsies" she develops because she has "read Plays, Novels, and Romances, till I began to think myself a Heroine of the first rate" (239). Her romantic folly leads her to marry her dishonest footman, who drives her into poverty, torments her with his mistresses, and eventually sells her son to a press-gang. Dorinda's poor judgment is as extreme as her misfortunes, but she is right about one thing. She has become the heroine of her own story. She is not a heroine in the sense that she wished to be – the kind that men adore and who ends up living happily ever after – but she is the heroine of a different kind of romance narrative, one abounding with predatory men and persecuted women. Her romance has one of the happier endings in *The Lining*, as Dorinda is reunited with her son, her husband is executed for other offenses, and Galesia advises the gentleman who has related Dorinda's tale to "since

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<sup>87</sup> Mary Anne Schofield, *Masking and Unmasking the Female Mind: Disguising Romances in Feminine Fiction, 1713-1799* (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 1990), 67.

your Wife is dead, when you have brought things to a Period, e'en take the Widow for your pains" (251). More importantly, however, in coming to such a conclusion, Dorinda has learned how to read her own romance. In the course of relating her story, Dorinda is able retrospectively to condemn her own foolish conduct and attempts to emulate heroines, recognizing that "one must remember the common saying, *Those that will no evil do, must do nothing tends thereto*" and finally learning to understand the importance of reputation and appearance to a woman by recognizing that she was in danger of "according to the saying of a Poet, *Dye with the scandal of a Whore, and never know the Joy*" (240).

Although she has rejected the romances she used to read as models for life, she has learned how to find a moralistic message and association with conventional wisdom in her own romance story, meaning that she is now able to recognize the critical value in her romance, where she functions as a negative example. Hearing Dorinda's story prompts similar musing in Galesia, and she thinks that "the stories of our Times are so black, that the Authors, can hardly escape being smutted, or defil'd in touching such Pitch" (252). While this reflection is fairly harsh on authors, Galesia as a reader/listener of Dorinda's own romance is not defiled by it; instead, she uses it to consider the present state of romantic writing, and recognizes in Dorinda the figure of the romantic reader lead astray.

Immediately after these thoughts, Galesia's friend Miranda arrives and tells Galesia a sad story very like Dorinda's. Miranda's unfaithful husband has disappeared and left her impoverished. Miranda and Galesia draw rational, if misanthropic, cultural conclusions from this tale. Miranda claims that the sorry state of marriage is due to "the Multitude of lewd Strumpets; who reign among us with Impunity" and that Galesia is fortunate because "amongst your many Tribulations, you have not had the Affliction of an ill Husband to torment you" (253). Galesia's reaction is slightly less bitter, as she reminds Miranda that she also has not had "a good one...to

consulate and protect me; But all these things are in the hands of Providence, in whose Protection let us recommend our selves" (253). Immediately following this recommendation, Galesia and Miranda go off to sleep, and the compressed narrative of their interaction also closes with a proverb, this one supplied by the narrator, that "*A good Conscience, is a continual Feast*" (253). Recalling the resignation and dependence on internal innocence that Galesia points to in her reading of Miranda's story, this proverb indicates that Galesia and Miranda have come to a shared reading of Miranda's romantic sufferings that acknowledges the unsatisfactory nature of marital relations but, in its reliance on providence and personal virtue, is also in harmony with communal wisdom on dealing with misfortune.

Galesia and Miranda are very good readers; they are able to extrapolate a universally applicable moral out of Miranda's own romance story, making it a base for critical reflection rather than an instrument of corruption. Dorinda, as the heroine of her own romance, is on the way to social recuperation by her narrative's end, and is taught by it how to "read" her own story. Galesia as the reader/listener uses the narrative appropriately, to reflect on writing and exemplarity, and so is informed rather than defiled by it. Galesia, Miranda, and Dorinda all demonstrate the process of reading romances productively, and so Galesia's interactions with these two women, heroines of their own romances, claims a place for the feminocentric romance tale within the process of cultural criticism even while it questions the pictures of femininity presented by romances. In Galesia's interaction with Miranda and Dorinda, gendered alienation is handled in much the same way as political/social alienation in other narratives. Dorinda and Miranda both occupy a marginalized position, based primarily on their romantic and marital failures. However, because their stories can be read as moral/social exempla, their marginalization becomes the means for their social reintegration; they acquire cultural

relevance through a productive reading of their tales that ascribes potentially universal conclusions to their particular sufferings.

Galesia's habit, in *The Lining*, of drawing exemplary narratives from both interaction and the "dirty rumped Book" she reads whenever she is left alone (202) also allows *The Lining* to borrow directly from other female writers, interrogating the cultural position of the female author and the kind of stories she is likely to tell. *The Lining's* incorporation and interpretation of other women's work insists on its critical value and in so doing, deploys the text's narrative/critical pattern to construct a culturally powerful image of the female writer. One of Galesia's visitors, Philinda, incorporates a specific romance tale into *The Lining*, which acts as a model for rehabilitating culturally questionable women's writing.

Philinda participates in the conversation between Galesia and their common friend, Lady Allgood, not by telling her own story or one drawn from her personal experience, but by re-telling a story she has read in Galesia's book, which strongly resembles Aphra Behn's *The History of the Nun; or, the Fair Vow-Breaker* (1689). The tale changes in Barker's hands; unlike Behn's version, "*Philinda's Story out of the book*" has little to say about financial motives affecting the nun's two marriages, and she is not granted any kind of dispensation in order to marry. In fact, since Barker starts her tale by claiming that the nun and the cavalier "promis'd personal Enjoyment, and to live together as married People" (214), it is not certain that they marry at all. Perhaps most significantly, the nun in Barker's tale sews her second husband's coat onto the sack containing her first husband's dead body by accident (217). Barker's version of the tale emphasizes the nun's sexual guilt, removing the familial and financial pressures that drove her into her second marriage, and insisting on the primary flaw of leaving the convent, but mitigates her murderous tendencies. The nun's combination of unexcused sexual transgression and her lack of bold and deliberate assertiveness, as compared to Behn's version, makes this nun a more

emphatically guilty and less attractive heroine and can be read as reflective of Barker's profound ambivalence about Behn, and the ambitious, market-driven model of the female writer that she represents.<sup>88</sup> In making this argument, Jaqueline Pearson points to Barker's repeated descriptions of the nun as cruel and wicked (216) and claims that the tale, in Barker's hands "is used to make very simple points about the destructive power of passion and to endorse the cliché ["Marry in haste, and Repent at leisure]" (Pearson, "History of the Nun", 241). Pearson, however, overlooks the fact that all narratives embedded in this text are endorsed by what she calls clichés, and that, however trite they may seem, they are always applicable to the narrative in question on at least one level.

Furthermore, the proverbs that evaluate all of the narratives embedded here always serve a significant textual function, even when they seem obvious or oversimplified; they provide a mechanism to reincorporate the uncertainty and ethical confusion that many of the narratives display with the surer voice of the community, so that every narrative, even when confused or told by a socially outcast person, is of demonstrable critical value to the culture as a whole. When Barker closes her adaptation of Behn's tale with a simple proverb, she may undermine the assertive appeal of Behn's Isabella, but she also reincorporates an erotically charged tale by a sometimes-maligned female writer into a universally accessible cultural discourse, ensuring it a place in the task of constructing standards of moral/ethical behaviour, whatever its flaws. In using this tale and reading it through the lens of a proverb, *The Lining* insists on the importance of reading women's writing in a reflective, culturally critical way that can find social value in narratives of moral failure and erotic transgression.

*The Lining* uses another tale adapted from Behn in "The History of *The Lady Gypsie*" and the "Story of *Tangerine*", both of which resemble the plots and characters of Behn's *The*

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<sup>88</sup> Jaqueline Pearson, "The History of *The History of the Nun*," in *Rereading Aphra Behn: History, Theory, and Criticism* (Virginia: University of Virginia Press, 1993), 234-53, 242-43.

*Wandering Beauty* (1698). The lady gypsy in Barker's tale is a thoughtless young girl, who brings most of her troubles on herself, and so is not nearly as sympathetic as Behn's Arabella Fairname,<sup>89</sup> but she is, in the end, sensible and virtuous enough to resist the temptation of seduction, make a good marriage, and be reinserted into her family and community. Barker's responsiveness to Behn's work is nothing new. In *A Patchwork Screen*, Galesia answers a woman who attempted to engage her in conversation by asking if she "Lik'd Mrs. *Phillips*, or Mrs. *Behn* best" by exclaiming "that *they ought not to be nam'd together*" (108). In *The Lining*, however, they are not only named together but coexist as prototypes of the woman writer. Galesia's dream sequences bring her into close contact with the "matchless Orinda" and confront her desire to imitate Orinda's writing life. *The Lining*, by incorporating both Behn and Phillips into its web of feminocentric sources and inspiration for writing, blurs perceived boundaries between appropriate and erotic women's writing, allowing both to function as potential tools for moralizing cultural criticism.

The position of Behn's narratives within Galesia's book itself is also significant, as the book also contains other unattributed tales that may or may not be by women writers and do not revolve around sexual or romantic themes. This means that Behn's narratives are laid alongside other tales of irreproachable moral pedigree, like the story of the two monks and "The Cause of the MOORS overrunning *Spain*" (205) that contain no hint of sexual scandal and are given strong moralizing messages. All of the narratives taken out of the book and recreated within *The Lining* are read in the same way. They all attempt to locate broadly applicable social critiques within particular tales, and so all take on roughly equal social and literary status in *The Lining* itself. Incorporating Behn's work in the moralistic anthology<sup>90</sup> represented by the dirty,

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<sup>89</sup> See Pearson, "History of the Nun," 243, for detailed discussion of Behn's Arabella Fairname.

<sup>90</sup> See Margaret Ezell's *Writing Women's Literary History* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1993), 69-71 for a discussion of how literary biographies and encyclopedias of the seventeenth and

rumpled book gives them cultural currency outside an erotic romance tradition, and argues that they can be read in the same way, and with the same results, as other, more obviously relevant tales. The compilation of Galesia's book, then, argues for women writers' place within the general literary environment and, by presenting and reacting to Behn's narratives in *The Lining*, demonstrates how they can participate simultaneously in broad cultural criticism and feminocentric discourses of courtship and seduction.

### 8. Commerce and Galesia's Dream

Just as the admission of alienation and political/religious differences is made to function as a point of social contact in this text, Galesia's implicit acknowledgement of her multiple sources of isolation also transforms her into a point of continuity between different times, as well as experiences. Both Jane Spencer and Kathryn King, in their discussion of *The Lining*, pay particular attention to a section of Galesia's dream where she is taken by her good genius to Parnassus to observe the annual coronation of Orinda. In the dream, Galesia arrives too late to see the ceremony itself, and instead sits in a corner to watch the singing, dancing, and hear a recitation of Abraham Cowley's "Upon Mrs. K. Phillips her Poems."<sup>91</sup> Spencer is particularly focused on the late arrival, seeing the dream sequence as an expression of "Barker's feelings, late in her life, that she has survived into a new and uncongenial age, when the tributes to the poet she admires are over."<sup>92</sup> King also focuses on the lateness of Galesia's arrival at the coronation and associates it with the changing conventions of writing, seeing Galesia's lateness and her dismissal from Parnassus with a handful of gold as "a market-place professional's nostalgia for a vanished world in which writing remains 'Orindan', uncontaminated by its

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early eighteenth century tended to incorporate women writers as reflective of critical principles applicable to both genders.

<sup>91</sup> Carol Shiner Wilson, ed., *The Galesia Trilogy and Selected Manuscript Poems of Jane Barker*, see Wilson's note 3, 276 for identification of the interpolated poem.

<sup>92</sup> Jane Spencer, *The Rise of the Woman Novelists: From Aphra Behn to Jane Austen* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1986), 68-69.

association with commerce” and as an admission that “for all her considerable regrets, it is with the fallen commercialized literary world that Jane Barker has cast her lot” (King, *Jane Barker*, 217).

In reading this episode as a tribute to the past and an indication of Galesia’s late arrival in the world of genteel, non-commercial women’s writing, neither Spencer nor King seems to notice that Galesia’s adventures in *The Lining* do not end with her expulsion from Parnassus. When she wakes, the fairy gold that closes her dream reappears as a purse of real gold, given to her by a mysterious gentleman. After reflecting on the troubles and psychological burdens that accompany wealth, Galesia determines to invest her wealth in a cargo of female virtues (279). By becoming the physical manifestation of virtue, and especially female virtue, the fairy gold, the bribe or consolation prize that marked Galesia’s expulsion from Parnassus, is transmuted into exactly the sort of merchandise that Galesia and her associates have been “selling” all along, and so Galesia’s expulsion does not really act as much of a rupture in her critical project before and after the dream sequence.

The acquisition of this merchandise prompts Galesia to engage with her social environment more broadly than she has done up to this point. Through an unnamed agent, Galesia offers her female virtues for sale at court, in the “Hundreds of *Drury*” (280), and amongst the wives of wealthy city merchants (281). Although she is not immediately successful in finding a market for her wares, the blame for that is explicitly focused on the customers, who reject them out of concern for fashion (279) and pretence of humility (281). Galesia’s investment of the fairy gold in goods for sale, then, gives her something of legitimate value to offer to an extensive cross-section of the female population, from court ladies to impoverished prostitutes. She finds some commercial success in the end, selling significant quantities of piety and repentance to prostitutes in Drury lane. Galesia’s mercantile adventures, more importantly,

create a vision of redemption and social reintegration. When Galesia first offers a “parcel of *Chastity*” in Drury Lane, one of the prostitutes takes notice that the parcels bear “the Mark of two or three of her Acquaintance who had lived with her in the same Court, viz. *Betty Bilk; Sarah Shuffle, Polly Picklock, &c*” and is surprised to see that “these Girls are grown such great Dealers in this kind of Ware” (280). The women she names were, according to her description, imprisoned and transported, presumably to North America or Ireland. They are, then, radically separated from their community and, as dealers in chastity, conceptually separated from their former prostitute companions. However, their involvement in commercial activity reinserts them into their old friend’s narrative as role models rather than partners in crime, and their marks on the chastity they sell become the visible mark of their social reclamation and redemption in the colonies. Participation in the marketplace, in this instance, becomes the visible sign of the women’s enhanced social engagement and puts them back into imaginative involvement with their original communities.

While selling her cloth, Galesia gains another narrative. After Mrs. Castoff buys a parcel of piety and repentance, she tells her own story of seduction and prostitution. There is little that is remarkable in the story itself. Mrs. Castoff was led away from her family by a woman, Mrs. Wheedle, who coaxed her into accepting a supposed position as a nursery-maid, but instead threw her into the clutches of a man looking for a mistress. Once seduced, Mrs. Castoff became his mistress and was content until he blamed her for infecting him with a venereal disease and cast her off. Her lover’s wife, hearing of her misfortunes, helps her set up as a mantua-maker, and she does well until she becomes involved in another romantic affair and is cast off again. Finally, without friends or lovers, she becomes a prostitute. The most striking feature of the narrative is the way “cast off” echoes through it like a refrain. Because of her vices, she is cast off by her first lover, her family, her lover’s wife, and her second lover, until she buys Galesia’s

piety and repentance and “according to the proverb, *Cast off Vice, when Vice cast off her*” (289). When Mrs. Castoff turns her life experiences into a narrative, she is able to read them as the cautionary tale that they are and, in incorporating the repetitive phrase, cast off, that is finally used to encapsulate both her moral failure and her move towards redemption, to author them as a coherent strand of socially relevant moral conflicts. In narrating her life, Mrs. Castoff turns her chaotic experiences into a whole by tracking their constant expression of moralized cause and effect. She recreates herself as not just a marginalized individual, but the creator of a significant tale with a universally accessible moral meaning. The moment of market-based exchange, where Mrs. Castoff takes Galesia’s piety and repentance and gives her a tale of piety and repentance in turn, continues the text’s overarching project of integrating marginalized individuals through appropriate readings of their stories and keeps Galesia situated in both the commercial world and environment of narrative exchange she has inhabited in the rest of the text. Commercial circulation widens Galesia’s reach and provides a channel and an impetus for others, like Mrs. Castoff, to narrate and interpret their lives, thereby demonstrating their social relevance.

Leigh Eicke does explore the commercial sequence that closes *The Lining*, interpreting Galesia’s attempts to “sell” virtue in the marketplace as “only somewhat successful” and seeing her return to the country with the unnamed lady as offering her “perhaps a return to manuscript culture” (Eicke, 152). It is true, as Eicke asserts, that Galesia at the end of the text is returning to the site of her large scale, manuscript-driven production, *A Patchwork Screen*. However, she is also returning into the country in order to continue selling her commercial wares. She hopes “to try the Country, in hopes the Women of all Ranks and Stations would be better Customers” (289) for her cargo of feminine virtues. Galesia’s return into the country may bring her back into contact with the kind of collaborative, manuscript production that she once

engaged in with the unnamed lady, but she also has a plan to remain engaged in commerce—standing in for the world of print—and to keep up her circulation among “women of all ranks and stations”. The hope that closes this text, then, may be the hope that Galesia will continue to bring together the sociable values of critical conversation and the multi-layered world of female writers, readers and customers through her identification of universal cultural meaning in particular women’s stories.

Josephine Donovan sees *The Lining* as “the terminal work in the women’s tradition of the framed-novelle” because Galesia is alone in some episodes and draws narratives from printed matter that she reads, rather than solely from her conversational partners or her own manuscript productions (Donovan, 56). Donovan suggests that *The Lining*, by engaging heavily with print culture, marks a move away from the collaborative storytelling and sociable criticism figured in, for example, *A Patchwork Screen*. Donovan also argues that *The Lining* acts as a contested text between the framed-novelle form and a move towards a more streamlined, unified fiction focusing on “the history and development of the central, female protagonist” because Galesia is reincorporated into her country idyll with the unnamed lady (Donovan, 57). Galesia’s history and development, however, are the history of the framed-novelle; her joy at returning to the country with the lady, and her ability to navigate her social world in a more or less satisfactory manner, have been created by and through the process of reading, interpreting, and identifying with other’s narratives.

*The Lining*, as the final instalment of the Galesia trilogy, is a distinctly successful example of the framed-novelle because it thoroughly incorporates the collaborative process of narrative criticism into the development of the central reader figure, thereby demonstrating the inherent social value of conversationally-driven narration and criticism. *The Lining* also does not abandon conversationally-structured narratives or sociable models of critical reaction; instead, it applies

conversationally-inflected methods of reading and reacting to all its embedded narratives, whatever their source, so that isolated reading and print publications are drawn in to the sociable ethos that characterizes the framed-novelle. The narratives Galesia draws from printed sources, as well as those that she hears from others, are all incorporated into a pattern of critical reading and alignment with communal wisdom, as expressed by the evaluative proverbs that close each narrative, so that printed, written, and oral narratives are given broadly equivalent status as material for reflection and for engaging in critical discourse. *The Lining* demonstrates the successful imposition of sociable reading strategies onto the isolated and isolationist world of print publication, arguing for the constant relevance of the framed-novelle form in a changing literary environment.

## Chapter 6

### Eliza Haywood

In the opening of *The Tea Table* of 1725, Eliza Haywood asks, “is there any Irregularity in Conduct, any Indecorum in Behavior or Dress, any Defect in Beauty, which is not here fully expatiated on?”<sup>93</sup> This capacious statement indicates the range of critical uses to which she puts the framed-novelle form in *The Tea Table* and *The Fruitless Enquiry* of 1727. *The Tea Table* appears quite different from the *Enquiry*, and from other works discussed here, because it is less concerned with the use of narrative as moral exemplum. Like them, however, it constructs a productive example of literary-critical conversation and examines both women’s roles and the importance of narrative within such conversation. More self-consciously literary than most of the framed-novelles discussed here, *The Tea Table*<sup>94</sup> examines the development of egalitarian relationships within a mixed-gender group, demonstrating how the incorporation of narrative and criticism into an ethos of sociable conversation can provide women with a pathway into enhanced discursive authority. Haywood’s creation of a group of idealized readers/critics in this text also allows her to use the framed-novelle’s conventions to create a blueprint for productive interpretation of amatory tales. It will be useful to think of *The Tea Table* as a technical guide to the critically significant narrations and conversations that other texts depict; deeply concerned with the practices of narrating and critiquing, *The Tea Table*, in effect, shows its readers how they ought to read and discuss it and other works of feminocentric fiction.

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<sup>93</sup> Eliza Haywood, *The Tea Table* in *Selected Works of Eliza Haywood I*, ed. Alexander Pettit (London: Pickering & Chatto, 2000)1:1-35, 7.

<sup>94</sup> The second part of *The Tea Table*, published in 1726, is not discussed here because, although it adheres to the form established by the first part, it displays a preponderance of criticism of other literary works and direct attacks on writers, specifically Richard Savage, which undermine its ability to present conversation as a socially reformative tool. See Alexander Pettit’s introduction to *The Tea Table...Part the Second* in *Selected Works of Eliza Haywood I*, 1:35-36, for a discussion of Haywood’s attacks on Savage in this text, and its possible causes and also Kathryn King’s “Eliza Haywood, Savage Love, and Biographical Uncertainty,” *Review of English Studies* 59 (2008): 722-39, for fuller discussion of the Haywood/Savage connection.

*The Fruitless Enquiry* is, by contrast, a more finished construction; it uses the process of productive interpretation outlined in *The Tea Table* to issue an injunction to the protagonist and so implicitly to readers to circulate among women and uncover their authentic life stories, a process that is meant to identify the requirements for women's happiness. As such, this work comprises thematically related narratives to locate shared elements of experience and social vulnerability affecting diverse women, turning the motif of searching for a tranquil woman into a means of shattering the idea that domestic agency can be a meaningful source of happiness for women. We will also see that the *Enquiry's* search after a woman who can provide a magical resolution to the central character's troubles privileges the discussion and exchange of women's stories as a method of guiding women's social judgment. It insists on the consequentiality of women's secret stories – the seductions, misjudgments, and acts of violence that make up the *Enquiry* are shown to be far more than salacious scandals. They are evidence of the unsuspected flaws in the central character's social environment. *The Fruitless Enquiry* resonates with the work of Barker and Manley in this sense; their texts demonstrate the framed-novelle's peculiar fitness for performing a proto-feminist identification of women as a class and they elevate amatory tales to a level of broad social significance through the techniques of accumulation and critical comparison.

### **1. Literary Ambitions and Didactic Purpose in *The Tea Table***

The work's full title is *The Tea Table: or, a conversation between some polite persons of both sexes, at a lady's visiting day. Wherein are represented the various foibles, and affectations, which form the character of an accomplish'd beau or modern fine lady*. The subtitle emphasizes the contradiction between the text's stated purpose and its actual content. It would lead the reader to expect to encounter foibles and affectations within the conversation itself, but no such failings appear. Foibles and affectations are confined to the introductory

passages which precede the actual conversations; these conversations are concerned with serious subjects that are better described as sins or crimes than foibles or affectations.

Haywood's statement of purpose and the opening passages of the work articulate her position with regard to the nature of public engagement and critical conversation. Haywood's claim to pursue foibles and affectations and the narrator's description of a tea table as a site for detecting and discussing absent persons' failures in appearance or manner, such as her references to "false Hair, fine Cosmeticks" (7), imply that the narrator is there to join with the other guests in criticizing absent others, rather than engaging with each other in constructive conversation. The narrator describes the social space of the tea table as a place to articulate opinions formed elsewhere, rather than a place to form opinions through discussion. This initial stance towards public engagement and criticism seems to align Haywood's text with a model of social criticism that would have been very familiar to her readers, one similar to that espoused by the appropriately titled *Spectator*. Anthony Pollock, in his discussion of Addison and Steele's role in imagining and constructing the eighteenth-century public sphere, says that *The Spectator's* model of critical engagement depends on Mr. Spectator's function as a neutral observer, which is distinct from impartiality because "impartiality allows for a public statement of opinion that neutrality precludes; and, while impartiality effaces one's private prejudices in the name of public declaration, neutrality marks the effacement of public declaration, regardless of private feeling."<sup>95</sup>

Mr. Spectator does not intervene in what he sees or discuss his observations directly with the people he observes, but instead carries his criticism home with him to write up in the complicated pseudo-public forum of a periodical addressed and distributed to unknown readers. The eighteenth century's most famous model of public-spirited criticism, then, relied on

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<sup>95</sup> Anthony Pollock, *Gender and the Fictions of the Public Sphere, 1690-1755* (London: Routledge, 2009), 58.

distanced observation and the expression of criticism in a forum that was conceptually removed from its occasion. *The Tea Table's* narrator describes the tea table as serving a similar function to that of *The Spectator*; it is a place where observations can be rehashed and the previously withheld criticisms those observations have inspired can finally be expressed. The narrator's evident disapproval of tea table conversation, and her plan to write about it in order to expose foibles and affectations, expresses an intention to follow Mr. Spectator's example of observing in silence and articulating his critiques later and for a different audience. She apparently intends to participate in a tea table conversation that revolves around criticism of previous observations, which will, in turn, criticize the conversation itself for a different and absent circle, the reading audience. The narrator's discomfort with this model of engagement is apparent early on, however, as she complains that the rare instances where "more useful Topics make the Conversation" are "so little approv'd of by the Generality of the persons who compose those Assemblies" (7). The narrator disapproves of a form of criticism that revolves around previously constructed opinions and her comment sets up the ongoing distinction she develops between ordinary tea table conversation and that encouraged by her hostess, Amiana.

Amiana is distinctive not just for her own "Wit and good Humour" (7) but also for the kinds of conversations that she develops at her tea table. The most obvious element of Amiana's conversation is its consistent benevolence but she also approaches the process of conversation from a different and proactive position. Amiana directs and reforms her guests' conversations about absent others, as she "excuses the *Whims* of the *Virtuoso* on the account of his Philosophy – the Vanity of the *Poet* for the sake of his good Verses – the severity of the *Prude* in respect to that Virtue she assumes" (8). Most significantly, however, she is "possess'd of so much Sweetness of Disposition herself, that she endeavours all she can to inspire the same in others" (7); hence, Amiana's participation in the tea table discussion not only prompts the

reinterpretation of other people's flaws in a positive light but is also an active attempt to guide the judgment of the conversational group. While the other conversational participants are busy articulating previously formed opinions, Amiana is making positive efforts to sway the formation of opinion. Amiana's tea table, then, is not just superior to other, similar gatherings because her conversations are less trivial and censorious of absent persons, but also because she encourages a different kind of conversation more closely allied to real social reform. The framed-novelle, which positively requires for its generic success the ongoing interaction of multiple persons and multiple perspectives, rather than uninvolved observation and subsequent reporting, provides a framework for Haywood to demonstrate and endorse a critical model that prioritizes social interaction as a means of forming judgment.

## **2. Constructing a Conversational Circle: interaction and equality in a mixed-gender group**

Alexander Pettit argues that Amiana attempts to control the conversation by minimizing and containing elements of sexual transgression, but he also claims that "Haywood uses a 'conversational circle' not to foster a corporate move towards moral consensus...but rather to present a multiplicity of moral perspectives, none of them dominant;" thus, he concludes that Amiana's attempts at control fail.<sup>96</sup> However, there is evidence that Amiana's moral perspective fails to control the conversation because she does not really wish to have control. Although Amiana's moral interpretations are consistently conservative, even prudish, she makes no attempt to silence the other conversational participants in the core group. She listens to the perspectives of others and offers her own in turn, making her consistent moralizing an effort at persuasion and an example of productive disagreement within a speaking group rather than a bid for conversational control.

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<sup>96</sup> Alexander Pettit, "Adventures in Pornographic Places: Eliza Haywood's Tea-Table and the decentering of moral argument," *Papers on Language and Literature* 38(2002): 244-69, 260.

Other characters behave similarly, listening patiently to the opinions of others in addition to offering their own, so that no particular participant makes a sustained bid for dominance. The frame character's cooperative manner of discussing and disagreeing is particularly apparent in the first sustained conversation on the relationship of love and individual will, where the men and women disagree, but do so without any attempt to talk over each other. They are always attempting to persuade their listeners into sharing their opinions, not attempting to impose their opinions, and so their conversational pattern functions as an example of interactive opinion formation even if the group does not always reach a clear consensus. So, although Haywood's text may not demonstrate much faith that a conversing group will come to a clear and desirable agreement, it does demonstrate the value of group discussion as a process that guides individual judgment by eliciting varying moral perspectives in turn, without imposing any one on the reader/listener.

Equality between members of the speaking group is illustrated by the narrator's manner of describing them. She claims that one of the men, Philetus, is "a Gentleman than whom there is scarce to be found one Master of more Accomplishments, a greater Capacity, or a Taste more refin'd and polite" and that Dorinthus "has few Equals for fine Sense" (10); she distinguishes both men as superior to most people but comparable to each other by virtue of their mental qualities. Brilliante, the narrator claims, is "by some distinguished by the Title of the *Lovely*, by others the *Witty*... it is difficult to determine in which she most out-shines the Generality of her Sex" (10). The narrator's refusal to choose between Brilliante the lovely and Brilliante the witty functions as a refusal to describe her on strictly gendered terms; because Brilliante can be read as the lovely or the witty, without either quality taking precedence over the other, she can function as either an overtly gendered figure, the lovely, or as an almost gender-neutral speaker, the witty. Allowing Brilliante's wit equal time with her loveliness gives her the same

kind of mental qualification as Philetus's capacity and Dorinthus's sense. Ascribing gender-neutral conversational qualifications to the core speakers allows them to perform the same conversational functions, without confining them to stereotypes of male or female speech.

The importance of gender neutrality in conversation is demonstrated by the difference in Amiana's conversational role at the beginning of the text and later when some undesirable speakers have been removed, specifically a "Titled *Coxcomb*" who has bored the group with opinions about a play and a woman who stopped conversation with her imitation of physical distress (8). Amiana is first described as engaged in the feminine conversational work of civilizing or reforming other conversational participants. Before the undesirable participants leave, Amiana's conversational efforts are directed towards discouraging malicious gossip and maintaining a veneer of friendliness: in other words, towards promoting good manners and acceptable sociable behaviour. This behaviour is gendered female in the eighteenth century, as Lawrence Klein demonstrates in his discussion of references to women contributing the "politeness" to polite conversation in the public sphere (Klein, 'Gender, Conversation and the Public Sphere,' 105-6). Thus, when Amiana is enmeshed in a conversational group that includes undesirable speakers, as at the beginning of the text, she is obliged to adopt a conversational role persistently gendered feminine. When the group contains only qualified speakers with a clear critical purpose her role is no longer obviously gendered. Amiana in the middle and at the end of the text expresses her opinion and introduces topics of conversation but does not need to police others. The process of desirable conversation encourages ungendered speech habits by removing the need for a feminine, conciliatory presence in the speaking group. Haywood's use of a conversational circle to frame her text demonstrates and endorses female discursive authority by providing an egalitarian, mixed-gender space where women can engage in productive social and literary criticism.

### 3. Embedded Narratives and Critical Collaboration

Kathryn King suggests that *The Tea Table* is Haywood's recreation of the mixed gender conversation she would have experienced in the Hillarian circle, a literary coterie gathering around Aaron Hill in the early 1720s that encouraged the work of young writers of both genders.<sup>97</sup> Christine Gerrard characterizes the Hillarian circle as a lively centre of London literary life in the early part of the decade, driven by Hill's commitment to offering "disinterested advice, support, and friendship" to young writers, as well as providing a venue for their voices through his periodical the *Plain Dealer* (1724), and staging benefit nights of his plays for his friends.<sup>98</sup> His friends included Haywood herself, along with Richard Savage and her soon-to-be nemesis, Martha Fowkes. Gerrard's account describes the Hillarian circle as remarkable for its combination of literary discussion and manuscript exchange with a commitment to questioning concepts of rank, gender norms, and social distance that sought to "create a public space for a civilized relationship between men and women untainted by outmoded rituals of female coquetry and male pursuit" (Gerrard, 76). The *Plain Dealer* of 27 April 1724 provides a striking picture of how the coterie may have operated. In this issue, the editor meets "a handsome appearance of young people of both sexes" gathered for tea at a friend's house.<sup>99</sup> The group impresses the editor with the good breeding of its members, and their discussion integrates gender-inflected social questioning and literary criticism. The group begins with a brief discussion of the expectation that women not reveal their affection for a man, with the editor determining that disinterested love will lead to an open deportment (79). They compare two

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<sup>97</sup> Kathryn King, "New Contexts for Early Novels by Women: The Case of Eliza Haywood, Aaron Hill, and the Hillarians, 1719–1725," in *A Companion to the Eighteenth-Century English Novel and Culture*, ed. Paula R. Backscheider and Catherine Ingrassia (Chichester: Blackwell Publishing, 2009), 261–76, 262.

<sup>98</sup> Christine Gerrard, *Aaron Hill, The Muses Projector, 1685–1750* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 62.

<sup>99</sup> Aaron Hill, *The Plain Dealer: being select essays on several curious subjects* (London: J. Osborn, 1734), 1: 77.

manuscript poems, one called “The Resolve” by “Lady W\_\_\_\_y M\_\_\_\_e”<sup>100</sup> and one by a young man in attendance; both poems address the relationship between flirtatiousness, virtue, and wit in women and both meet with the group’s approval (80-81). Although this is only a short sketch of mixed-gender sociability, its similarity to the ethos of *The Tea Table* is plain. Both texts locate productive discourse between men and women in the feminocentric space of the tea table, unite positive social qualities with distinctly literary critiques, and, through the emphasis they place on good breeding in setting the scene, gesture towards the importance of polite sociability in critical conversation.

Reading manuscripts plays an important role in both *The Plain Dealer* and *The Tea Table* in supporting egalitarian interaction in the text’s mixed-gender conversations. The Hillarian circle provided Haywood and its other members with advice on their work and a network of literary friendship, as well as an egalitarian, mixed-gendered space. The literary and social support that the Hillarian circle offered Haywood is also part of a larger model of literary interaction and group-based criticism. In their study of criticism as a sociable practice, Paul Trolander and Zeynep Tenger suggest that literary circles surrounding writers such as Katherine Phillips would have “engaged in campaigns of wider manuscript circulation of their sponsored poets before moving them to print,” a practice that exemplifies the interdependence of literary activity and sociability in the period immediately preceding the most productive stage of

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<sup>100</sup> This poem, as quoted in *The Plain Dealer*, is “The Lady’s Resolve” in *The Poetical Works of the Right Honourable Lady M\_\_\_\_y W\_\_\_\_y M\_\_\_\_e* (London: J. Williams, 1768), 88-90. It is included as “Written extempore in Company in a Glass Window the first year I was marry’d” in Lady Mary Wortley Montagu, *Essays and Poems and Simplicity, A Comedy*, ed. Robert Halsband and Isobel Grundy (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1977), 179. The poem quoted in *The Plain Dealer* vol.1, 81 as “Answer to the Resolve” and attributed to one of the gentleman present, appears to be a slightly different version of “The Gentleman’s Answer”, from *The Poetical Works of the Right Honourable Lady M\_\_\_\_y W\_\_\_\_y M\_\_\_\_e*, 93-94 with lines 6-8 showing the most alteration. “The Gentleman’s Answer” is not included in Halsband and Grundy’s edition.

Haywood's career.<sup>101</sup> Haywood looks to her own experience and to the tradition of the literary circle to demonstrate the significance of literary and social engagement in promoting equal interaction in mixed-gender groups. Not only does the convention of manuscript circulation in a sociable setting allow women to introduce their chosen works, orienting conversation around literary products promotes equal participation by neutralizing the gender-inflected experiential differences that can hamper more abstracted discussions. Presenting embedded narratives as literary products, and particularly as amatory fiction, levels the conversational playing field by providing all participants with equal access to the thematic basis for their critical conversations.

Haywood did not always have access to the Hillarian circle to promote or comment on her career. Examining the complicated relationships of the Hillarians in detail is unfortunately beyond the scope of this study, but we can note that a work of the same year as the first part of *The Tea Table*, Haywood's *Memoirs of a Certain Island adjacent to the Kingdom of Utopia* (1725) presents a harsh satirical view of Martha Fowkes and marks an effective rupture with the Hillarian group (Gerrard, 95). It is surely not a coincidence that Haywood published *The Tea Table* shortly after ending her association with a group that seems to have been so structurally and ideologically similar to the one portrayed in this text. In the connection between *The Tea Table* and the Hillarian circle, we can see in concrete terms a benefit of the framed-novelle form that is hinted at in Jane Barker's work. The literary creation of an imagined critical group can seem to compensate for a writer's real-life lack of such interaction. Creating a fictional discursive group that relates and critiques literary narratives (only one of the embedded narratives here is an orally reported tale; all others are also manuscripts discussed by the group)

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<sup>101</sup> Paul Trolander and Zeynep Tenger, *Sociable Criticism in England 1625-1725* (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 2007), 17. Although Trolander and Tenger do not spend much time directly discussing how women's critical roles may have varied in sociable and printed contexts, they do consistently present coterie criticism based on manuscript circulation as an environment that encouraged roughly egalitarian gender relations.

seems to allow Haywood to meditate on the development of critical reading practices, their relationship to discursive interaction, and the role of exemplarity in narrative within her own text, rather than in real life. Writing in a framed-novelle form at this point in her literary life can be seen as a significant turning point in Haywood's development into the socially responsive but slyly subversive writer of *The Fruitless Enquiry*.

The presentation of embedded narratives as literary objects also allows Haywood to manipulate shifting combinations of oral and literate cultures. Catherine Ingrassia notes that *The Tea Table* claims to be the written replication of oral practice and describes how Haywood uses figures of disruptive speakers to highlight difficulties in the containment of oral freedoms. Ingrassia relates this discussion to one of Haywood's translated works, *La Belle Assemblée* (1724), in which reading is explicitly imagined as differing along gendered lines. In *La Belle Assemblée*, the men form a plan whereby they will separate and "in mutual silence take up what Book shall please us best" and then reconvene for discussion, while the women decide to adopt the same plan "all but what relates to the Silence."<sup>102</sup> Ingrassia interprets the women's blend of orality and reading as an indication of how women engage in communal, inclusive interpretation (Ingrassia, "Eliza Haywood, Periodicals, and the Function of Orality," 147-48). When written texts are read aloud and responded to in the course of a conversation, all participants have equal access to those texts, despite any differences in literacy, familiarity with literary conventions, or simple possession of the text. Reading aloud demystifies texts so that everyone within the listening group is able to participate in the ensuing discussion.

*The Tea Table* privileges this feminine model of orally-inflected shared reading as an approach to interpretation and criticism. The manuscripts that speakers introduce as topics for

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<sup>102</sup> Catherine Ingrassia, "Eliza Haywood, Periodicals, and the Function of Orality," in *Fair Philosopher: Eliza Haywood and the Female Spectator*, ed. Lynn Marie Wright and Donald J. Newman (Lewisburg: Bucknell University Press, 2006), 141-57, 142. For reasons that are not entirely clear from the article, Ingrassia classifies *The Tea Table* as a periodical.

discussion are read aloud and presented to the group in their physical form, so that they exist simultaneously as both literary objects and oral performances. As Adam Fox discusses in his study of early modern oral and literate cultures, the practice of reading aloud had long been a way to overcome disparate literacy levels and so “give texts a public and communal dimension.”<sup>103</sup> There is no indication that any of the participants in this text have problems with literacy; since it is presented as a gathering of the upper classes. However, the process of reading aloud still gives embedded narratives a “public and communal dimension” because it disrupts the isolation of reading to oneself, so that engagement with written work becomes a natural part of sociability. Textual criticism is taken out of the private world of the library or the closet and naturalized within the feminocentric space of the social gathering.

*The Tea Table* uses the oral delivery of literary objects to make literary criticism into an informal, collaborative act embedded in the environment of sociable conversation. All of the texts in this study use the oral delivery of instructive narrative to claim moral authority and utility for the act of sociable conversation, but *The Tea Table* takes that process further. Using the same technique to inspire and structure literary criticism, Haywood gives the feminocentric space of the tea table cultural and aesthetic authority as well. This text demonstrates that sociable conversation can lead women into the “republic of letters”, making reading and reflection on texts an inclusive and communal process, one that fits comfortably within the female-driven world of the social visit. So, although the *Tea Table* does not try to guide the participants to specific conclusions on morality or the social status of women, it is highly effective at demonstrating the potential for women to gain social authority and participate in significant cultural discourse that is already present in the structure of sociable interaction. For

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<sup>103</sup> Adam Fox, *Oral and Literate Culture in England 1500-1700* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 37.

these reasons, this text may take the strongest stance in this study in presenting conversational engagement as a potential tool for enhancing female social positions.

Orienting understanding and judgment of a narrative around both its oral and written presentation also supports the interactive, socially engaged climate of criticism that the text constructs. Reading aloud to an assembled group encourages oral response, and so makes reading and criticizing a narrative into a collaborative process. The presence of a textual object that can be given to participants to review makes the narrative equally accessible to all literate parties; when everyone can look at a written text, everyone can use that textual object to enable their own response. Blending oral and written presentations encourages interactivity and provides all participants with a documentary record that they can point to and fall back on to support their opinions, an approach that encourages the egalitarian gender relations depicted in *The Tea Table*. Here the experiential differences (and handicaps) that can inflect conversations not centred on narrative can be overcome.

The function of written narratives as conversational levellers is illustrated through the progression of narrative and criticism in *The Tea Table*, in which disagreement is mediated by introducing a text that acts as a catalyst for further discussion. Discussion in this conversational circle begins with general principles, on which the participants disagree, and then moves into narrative. The introduction of narratives regroups the participants around a shared frame of reference. Grounding discussion of general principles in specific circumstances presented in a narrative opens up opportunities for agreement within the group because a narrative offers multiple avenues for interpretation and so multiple sites for social criticism where men and women can reach agreement. Judging a narrative is inherently different from judging a floating idea, such as the idea that giving in to passion is innocent, because a narrative presents its reader/listener with particular circumstances from which they can draw conclusions rather than

asking them to draw on received wisdom about social life, wisdom which is more liable to limitation along gender lines.

The conversational criticism of the core group begins with disagreement on the subject of love, individual will, and social condemnation of persons who give way to their passion. The group is split along gender lines; the male speakers maintain that people who give way to passion are “innocent in *Design*” (11) and the women argue that because women always should have the spectre of social ruin in front of them, giving way to passion is “so vastly contrary to Reason, good Sense, and even the first great Law of Nature, self-preservation” (13) that there can be no excuse for it. In this initial discussion, male and female speakers are effectively responding to different ideas, or reading from a different text. Philetus’s rhapsody on the effects of love presumes a situation where the lover in question is so enamoured that he or she honestly cannot distinguish between desire and reason. Brilliante and Amiana’s discussion of women’s response to love, however, assumes that passion can never make a woman forget her social vulnerabilities, and so some of her reasoning capacity remains to preserve her from ruin which is why it is still inexcusable for a woman to give way to passion. The group’s gendered division of opinion is caused not only by their varying moral philosophies but by the incongruity in their basis for reasoning and forming social critiques.

Gender division alters when discussion is based in a narrative, introduced with a copy of a poem written by a young lady “in the time when she was in Possession of all those Pleasures which are to be found in Love” (13). After Amiana reads the poem, which focuses on the woman’s fears that her lover will be inconstant, the group shifts its discussion from love as a universal experience into a discussion that Brilliante describes as having “insensibly fallen from the particular Passions to the Temper in general” (17), concerning the effects of individuals’ tempers on their life experiences, a subject on which everyone can reach agreement. This

newfound agreement is demonstrated by *Brilliante* and *Philetus*'s similar critical reactions to similar narrative stimuli. *Philetus* responds to the lady's poem about abandonment not by reiterating his endorsement of passion as innocent despite the cost, but by claiming that the writer of the poem expresses such anxiety because of "the Extravagance of the Lady's own Temper" (14). *Brilliante* responds to a narrative about another woman who anticipates misfortunes by agreeing that some people "make to themselves Woes more terrible than all that Fortune cou'd inflict on them" (17).

The introduction of narrative makes it possible for these two disputants to agree on a social issue because they are now basing their criticisms on the same foundation. The use of embedded narrative to stimulate criticism allows *Brilliante*, *Philetus*, and the other speakers to respond to the same set of circumstances; this in turn enables cross-gender agreement by making it easier for men and women to exercise their reason on the same material. *Brilliante* and *Philetus* no longer have to imagine the feelings of lovers in order to respond; they are given a coherent and complete account of both women's actions and motivations, and so are able to respond to them without the gender-influenced guesswork of drawing on general ideas about men, women and relationships. Grounding criticism in narrative makes it possible for the frame narrators to consider all the variables and mitigating aspects of the situation they are asked to judge, and so encourages them to exercise their critical abilities outside their gender-determined life experiences.

The significance of narratives and embodied texts as evidence for criticism is revealed by the inset tale, "Beraldus and Celemena, or, The Punishment of Mutability." Beraldus and Celemena's amorous tale is unremarkable, except that its outcome turns upon the existence and destruction of their private narrative in textual form. When Beraldus learns that the princess is suspicious of his relationship with Celemena, he protects himself by urging her to

return all of his letters to be burnt, claiming that discovery of the letters would endanger them (23). However, he also says something that Celemena does not notice, that the letters constitute “undeniable Proofs both of my unceasing Passion, and your kind Return” (23). When Beraldus is called for questioning on his affair with Celemena, he is able to turn the destruction of the letters into a means to confuse guilt, innocence, and the progression of events in their love story. When his first excuse, that Celemena has plotted to discredit him out of revenge, fails to convince his audience, he asks “Is it reasonable to imagine an Intreague, such as she mentions, cou’d be carry’d on without some Letters passing between the Persons concerned in it? I am ready to confess all she charges me with, if she can produce but one Line under my Hand, signifying I ever had a Design on her” (27). Celemena, of course, cannot produce any letters, and the lack of textual evidence allows Beraldus to confuse this narrative so much that it is no longer comprehensible to any of his listeners.

Because Celemena has no textual evidence, Beraldus is able to prove his story by naming Lamira as the object of his affections, a narrative move that causes “a Shout of Laughter and Astonishment...through all the young Part of the Assembly” and prompts wiser persons to think “it too improbable that a Man of so much Cunning and Penetration as BERALDUS was esteem’d, should think it so great a Hardship to be compell’d to marry CELEMENA; yet avow a Wish of that kind in favour of LAMIRA” so that the entire court is in “a little Dispute among themselves in what manner to judge of this Affair” (28). Beraldus’s version of events is so inscrutable that even Lamira is “fill’d...with too much Astonishment to permit her to reply: it had been in Terms very contrary to those of Marriage BERALDUS had solicited her” (28). Without the texts that would have proven Beraldus’s seduction of Celemena, and so have shown his affair with Lamira as what it was, his narrative is unreadable. The aura of readerly confusion that surrounds this tale reminds us of Barker’s “The Unaccountable Wife” (see chapter 5, section 3).

Both tales function as internal limits on the intratextual narrators' ability to understand and interpret a narrative. For Haywood, narratives that are not rooted in textual evidence prove incomprehensible, with different meanings to different persons, implying that it is the egalitarian accessibility of texts, their manifestation as literary products, that allows diverse persons to coalesce in productive, narrative-inspired criticism.

The assembly judging Beraldus splits along experiential lines, with the young and old coming to different interpretations because without textual evidence to prove or disprove Beraldus's assertions they have to fall back on their own understandings of life in order to fit what they are told into a comprehensible framework. As with the frame narrator's discussion of the effects of love, the assembled listeners are no longer reading or reacting to the same story. Because Beraldus's assertions are unsupported by any textual evidence, his readers all try to fill in the gaps using their own experiences of humanity as a guide, and so come to different conclusions. Beraldus's destruction of the textual evidence of his relationship with Celemena allows him to evade her accusations, but also makes his narrative incomprehensible and undermines the judging group's internal cohesion and interpretive capacity. The lack of full narratives in the story of Beraldus and Celemena turns judgment into chaos and guesswork and makes agreement impossible. This embedded narrative enforces the text's presentation of narrative as an indispensable reference for productive criticism by demonstrating the difficulties inherent in judging a situation that is not grounded in a universally accessible narrative. In the story of Beraldus and Celemena, Haywood works out a dramatic demonstration of narrative's central role in enabling criticism, and so uses this embedded narrative to emphasize the significance of narratives and texts in *The Tea Table* as a whole.

When a narrative is embedded within a frame narrative, it can articulate both a moral/social judgment and the process of arriving at that judgment. Framing narratives that

depict interaction and varying critiques among intradiegetic readers, as in *The Tea Table*, implicitly position embedded narratives as sites for multiple critical reactions, thereby inviting readers to join in the critical conversation, and construct a response from their own perspectives and those offered by the textual readers/listeners. At the same time, the representation of people actively formulating critical responses within the framing story provides a model for how readers can replicate the process. Embedding discrete narratives within frame narratives enhances the exemplary value of the text as a whole because it can teach readers both what to read for – a moral or social message or both – and how to read in such a productive way. The multiple, exemplary functions of embedded narratives with a framing story explain the framed-novelle's special efficacy in demonstrating the potential value of narratives that are not, at first glance, socially significant. The framed-novelle's narratives-within-a narrative structure allows it to teach its readers about both moral and social messages and how to arrive at them through reading and critical reactions; feminocentric, amatory tales become training material for enhancing readers' social/literary judgment. Framed-novelles are, then, able to function as both socially exemplary texts in their own right and guides to critical judgment in general. *The Tea Table* is particularly effective at performing this dual exemplarity precisely because its framing narrative is so closely focused on a literary-critical conversation. The conversational participants are all presented as highly effective readers who can both extract a social message from a text and interact with each other to develop opinions individually and as a group, and so their discussion provides a critical pattern for readers to adopt while instructing them in how to read the embedded narratives of *The Tea Table* itself.

**4. Blessed Art Thou Among Women: virtue, exemplarity, and maternity in *The Fruitless Enquiry***

If *The Tea Table* is an examination of critical, discursive practices and their role in extracting meaning from narrative—a blueprint for and examination of the framed-novelle as a

form—then *The Fruitless Enquiry* is a full deployment of that form. In *The Fruitless Enquiry*, Haywood uses discursive interaction and narrative criticism as a guide to moral/social judgment that she has developed in *The Tea Table* to perform a sustained examination of gender-inflected moral concerns. Unlike *The Tea Table*, the conversation and narration in this novel is exclusively female and focused on marriage and domesticity; a contrast that allows *The Fruitless Enquiry*'s bleak portrait of matrimonial domesticity to highlight the benefits of *The Tea Table*'s mixed-gender egalitarian space. Like *Reflections on the various effects of love*, it is concerned with the question of love in maturity, and differs from other framed-novelles in its close focus on the problems of established domesticity (rather than courtship/seduction) and use of maternity as an impetus for a woman's journey into social criticism. The *Fruitless Enquiry* revolves around themes of feminine virtue and happiness, maternity, and affective bonds between women. Its diverse narratives present women as a group defined largely by unhappiness and relative powerlessness, and so question the relationship of virtue to happiness while also undermining the idea that domestic relationships can be a meaningful path to agency or satisfaction for women. Its opening pages introduce to us three women, the protagonist, the dedicatee, and another implied female presence, who illustrate varying points of connection between these central concerns.

The dedicatory preface to Lady Elizabeth Germain establishes a clear link between virtue, happiness, and the work's didactic concerns; Haywood claims that she has chosen Germain because "it is not in the Power of great Titles, Personal Perfections, nor the Goods of Fortune, but in that innate Peace of Mind, which arises from Virtue...to bestow true happiness."<sup>104</sup> Germain demonstrates this truth through her own "Eternal Harmony of Soul, and ever chearing Goodness" and so her example will help Haywood in her quest to "persuade my

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<sup>104</sup> Eliza Haywood, *The Fruitless Enquiry: being a collection of several entertaining histories and occurrences* (London: J. Stephens, 1727), ii.

Sex from seeking Happiness the wrong Way” (ii-iii). In her single, married, and widowed state, Germain provides “so glorious a Pattern” (iv) that she will inspire other women to emulate her virtuous character and find happiness within it. Germain, a lady-in-waiting to Queen Anne and art collector whose correspondence with Jonathan Swift was long-lasting but sometimes acrimonious,<sup>105</sup> is an appropriate dedicatee for an ambitious woman’s fiction. Mary Barber’s “To the right Honourable the Lady *Elizabeth Germain* upon seeing her do a generous Action” (1734) praises Germain for her compassion and refers to “her gen’rous Hand long us’d to bless”, implying the same reputation for virtue and compassion that Haywood describes.<sup>106</sup> Edward Young dedicated his *Love of Fame, the universal passion: Satire VI on women* (1728) to her. Young, in satirical spirit, claims that if Germain does not patronize his work he will “In vengeance write a volume in her Praise/ Nor think it hard so great a length to run/When such the theme, twill easily be done.”<sup>107</sup> Clearly well-known in the literary world, her toleration of Swift and the prominent position of her name on Young’s misogynist satire allow us to speculate that she may have also had a sense of humour. What is known of her personal life, however, makes her a truly ideal dedicatee for this particular text. Germain had three children but lost them all, and remained a widow even though her husband urged her to remarry and have children after his death (Baker, 957). If Germain’s virtue and “eternal harmony of soul” made her happy, it was happiness won in the face of loss.

Haywood’s praise of Germain’s virtue as a single woman, a wife, and a widow also allows her to embody tensions between identification and aspiration, exemplarity and idealization. Germain’s virtue, in Haywood’s description, makes her “shine in an unrival’d lustre

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<sup>105</sup> Anne Pimlott Baker, “Germain, Lady Elizabeth [Betty] (1680–1769),” in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, ed. H. C. G. Matthew and Brian Harrison (Oxford: OUP, 2004), 956-57.

<sup>106</sup> Mary Barber, *The Poetry of Mary Barber*, ed. Bernard Tucker (Lewiston: The Edwin Mellen Press, 1992), 133.

<sup>107</sup> Edward Young, *The universal passion. Satire VI. On women. Inscib'd to the Right Honourable the Lady Elizabeth Germain* (London: J. Roberts, 1728), 2.

the *Phenix of the admiring World*" (v), but the range of her virtue, displayed across every social state a woman can inhabit, also makes her an ideal that every woman should emulate. Better than any woman, she is nonetheless a model for all; women as a class are encouraged to identify with that aspect of their virtue that corresponds with their station and aspire to it. Germain as a pattern of virtue in every female situation becomes both ideal and everywoman. The dedication sets the tone for this framed-novelle, in which we find a continuing preoccupation with feminine virtue, happiness, and objects of emulation that, while perhaps not imitable, are nonetheless applicable to all women.

Like Germain, our central character, Miramillia, is a virtuous widow, and the praise the narrator bestows on her sets her up as a similar model for all women. She is introduced to us as "one of the most lovely Women of the Age" whose "Beauty, Wealth, and Accomplishments" attract the admiration of all (1), but she herself locates her happiness entirely in the virtuous cares of maternity. Miramillia's motherhood defines her. The opening pages explain that, after her husband's death, all her cares and happiness are centred in her son; he is described as the "Darling of her Soul" and she spends her time "glory[ing] in maternal Fondness" (1-2). So devoted is she, that she refuses advantageous proposals after her widowhood in order to maintain her exclusive right to look after her son and his estate (1). He vanishes one day, after spending the morning meditating in the wilderness near their castle, and his absence drives her into seclusion, neglect of her person, and a restless quest for advice from fortune-tellers (2-4). She finds a fortune-teller who tells her that she can obtain news of her son's fate by convincing a woman who is completely contented in her own mind to sew a shirt for the missing son. Filled with new hope, Miramillia mentally reviews all her female acquaintances to determine which are most likely to be completely contented, and embarks on a series of disappointments. As her

seemingly-happy friends tell her their tragic secrets to explain why they cannot sew the shirt, she learns that no woman is as happy as she appears.

The focus in the introductory pages on Miramillia's devoted maternity encourages us to understand her primarily through her motherly role. Her refusal to remarry out of concern for her son's estate also implies that Miramillia's social agency, her independence as a wealthy widow and self-assertion, is on behalf of and mediated through her son, just as her emotional life is centred on the "glory" of maternal fondness. Miramillia's relative independence and authority as a widow controlling a fortune are virtuous because they are filtered through maternal love and focused on a male child. As such, Miramillia inevitably reminds us of another woman whose agency and virtue are exerted through and for her son, and whose many names (Our Lady, Queen of Heaven, the Ever-Virgin Mary, the Theotokos) indicate the interweaving of maternity, virtue, agency, and suffering that drive this text and Miramillia's quest.

Julia Kristeva's influential essay "Stabat Mater" speculates that the growth of feminism in Protestant countries may be due to their relative lack of "a totality made of woman and God" as conceptualized in the Virgin Mary in Catholicism and the Eastern Church.<sup>108</sup> Whatever its religious implications, de-emphasizing the Virgin Mary means de-emphasizing a conceptualization of femininity in which virtue (in both specifically sexual and more general terms), maternity, and authority can co-exist in harmony. Although the title, "Queen of Heaven" was only proclaimed by Pius XII in 1954 (Kristeva, 170), iconographic representations of the Virgin Mary being crowned by her son date back to the twelfth century.<sup>109</sup> Her stature is bestowed upon her by her male child, and her authority is intercessory. She can only mediate between suffering humanity and her judging son, and yet her virtue is so great that when she

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<sup>108</sup> Julia Kristeva, "Stabat Mater," in *The Kristeva Reader*, ed. Toril Moi (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1986), 160-87, 168.

<sup>109</sup> Marina Warner, *Alone of All Her Sex: The Myth and Cult of the Virgin Mary* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1976), 113.

“begs her son on her breasts, her womb, and her motherhood always to grant her prayers for sinners”, he cannot deny her (Warner, 322). As intercessor, she is a secondary agent of salvation, effectively monitoring her son’s estate on his behalf, much as Miramillia does for hers. In the Virgin Mary as Queen of Heaven and intercessor, we see a conceptualization of feminine agency and stature filtered through a son and justified as a function of her perfect motherhood. Like Lady Germain, she also exists as unreachable ideal and everywoman. In iconographic representations of the Dormition, the mother becomes a girl held by her son, who becomes a father. In the work of Bernard of Clairvaux, and the visions of Catherine of Alexandria, the mother is celebrated as her son’s mystical wife, embodying a “threefold metamorphosis of a woman” as idealized wife/mother/virgin daughter (Kristeva, 169). Like Lady Germain, she is better than any woman, but every woman can identify with some aspect of her virtuous persona and strive to emulate that concentration of female perfection.

While Miramillia’s financial agency exercised on behalf of her son reminds us of the Virgin Mary as intercessor, she is even more closely allied to Miramillia in her capacity as a sorrowing mother. The Virgin Mary’s story is ultimately triumphal but not always happy, and her suffering raises questions about the rewards of feminine virtue; it hardly seems fair that the most perfect woman ever to exist should have to watch her only son die a particularly gruesome death. For at least three days of her earthly life, she is an image of feminine virtue and perfect maternity that is emphatically not rewarded. Her reward, and her elevation to eternal happiness and intercessory agency, come with her son’s return. Whether conceptualized as Dormition or Assumption, her bodily translation into heaven is always accomplished by her son. Marina Warner tells us that, in an early Syriac version of her tale, she prays in sorrow by Christ’s sepulchre after he leaves the world, asking to be reunited with him, until he appears along with Moses and Enoch to take her to paradise. In the later *Pseudo-Melito* tale, he allows her to die

first but then returns her soul to her body and delivers her to the angels in heaven (Warner, 85). Always, however, her reward is accomplished through her son's return and is preceded by sorrow and separation.

The Virgin Mary is not explicitly referred to in Haywood's framed-novelle, and it may seem inappropriate to relate eighteenth-century English writing to beliefs most closely identified with Catholic theology. However, symbols may linger long after the beliefs that shaped them have faded and so her story still reminds us, as we read Haywood's work, that an idealized mother seeking her vanished son is always also seeking something more. She is also seeking the reward of her own perfections, the virtuous agency made possible by filtering feminine authority through maternity and the son. When Miramillia embarks on a restless quest to find her son, she is also trying to find her own identity as a virtuous and self-actualized woman. She is trying to recapture the domestic tranquillity and mediated maternal agency that should reward her virtue. Her belief that a magic shirt made by a contented woman can return her son, foolish as it is, is also an attempt to exert control over her life trajectory; to claim tranquillity and happiness as the reward of feminine virtue.

Miramillia's attempt to use mystical means to assert influence over life ironically undermines the prudent and virtuous character she displays in her maternal role. She falls "into a Sort of superstitious Credulity, which before she had despis'd" (3) as she goes from one fortune-teller to another to find information on her son. Although her lingering good sense does not "suffer her to place any great Dependence on what they said" (3), Miramillia's solution is not to stop going to fortune-tellers, but to go to more, comparing one with another, hoping to extract some grain of truth out of their compiled predictions. Miramillia's behaviour in this respect makes her into a sort of psychic/supernatural coquette, the sort of woman routinely condemned in Haywood's conduct writing. Like a foolish woman who does not genuinely believe

in the affections of any one lover, but still sees value in aggregate male attention, Miramillia cannot trust any one prediction but still seeks more, displaying a promiscuous, but not a particular, reliance on empty assurances. Even in the opening pages the contrasts that Haywood delineates between Miramillia's earlier and later behaviour imply that her poor judgment and credulity are caused by her unhappy circumstances, not the other way around. Her absorption in her maternal role, which exemplifies her feminine virtue, does not give her eternal harmony of soul but extreme emotional distress and, in a back-handed way, undermines the good sense and discretion that made her worthy of tranquillity in the first place. The opening of this tale creates a blatantly unjust and irresolvable picture of femininity and the possibility of happiness: we are introduced to a virtuous woman who, when faced with unmerited suffering that she cannot redress, undermines her own exemplarity by attempting to regain happiness and agency through supernatural means in which she does not ultimately believe.

##### **5. Woe, Wonder, and Women's Stories**

The rupture between Miramillia's good sense before her son's disappearance and her extravagant behaviour afterwards also hints at another kind of rupture; Miramillia's search for a magical resolution to her problem implies an inability to integrate her suffering with the rest of her life, to rationalize it as a natural part of her experiences. Barbara Benedict remarks that the name "Miramillia" indicates a person who will see or encounter wonders,<sup>110</sup> which may describe the root of her difficulty in accurately evaluating the people around her. Although Miramillia does encounter horrible tales, they are not really wonders at all. The consistent misery of the embedded narratives means that they are not wonderful, but typical. The "wonders" that

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<sup>110</sup> Barbara Benedict, "The Curious Genre: Female Inquiry in Amatory Fiction," *Studies in the Novel* 30 (1998): 194-210. Benedict describes Haywood's treatment of Miramillia's inquiry as articulating "the traditional and conservative view of curiosity" and reads the discovery of the skeleton in Anziana's story as indicting inquiry and reminding the reader that there are always negative consequences to curiosity (206-7). Benedict does not discuss any of the other narratives or Miramillia's eventual improved judgment.

Miramillia encounters in the form of repeated tales of female suffering and powerlessness are aspects of women's lives, and one of the ends of her enquiry is to teach her to see them as such. Her search for supernatural aid indicates a feeling that her problem is, in some sense, unnatural and so cannot be solved by ordinary means. Her enquiry teaches her that feminine virtue met with unmerited suffering and powerlessness is ordinary. The wonder she sees is that, while her virtue may make her different from other women, it is no guarantee that her fate will be any happier than theirs. She may be an exemplar to women but, in her capacity as helpless sufferer, she is everywoman.

It is significant in this context that male assistance is useless. Since she has been told that only a contented woman can bring back her son, Miramillia's enquiry pushes her into a world of exclusively female assistance and female commonality. Learning to identify herself and others on the basis of their shared conditions of unhappiness and helplessness is, for Miramillia, a necessary precondition of forming close and authentic connections with other women. In this sense, Miramillia also enquires after sisterhood. In discussing modern feminist thought, Elizabeth Fox-Genovese describes the concept of sisterhood as "afford[ing] a network of mutual support – a fund of collective strength and affection which women could draw upon for their still private battles in the home or on the job".<sup>111</sup> Miramillia asks for help from women on the basis of their shared affection, citing friendship and their capacity to commiserate as reasons for them either to help her or explain why they cannot. The women respond on the same terms, telling their stories as proof of their friendship and emphasizing that they would be happy to help her, if only they could. Although Miramillia's network of support does not uncover a happy woman, the attempt is imagined as a quest to draw on female friendship to resolve female

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<sup>111</sup> Elizabeth Fox-Genovese, *Feminism without Illusions: A Critique of Individualism* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1991), 14.

problems. Haywood's frame story understands women's problems as best solved through women's bonds.

The magic shirt is never made. While Miramillia's mission tries to produce a utilitarian textile, along the lines of Galesia's efforts in Barker's fiction and a prototypical feminine creation, it actually produces a series of narratives. Both products, in this text, are a way to reveal female subjectivity; the shirt, if ever made, would be a kind of icon of feminine happiness and the narratives uncover the hidden realities of women's lives and so function as a revelatory catalogue of feminine suffering. The difference is that although the shirt cannot be made, the tales can be told. By comparing the reality of women's authentic narratives to the impossibility of the shirt as an icon of feminine happiness and domestic production, Haywood subtly privileges articulate, examined narratives relayed from one woman to another as a necessary and practicable path into understanding feminine experience. The close text/textile link in this work emphasizes the social importance of feminocentric texts, and enhances the critical value of the narrator's embedded tales.

At the beginning of the enquiry, Miramillia's primary fault is her credulity and difficulty in arriving at a rational interpretation of her problems. Her faults are also the faults of romance as a genre, those faults that mark it as feminine, which Laurie Langbauer describes as "lack of restraint, irrationality, and silliness"; these faults Langbauer identifies, in more general terms, to be the faults of a pervasive "wildness" and elevation of women's stories to adventures.<sup>112</sup> She goes on, however, to find positive ground in the conflation of femininity with this denigrated form, explaining that a woman telling wild tales (what she describes as a "woman's convention") can "be a generative one, providing a meeting place for women, a ground from which they might at one time have spoken" (Langbauer, 84-85). Haywood acknowledges and exploits this

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<sup>112</sup> Laurie Langbauer, *Women and Romance: The Consolations of Gender in the English Novel* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1990), 78- 79.

identification of women, romance, and wildness; the romantic tales that her embedded narrators relate are characterized by horrific marital/social situations and extravagant sufferings, such as castrations and literal skeletons in closets. Her use of the wildness of romantic tales is, however, an unquestionably generative one, as they all tend to the correction and restraint of another type of wildness: Miramillia's restless and irrational search for a magical remedy to her problems.

Deborah Ross's work on women, romance, and realism helps us to conceptualize the means through which wild, romantic tales correct and redirect Miramillia's social judgment. In discussing the perceived failure of romances to live up to the expectation of realism in the emerging novel, Ross notes that romantic tales appear unrealistic because they confuse relationships of cause and effect—the heroine of a romance does not control the events of her own life and so romances are “loosely held together by the heroine's feelings and perceptions.”<sup>113</sup> The “wildness” Langbauer identifies in the romance, its failure to reflect real life and elevation of women's stories to adventure, can then, encode a different kind of realism and truth. The wildness of romance registers women's emotional response to a world in which they tend to be disempowered, where there is not a clear relationship between cause and effect in their lives because its defining characteristics of marriage, seduction, and domestic functioning, are only tenuously within their control. Elevating women's lives into adventure tales may be true to feminine experience, however improbable, because adventures are “events that come to one from without, and therefore the lives of the unempowered are full of it” (Ross, 4). Negotiating life as an eighteenth-century woman is an adventure, however mundane, because it is always a process of being buffeted about by men and social norms over which the woman has little actual control.

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<sup>113</sup> Deborah Ross, *The Excellence of Falsehood: Romance, Realism, and Women's Contribution to the Novel* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1991), 6.

Miramillia's search for a magical remedy and for a happy woman who does not exist is an effort to force a coherent relationship between cause and effect, virtue and reward. Listening to stories of other women's extraordinary troubles and sorrows gradually restrains Miramillia's restlessness and imaginative excess by teaching her to see and understand the fragility of the relationship between women's virtue and women's agency, their moral stature and their hope for tranquillity. The wild, romantic nature of these tales is a tool for helping Miramillia develop a realistic social perspective. Extravagant, adventure-like tales of powerless women help her see her own suffering and powerlessness as an ordinary part of her social environment.

The method by which this transformation is achieved justifies Haywood's consistent use of amatory tales, in this text and others. Kathleen Lubey discusses Haywood's loyalty to the amatory tale as a compensatory measure for the repetitive, predictable nature of women's lives. Women's imaginations may stagnate because "denied the variety and surprise of the public life enjoyed by men, the feminine mind has comparatively little opportunity to engage new ideas, and so it continues to churn previous experience".<sup>114</sup> Engaging with romantic stories about women's experiences encourages imaginative activity where readers practice moderating their feelings and actions (Lubey, 315). Miramillia's enquiry acts out the same pattern. She is so absorbed in her own unhappiness that she is unable to control or moderate her grief and allows it to lead her into irrational, extravagant behaviours. As she hears the stories of unhappy women and identifies with them, her feelings are tempered and she accepts the impossibility of perfect happiness. Imaginative engagement with other women's narratives undermines Miramillia's fixation on her problems and so moderates her passions and her actions. After hearing all of the women's stories, Miramillia concludes that she should "give over an Enquiry which she was

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<sup>114</sup> Kathleen Lubey, "Eliza Haywood's Amatory Aesthetic," *Eighteenth-Century Studies* 39 (2006): 309-22, 313.

convinc'd would be altogether fruitless, and depend wholly on Heaven for the Restoration of her Peace" (259), a resolution that, Haywood implies, is the proximate cause of her son's return (260). Her decision to rely on pious resignation is roughly similar to the advice she gives her friends after hearing their stories, indicating that her exposure to other women's problems was a necessary part of her own improved rationality. Her decision to depend wholly on heaven may also explain the relative lightness of critical discussion in this text, as compared to other framed-novelles. Miramillia is not encouraged to take social action in response to the text's embedded narratives. She is not really encouraged to arrive at a radical reinterpretation of women's social position. She is rather led to accept the bleak reality of women's lives that has always surrounded her and that acceptance is driven largely by the accumulation of female narratives. There is still a pattern of discursive critical reaction in this text but, because it advocates resignation and dependence on heaven as the only solution to women's troubles, *The Fruitless Enquiry* remains pervasively concerned with the ability of exemplary narrative to inspire identification with and acceptance of feminine helplessness.

Miramillia's enquiry and the acceptance she develops are reenactments of the benefits to the reader of engaging with similar narratives, in that both are supposed to result in an improved, more socially aware perspective on one's own experiences, and so greater emotional and behavioural moderation. The framed-novelle allows Haywood to depict within the text the process by which enhanced restraint and rationality arise from repeated exposure to shocking narratives, a process that mirrors the experience of readers. This link between Miramillia's development as a character and the development of her readers, who, it is expected, will engage with narrative in a similar way, also allows her performatively to justify her preference for amatory, feminocentric fiction, and argue for its value in improving readers' social and critical skills.

## 6. Authentic Narration and Fruitless Virtues

As Miramillia learns her friends' true stories, their narratives explode the idea that virtue creates happiness. In this respect, the *Enquiry* displays conceptual similarities to Haywood's *The Female Spectator* (1744-46), as both texts complicate the assumption that virtuous female conduct will lead to a female control over the domestic sphere.<sup>115</sup> Both texts use the motif of interpolated narratives to refute the valorisation of marriage and domesticity found in other sociable literature of the period, such as *The Spectator* (Nestor, 3-4), but the *Enquiry's* sustained use of embedded, first-person narratives takes this refutation a step further. Narrators describe their motivations and sufferings in detail, critiquing their own actions and encouraging Miramillia to do the same. The pattern of multiple, first-person narratives told to another involved character made possible by the framed-novelle allows Haywood to present her flawed females not just as moral examples, but as active, judging subjects whose understanding of their social world is improved by ethically complicated experiences.

The story of Bellazara is a perfect case study, as the heroine's virtues—manifested by her deep love and loyalty to her husband — produce 'vicious' behavior in the form of adultery and plunge her into misery. Bellazara is blackmailed into adultery because of her loyalty to her husband. After her husband's servant, Mercino, rapes Bellazara, he ensures her silence by telling her that, when her husband was young, he quarrelled with a prominent man and "it was the Lot of [her] unhappy Husband to overcome by the Death of his Adversary; that none but himself had been privy to the Accident, and that he had help'd to convey the dead Body to the Water-side" (127). The servant threatens to inform the authorities of the murder unless she keeps silent about the rape and tolerates a continuing relationship with her rapist (131). Bellazara proves only too loyal, as she submits to Mercino's demands in order to shield her husband (132). It is

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<sup>115</sup> Deborah J. Nestor, "Representing Domestic Difficulties: Eliza Haywood and the Critique of Bourgeois Ideology," *Prose Studies* 16 (1993): 1-26, 2.

Bellazara's capacity for unwavering devotion to her husband that drives her to adultery; that she prioritizes his claims and the marital devotion that inspires her to do so are inextricably linked to her sexual virtue, but in a cruel and damaging way. She is caught in a web of her own prudence and spousal affection. Bellazara's actions complicate the notion that chastity and sexual loyalty are a woman's greatest virtues, as Bellazara's infidelity is actually a profound and loving self-sacrifice, but also support the picture of women that *The Fruitless Enquiry* quietly creates: that common standards of feminine virtue have very little relationship to women's life outcomes or their subjective experiences.

Two of the embedded narratives in the *Enquiry* also question the relationship of virtue and happiness by complicating gender roles in such a way that sexual behaviours produce unusual social and romantic consequences. The stories of Iseria and Clara revolve around castration which, in both cases, has far reaching effects on the relationships of the central couples, effects that not only inhibit the man's sexual capacity but also destabilize the balance of gender roles expected in the romantic couple. Montrano is the best example, as the sexual threat he faces is inextricably tied to his concept of sexual virtue. When his wealthy uncle sends him to Ceylon as punishment for his unauthorized marriage with Iseria, Montrano is shipwrecked, enslaved, and attracts the attention of the tribal king's wife, an Italian who found her way to the Maldives after a series of misconduct and adventures that put Montrano's own to shame. Her interest in him is sexual and Montrano, determinedly faithful to his wife, resorts to subterfuge to put her off, feigning sickness and madness for years. Montrano's gendered identity is already complicated, as his powerlessness and subordination to a powerful, orientalist woman call his masculine agency into question. The king's wife realizes that Montrano has tricked her and offers an ultimatum: he must either submit to her desires immediately, or suffer a physical punishment that she does not specify, but implies will be

traumatic. Montrano refuses, and is taken away, held down by burly men, and castrated. After he is made sexually useless, the king's wife allows him to escape and he eventually finds his way back to Iseria (56-82). Montrano's persistent and absolute fidelity can be seen as foreshadowing his fate; he does not subscribe to a sexual double standard, as his sexual commitment to his wife is of central importance and he preserves his chastity (even to twenty-first century ears, that word sounds out of place for a man) as vigorously as any romantic heroine. His castration and symbolic loss of masculinity are both the punishment for and the reward of his behaviour. He privileges his emotional tie to his wife over all inducements to infidelity and, when they are reunited under conditions that make a sexual relationship impossible, he continues that pattern by forging a relationship with her based entirely on loyalty and emotional connection. Jennifer Thorn claims that Haywood uses castration to create a perverse utopia, where the loss of masculinity fosters "intergender sympathy" by enabling emotional and loyalty in men.<sup>116</sup> Castration gives Montrano what he wanted all along; an emotive relationship that does not allow for gendered difference in sexual mores.

Once reunited with Iseria, Montrano feels unable to tell his own story and passes the task on to his friend Clitophon. This refusal of narrative agency is symptomatic of Montrano's loss of agency in other senses. After his escape from his captors, he remains reliant on the good will of the people he meets, and his return home is more the result of his friend's energy and activity than his own. Montrano interprets his sexual loss as also a loss of his social position and potential, when he tells Iseria that she should leave him because a relationship with him can only "condemn thy Charms to cold Sterility: Thou, who mayest bless the World with a race of

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<sup>116</sup> Jennifer Thorn, "A Race of Angels: Castration and Exoticism in Three Exotic Tales by Eliza Haywood," in *The Passionate Fictions of Eliza Haywood: Essays on Her Life and Work*, ed. Kirsten T. Saxton and Rebecca P. Bocchicchio (Lexington: The University Press of Kentucky, 2000), 168-94, 170.

Angels" (83). Montrano's interpretation of sterility as disqualifying him for a romantic relationship is closely linked to his interpretation of identity as based on social positioning.

Thorn points out that reproduction and its correlated ideas of sexual and racial identity are "aspects of a single mode of being: producing offspring, preserving family lines" (Thorn, 169), and goes on to explain that there was at this time a perceived national duty to procreate (Thorn, 171). In this climate a sterile man, and especially a sterile man who marries a fertile woman, is detached from the social position associated with a father of a family and perpetuator of a lineage and could also be perceived as occupying a vexed and unsatisfactory political position due to his failure to procreate. In citing his sterility as a reason to break off this previously consummated marriage, Montrano acknowledges that his castration has effected a fundamental change in his identity, that he is not really the man Iseria married, and so she is not required to remain with him. Clitophon's claim that the act of castration has "robb'd [him] of his Sex" (75) enforces Montrano's own perception that he has been radically changed, as it takes away that most basic of identity markers, his gender, and implies that Montrano has been feminized. Iseria refuses this interpretation, claiming that "I am your Wife, your lawful wedded Wife, and will maintain my Claim against the united Force of the whole World" and telling him that he still is "as dear as ever" (84). Iseria, then, does not acknowledge a break in Montrano's identity sufficient to justify a rupture in their relationship. She privileges emotional continuity in order to read Montrano as the same man, and still her husband, rather than subscribing to his perception of himself as radically changed. In her marriage, castration is almost idyllic, as it seems to create an egalitarian relationship and pushes both Montrano and Iseria to relate on an affective level and understand their identity as a couple as driven by internal and subjective factors. Marriage to a feminized man may, in this story, improve and deepen the relationship by enabling emotional reciprocity.

The story of Clara and Ferdinand reaches castration through a very different route, but ends on similar thematic notes. Clara develops a close bond with her cousin, Ferdinand. Feeling secure in his chaste affection, she wanders out into a meadow with him, where he tricks her into allowing him to bind her hands with rushes and then rapes her. He attempts to justify his actions by professing his love for her, and she conceals her rage and grief until, fearing that he has divulged the story, she takes revenge by persuading him to be bound in the same way and then castrating him with a penknife (242-50). Clara's attack is a dramatic blurring of boundaries surrounding gendered behaviour. In addition to becoming a sexually-motivated assailant, her attack mimics Ferdinand's assault; from her use of reeds to bind his hands, to her triumphant cry of "now I will ravish you"(249), Clara creates herself as a rapist, feminizing Ferdinand even before the actual castration by treating him as the gullible, sexually vulnerable target she once was. Her actions upset the gendered power relationship that has always existed between them. They are both victims and victimizers, sexual predators and prey, and Clara has even neutralized the uniquely feminine threat of a damaged reputation, since her actions will permanently silence Ferdinand.

Ferdinand dies, but not until the two have been reconciled. Clara describes his death as a moment of mutual forgiveness, where "the wild Desires, which had prompted him to my Undoing, were now converted into the most holy Fires, and purest Raptures; the Friendship I had for him, into the most tender of those Affections, which can be call'd Love" (256). The efficacy of castration in bringing about an equitable relationship between the two is obvious; Clara's actions have rendered Ferdinand as vulnerable to sexually-based assault as any woman, and, as a result, they reach emotional parity. With the possibility of marriage foreclosed by Ferdinand's impending death, and further sexuality prevented by his condition, the complicated affection they have both felt at different points is at last resolved into holy fires and tenderness.

Their story implies that they were not really capable of mutual affection until their gendered power imbalance and its associated threat of sexual imposition were cut out of the picture. Reciprocal sexual aggression seems necessary, in this tale, to the development of an affectionate relationship, so that it is a vice that actually leads to love for this pair. Clara and Ferdinand end, then, in a position not unlike that of Montrano and Iseria. With a sensual relationship out of the question, and gendered identity profoundly compromised, both couples relate on a purely emotive plane characterized by mutuality and egalitarianism. Neither story is a romantic success, but both offer glimpses of idealized relationships enabled by destabilized gender distinctions and unconventional sexual behaviour. The theme of castration and its correlating depiction of ambiguously gendered behaviour refutes the idea that observance of gender roles and standard sexual virtues are essential to happiness by locating the potential for intergender sympathy and harmony in ambiguity. Like the text's other embedded narratives, these stories are scandalous not just in their content but in their undermining of normative advice on feminine happiness.

### **7. Reading, Narrating and Interpretive Agency**

In discussing the culture of reading in Haywood's work, Catherine Ingrassia attributes Haywood's role in constructing alternative forms of female subjectivity to her ability to encourage women to narrate their lives through connections with other women,<sup>117</sup> to author themselves through their interactions with each other. Although Ingrassia focuses on Haywood's eroticization of female connection and *The Fruitless Enquiry* is free from erotic links between women, Ingrassia's identification of Haywood's advocacy of female connection still applies. All of the women that Miramillia meets author themselves on two levels. All have constructed a

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<sup>117</sup> Catherine Ingrassia, "Eliza Haywood, Sapphic Desire, and the Practice of Reading," in *Lewd and Notorious: Female Transgression in the Eighteenth Century*, ed. Katherine Kittredge (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2003), 235-58, 237.

public persona of a happy, virtuous woman, and have done so well enough that Miramillia truly believes from outward appearance that each possess the tranquillity she seeks. Second, when Miramillia's asks for help, they all offer a new narrative of themselves and a new picture of their subjectivity that revolves around moral ambiguity and the inadequacy of any existing code of conduct.

These stories were all profound secrets before Miramillia's demand for the truth; they were all stories of the self that could not be told. The women only agree to give Miramillia their real narratives because it is the only means to refuse her request to make the magical shirt and bring back her son with compassion. One woman, Iseria, agrees to tell the story of her husband's castration "lest you should suspect my Friendship" (48), a sentiment that is echoed by Celesina (86), and Bellazara (112). For these women, who have hidden their sufferings from everyone else, the female connection represented by Miramillia, her reliance on their help and their reliance on her discretion, supersedes the importance of keeping secrets. The value of an understanding listener overrides their consistently maintained discretion. The narratives Miramillia draws from these women cement their connections and are also equally reliant on their connections. Haywood argues for the centrality of female connection in coming to any right understanding of women's lives by making the act of narration and self-revelation completely dependent on the bonds between women.

Miramillia's sustained quest to solicit female narratives writes her into a female community, as the act of requesting and receiving secret narratives constructs an authentic relationship with the other women while encouraging her to identify with them. The theme of revealed truth that dominates this text also reinforces the framed-novelle's link to the secret history. Miramillia receives a series of secret stories that contradicts the apparent smoothness

and prosperity of her friends' lives, generating what we could consider a secret history of the feminocentric or domestic world.

Rebecca Bullard's examination of the secret history as a rhetorical and political form argues that disclosure narratives can "undermine prevailing orthodoxies about the character of the reigns that [secret history] describes" and expose the unsteady foundations of political systems (Bullard, *Politics of Disclosure*, 7). As in the political secret history, the series of women's secrets that Miramillia uncovers is a destabilizing force, requiring the reader to question prevailing orthodoxies about their society, femininity, and the creation of female happiness. In both forms, the motif of disclosure also encourages astute and sceptical reading practices, reminding the reader that there may be danger beneath the political machinations or domestic bliss that they think they see. Through revelatory narratives, Miramillia learns to expect hidden tales of distress and disaster and to appreciate the importance of secret-keeping in making the world appear well. Hearing women's secrets, and learning to connect the apparent happiness of her social world with its dependency on concealing and selectively revealing secrets, makes it possible for Miramillia to question and understand the cultural codes surrounding women's lives that drive her world. Narrative and secrecy create a link between women's conversation and their wellbeing, as authentic narration between women improves their social judgment. Miramillia only learns correctly to understand her social world as one in which virtue fails to create happiness by listening to other women's stories. By making authentic narration a condition and requirement of female friendship, and presenting such narration as a means of regaining interpretive control over one's own life story, Haywood casts intimate female conversation as a privileged site for women's self-definition, one that can both reveal the conflicts between appearances, behaviours, and emotional experience and enhance the reader/listener's ability to evaluate and understand her own experiences.

## Chapter 7

### Sarah Scott

Mrs. Mancel, one of the founding ladies of the eponymous utopian community in Sarah Scott's *A Description of Millenium Hall* (1762) claims that "we do not set up for reformers, we wish to regulate ourselves by the laws laid down to us.... Beyond that small circle all is foreign to us."<sup>118</sup> This is an astonishing assertion. The ladies of Millenium Hall and, to a lesser extent, the narrative characters of *A Journey Through Every Stage of Life* (1754), are engaged in benevolent projects intended to improve the morals, and socioeconomic circumstances of those around them. They are reformers, whether they set up as such or not, and so we must ask why Scott would deny such a purpose. There may be two reasons, reflective of the distinct capabilities of the framed-novelle sequence and its suitability for telling and re-valuing stories of women's lives. First, the ladies are never commanding or assertive reformers—they do not seek to impose rules for living on unwilling others. They reform by inspiring ingenuous agreement with their principles, and encourage such agreement through narrative accounts of their benevolent projects and critical conversation on their principles. They also do not seek to reform in the sense of replacing familiar social structures and principles with something entirely new. They seek, instead, to perfect familiar concepts of the duty of charity, and to demonstrate their capacity to inhabit and reshape the ideal of benevolent authority. Combined narratives and critical reactions are essential to a perfecting, reshaping model of reform, as they allow Scott's works to demonstrate the exemplary morality of her reformers, the efficacy of their tactics, and the theoretical continuity of those tactics with already-existing social ideals. Considering the great significance of narrative exemplarity and critical explication in fostering

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<sup>118</sup> Sarah Scott, *A Description of Millenium Hall*, ed. Gary Kelly (Ontario: Broadview Press, 1995), 166.

Scott's vision of ingenuous agreement and reshaping reform, we might almost say that the framed-novelle sequence is the natural or inevitable form for her socially experimental works.

An earlier work by Scott, *A Journey Through Every Stage of Life*, depicts the social and moral education of an imprisoned princess, which takes place through a series of instructive conversations and narratives told by her nurse. *Millenium Hall* describes the creation and operation of benevolent women's community, incorporating discussion of its social principles into narratives about the lives of its founders. Scott's later text, notable for its description of a woman-dominated utopia, seems to have little in common with the comparatively unimaginative trope of an imprisoned princess that structures *A Journey*. However, in the same way as we have seen Haywood's *Tea Table* prefigure her *Fruitless Enquiry*, we can recognize that the embedded narratives of *A Journey* engage in an examination of work, community, and gender that foreshadows the principles informing Scott's developed fiction of an ideal society. Both texts use the framed-novelle form to question the relationships developed through the process of narration and critical reaction, thereby exploring the exemplary and reformative potential of socially conscious narrative interpretation. Scott's experiments with the framed-novelle sequence, read together, exemplify the form's unparalleled ability to demonstrate and argue for the gendered failings of ordinary family structures and the transformative potential of women's social influence outside the immediate domestic circle. This chapter considers Scott's two ventures into the framed-novelle form as a distinct progression, from her early use of the structure of discrete narratives within critically-aware conversations to examine and develop principles of benevolence and female social leadership, to later use of the same structure to argue for and demonstrate the efficacy of such principles. Within this discussion we will see how Scott occupies a practical, goal-oriented position within the framed-novelle tradition, as her

work remains tightly focused on the socially transformative possibilities of combined narration and critical reaction.

### 1. A Journey Through Narratives

*A Journey* is organized around themes of captivity, stasis, and personal change.

Carinthia, the imprisoned princess, cannot experience life because her usurping uncle keeps her imprisoned with Sabrina for her protection. Sabrina's tales serve as a surrogate life experience for Carinthia, teaching her how to be content in her current situation and reforming her ideas on what is truly pleasurable in life, weaning her away from dreams of flirtation and to instil ethically focused ideas on ways to use the influence she will have, should she ever regain her position.<sup>119</sup>

The characters Sabrina offers as models for emulation are generally those who indoctrinate others with their own virtue and deliberately influence the behaviour of others. Those persons who are most worthy of emulation, then, are those who are most successful at improving or creating new models of community.

In the preface, the ideal of emulating virtue helps explain how the text should be read. The preface begins with the claim that "no Writer was every happier in furnishing the World with Instruction and an agreeable Entertainment at the same time, than the Author of this Work who seems to be blessed with an honest Heart as well as a sprightly Genius" (1: i). Focusing praise on the author's "honest heart and sprightly genius" locates the text's laudable qualities in the author's character. This attribution of the text's efficacy as a reformatory guide to the author's "honest heart and sprightly genius", however, also seems to deprive the author of any element of deliberate creation. The text's excellence is not presented as the result of the author's hard work or dedication to the narrative task, but to innate qualities. This attitude, of literary excellence proceeding from the author's innate characteristics, may reflect some of

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<sup>119</sup> See chapter 2, section 4 for a discussion of *A Journey*'s close ties to the oriental tale collection.

Scott's attitudes towards her literary labour. As Betty Schellenberg describes, one of Scott's letters to her sister displays an odd understanding of her own literary position. Here, she tells her sister, with reference to a widely publicized trial, that "if I were to write anything, it must be a satire on juries...it is therefore lucky for me that I am not a writer." Schellenberg claims that this demonstrates Scott's denial of authorship as "an essential component of one's self that must be acknowledged" seeing it instead as "an option that could simply remain unexercised."<sup>120</sup> In this preface, and the claim that *A Journey's* excellence is due to the writer's honest heart, however, Scott's disclaimer of the identity of a writer takes on slightly different meanings. If Scott is not a writer but produces exemplary texts as an outpouring of her honest heart, then she constructs her literary position as a professional moral guide, rather than a professional writer.<sup>121</sup> In other words, her honest heart gives her privileged authority to speak about moral and ethical questions.

Grounding the text's authority in these qualities may not make any claim to authorship as a profession, but it can override any gender disadvantages in print culture. Scott's textual creation is presented as somehow less important than the laudable personal qualities reflected in that creation. Therefore, her entrance into print, and its ensuing claim to discursive authority, appears the natural effect of her own exemplary character rather than a deliberate and planned insertion of herself into the literary marketplace and the arena of ethical debate. The preface's privileging of the writer's honest heart and Scott's claim that she is not a writer prefigures the assertion of the *Millenium Hall* ladies that they are not reformers, despite the fact that they are obviously engaged in a variety of reforming projects. When they claim that they are not

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<sup>120</sup> Betty Schellenberg, "Making Good Use of History: Sarah Robinson Scott in the Republic of Letters," *Studies in Eighteenth-Century Culture* 32 (2003): 45-69, 45-46.

<sup>121</sup> See Jennie Batchelor, "Women's Work: Labor, Gender and Authorship in the Novels of Sarah Scott" in *British Women's Writing in the Long Eighteenth Century: Authorship, Politics and History*, ed. Jennie Batchelor and Cora Kaplan (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2005), 19-34, which addresses questions of labor and writing in Scott's work throughout.

reformers, they present dissemination of their ideals as the natural effect of their exemplary lives, and so are able to construct themselves as authoritative leaders without obviously trying to do so, and so without obviously challenging gendered and social hierarchies. Similarly, presenting a writer's ethical value as the effect of her "honest heart", rather than her literary labour grounds her discursive authority in innate moral exemplarity. So, *A Journey's* instructions to its readers on how and why it ought to be read begins the justification of discursive authority through moral superiority that will, in *Millenium Hall*, provide part of the ideological basis on which the ladies are able to enforce their own exemplary pattern of community.

## 2. The Narrative Relationship

*A Journey* presents a different relationship between narrator and addressee than the relationships found in other texts in this study. Sabrina, the central narrator, is one of Carinthia's ladies, something between a servant and a companion, and perceives storytelling as work; frequent reference is made to her being tired with her task. The narrative relationship between Sabrina and Carinthia, then, brings the text as a whole into contact with questions of social class relations and the status of storytelling as work.

Sabrina's relationship to her task of storytelling is fraught with ambiguity. Although she implies that her narrative work is hard labour through her requests to rest, she also reminds Carinthia of the danger of encouraging an old woman to talk and tell stories: it is dangerous because of the risk that she will enjoy being listened to so much that she will never stop talking. Sabrina's storytelling occupies an indefinite position between work and play, between labour as part of her employment and spontaneous artistic creation. Because the pacing and ordering of Sabrina's narrations are determined by a continuing balancing act between her desire to proceed in a way that is comfortable for her, and Carinthia's desire to hear the end of tales, their discursive relationship also addresses questions of control over the narrative act, where

both the actual telling of a story and its interpretation is a contested event between the narrator and the listener. The pacing and the interpretation of narratives are also intimately connected since Sabrina reflects on her desire for breaks in narration, claiming to use them as a means to heighten Carinthia's interest by building suspense or to encourage Carinthia's investment in the tale by giving her time to imagine its continuation (see 1:150 and 1:172-73). Carinthia uses her frequent requests for Sabrina to continue a narrative as a means to articulate her perspective on their purpose, with her impatience emphasizing narratives' function as entertainment. Her occasional pushiness in asking Sabrina to continue gives her a means to construct herself as a reader who is able to remain in control of the means by which she receives a narrative. However, since she is not reading a book but listening to a series of stories told her in real time by a present person, her negotiations for control over interpreting the story also function as negotiation over the status of the relationship.

Sabrina's frequent requests for rest, her perspective on storytelling as something between hired labour and discursive self-indulgence, and her attempts to maintain interpretive control of the stories she tells through judicious pacing and commentary allow her to occupy a middle position on a creative working continuum that stretches between the author figure, herself, and the character of Leonora rendered in the text's central narrative.<sup>122</sup> Carinthia's interest in having the stories continue on her time and in interpreting them her way allows her to occupy a position somewhere between the extradiegetic reader of Scott's text and the authoritative characters, sometimes employer figures themselves, in the embedded narratives who seek to establish interpretive control over the central figures, such as Flavia, who employs another woman for the sole purpose of reminding her of her reduced financial circumstances and asserting her own superiority. The narrative relationship that develops between Sabrina and

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<sup>122</sup> See Batchelor, 24, for a discussion of how conscious attention to production links Sabrina's storytelling to authorship.

Carinthia, then, has significant implications for the text's perspective on authorship, work, and their social uses.

The end of chapter three, which forms part of the story of Leonora and Louisa, exemplifies how Sabrina's strategic breaks in narration affect the interpretation of her narratives and modify her position as the storyteller in her relationship with Carinthia. Sabrina ends chapter three just after Leonora's father, Hortensius, considers defying his wife and treating Leonora fairly. Sabrina chooses this moment to stop because "it is not proper a Man should yield too easily to his Wife, to save *Hortensius's* Honour as far as I can, I will leave Arabella time to exercise all the Power of Art and Obstinacy, to conquer his better Disposition, and take breath a little, to give him Leisure to submit with less Indignity" (1:65). Sabrina's comments on narrative pacing reinforce her interpretive control over the story itself; Hortensius's honour is in her hands because she can, by the pacing of the story, present him as either a weak-willed man giving in to his wife, or as one worn down by his wife's "art and obstinacy." Her comments hint at her entitlement in the role of narrator to emphasize blame where she wishes. They also, however, point out the artificiality of such methods. Sabrina *gives* Hortensius "leisure to submit with less indignity" because of her own recognition that "it is not proper a man should yield too easily to his wife." She consciously constructs her story to fit a particular maxim on marital relationships. Sabrina's self-conscious construction of Hortensius and Arabella's relationship through narrative pacing is a counterpart to the strategy of reading for exemplarity outlined in the editor's preface, where readers are advised that the work contains "shining Examples of Wisdom and Probity" as well as "other Examples, where Vice and Folly are painted in their natural Deformity" used as a "Method of instilling good Principles into Youth" (1: iv-v). Just as readers are encouraged to recognize examples of wisdom, probity, and folly in the narratives, and so massage the characters' exploits into ethical exemplum, Sabrina

admits to making her story fit a preconceived principle. The use of narratives as ethical examples is a collaborative process between narrator and listener and so, by extension, between writer and reader. The continuous negotiation between Sabrina and Carinthia over how narratives should be told and received acts as an examination of the didactic effectiveness of Sabrina's narrations.

Narrative pauses also enable the voicing of critical reaction to embedded narratives that appears in all framed-novelles; in these sections, Sabrina and Carinthia engage in discussions that connect individual situations to general ethical principles. Unlike most of the reader/listener figures discussed in this study, Carinthia is sometimes slow or unwilling to be instructed. Her occasional unwillingness creates opportunities for commentary on the kinds of stories and narrative strategies that are most likely to succeed in conveying an improving message, such as for example, when she expresses a lack of sympathy for a young girl, Lucy, whom Leonora helps to reform and eventually secure marriage with her would-be seducer. Carinthia claims that she cannot understand why Lucy does not simply avoid him, rather than remain in danger of seduction, because "the Danger *Lucy* was in, appears so obvious, that Fear, wherein is our only Safety, might have taught her, like other timorous and defenceless Animals, to fly the Perils she could not otherwise avoid" (1:79). Carinthia's reaction makes it clear that the narration has failed to convey any instructive message about the danger of love, as she still sees it as something that can be easily avoided.

Sabrina adjusts her didactic tactics to clarify the message, explaining to Carinthia that Lucy, although she was aware of her danger, "preferred the Pains of hopeless Passion to those of an eternal Farewell", a choice that was "contrary to Reason, but agreeable to Love" (1:79). Later, an episode in which Leonora convinces an old woman to forgive her wayward daughter by demonstrating the difficulty of resisting a lover presents Carinthia with a narrative image of

women who, like herself, had difficulty understanding weakness in others but was taught to be sympathetic. Carinthia's slowness to learn encourages Sabrina to adjust her didactic tactics and develop a convincing pattern of narrative example and explication. The exploration of narrative effectiveness that Carinthia and Sabrina undertake works towards the pattern Scott will achieve in *Millenium Hall*, of giving her intradiegetic listeners narrative examples from one of the ladies and sustained ideological justifications from others, so that their principles can be both explained and demonstrated. As Susan Lanser reminds us, the process of "maxim-izing" a text, or using extrarepresentational acts to explain instances in which the text's values deviate from cultural norms, functions as a way to "establish the writer, through her authorial narrator-equivalent, as a significant participant in contemporary debates."<sup>123</sup> Scott's use of the framed-novelle form in *A Journey* brings demonstrative examples into explicit contact with both the maxims the text wishes to impart and occasional readerly resistance. This combination enhances *A Journey's* significance to contemporary social and literary debate by making it possible repeatedly to evaluate and adjust the text's didactic strategies, eventually finding combinations of narration and instruction that can convince recalcitrant readers.

### 3. Gender, Work, and Charity

*A Journey* is the only text in this study in which we do not have to rely on our own interpretation to determine which of its embedded narratives (if any) ought to serve as the ideological theme which other narratives will improvise upon. Carinthia and Sabrina's negotiation of narrative conditions includes a discussion of which tale ought to have the "precedency"(1:5). Sabrina assigns precedency to the history of Leonora and Louisa because Leonora "was almost the only Woman I have ever met with who endeavoured to conquer the Disadvantages our Sex labour under, and who proved that Custom, not Nature, inflicts that

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<sup>123</sup>Susan Snider Lanser, *Fictions of Authority: Women Writers and Narrative Voice* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1992), 17.

Dependence in which we live, obliged to the Industry of Man for our Support, as well as to his Courage for our Defence” (1:6). Scott’s decision to justify the position of Leonora and Louisa’s tale through reference to its engagement with cultural constructions of gender encourages us to read the tale for those issues and as an orienting device for the rest of the text.

The history of Leonora and Louisa uses gendered masquerade to be one of the more culturally subversive tales examined here. After her father brings home a wicked stepmother, Leonora and her impoverished cousin Louisa are mistreated and persecuted; the stepmother tries to humiliate Louisa by making her perform menial tasks and emphasizing her status as a poor dependent; she criticizes Leonora (1:14), refuses to send Louisa to a spa-town, thought to be necessary for her health (1:15), and tries to force Leonora into marriage with an old miser (1:16). Their troubles are brought on by familial collapse; the stepmother, Arabella, acts out of malice and jealousy and the father, Hortensius, can no longer moderate his wife’s behavior or exert his position as head of the family (1:15-16). In the marriage of Hortensius and Arabella, Scott creates an image of domestic failure that nevertheless remains within conventional gender roles. Arabella confines her machinations to the domestic sphere and works through indirection and a pretence of maternal concern, rather than attempting to give actual commands (1:13), while Hortensius seems content to leave family affairs to his wife for the sake of marital peace (1:12). The result is that the familial system undermines what it is designed to protect, pushing Leonora, a potentially vulnerable young woman, outside paternal protection, threatening the life of Louisa, and nullifying their filial affection for Hortensius. The family founders as a result of adherence to domestic roles that proves destructive when mingled with self-interest, as demonstrated by Arabella. Leonora and Louisa’s story encourages Carinthia, and the reader, to question the value of familial systems that tend to self-destruct even when they appear to

adhere to expected patterns of behaviour and so orients the text as a whole around the search for an alternative.

Leonora and Louisa run away and, in order to avoid trouble with rapacious men, disguise themselves by dressing Leonora as a clergyman and masquerading as brother and sister (18). So far, so conventional; their flight and choice of disguises makes them seem like a pair of comic Shakespearean heroines. We should note, at this point, that appropriating familiar literary tropes/figures for proto-feminist purposes is a common tactic in the framed-novelle sequence, appearing in Sarah Fielding and Jane Collier's *The Cry* (1754) as the reuse of Spenserian and Shakespearian women through Portia and Una (see chapter 8, section 3) and in Jane Barker's *The Lining of the Patchwork Screen* (1726) as incorporation of familiar proverbs and references to Aphra Behn's amatory tales (see chapter 5, section 7). Leonora and Louisa's disguise, rooted in literary convention, becomes much more provocative. Leonora decides to be a clergyman because "she could not reconcile this Metamorphosis of her Sex to the Delicacy of her Modesty, except by assuming the Dress of a Clergyman, which left her Petticoats, tho' it took from her her Sex, and obliged People of any Degree of Politeness to behave with much the same kind of Decorum in her Presence as if she had appeared a Woman" (1:18-19). In choosing to pass as a clergyman and in explaining her choice through reference to a clergyman's distinctive dress and right to heightened politeness, Leonora negotiates a new gendered position, casting herself as a not-quite man. She sees the guise of a clergyman as allowing her to carry some elements of her femininity into the presumed independence and social protection of masculinity. Her disguise is not just a reversal of gender roles, but a conscious attempt to create and occupy a new gendered position.<sup>124</sup> Leonora's masquerade is a self-reflective questioning of the social origins

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<sup>124</sup> See Catherine Craft-Fairchild's *Masquerade and Gender: Disguise and Female Identity in Eighteenth-Century Fictions by Women* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1993), 5, for a

of gendered behaviour, and so sets the text as a whole up for a sustained questioning of cultural gender norms.

Leonora is able to effect positive change because she fills her various masculine roles so much better than any real men around her. As an exemplary clergyman, artist and teacher, Leonora actually does what all men should do; she uses the influence attached to her positions to assist others and convert them into her pattern of virtue. Her conversion tactics are described most specifically during her stint as an artist, where the people who request portraits from her end up getting both more and less than they bargained for. While she paints their portraits, Leonora gives her clients portraits of their character, prompting a process of personal regeneration into her own brand of enlightened morality. For example, she uses her art to encourage reconciliation between an old woman and her daughter, who has married against her wishes, by incorporating a depiction of the old woman's grandchild into her portrait of the offending couple (1:83). Displaying the picture to the old woman, Leonora takes advantage of the latter's admiration for the child to convince her of the impossibility of her daughter resisting the importunities of a favoured lover, adopting the seductive part herself until "the old Lady confessed that if her Son in Law made love as well as *Leonora*, a young Girl could not be expected to prove so cruel to him, as to be scrupulously dutiful to a Mother" (1:84). Through these means, she is able to present the old lady with a portrait of her own weakness and vulnerability to error, and so induce her to forgive her daughter.

Leonora uses her talent for representation to spread her own brand of sympathy and benevolence to others, repairing their relationships and so interpreting her art as a vehicle for social cohesion. Along the way, her art itself recedes in importance. Leonora's real art is her role as a moral guide and example, which grows from her virtuous life and principles. In this

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discussion of masquerade and subversive potential, emphasizing how straightforward gender reversals do not necessarily disrupt constructions of gender.

sense, Leonora's experiences and use of her influence as an artist confirm the approach to authority first presented in the preface: that the artist's (visual or literary) authority and influence lies in their innate, exemplary qualities and ability to inspire emulation, rather than in their artistic product. This is a position that, by entirely avoiding questions of skill or education, also avoids any gendered disadvantages for women participating in artistic and literary spheres.

Leonora's use of positional influence to spread her social ideals prefigures the educative utopia Scott presents on a broader scale in *Millenium Hall*, and shares some of its ideological roots,<sup>125</sup> but her attempts to inspire systematic, reciprocal benevolence are complicated by her masculine disguise. Assuming a new identity requires her to remain mobile, separated from her larger society, and so she can only spread her principles among the people she casually encounters, such as those who come to her studio. Her stint as a schoolteacher is an exception as it provides her with the opportunity to instil principles of benevolence in the boys under her care, and to exercise her talents of forming a community based on reciprocal affection by inspiring the boys with a desire to please her (1:116-22), but she is still restrained from constructing herself as an acknowledged social leader by her formal position. As a schoolmaster employed by others, Leonora has influence, but lacks the independence necessary to form a new community based on her principles, and instead can only instil them in those children who are brought to her. So, although Leonora has the ideological basis for engaging in large-scale social projects like that of *Millenium Hall*, her circumstances limit her opportunities to actually do so. Without an acknowledged identity, she also cannot be an acknowledged social leader. While her performances as a man allow her to challenge gender constructions and demonstrate the ability of a woman to become a moral exemplar, they do not allow her to maximize her

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<sup>125</sup>See Johns, 108-9 for a discussion of how Leonora's charity seems to have its roots in a reading of the Christian duty of benevolence that links her form of benevolence with the more codified, ideologically explicit activities of the *Millenium Hall* ladies.

exemplary influence. In Leonora's story, we see Scott exploring, but eventually rejecting, the idea of making women social leaders by simply making them men. Instead, Leonora's exertion of social influence through a complicated gendered position prefigures more complete versions in Mrs. Traverse, found later in *A Journey*, and in the ladies of the later publication, *Millenium Hall*, who remain openly female but construct themselves as benevolent social authorities through their moral superiority and avoidance of marital, domestic plots.

Sabrina's last story leads, through Mrs. Traverse, to an early version of the social vision of *Millenium Hall*, which is also rooted in familial failure. When Mr. and Mrs. Rivers cannot have a child, Mr. Rivers becomes so dissatisfied with his wife that he seduces and impregnates a young woman (2:189-95); years later, he is reacquainted with his victim, now known as Mrs. Traverse. Mrs. Traverse is as unlike an abandoned heroine as anyone could be. She adopts a new identity and:

endeavour[s] to turn into a general Benevolence, that large Portion of Affection which was before engrossed by Mrs. *Gowran* [the older woman who helped her avoid exposure and shame when she became pregnant], who greatly deserved it all. The Love of human Kind, so delightful to the Heart wherein it has subdued all trifling Attachments , or too partial Passions, has been my Consolation, and created a Happiness which seems above the Reach of mortal Powers to destroy. (2:250)

Mrs. Traverse diffuses her tranquillity and benevolence throughout her community, and establishes a position for herself as a charitable employer and instructor. When young Mr. Rivers (her son, though she does not yet know it) assists her after a fall from her horse, he discovers in her house a room full of "above a dozen People at work, besides her own Servants...all under her Direction" (2:233), employed in making the various decorations that Rivers has seen displayed in her house. Mrs. Traverse's position as the inspiring genius of this workshop is made clear by young Rivers' observation, in watching the workers, that while he was "charmed with the various Beauties their Hands gave Rise to...their Minds were ignorant of the Perfections of their Labours" (2:233). In discussing her efforts, Mrs. Traverse belittles the

aesthetic significance of her workshop, and instead assures Rivers that she does not take “People off from Offices of more general Use to Persons in low Station, to employ them in frivolous and trifling Arts” (2:234). She points out also, that most of the women in her workshop are “too lame to move about” (2:234). Mrs. Traverse implies that her workshop is a stop-gap measure, and that the lame women under her care are being taught “more Ways of gaining their Bread” (2:234). In her distinctions of what is useful to “persons in low station”, and her intention of making the workers in her idealized domestic factory fit for employment in the harsher outside world, Mrs. Traverse is moving towards the kind of economic and class-bound reformist imagination that will take shape in *Millenium Hall*.

Like the stratified schooling system and employment practices of the Millenium Hall ladies, Mrs. Traverse focuses on making the objects of her benevolence better able to find a productive and happy life within their own social station. Her reformist efforts are inspired by a Christian sense of respect for other people and an interpretation of benevolence as a duty, but also by a respect for and adherence to existing social structures.<sup>126</sup> The ambivalence about reform indicated by her obvious respect for her social inferiors, combined with her unwillingness significantly to upset the social structure, is the root of Mrs. Traverse’s incomplete removal from a more conventionally commercial world. Though she has set up a benevolent workshop, where payment takes the form of instruction as well as money, and the product is gratitude and reform as much as artisanal objects, she means for her employees to reenter ordinary employment at some point. This incompleteness persists in the similar projects of *Millenium Hall* where the ladies, who combine service to others with independence and economic engagement with abstract benevolence, “effect a kind of feminized moralization of

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<sup>126</sup>See Christina Rees’s *Utopian Imagination and Eighteenth-Century Fiction* (New York: Longman Publishing, 1996), 226-27 for further discussion of the school system in *Millenium Hall*, as well as an assessment of how the use of social and economic power impacts the text’s presentation of a utopian society—a discussion that is similarly applicable to Mrs. Traverse’s utopia in embryo.

commercial culture” (Guest, 44). Mrs. Traverse moralizes commercial culture by blending industry with benevolence and her desire to instruct her employees in moral and religious duties, as well as ways of earning their living. Referring to such moralization as also a feminization is appropriate; as Elizabeth Kowalski-Wallace describes in her examination of women and business in the eighteenth century, the commercial world was often imagined as antithetical to the feminine elements of emotion and affectivity.<sup>127</sup> Combining employment with moral instruction and benevolence, however, brings emotional and affective qualities into close engagement with commercial transactions, and so Mrs. Traverse’s activities question established gender norms by demonstrating how the feminine can humanize the commercial. The local parson explains to young Mr. Rivers that Mrs. Traverse is an exemplary character because in addition to being “a great Oeconomist even in her Charities” (2:235). She organizes those charities so that “an Attention to suit People to the necessary Ranks in this Life, was happily blended with the Care of qualifying them for the highest Place in the next” (2:236). She uses both example and instruction to instill her moral and benevolent principles into the objects of her charitable endeavors. So, we see that Mrs. Traverse’s charitable projects, and her intention of basing social relations on benevolence without disrupting social hierarchies, are nearly identical to the benevolent economy of the *Millenium Hall* ladies, but on a smaller scale.

Mrs. Traverse’s need to improve the lived experience of social hierarchies without dismantling them may explain why, despite all her moral superiority and charitable efficiency, her community-building is on a smaller scale than that depicted in *Millenium Hall*. Mrs. Traverse is more like Lady Emilia, Miss Selvyn’s mother in *Millenium Hall*, than any of the founding ladies themselves. Like Lady Emilia, she was seduced as a young woman and, although her sincere repentance and irreproachable life restore her moral superiority, she refuses to marry the father

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<sup>127</sup> Elizabeth Kowaleski-Wallace, *Consuming Subjects: Women, Shopping and Business in the Eighteenth Century* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997), 111-13.

of her child because she thinks “a perfect Esteem and good Opinions so necessary a Foundation for matrimonial Happiness, that I would not on any Account marry a Man whom I have known guilty of a base Action, or that has experienced my Frailty” (2:251). Although Mrs. Traverse’s reform and principled refusal to marry allow the text to demonstrate the inadequacy of chastity as a substitute for female virtue and thus to construct Mrs. Traverse as an exemplary figure despite her earlier fall, her continuing position as a seduced and single woman limits the scale of her benevolent endeavours. Unable to marry, she cannot, as the elder Mr. Rivers suggests, “appropriate my Fortune as you do your own” (2:251) and so extend her charitable plans. When her old friend Mrs. Gowran dies, she also cannot form the kind of mutually beneficial female community presented in *Millenium Hall* and so extend her sphere of influence because the necessity of keeping her secret makes it impossible for her to form the confidential relationships with other women that such a community requires. Instead, Mrs. Traverse expands her society to include only family, or those who already know her secret: Mr. Rivers, her son, and his wife. There is no attempt to extend her sphere of influence by broadening her charitable projects. Mrs. Traverse exemplifies the professed moral of Sabrina’s tale, which is that wealth “when dedicated to the Service of Benevolence and Humanity...is a Blessing worthy the Desire of all who are conscious they would use it to such good Purpose” (2:264) but she also questions the value of standard ideals on love, chastity, and domesticity in structuring an exemplary woman’s life. Despite her present virtues, however, her questionable past makes it difficult to conceptualize her as a large-scale reformer.

The influential figures of *A Journey* embody different aspects of the matrix of social and personal factors that allow the *Millenium Hall* ladies to become effectively benevolent social authorities. Leonora’s ability to inspire emulation through virtuous example and her considered rejection of an individualistic ethos make her like the *Millenium Hall* ladies in character, but her

disguise and the ensuing difficulty of connecting with a community or establishing permanent patronage-based relations make her an unfit model for creating a permanent community of large-scale reformers. Mrs. Traverse comes closer to forming and guiding a community based on reciprocal benevolence, and her sophisticated understanding of the close interaction between commerce, charity, and social hierarchies would seem to qualify her to be one of the *Millenium Hall* ladies. However, her chequered past makes it impossible for her to form the benevolent associations necessary to large-scale reformatory work, and so she is not the best model for an authoritative female reformer. By presenting these types of benevolent reformers together, as variations on the themes of social duty and moral exemplarity, *A Journey* explores the requirements for becoming an ideal reformer, and so works out the conditions of *Millenium Hall*'s benevolent utopia while presenting its own didactic message of benevolence as a social duty that can both produce personal satisfaction and assist others. The presentation of multiple narratives, discrete but related, that characterizes the framed-novelle gives Scott an opportunity to use this text as a workshop for adjusting the social vision that will inform her best-known work.

The critical commentary by and negotiations between Sabrina and Carinthia about the stories told also explore the appropriate methods for presenting and interpreting didactic tales, working out the relative duties of narrator and listener, taking advantage of the framed-novelle form to encourage receptive, morally motivated reading and to strike the right balance between example and explanation. This balance, in *Millenium Hall*, turns into a systematic use of narration and instructive conversation to maximize the ladies' reformist potential. *A Journey* acts as both an example of the framed-novelle's potential to enable ethical engagement and questioning, and as a handbook on how to use it for the best didactic effect.

#### 4. *Millenium Hall* and Utopian Contexts

The complex interactions of narrative, critical explanation, commerce, and charity that create *A Journey's* social vision reappear in a fully theorized form in *Millenium Hall*, which uses the framed-novelle to build a reforming social vision out of radical and reactionary elements and to authorize women's voices through appeals to conventional authorities. Scott's text treats rational conversation as a reforming tool, as do other texts in this study, but it also surpasses them in its depiction of the concrete effects of that reform and its integration of the conversational process into a theoretical justification for both social change and increased female autonomy. The textual conversations themselves are a series of embedded narratives describing how the ladies first came to Millenium Hall and discussions of their social principles, designed to persuade the listener/reader into agreement and compliance. Narrative and social criticism in this text serve distinct but interdependent purposes, with the embedded narratives demonstrating the ladies' virtue and purity of intention, thereby establishing their authority to act as reformers, and their moralizing discourses providing the theoretical basis for and evidence of the success of their reformative projects. Embedded personal narratives act as legitimating sources for socio-cultural criticism. They pave the way for a speaker's ideas by demonstrating that speaker's personal virtue and choice of benevolence as a way of life, while the conversations surrounding them are designed to teach willing compliance with the moral environment of Millenium Hall. Scott's use of the framed-novelle is an essential part of her text's proto-feminist ethos, as the embedded narratives position the women's retirement and charitable actions as deliberate and systematic social innovation, rather than the fortunate effects of their flight from romance.

*Millennium Hall* uses social contractualism as an organizing force for its utopian project, possibly because the idea of a society formed by contractual relations, as posited by Thomas

Hobbes and John Locke, made possible an attempt to authorize the inclusion of women as participatory social and political subjects. Although the organization of Millenium Hall and its environs rejects the individualistic nature of contractual relations as described in Lockean social theory, it does focus on reciprocal, consensual relations as the basis of its created society.<sup>128</sup>

The ladies' wariness of individual property might, at first, seem to erase the concepts of exchange, since all tangible property is shared by the group of founding women. However, the text's consistent linking of shared property with perfect friendship reinscribes exchange-based relationships into this community; a character's willingness unreservedly to share her property is repaid with trust and intimacy in the context of personal friendships, and with access to peace and equality within Millenium Hall.

Not everything is equalized in Millenium Hall, as the ladies' insistence on total property-sharing is limited to their own class, perhaps because only members of their class have independent property to share and redistribute. They do, however, encourage benevolence on a similar pattern among their beneficiaries, inspiring them to mimic their system although they cannot directly participate in it. As the talkative old woman tells the male letter-writer ( the character not named as Sir George Ellison until the sequel) when he asks how the ladies have assisted and reformed the poor of the village "there is neighbour Susan, and neighbour Rachel; Susan is lame, so she spins cloaths for Rachel; and Rachel cleans Susan's house, and does such things for her as she cannot do for herself...now we love one another like sisters, or indeed better, for I often see such quarrel" (66-67). The ladies have encouraged the poor to share their

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<sup>128</sup> Sara Gadenken, "A Method of Being Perfectly Happy: Technologies of Self in the eighteenth-century female community," *The Eighteenth-Century Novel* 1 (2001): 217-35, 217-19. In her brief discussion of *Millenium Hall*, Gadenken argues that the text rejects Lockean principles by presenting a social vision in which individuals develop embedded in communities formed by non-consensual relations, a society and a family that the individual in question did not choose. While this observation is accurate as it relates to the ladies' lives before coming to the estate, and so helps explain the text's wariness of purely self-serving actions, it does not consider how the ladies' ability to create a truly consensual society of their own reimagines and reclaims contractual principles in a framework of reciprocal benevolence.

form of property, their labour, and all have benefitted from that system by learning to “love one another like sisters”. The ladies’ exercise of benevolent authoritarianism, then, is not limited to sharing wealth with the less fortunate. By encouraging their beneficiaries to adopt a system of benevolence towards each other and exchange their labor for harmony, the ladies make everyone in the environs of Millenium Hall into both a benefactor and a beneficiary, contributors to the general good and happy in themselves. Although they remain divided along class lines, everyone is part of a structure and of a series of acts of reciprocal benevolence, so that the harmony springing from benevolent exchanges becomes currency in this self-contained environment.

The Millenium Hall project is a softening of Mrs. Traverse’s commercially-inflected benevolence. Class lines are still in place, but the ladies’ encouragement of reciprocal benevolence within all socio-economic groups blurs the line between philanthropist and recipient so that everyone can reap similar benefits of giving and receiving. Scott’s text creates a world in which exchange takes place through intangibles, with the ladies’ charitable acts repaid in gratitude and willing compliance with the ethical atmosphere of Millenium Hall. In this climate, even storytelling is a reciprocal interaction, as well as the social transformations brought about by such interactions. The ladies’ beneficiaries express their gratitude not just for their homes and other tangible benefits, but for the ladies’ willingness to talk to and teach them, a practice that is essential to creating harmony within the Millenium Hall community.

Mrs. Mancel articulates a religious authorization for the ladies’ activities, claiming that their industry is inspired by Christian commandments to “feed the hungry, to cloath the naked, to relieve the prisoner, and to take care of the sick. Those who have not an inheritance that enables them to do this, are commanded to labour” (244). Alessa Johns interprets this religious justification as a reading of Luke 6, which instructs Christians to “Give, and it shall be given unto

you...For with the same measure that ye mete withal it shall be measured to you again”(Johns, 106-107). The Biblical passage in question introduces the concept of benevolence as being both reciprocal and capable of being carried out and repaid in intangibles, as it reminds potential philanthropists that what they give “shall be given unto you” and hints at the possibility of rewards in a future life. However, the most salient feature of both the passage and Mrs. Mancel’s interpretation of it may be that it makes no distinction between genders and requires not just charity, but work for the purpose of performing charity. By interpreting the commandment to be benevolent as also a commandment to labour if necessary, Mrs. Mancel constructs a religious justification for women’s departure from the labour required in domestic marriage.

Labour that can enable benevolence on the scale of Millenium Hall cannot be purely domestic and the ladies labour in many ways, from founding schools to running factories and engaging in some complicated accounting to insure that their efforts have the greatest possible impact. As discussed above, however, one of their most important forms of benevolent labour is their willingness to talk to their beneficiaries, making them fit for their new positions in the ladies’ utopia. Viewing conversational engagement as charitable work transforms it into a Christian duty, so that their creation of discursive authority through their articulation and explanation of their principles becomes unchallengeable as an appropriate feminine activity. Scott has found a way to blend principles of exchange and of Christian benevolence into an authorization for feminine activities that may not be a challenge to gender roles in their nature but prove to be so in their extent. The charities founded by the ladies allow them to reform and create whole communities and industries, so that their benevolence takes on undeniably public significance.

Many of the women's activities, such as educating young girls in their home, are rooted in domestic roles and replay expectations of women as fundamentally house-bound creatures. The way in which the women of Millenium Hall perform these activities, however, creates slippage between domestic and cultural or economic power, allowing them to occupy a space in between public and private spheres of influence and exercise authority in both. Their establishment of a satellite community for poor gentlewomen, for example, looks like straightforward feminine charity. The satellite community focuses on the private lives of other women, but its extent places it somewhere between a domestic and truly cultural reformative project. Not only do the Millenium Hall ladies fund the satellite community, they codify rules for its management, demonstrating both their authoritative position and their approach to inspiring reform. Their creation of rules for the community encompasses everything from use of the women's private fortune to determining who will take charge of the dinner table (116-17). The ladies' establishments of rules for the community, together with their codification of expulsion processes, indicate their approach to social reform. The creation of the satellite community is a measure of the range and depth of the founding ladies' goals; they use disadvantaged women's need for a refuge to replicate their own ideal society and so extend their sphere of social influence.

Their success in shaping the satellite community also demonstrates how their benevolence interacts with efforts to perpetuate their social ideal. They have insured that their satellite community will operate peacefully according to their original rules by "example and suggestion" and through their efforts to teach the ladies that "it was the duty of every person to be of service to others" (118). They have been so successful in their efforts to inculcate virtue in their beneficiaries that their plan to form a second community on the same lines includes having the new women live with the women of the first satellite community for a few months, so that

they “will be fitted for their new way of life, and taught to aim at the happiness enjoyed in this community, by the same means that they have attained to it” (121), those means presumably being the reforming efficiency of example and suggestion. The women in the satellite community have accepted the founding ladies’ principles of virtue so thoroughly that they are capable of voluntarily transmitting them to others as if they were their own. The women’s wholesale adoption of the founding ladies’ principles of virtue returns the text to Lockean social theories, but this time to his writings on education. Helen Thompson turns to Locke and *Some Thoughts Concerning Education* (1693) to articulate the eighteenth century’s attempts to create in men “a newly autonomous aptitude for assent” through an educational process where boys are taught to be “in love with all the ways of virtue,”<sup>129</sup> so that cooperation with the existing social and political order among adult men is the result of a genuine desire to cooperate.

##### 5. Education and Critical Socialization

Although, as Thompson’s description makes clear, Locke’s formulation of how to inculcate ingenuous desire to obey relied on the experiences of early childhood and the gradual transformation of fatherly authority into friendship, the same end is achieved here with adult women and through the same means. The founding ladies teach the women of their satellite community to desire the virtues they have chosen as founding principles through the combined force of their rules and their own example of how to spend their time working for others, a process intended to teach the women that an idle mind would result in “discontent, malignity, ill humour” (118). The founding ladies use their authority to make the women they are educating love their chosen virtues; they reflect Lockean principles of an ingenuous education by gradually incorporating the women into their own circle at Millenium Hall, first “insist[ing] when they waited on the community that not one of the sisterhood should discontinue whatever they

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<sup>129</sup> Helen Thompson, *Ingenuous Subjection: Compliance and Power in the Eighteenth-Century Domestic Novel* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2005), 6.

found her engaged in" (119) so that the women will learn to interact with them without ceremony. At the time that Ellison encounters the community, the ladies report that "few days pass without our seeing some of them" and "nor are they themselves scrupulous about coming" (119).

The founding ladies have established a relationship with the women of their satellite community that looks and feels like unconstrained friendship, thereby obscuring the fact that the women are still living in a mansion owned by the ladies and still subject to their rules, a relationship that mimics the Lockean process Thompson describes as "converting absolute paternal authority into the medium of civil friendship between men" (Thompson, 32). The founding ladies have taken on something very like an authoritative paternal role in their deployment of actual authority and gradually increasing friendship to convert the other women to a genuine love of appropriate virtues. Teaching the women of the satellite community to be in love with virtue demonstrates the founding ladies' ability to use their social power benevolently and wisely, and so argues for their right to do so.

The ladies' original authorization for their actions springs from a very literal interpretation of Biblical injunctions to work for others and so is, in a sense, highly conventional. As Julie McGonagal recognizes, however, the ladies' exercise of charity complicates their gendered position by putting them in a symbolic position of paternal power with their beneficiaries, particularly lower-class women, to whom they give dowries as an incitement to virtue.<sup>130</sup> Their exercise of charity reinforces their class privilege, as persons with the means to bribe the poor into good behaviour and brings them very close to a potentially incisive challenge to appropriate femininity, as their benevolence allows them to become agents, rather than

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<sup>130</sup> Julie McGonagal, "The Tyranny of Gift Giving: The Politics of Generosity in Sarah Scott's *Millenium Hall* and *Sir George Ellison*," *Eighteenth-Century Fiction* 19 (2007): 291-306, 301-300.

objects, of social authority enforcing feminine virtues.<sup>131</sup> Presenting their unusually extensive benevolence as both purely beneficial and an acceptably feminine activity, then, requires the continuing authorization of their projects through demonstration of the sincerity of their motives, their own feminine virtues, and their use of authoritative agency to bring the members of their community into a cheerful and willing participation in the estate's organizing ideals. Their narratives, which insist on the appropriateness of their motives and personal qualities, are a necessary backdrop to their articulated principles and demonstrable success, in order to present the women's social authority as an exercise of presumptively male roles that does not negate their own feminine virtue.

## 6. Narratives of Choice

Most of the text's embedded narratives address the growing significance of the ladies' relationships to each other and emphasize the voluntary nature of their retirement to Millenium Hall. Embedded narratives thus function as both inspiration for the project of the women's estate and as reforming tools in their own right, guiding interpretation of the text/estate and encouraging replication of the women's social vision. Because the narratives emphasize the significance of the women's relationship to each other while refusing to cast the women as victims of their gendered social position, they emphasize the failure of ordinary domesticity and present idealized friendship as an appealing and viable alternative. By demonstrating both the sincerity of the women's efforts at creating a new community and their undeniable skill at forming idealized relationships, the embedded narratives authorize the women's critical

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<sup>131</sup> See Lisa Moore's *Dangerous Intimacies: Toward a Sapphic History of the British Novel* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1997), 29-31 for a discussion of how the ladies' benevolence perpetuates the patriarchal abuses to which they are themselves subject. Although Moore's argument rightly points out the position of the ladies as authoritative agents with respect to poorer women, it does not recognize how the ladies' position is affected by the fact that they are entirely separated from any exterior bourgeois hegemony while within the specific environment of Millenium Hall.

reaction to their society and, along the way, describe their sources of discontent and so function as a reformatory tool for listeners.

The personal narratives of the estate's founding members seem much like the romantic narratives found in other texts in this study, but their sufferings are mild by comparison. There are no truly ruined lives, the only seduction is of a character's mother, and even the woman who suffers the most, Mrs. Morgan, is in the end left a wealthy young widow. Lady Mary Jones is a foolish flirt, whose "giddiness and perpetual dissipation" create unpleasant whispers about her virtue (173) but she changes her ways before she has suffered much more than embarrassment. Her behaviour does not seem to have permanently destroyed her chances for an appropriate marriage. It is tempting to read the ladies' relatively harmless and uneventful romances as Scott's nod to conventional standards on the irretrievability of feminine virtue, to think that she displays less daring opinions than, for example, Haywood, who grants her seduced heroines ethical authority.

However, Scott's insistence on her ladies' untarnished virtue may arise from a textual need to present them as free agents, not as virtuous heroines. A seduced woman has limited options, and one of the main textual roles of the narratives is to insist that these women chose to withdraw from society freely and gladly, even though they did have other options. The brief history of Lady Emilia, a seduced woman who, like Mrs. Traverse, goes on to live an irreproachable life, hints at Scott's willingness to contest rigid standards of virtue in woman. However, in order for her founding ladies to remain convincing as free agents, they must remain unimpeachably virtuous. The presentation of the ladies in their embedded narratives as able to avoid romantic entanglements, then, supports their social reform as the effect of a free choice and uses their romantic histories as ways of tracing their growing relationships to each other and the development of their views on an ideal lifestyle.

The longest of the embedded narratives tells the history of Mrs. Morgan and Mrs. Mancel, allowing it to perform a subtle and implicit critique of heterosexual relationships while emphasizing the development of their relationship. The women are so intertwined that Mrs. Maynard starts off her narration with the claim that “I could not, if I would, disunite them in my relation, and it would be almost a sin to endeavour to separate them even in idea” (76). Throughout their narrative, the two make repeated efforts to avoid separation even in idea. Mrs. Maynard’s account begins with their time at school, where their close friendship developed through sharing money and possessions, and was solidified through Miss Melvyn’s realization that Miss Mancel was capable of reciprocal benevolence despite her youth, and that “those who know all the pleasures of conferring an obligation, will be sensible, that by accepting it they give the highest delight the human mind can feel” (93). Their early years are primarily a development of the principles of reciprocity that will later influence the creation of Millenium Hall.

While the first part of the narrative has described the developing friendship between the two, the remainder focuses on the failure of traditional domestic structures. Their separation and suffering are caused by a wicked stepmother, Lady Melvyn, who resents Miss Melvyn and so conspires to marry her off to an old miser. This domestic failure is almost exactly like that in Leonora’s story; a malicious, but completely domestic, stepmother and an ineffective father allow their exercise of familial authority to undermine the filial affection and domestic ties it is meant to preserve. Marriage fails Miss Melvyn too, as it separates her from Miss Mancel and her husband’s miserliness undermines her charitable nature (131, 134). Domesticity and marriage are constraints on women’s happiness and social agency, as they separate the friends and hamper Miss Melvyn’s benevolent impulses. Separation is the worst effect of marriage for Miss Melvyn, as her husband does all he can to exclude Miss Mancel from her life. We are told that “this was the severest affliction they had ever yet experienced, or indeed were capable of

feeling” (131), a claim that unequivocally prioritizes friendship, and its loss, over the misery of poverty, betrayal by family and guardians, and an enforced marriage.

The cumulative effect of the narrative priority of the women’s relationship to each other is to emphasize its superiority to marital domestic arrangements and their genuine preference for it. Miss Mancel articulates this idea after the death of Mr. Lambton; she eventually expresses satisfaction in her disappointment, claiming that Lambton’s death was providential because marriage would cause her to “conform implicitly to all his inclinations, her views would have been confined to this earth, and too strongly attached to human objects” (161). The life that Mrs. Mancel describes with Lambton is the opposite of that she develops with Mrs. Morgan, which is described as “a way of life where all their satisfactions might be rational, and as conducive to eternal as to temporal happiness” (159). At the time of Mr. Morgan’s death, both women were “of an age and fortune to enjoy all the pleasures which most people so eagerly pursue” (159); it is clear, then, that retirement and female relationships were not the only option.

Mrs. Mancel’s focus on the rational satisfaction and connection to eternal happiness of her friendship with Mrs. Morgan, along with the text’s acknowledgement that the women had other, possibly appealing options, may indicate the differences between the close female friendships developed in Scott’s work and the disruptive versions of same-sex attachment discussed in other texts in this study. Mrs. Mancel rationalizes her romantic disappointment with Lambton by claiming that such an exclusive, erotic bond would have disabled her benevolent friendship with Mrs. Morgan *and* the larger benevolent community born out of that friendship. In Scott’s work, attachment between women is non-exclusive and socially oriented; despite the intimacy of Mrs. Mancel and Mrs. Morgan’s friendship, they do not seek to reserve their hearts for each other but to extend their benevolence and devotion to their entire

community, essentially drawing the community into their own affective bond. Same-sex attachment in Scott's work is non-threatening and socially and critically valuable because it does not separate pairs of women from their communities or from women as a class, but instead gives them a base of affective support from which they can engage with and change their society as a whole (see chapter 4, section 4 and chapter 5, section 3).

As with the earlier stages of the women's tale, this emphasis on friendship and the women's eagerness to share their ideas and their lives present their relationship as their authentic preference. Mrs. Mancel learns to endorse Lambton's death not because she fears it would have been an unhappy marriage, but because she sees it as another form of seduction. Attachment to Lambton would have lured her away from her real preference for a single, rational life with her friend, and so she imagines all marriages, not just bad ones, as distractions from her preferred lifestyle. Her unconstrained decision to join with Mrs. Morgan and form Millenium Hall instead is an authentic preference for idealized benevolence, one not driven by a need to escape from male persecution.

Because the women have other options for exercising forms of feminine influence, such as making satisfactory second marriages or building social lives as financially independent single women, their narratives demonstrate a persistent desire to explore and stretch the boundaries of feminine influence by creating their own sphere of social action. The women's status as deliberate experimenters, rather than romantic refugees, enhances their ability to act as authority figures within their estate because their actions are presented as the result of serious consideration and sustained social criticisms, rather than the fortuitous consequences of trying to escape from romance plots. The embedded narratives are essential to interpretation of the social conditions created at Millenium Hall; they describe the women's virtues, and so make them all unassailable as models of appropriate femininity. They also display their right to

become authoritative reformers by demonstrating both the deliberately chosen, critically motivated nature of their removal to Millenium Hall and their capacity to combine male social models, such as benevolent authoritarianism, with appropriate femininity.

Betty Schellenberg, in her discussion of how the conversationally-driven form of *Millenium Hall* impacts its presentation of a sociable community, recognizes that the embedded narratives avoid both the expected pattern of courtship and marriage and “the sentimental plot of the passive female victim, seduced or self-destroyed as the ultimate proof of her innocence,” but she goes on to claim that the narratives’ avoidance of romantic and courtship plots constitutes “a rejection of the plot of individualistic desire altogether” (Schellenberg, *Conversational Circle*, 94-95). The narratives’ close focus on the development of friendships and shared ideals between the founding women, however, implies that their life at Millenium Hall is chosen even in the presence of other options. If they truly chose this life, then Millenium Hall cannot embody a wholesale rejection of individualistic desire. Their desire may not be “individualistic” in the sense of narrowly focused on personal happiness, but it is nonetheless authentic, formed by each woman individually and in cooperation with the others. Narrative and social authorization for their projects springs from the narratives’ refusal to present them as victims of or refugees from their broader social world. Their stories insist on their conscious intention to engage in utopian experimentation, giving them the right to be judged on and authorized by their experiments’ undeniable success in forming a better world. The narratives’ relation to each other, where each woman finds sources of dissatisfaction with her personal and romantic life, to be resolved only when she is united with the other women, creates a pattern that authenticates each woman’s genuine desire to find emotional fulfilment outside the courtship/marriage cycle. The cumulative effect of the narratives is to insist on the ladies’

irreproachable virtue and to present their community as a deliberate response to the inadequacy of domesticity and romance.

Within the confines of Millenium Hall, the founding ladies are able to exercise benevolent social authority in such a way that their dependents comply completely with their principles, without any felt compulsion to do so, thereby making themselves into ideal figures of an authority exercised to beneficial ends. Like Leonora, they are able to perform male roles better than any actual man but, unlike her, they do it openly as women and make it compatible with feminine virtues. Their success transforms their social role, and so they are able to present large-scale benevolent control as a viable alternative to domesticity, through which women can exercise significant social influence. The ladies go on to repeat the process of reform with their male visitors, Ellison and Lamont, using their conversations to establish a pattern of increasing agreement with the men until, at the end of the text, both show signs of unenforced compliance with the ladies' social ideals. Their interaction with the ladies is not an "education" in the strictest sense, as both are already independent adults, but is a critical socialization. They are gradually taught to see the social flaws that inspired the creation of the estate and to agree with its organizing principles, through the same kind of reformatory conversation that the ladies use on all of their objects of charity.

### **7. Reformatory Education, in the text and out**

*Millennium Hall* operates within a double frame. The embedded narratives are contained within an inner frame in which Mrs. Maynard describes the estate and its members and the outer frame of a letter written by George Ellison. The reader's recognition of the male author-function fades quickly, however, as the women's social and narrative direction takes over from the ostensible writer's (Ellison's) interpretations. Ellison's involvement with and responsiveness to the women's stories are so complete, that the terms and direction of the

letter seem to be within their control, with the man who holds the pen becoming a conduit for their thoughts and actions. The level of influence and reforming guidance that the women exercise within their created community is extended through their relationship with the men who tour their estate and listen to their stories.

Alessa Johns describes *Millenium Hall* as a “self-replicating utopia” because its marriage of contractualism with Christian principles of benevolence creates “an endless sequence of reformative transactions” (Johns, 92) where beneficiaries reciprocate by adopting and transmitting the ladies’ principles. Ellison, by writing his letter, becomes a step in that sequence. He is transformed through his direct interaction with the ladies, and in exchange, he participates in their project by transmitting their ideas to others, who will learn from them as he has and continue the process. He recognizes his own role when he claims that he has “no other share than that of a spectator, and auditor, in what I propose to relate” (54). This depiction of himself as a conduit for replicating and transmitting his experiences with the women voluntarily disclaims his function as an author, and cedes textual and moral authority to the women he describes.

Ellison and Lamont are the only people with whom we see the ladies interact who have the potential to be their social or cultural superiors. Ellison and Lamont are independent men, and so in most situations would have an advantage over the women in establishing social and discursive authority. The women can convert Ellison and Lamont into collaborators in their reformative projects because they deploy all their conversational interactions for such an instructive purpose. Ellison’s request to hear the ladies’ stories is driven by a desire for instruction regarding their principles, the same kind of instruction into virtue through talk that the ladies have given the women of the satellite community. They reciprocate from a desire to incorporate the listener into the organizing principles of Millenium Hall, and he in turn is

expected to respond with gratitude and with adoption of their virtues. Making Mrs. Maynard the only narrator of the women's stories also emphasizes their didactic purpose, so that they can establish the women's reformatory authority through their depictions of their virtue, sincerity, and ability to inhabit quasi-masculine roles without detracting from the women's current position as almost-patriarchs by linking them too closely with their imperilled pasts. Patricia Spacks complains that Mrs. Maynard obscures the possible psychological richness of the tales through her summary style of narration; "the main interests in that story are the happy ending and the didactic message."<sup>132</sup> Telling the stories at second-hand, so that their emotional content is subsumed within their didactic message, allows the ladies' to draw on their personal pasts to authorize their reformatory mission without complicating or compromising their current position as independent, authoritative agents, allowing both their exemplary narratives and their critical discussions to fulfil their respective functions. The narratives are made purely didactic by being summarized and psychologically simplified through second-hand narration. The ladies' explanation of their estate and their principles, which proves their ability to link their actions to abstract principles and justify their social criticism through the peace and harmony they have created in their communities, is subtly disassociated from the ladies' conventionally feminine past, so that the benevolent authority they currently possess can appear as the natural effect of their reforming vision rather than a dramatic departure from their prior domestic roles. The use of a form that allows for both conceptual links and structural separations between personal narrative and its critical effect is essential to the ladies' presentation of themselves as authoritative agents of reform in relation to their male auditors.

When the founding ladies speak themselves, the text depicts parallels between their interaction with the men and their program of reforming the disadvantaged people around their

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<sup>132</sup> Patricia Meyer Spacks, *Privacy: Concealing the Eighteenth-Century Self* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2003), 135.

estate. The first old woman that Ellison meets on the estate tells him that the ladies never come to see them “without giving us some good advice” and that when the cottagers quarrelled, the ladies “condescended to make it up amongst us, and shewed us so kindly how much it was our duty to agree together” (67) that they have all learned to suppress their personal failings. The woman’s repeated sense of the ladies’ goodness in talking to the others and teaching them to resolve their interpersonal issues expresses a deep gratitude for this form of charity, and so implies that the ladies’ habits of benevolence are as much about their willingness to talk, to teach, and to offer their time and wisdom as they are about their willingness to offer financial or material assistance. As with the satellite community of impoverished gentlewomen, the ladies have used their conversational skills to produce ingenuous subjection, with the recipients of their charitable efforts accepting their principles so completely that they have come to seem like their own.

The similarities between this form of conversation and that involving the men appear when the men take their first guided tour of the estate’s gardens. All of the ladies’ discussion and explanations, even those that address their general moral principles, are prompted by and confined to the specific environment of the estate, what it includes and what it does not. For example, Mrs. Mancel’s discussion of the treatment of animals, and the cruelty of confining exotic beasts for entertainment, is prompted by Lamont’s curiosity about the garden. Their conversation about animals is the first instance of principles of reciprocal benevolence in the text, as Mrs. Mancel claims that it is acceptable for man to forcibly tame domestic animals because “the great benefits he receives from, and communicates to the animals, excuses the forcible methods by which it is accomplished” (71). The idea of reciprocal benevolence is smuggled into Mrs. Mancel’s argument, however, as her focus remains on eliciting agreement with the specific conditions of the Millenium Hall estate, in this case, the ladies’ refusal to

develop a menagerie. Lamont's response reflects this limited goal, as he claims that "it is most advisable for me not to attempt to defend what I have said, should I have reason on my side, while you have humanity on yours" (72). Lamont's response avoids explicit engagement with Mrs. Mancel's arguments, but demonstrates a willingness to accept and endorse the estate as it is, and, by extension, the ladies' right to create and control their ideal community. Lamont is not just being reformed into becoming an advocate of the general virtue and moral exemplarity that the ladies embody, but also into an advocate of and willing participant in the Millenium Hall community as such.

The text ends with descriptions of the ladies' textile factory, which employs "several hundred people of all ages" and has succeeded so well as "to enrich all the country round about" (243) and of Lamont reading the New Testament in an effort to confirm his observation that the founding ladies are so virtuous that their religion must be the true one; he searches the Bible to discover "whether the moral evidences concurred with that divine stamp, which was so strongly impressed upon it" (248). These two descriptions are fitting closure, as they illustrate the extent to which the ladies' use of charity and reformatory conversation has expanded their sphere of authority. They claim that they "did not mean to drive a trade" (247) by operating the textile factory, but they have nevertheless been successful enough to employ a large number of people and produce substantial economic benefits for the surrounding community, and so have created a role for themselves as burgeoning industrialists. The textile factory, and the link it implies between female agency and the production of textiles as traditional women's work, provides a further echo of an ongoing metaphor found throughout the history of the framed-novelle by women (see chapter 5 introduction and chapter 6, section 5). It also perfectly exemplifies how the ladies' benevolence disseminates their influence past their domestic world into the surrounding community, and past the ordinary means of exercising charity into the

masculine sphere of business and economic development. Lamont's voluntary decision to read the New Testament to confirm his endorsement of the ladies' principles demonstrates the efficacy of their conversational interactions, both narrative and critical, in bringing about his spontaneous compliance with their social vision and love for their virtues. In *The History of Sir George Ellison* (1766), Ellison will carry the lessons he learned at Millenium Hall into his own neighbourhood, and adopt similar practices of encouraging reciprocal benevolence and converting others into virtue through kindness and conversation. As a writer and a philanthropist, Ellison's time at Millenium Hall transforms him into a willing conductor of the ladies' social vision, who continues to call on their judgment in organizing his own charitable estate.<sup>133</sup> Ellison is the ladies' greatest triumph, as he adopts their benevolent practices to realize similar ends. Through Ellison, the ladies use their exemplary narratives and social commentary to remake society in their own image. In reforming Ellison, the ladies are able to both justify their own adoption of social authority through their demonstrable success and reform masculine authority models by showing how social control can and should be rooted in deliberative benevolence and virtue, rather than strict constructions of gender roles. These closing images of the ladies' influence confirm their status as authoritative social reformers operating through the feminine mediums of charity and conversation designed to create harmony, and so allow *Millenium Hall's* delicate balance between didactic narrative and persuasive conversation to prove women's ability and right to develop an alternative to domesticity and act as agents of social control.

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<sup>133</sup> See Sarah Scott, *The History of Sir George Ellison*, ed. Betty Rizzo (Lexington: The University Press of Kentucky, 1996), 50, 99 and also Johanna Deveraux, "A Paradise Within? Mary Astell, Sarah Scott, and the Limits of Utopia," *Journal for Eighteenth-Century Studies* 32 (2009): 53-67, 65-66, for a contrary view, emphasizing the difference between Ellison's mobility and the ladies' physical stasis as evidence of how *Millenium Hall* represses individual desire and so falters as a feminist utopia.

## Chapter 8

### Sarah Fielding and Jane Collier

Sarah Fielding and Jane Collier begin their eccentric framed-novelle, *The Cry: a new dramatic fable* (1754) with the claim that “our address is to the candid reader. To the morose critic we know that all address is vain. To such as are willing to understand, we will endeavour to be perspicuous”.<sup>134</sup> Christopher Reid describes the use of “candour” in our period as a term describing attitudes towards moral judgment and associated with “a spirit of fair dealing and compromise, with the adjustment and reconciling of difference.”<sup>135</sup> The *Oxford English Dictionary* defines “morose” as an adjective for persons in our period as “sullen, gloomy, sour-tempered, unsocial” (*OED*, s.v. “morose”). These two terms thus denote opposite types of readers, one open and fair, seeking to adjust to the spirit in which the text is written, and one perverse, approaching the text without wishing to be pleased by it. However just, the claim that all address is in vain to the morose critic is still unnerving in its simplicity. Fielding and Collier are willing to discard a presumably large body of readers on the grounds that its members are immune to understanding or instruction, unreachable through the medium of writing. Their stark dismissal of a class of readers may, however, represent a subtle but deliberate shift in emphasis of the framed-novelle sequence, away from its critical potential in the use of narration and conversational criticism as a primarily instructive tool to its use as also a revelatory tool, where a person’s (or group’s) participation in conversational exchange and response to narrative is a display and indictment of their character as social beings and as readers.

The focus on readers and critics in the prologue also indicates a development in the interaction of character, morality, and literary capacity in Fielding and Collier’s work, a

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<sup>134</sup> Sarah Fielding and Jane Collier, *The Cry: a new dramatic fable* (London: R. and J. Dodsley, 1754), 1:1.

<sup>135</sup> Christopher Reid, “Speaking candidly: rhetoric, politics, and the meaning of candour in the later eighteenth century,” *British Journal for Eighteenth-Century Studies* 28 (2005): 67-82, 68-69.

development that attains its clearest expression in Fielding's earlier *Remarks on Clarissa* (1749). Many of the framed-novelles we have discussed have been manifestly concerned with both cultural and literary intervention. Eliza Haywood's *The Tea Table* (1725) is engaged with the practice of coterie criticism and the importance of narrative in encouraging egalitarian interactions in mixed-gender groups. *The Tea Table* also addresses the relationship between critical capacity and character through its detailed commentary on both the social and the intellectual qualifications of its conversational group (see chapter 6, section 2). Jane Barker's two *Patchworks* (1723 and 1726) comment on the literary advantages of their own structure while developing a web of literary referentiality that situates Barker's work alongside her more famous peers and within a developing literary marketplace (see chapter 5, section 7). *The Cry*, however, takes the framed-novelle's association of gendered cultural critique and literary commentary a step further by making feminine virtue and skilled literary responsiveness co-extensive. *The Cry* performs this conflation of moral worth and candour in reading by combining two intradiegetic readers, Una and the body of persons that constitute Cry, with two narrating characters, Portia and Cylinda, whose personal narratives question the interactions of learning, interpretation, and feminine virtue. The work as a whole is strikingly intertextual, reappropriating familiar figures from earlier literature for new and slyly subversive uses. *The Cry* thus merges literary responsiveness and moral questioning into complementary processes. Fielding's experimentation with the mutually reflective nature of literary and moral adroitness can be traced to *Remarks on Clarissa*, in which characters' ability to perform candid, critically astute readings of *Clarissa* within a conversational setting simultaneously reveals their individual character, upholds the literary and cultural value of *Clarissa* itself, and demonstrates the efficacious beauty of conversation as a critical and didactic process. In this chapter, we will begin with an examination of *Remarks on Clarissa* as an example of the framed-novelle's potential to

create a pointedly specific but also broadly applicable literary intervention and then move on to read *The Cry* as an expansion and redirection of Fielding's earlier approach. In reading *The Cry*, we will focus on its manipulation of familiar literary figures as a method of combining learning and knowledge with critiques of gendered norms. We will also see how Fielding and Collier's pointed reuse of literary models of femininity comments on the place of their own work within its literary culture, as well as the role of women's stories and women's writing generally. Finally this chapter considers the framed-novelle's distinctive structure, in this text, as a necessary means for creating a productive and morally informed challenge to cultural preconceptions regarding learning and feminine virtue.

### 1. *Remarks on Clarissa*: framing and criticizing character

The purpose of Fielding's *Remarks on Clarissa* seems to be both transparent and self-contained. Addressing Richardson, she says that "my design is fairly to lay before you all the Criticisms, as far as I can remember them, that I have heard on your History of *Clarissa*."<sup>136</sup> From this, she will deduce whether or not objections to the novel have good grounds (2). The actual progression of this creative and critical work is far more compelling and consequential in its sociable criticism, reading practices, and the moral implications the author develops of both. It may seem idiosyncratic to call *Remarks on Clarissa* a framed-novelle. It does not have much narrative appeal, but there is undoubtedly a set of narratives within it. Fielding does not simply lay objections to *Clarissa* before her reader, but allows them to emerge from a series of imagined conversations. The conversational group meets, separates, and meets again, and their responses to *Clarissa* are interspersed with their responses to, and irritation with, each other. *Remarks on Clarissa* combines direct critical acts with a narrative of the development of a critical group. Because the characters are actively reading *Clarissa* between their meetings, Fielding's

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<sup>136</sup> Sarah Fielding, *Remarks on Clarissa* (Los Angeles: The Augustan Reprint Society, 1985), 2.

work transforms the reading process itself into a narrative of critical development. We meet a group of speakers whose critical abilities and personal qualities intersect and reinforce each other and we then see their reactions change as they read new volumes and participate in discussion, learning about *Clarissa* and about the characters at the same time.<sup>137</sup> We are encouraged to develop an understanding of *Clarissa*, of narrative interpretation, and of discursive interaction that reflects a unified vision of literary responsiveness and moral character.

Our conversational circle opens with a gentleman complaining that *Clarissa's* bulk is disproportionate to its literary and cultural importance, because "he could tell the whole Story contained in the two first Volumes in a few minutes;...there is a Family who live in the Country, consisting of an old, positive, gouty Gentleman, two old Batchelors as positive as their gouty Brother" (4). The gentleman continues his reductive interpretation of *Clarissa*, overlooking the emotional nuances of Clarissa's relationship to her family and their persecutions to say simply that "they call it Obstinacy; she calls it Resolution" (5). The gentleman's complaint is undone when the sprightly Miss Gibson, using an almanac's list of monarch's births as an example, tells him that "by his Rule of Writing, that was the best History of *England*, and Almanack-makers were the best Historians" (5). Her point is reinforced by a Mr. Johnson, whose drollly dull recital of Roman history in a few hundred words functions as both a defence of *Clarissa's* length and an argument for its literary and cultural significance, as it leads into a discussion of the relative usefulness of imperial history and the history of the Harlowes.

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<sup>137</sup> See Emily Friedman's "Remarks on Richardson: Sarah Fielding and the Rational Reader," *Eighteenth-Century Fiction* 22 (2009): 309-26 for a discussion of Fielding's work as a prioritization of cognitive, rational reading practices, "more interested in engaging minds than hearts", 309. Though Friedman is entirely right in emphasizing the importance of reasoned discussion in Fielding, *Remarks on Clarissa's* depiction of questionable motives in criticizing *Clarissa*, and Bellario's mockery of a woman who can neither cry at a tragedy nor laugh at a comedy (see Fielding, *Remarks*, 32) may present a case for engaging, if not unequivocally celebrating, the importance of hearts in the reading process.

When one of the men objects to Mr. Johnson's recital on the grounds that he cannot believe "the knowing the Particulars of the Family at *Harlow-place* was of as much Consequence, as the knowing the Springs and Wheels on which turned the Affairs of the greatest Commonwealth" (7), the lady of the house counters that:

I really think the penetrating into the Motives that actuate the Persons in a private Family, of much more general use to be known than those concerning the Management of any Kingdom or Empire whatsoever. The latter, Princes, Governors, and Politicians only can be the better for, whilst every Parent, every Child, every Sister, and every Brother are concerned in the former, and may take example by such who are in the same Situation with themselves.(7)

We are also told that this lady "has bred up three Sons and three Daughters, who do Honour to her Education of them" (7). In addition to enforcing the status of particularized fiction as universal exemplary guides, this exchange introduces issues of character and interpretive flexibility as essential elements in the critical process. We are told little of the complaining man, but can deduce that he is not able to imagine the critical significance of a private family's actions, and that his inability to see any equivalency between the drama of old Rome and the drama of Harlowe-place betrays a rigid understanding of what is and is not consequential, instructive material. The lady of the house, explicitly presented to us as an efficacious familial educator, has a more capacious understanding of consequence, exemplarity, and applicability. Her admirable maternity is linked to and informs her reading and her critical receptivity to *Clarissa* as a didactic and exemplary text. Her familial virtues allow her to see and understand the cultural weight of familial virtue and its fictional presentations.

As the conversation continues, participants develop a closer connection between standards of feminine virtue and interpretive dexterity. One of the men, Bellario, complains that Clarissa can be accused of "wanting Affection for her Lover, for that he was sure, a Woman whose mind was incapable of Love, could not be amiable, nor have any of those gentle Qualities which chiefly adorn the female Character. And as to her whining after her Papa and Mamma,

who had used her so cruelly...I think 'tis contemptible in her" (15). Bellario's reaction to *Clarissa* is based in a limited and misogynistic model of feminine worth. All a woman's amiable qualities are dependent on her capacity to feel and display affection for her lover—a suspiciously self-serving interpretation of women's amiability, when spoken by a young man, and also a simplistic understanding of feminine worth, based entirely on the demands of romance and unresponsive to the impact of particular circumstances on virtuous behaviour. Bellario's dismissal of Clarissa's constant affection for her parents also creates an odd double standard; he demands unconditional affection from amiable women with their lovers, but views their affection for a family as contingent and easily discarded. Bellario's interpretation is clumsy and predicated on a belief that lovers can make extreme demands of their mistress's affection; it proves as much a comment on his critical skill and social views as on the work in question. When Miss Gibson offers a sustained defence of Clarissa and her affections, pointing to Lovelace's treatment and the difficulty, for anyone truly affectionate, of eradicating filial love, Bellario can do little except "look very grave for a Moment, and then [say] he was sure she had no Affections in her" (23).

Despite this critical mishap, Bellario's progression through reading and reaction teaches us what candid criticism should be. Despite his objections to Clarissa's character, he promises that he will "not absolutely give his Judgment till he saw the Conclusion" (24). When the group meets for the last time to discuss the conclusion, Bellario is entirely altered and declares that he has now decided that Clarissa is "as much as Mortal could be 'LOVE ITSELF'" (30). He is also entirely reconciled to a long and tragic ending saying that he "highly applauded all the material Parts of it" (of *Clarissa*) and furthermore, "for the Sake of *Clarissa*, he would never form any Judgment of a Work again till the whole was lain before him. This was noble! This was candid! This was like Bellario!" (31). Such exclamatory interjections reinforce that, in approving of *Clarissa* and promising to withhold judgment of new works, Bellario has reached a more

productive, more candid critical process. If we take Bellario's changing judgments as he progresses through *Clarissa* as a model, then the skilled and candid reader is one who can be convinced by discussion and further reading. The candid reader is one who is not so in love with his opinions as to refuse to change them. The candid reader judges a text or a narrative as a whole, rather than seeking out objectionable parts, and can set aside his own prejudices and preferences, in favour of overtly affectionate women or happy endings, to judge a work on its own terms. The good and candid reader is an impartial reader, whose interpretive flexibility indicates that his own character is open to instruction and reform.

## 2. *The Cry*: diffidence and innovation

Modern critics often imagine Sarah Fielding and Jane Collier's *The Cry* as an example of the decisive break mid-eighteenth century women writers sought to make with their predecessors, such as Manley, Behn, and Haywood, who were as notorious as they were popular. The authors' vigorous protest in the introduction against reading fiction in search of personal libel does seem to disclaim the influence of earlier women writers and their attraction to the secret history tradition, but some aspects of narrative structure and social critique remain constant. Such structural and critical similarities serve as an indication that Fielding and Collier found a way to massage aspects of a feminine literary tradition into increased respectability even while their concern with modesty and propriety appears to repudiate the influence of their predecessors. *The Cry* is a framed-novelle centred on a process of conversational exchange, making it structurally similar to works by earlier women writers, but it is, in some ways, counterintuitive to follow chapters on Jane Barker and Sarah Scott with a discussion of *The Cry*. Other framed-novelles place great faith in the power of narration and critical conversation to draw women together into communities of shared interest to advocate for gender-sensitive social reform. Fielding and Collier's combination of narration and critical reaction takes a darker

perspective. The discursive group, the mass known as the Cry, are persistently malicious, misjudging, and seemingly immune to the influence of morally exemplary narrative. As a result, *The Cry* is a divided and fractious work, distributing its primary narrators between allegiance to the Cry as the embodiment of vice and malicious misreading and Una as the embodiment of truth and justice. The hopeful vision of female connection that was such a marked feature of Jane Barker's work is hard to find here.

*The Cry* still deserves its place in this study, however, because it is pervasively concerned with the social and moral significance of women's stories and the relationships between woman-centred narration, critical reaction, and the development of moral and social perspectives. It also puts women's stories in conversation with each other to engage with ideas of learning, reading practices, femininity, and virtue in more sophisticated ways than most other works discussed here, exemplifying the framed-novelle's ability to create simultaneously gendered social critiques and comments on literate culture. Fielding and Collier's conclusions are less enthusiastic about the transformative potential of narration and conversation, less able to celebrate discursive interaction among women, but the authors still examine similar themes through similar textual tactics. There is a pessimism about their work, but it is nonetheless able to use the framed-novelle's structure to create critically authoritative women and to perform literary and cultural interventions by insisting on the consequentiality of their tales. With all their distrust of morose critics, Fielding and Collier still use the interaction between narration and criticism to create an ambitious and capacious exploration of women's stories and how they can and should be read.

Their ambition and self-conscious literary innovation may not, however, be immediately apparent. Jane Spencer and Susan Catto in her unpublished thesis,<sup>138</sup> argue that mid-century women writers are distinguished from their predecessors by the diffidence of their writing. As Spencer describes in her discussion of mid-century women writers in the literary marketplace, eighteenth-century critics praised women for their perceived “artlessness” and some of their male counterparts, such as Richardson, positively prized women’s assumed or pretended ignorance of their own merits and modest reluctance to publish (Spencer, 79-80). Although Fielding complied with ideals of female diffidence in publishing some of her other works, for example in her claim that she published *David Simple* only because of her distressed circumstances,<sup>139</sup> the preface to *The Cry* presents a dramatically different and more assertive view of Fielding and Collier’s position as authors. Speaking of novels, they claim that they “wish, if possible, to strike a little out of a road already so much beaten” (1:9) and then go on to describe and defend their stylistic choices as both conscious literary innovations and tools to assist in their project, which is to “paint the inward mind” (1:11). This defence of their stylistic and generic choices allows Fielding and Collier to present themselves not as women diffident about their own merit but as highly deliberate writers consciously manipulating generic conventions for their own ends. In this sense, their explanation of their generic choices is not unlike Jane Barker’s confident assertion that her use of a discursive form involving embedded narratives and frame characters/interpreters in her *Patchwork Screen for the Ladies* means that it is uniquely adapted to her didactic project of making disunion meet in an “harmonious Tea-Table entertainment” (Barker, 52).

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<sup>138</sup> See Susan Catto, “Modest Ambition: the influence of Henry Fielding, Samuel Richardson and the ideal of female diffidence on Sarah Fielding, Charlotte Lennox and Frances Brooke” (Dphil thesis, Oxford University, 1998).

<sup>139</sup> Sarah Fielding, *The Adventures of David Simple*, ed. Linda Bree (London: Penguin Books, 2002), 2.

Fielding and Collier's awareness of themselves as literary innovators undermines the idea that they attempted to gain acceptance through a display of diffidence or uncertainty about the value of their work, and their proud claim deliberately to manipulate generic norms to further a didactic purpose could represent a point of continuity between their work and their female predecessors. Fielding and Collier's unabashed confidence in their literary status is also expressed through their deliberate association of their work with the epic tradition; they compare their introduction to the proem of an epic (1:9-10). This association challenges the educational position of women by displaying the authors' easy familiarity with the classics and claims serious literary status for the work itself by emphasizing its points of contact with a culturally accepted standard of serious literature. The association of their work with the epic is also reminiscent of Sarah's brother's, Henry Fielding's description, in *The Adventures of Joseph Andrews* (1742), of a comic romance as "a comic Epic-Poem in Prose."<sup>140</sup> Fielding and Collier's reference to the epic in their assessment of their own work insists on its literary value and positions them as participants in the ongoing discussion over the novel's place in the literary world. Their model of assumed diffidence, then, does not discount or undervalue their work's position within their textual culture.

Assumed diffidence for Fielding and Collier may be located instead in their explanation of authority within the text. The introduction explains their decision to begin each scene with a motto as a manifestation of their desire to "give a sanction to our own sentiments by those of the most approved authors" (1:18). Sanctioning their sentiments through reference to "the most approved authors" allows Fielding and Collier to manifest diffidence about the value of their sentiments, and so perform diffidence in judgment without assuming modesty in regards to their merit as writers. Although Una is presented in the main text as a decisive, infallible

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<sup>140</sup> Henry Fielding, *Joseph Andrews*, ed. Martin C. Battestin (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1967), 4.

figure, the prologue acknowledges the reader as the ultimate authority on interpreting the text by asking the reader, not to accept all of Una's judgments, but to refrain from condemning Una's judgments until "they have thoroughly considered and given it a fair examination" (1:24). This address invites the reader to share interpretive authority with both the embodied representative of truth and the authors'/narrator's own voice. The prologue goes on to claim that the authors/narrators "have not publish'd any such sentiment without having first ourselves carefully examined it on all sides" (1:24), and so allows Fielding and Collier to assume diffidence regarding social and cultural judgments while retaining confidence in the literary significance of their work. Although a collaborative approach to writing and authorship can be a pathway into authority,<sup>141</sup> this collaborative approach to interpretive authority over a text after its composition may be a way for Fielding and Collier to perform socially expected feminine modesty. Such interpretive collaboration also draws the reader into the work's portrayal of critical responsiveness and moral character as interconnected concepts, forcing the reader to identify himself with either Una or the malicious Cry. This in turn presents *The Cry* as a whole as a tool for self-contained argument concerning literariness and virtue and for self-evaluation on the part of the reader. This distribution of interpretive authority between clearly distinguished author/narrators, a judging frame character, and a participatory reader would be more difficult to achieve in a text that was not constructed on a pattern of conversational exchange and critical reaction. Hence, the framed-novelle form is instrumental in allowing Fielding and Collier to balance expressions of diffidence in judgment with clearly articulated confidence in the value of their work.

*The Cry* follows works by earlier women writers in allowing its embedded love stories to function as general social commentary while it articulates anxiety about reading practices. As J.

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<sup>141</sup> McVitty, 180-81. For a discussion of how collaborative or communal writing could lead to a feminine conception of narrative voice, see Lanser, 20-23.

Paul Hunter points out in his discussion of *The Cry*, while the complexity of some narrative strains may “resist ...interpretation in terms of honored precedents” the intention to draw broadly based social messages from particular love stories is always present through the interpretive voices of Una, the Cry, and the author/narrator.<sup>142</sup> As *The Cry*'s embedded narratives are longer and more complicated than those found in our other framed-novelles, a summary of their important points will facilitate our understanding of the text's commentary on reading practices and pervasive social ills. Our central narrator, Portia, is brought before the Cry by Una to narrate the events of her life. She tells a story about her relationship with the family of Nicanor, which consists of Cordelia, her intimate friend, Ferdinand, her unacknowledged lover (for most of the tale) and Oliver, their spiteful older brother. Ferdinand, Portia, and Cordelia enjoy an intimate friendship, attracting the malice of Oliver and Melantha, an unpleasant woman who is also in love with Ferdinand. Nicanor dissipates his fortune and involves his children in financial hardship. As a result, Ferdinand goes to Barbados to try to regain financial stability. While he is gone, Oliver invents a scheme to blacken Ferdinand's character with Nicanor and with Portia, convincing the family that Ferdinand has become dissolute and profligate. Hearing of Oliver's machinations, Ferdinand invents subterfuges of his own to confirm his new, unsavoury reputation so that he can test Portia's principles, and learn if she is able to conquer a passion when the object of it proves unworthy. She can, and she flees into the country to avoid Ferdinand upon his return to England. Convinced of her prudence and virtue, Ferdinand tells Portia the true story of his scheming, they marry, and live happily ever after with Cordelia. Portia's story is intertwined with the story of Cylinda, a young woman led into vice and folly by her exaggerated pride in her intellectual gifts. Cylinda learns, in the course of her narrative, that Portia is a childhood friend, taken away from her years before because her

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<sup>142</sup> J. Paul Hunter “Novels and History and Northrop Frye,” *Eighteenth-Century Studies* 24 (1990-91) 225-41, 235.

mother feared Cylinda's influence. Through reflection on her life and the counterbalancing example of Portia's prudence and virtue, Cylinda achieves repentance and is invited to join Portia, Ferdinand, and Cordelia in their idyllic retirement.

The tales that Portia and Cylinda tell, of both their own and other's romances, are used by the competing interpretive voices of Una and the Cry to draw conclusions on subjects as diverse as female education and mankind's capacity for disinterested generosity. In this sense, the Cry and Una fulfill a function very much like that of the frame narrators in works like Manley's *New Atalantis* or Barker's *A Patchwork Screen for the Ladies*, in that their reactions to embedded narratives represent possible social critiques of individual experiences. The Cry is almost always wrong in its conclusions and Una is always right, but both still adhere to an interpretive pattern of generalizing individual tales into social "truths", and so insist on the exemplary force of embedded narratives in a larger discursive framework. The framed-novelle's consistent tactic of extrapolating social messages from particular tales also, in *The Cry*, creates space for an ongoing examination of varying reading practices and their moral implications. As the Cry and Una respond to Portia and Cylinda, and Portia and Cylinda describe their own experiences with reading and interpretation, we see patterns of reading and critical reaction rooted in either malice and intellectual pride or candour and prudence, so that interpretive struggle among *The Cry's* speakers and narrators creates a close connection between critical response and personal character. *The Cry's* concern with reading practices revolves around their moral significance, creating a relationship between narration and critical reaction where narration and response can generate social criticism while also discovering the reader's true character.

*The Cry* takes place in an allegorical sphere in which the primary authority figure is Una, the embodiment of truth. She acts as a mediator and a judge of the exchanges between Portia,

Cylinda, and the Cry even though she lacks any more explicit sanction to do so than her innate rationality and trustworthiness. The image of authority presented in *The Cry* mimics the authority that resides in the process of sociable conversation in that it is based on tacit agreement and the exercise of rationality<sup>143</sup> rather than formal positions of power. The actual site of *The Cry* is described only as a large hall, to which the participants are summoned by an apparently supernatural process. It is a space meant for speaking to and with large crowds, but is not explicitly associated with any real public gathering place. The only real gathering place that the setting of *The Cry* resembles would be a theatre, which is also an easily accessible public space that offers cultural examination and criticism removed from positive authority. The vaguely mystical setting of *The Cry* is an allegory of the public sphere in that it represents a space for discourse removed from formal authority and created with the goal of providing a site for criticism that carries cultural weight despite its lack of tangible power. As described in Markman Ellis's essay on "Coffee-women, *The Spectator* and the public sphere in the early eighteenth century" (2001), the social barriers affecting women's entry into public discourse in the eighteenth century were based not on a perceived need to exclude women from the process of socially significant conversation, but on the impropriety and inadvisability of their presence in the particular, localized spaces with which public sphere conversation was associated.<sup>144</sup>

By situating *The Cry* in an alternative public sphere without actual correlative, Fielding and Collier avoid any of the possible cultural complications of a woman speaking and defending her actions in a real public forum. The name Fielding and Collier give to their speaking mass is also significant in relating their work to ideals of publicness and public opinion. Among the *Oxford English Dictionary's* seventeen definitions of "cry" the two most relevant are number

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<sup>143</sup> See chapter 3 for fuller discussion of sociable conversation and women's access to discursive authority.

<sup>144</sup> See also Markman Ellis, "Coffee-women, *The Spectator* and the public sphere in the early eighteenth century" in *Women, Writing and the Public Sphere, 1700-1830*, ed. Elizabeth Eger, Charlotte Grant, et al. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 27-52, 31-38.

eight, “the public voice loudly uttered in approval, denunciation, etc.; the *vox populi*” and number nine, “a form of words in which popular opinion on any matter finds general utterance; an opinion very generally expressed” (*OED*, s.v. “cry”). The earliest examples given for these definitions date from 1628 and hence would have been current to Fielding and Collier’s audience. The idea that the Cry is an embodiment of the *vox populi* is supported by the description in the introduction of the Cry as a collection of embodied human vices (1:19-20). The Cry is meant to represent common characteristics rather than individual characters, and so speaks with the voice of people as a mass, rather than voices of persons. These two definitions characterize the Cry as a body that exists for the primary purpose of formulating and articulating popular opinion, and so the Cry calls attention to both the process by which individual actions become material for public judgment and the many shortcomings of the people, or public opinion, as a moral and ethical guide.

Despite their similarities, critical conversation often works differently for Fielding and Collier than we have seen elsewhere. For other women writers who relied on a conversational structure to support their narrative and critical purposes, conversation was usually represented as effective. Conversational exchange and the critical reactions it inspired were almost always able to reform listeners or reconcile them to their social position and point the way towards positive social change. In *The Cry*, however, the reform and reintegration brought about by conversational exchange are incomplete. Cylinda’s process of telling her own story and listening to others inspires her repentance and Portia’s combination of narration and reflection helps her justify her story to the only authority that matters (Una), but the Cry itself remains unreformed and seemingly unaffected by the conversational process. The Cry at the end of the text is just as belligerent and maliciously devoted to misinterpretation as it was at the beginning. For Fielding and Collier conversational exchange is a powerful tool for displaying women’s interpretive

agency and for limited reform, but is not imagined as unfailingly successful as it is in the work of many other women writers. This distinction may be explained by differences in both the construction and aims of *The Cry* and differences in its understanding of what is required for appropriate interpretation, which are discussed below.

Unlike most works we have discussed, *The Cry* attempts to examine the lives of two individual women (Cylinda and Portia) and engage with general popular opinion about women's lives in the process. Portia's narratives and sustained critical discussions are tools for her to justify her behaviour and definitively align herself with standards of acceptable feminine behaviour, but they are also an attempt to alter and improve the Cry's moral sentiments and critical abilities. Even though the Cry is described in the beginning of the text as a malicious and hopelessly flawed mass, "composed of all such tempers and dispositions as bear an inveterate hatred to Truth" (1:19), Portia never disregards their reactions to her speech, nor does she address herself only to Una. Instead, she engages in a sustained but fruitless attempt to reason them into better judgment. Portia's engagement with the Cry is an attempt to use rational conversation as a tool for broad social reform. Although she fails in this respect, her stories and discussions do inspire a desire for reform in Cylinda, and help reintegrate her into an acceptable social role. Furthermore, the narrator's persistent characterization of the Cry as wilfully misjudging leaves open the question of whether or not a mass or embodied *vox populi* that was not so dedicated to misinterpretation would be amenable to reform through critical discussion. *The Cry* presents critical conversation as a powerful but limited tool. It can reform and reintegrate an individual, as demonstrated by Cylinda, and may be able to reform popular opinion as a whole, but only if the embodied voice of popular opinion is willing to be reformed.

The efficacy of conversation in *The Cry* is, as discussed above, heavily dependent on listeners' personal qualities, a dependence that is less explicit in the other works we have

discussed. In many such texts, it seems that frame characters have only to hear the stories they are told and exercise basic interpretive strategies in order to arrive at the right conclusions. *The Cry*, however, functions as an illustration of the psychological processes inherent in formulating a critical response to narrative, and so emphasizes the importance of a receptive state, of candour, in interpreting narrative. The vanity of any address to the morose critic is demonstrated by the narrator's remarks on the Cry's misinterpretations of Portia's speech and the malice and vanity that drive those misinterpretations. For example, when the Cry reacts to Portia's description of the flattering and unrealistic nature of the language of courtship by accusing her of being incapable of noble or generous love, the narrator's voice intrudes to remark that just as Edmund Spenser "in his allegory of the *house of pride*, makes all those who are enlisted in that numerous train, the most ready to complain of the pride of their leader; it may not appear strange, that the *Cry* should on all occasions be no less prompt to accuse others of a vice, to which they themselves are most prone" (1:74). This aside makes it clear that the Cry's misconstruction of Portia's speech is not a failure of communication but an effect of the personal flaws embodied by members of the Cry, and so emphasizes the central significance of a listener's own character arriving at appropriate interpretations. Goodwill, willingness to understand, and motivations for participating in conversational exchange are indispensable ingredients in the interpretive process. Fielding and Collier complicate their picture of conversation's efficacy as a critical and reformative tool by insisting on the importance of personal character in interpretation and distributing the responsibility for arriving at an appropriate interpretation between both critical ability and the listener's attitude.

### **3. Reclaiming Women: new settings for familiar figures**

Of the four most individuated speaking characters in this work—Una, Portia, Duessa, and Cylinda—three are direct appropriations of famous fictional women. Una, Portia and Duessa are

all instantly recognizable references to highly regarded literary characters (by prominent men) and representative of cultural types of influential women. They are all female leaders in their own way. Although Linda Bree argues that Fielding and Collier's consistent reliance on Edmund Spenser and other male writers may undermine their claims to originality and literary independence,<sup>145</sup> such a view may not take into account Fielding and Collier's reappropriation of the literary elements they borrow from others for their own new purposes.

Fielding and Collier's borrowing serves several purposes, each intricately tied to *The Cry's* overarching literary and critical aims. First, they display their own literary familiarity and dexterity. Their use of Spenser and Shakespeare does not indicate 'learning' in the classical sense, as these are all English works, but it does display a use of literary materials for creative, critical, and moralizing purposes. Fielding and Collier's versions of Una, Portia, and Duessa are all similar to their originals, but also distinct in that they use their authoritative speech to influence and respond to women's stories told within a primarily woman-driven critical space. Fielding and Collier's intertextual characters are distinctly creative in that they imagine how familiar models of influential women would interact and behave when their abilities are directed towards each other and towards feminocentric social questions, rather than towards assisting or manipulating men. Their representations of famous fictional women are also critically astute because they display women using their critical voices and discursive leadership for both good and bad ends. Portia and Una dominate this work morally and critically because their judgments are always carefully reasoned and morally sensitive, and because their own commitment to truth and justice—their moral superiority—is demonstrated through their critical speech. Duessa is, of course, simply bad. As a spokesperson for the Cry, she is an agent of malicious interpretation, abusing her discursive leadership to encourage deeply flawed social judgments.

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<sup>145</sup> Linda Bree, *Sarah Fielding* (New York: Twayne Publishers, 1996), 94.

Combining these three figures allows Fielding and Collier to create a picture of women's interpretive agency and discursive influence where its advisability and social usefulness reside not in gender but in individual moral character. Critically authoritative women can be good or bad, exemplary or socially disruptive, depending on the moral stature of the particular woman, displayed through her responses to narrative and discursive habits.

Spenser's Una is an influential but decidedly non-threatening female figure, as her impeccable virtue and intelligence are in the service of the Red Cross knight.<sup>146</sup> In *The Faerie Queene* (1590-96), Una's primary purpose is to act as a virtuous inspiration to a male figure and so she represents the myth of women as a force for reforming and civilizing the male, an idea that would have been tied to women's speech roles in the eighteenth century, as women's purpose in conversation was conceptualized as having a softening, humanizing influence on male participants (Klein, "Gender, Conversation, and the Public Sphere", 105-7). In Fielding and Collier's hands, there is no knight. Una gains critical authority as the representation of truth in *The Cry* and acts as both a general conversational mediator and Portia's primary ally. She is described as "divine Truth...enveloped in a mortal form" (1:24), a title that unambiguously represents her as both the moral and the interpretive centre of the work. Both divine and innately truthful, Una can be relied on to react to every narrative in the best, most accurate way and to display her own moral superiority in doing so; she is the candid reader. The authors' plea, in the prologue, that their readers "condemn not any sentiment which is stamped by the approbation of our Una, till they have thoroughly consider'd and given it a fair examination" (1:24) associates Una's moral stature with her critical reliability. Readers are asked to trust Una's critical judgments on the basis of her divine truthfulness, so that hostility or resistance to Una effectively indicates hostility or resistance to moral exemplarity and critical candour.

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<sup>146</sup> See Edmund Spenser, *The Faerie Queene*, ed. Helen Moore (Hertfordshire: Wordsworth Editions Limited, 1999), 26-36.

Una's status as a moral and interpretive leader orients the entire work around a close association of character and criticism. Those who argue with Una display shoddy or self-serving critical habits and also the personal flaws, of hostility to truth and reluctance to receive instruction, that make the Cry as a whole a group of morose critics, rather than candid readers. In the prologue, the author/narrator claims that Portia "would have too hard a task, unaided and friendless, to endure the insulting taunts and biting reproaches of such a multitude" (1:21). It is clear, then, that one of Una's roles is to offer support and encouragement to Portia's struggle with the Cry for interpretive authority. Una also becomes an hostess figure, in that she is responsible for summoning Portia, Cylinda, and the Cry into the conversational space and so effectually creates the opportunity for conversational exchange while she facilitates and guides its development. So, Fielding and Collier's version of Una makes her a protector, encourager, and instigator of female narration and moralizing reflection, rather than a moralizing influence on a wayward knight. Una's influence and interference also act as a civilizing influence on the Cry, frequently putting an end to the taunts and insults they direct towards Portia and sometimes even forcing them grudgingly to accept Portia's version of events. She remains, then, a kind of protective force, but for the purpose of facilitating and defending a woman's exercise of her critical skills.

Duessa, also borrowed from *The Faerie Queen*, undergoes a similar redirection of purpose in Fielding and Collier's version. Duessa in *The Cry* is still a representative of all error and acts as a force for confusion and misrepresentation, but the object of her misguidance has changed. Spenser's Duessa is in the service of a male sorcerer, Archimago, and takes on the task of deceiving and misleading the Red Cross knight (Spenser, 36-38). *The Cry's* Duessa, however, is a spokesperson for a mixed-gendered assembly and her primary purpose is to attack and insult one critical woman, Portia. It is worth noting, at this point, that although the Cry is composed of

both men and women, women tend to take a more active role in articulating both the Cry's faulty judgments and its malicious tendencies. On two separate occasions, the men of the Cry actively refuse to speak. In one instance, they fear that their confirmation of Portia's assessment of the language of courtship will cause them to run the risk of "losing a mistress or offending a wife" (1: 73) and later the same fear prevents them from contradicting Miss Notable's satire on Portia's appearance despite their desire to "take the part of insulted beauty, although in the person of Portia" (1:110). Fear and a desire to avoid conflict restrain the masculine voice of the Cry and female judgments, however faulty, are allowed to pass without internal challenge. This, combined with the fact that most of the named speakers for the Cry are women, makes it reasonable to conclude that female voices take a dominant part in both forming and articulating the Cry's judgments.

Duessa's position as a spokesman for the Cry expresses primarily female judgments and her ability to articulate malicious misrepresentations draws on images of the speaking, gossiping woman as inclined to mislead her hearers and exert a damaging influence on truth and social judgment. The picture of Portia that emerges out of the interplay between Una's judgments and the Cry's judgments as voiced through Duessa, then, is constructed out of two images of women's cultural influence. The reader is consistently guided through the process of interpreting Portia's story and her expressed opinions by two competing versions of women's voices, linked to cultural images of authoritative women. The interplay between these conflicting models of female judgment will, assuming of course that the reader is "candid", lead to a carefully reasoned assessment of Portia's story and her expressed social critiques, and so the juxtaposition of images of speaking women acts as a guide to rational interpretation. Fielding and Collier are able to reappropriate images of speaking women that are both easily

recognizable and misogynist and play them off each other to produce an example of female-directed critical conversation that leads to reasoned, socially useful critical reactions.

Portia also draws on a readily available cultural myth of the authoritative woman, this time from Shakespeare's *The Merchant of Venice* (1596-97). Shakespeare's Portia is a witty and learned woman, with remarkable linguistic facility, but her interpretive cleverness is exercised to aid a man. Furthermore, her interpretive skills are exercised in the guise of a man.

Shakespeare's Portia assumes a new identity and a male disguise in order to penetrate the exclusively male province of a court and use her rationality and legal-critical dexterity to change the outcome of the trial. This Portia, then, represents cultural anxieties over learned, witty women, who might lose their femininity. Portia's first attempt to resolve the dispute between Antonio and Shylock is an appeal for mercy, which fails, forcing her to move on to a hair-splitting reading of the original contract.<sup>147</sup> Her affective reasoning and speaking are ineffective, pushing her into logical, empirical reasoning and speaking. Shakespeare's Portia, then, can only acquire interpretive authority by completely abandoning performed femininity, and so implicitly acknowledges every ingrained fear about the pernicious, masculinizing effect of learning and authority on women. Fielding and Collier's Portia speaks to the same myths and fears through her heavily reasoned defence of her own actions, her discussions of learning in women, and her search for precision and transparency in language, but she does so without any attempt to disguise or undermine her own femininity and many of her arguments are meant to defend the gendered propriety of her own behaviour. Portia's explanations of her actions in her relationship with Ferdinand and the rest of his family are often accompanied by references to

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<sup>147</sup> See William Shakespeare, *The Merchant of Venice: Texts and Contexts*, ed. M. Lindsay Kaplan (Boston: Bedford/St. Martin's, 2002), 95-100.

prominent male writers, as when she draws on Francois de Fénelon's *Telemachus* of 1699<sup>148</sup> (1:30) to support her endorsement of immediate, reciprocal affection and explain her feelings for both Cordelia and Ferdinand. Here, Portia's use of established authorities is intended to justify both her behaviour and her moral sentiments, and so her knowledge and learning become tools to support her ideals of propriety in feminine behaviour, rather than detractions from her own femininity.

Portia's fondness for making up new words, such as "turba" and "dextra", displays both a link to Shakespeare's Portia through her insistence on heightened precision in language and directly addresses specific cultural myths about women's use of language. Deborah Cameron describes eighteenth-century conceptions of women's speech as a corrupting force in language with reference to Lord Chesterfield,<sup>149</sup> who claimed that in women's speech "If words are wanting, which indeed happens but seldom, indignation instantly makes new ones; and I have often known four or five syllables that never met one another before hastily and fortuitously jumbled into some word of mighty import."<sup>150</sup> Portia's careful description of the derivation and meaning of her new words displays women's ability to be both creative and precise in their use of language, and the words themselves are used as tools to advance Portia's conventional and appropriately gendered moral sentiments. She interacts with the myth of women as linguistically chaotic by demonstrating a careful form of linguistic creativity that enhances the precision and transparency of her speech and is used to support uncontroversial standards of feminine behaviour rather than expressing indignation or acting as a force for corruption and confusion in speech. Portia's insistence on transparency and precision in language directly

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<sup>148</sup> Fénelon's *Telemachus* was an important work of political theory in the eighteenth century, offering guidance on how to be a good ruler.

<sup>149</sup> Deborah Cameron, *The Myth of Mars and Venus* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 24-25.

<sup>150</sup> Phillip Dormer Stanhope, *Miscellaneous Works of the Late Phillip Dormer Stanhope, Earl of Chesterfield* (Dublin: W. Watson, Whitestone, Slater, et al, 1777), 1: 170-71.

addresses conventions of gendered behaviour when she dissects the language of courtship, claiming that the overwrought, almost idolatrous language men use with women leads women to impose upon themselves and mistake flattery for love (1:69-70).

Linda Bree sees this discussion as a moment where the text's fixation on language collides with continuing discussion of gender roles to point out the inability of linguistic conventions properly to represent women's reality (Bree, 102). Portia's discussion of linguistic courtship rituals, then, addresses both gendered use of language and the reality of gender roles in society. However, Portia's translation of men's courtship language eventually leads to an argument for the feminine virtue of modesty in relation to men and an attack on that classic female failing, excessive vanity. So, her learning, as reflected in her linguistic skill, reaffirms her own irreproachable version of femininity. *The Cry's* Portia addresses both cultural myths about the rational, learned woman as insufficiently feminine and about women's linguistic creativity as a force for confusion. By using her familiarity with the established authority of prominent authors to support her ideas of appropriate gendered behavior in the construction of relationships, she demonstrates that a woman's learning can support, rather than disguise, her feminine role. She addresses cultural fears about women's linguistic innovation and confusion by playing with words in a highly rationalized way and using her linguistic talents to support standards of appropriate behaviour. This Portia interacts with cultural myths about specific types of learned women, but does so in such a way that perceived weaknesses or dangers in women's wit and discursive capability are transformed into appropriate feminine strengths. Portia demonstrates the ability of a text that puts varying women's voices in conversation with each other to access and reimagine cultural perceptions of femininity, learning, and critical authority.

#### 4. Literary Leanings: Portia, Cylinda, and the consequences of women's learning

The Cry's initial reaction to the subject of learning is confused and contradictory. When Portia acknowledges that learning may produce arrogance (1:139) and she draws a distinction between learning as only "gaining the various names for things" and knowledge as the more useful and substantive "gaining ideas of things and investigating their utility" (1:140), the Cry cannot determine if she is praising learning, or condemning it. Determined to oppose Portia in all things, their "doubt about Portia's having learning or no learning, kept them from unanimously either praising or decrying it" (1: 142). Their judgment solidifies, however, when Portia tells an illustrating story of ignorance, malice and learning in women. Portia tells the Cry that she once overheard a servant possessed of a (very) little learning discussing the subject with his illiterate sweetheart. The servant shows off his few words of Latin and roundly condemns learning in women to ingratiate himself with the girl, and she responds by listing women of her acquaintance who have become lazy, proud, and slatternly because of their unfeminine learning (1:146-47). She includes among these a Miss C----, Portia's friend, whom she knows to be both seriously and substantively educated and "uncommonly diligent in every part of useful economy" (1:149). The Cry resists this portrait of an exemplary learned woman, insisting instead that Portia had "misrepresented her friend, and the honest country girl...had spoke the truth" (1: 150).

The Cry's reaction is nothing short of wilful misinterpretation. They do not know Miss C----, but Portia does, which means that they simply elect to believe the 'country girl's' interpretation of her character over Portia's because they prefer it. They choose to condemn the unknown Miss C---- merely because they can admire learning only so long as they can think of it as "too robust and masculine to be suited to a female delicacy. Let it once come so near you, as

for a woman and an acquaintance to be possessed of it, and you would sink under the intolerable burthen of feeling...your own inferiority" (1: 156). This episode tells us more, really, about the Cry, its character, and its interpretive habits than it does about women and learning. The Cry's wilful misreading is based in jealousy and spite, and so is indicative of their character. The question of learning at this early stage is, therefore, intimately connected to the work's broad concern with interpretive response and moral stature. As we go on, however, we will see that this episode, and the Cry's reaction, mark out a set of considerations through which the work will consider Portia, Cylinda, and female learning. Through Miss C---, we are given indications of the compatibility of learning with feminine virtue, and Portia's discussion and the Cry's malice demonstrate the connections between learning, pride, and intellectual jealousy, as well as some brief speculation on the consequences of learning for women.

When she finally appears, Cylinda introduces issues of virtue and chastity, in addition to laziness and negligence, into the work's consideration of women and learning. We are told about Cylinda long before we meet her, as Portia's history of Ferdinand's family includes a description of how the father, Nicanor, embarked on an ill-advised affair with Cylinda when she insisted on maintaining an inappropriate level of intimacy while refusing to consider marriage. In Portia's account, Cylinda is a morally thoughtless character, and Nicanor's involvement with her injures his children's financial prospects (see 1:207). In Cylinda, we are prepared to meet a vain and vicious woman, but her account of her behaviour introduces more intriguing and critically relevant questions on the relationship of learning, reading, and virtue, especially in women.

Cylinda tells the Cry that her father, a wise man, chose to educate her "just in the same manner as if I had been a boy" so that at sixteen she was "an exceeding good *Latin* scholar, and pretty far advanced in *Greek*" (2: 254). Her education is not complete, however, as her father

instructs her in philosophy without any meaningful religious reflection. She is taught only that “twas very right to do right, and very wrong to do wrong” and, dissatisfied with this, decides to “chuse my own religion and to settle my own rule of life” (2: 257). Eventually, she “formed the object of my own worship, which was no other than my own understanding” (2: 260). Cylinda’s adoration of her own understanding makes her easy prey for her cousin Phaon who, by flattering her pride in her learning and intelligence, convinces her that “women of uncommon understanding and a superiority of parts, ought not to be tied in fetters by the rules of honor or the forms of established custom” (2:266). Her relationship with Phaon is not consummated, but the ease with which she is convinced that intelligent women are above the laws of morality is indicative of the ongoing problems she experiences in reconciling learning, pride, misreading, and feminine virtue.

After her cousin’s death, Cylinda goes in search of a new object for adoration and settles on Anthony Ashley Cooper’s *Characteristicks of Men, Manners, Opinions, Times* (1711), particularly his claim that ridicule serves as the test of truth, which Cylinda expands into a belief that “all belief in revelation or tradition had in it something very ridiculous” (2: 277). As we have seen in our own discussion of the third Earl of Shaftesbury (see chapter 3, section 2), there is far more to his work than a love of ridicule, but Cylinda sees only a straightforward progression from humour to something like blasphemy. Cylinda’s reflections on Shaftesbury’s claim that God reveals himself to man’s reason eventually lead her to believe that “the deity was to submit to my censures, [making] me superior to the supreme being” (2:283). Shaftesbury’s work in fact emphasizes the necessary interaction of wit and humour, reason, and man’s sociable nature to create a productive critical conversation, a process that is intimately connected to his theorization of unenforced, ingenuous virtue (Klein, *Shaftesbury*, 34-35). Cylinda, however, is interested only in the freedom of humour, being entirely blind to anything except the license

she perceives in Shaftesbury's work to mock all revelation and acquire an exaggerated fear of "all restraints made to bubble the understanding" (2: 278). Cylinda is revealed to be a superficial and vain reader/scholar, for all her learning. Her learning causes her to adore only her own understanding, and the self-serving bent of her studies interprets what is really a dense system of moral philosophy into a license to do anything and mock everything, and studiously avoid all restraints. Her enthusiastic but critically impoverished reading of Shaftesbury is exposed when, in response to an older gentleman's questions on what principles she has derived from his reading, she is only able to respond with "many of my author's favourite expressions, such as social affections, philanthropy...and yet was at last almost reduced to the necessity of closing my sentence with Mr. Bay's phrase of 'all that'" (2:286). The older gentleman persuades Cylinda out of her simplistic understanding of Shaftesbury, and so out of her admiration, but her philosophical adventures are not over. Cylinda becomes a Platonist and a stoic by turns, in each case delighting in her new philosophical system primarily because it gives her "mental gratification of my own dignity" (2:335).

When she grows tired of stoicism, her admirer Millamour introduces her to the poetry of Lucretius and epicurianism. Once enamoured of epicurianism, she begins an affair with Millamour, with absolutely no regard for "the narrow feminine expression" (3: 9) of chastity. Her fall is directly connected to her familiarity with ancient philosophical systems, and therefore to her learning, but that does not mean that *The Cry* as a whole, or even Cylinda's story, endorses the idea that learning in women produces vice. Cylinda admits that she is able to combine her scorn for chastity with commitment to epicurianism because "the remarkable continence and abstinence of Epicurus himself, I imputed to the weakness of his constitution" (3:10). Cylinda's dismissal of Epicurius's abstinence as a mere bodily condition, not applicable to herself or her favourite philosophy, indicates that she has once again misread her adored

authors. She has failed to follow Epicurius's lead in thinking deeply on the real nature of pleasure and pain, and instead seizes on the immediate, obvious appeal of a simplified epicurianism, allowing it to lead her into vice. After refusing to marry Millamour, Cylinda removes to London and meets Nicanor, whose tales of travels through Greece and Egypt add a new element to her love of philosophy and, fascinated with his accounts, she becomes his mistress too (3: 38). After living in extravagance for some time, Cylinda is cheated by her financial agent and in danger of imprisonment. She has, without realizing it, already helped to bankrupt Nicanor, and so runs away into Yorkshire in the company of a female friend (see 3:43-9).

Cylinda's life is a history of persistent misreading, inevitably bound to development of character and moral corruption. She misreads her favourite philosophers, reducing their principles into their most self-gratifying forms. Her juvenile philosophical fancies display both her under-developed critical skills and her intense pride in her 'learning', and the resulting combination of misguided reading and perceived superiority leads her into vicious behaviours. Cylinda is, in most ways, a cautionary tale. She confirms every fearful belief about the effect of learning on feminine virtue and, in the ongoing argument of *The Cry*, she demonstrates the inescapable interconnectedness of critical readings and moral character.

There is, however, a brighter spot in Cylinda's story. Before moving to London, she befriends a young girl, whom she treats as a favoured student and intends to "lead her, as I saw the greatness of her capacity, through all my own admired philosophy" (3:18). They lose contact, however, when she moves away from Cylinda's region. At the close of Cylinda's tale, Portia reveals that she was that girl, and that her mother took her away to avoid the dangers of Cylinda's influence. This early connection opens the way for a discussion of Portia's own education and reading habits, where she satisfies the *Cry's* curiosity by revealing for the first

time that she is possessed of learning. Portia explains that her father insisted that she be instructed in “all the learning I was capable of attaining” so that she would not then “look up to it with a preposterous admiration, as if it was something dwelling in the clouds” (3: 107). Portia is instructed in classical languages and taught to recognize in studying classical philosophy, “the fallacy and narrow bounds of all mortal knowledge” (3: 113). Portia’s scholarly attainments and critical capacities are not discussed in as concentrated a manner as Cylinda’s, but they do permeate the entire text. When she introduces the word “turba”, for example, she demonstrates how her literary and linguistic skills support and reflect her moral and critical capacities. Portia explains that she has chosen the word because it can convey “all the evil passions, such as wrath, hatred, malice, envy” that are capable of entirely possessing and controlling a person, and its Latin roots express “a multitude of various kinds; it signifies also trouble, bustle, and confusion” (1:194-95). In this instance, we see that Portia’s learning is compatible with her admirable character and capacity for moral reasoning. Her word indicates her understanding of the relationships between varying evil passions, and their effects on the mind. Her learning, in the sense of linguistic skill, allows her to express, precisely and creatively, her sophisticated understanding of passion and inner turmoil, thereby embodying a positive model of feminine learning and its effects on moral character.

In her discussion of Ben Jonson, Portia also displays her capacity for sensitive, morally informed reading. She claims that his prologue to *Every Man in his Humour* (1598), with its “side-way reflexions... on Shakespeare” (1:163) demonstrate both Jonson’s own jealousies and the malignant effects of envy as a passion, while still acknowledging and admiring his excellence as a writer (1:167-68). Portia is able to extrapolate broad moralizing principles from particular literary examples, and to separate admiration or interest in a piece of writing from its moral content or effects. She shows herself to be both literarily sensitive and critically impartial, which

means that her reading and critical reaction reinforce her position as a moral and interpretive exemplar. In Portia, we see learning and literary skill in women as an indication of their moral worth and feminine virtues.

Through the contradictory portraits of Portia and Cylinda, the morality and advisability of female learning is made to turn, like so much else in this text, on questions of candour and motivation. In Portia's hands, learning supports her moral superiority and is never allowed to detract from her feminine virtues; her astute critical reactions to texts demonstrate that her reading helps to support and express her moral principles. For a learned woman who is also morally reflective and impartial, learning will only display her virtues in a clearer light. For a learned woman who is proud of her own intellect and in search of arguments supporting her superiority, it will display her vices. *The Cry's* use of comparative narration, therefore, allows it to construct a depiction of learning and its moral consequences that are not gender-dependent, but character-dependent, so that the work as a whole can contain a mildly subversive argument on the advisability of women's learning that also contributes to its ongoing association of textual response with candour and personal motivation.

##### **5. Loving and Judging: romantic narrative, critical reaction, and character**

It is a genuine relief to the reader to finally reach the last half of *The Cry's* third volume. At this point, Portia puts her explicit moralizing on hold to tell the story of Ferdinand's departure to Barbados, the ensuing carnival of deception, and their eventual marriage. It should not surprise us that entertaining, eventful narration occupies such a comparatively small part of this work. The introduction has outlined a view of narration and critical reaction that deliberately places most of the work's didactic weight on its directly moralizing sections. Fielding and Collier claim that "stories and novels have been so much more sought after than mere essays" (1:7)

because critical essays lack “a real foundation of matter.”<sup>151</sup> The authors interpret the story or the incidents of a work such as theirs as providing the foundation of matter for a critical purpose, which can be as well fulfilled by a story or novel as by a mere essay. To Fielding and Collier, a story or novel is not opposed to the essay as an entirely different genre, but exists with it on a continuum of written vehicles designed for critical purposes. *The Cry* privileges its conversationally expressed critical reactions over its narrative function, and so embedded narratives function as aids to critical reactions, rather than driving the text’s critical function. This view is supported by Fielding’s expressed views on writing in her introduction to her next fictional work, *The History of the Countess of Dellwyn* (1759).

Fielding’s introduction to *The History of the Countess of Dellwyn* presents thoughts on writing and narrative that shed light on the more complicated format of *The Cry*. In her introduction, Fielding claims that “the smallest incidents most clearly unravel the labyrinths of the human mind”<sup>152</sup> to explain her endorsement of stories told through comparatively commonplace plot incidents. This assertion, combined with Fielding’s constant insistence on the paramount importance of accurately illustrating vice and virtue in fiction, indicates a subordination of plot to critical purposes, so that incidents are valued insofar as they illustrate human nature, and not for their intrinsic appeal. This view may help explain the relative poverty of appealing incidents in *The Cry*. If the primary purpose of a story is to shed light on the human mind and illustrate vice and virtue, then the emphasis on conventional morality in Portia and Ferdinand’s love story becomes somewhat less engaging than Portia’s critical exposition and manner of recounting that love story, which offers an interpretation of both her own actions and the social conditions that made her story possible. The narrative aspects of *The Cry* support

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<sup>151</sup> In interpreting narration as a ‘foundation of matter’ for critical discussion, Fielding and Collier take a similar approach to Haywood’s *The Tea Table* of 1725, which sees narration as a means of unifying a critical group around a shared set of examples and illustrative incidents. See chapter 6, section 3.

<sup>152</sup> Sarah Fielding, *The History of the Countess of Dellwyn* (London: A. Millar, 1759), xv.

the critical views offered in the conversational exchanges instead of working the other way around.

Portia and Ferdinand's love story does, however, have a significant relationship to the work's overarching critical concerns, particularly in its final episodes, as it allows for a reading of Portia as an authoritative moral centre within her marriage, as well as within *The Cry's* discursive arena. In discussing the unconventional undercurrent of the Portia/Ferdinand narrative in *The Cry*, Jane Spencer describes it as a protest against the lover/mentor figure, with Ferdinand as a mentor who is too enthusiastic about his role and tests Portia too much (Spencer, 157). While Portia and Ferdinand's relationship does seem to be a criticism of the idea of a lover/mentor, Spencer's understanding of that criticism may not go far enough. Fielding and Collier may actually be engaged in something closer to a complete role reversal in their use of the Portia/Ferdinand narrative to react to the idea of a lover as mentor. The idea that Ferdinand is presented as a mentor to Portia is undermined by the fact that she makes so few references to learning anything from Ferdinand, and even those do not imagine their relationship as distinctly or exclusively instructive. When the Cry accuses Portia of borrowing Ferdinand's sentiments (1:187), she acknowledges their charge but her claim to have learned from Ferdinand is then generalized into a discussion of learning from conversation. She says "that I endeavour to improve myself by such conversation as that of *Ferdinand*, is, in my opinion, more to my honour than my shame...no one can make a right use of another's observations, without a capacity to understand them" (1:187-88). Portia does not learn exclusively from Ferdinand; she claims to improve herself from all such conversation, and her explanation to the Cry is just as focused on her own capacity to understand as on the value of Ferdinand's sentiments. So, she presents Ferdinand as a generally useful conversational partner rather than a unique mentor figure.

The lover/mentor narrative pattern is more decidedly undermined by the fact that Portia is never the one in need of guidance or reformation, and her virtue is never really in doubt. It is Ferdinand whose behaviour casts doubt on his reputation and who is eventually reformed of his tendency towards thoughtlessness. Although Jane Spencer describes Ferdinand's plot to convince Portia of his newly corrupted character as his over-zealous method of testing her principles, the way in which the situation is narrated makes it seem more as if it is her actions that eventually reveal the truth about Ferdinand. Ferdinand continued to adopt an appearance of rakishness while Portia was in London, even after her behaviour towards him convinced him of her "steadiness of mind" (3:263). His persistence in "testing" her even after she had passed his test makes it clear that a happy resolution to this love plot requires not confirmation of Portia's prudence, but Ferdinand's reformation. Ferdinand claims that he concocted his plan to "make the experiment whether you could conquer your passion when your esteem was lost" (3:258), in other words, to test Portia's judgment and prudence. Portia's prudence was, however, never in doubt to anyone but Ferdinand. Portia's behaviour when she learns of Ferdinand's supposed corruption confirms her previous assertions on relationships and the basis for affection, while his behaviour in plotting such a deception contradicts all the sincerity that she originally saw in him. All his plan really reveals is his own personal flaw-what he describes as "a curious love of refinement on my pleasures" (3:207). Ferdinand is, in a sense, playing a feminine and even a coquettish role by creating the appearance of wrongdoing. Thus, he demonstrates the flightiness and carelessness of appearances that constitute his primary personal failing. Portia's steadfast adherence to principles, her willingness to search for the truth of the situation rather than judge based on appearances, and her readiness to forgive Ferdinand by making him ashamed of his own behaviour. Portia is playing a fairly masculine role as the reforming lover, one that recalls male lover/mentors such as Lord Alanthus in Mary

Davy's *The Reform'd Coquet* (1724), whose generosity in forgiving errors reforms the objects of their affections. It is significant that one of the most damning rumours Ferdinand circulates about himself is a sexual failing, his supposed seduction of the planter's daughter. Portia's reaction to this rumour focuses on both the misery of the seduced girl and the damage to Ferdinand's character; this episode prompts her to describe Ferdinand as being "lost to her" (3:200) because he is lost to himself, and so she falls back on the language of women's sexual failings to describe the effects of Ferdinand's sexual behaviour.

There are also other, auxiliary reasons for seeing Ferdinand as a feminized hero. The similarity of character between Ferdinand and Cordelia is consistently stressed; the author/narrator always mentions them together, almost as a unit, when describing their early life and education (3:208-10). Portia often equates her affection for Cordelia with her affection for Ferdinand and describes her meeting with both as giving rise to an almost immediate, unbounded confidence (3:29, 49) so that, in the early stages of their acquaintance, there is very little distinction between female friendship and romantic love. Ferdinand's behavior towards his father with regards to money also follows the pattern that Cordelia set before his return from travelling, and so there is, for much of the text, virtually no difference between the brother and the sister in terms of social position and familial influence. A feminized hero would have been a familiar figure to Fielding and Collier, as Fielding's great novelistic success *David Simple* (1744) revolves around a man who exhibits similar forms of femininity. Like Ferdinand, David is economically disenfranchised and plagued by a spiteful brother and, although David does not engage in deception, he does come to rely on a highly rational woman for guidance. David is feminized through economic helplessness and impotence within his family; Ferdinand's similar position and assumption of coquettish female behaviour takes the idea of a feminized hero previously established in Sarah Fielding's work a step further. Ferdinand's position and

behaviour push him into a feminized role in his relationship with Portia, as it is his virtue that is in doubt and his actions that require a check and correction from his lover.

Portia's role in her relationship with Ferdinand is perhaps an even greater challenge to gender norms in the lover/mentor narrative, as she accomplishes a possibly masculine end through feminine means. Portia's behaviour makes Ferdinand acknowledge his flaws and brings about his reformation, but does not undermine her own femininity. In dealing with Ferdinand's changed character, she favours avoidance over conflict. After Ferdinand's return from Barbados but before his proposals to her, she "avoided as much as possible the being ever alone with Ferdinand" (3:211) and refrains from discussing either the reasons behind his change or her opinion of the new Ferdinand. Even his first, written proposal fails to provoke a fully articulated response, as she simply refuses to speak to him in private and then flees to the country. In her dealings with the new Ferdinand, Portia adheres closely to the prescribed feminine behaviour of not articulating her real feelings for a man, a behaviour that has been previously endorsed by the Cry. Portia exercises the feminine privilege of not speaking her mind about men and, through her reticence, prompts Ferdinand to follow her to her country retreat where she finally confronts him. Her prudence and consistent refusal of his proposals in this situation shame him into finally recognizing his own faults and need for reform, as he admits later. Portia's avoidance of Ferdinand and reluctance to discuss his change in character demonstrates her persistent adherence to her principles and create the opportunity for her to speak to him from a firm position of moral superiority, thereby embarrassing him enough to inspire reformation. When Ferdinand comes to speak to Portia after learning that she is not really dead, he claims that "so sudden a shame overtook me when I considered the mean figure I at that time made in your eyes, that I had not the power to contradict what I had utter'd" (3:265) and explains that it was only then that he finally resolved to end his games. Portia's adherence to a feminine behaviour

pattern of avoidance and speaking her feelings only when she is forced to do so by a positive proposal allows her to achieve the possibly masculine end of reforming her lover through shame and awareness of his own faults. So, although Portia takes on the mentoring role in this lover/mentor narrative, she does so while remaining committed to standards of feminine behaviour.

In this sense, Portia's love story quietly endorses her critical role. Just as Portia's moralizing discussions and critical reflections demonstrate the compatibility of learning, rationality and critical authority with appropriate femininity, her relationship to Ferdinand demonstrates the possibility for a woman to take on roles that are conventionally gendered male, such as a mentor or moral guide, without jeopardizing her adherence to feminine behaviours. Portia's display of her moral character through her critical and interpretive acts is also reflected in the closing episodes of her love story. When she is convinced that Ferdinand has become unworthy, she tries to avoid him and disciplines her feeling for him, even to the extent of refusing a marriage proposal (3: 237). When Ferdinand tells a narrative of how he became a libertine, Portia's critical reaction displays the prudence and impartiality that have characterized all of her critical discussions. Her love story integrates her prudence, her critical skill, and her desirability as a wife into a total portrait of skilled reading and feminine virtue. The close of her tale also inspires deep and heartfelt repentance in the misjudging Cylinda, who reacts to Portia's self-discipline with the realization that her "life may be properly called the triumph of the imagination, as yours, Portia, is of the judgment" (3:280). Cylinda's reaction injects a note of (limited) reformatory efficacy into *The Cry's* generally pessimistic presentation of exemplary narrative. Cylinda also, finally, performs a morally sensitive reading of the examples and principles laid before her. In this sense, Portia's love story continues *The Cry's* project of using critical reactions to examine and reveal readers' characters and also allows the

work as a whole to end in an affirmative tone, using the feminocentric romance tale to challenge gendered boundaries within romantic relationships, to celebrate a woman's moral leadership, and to reclaim a wayward woman through a pattern of morally productive narration and criticism.

## Chapter 9

### Conclusion

Clara Reeve writes, in *The Progress of Romance*, that “the Romance is an heroic fable, which treats of fabulous persons and things—The Novel is a picture of real life and manners, and of the times in which it is written” (Reeve, 111). While this distinction may accurately reflect popular critical beliefs, in Reeve’s time and ours, concerning the difference between the romance and the novel, the genius of the framed-novelle and its importance in the development of the novel proper lies in its capacity to do both—to represent fabulous persons and things, and real life and manners. The framed-novelle combines and criticizes romantic, exaggerated tales so that fantasy can teach its readers about reality, making the trivial, improbable, or improper nature of amatory narrative an effective screen for encoding serious protest on real and systemic social problems. The multiple embedded narratives and critical discussions of the framed-novelle sequence are tools for imagining new relationships between dramatic examples and the everyday problems they exemplify, between individuals and the cultural environments they navigate, and between particular cases and general rules.

#### 1. The Framed-Novelle and its Cultural Contexts

The building blocks of a framed-novelle sequence are a set of thematically similar narratives and accompanying critical discussions. The sequence’s basic critical aim is to evaluate and conceptualize the relationship of the particular to the general. This structure shared by texts in the tradition of the framed-novelle sequence is complimented by shared thematic concerns, specifically a broad focus on experiences common to women and questioning of the social problems and gender norms that tend to place women in vulnerable positions.

The framed-novelle sequences considered in this study use the interaction between narratives and discourse to examine the connections between an individual and her social

environment, between transgressive or anomalous actions and general social rules, and between discrete narratives and larger bodies of narratives sharing themes and following similar patterns. As the stories of socially diverse women with similar experiences accumulate, framed-novelle sequences sometimes also seek to connect particular women to the generality of women, taking early tentative steps towards conceiving of women as a distinct class with shared interests, and so articulating a proto-feminist critical standpoint. The pattern of narrative and discussion that characterizes the framed-novelle sequence also connects particular embedded narratives and particular framed-novelle sequences to the general literary environment, specifically to contemporary anxiety and debate over the moral value and literary merit of romantic or (what William Warner terms) absorptive narratives. The framed-novelle sequence, then, seems to be a genre that is fundamentally and structurally fixated on understanding and formulating generalities; particular narratives challenge and inform the development of general rules for women's behaviour, particular women learn to see themselves as parts of the general category woman, all subject to similar social pressures and concerns, and the particular texts themselves argue for the importance of attention to women's particular problems, such as sexual and financial vulnerability, in establishing general, society-wide understandings of manners and morals.

Many, if not most, of the embedded narratives in the texts considered here are predictable tales of seduction, unhappy marriage, and other forms of feminine suffering. Individually, many of them would not be worth reading, because they can only teach what we already know and what any literate person in the eighteenth century would have known. They teach us that seduced women tend to have horrible lives, that building a happy marriage can be incredibly difficult for a young girl without a fortune, and that finding a way to live as a single woman is generally not any easier. The framed-novelle sequence acquires its cultural and critical

value through accumulation and combination. By bringing thematically similar stories together in one place and subjecting them to rational analysis, it demonstrates that the problems that beset contemporary women are systemic, not coincidental, and so elevates them from mere romantic formulas into actual social problems. In Sarah Scott's *Millenium Hall* for example, narratives that relate the trials faced by women who cannot or do not wish to marry combine and are brought into an ideological framework addressing the duties and abilities of single women. In this way, spinsterhood and the financial and social difficulties of living single cease to be the unfortunate but particular challenges facing individual women and become systemic social problems, that can be understood and maybe even resolved with the aid of rational-critical debate.

If the practice of rational criticism within sociable conversation is, as I have argued, a space of connection between the individual person and his authoritative, judging society, then the framed-novelle's pervasive practice of bringing personal or intimate matters into critical discussion has at least two obvious benefits. First, it makes private, amatory issues culturally relevant by subjecting them to the same kind of evaluative, occasionally combative, process used to examine political or ethical matters. Second, it lays them open to deliberately rational critique and, in doing so, gestures towards a reevaluation of gender norms by undermining perceptions of women and their troubles as thoroughly or exclusively individual and emotional issues, not fit for reasoned analysis. When amatory narratives, or the narratives of women who fail to fit expected patterns of gendered behaviour, are first told and then subjected to evaluative discussion, they are also demystified. Although romantic narratives, such as those contained in Eliza Haywood's *The Fruitless Enquiry* and Sarah Scott's *A Journey Through Every Stage of Life* appear, at first, to engage with an emotion-driven ethic, where women's lives are shaped through the seemingly irrational and undissectable influences of personal feeling, their

constant reference to their critical discursive frameworks insists that every aspect of women's experience can be analysed, classified, and used either to reconceptualize standards of gendered behaviour or to establish new ones. There is an old saying familiar to every feminist, that the personal is political, and one of the most significant protofeminist gestures of the framed-novelle sequence may be in demonstrating, through persistent connection between narrative and discussion that engages with the ideal of socially and politically consequential conversation, the unavoidable truth of that statement.

In this sense, the framed-novelle sequence reconciles its intimate nature with its focus on open, rationalized social criticism in much the same way that it incorporates its commitment to exploring the realities of women's lives, even the unsavoury parts, with instructing its readers in virtuous principles. Again, William Warner is the best source for understanding how particular stories of scandal and seduction can coexist with and inform a general commitment to virtue. The most striking part of Warner's cultural history of the novel may be his argument that novels, from their inception, coexisted with and responded to wide-ranging anti-novel discourse, by which he means criticism of imaginative, and especially romantic fictions that risked creating a tolerance for licentious behaviour in their readers (Warner, *Licensing Entertainment*, 5). Women writers of the period, particularly those working in the framed-novelle form, often seem addicted to embedded narratives about women who succumb to exactly this risk, who, lacking the capacity to engage in a critical evaluation of the things they read and hear, are perverted into emulating licentious stories. This risk, like the risks inherent in virtual experiences, is counterbalanced through explicitness, and through a pervasive insistence that particular stories dealing with moral failings must always be related out to a generalized moral discussion. Writers of framed-novelle sequences are able to co-exist with anti-novel discourse and its accompanying implications of immorality by acknowledging its force in their own texts and, at times, by

providing the solution through the structure of their texts. In Jane Barker's *A Patchwork-Screen for the Ladies*, for example, embedded narratives often involve young women who lack critical abilities and so are easily persuaded to believe all the lies, half-truths, and fictions they hear. Their failings are counteracted by the superior reading practices of Galesia and the unnamed lady. Their careful consideration of how discrete narratives relate to each other, and where they should be placed on the screen they are producing, allows them to model reading practices that are deliberate and focused on abstracting broadly applicable meaning, and so keep the readers safe even when exposed to dangerously provocative fictions. The process of subjecting morals, behaviours, and other elements of social life presented in stories to virtual discussion through represented conversation is, then, able to preserve an amatory narrative's claims to virtuous instruction and cultural legitimacy by acknowledging the potential dangers of absorption in particular stories. The framed-novelle shows readers how to counteract the dangers of narrative absorptions by always relating specific narratives to the world of real experience and general moral rules.

## **2. Particular Cases, General Rules**

Josephine Donovan's chronologically broad and pan-European evaluation of the framed-novelle sequence, which served as the starting point and inspiration for this thesis, leads us back to the form's underlying concern with connecting particularities and generalities and, in doing so, helps provide a framework for understanding the differences and similarities between the texts under consideration here. Donovan reads the framed-novelle as a fictional cousin to the practice of casuistry, which is "a form of legal and moral reasoning that mediates between general rules or maxims and specific circumstances by means of the case history...that points up the contradictions between the circumstances and the law in order to effect accommodation or change" (Donovan, 59). In Donovan's account, casuistry can become a powerful proto-feminist

weapon in the context of the framed-novelle sequence because the practice of casuistry was effectively pre-designed to enable and permit the articulation of opposition to prevailing norms and maxims; with such an opposition-friendly model, using fictional narratives of individual women to problematize misogynistic maxims or beliefs is very much a natural development, one that Donovan locates as far back as Christine de Pizan and traces up through Manley's *Rivella* and Barker's Galesia trilogy (Donovan, 72-76).

As a relatively formalized model to describe how particularities and generalities can either undermine or reinforce each other, casuistry does seem to be a significant discursive model for the development of the framed-novelle. In the context of its potential as a device for articulating proto-feminist critiques, however, our closer focus on eighteenth-century English framed-novelles may require an attention to the subtly different ways in which the relation of particular cases to general rules can shape a text's argument and feminocentric message. Donovan's discussion of casuistry as a vehicle for protofeminist critique is fairly narrowly focused on its ability to counter misogynist or pejorative beliefs and maxims about women – perhaps because her most detailed examples of causistical texts are from the earlier end of her period. In the texts under consideration here, however, the use of particularized stories and women's circumstances to evaluate and reflect on general rules and gender norms can perform more subtle functions.

As we have seen in our eighteenth-century English framed-novelles, they do not consistently seek to undermine specifically misogynist or pejorative maxims, but instead use the narrative-discussion combination that characterizes the form to connect particular narratives to general principles in a variety of ways. Some, such as Manley's *New Atalantis*, use particular narratives to affirm and systematize general maxims on the sexual and romantic vulnerability of women, and the imperative importance of avoiding seduction. In fact, *New Atalantis* could be

read as affirming misandric maxims, and it conceptualizes male rapacity and greed as an endemic, rather than individualized and situational, social problem. Others, such as Sarah Scott's *Millenium Hall* use particular narratives of women's experience to create new maxims and rules about the possibilities for women's lives and argue for their general applicability. Although Scott's use of embedded narratives challenges some pejorative maxims along the way, most notably the belief that women require marriage for personal happiness, the end goal of the text is to use the embedded narratives to endorse new rules about the central importance of reciprocal charity in maintaining a mutually satisfactory society and the ability and duty of women to assist each other as part of a benevolent economy.

The framed-nouvelles considered here are not always identical in their depictions of the relationship between particular cases and general rules. Some use the relationship of their embedded narratives to critical discussion for the primary purpose of reexamining and problematizing already-existing general maxims and gender norms. Others use the same relationship to articulate new life maxims and gender norms and present a case for their general applicability. All of our framed-nouvelles, however, use narration, critical reaction, and consideration of reading practices to reflect upon relationships between individuals and groups, examples and the thing exemplified—of parts to wholes.

If we wish, then, to understand the framed-nouvelle's significance within its literary environment, and especially within the development of novelistic prose fiction, we should follow our authors' lead and see the framed-nouvelle as a part reflecting and commenting on a whole. In their self-conscious concern with their own literary status and the ways in which they should be read, the framed-nouvelles we have discussed provide a series of particular reflections on their period's hopes and fears for fictional development as a whole. The framed-nouvelle alternates between entertainment through narrative and instruction through critical reaction,

and so prefigures and explains the developing novel's broad tendency to claim an instructive purpose for its entertaining representations. In their distinctive ability to mimic the process of sociable conversation, these works provide a glimpse into how their society's idealization of such a practice could extend access to rational-critical discourse, and to the critical authority inherent within it, to a range of otherwise disempowered participants. By using discrete tales of particular women to engage and encourage identification with all women, whatever their differences, the framed-novelle both articulates and resists its society's often unspoken identification of women as an inferior group, characterized by over-investment in romantic and domestic concerns. Because they deploy amatory, apparently formulaic tales to comment on everything from the sophisticated moral problems posed by Jacobite loyalty to the problem of learning and virtue in women, framed-nouvelles exemplify the ability of developing fictional models in general to comment on complicated and consequential social questions through recourse to seemingly straightforward and frivolous tales. In this sense, the framed-novelle sequence does with multiple stories and explicit discussion what the developing novel does with one story and implicit reference—it shows its readers the vast importance of small stories and the moral and emotional truth of fanciful fiction.

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