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To Write Female Action: Representations of Female Agency in Aphra Behn's *The History of the Nun*, Jane Barker's *Love Intrigues* and *A Patch-Work Screen for the Ladies*, Mary Davys's *The Reformed Coquet*, and Eliza Haywood's *Fantomina*

by

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Introduction

Aphra Behn's commercial and artistic success in the male-dominated writing sphere of the Restoration has established her as the celebrated female author of early women's writing. Her "bawdy" plays and erotic plots defied expectations of female writing as she "refused to be accommodated within the boundaries her contemporaries were beginning to draw round the female author" (Spencer, *Rise* 42). Across the board, critics agree that Behn's act of writing despite her sex symbolizes the beginning of female penetration into the male hegemony over literature. Janet Todd calls Behn "the great originator," the first professionally and financially successful female playwright (and later poet and novelist) in the seventeenth century (41). With the production of *The Forc'd Marriage* at Lincoln's Inn Fields in 1670, Behn made her literary debut at a time when "women's writing itself [was] seen as a challenge to the feminine role" (Spencer, *Rise* 108). To take the pen was to claim agency over her identity as a woman and to write her way out of the confines of the "feminine role."

Though Behn was the first woman to write for a living, she was preceded in the literary sphere by, among others, Katherine Philips, the widely acclaimed poet and dramatist. Yet Behn's movement into the literary sphere differed from that of Philips in that Behn presented herself as a female equal, rather than as a female counterpart. Marilyn L. Williamson delineates the dissimilarities between the two dominant seventeenth-century woman writers to identify two strains of writing and authorship in early women's writing. She describes

Philips as "painfully self-deprecatory," a writer whose "way of dealing with the privilege of writing was to disown any assertion in the process" (Williamson 64-65). Behn, on the other hand, "assertively competed with men on the stage, in verse, and in fiction," and "declared that women could write as well as men" (Williamson 139). For Behn, writing was a financial as well as a necessarily engendered act of assertion; she wrote for production and publication, and expressed her desire for authorial recognition equivalent to that of male authors.

Not only did Behn compete with men for publication, she also explored female sexuality and free love within the cavalier discourse of her period. As Williamson writes, Charles II's court embraced a cavalier ideology which was "sexually radical and politically conservative," and characterized by a "preoccup[ation] with sexual conquest" (135). The libertine ideology was one of "unfettered male self-assertion" in which rakes abhorred marriage, sought "power in sexuality," and pursued free, uncommitted love (Williamson 136). Consequently, cavaliers used sexual conquest of woman to celebrate their masculinity in a "male fantasy" of power (Williamson 136). Behn, regardless of her sex, responded to the libertine notions of her day by writing as frankly about women's sexuality as male writers did about male sexuality. She "use[d] cavalier assumptions about women to declare honestly women's equal sexuality" and to "celebrat[e] female desire" on the same stage where male libertinism was celebrated and perpetuated (Williamson 138).

The cavalier ideology, however, presented at best contradictory notions of femininity, all the while privileging male sexuality. On the one hand, the

libertine ideas of free love and sexuality led male dramatists to create cavalier female characters who "seek adventure, have wit and independent spirits, and considerable flair," and often "are wild for sex" (Backscheider, *Spectacular* 60; Hobby 104). In literature, then, women could experience the liberation of Charles II's Restoration court. In life, on the other hand, the libertine code that "the rake must tire of his conquest and move on" meant women were often seen "simply as sex objects" (Williamson 135; Pearson, *Prostituted* 71). Elaine Hobby identifies the wit, independence, and explicit sexuality of some female characters in drama by male playwrights, but she does so to argue that "Female writers knew that such 'liberation' was illusory, invented and promulgated by men, since for women, chastity and a modest reputation were deadly serious matters" (104). Though the cavalier assumptions of sexuality freed female characters to enjoy independence and sex, women themselves continued to be constrained by social decorum and more importantly, remained the objects of male sexual predation. Thus, while writing in the years of Charles II's libertine court gave Behn access to a discourse of sexuality, it also would have required that she partake in the "Restoration court that celebrated the rake," with all its concomitant misogyny (Williamson 29).

When Behn turned to fiction writing after the collapse of the London theatres in the 1680s, she carried her focus on the power of sexuality and love into the newly evolving novelistic genre. *The History of the Nun*, which appeared in 1689, was one of Behn's final publications during her life and coincided with the last years of the Restoration. Her death shortly after

occurred at the beginning of the new Protestant reign of William III, a reign during which women's writing would increasingly be defined as necessarily moralistic. Behn's writing career was thus bracketed by the years of Charles II's flamboyant court. Jane Spencer argues that such a historical position freed Behn's writing from the growing restrictions on the female author: "Writing before the full establishment of the convention that love is the woman writer's subject and a moral aim her excuse, Behn has a freedom denied to most of her eighteenth-century descendants" (*Rise* 47). A comparison of Behn to eighteenth-century women writers must therefore take into account the specific moment in which she wrote. In one sense her moment freed her to write about sexuality, while in another sense her lack of many female literary precedents and her necessary negotiation of male libertinism subjected her to formal and thematic constraints.

That Behn did write openly about women's physical desire at a time when discussion of male sexuality was defined by female sexual subordination meant her works stood apart from her literary predecessors and, most notably, from Philips. Behn's life and writing career soon came to represent the prostituting female author whose "loose morals" and works stood in opposition to Philips's modest and chaste life and career (Williamson 20). Spencer writes, "At the turn of the century Philips and Behn stood together in the public mind: the first gentle and genteel, irreproachable; the second a successful professional, and surely ... a better model for the eighteenth-century woman novelist, but also bawdy in her work" (*Rise* 29). Eighteenth-century women writers, then,

were faced with two literary roads to follow: "the modest and the immodest" (Todd 41). Critics such as Williamson have further established the dichotomous vision of early women's writing by detailing the differences between followers of Philips and those of Behn. Williamson describes Philips-like writers as "politically, socially, and artistically conservative ... reserved about sexuality" and often writing for coterie audiences, "seldom" for money (21). On the other hand, writers of the Behn tradition are "assertive in their capacities," "write for money," and create works in which "women acknowledge their sexuality" (Williamson 22). While categorizing women writers along two lines of authorship has helped access early women's writing, it has also narrowed interpretive possibilities of the authors' texts and imposed critical privileging of Behn followers as more explicitly subversive and proto-feminist.[1]

Williamson, Spencer, and Todd do acknowledge that the perceived dichotomy in early women's writing was not "static or rigid" in the eighteenth century, even though the vilification of the "loose" Behn and the celebration of the "chaste" Philips did dominate ideas about women's writing and authorship (Williamson 20-21).[2] Williamson considers how "all [were] women writing in common cultural conditions, and so they share many other characteristics," such as anxiety over claiming narrative authority and concern with women's power in and outside of the amatory plot (22). My study will look at how five short

[1] Marta Straznicky makes a similar claim about the reductive effects of separating early women's writing into two opposing groups in "Restoration Women Playwrights and the Limits of Professionalism" 703-26.
[2] Spencer, among other critics, notes how seventeenth-century female writers did not perceive the divide between Philips and Behn as deeply as later eighteenth-century authors, when women's writing was increasingly constrained by didactic and pious expectations (*Rise* 29-33). She writes, "The choice did not have to be made straight away. For some time [Philips] and [Behn] were added together, not set one against the other" (*Rise* 29).

fictions by Aphra Behn, Jane Barker, Mary Davys, and Eliza Haywood highlight the authors' shared cultural context as well as their disparate political and personal experiences. Through a close analysis of Behn's *The History of the Nun* (1689), Barker's *Love Intrigues* (1713)[3] and *A Patch-Work Screen for the Ladies* (1723), Davys's *The Reformed Coquet* (1724), and Haywood's *Fantomina* (1725), I will illustrate how each writer explores representations of female agency in order to face the question of woman's ability to control her life.

Most critics, including Williamson and Spencer, identify Jane Barker and Mary Davys as moralistic writers of the Philips line, while Aphra Behn and Eliza Haywood stand on the transgressive side of the divide. Spencer defines Barker as "the new, moral woman writer, acceptable to later generations," and Ros Ballaster argues that "Mary Davys seek[s] to revive moral vigour in feminocentric representations of love" (Spencer, *Rise* 42; Ballaster, *Seductive* 32). Eliza Haywood, whom Williamson describes as "not ashamed to imitate the work" of Aphra Behn, is widely praised by critics for her depiction of desirous and aggressive heroines and considered to be a "champion of her sex" (228-29). Despite such perceived differences among the four authors, the five fictions I have chosen all deal with the woman's right to choose action and her struggle to negotiate a culture characterized by "anxiety and fears about

[3] Jane Barker first published *Love Intrigues; or, The History of the Amours of Bosvil and Galesia* in 1713 as by "A Young Lady." It was then reissued in 1719 as part of *The Entertaining Novels of Mrs. Jane Barker* (2 vols.), along with her 1715 romance *Exilius* and its dedication to the Countess of Exeter (from *Exilius*), and a poem dedicated to Barker by George Sewell, a hack writer for the printer, Edmund Curll. The text I will be using is taken from Carol Shiner Wilson's edited version of Barker's trilogy, in which Wilson uses the 1719 edition of *Love Intrigues* (from Barker's volume two) and the 1723 edition of *A Patch-Work Screen for the Ladies*.

women's assertiveness and independence in speech and action" (Fletcher 401). It is the shared theme of female agency, where agency is defined as "active working or operation" and "working as a means to an end," that connects the five short fictions by Behn, Barker, Davys, and Haywood, even despite their varying erotic or didactic, transgressive or conventional novelistic approaches (*OED* 1, 2).

While Barker does undeniably write to "pious and didactic purposes," she also creates a heroine in Galesia whose method of taking control over her life through extreme self-suppression and passive repression of emotion shares characteristics with that of Behn's transgressive Isabella (King, *Exile* 9). Similarly, though critics celebrate Haywood's depiction of subversive heroines and criticize Davys's seemingly conventional female characters, in *The Reformed Coquet* and *Fantomina* both writers develop heroines who actively assert agency over much of the plots' action. The fact that the four writers share in the same commitment to imagining, through visions of female agency, the possibility for female speech and action calls into question the critical penchant to identify a "split between female-authored pious and didactic love fiction ... and erotic fiction by women" (Ballaster, *Seductive* 33). What finally links the five works, regardless of the authors' political, religious, or personal situations, is their common dedication to presenting heroines who work toward one end: the woman's right to direct her own actions and to assert control over her own life.

Behn and Barker: Passive Agency

Critics rarely pair Behn and Barker except to identify the textual moments wherein Barker explicitly rejects Behn and rewrites *The History of the Nun* to a didactic purpose.[4] In an oft-cited passage from *A Patch-Work Screen for the Ladies*, Barker's narrator-heroine Galesia expresses admiration for Philips and aversion toward Behn. Galesia tells the Lady with whom she shares her patches of poetry and scraps of stories, "One ask'd me, If I lik'd Mrs. *Philips*, or Mrs. *Behn* best? To whom I reply'd, with a blunt Indignation, That *they ought not to be nam'd together*" (108). Critics have interpreted this passage as proof of Barker's dedication to following Philips's model of the modest woman writer. Paula R. Backscheider concludes, "whereas Philips had been glorified by men, Behn would soon become the object of vilification and would be so systematically discredited that by 1723 Jane Barker would write that [Behn's] name ought not to be mentioned with Orinda's" (*Spectacular* 80). Galesia's statement does seem to leave little room for any other interpretation; thus, Barker has come to be considered by critics such as Williamson as "one of the creators of the Orinda tradition" (103).

Yet Galesia's outright rejection of Behn is problematized by Barker's repeated rewritings of Behn's works in *The Lining of the Patch Work Screen* (1726).[5] The most notable revision of Behn occurs when Barker retells *The*

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[4] Barker's inset stories "The History of The Lady Gypsie" and "History of Tangerine" in *The Lining of the Patch Work Screen* (1726) bear likeness to Behn's *The Wandering Beauty* (1698) (Wilson 227n1). Also see Pearson, "Gender" 45, and Spencer, *Afterlife* 168.

[5] There is no hyphen in this title. Though Barker completed and printed the work in the fall of 1725, most sources, including the Wilson text used for this thesis, date the work to 1726, the year that appeared on the novel's title page (King, *Exile* 160 and n39; Wilson xlv).

History of the Nun in "strong and unproblematic moral language" (Pearson, History 241). Both Jacqueline Pearson and William H. McBurney[6] have discussed Barker's revisions to Behn's text, which turn the original, ambiguously guilty Isabella into an evil heroine of unsympathetic guilt. Ostensibly, Barker's pacification of Isabella's original subversiveness, coupled with her condemnation of Behn, establishes the opposition between the two writers: one wrote with a transgressive aim and the other a moralistic goal. As Pearson has noted, however, Barker's rewriting of Behn reveals a degree of ambivalence toward the literary precedent that complicates Galesia's critical judgments. Pearson writes, "Barker is excited by Behn's imagination and cannot stop retelling or imitating Behn's fiction, and yet she also feels called upon to condemn the example Behn provides for women writers" (History 241). That Behn repeatedly appears in Barker's text, though moralized and condemned, suggests that her works and career left a lasting mark on her successor.

Pearson further explains Barker's didactic revisions as part of "the post-1688 reaction against sexual explicitness" (History 234). She suggests that "Behn's cultural position in the 1680s allowed her to incorporate radical images of femininity into her work: Barker's in the 1720s did not, and as a result her textual strategies have to be more wily and covert" (Pearson, History 241-42). Barker's moralizing of the tale, then, does not necessarily stem from a deep aversion toward Behn, as Galesia's comment might suggest, but rather reflects

[6] McBurney also suggests that Barker's story of a vow-breaking nun may stem directly from the influential *Lettres Portugaises* (1669), rather than solely from Behn's text. See McBurney, "Edmund Curll" 395-96.

to some degree her position as a woman writing in 1726. The literary connection between the two writers is thus more complex than a simple reading of Galesia's statement implies. Yet most of the critical discussion about the two women writers has focused on the explicit moments in Barker's text where she openly refers to or revises Behn.[7] My study of representations of female agency in *The History of the Nun* and Barker's first novel, however, departs from such critical practice to reveal the "more wily and covert" ways in which Barker invokes the subversive influence of Behn.

Behn's Isabella and Barker's Galesia at first appear entirely disparate. Isabella has grown up in a convent where her father placed her after her mother's death. There she develops a "conduct and discretion ... equal to her wit and beauty" that establishes her as a "maid of immortal fame" (8). When she reaches thirteen, her father and aunt force her to choose between the convent and the married life; they expose her to the world "to try whether it were not for want of temptation to vanity that made her leave the world and love an enclosed life" (7). Isabella predictably rejects the outer world and undergoes the "fatal ceremony" of becoming a nun (9). For some time she practices her religion devoutly, until she falls in love with Henault and breaks her holy vow by escaping the nunnery with him. Years of bad luck befall the lovers, and then Henault leaves for war and is reported dead. Isabella then marries again, to Villenoys, and continues living an exemplary life: "she was esteemed the fairest and best of wives" (33). Her happiness with Villenoys does

[7] Pearson also discusses how both Behn and Barker turn women's conventional needlework into assertions of female power and intellect. See Pearson "History" 247-50.

not last long, however, as Henault returns and Isabella, out of fear, shame, and despair, kills her first husband. To hide the murder, she convinces Villenoys to carry the body to the river and throw it over the bridge in a sack. She then secretly sews the sack to Villenoys's shirt so that he unknowingly throws himself off the bridge with the body; she thereby kills both husbands at once. Her murders (and bigamy) remain unknown until Henault's body is identified and she confesses. Condemned to execution, she dies a martyr, as "She was generally lamented" (42).

Galesia, on the other hand, never marries and commits no acts of murder. In fact, little action occurs in *Love Intrigues* except the heroine's obsessing over her inconstant lover, Bosvil. Barker's novel opens with the mature Galesia relating the story of her life and particularly her failed love affair to her companion Lucasia, who "desir'd *Galesia* to recount to her the Adventures of her early Years" (7). Galesia's first unsuitable pursuer, Mr. Brafort, is conveniently disposed of by his death of a fever. Meanwhile, the heroine's love and obsessive passion for Bosvil grows, but his inconsistent treatment of her causes her to "*vow a Virgin to remain*" (14). She claims to devote her life to writing rather than pursuing her love of Bosvil, but her "design'd Tranquility was disturb'd by [his] frequent Visits" (16). Galesia refuses to express her love for Bosvil to him or to anyone else, including her own mother, and thus the amour never develops. The novel focuses on Galesia's efforts to make sense of her identity as a single woman writer and on her attempts at education, which by her sex she is denied. Bosvil finally marries another, and Galesia must

"perform all the Farce of a well pleas'd Kinswoman" and pretend happiness for him, despite her own feelings of abandonment (46). In the end, Lucasia offers one criticism of the young Galesia: that she should have confessed her love for Bosvil to her mother.

The dishonest, desirous, and murderous Isabella bears no ostensible likeness to the loyal, chaste, and virtuous Galesia. Furthermore, the two texts differ in narrative form: Behn's narrator is clearly differentiated from her heroine, for though she "identifies fruitfully" with her, the narrative remains in the third person (Pearson, History 245); Barker's narrator, on the other hand, is the heroine, though matured, as her narrative is a first-person reflection on her own youth. While both authors take part in "the investigation of psychological idiosyncracy," the effect of Barker's self-reflexive narrative, wherein the narrator not only provides the interpretation of her life, but also includes her own inset writings, is a deeper penetration into the heroine's mind, both in her youth and maturity (Todd 142). Despite the authors' varying use of a sympathetic yet distant narrator, or a matured protagonist-narrator, both Behn and Barker face the problem of woman's ability to take control of her life through narrators and heroines who similarly invoke passive female agency.[8] Passive, which means "unresisting or submissive," can also be defined as "exposed to suffering" and as "produced or brought about by external agency" (*OED* B.3, A.2a). It is the latter two definitions I will consider in relation to the female narrators and heroines of the two texts.

[8] My use of passive agency differs entirely from popular psychology's concept of passive-aggression, and I will not be taking a psychoanalytical approach.

Patricia Meyer Spacks identifies the passivity prevalent in female characters of the period when she writes, "active though they may be in caring for others or in conventional female occupations, [they] are strikingly passive ... in accepting the suffering inflicted upon them" (*Imagining* 72). Isabella and Galesia, however, do not simply "[accept] the suffering inflicted upon them"; instead, they turn that suffering, which is often self-imposed by their own acts of self-suppression, into a catalyst for action.[9] Both women take control over the direction of their lives: Isabella seizes her love and engineers the murders of her two husbands, while Galesia chooses a single life and actively pursues a career as a writer and healer. The heroines' agency, however, is complicated through two methods of displacement such that their actions appear enforced, if not inevitable, and not the product of self-will. Either their actions occur through self-imposed suppression of emotion and action, which exposes them to suffering, or are attributed to an "external agency" such as fate or providence. To claim agency through passive means renders the women's acts of assertion over their lives explainable in a culture that "routinely allows women no freedom of choice over their own lives" (Pearson, History 246).

Behn's narrator first considers the extent to which Isabella controls the direction of her life by questioning how free she is to choose between the convent and marriage. She records how Isabella's father has her experience the

[9] The passive agency I identify in the texts by Behn and Barker is similar to that which has been much discussed in Richardson scholarship of *Pamela* and *Clarissa*. Richardson's heroines rely on passive resistance to male suitors (often through internalized writings) and the power of moral will to overcome male aggression. Criticism of Behn and Barker, and specifically of *The History of the Nun* and *Love Intrigues*, has not focused on the female authors' use of passive agency, which precedes and shares characteristics with that of their famous male successor.

world because he was "not so positive in that resolution [that she should become a nun] as to put the matter wholly out of her choice" (5). As Ann Messenger writes, it therefore appears that the heroine has been "given full opportunity as a girl to live in the world if she chooses" (47). Yet the narrator undermines the sense that Isabella is "given full opportunity" to live outside the convent when she suggests that the heroine was too young to make such a decision. She writes, "I could wish ... that nunneries and marriages were not to be entered into 'till the maid so destined were of a mature age to make her own choice" (5). The narrator continues to question Isabella's agency in the choice by revealing that the heroine's aunt used "all her arts and stratagems to make her become a nun," and that Isabella's father had always imagined his daughter in the holy orders (6). He responds to her decision to join the convent by telling her "she had argued according to the wish of his soul" (8). In the end, Isabella's freedom to direct the course of her life is a mere illusion, for her father and aunt force her to make the decision at too young an age and both authority figures have already designed for her to become a nun.

Backscheider also contends that "Behn's text begins with the depiction of Isabella making a series of decisions, thereby established as a thinking, responsible individual" (*Spectacular* 97). While the narrator does establish the heroine as intelligent, possessing "so quick and piercing a wit," she also works to reveal how "the pressures of society on women to conform to either monastic or marital paradigms" seriously limit Isabella's intellectual agency (6; Pearson, Gender 51). The opening scenes of Behn's text depict Isabella as a thinking

woman who cannot use her intelligence to direct her own life because she is restricted by a patriarchal society in which "women are deprived of authority even over their own lives" (Pearson, Gender 51). Isabella must, therefore, discover a way to act that will allow her to overcome her culture's gender restrictions.

Barker's heroine Galesia also exhibits an active intelligence inhibited by cultural constraints on women's intellectual capacities. Barker foregrounds Galesia's "considerable wit and intelligence" in the opening of *Love Intrigues* when she reveals her heroine as politically informed (King, Needles 80). Galesia and her friend Lucasia discuss "the Adventures of the present and foregoing War and what they had to hope or fear from the Success or Overthrow of either or both Parties" (7). The women are capable of intellectualizing the events occurring around them, events in which they are personally and politically invested. Once Galesia begins relating her "*History*" to Lucasia, however, the restrictions placed upon the narrator's intellect by consequence of her sex become everywhere apparent (7). Like Isabella, whose choice to join the nunnery is undermined by her immaturity at the time of her decision, love assaults Galesia before she is old enough to understand it. The elder Galesia writes, "I was scarce arriv'd to those Years in which we begin to distinguish between Friendship and Affection, but I became sensible of the latter towards ... one Mr. *Bosvil* ... my Heart was sensible of an Emotion it had never felt before" (9). Galesia's youth inhibits her from identifying and thereby controlling the "Emotion" of love. In fact, she has only just come to the state of

self-consciousness necessary to recognize such emotions: "we pass our happy Days, 'till Reason begins to bud in our Actions; then we no sooner know that we have a Being ... but Passion takes Root in our Hearts" (9). Galesia's youth and sexual innocence inevitably dis-empower her in the game of seduction.

Barker's emphasis on her heroine's ignorance of amour and of the world does follow generic conventions of the amatory plot. John J. Richetti identifies "the destruction of female innocence by a representative of an aristocratic world of male corruption" as the general theme of early eighteenth-century amatory fiction (*Popular* 125). To remain within the generic bounds of romance fiction, Barker must depict her heroine as the conventional maiden whose innocence renders her vulnerable to seduction and ruin by aggressive male rakes. Yet Galesia's worldly innocence, or ignorance, also carries a covert criticism of women's exclusion from educational institutions, for Barker herself was "a learned woman who identified with, but was excluded from, men's communities of learning" (King, *Exile* 68). Spacks observes how conventional innocence in eighteenth-century female characters can suggest a subversive message, writing, "Female innocence ... is male oppression" (Ev'ry 31). Galesia's ignorance in the game of love, therefore, stems from her exclusion from the world in general. Though she does enter the world at fifteen, she does so at her mother's behest, not her father's, and when her journey takes her to Oxford where her brother studies, she is only exposed to "the Glory of the University; at the Time of the Act," not the intellectual life of the male students (12). In fact, of the educational side of Oxford Galesia remains frustratingly silent, for of her visit

she simply states, "I will only say *Time is past*, and for ever keep Silence on that Subject" (12). Female exposure to the world does not involve intellectual education. Galesia's innocence is not figured simply as a conventional characteristic of the romance heroine, but rather as the result of women's cultural exclusion from educational institutions.[10]

When Galesia does ask her learned brother to teach her "Grammar," he at first "laugh'd at [her] Project" and then only concedes to teach her out of politeness: "he humour'd me out of Complaisance" (15).[11] He even doubts that her feminine mind can withstand "the first Difficulty ... in the *Syntax*," as it is inherently more challenging than women's subjects, which include "where to place a Patch, Curl ... on a young Face, so as to render it ... more gallant" (15). Though Galesia's brother admits her into the male-dominated world of learning, he does so with ridicule and condescension, expressing ambivalence toward women's entrance into education. Pearson finds Behn's texts "preoccupied with issues of female power and powerlessness" (Gender 180). For Barker, female powerlessness arises out of women's lack of education, as she associated "exclusion ... from male institutions of learning ... with themes of power" (King, *Exile* 82). While Isabella's choice, or rather non-choice, between the nunnery and marriage reveals her powerlessness to evade restrictive gender roles, Galesia's involvement in the courtship plot is depicted by Barker as the

[10] Many critics read Barker's fiction as autobiographical; therefore, it should be noted that Barker did circulate with learned men at Cambridge and did partake in social literary circles. For further reading, see King, "Jane Barker, *Poetical Recreations*, and the Sociable Text" 551-70; Wilson, Introduction xv-xlv; and Spencer, "Creating" 166-67, 178-79.

[11] Throughout her poetry and prose, Barker expresses deep admiration for her brother, Edward Barker, who did teach her much in the way of literature and medicine. For further biographical reading on Barker, see the sources outlined in n9.

result of her sex, not her choosing. As a woman, she is powerless to enter, seriously and of her own accord, the institutions of learning she desires, for she lives "in a world in which female intellectual attainment was rendered ridiculous, grotesque, or invisible" (King, *Exile* 69). To take control of her life, Galesia must write her way out of the amatory game, a process she begins in *Love Intrigues* and furthers in *A Patch-Work Screen for the Ladies.*

In order to discover a means to achieve "women's freedom to choose their destiny," Isabella and Galesia develop a form of agency masked by passive self-suppression and suffering (Spencer, *Rise* 46). At the beginning of Isabella's monastic career she fulfills her duties as a nun to the utmost perfection. The narrator writes, "there was never seen any one who led so austere and pious a life as this young votress" (10). Isabella's status as an exemplary nun stems from her absolute abdication of all other pleasures, as she "[gives] herself wholly up to devotion" (10). When Henault begins visiting the grate, however, she finds her passion for him distracts her from her devotion to God. She therefore turns to increased asceticism to quell her love: "now she redoubled her austerity; and in cold winter nights of frost and snow would be up at all hours and lying upon the cold stones before the altar, prostrate at prayers" (12). Her self-inflicted asceticism causes her to suffer "fits, pains, and convulsions" and elicits alarm in the Lady Abbess, who begs Isabella "not to harass herself so very much" (15, 12). As a nun, however, the only way Isabella knows how to control her thoughts and actions is through self-imposed suppression and denial of the private passions that threaten her singly directed devotion toward God.

Yet the power of love proves greater than Isabella's powers of self-repression, and she finds that "the more she concealed her flame, the more violently it raged" (15). Messenger observes how the heroine's attempts to quiet her desire fail, writing, "She has tried everything she can think of to overcome her passion, but without success" (50). Isabella's efforts to suppress her love do fail, but even more significantly, her attempts to overcome her desire through self-imposed asceticism cause her passion to increase. Paradoxically, the suffering and anguish Isabella brings upon herself through her acts of self-suppression serve to heighten her desire: "When she had raged and struggled with this unruly passion, 'till she was quite tired and breathless, finding all her force in vain, she filled her fancy with a thousand charming ideas of the lovely Henault, and, in that soft fit had a mind to satisfy her panting heart" (16). Self-inflicted pain excites passion. Only by claiming her love will Isabella finally be released from the turmoil she endures, for as Messenger writes, "her passion is irresistible" (49).

Isabella's attempts to assert agency over her desire through self-suppression finally erupt as she, "not being able to contain her love any longer within the bounds of dissimulation or discretion ... burst out into tears" (21). The love she can no longer suppress now "burst[s]" out openly, and Isabella finds she has no choice but to submit to the external force of desire and to act upon her love: "she at last was compelled by a mighty force, absolutely irresistible, to speak" (22). This marks the beginning of Isabella's transformation from the self-restrained, suffering nun, to the self-directed,

desirous woman. Pearson argues that Behn's narrative "suggests that female powerlessness justifies female acts" (History 246). Isabella is powerless on two fronts: she is confined to the convent and she cannot overcome the power of love. When she finally speaks her love, the action appears both inevitable, as love overwhelms her, and justified, for her powerlessness to maintain her saintly status and evade love through monastic asceticism leaves action as her only recourse. To Pearson's argument, however, I also add that Isabella's efforts to act against her desire through passive self-suppression turn into the catalyst that causes her to claim agency over her love and life.

Galesia also turns to self-imposed repression of emotion to control her honor and her love for Bosvil by rigorously adhering to the courtship rules that dictate women's inaction in the amatory game. Spacks describes the rules of the eighteenth-century's "intricate game of courtship" when she writes, "a woman who allowed her interest in a man to become apparent before he declared his in her risked disgrace" (Ev'ry 27). Despite her alleged inexperience, Galesia understands the rules fully: "I study'd ... how to make suitable Answers to ... him ... that I might not betray my Weakness in too ready a Complyance" (19). To maintain power over her reputation and her passion, Galesia engages in total self-suppression of desire, just as Isabella turns to asceticism to control her love. She admits to having "the Cunning to conceal [her] Passion" and confesses to having "kept [her] Words close Prisoners" (11, 25). While her concealment and silencing of desire may be read as merely conventional behavior for the pursued romance heroine, repression of emotion is also, for Galesia, a self-willed act

intended to achieve her means: that of freedom from the amatory plot. Spencer writes, "There is a covert suggestion ... that Galesia's reserve towards Bosvil was adopted not just from fear of being seduced but from fear of being seduced away from her vocation" (Creating 170). Galesia's "fastidious adherence to [the] codes of female virtue" that require female silence is, in effect, a deliberate act of self-suppression designed to make her suitor lose interest so that she can freely pursue her preferred single and literary life (King, *Exile* 192).

Spencer argues that Galesia fails to obtain Bosvil because she follows the conventions of the proud and vain romance heroine too closely. She writes, "The failure of the Bosvil-Galesia relationship can be attributed to Galesia's pride and vulnerability ... explained in terms of her identity as a heroine" (Spencer, Creating 170). According to Spencer, Barker writes Galesia into the conventional role of the romance heroine to "make her single life seem equally valid as another kind of heroine's destiny" (Creating 170). While I agree with Spencer, I also suggest that the Bosvil-Galesia relationship fails because of Galesia's deliberate invocation of passive agency. The heroine consciously represses her desire, inflicting pain upon herself, as she "was tormented with a thousand Anxieties," until Bosvil effectively exits her life and she is released from the courtship plot (13).

Whereas Isabella's self-denied desire bursts at the grate, Galesia's imprisoned words are released as she literally and figuratively writes a new identity for herself. Galesia commands herself to "*cast off thy Chain, / Which links thee to thy faithless Swain; / And vow a Virgin to remain*" (14). To free

herself from Bosvil and all subsequent male suitors, Galesia commits herself to celibacy not out of required monastic duty, but out of choice. Up until now, Galesia's thoughts and actions have been limited to the amatory struggle, for she can "not sequester [her] Thoughts one Moment from [her] belov'd *Bosvil*" (12). To envision herself unchained is to envision herself able to think and act as she chooses. She therefore "resolv'd to espouse a Book," to pursue the literary career that is fully established in *A Patch-Work Screen* (15). Spencer discusses Galesia's act of agency in following a literary career when she writes, "Galesia's poetic vocation is to lose her Bosvil's love and the chance of marriage, but the choice has been hers" (Creating 173). Galesia's agency in following the poetic vocation results from her intentional exaggeration of the courtship rules that require women to deny their desire.

The scene that best epitomizes the way Isabella's self-induced suppression of desire turns into agency is the miscarriage scene. Henault's failure as a farmer causes his father to pressure him to join the war, an act that will redeem him and "win his father's approval and support" (Messenger 48). When Henault tells her his plan to go to war, she calls on her powers of passive agency, internalizing her desire to keep him from going to the point where her body literally bursts and she miscarries. The narrator writes, "she almost fainted in his arms while he was speaking, and it possessed her with so entire a grief that she miscarried" (29). The suffering and grief she inflicts upon herself results in the miscarriage that forces Henault to stay, the end she sought all along, for "to re-establish her repose, he was forced to promise not to go" (29).

Instead of directly demanding that he stay, Isabella successfully invokes passive agency: she causes herself pain and represses action in order to achieve power over him and keep him from leaving. In her study of eighteenth-century epistolary fiction, Ruth Perry explains that in literature of the period, "the woman's role is stereotypically reactive rather than active" (22). On the one hand, Isabella's miscarriage appears as an uncontrollable physical reaction to the surprise of Henault's proposition. On the other hand, however, it also reveals Isabella's activity within the scene, for the miscarriage occurs not as a consequence of her lack of bodily control, but rather as a result of deliberately internalizing despair. In fact, throughout the scene she remains in control of her body, never actually swooning, as she only "almost fainted" (29). The miscarriage itself is not so much a simple reaction of the body as it is the result of her active internalization of "so entire a grief" at the thought of Henault leaving her without her permission. Furthermore, when Henault eventually does go to war, he does so only with Isabella's consent, for only after she has "considered all their circumstances and weighed the advantages that might redound both to his honor and fortune by it" does "she [suffer] him to resolve upon going" (29). In the end, Henault's departure results from Isabella's resolve, not his own. She exercises agency over him passively, through the self-inflicted grief that results in her miscarriage and through her powers of internal contemplation.

Once Galesia discovers the agency she claims in writing, she too learns how to empower herself over her lover. At first Galesia responds to Bosvil's

rejection of her by wishing herself dead, as she "wish'd ... some Thunder descend, and strike me into the Ground" (32-33). She then realizes the power her death would give him, thinking, "that will render *Bosvil* too happy" (33). Instead of her own death, then, Galesia finds a pen and paper, which she will use to "write the whole Scene of this Treachery, and make myself the last Actor in the Tragedy" (33). In command of the pen she can control the amatory plot, depicting herself and her passion as she pleases. She therefore writes Bosvil a letter in which she banishes him: "I beg you to see me no more" (33). After finishing her letter she confesses, "I pleas'd myself that I had taken this Occasion, at once to command his Absence" (33). Just as Isabella does not speak her demand that Henault stay, rather internalizing and embodying it, Galesia does not voice her command that Bosvil leave. Rather, she claims agency over her lover through the indirect yet powerful means of written words.

In person, however, Galesia loses her to ability to control her words, as her body inevitably expresses the desire she struggles to repress through its uncontrollable "Smiles, Sighs, and broken Words, scarce containing common Sense" (27). King argues that, "In poetry ... [Galesia] can articulate the desires she must guard against revealing to the world" (Coming 94). Poetry not only allows Galesia to articulate her desires; it also allows her to dissemble in diction what she cannot hide in body. In poetry, then, Galesia discovers agency over expression, for as King writes, "Poetry offers a space in which to exercise control over the linguistic forms which break apart under the pressure of a code of propriety" (Coming 94). Self-directed poetry releases Galesia from the "code

of propriety" that requires women to suppress desire. It also, however, enables her to control the expression of her love, as her body remains hidden behind the page. Galesia's deliberate turn to the pen thus illustrates her use of passive agency: she takes action both by writing and in writing, as the pen facilitates her demand for freedom from Bosvil and empowers her over her uncontrollable physical desires.

Behn and Barker also depict passive agency in their heroines through female narrators who repeatedly attribute female action to external forces such as love, fate, or providence. Messenger argues that in Behn's narrative, the tension between Isabella's agency and the role of fate in her actions calls into question how much power Isabella has over her own life: "The seriousness of her vow-breaking is not the question; her power to choose is" (52). According to her, fate causes Isabella to fall in love, break her vow, and commit the two murders, so that in the end the heroine does not, in fact, exhibit any agency at all. Messenger writes, "if Fate has taken sides, freedom of choice is merely an illusion" (53). Isabella's choice between the convent and marriage is an illusion, yet fate works in the novel only as a displacement of the heroine's agency in her subsequent acts, not a replacement. The narrators invoke external forces whenever the heroines take action in order to explain and justify women's actions, to release the heroines from guilt, and finally to emphasize women's true lack of independent agency in a culture that denies women power over their own lives.

Isabella's internal debate over her escape from the convent and her two acts of murder illustrate most clearly how Behn's narrator invokes fate to absolve her heroine of guilt while simultaneously depicting Isabella as an actively plotting criminal. To signal Isabella's willing participation in her actions despite the power of fate, the narrator shifts from past, inactive tense to the present, active tense whenever the heroine debates with herself or acts. The narrator first uses past tense to blame fate for Isabella's first vow-breaking: "she was forced to permit that ... she could not conquer and submitted to her fate as a thing destined her by Heaven itself" (24). The narrator's passive voice textually mirrors Isabella's submission to the external force of heaven to present the heroine as a passive female who is acted upon. When Isabella internalizes the debate, however, the narrator shifts to the present, active tense to describe how "she brings reason on both sides" and finally decides "to fly" (24-25). The present tense of the narrative grammatically reflects Isabella's agency in vow-breaking, subverting a passive image of the heroine who is exposed to be an actively, though internally, plotting woman.

Even more radical tense shifts occur when Isabella acts upon her decision to murder her first husband. Once again, the scene begins in the past tense as the narrator records Isabella's deliberation over Henault: she "resolved upon the murder of Henault" (37). When Isabella actually kills him, however, the tense suddenly shifts to the present, active tense: "she goes to the bed of the unfortunate Henault" (37). Ballaster explains how when Katteriena confesses her amorous history to Isabella, Behn turns to "direct speech and ... first-person

narrative" to achieve "an illusion of immediacy" (*Seductive* 102). Though the textual moments when Isabella debates with herself and decides to act are not first-person narratives, the active verbs create a similar sense of immediacy that is absent from the past tense passages wherein the heroine submits to an external force. When Isabella approaches the bed of Henault she considers how to murder him convincingly and clandestinely: "considering, she knew not how to conceal the blood should she cut his throat, she resolves to strangle him or smother him with a pillow" (37). The present tense of the verb "resolves" propels the narrative toward the crime that follows, for "that last thought was no sooner borne but put in execution" (37). The active narrative reveals Isabella as carefully and precisely planning the death of Henault, just as she consciously decides to fly the convent. Choice is not an illusion; it is a right she claims.

In the second act of murder, however, the narrator complicates a clear vision of Isabella's agency by displacing the heroine's actions onto fate. The narrator writes, "when Fate begins to afflict, she goes through stitch with her black work" just before Isabella "tak[es] the pack-needle with the thread" and "sew[s] the sack with several strong stitches to the collar of Villenoys's coat" (39). The narrator simultaneously tells the reader that "Fate" stitched the sack to Villenoys and that Isabella's "strong stitches" sew him to his death. The effect of displacing the murder to fate while revealing Isabella's agency in the act is to create in Isabella the image of passive agency. When Behn's narrator attributes the action of sewing and thus killing to fate, she pacifies Isabella's transgressive act or murder, rendering women's agency a passive vehicle of fate.

Just as Behn's narrative transfers Isabella's agency onto external forces, Galesia's own decision to write appears at once as an act of her own will and as providential design. After multiple inadequate suitors fail to possess Galesia in *A Patch-Work Screen*, the heroine states, "I began to believe Providence had ordain'd for me a *Single Life*. *Began*, did I say? No, rather *continued* in that Sentiment ever since the Disappointment of *Bosvil*" (139). Where Galesia's freedom from the shackles of love occurs at the hands of providence, her subsequent writing career is also depicted as pre-ordained, for as Williamson writes, "Making fate responsible absolved [Galesia] from any violation of the social norms in the privilege of writing" (104). To write as a woman, Galesia necessarily steps out of the bounds of feminine silence and thus of femininity itself. To explain her agency in writing as the design of providence, then, is to both validate and sanctify women's public acts of written speech. In effect, the heroine who actively aspires to "become *Apollo's* darling Daughter, and Maid of Honour to the Muses" is rendered as the passive object of providential design (15). Though Galesia acts as her own agent when she claims the pen to "writ these Lines into the Body of the Tree," the lines that commit her to the chaste poet's life, she is also acted upon by God, who wills her to remain unmarried (15). The narrative confounds a clear sense of Galesia's agency in choosing the single and literary life by invoking providence to create in Galesia a vision of passive female agency.

The passive agency identified in both Isabella and Galesia originates in the female narrators who struggle between complicity with and resistance

against their patriarchal context. Pearson writes, "Behn's narrators are torn between their desire to endorse the moral system that confines them and their sympathy with the female characters who rebel against it" (Gender 52). The female narrator, who like Isabella, "once was designed an humble votary in the house of devotion," reveals herself as implicated in the same context as Isabella, one that confines women's ability to control their destinies (5). While the narrator admits she did not follow the monastic path, stating, "I rather chose to deny myself that content I could certainly not promise," she also confesses that she is powerless to change the system (5). She writes, "since I cannot alter custom, nor shall ever be allowed to make new laws, or rectify old ones, I must leave the young nuns inclosed in their best endeavors of making a virtue of necessity; and the young wives to make the best of a bad market" (5). As a woman, she lacks the power to "make new laws" and therefore must accept her context, even as she condemns the limited and inadequate choices it offers women.

The narrator's vacillation between complicity with and resistance against her context first appears at the beginning of the novel when she warns of the fatal consequences of breaking the monastic vow: "of all broken vows these are those that receive the most severe and notorious revenges of God" (4). Throughout the text, she appears to comply with the culture that condemns vow-breaking by similarly judging Isabella. When Isabella begins planning her second murder, the narrator asserts, "she was the readier for another and another of such a nature as has, in my opinion, far less excuse than the first" (39).

Isabella's guilt is emphasized by the narrator's opinion of the murders as well as by her final condemnation of the heroine to death. Yet the narrator also creates in Isabella a sympathetic heroine who is praised for her "holy and charitable life" up until her death, which "every one bewailed" (42). In fact, Pearson writes that Behn's narrator uses her shared experience with Isabella to "[present] a tissue of paradoxes and contradictions in which, despite the loud proclamation of a moral purpose, the vow-breaking bigamist murderess is also a heroine, praised" for her virtuous life even at the point of her execution (Gender 51). By creating a heroine who fulfills the ideal of female virtue, "a woman of so admirable a life ... of so undoubted a piety and sanctity of living," the narrator complies with her culture's mythology of the virtuous woman (41). By creating a transgressive heroine who breaks her monastic vow and "in one fatal night destroyed two ... innocents," she resists her context's notion of submissive femininity (39). The narrator uses passive agency in her own narrative as she writes the conventionally ideal figure of femininity only to transform it into the transgressive force behind a subversive subtext of female assertion.

Pearson argues that the narrator's use of textual contradictions in her narrative as well as in her heroine finally serves to undermine the cultural morality by "creat[ing] complex paradoxes about female power and powerlessness" (Gender 48). While I agree with Pearson, I also argue that the narrator's own "power and powerlessness" as the creator of the text and as a woman in a confining context explains and exemplifies the passive agency used to justify Isabella's actions in a culture where "[w]omen's power and

independence are rigidly limited" (Pearson, History 245). To write a novel in which female agency appears at once passive, or complicit, and active, or resistant, is to embody textually the simultaneous power and powerlessness of an intelligent woman in a circumscribed context.

Barker's narrator also struggles between complicity with and resistance against her context as she attempts to validate a single, literary life for women. King identifies the elder-narrator Galesia's challenge when she explains, "It is impossible that a woman coming to writing in England in the 1670s and 1680s would not be anxious about her own acts of authorship" (Coming 91). The narrator's ambivalence toward her unconventional life surfaces throughout her narrative in complicit statements that curiously contradict her renunciation of the amatory plot. She exhibits anxiety over her learning when she writes that her education "serv'd to fill [her] Head with Notions, and perhaps [her] Heart with Pride ... but a mispending of Time, Learning being neither of Use nor Ornament to [her] Sex; but on the contrary, many count a studious Woman as ridiculous" (37). The narrator's seemingly conventional judgments about the value of female education reveal her as powerless as Behn's narrator to evade the restrictive gender attitudes of her context. According to King, Barker's narrator "grounds her identity in acts of writing but questions the legitimacy of literary activities for women in general" (Coming 93). The elder-narrator Galesia's ambivalence about female education arises from her own struggle to negotiate cultural assumptions about women's learning.

Yet Galesia's continued efforts at education, for she admits, "I daily improv'd my Studies," and her refusal of the conventional heroine's conclusion in marriage also reveal her as resistant to gender restrictions (37). Like Behn's narrator, she passively submits to social assumptions about women's writing and education while actively pursuing a literary vocation that penetrates the male-dominated world of literature. Galesia's passive agency, like Isabella's, is embodied in an ambivalent narrator who works to free her own narrative and writing identity from a culture that "relegate[s] ... the writing woman to the cultural margins" (Coming 94). In Aphra Behn's *The History of the Nun* and Jane Barker's *Love Intrigues*, the female narrators and heroines use passive means to claim agency and to resist, through subversive subtexts, the hegemonic plot of female subordination and silence. While the female narrators and heroines do not achieve an unambiguously positive vision of women's ability to act within and against their context, they do present an image of passive female agency that successfully, if temporarily, navigates a culture which confines women's speech and action.

Davys and Haywood: Active Agency

The short fiction by Davys and Haywood is generally paired in critical discussions only to oppose the didacticism of the former with the eroticism of the latter. Pearson demonstrates such critical inclination when in her study of eighteenth-century female dramatists she places Davys with the "respectable women writers" and Haywood with the "unrespectable and despised" playwrights (*Prostituted* 230). Davys, like Barker, did want to be perceived as a

respectable woman and writer; thus, she deliberately "construct[ed] a self that [would] conform to society's requirements" (Bowden, Mary Davys 18). Martha F. Bowden explains that Davys's anxiety over authorial identity stemmed not only from having to negotiate the scandalous reputations of Behn and Haywood, but also from her Irish heritage, which rendered her of a dubious class, and her widowhood, which left her "without financial support and ... male protection" (Mary Davys 19). Davys therefore presented her works so as to profit in purse and person: she wrote seemingly moralistic tales and described herself as "a Relict of one of [the] Brotherhood, and one, who (unless Poverty be a Sin) never did anything to disgrace the Gown" (254). Perhaps the fact that Alexander Pope subscribed to Davys's *The Reformed Coquet* in 1724,[12] only to condemn Haywood in his *Dunciad* 1728, best exemplifies Davys's success in maintaining "an 'unblemished reputation'" (Pearson, *Prostituted* 237).

To read Davys's respectable authorial identity as representative of her work, however, is to overlook the ways in which she, like Behn, Barker, and Haywood, seriously faced, rather than accepted, the problem of women's oppression. Williamson describes Haywood as an author who "dwells on women's oppression more than any other writer of fiction" (235). Davys's most successful prose publications in 1724 and 1725[13] occurred simultaneously with

[12] Bowden records that Pope subscribed to *The Reformed Coquet* in 1724; however, Sarah Prescott writes in *Women, Authorship and Literary Culture, 1690-1740* that he subscribed to *The Works of Mrs. Davys* in 1725. Since the question of subscription lists can often be a tricky one and since Bowden's study is specifically on Davys, whereas Prescott's is a broad survey of early women's writing, I have chosen to follow Bowden's research (Bowden, Mary Davys 28; Prescott 129).

[13] In 1725 Davys published *The Works of Mrs. Davys*, which included old and new prose fictions, as well as her second drama, *The Self-Rival*.

Haywood's most prolific fiction-writing years in the 1720s,[14] situating the two authors in the same historical and literary context: one that circumscribed female speech and action. Bowden notes the historical overlap between the two writers when she states, "Haywood ... is particularly important for a consideration of Davys because she was the foremost woman writing at the time Davys's own work was being published" (Mary Davys 18). For Davys, to write alongside Haywood not only meant avoiding the slander Haywood received, but also engaging in the same effort to envision the possibility for independent female agency.

Pearson thus concedes that Davys's writings do evince "concern for women's abilities and education" (*Prostituted* 237). She further suggests that Davys's dedication to the question of women's opportunities provides "an exception to the generalisation that after the first decade of the eighteenth century 'reaction set in' against feminism" (Pearson, *Prostituted* 237). Like most critics, however, Pearson fails to find evidence of Davys's concern for female oppression in *The Reformed Coquet.* Instead, she describes Davys's first successful novel as one that deals "with wholly conventional images ... demonstrating its frail heroine's need for male control" (Pearson, *Prostituted* 237). In her assessment of the novel, Pearson agrees with Spencer, who judges the work as "an apology" for "male domination," rather than a protest against it

[14] Haywood issued five or more publications a year during the 1720s, the decade in which three different collections of her work appeared; in 1725 alone she published ten titles. Literary historian Cheryl Turner ascribes the sharp increase in writing by women in the 1720s to Haywood's prolific output, which she calculates amounted to 70% of the publications by women during this time. Christine Blouch doubts that all of Haywood's publications have been accounted for. For further reading, see Turner, *Living by the Pen* 38, 116, and Blouch, Introduction 7, 9-13.

(*Rise* 147). I will problematize a reading of Davys's text as simply conventional and moralistic by pairing it with Haywood's *Fantomina*, the fiction feminist critics have hailed as "a fantasy of female freedom" (Craft 830), to demonstrate how the two authors present similar visions of female agency in their seemingly dissimilar texts.

It is easy to conclude that Davys's novel offers nothing but a "priggish outlook" and a "definite didacticism," for she opens the novel with a dedication "To the Ladies of Great Britain" wherein she announces her intent to reform the coquette (MacCarthy 252). She writes, "The Heroine ... will tell you the Advantages of a kind friendly Admonition, and when the little Lightnesses of her Mind were removed, she became worthy of imitation" (253). The heroine, Amoranda, is "vain, headstrong, flirtatious but at bottom virtuous" (Ballaster, Women 208). She has inherited a vast quantity of wealth from her uncle, an East-Indian merchant, and has grown up indulged by her mother and father. When they die, they leave her "a finished Beauty and Coquet" (258). The combination of being rich, beautiful, witty, and without parental authority renders her vulnerable to the copious suitors who court her purely for their own economic gain: "it was not possible for one single Fault to be joined to three thousand Pounds a Year" (258). Meanwhile, Amoranda's uncle sends her a guardian named Formator who is to reform her of her vanity and rid her "House of the Caterpillars that infested it" (275). Before the heroine reaches full reform, however, she must first encounter male sexual aggression and predation in many forms: she hears firsthand of another woman's sexual abandonment and

experiences near-abduction and near-rape. Alanthus, a handsome young man on a horse, saves Amoranda from rape, and she subsequently falls in love with him. Finally, she discovers that the trusted guardian Formator is really Alanthus, who has disguised himself as an old man so that she will receive his advice and reveal her sentiments to him. Amoranda, effectively subdued through the process of her reform, consents to marriage and exits the text silently, leaving Alanthus and her uncle to tell the story of her reform and engagement.

Haywood's work, on the other hand, is celebrated as a text that "radically rewrites the tale of the persecuted maiden" in favor of the sexually desirous, empowered woman (Croskery 72). The heroine of Haywood's novel, conventionally "a Stranger to the World, and consequently to the Dangers of it," unconventionally exhibits and embraces her sexual desires (227). She dresses as a prostitute to win the attention of the libertine Beauplaisir and finds enjoyment in the freedom her costume gives her: "she found a vast deal of Pleasure in conversing with him in this free and unrestrained Manner" (228). The heroine also discovers satisfaction in her ability to trick him, "hugging herself with Joy that she had the good Luck to come off undiscovered" (229). She sets up subsequent meetings with Beauplaisir, all in disguise as the prostitute, only to find she cannot fend off his sexual advances. Once he has ruined her and broken his promise of fidelity, she embarks on a series of disguises to fulfill her own sexual desires and to maintain his lust for her, for as the characteristic Restoration rake he "must seduce and run in order to satisfy

the never-ending ... desire" for sexual conquest (Croskery 76-77). The heroine's disguises include Fantomina[15] ("the Daughter of a Country Gentleman"), the country maid Celia, the Widow Bloomer, and finally the masked Incognita (231). In each costume, Fantomina seduces Beauplaisir and continues meeting him in that persona until he once again loses interest. She successfully manages to maintain her identities until she finally finds herself pregnant: the one state she cannot hide. Fantomina's mother appears just in time for the heroine to go into labor, the final exposure of Fantomina's sexual promiscuity and ruin. The mother forces Fantomina to confess her sexual crimes, and when she learns "the Blame is wholly" Fantomina's, she punishes her daughter by banishing her to a "Monastery in *France*" (248).

The full title of Haywood's narrative, *Fantomina: or, Love in a Maze. Being a Secret History of an Amour Between Two Persons of Condition,* gives little hint of the heroine's punishment, as opposed to Davys's novel, which announces the reform and consequent submission of her heroine in the title. To judge from the titles, then, the narrative focus of the two texts appears disparate: the one aims for female self-renunciation and the other resists it, but finds it inevitable in a culture that dictates the "ultimate physical repression" of women (Perry 149). I argue that despite the ostensible difference in the narrative directions of the two fictions, there is a link between them, which is found in their common depiction of heroines who invoke active female agency to gain control over their lives. Active agency, unlike the passive agency identified in

[15] Haywood's narrator never discloses the birth-name of her heroine; therefore, I will refer to the heroine by the name of Fantomina, the first named disguise the heroine dons.

Behn and Barker, involves "outward action rather than inward contemplation or speculation," and is achieved by "exerting action upon others" (*OED* 1a, 2). Amoranda and Fantomina do not discover agency through a passive process of self-repression, contemplation, and internalization of desire. The narrators never delve into the heroines' inner psychologies, rather depicting their agency from the outside as the two actively seize their desire for autonomy and self-control by exerting energy outwardly and over others, not inwardly. Williamson writes of Haywood, "many of her heroines are boldly aggressive and seem to protest against the growing passivity and confinement of women in their sphere that characterizes the eighteenth century" (228). In *The Reformed Coquet* and *Fantomina*, both Davys and Haywood create texts that resist the "growing passivity and confinement of women" through heroines who repeatedly choose outward action as the means to achieve their respective ends: independence and sexual gratification.

From the start, the narrators of both texts establish Amoranda and Fantomina as actively intelligent women. Davys's narrator introduces Amoranda as "a little Angel for Beauty ... extremely admired, no less for that than for a sprightly Wit" (256). By characterizing her wit as "sprightly," which connotes activity, the narrator not only emphasizes the heroine's intelligence, but also specifies that her intelligence itself is active. Whereas coquettes are generally considered "little raw unthinking Girls," as Richard Steele writes in *The Spectator* and Davys implies in her preface when she writes of the "unthinking Minds of some of [her] Sex," Amoranda possesses an active mind

(Steele II.182.216-19; 253). She may be coquettish, but she is not unthinking. Haywood's narrator similarly underlines her heroine's active intelligence when she introduces Fantomina as "A Young Lady of distinguished Birth, Beauty, Wit, and Spirit" (227). "Spirit" is defined as "vigour of mind ... disposition or readiness to assert oneself or to hold one's own" and "a brisk and lively quality in things" (*OED* 13a, 14a). That Fantomina's "Wit" is accompanied by "Spirit" denotes how her intelligence is a "lively" force that will enable her to assert herself. While Isabella and Galesia both exhibit intelligence, theirs is not the outwardly vigorous force of Amoranda and Fantomina, the heroines who explicitly choose to take action for themselves and over others.

Crucial to the heroines' ability to claim agency over their own lives is their freedom from parental authority. Natasha Sajé observes that "Amoranda's precarious period of freedom is the result of her being cut loose from parental authority" (168). During the "Interregnum" between the death of her parents and the arrival of her guardian, Amoranda entertains countless suitors (258). The narrator writes, "her Levee was daily crowded with almost all sorts, and (she pleased to be admired) though she loved none, was complaisant to all" (258). Freed from parental authority, Amoranda entertains guests as she pleases. Furthermore, she quickly discovers in coquetry the power to defer the marriage-or-ruin ending and to thereby maintain, if only temporarily, her independence. Spencer explains the empowerment women found in coquetry when she writes, "The coquette, ... often defying propriety, tried to extend the time of her power and postpone or avoid her subjection" (*Rise* 142). To take the

part of the coquette is, for Amoranda, to choose independence. She does not become a coquette because she is naturally unthinking, but rather because she actively recognizes that through coquetry she can enjoy company as she pleases without submitting to male authority. When Amoranda announces to Lord Lofty, "everything loves Liberty, and so do I; don't you, my Lord?" she at once puts off his advances and asserts women's equal right to independence within and outside of the amatory plot (264).

While the death of Amoranda's parents frees her to engage in coquetry, the absence of Fantomina's mother enables her to enact the disguises she imaginatively invents. The narrator writes that Fantomina, "having no Body in Town at that Time to whom she was obliged to be accountable for her Actions did in every Thing as her Inclinations or Humours rendered most agreeable to her" (227). Just as no one can hinder Amoranda from entertaining multiple suitors, no one can keep Fantomina from acting upon her desire for sex and control. Released from parental constraints, she "[t]herefore thought it not the least a Fault to put in practice a little Whim which came immediately into her Head, to dress herself as near as she could in the Fashion of those Women who make sale of their Favours" (227). In her first disguise, Fantomina finds she can entertain Beauplaisir and her own sexual desires without "running any Risk, either of her Virtue or her Reputation," or, since he believes her a prostitute, having to consent to marriage (230). Ballaster theorizes the power the public masquerade gave women when she explains how "The new divisions of place and culture that bourgeois hegemony was carving out for itself ... were

peculiarly restrictive to bourgeois women .... Only the masquerade provided a sanctioned space for a lifting of restrictions on women's mobility" (*Seductive* 188). Whereas Amoranda turns to coquetry to defer subjection to marriage, Fantomina privatizes the masquerade to enjoy a release from gender restrictions on female sexuality.

Armed with active minds and freed from parental authority, Amoranda and Fantomina exert control over their plots by assuming the roles of playwright, stage-manager, and for Fantomina, actress, to direct the scripts of their narratives and the actions of others. The influence of the Restoration stage is one similarity critics do identify in the fiction by Davys[16] and Haywood. Of Davys, McBurney asserts, "no English novelist before Fielding – with the possible exception of Mrs. Aphra Behn – was so extensively influenced by the theater as Mrs. Davys" (Forerunner 351). He also observes the Restoration theatre's influence on Haywood, who began her career as an actress. McBurney writes, "In ... borrowing from the theater [Davys] was not an innovator .... apparent similarities ... of many characters and situations in the novels of Mrs. Eliza Haywood to those of heroic plays may be noted" (Forerunner 350). Davys and Haywood not only share a common historical moment, but they also both write fiction informed by the Restoration stage. Further, the two writers recognized how the stage empowered women, for as Williamson writes, "Women could read, and write, and act on the stage; these were all sources of

[16] Davys first appeared in print with her 1704 prose fiction, *The Amours of Alcippus and Lucippe*, but she made her literary debut in 1716 when her play *The Northern Heiress* ran three performances at Lincoln's Inn Fields. Davys only published one other play, *The Self-Rival* (1725), which was never produced. For further reading on Davys and the influence of the Restoration theatre, see McBurney, "Mrs. Mary Davys: Forerunner of Fielding" 350-2, 355, and Pearson, *Prostituted* 233-51.

limited but public power" (27). For Davys and Haywood, the stage-door opened to the public arena of literature. For Amoranda and Fantomina, the theatre-door opens to a stage on which the heroines write the script, design the set, and direct the action to achieve "public power" over their lives.

Amoranda's staging of the punishment of Froth and Callid exemplifies how she invokes the role of playwright and stage-manager to control the stage of her plot. She learns of the Froth/Callid conspiracy to abduct her for her money from her housekeeper, who, having overheard the two rakes conspiring in the "Summer-house," informs the heroine, "they began to lay a most dangerous Plot against you" (266). Bowden reads the summer-house as a metaphorical stage within the novel: "it can easily be imagined as a functional stage set: it is on two levels, which allows Callid and Froth to be overheard .... Its front windows allow it to be used as a little theater itself [and] we can look in at the various scenes going on there" (Introduction xxix). Froth and Callid plan to use Amoranda's summer-house as the stage upon which they will enact their scheme, for as the housekeeper relates, the heroine is "to be entertained with a Dance ... just at the Summer-house Window" (266-67). By setting their scheme in the summer-house, which is essentially Amoranda's stage as it stands on her property, Froth and Callid attempt to appropriate for themselves the heroine's theatrical space. In Davys's novel, however, the stage is a space of female action such that when Amoranda decides to "throw in [her] Counter-Plot among them and see who will come best off," she sets her plot on the summer-house stage to reclaim it from the male predators (267).

Despite Formator's arrival and her promise "to live under [his] Restrictions," Amoranda actively invents a new ending for Froth/Callid's scheme: "I design to place two sturdy Footmen, dressed in mine and *Jenny*'s Clothes, in the Summer-house ... the Footmen don't want Courage, and I hope my designed Injuries will give them resentment to it: I dare say they will give them love for love and pay them in their own coin" (267, 269). After she lets Formator into her plan, he requests her permission to play her character, asking her, "give me leave to personate you in the Summer-house tomorrow night" (269). Before she consents to cast him in her role, however, she makes him convince her he can play the part, for she does not believe that his "feeble Arm" will effectively punish the rakes (269). Amoranda boldly challenges, "they will make no more of you than they would of me myself," and it is only after Formator persuades her he can follow her stage directions of beating the rakes that she allows him to impersonate her (269). Though "Formator acts to prevent her abduction by two foolish suitors," it is Amoranda who casts him as herself and writes the part he acts (Ballaster, Women 204).

Sajé reads Formator's impersonation of the heroine as epitomizing his project of the "erasure of Amoranda" (172). She argues that in playing the heroine, Formator "not only speaks and acts *for her*, he speaks and acts *as her*" (Sajé 172). Sajé's argument is a compelling one, for certainly Formator does gain access to Amoranda's voice and actions by playing her part. Yet her argument does not acknowledge the fact that Amoranda still directs his actions, though from the wings of the stage. She gives him the cue to find a footman to

impersonate Jenny when she "called *Formator*, and bid him choose a Companion for the Exploit in hand," and he follows her directions accordingly: "*Formator* took the young Lady's advice, and went to choose a good sturdy fellow" (273). Though Formator is dressed as Amoranda, she controls his actions and in fact tells him when to act. Amoranda may give Formator her costume, but she does not give him her agency over the Froth/Callid script she writes.

Moreover, whereas Sajé argues that Formator not only acts as Amoranda but speaks as her, effectively usurping her voice, I suggest that Amoranda retains her own voice by opening and closing her play. Pearson finds that in Restoration drama, "Female characters are much more likely to open and close plays by women writers," which according to her, means the audience is "introduced to the dramatic world through their eyes" (*Prostituted* 64). Before Amoranda stages her play she states, "In short, everything we do, you construe to your own advantage: if we look easy and pleased in your Company, we are certainly in Love; if grave and reserved, 'tis to hide our Love" (272). To open her scene with a speech on the "contradiction of chastising woman for pleasing men while asking her to please them in a more modest and self-effacing way" is to introduce the stage through the woman's experience of the double standard (Sajé 167). Amoranda also makes sure she has the last word, reminding the beaten rakes, "I promised you a Supper and *Dessert*, and believe you have had both" (274). The heroine writes and directs the punishment of Froth and Callid, and though she casts Formator as herself, she remains in control of the summer-

house stage, opening and closing the scene as she renders the stage a site of female power, not male aggression.

It is not surprising when Davys's dramas are considered that she uses elements of the stage to empower the heroine of a fiction about female oppression. Pearson writes, "Both Davys' comedies allow women to dominate at all levels," and both "take an interest in women not under male control" (*Prostituted* 240). The heroine of Davys's prose fiction is, on the other hand, firmly under male control at the time of the Froth/Callid plot. To clear a space in which her heroine can exercise power, Davys turns to the model of the Restoration stage, transforming her heroine into a metaphorical playwright and stage-manager. In such roles, Amoranda can access the power, if limited, that women found in the theatre to protect herself from male predation and to control the actions of those around her.

While the summer-house serves as a stage within Davys's novel, Haywood first introduces her heroine in the playhouse, the space in which the narrative begins. The narrator writes, "A Young Lady ... happened to be in a Box one Night at the Playhouse; where ... she perceived several Gentlemen extremely pleased themselves with entertaining a Woman" (227). The heroine's theatrical context sets the stage for her invocation of playhouse roles and inspires her to write her first disguise. Audience to the courtship game she views at the playhouse, Fantomina learns how to play the part of the prostitute, "practicing as much as she had observed at that Distance the Behavior of that Woman" (227). Through her "intentional production of a spectacle" in her first

role, she wins "A Crowd of Purchasers," gaining an audience for herself on her own stage of seduction (Craft-Fairchild 62). The heroine's initial role-playing serves as the first act in her narrative drama, as her "spectacle" expands to include further disguises, dramatic sets, and seduction scenes. Christine Blouch concludes, "The rest of the text might be said to operate as a play within a play" (What 312). As Fantomina takes over the stage of her narrative, she assumes various theatrical roles: script-writer, to create various roles for herself; stage-manager, to build the sets and direct the actors; and actress, to "'re-enact' the scene of seduction," the woman's moment of power (Ballaster, *Seductive* 189).

After Fantomina writes her first part as the prostitute, she commands the set, realizing that since her virtue is at stake she must decide the terms upon which she meets Beauplaisir. She therefore "took Lodgings in a House" not far from the playhouse, "thinking she might with more Security to her Honour entertain him at a Place where she was Mistress, than at any of his own choosing" (229). As stage-manager, Fantomina discovers the power to direct the scene of seduction by setting the stage to her advantage. Blouch suggests that Fantomina's management of the site of sexual intrigue marks her active agency: "It is ... Fantomina who engages the room, one of the transitions from passive to active that signals her assumption of authorship" (What 313). To choose the set is to assert active agency over the amatory plot that unfolds therein and to claim control over the subsequent script of seduction. When the narrator describes the set as demonstrating that "the Director neither wanted Money nor was ignorant how it should be laid out," she emphasizes Fantomina's

power over the scene (230). As "Director," Fantomina authors and authorizes the amatory plot she writes and stages.

Just as Amoranda dictates the roles and actions of her fellow players, Fantomina both composes the script of her co-actors and actively recruits them. As Incognita, she convinces two men from the "*Mall*" to act as her messengers, instructing them to "be so careful in your Replies" so as to "refus[e] to make [Beauplaisir] Partaker in the Secret" (242). She recruits the two men according to their ability to play the parts she has written, for if they fall out of character and reveal her person, she will lose control over her sexuality, plot, and reputation. Thus, she warns the men, "the Business is only an innocent Frolic, but if blazed abroad, might be taken for too great a Freedom in me" (241). Blouch argues that Fantomina's ability to satisfy her sexual desires depends upon her scripting of the amatory plot's body language. She writes, "The young lady's increasing control of her sexuality is ... located squarely in her control of language and a corresponding understanding of Beauplaisir's – especially his body language" (Blouch, What 313). It is true that in each disguise Fantomina follows a specific script of body language that determines each plot's scene of seduction. The heroine's control over the literal speech of the actors in her masquerade is also, however, crucial to her ability to direct the scene of seduction, for as long as they follow her script, her plot is acted out and her reputation held intact.

Like Amoranda, who directs Formator's actions during his time on her stage, Fantomina finds that the metaphorical roles of the theatre allow her to

manage Beauplaisir's physical and verbal responses. The difference between the two heroines lies in the way they claim agency for themselves: Amoranda directs the action from the wings of the stage, while Fantomina casts herself in the leading role. Haywood's narrator repeatedly emphasizes the theatrical skill of the heroine, who "was so admirably skilled in the Art of feigning, that she had the Power of putting on almost what Face she pleased" (238). That Fantomina can successfully don any "Face" she pleases highlights her power over the game, for in choosing her role she establishes the terms of the amatory plot. Catherine Craft-Fairchild explains how through her masks, the heroine "manipulat[es] the terms of her own representation instead of being manipulated by them" (64). To control her representation through her choice of costumes and sets is to direct Beauplaisir's actions, for he changes his method of seduction to match each identity she presents. When she dresses as the country maid Celia she "feigns extreme youth, innocence, and naïveté" (Craft-Fairchild 63). Beauplaisir predictably responds to Celia's youthfulness by playfully asking her "If she had ever been in Love? and many other such Questions, befitting one of the Degree she appeared to be" (235). As the Widow Bloomer, she "appears helpless and poor," evoking pity in Beauplaisir, who responds not with the playfulness of the Celia intrigue, but with a "complaisant and tender Air" (Craft-Fairchild 63; 236). Fantomina takes on the roles of playwright, stage-manager, and actress to control her lover and the ensuing amatory plot, for with each disguise she fabricates, a new seduction scene transpires.

Moreover, by forcing Beauplaisir to alter his act of seduction according to her identities, Fantomina reverses the gender paradigm that defines "the women's role as stereotypically reactive rather than active" (Perry 22). That she initiates and controls the various intrigues ensures that he can only ever react to her choice of identity and scene. Though Fantomina changes costumes to maintain his interest, as he "varied not so much from his Sex as to be able to prolong Desire, to any great Length after Possession," her "inventing Brain" anticipates his waning desire by creating a new disguise before he has time to reject the previous one (233, 235). The heroine's pattern of deliberately donning fresh disguises before Beauplaisir can reject her establishes her as an active, rather than reactive force. Whereas the stage in Davys's text offers a space for women to assert control over men in order to protect themselves, the stage in Haywood's novel provides a space in which women can display and act upon their sexuality as they please.

Another way that Amoranda and Fantomina claim agency over their plots is through writing letters. Perry explains that letter-writing was one literary activity allowed to women because, among other reasons, "it was a format that required no formal education" (17). Amoranda thus turns to the epistolary genre because it is a literary form available to her and because it allows her to direct her speech outward. Bowden writes that in Davys's novel, "all thirteen letters ... are not ornaments to the plot but essential devices for furthering the story" (Introduction xxviii). To motivate the Lord Lofty/Altemira marriage, Amoranda writes letters, furthering the plot according to her own

ends. After she learns of Altemira's ruin by Lofty she states, "till I see you as firmly his as he has promised you should be, I will never leave contriving" (283-84). By now, Formator has fully embarked on his edifying efforts: "he provided a choice Collection of Books for her, spent most of his time with her, diverted her with a thousand pleasant Stories" (275). Amoranda's education and character development are clearly under Formator's control, for he chooses what she reads and dictates the stories she hears. Despite his power over her education, however, the heroine continues to claim agency over those around her when she composes the letters that lead to the Lofty/Altemira union.

To achieve her goal of reinstating Altemira's virtue, Amoranda commands the ruined woman to write a letter to Lofty and tells her what to write: "you will write a Letter to Lord *Lofty*, to let him know you have recovered the Bond and Contract" (284). By directing Altemira's actions and determining her speech, Amoranda effectively takes control over the plot, a control further emphasized by the narrator, who insists "neither *Altemira* or *Formator* knew anything of her Design" (285). Amoranda chooses letter-writing as the medium through which to enact her design because it allows her to exert agency over the recipient, whose position on the receiving end necessarily renders him reactive. After directing Altemira's letter, she writes her own letter to Lofty, in which she sets up a time for "an Interview" with him (284). That Amoranda initiates the correspondence with Lofty establishes her agency over him, for not only does she choose the time and place for their

meeting, but in demanding his presence she also assumes his willingness to follow her directions, thereby implying his non-agency in the event.

At the same time that the heroine writes a letter to motivate Lofty into action, she returns to the role of stage-manager to direct Altemira's disguise as herself, for she "desired *Altemira* to come in and dress her in the same Gown she had put on" (288). In the Lofty/Altemira plot, Amoranda controls the narrative both in her words, through letter-writing, and in her actions, as stage-director. When Lofty falls prey to her plot, marrying Altemira rather than herself, Amoranda reverses the gender paradigm to give the man away in marriage: "I have given you to one, who has the best right to you" (289). Duped by the woman he initially categorized as "a young unthinking Girl," Lofty has no choice but to "show himself a Man of Honour at last" (289). Though Formator has increasingly taken control over Amoranda so that when Altemira arrives dressed as a man, the heroine "dared do nothing without *Formator*," she exercises agency over Lofty and Altemira when she picks up the pen to write the narrative of their union (276). Williamson recognizes Amoranda's influence over the Lofty/Altemira marriage when she writes, "Amoranda manipulates Lord Lofty into reforming from the predatory male to the married man" (243). Through letter-writing, the genre that enabled female speech and action, Amoranda actively claims control over the narrative and in so doing resists Formator's increasing restriction of her activity.

Fantomina's letters, like those of Amoranda, also motivate narrative action and render male characters reactive recipients, for as Fletcher writes,

"Speech ... proposes and initiates" (12). After meeting Beauplaisir as the Widow Bloomer, she writes him two letters, one as the Widow and the other as Fantomina: "she wrote to him to visit her the first Opportunity, and enquire for the Widow *Bloomer*, -- She had no sooner dispatched this Billet, than she ... wrote to him, in a different Hand, a long Letter of Complaint" (238-39). Fantomina's letters initiate instant response from the rake, as "[s]he received in one Day Answers to both" (239). Moreover, the content and tone of his letters necessarily depend on hers, as she proposes the terms of the correspondence by writing first. He therefore writes "To the Charming Mrs. *Bloomer*" that "Never did any look like you, -- write like you," and "To the Lovely *Fantomina*" that he has not been "unfaithful" to her (239). Through letters, Fantomina discovers another way to control Beauplaisir physically and verbally. Beauplaisir's letters also, as Margaret Case Croskery argues, reveal how little agency he has in the amatory plot, for though he thinks he is fooling Fantomina when he claims fidelity, "he has not yet been unfaithful" (87). Croskery writes, "Beauplaisir's clever fictions cannot fool the woman who creates the fictions of her own desire" (87). By taking the pen first, Fantomina forces Beauplaisir to react either with passion or defense and exposes his impotency in "cracking the amatory codes" she has mastered (Croskery 87).

While both Davys and Haywood create heroines who similarly exhibit active agency, the authors' metaphoric use of the masquerade differs greatly. Terry Castle idealizes the public institution of the masquerade as a "feminocracy," describing the event as one "pervaded by female desire,

authority, [and] influence" (254). She writes, "For respectable women masquerade anonymity meant freedom from social constraint," freedom "to circulate – not as a commodity placed in circulation by men, but according to her own pleasure" (Castle 254-55). Castle's valorization of the masquerade as a female utopia has been much invoked in discussions of Haywood's work. Mary Anne Schofield argues that in *Fantomina*, Haywood demonstrates how "through masking, women are able to discover a true self that can stand in opposition to the male-controlling ideologies of female powerlessness and romantic love" (47). Fantomina does refuse "female powerlessness" by conjuring up new disguises when Beauplaisir loses interest, for she, "wisely considering that Complaints, Tears, Swoonings, and all the Extravagancies which Women make use of in such Cases have little Prevalence over a Heart inclined to rove ... resolved to take another course" (233-34). The course she resolves upon is a course of action achieved through privatization of the masquerade, which allows her to circulate freely with Beauplaisir and to gratify her sexual desires.

Conversely, Davys's use of the masquerade metaphor, critics argue, works to dis-empower Amoranda, the only character who never dons a mask. Sajé identifies how "instances of disguise in the novel hide male power so that it can work more efficiently" (172). After Formator's identity as Alanthus is revealed, Amoranda demands a reason for his disguise, to which he replies: "I thought the sage Advice you stood in need of would sound more natural and be better received from an old mouth than a young one," and "I thought you would be more open and free, in declaring your real Sentiments of everything to me"

(316). Alanthus's disguise does, in fact, enable him to achieve his goals, for she heeds his advice on the virtues of female silence and submissiveness and openly reveals her passion for Alanthus to him. Biranthus's disguise as Berintha provides another example of how in Davys's novel "The power of males to disguise themselves physically ... is ancillary to their power to disguise their motives," as his female dress hides his intent to rape her (Sajé 172). In Amoranda's world, masks empower men by allowing them to cover their persons and intentions in order to access the female mind and body. Davys's masquerade is no feminocracy. Yet Castle does identify other literary uses of the masquerade when she writes of the event's "catalytic effect on plot" (118). Though Amoranda never dresses in costume herself, she does direct others, such as Formator and Altemira, to don disguises in order to motivate the action of her plots. While it cannot be argued that disguises empower women in Davys's text as in Haywood's, I suggest that Amoranda does actively employ the mask for its catalytic effect on plot to achieve her ends.

Even in *Fantomina*, however, the masquerade metaphor fails to provide an unproblematic vision of female empowerment. Each of Fantomina's chosen identities is, in fact, a stereotypically powerless female role: the prostitute, the daughter, the maid, the financially ruined widow, and the faceless domino who is, despite being rich, identity-less, "utterly blank" (Ballaster, *Seductive* 191). Craft-Fairchild observes that the heroine, in her privatized masquerade, "reconstructs traditional images of subordinate, helpless femininity" (63). That Fantomina's identities have female powerlessness inscribed in them complicates

a simple reading of her masquerade as one that "stand[s] in opposition to the male-controlling ideologies of female powerlessness" (Schofield 47). In the end, the heroine can only choose the roles available to women, roles defined by the culture that represses female speech and action.

Hobby explains that women's "capitulation or resistance is not free or self-determined: it can normally only occur within the limits and on the terms of the framework set by the dominant group, men" (8). Fantomina can attempt to "escape from masculine closure through re-enactment of fictional feminine identities," but the possible feminine identities themselves are pre-defined by the framework of the masculine, dominant group (Ballaster, *Seductive* 195). Moreover, the heroine knows that once the masquerade ends, her control over her sexuality and reputation crumbles: "the Intrigue being a Secret, my Disgrace will be so too" (232). Williamson argues that in some of her fictions Haywood represents women's desire for power to demonstrate just how "powerless women really are" (235). In *Fantomina*, Haywood depicts a heroine who achieves power through her privatization of the masquerade, but whose limited choice of masks and whose dependency on the masquerade underline her essential powerlessness.

At the end of both texts, the active heroines also lose their agency, as one ends married and the other banished. As in the fictions of Behn and Barker, the ambiguous conclusions of the works by Davys and Haywood stem from the narrators' own ambivalence toward the possibility of independent female action. Davys and her narrator both vacillate between complicity with and resistance

against the cultural assumption that the husband "was supposed to map out the limits of [the woman's] world" (Hobby 3). The author's dedication reveals acceptance of the marriage institution when she implores women to choose the best husband possible: "One little word of Advice, Ladies .... choose a Man with fine Sense ... and let him have some Merit as well" (253). Since she cannot change the woman's gender-inscribed role as wife, she seeks to instruct her on how "to control her life as much as possible within the extremely narrow confines of society" (Williamson 243). If women cannot choose an ending other than marriage, they can at least exert control over the choice of husband.

On the surface, Davys's narrator continues to express complicity by condemning female autonomy and instructing women "to repudiate the faults seen as specially feminine" (Spencer, *Rise* 144). The narrator repeatedly judges Amoranda for her "Vanity, which is most Women's Foible," complying with cultural assumptions of women's natural desire for flattery (257). She also continually argues against women's ability to govern themselves, exclaiming, "What an unhappy Creature is a beautiful young Girl left to her own Management" (264). The heroine must learn through her reform that as a woman, she cannot manage her own life. Yet in the dedication and preface to the novel it is Davys, the author of a tale of women's reform into silence, who invokes the role of the coquette and asserts her independence. She writes, "But she who has assurance to write has certainly the vanity of expecting to be read: All Authors see a Beauty in their own Compositions" (252). Davys gazes on her novel with the same self-indulgence as the coquette, who gazes at herself in

the mirror. Sajé identifies the author's paradoxical coquettishness when she writes, "The author, like the coquette, transgresses notions of the feminine by her will to power" (166). Davys exhibits her "will to power" in her preface, wherein she claims sole agency over the authorship of the book, asserting, "I only am accountable for every Fault of my Book; and if it has any Beauties, I claim the Merit of them too" (254). Though she admits to receiving encouragement from the "Gentlemen" at Cambridge, she maintains full responsibility for the work (254). In a text ostensibly intended to teach young girls that they cannot govern themselves, it is noteworthy that the author coquettishly commands power for herself.

Davys's narrator implicitly resists the notion of female dependency and the confinement of female action by representing reform as repressive. Ballaster writes, "as the almost sinister manipulativeness of Formator indicates, women novelists were also aware that confining women to domestic and private moralities could be as oppressive a tyranny as viewing them solely as sexual playthings and targets for male lust" (Women 206). Davys purports to write a novel that teaches women to abandon coquetry, which renders women "sexual playthings," but she presents reform of coquetry as the woman's abdication of agency and self. Sajé writes, Davys "suggests that a reformed coquette is a woman whose will, voice, and financial power have been expunged" (165-66). To coquettishly claim agency and independence in the dedication and preface, and to depict reform as involving distrust, fear, as Amoranda becomes "afraid of everybody," and silence, is to criticize, if not to resist, the domestic ideology

that confines women to male dependency in marriage (276). Davys's ambivalence, which is reflected in her narrator, explains how a text about female submission in marriage also encodes a subtext of the negative cost of female reform.

Haywood's narrator also evinces ambivalence toward the possibility for female action when she complicates a clear sense of her heroine's agency by emphasizing the overwhelming power of passion. Richetti writes, "Fantomina's masquerade is inventive self-expressiveness, but very quickly her sexual play serves mainly to reveal the strength of inner compulsions and irresistible attraction" (*English* 85). According to him, passion impels Fantomina to embark on the masquerade designed to achieve sexual gratification. When the heroine first dresses as the prostitute, the narrator writes, "Strange and unaccountable ... Whimsies she was possessed of, - wild and Incoherent her Desires, - unfixed and undetermined her Resolutions" (229). Here is a heroine whose sexual passion is so overwhelming it absolves her of agency, as her "Resolutions" become "undetermined" and her actions controlled by the power of passion itself. Williamson argues that "[b]ecause [Haywood's] thinking was based on the institution in which women were subordinate, she had trouble imagining them as successfully empowered in their own right or truly independent" (239). Haywood's narrator explains Fantomina's active agency as the inevitable result of the external force of passion because of her own ambivalence toward the potential for independent female agency.

Fantomina's public ruin and banishment after having enjoyed free reign over her sexuality further reveals the narrator's ambivalence about the extent to which women can control their lives. Yet as many critics have noted, the narrator "never formally chastises [her] heroine" for asserting herself and her sexuality (Croskery 92). Croskery contends that "Haywood's heroines are rarely punished simply for experiencing sexual desire, nor are they always punished for acting upon it" (70). Though critics tend to read Fantomina's conclusion as entirely, or at least ambiguously positive, she is forcibly banished by her mother, who represents her culture's morality. Even as the heroine's mother sends her away, however, the narrator refuses to condemn or judge the heroine's acts. Instead, she concludes the novel on a note of near-admiration: "And thus ended an Intrigue, which, considering the Time it lasted, was as full of Variety as any, perhaps, that many Ages has produced" (248). Regardless of critical interpretation of Fantomina's conclusion, the narrator's refusal to judge Fantomina for her transgressions does present an unambiguous, though implicit, final act of resistance against cultural repression and condemnation of female sexuality.

Davys and Haywood, in *The Reformed Coquet* and *Fantomina*, attempt to establish a space in which women can actively exercise agency over their lives, yet they do so with ultimate skepticism toward the fantasy of female empowerment. The fact that they create heroines who effectively claim agency for themselves for the greater part of their texts does, however, demonstrate that in the end, "as much as [they] accepted the constraints of [their] society, [they]

also wrote ... to aid women in their struggle for survival within existing social structures" (Williamson 239). Through Amoranda and Fantomina, Davys and Haywood envision the possibility for freedom of female action and sexuality, imagining heroines whose temporary moment of power resists the reality of women's "subordinate positions in key social institutions" (Hobby 8).

Morality Tales: Behn and Davys

Though Behn and Davys fail to achieve a vision of lasting female agency in their heroines, they successfully exercise authorial agency over the texts they write by questioning the social and literary conventions upheld in the morality tale. According to Ballaster, the female author, as the "scriptor," discovers the agency her heroine cannot through her authorial control over the narrative (Women 202). She writes, "Female mastery lies ... in the act of representation itself, the act of narration which is foregrounded as the only place for the imitation of masculine mastery without personal cost for women" (Ballaster, Women 210). In her view, "[the] author evades the need for a male protector precisely because the novel allows her to enter a form of authoritative discourse without the 'risk' of physical display of her own proper body (the heroine stands as surrogate)" (Ballaster, Women 198). I agree that the authors' bodies and assertions of female autonomy remain protected by their novelistic frames, whereas the heroines of their novels, Isabella and Amoranda, are exposed to the social morality that sends them to the executioner's block and the wedding altar. I also recognize that Behn and Davys, as the originators of the texts, possess a power over the narrative the heroines cannot. I further suggest, however, that

the authors achieve authorial agency not simply through "imitation of masculine mastery" of literary convention, but by identifying and challenging the ideological assumptions encoded within the moral frame itself: female virtue and the woman's need for male protection and guidance.

Lennard J. Davis studies the relationship between ideology and fiction to argue that novels are products of ideology, which he defines as "a system of beliefs of a particular group or class," and therefore perpetuate ideology (51). He writes, "Novels make sense because of ideology; they embody ideologies; and they promulgate ideology" (Davis 25). For Davis, no novel can ever successfully resist or rise out of the system of beliefs that governs its production and circulation. Yet he also defines ideology as the "false ideas or false consciousness" generated by a culture to help explain and cope with the harsh realities of social experience (Davis 51). It is this last-mentioned definition of ideology I will apply to my study of how Behn and Davys create a series of paradoxes to expose the falsity of the ideas of femininity that govern the frame of the morality tale, as well as the woman's lived experience. In contrast to Davis's assertion, the authors do release their novels from the "ideological straitjacket" that entraps their heroines by exerting agency over the social and generic conventions that inscribe the engendered ideologies of female virtue and dependency (Fletcher 395).

Hobby explains that the dominant ideology defined femininity in terms of sexuality, requiring women to be "first and foremost, sexually chaste" (9). The cultural emphasis on female chastity stemmed in part from male anxiety

over sexual women, for as Fletcher writes, "a good many men at least were deeply concerned about women's supposed sexual voraciousness" (377). Male concern over female sexuality worked to establish the cultural judgment that sexual women were, in fact, bad women. While society condemned female sexuality as immoral, it also "perceived [women] as the more lustful sex" (Hobby 2). Women therefore had to overcome their supposedly inherent and immoral sexual voraciousness in order to achieve the moral height expected of them, for though they were perceived as desirous, they were also expected to "reform morals" in others and particularly in their husbands (Backscheider, Women Writers 254). Because of the belief in women's innate lustfulness, however, "[a] chaste reputation was hard to gain and easy to lose" (Hobby 2-3). In essence, women had to work harder than men to quell their insatiable "carnal appetite," meaning that female morality was held to a higher standard than male morality (Hobby 2). For women to pacify their sexual passions and "cure [their husbands'] imperfections by virtue and example," they had to be, in effect, more virtuous than men (Fletcher 387).

To manage their voracious sexuality, women, considered the weaker of the sexes, needed external structures of authority, "they need[ed] all the resources of religion and social morality" (Spacks, Ev'ry 41). Religion gave women the moral structure necessary to control the unruly passions within; thus, piety became the measure of female virtue, or goodness, and by extension of female chastity. In the opening of Behn's text, the narrator conforms to social prescriptions of pious female virtue, or chastity, by describing Isabella as the

heroine whose fastidious devotion renders her the ideal figure of femininity. She writes, "now she has so entirely wedded her future days to devotion and given all to Heaven ... [she] lives here a life more like a saint than a woman; rather an angel than a mortal creature" (16). By likening the virtuous woman to a saint or an angel, Behn's narrator suggests that the cultural emphasis on female chastity and virtue holds the heroine to a state of sainthood, a state more pure and less human than mortal womanhood. In fact, Isabella's adherence to pious practices is so exemplary she becomes "a proverb, and a precedent," so that "when [the nuns] would express a very holy woman ... they would say, 'She was a very Isabella'" (11). To become the paragon of female virtue, the heroine must rise above the moral standards of humanity. In Isabella, Behn creates a deliberately exaggerated image of female virtue to expose the contradictory ideological expectation that women exhibit inhumanly high standards of morality and to explore the consequences for women of such engendered assumptions.

While Behn questions the cultural idealization of femininity, she challenges the dominant definition of female virtue through her choice of dedicatee: the Duchess of Mazarine, who broke her marriage vows to live an unconventional life as a mistress in Charles II's court. Though her title promises to "punish female vice and crime," in her dedication she expresses "awe and reverence" for a woman who has committed the crime of marital vow-breaking (Pearson, History 244; 2). Pearson argues that the dedication "help[s] to provide a frame that subverts the simple moral tale that the novella appears to

offer" (History 244). Though Behn purports to write a narrative that punishes female vice, she complicates her moral frame from the start by examining the cultural criteria for female goodness. As Pearson writes, Behn's choice of dedicatee "gives a different slant to a tale ostensibly about broken vows, suggesting that subjection to the church or to a husband need not necessarily be a virtue" (History 244). Where Behn finds in the Duchess a female figure to be "adored," she suggests that women's exemplariness need not necessarily stem from pious or wifely devotion (3). Skeptical about the implications of linking women's virtue with her piety, a link that expects the heavenly of earthly women, Behn offers another example of admirable, though unconventional femininity. Through her dedication, Behn asserts agency over the social convention that defines female virtue by religious and marital oaths, and over the generic form that expects the dedication of a tale of the punishment of female vice to be to a conventional model of angelic female morality.

The narrator's opening condemnation of vow-breakers, however, upholds the novel's moralistic title and frame. She declares, "Of all the sins incident to human nature, there is none of which Heaven has took so particular, visible, and frequent notice and revenge as that of violated vows, which never go unpunished" (3). Isabella's final punishment in death is depicted from the beginning as the unavoidable outcome of her monastic and marital vow-breaking. In her politicized reading of the text, Ballaster argues that the heroine's vow-breaking is itself an inevitable consequence of the "destructive confrontation between a concept of absolute moral justice ... and the

contingencies of political and social survival" (*Seductive* 83). She sees Isabella's inability to maintain her oaths as reflective of the shifts in religious and political affiliations in the post-1688 era. I also suggest that Behn's skepticism about the ideology of pious female virtue and its expectations and implications for women offers another reason for the inevitability of Isabella's fall. In Behn's narrative, the heroine cannot help but break her religious and marital vows because both require her to maintain a saintly state of morality, a contradictory, if not impossible, expectation for a mortal woman.

As previously observed, Isabella finally decides to leave the nunnery for Henault when her piety fails her: "She had tried fasting long, praying fervently, rigid penances and pains ... to conquer the unruly flame; but still it burnt and raged but the more" (24). The narrator explains that the heroine sinfully acts upon her love because "she was human and no angel" (24). Isabella has tried to maintain her angelic piety, which has thus far made her the exemplar of female virtue, but the pressure to uphold an infallible, saintly state proves untenable for the mere human female. As a mortal woman, she cannot fulfill her society's idealization of the angelic, chaste female figure. Of Isabella's descent, Craft concludes, "As any Restoration reader familiar with earlier satires would know, such a paragon is destined to fall" (823). Isabella does fall because she cannot maintain the heavenly height of her virtue, yet her tumble from near sainthood is not simply a product of literary convention. Rather, Behn exercises authorial agency over the genre of the morality tale, which upholds the ideology of

female virtue, to depict the fall of the pious heroine as the inevitable consequence of the cultural paradox that holds women to heavenly standards.

Fletcher explains that in the eighteenth century, it was thought that through "their piety women were able to turn their natures to good account" (386). He writes, "Femininity begins to see the light of day as a set of positive virtues" governed by piety, the most "crucial virtue" of all (Fletcher 386). Behn, however, depicts pious female virtue as a negative force that paradoxically impels Isabella to commit her murderous crimes. By the time of Henault's return, the heroine has, through her exemplary piety and wifely devotion, "acquired a reputation such as never any young beauty had" (31). She is virtuous like no other mortal woman, even after having broken her monastic and marital vows. Henault's return, however, seriously threatens to destroy her virtue and ruin her reputation by revealing her as a bigamist, which carries with it the implications of disloyalty and sexual activity. The narrator writes, "She finds by his return that she is not only exposed to all the shame imaginable ... but all ... the scorn of the town, who will look on her as an adulteress" (35). Held up as the paragon of female goodness, Isabella has a long way to fall, and aware of the stakes of her exposure, she decides to murder Henault and cover up the act so as to keep her reputation intact.

Isabella thus "resolved upon the murder of Henault, as the only means of removing all obstacles to her future happiness" (37). Suddenly, the heroine's virtuous precedent becomes the destructive force that causes her to murder her first husband, for only by maintaining the "glory" of her unprecedented

reputation can she ensure her "future happiness" (35). In her murderous heroine, Behn presents the ideal figure of femininity in order to illustrate, in effect, the process of "great virtue turning into great vice" (Spencer, *Afterlife* 128). Even Villenoys's death results from the need to protect Isabella's virtuous reputation. Villenoys only volunteers to throw the body in the river to "save Isabella's honor," but it is his offer that provides the heroine with the opportunity to dispose of both husbands at once (38). Though Isabella can release herself from the confines of the nunnery and shift her wifely devotion between men, she cannot free herself from the ideological expectation of saintly femininity, turning to extreme acts of murder to maintain her exemplary status. Through Isabella's fall from glory, a fall she ironically takes to protect her perfect reputation, Behn reveals the price women must pay to conform to an ultimately destructive definition of female virtue.

Not only does Isabella's unprecedented virtue impel her to kill both her husbands, it also paradoxically enables the murders by serving as a foil for her violent actions. Her reputation as an innocent, honest woman wins her public trust, which she quickly learns to use to her advantage, as when she frees herself from the nunnery with the "key of the monastery [which was] often intrusted in her keeping ... whose virtue and discretion was infallible and out of doubt" (24). Spacks explains how innocence can cover female transgressions when she writes, "Innocence might provide a valuable screen to hide behind; for this purpose the appearance of innocence was perhaps more useful than the reality" (Ev'ry 32). Isabella's innocence is, in effect, only an appearance, for as Pearson

notes, the heroine is an "active sinner ... [and her] innocence is at best debatable" (History 237). Yet it is her appearance as the ideal, virtuous woman, not the reality of her sinfulness, which ensures the success of her murders. Her reputation has led to the general belief in her goodness and disbelief in the possibility of her sinfulness; therefore, she is neither suspected nor condemned until her own confession.

Persuaded by Isabella's convincing "screen" of innocence, Maria never "imagined the truth" of the heroine's murderous intentions toward Henault, thinking she "knew her lady's prudence too well to question her conduct" (36). It is Isabella's virtuous reputation that allows her to go through with the violent crime because it hides her transgressive plans behind a display of goodness. Her virtue even screens the guilt she suffers after murdering Henault, for though her "accusing" conscience causes her to "[weep] in a most violent manner," Villenoys remains wholly unassuming and entirely confident in the power of her virtue (38). He states, "I know thou art too good to commit a sin I may not with honour pardon" (38). In Behn's text, however, the conventional power of virtue to withstand sinful temptations and actions turns into the power that inspires and instigates transgressive actions.

Miraculously, Isabella maintains her reputation throughout the text so that even after Villenoys's dead body opens its eyes to accuse her, "the world, instead of suspecting her, adored her the more" (41). That an ex-nun and twice murderess can continue to be "adored" as the exemplar of female piety and goodness calls into question the very definition of female virtue. Pearson

argues that "Isabella's innocence is ... a fiction of conventional femininity that she acts out" (History 237). The contradiction between Isabella's actions and reputation undermines the ideological definition of female virtue as the product of piety: though Isabella is pious to the end - as the narrator writes, "[w]hile she was in prison, she was always at prayers" - she is not, finally, virtuous (42). At the novel's conclusion, the paragon of femininity turns out to be a fictional model, and the notion that female virtue stems from piety surfaces as a false construct of ideology. Finally, Isabella's fall suggests that defining female virtue according to pious and wifely devotion does not lead to a positive expression of femininity, but rather to ruinous ends, for it is pious female virtue that enables, as it hides, murderous acts.

In the final execution scene, Behn demonstrates the full destructiveness of the ideology that holds women to a heavenly morality by revealing that Isabella can only ascend to the idealized state of saintly femininity in death and martyrdom. Spacks explains that in eighteenth-century novels, the "moral may support the proclaimed standards of society while its 'tendency' ... encourages questioning and challenge" (*Desire* 11). On the one hand, condemning the heroine to "lose her head" supports the moral framework of the novel, which is governed by the "standards of society" that proclaim the punishment of female vice (42). Even Isabella's reaction to her death sentence seems to fulfill the moral, as she "joyfully received" her punishment and "said Heaven and her judges were too merciful to her and that her sins had deserved much more" (42). Messenger argues that the heroine is "cheerful because her approaching

punishment proves that God is in His heaven and that the moral order ... is real" (51). Isabella's decapitation, therefore, brings her transgressive acts back within the morality of social and literary conventions.

On the other hand, the fact that the heroine can only fulfill her society's idealized vision of virtuous femininity in death emphasizes the essential destructiveness to women of the definition of female virtue as a state of angelic piety. When Isabella confesses her sins, "The whole world stood amazed," "and every one bewailed her misfortune" (42). With her confession the angelic heroine admits her humanity and thus, her inherent fallibility. Once she is raised on the executioner's block, she paradoxically becomes the moralizing voice of the narrative, "exhorting daily the young and the fair ... never to break a vow" (42). Isabella's lectures, which appear to serve the moral frame, also work to solidify her moral exemplariness and thereby ensure her martyrdom, for after the executioner "at one blow severed her beautiful head from her delicate body .... She was generally lamented and honorably buried" (42). Though Isabella is condemned to death, she is not condemned in public thought: she receives an honorable burial, unlike most murderers of the seventeenth century, whose bodies were dishonorably discarded. The heroine's respectable burial symbolizes her rise in death to an eternal state of saintly female virtue, a state she could not achieve or maintain while human.

Furthermore, in rendering her sinful heroine a martyred saint, Behn subverts the genre's moral judgment of female transgression, ironically turning her heroine's earthly condemnation into heavenly commendation. That despite

her guilt, Isabella continues to be praised and even idealized by the narrator as well as the "whole world," and that she receives a proper burial, draws into question just how much vice is actually punished in the end. Pearson argues that in Behn's texts, "since female autonomy ... is likely to prove disastrous .... the presence of the female narrator presents a counter-message, as her powerful imagination creates the text and subverts it" (Gender 49). Finally, it is Behn-the-author who claims agency over the moral framework she subverts: she exposes the contradictions and devastating consequences of the ideology of female virtue in order to destabilize the cultural and generic conventions of the morality tale that encodes the notion of saintly femininity.

If Behn asserts authorial agency over the morality tale by questioning the ideology of pious femininity it upholds, Davys exercises agency over the reform novel by challenging the cultural assumption that women need male guidance. Spacks explains how society "expected women to be like children in their incapacity to make their own decisions, control their own lives" (Ev'ry 46). The cultural process of infantilizing women was further enforced by eighteenth-century inheritance laws and financial practices, which Perry argues served to "emphasize the dependence and child-like status of women" (31). A woman could not support herself and furthermore, upon marriage, her money and possessions became the property of her husband. The cumulative effect of such social and legal practices was to determine and ensure that women were necessarily dependent on men physically, emotionally, and financially. Women were therefore taught to believe they could not govern themselves, for as

Spacks writes, "Deprived, like children, of real responsibility, they long, like children, for authority figures" (Ev'ry 46).

Davys's text opens on the young and willful Amoranda, who forcefully "thrust[s]" her male admirer "from her with the utmost Contempt, and bid him see her no more," for she "was now resolved to be a woman" (256). The episode functions as proof of her need for reform, as well as serves to contrast the adult Amoranda, who, having been successfully educated out of will, learns, "we foolish Girls are not to be trusted with ourselves" (292). Formator, the male guardian imposed upon her by her uncle's authority, has effectively "taught [her] to believe [women] are the worst Guardians [they] can possibly have" (292). Though Amoranda has grown into a woman of marriageable age, her reform has entailed a "regression to childhood" (Sajé 168). She turns from the young girl who throws a boy from her to the woman who, when threatened with rape, can only call for the aid and protection of male authority: "Oh, *Formator*! did you but know my Distress, you would come to my Relief .... Oh wretched me! what shall I do?" (297-98). Despite her age the heroine, like a child, seems unable to make good decisions on her own (it is because she chose to join Berintha/Biranthus on the river that she becomes threatened with rape) and is incapable of protecting herself. Male protection and guidance is therefore necessary.

Spencer identifies Davys's reform novel as part of "a tradition of conformity" to male authority (*Rise* 140). She describes the novel as one that "combines love story and moral lesson, and reflects the sexual hierarchy

established in society" (*Rise* 145). On the surface, Davys's novel does conform to the "sexual hierarchy established in society," for Amoranda learns the "moral lesson" that she cannot govern herself and accepts submission to male authority in marriage. Yet as Sajé argues, the coquette's reform also "provides a site for the critique and regulation of women's self-expression and economic power" (165). Where reform requires renunciation of "self-expression and economic power," as it does in Amoranda, it also reveals the cost of reform to women: annihilation of agency and voice.

One way in which Davys asserts authorial agency over the reform novel's ideological assumption that men provide women with necessary moral guidance and protection is through her emphasis on the violent nature of the male characters. That Amoranda's context is one of male aggression is established in the opening of the novel when Lofty, wandering through her halls, stops to contemplate the "painted Roof representing the Rape of *Helen*" (258). The narrator explains how he "gazed" on the painting "with some Admiration and could not forbear comparing *Amoranda* to [Helen], nor thinking the whole Scene unlike his own design" (258-59). On the one hand, the narrator's revelation of Lofty's malicious motives proves that as a vulnerable beauty, Amoranda needs a male guardian to protect her from predatory suitors. On the other hand, however, the fact that a painting of a woman's rape serves as the backdrop for the heroine's home suggests that male violence permeates even the presumably safe domestic space. Sajé describes the prevalence of male aggression in Amoranda's world when she writes how "A violent world lurks

right outside the guarded woman's door" (174). It is not surprising, then, that when Amoranda ventures down the river with Berintha/Biranthus and Arentia, she finds herself in "the midst of a wild Desert" where "Beasts" and "Monster[s]" lurk disguised as men (297-98). Davys also depicts the male violence Amoranda suffers in the forest with disturbing graphicness, as Biranthus declares to the heroine, "I will enjoy thee; and then, by the assistance of my Arm, he shall do so too" (298). When Richetti reads the novel for its "comic realism," he overlooks the real and terrifying danger of male sexual aggression Amoranda faces both at home, where she is likened to a rape victim, and abroad, where she becomes that victim (*English* 13).

Altemira's story epitomizes women's vulnerability to male violence both inside and outside the home. After her parents' deaths leave her an orphan, she falls under the care and protection of her brother, "who was Father too" (276). Seemingly, she should be able to trust her brother to care for her, protect her, and guide her, for he is the only figure of male authority in her life. Yet he cannot keep "within the Bounds of Honour," sexually accosting her in her own room: "snatching [her] to his Bosom, pressed [her] with a Warmth" (277). Altemira does not want to question his authority and honor and thus, "imputed the Action rather to Chance than Design" (277). He continues to exploit her trust and attack her person until she finally leaves the supposed safety of her home for the dangerous world outside her door: "I ... resolved to ... go where he should never see me till I was satisfied he had got the better of his own Folly" (278). While it is expected that Amoranda will run into male aggression

in the "great thick Wood" of "Devils," it is not necessarily expected that Altemira will suffer male predation in her own home and at the hands of her own brother (297). Davys concedes to the social ideology of women's need for male protection when she calls unprotected women "unhappy Creature[s]" who, "left to [their] own Management ... [become] prey to every designing Rascal" (264). But in writing the inset tale of Altemira, a woman who happily accepts her brother's management over her only to find that he is the "designing Rascal" who preys upon her, Davys calls into question the ideology encoded in the reform novel that men are effective moral guides and protectors for women.

Davys also uses Altemira's story to comment on how misleading the appearance of male authority can be. Sajé argues that in Davys's text "attention to surfaces interrogates the boundaries between interiors and exteriors, and between the genuine and the artificial, making the reader aware that such distinctions are constructed rather than essential" (170). The actions of Altemira's brother highlight the distance between his exterior identity as a brother, whose filial "Love seemed faultless and natural," and his interior self as the sexually predatory male (277). Though Altemira's brother never dresses in disguise, his identity as her brother works to mask his inadequacy as a male guardian. The moral lesson Altemira brings to Amoranda, then, is just as much about learning the possible artificiality of even seemingly trustworthy male authority figures as it is about the threat of male violence outside the home. Davys inserts the story of Altemira's ruin to suggest that the male guardian's appearance as the protector may not, in fact, prove reliable: that his benevolent

exterior belies the possibility of a malevolent interior is a false assumption constructed by the ideological notion that women require male authority.

Another way in which Davys exposes the contradictions evident in the ideology of female dependency is by creating a fundamentally dishonest mentor. She introduces Formator into the text as "an avatar of truth," the serious voice of morality who "inveigh[s] against ... an immoderate Love of Pleasure" (Sajé 171; 268). That Formator is a truthful, moral guardian is proven to Amoranda by her uncle, who uses his status as her legal guardian to validate his choice of substitute: "*You will, I hope, from my past Behaviour towards you, believe you very dear to me; and I have no better way of showing it for the future, than by putting you into such hands as* Formator's" (267). If Amoranda trusts her uncle, her only male family member, then she will trust Formator, the man whom her guardian has chosen to edify and reform her. In fact, the heroine accepts Formator because of her respect for her uncle, declaring, "since my Uncle has sent you to supply his Place, I will use you with deference" (268). To introduce Formator as a trustworthy figure is to establish his role as the vehicle of truth, for only if Amoranda accepts his legitimate authority will she believe his lessons. Therefore, when he lectures her on her need for male guidance, explaining "how great [her] misfortune has been, in being left so long to the Choice of [her] own Company," she thoroughly believes his words, "[telling] herself in her own Breast that every Word he said was true" (272).

The untruthfulness of Formator's disguise, however, undermines the truthfulness of his words, for as Sajé observes, "his position in Amoranda's life

is based on deceit" (171). As the male reformer of female conduct, he predictably lectures the heroine on nurturing her natural female qualities: "Virtue, Modesty, and an innate Love to Honour" (272). Sajé explains that, "Women's 'art' – manipulativeness, deceit, opaqueness – is an age old reason for disciplining them" (175). During her time of power, Amoranda engages in the deceptions of coquetry to manipulate her male suitors, as "she artfully hid from one what she bestowed upon another" (261). Formator must reform Amoranda so that she no longer uses the artifice of coquetry to win male flattery, but instead turns to the feminine qualities of virtue and modesty to "have one Man of sense vindicate her Conduct" (291). The lesson Formator preaches is the conventional one of female reform, yet the fact that his identity as the reformer of Amoranda is itself based on artifice contradicts his message against female artifice. Sajé concludes, "Davys's use of a grand deception to cure Amoranda of deception might also suggest Davys's skepticism about reform" (169). I agree with Sajé that Davys's depiction of female reform as occurring at the hands of an essentially untruthful male authority figure draws into question the morality and truth of his lessons. I also add to Sajé's argument that Davys deliberately presents the paradox of a deceitful mentor of female reform in order to reflect the contradictions inherent in the ideology supported by the reform tale, an ideology that keeps adult women in a childlike state of male dependency.

Davys further challenges Formator's adequacy as Amoranda's moral reformer through two methods: she uses Amoranda's assertions of his trustworthiness to provide an ironic commentary on his fundamental

deceitfulness, and she contrasts the heroine's honesty with his dishonesty. When the disguised Formator warns Amoranda of Berintha's questionable identity, she responds by stating, "everything you say pleases me, because I know it comes from an honest Heart" (293). Through Amoranda's emphasis on the honesty of Formator's heart, Davys ironically gestures toward the fact that it is exactly Formator's heart that is dishonest, for he has disguised his motive to mould her into the wife of "his own liking" (291). Sajé sees Formator as "an ironic figure," who on the surface operates as a "nod to patriarchy," but whose project of "affirm[ing] the status quo" is undermined by his own artificiality (170). Formator represents the status quo not only in his lessons of female conduct, but also in his project of becoming her husband through a constructed persona, an act which reflects the constructedness of the marriage institution's sexual hierarchy.

Amoranda's undoubting trust in Formator leads her to divulge her inner thoughts and emotions to him with an honesty that opposes his essential dishonesty. She states, "as I believe you sincerely my Friend, as such I will always use you" (271). As a friend, Formator can be trusted with her confidences, and thus she openly confesses her love for Alanthus to him: "I'm sure I feel something in my heart that was never there before" (304). Sajé argues that the "power of disguise is accorded to men in the novel while Amoranda is made transparent and readable" (171-72). Whereas Formator creates an external appearance to hide his heart's intentions, Amoranda appears in her true form, undisguised in heart, mind, or body. That the heroine's truthful

physiognomy serves as a window to her heart is evidenced when Formator literally reads her: "While *Amoranda* read this Letter, *Formator* watched her Eyes, in which he saw a pleasing Surprize" (304). Her eyes give him free access to her heart, for even she admits, "I think I have the foolishest Eyes that ever were, they can't keep a secret" (305). To watch Amoranda's eyes is to read her internal desires through her exterior.

I agree with Sajé that Amoranda's readability reveals the power disparity between the male guardian who uses disguise to access the heroine's emotions and the heroine who cannot hide her inner desires. Yet Amoranda also willingly confesses her desire for Alanthus, which I argue establishes her inherent honesty as much as it does her manipulation by Formator. When she condemns her eyes for expressing too much, she goes on to say, "but they can tell you no more that [sic] I have done already, I have owned to you I do like this man" (305). I therefore suggest that Amoranda's legibility not only reflects her vulnerability to male exploitation, but also serves as an example of honesty which contrasts, and thereby emphasizes, the male guardian's essential deceitfulness. Where the coquettish heroine in need of reform is more honest than her male reformer, his adequacy as the teacher of female morality is questioned and the necessity of female reform by a male guardian is challenged.

Formator's identity as the moral reformer is finally undercut when Davys reveals the "trusty Guardian" as more like the "Monster" Biranthus than their opposing character roles suggest: for though one represents virtue and the other vice, both use disguise to violate the heroine's mind or body (290, 298).

Amoranda inadvertently and ironically draws the link between the two men when she rebukes Biranthus for his use of disguise to abduct and rape her. She declares, "a disguised Lover is always conscious of some Demerit, and dares not trust to his right Form, till by a false appearance he tries the Lady" (296). The heroine who believes in the veracity of Formator's identity unknowingly condemns her beloved guardian, for like Biranthus, Alanthus has disguised his identity to access her heart and mind. To connect the figure of morality with the villain whose violent attacks epitomize male aggression is to undermine the difference between the two men. Davys further links Alanthus/Formator with Berintha/Biranthus when she uses common imagery to describe the two men. After Alanthus's true identity is revealed, Maria tells Amoranda, "*Formator* has cast his skin," likening the moral guardian to a molting snake (314). Strangely similar to Maria's use of the snake metaphor, Amoranda calls Biranthus a "Viper" (298). Though the two men play opposite roles in the novel, both easily put on and shed disguises, or skins, to violate the heroine's physical or mental person. Linking the male villain and mentor thus implies that the two representatives of male power are perhaps more alike than their appearances suggest. Furthermore, while Davys exhorts her female readers to make the best of necessity by choosing to marry the man with "some Merit," the only viable husband she presents to her heroine is exposed as a man of "Demerit" who shares characteristics with the novel's arch-villain (253).

Though both Alanthus and Biranthus dress themselves in order to gain a power over Amoranda they could not have otherwise, the outcomes of their

disguises do differ, for Alanthus never attacks Amoranda's person while Biranthus attempts to rape her. In fact, Alanthus congratulates himself at the end of the novel for never physically approaching her: "I never dared so much as touch your Hand, though my Heart had ten thousand flutters and struggles to get to you" (320). Sajé, however, reads Alanthus's disguise as Formator as an aggressive violation of Amoranda's mind, arguing that "the concealment of known motive constitutes a kind of mental rape" (171). While I am hesitant to equate the physical act of sexual aggression with that of mental manipulation, I do argue that Alanthus's use of disguise to access Amoranda's emotions reveals a commonality between the rapist and the reformer that works to undermine the latter's identity as the moral figure of male authority. When Davys implicitly aligns Alanthus with Biranthus, she emphasizes his "sinister manipulativeness" and consequently, questions his adequacy as the reformer (Ballaster, Women 206). Bowden responds to the artificiality of Alanthus's disguise as the moral guardian to ask, "are we supposed to see in the young man who puts on a fake beard and a lisp a spoof on the whole idea of Mentor?" (Introduction xxxiii). In answer to her question, I suggest that Davys reveals the contradictions in Formator's methods of female reform to question his moral efficacy, and by implication, the moral good male authority figures can do for women.

Though Davys questions Alanthus's adequacy and project, she still submits her heroine to his reformation. By the end of the novel, Amoranda identifies the change within her, which she attributes to her guardian: "the groundwork of this Reformation in me, came from those wholesome Lectures

you [Formator] have so often read to me" (303). It would appear, then, that Davys upholds the reform promised in her title, thereby reinforcing the "sexual hierarchy" that ensures female submissiveness in marriage (Spencer, *Rise* 145). As many critics have noted, Amoranda's reform does entail a loss of agency and total renunciation on her part, for as Bowden writes, by the end of the novel the heroine's "sparkle has disappeared," and she has grown "utterly silent" (Introduction xxxii). At the start of the novel, Amoranda is fearless and fully confident in her ability to take care of herself, as apparent in her response to Jenny's warnings about Lofty's motives. To Jenny's suspicion that his "Intentions are dishonourable," Amoranda simply "burst out laughing" (260). She does not fear Lofty, nor does she fear being victimized by him. Under Formator's tutelage, however, she turns into a fearful, dependent woman who is so frightened by the outside world that when Altemira appears at her door dressed as a man, she hesitates to let her in without her guardian's protection. The narrator writes, "Poor *Amoranda* had been so lately in jeopardy, that she was now afraid of everybody, and dared do nothing without *Formator*" (276). That Amoranda has gone from laughing at the real threat of Lofty to fearing "a poor, thin, pale, meager young Creature" who turns out to be an emaciated, ruined woman raises the question of how far Davys supports the process and outcome of female reform (276).

Sajé argues that in fact Davys depicts the negative changes in Amoranda's character to write a subtext of the cost to women of reform. She writes, "Davys represents reform as requiring the silence and disappearance of

women" (Sajé 167). The price Amoranda pays to fulfill the male fantasy of female submissiveness is a high one: she loses her agency, voice, and trust. Furthermore, the process by which she undergoes reform is one of real threat to her mind and body, so that she is driven to crying, desperately, "Is there no Justice, no Honour, no Friendship to be depended on in this vile World?" (294). Even though she does come to accept Alanthus as her lover with "cheerful Looks," the process is presented as a painful one, for she no longer knows who or what to trust: "What ... do I see? Or what am I to believe? not my Eyes, for they have deceived me already; not *Alanthus*, for he has deceived me too" (314-15). Amoranda's reformation, which finally silences her and submits her to dependency on male figures of authority, is depicted as the result of the violation of female safety and trust. In the end, Davys uses the frame of the conventional reform tale to question the kind of education women receive and how women are taught.

To write her heroine's reform, but to present it as the negative consequence of a deceptive male guardian, is to counter the message of the reform genre itself, for as Spacks contends, "Even when a novel tells a story of the efforts toward conformity, as almost all eighteenth-century novels ... do, its revelation of the efforts' costs may indicate a counter-message" (*Desire* 11). In *The Reformed Coquet*, Davys writes the conventional tale of female reform in order to expose the consequences to women of the ideology of female dependency upheld by the frame of the morality tale itself. Of Davys's novel, then, Ballaster concludes that "it is the female scriptor ... who manages to

negotiate a space for female autonomy even while she tells the story of her heroine's submission to male authority" (Women 205). The agency Amoranda loses is finally discovered by the female author who claims narrative control not only by writing a counter-message, but also by revealing the ideological contradictions inscribed in and perpetuated by the reform narrative and thereby destabilizing the generic conventions of the morality tale.

Backscheider identifies how eighteenth-century women writers "seem to know the limits of credibility of their heroine's power" (Influence 12). Her observation holds true for Behn's *The History of the Nun* and Davys's *The Reformed Coquet*, for both writers imagine the possibility of an unlimited female agency, whether passive or active, in Isabella and Amoranda, yet both authors accept the social limitations on female agency in the end. The authors themselves, however, refuse to remain limited by the gender ideologies that enclose their heroines and define the parameters of the morality tale. Instead, they assert authorial agency over both the social and literary conventions that confine their heroines to culturally constructed ideas of femininity by questioning and challenging the paradoxical ideologies of their generic frame.

Amatory Plots: Barker and Haywood

Like Behn and Davys, Barker and Haywood also claim agency over narrative conventions as they work through the contradictory gender ideologies of the amatory plot. The English amatory novel derived in part from the French romances of the seventeenth century, narratives which depicted the "all-powerful rationale of love" and focused on the woman by "placing the heroine

at its center" (Ballaster, *Seductive* 46-47). The novel, however, turned the romance's valorization of female love into a realistic portrayal of the dangers to women of the amatory struggle. Ballaster writes, "heroic romance encouraged the female reader to believe in the invincibility of women's power through their capacity to inspire ideal love, the histoire ... warned them that sexual desire might well engulf and destroy them" (*Seductive* 53). In short love fiction by women, the heroine's seduction, betrayal, abandonment, or ruin became the consequence of love, rather than the discovery of "True heroism in 'feminine' love," as in the heroic romances (Ballaster, *Seductive* 46).

The negative endings available to the heroines of English amatory fiction reflected the implications for women of the double standard, which "overlooked promiscuity in men but severely punished women for any breach of chastity" (Spencer, *Rise* 109). A woman who engaged in sexual intrigue not only faced the risk of pregnancy, but also the threat of public condemnation, for society deemed the sexual woman as the bad woman. According to Spacks, "at the century's ... beginning, society drew an absolute line between virtuous and nonvirtuous sexual conduct in women" (Ev'ry 27). The amatory novel focused on the woman's struggle to negotiate courtship and female virtue in a society that celebrated male sexuality but judged female sexuality. The plot of short love fiction, then, "typically featured a heroine who was seduced and then pathetically abandoned" (Croskery 69). Richetti sees the plotline of persecuted femininity as "appropriate to the social realities of the age," because as long as men were encouraged to pursue multiple sexual conquests, women continued to

be seduced, betrayed, abandoned, and ruined (*Popular* 124). In *Love Intrigues* and *Fantomina*, however, Barker and Haywood challenge the amatory genre's possible endings for the heroine to include new options for women: the single life and the ability to be sexual yet still respectable.

The double standard that condemned female sexuality held women in a double bind, for love, which implied sexuality and endangered women, was also considered to be their natural focus. Spencer writes, "The ordinary experience of the proper woman was supposed to be mainly emotional experience: romantic love was considered to be at the centre of her life" (*Rise* 183). Barker locates her novel of the single woman, Galesia, within the romantic frame of the amatory novel to question the ideological belief that love was, in fact, woman's essential aim. That she firmly locates her novel within the amatory tradition is evidenced in the title, which reads, *Love Intrigues: or, the History of the Amours of Bosvil and Galesia.*[17] From the start, however, Barker destabilizes the romance genre and with it, the ideological assumption of the woman's natural role as the beloved and wife, through a series of paradoxes: she exposes the artificiality of the romance game, and she creates a heroine whose adherence to the rules of courtship leaves her single. For Galesia to follow the courtship codes she must mask her sexual desires; she must, in effect, put on a guise of "pretended Indifferency" (13). The heroine confesses, "in *Bosvil's* Presence I made a shift to keep up this seeming Insensibility, yet interiorly I was tormented

[17] King suggests that Barker's publisher Edmund Curll added *Love Intrigues* to Barker's original title, *The Amours of Bosvil and Galesia*, to make the work appear more salacious, more like the scandal chronicles of Delarivier Manley, and therefore more marketable. See King, *Exile* 182-92. For more on the relationship between Barker and Curll, see McBurney, "Edmund Curll" 385-99.

with a thousand Anxieties" (13). Galesia suffers inner "Anxieties" because the outward appearance of indifference she must present is unnatural, as it is anathema to her true feelings for Bosvil.

King argues that in the novel, Barker displays the "seemingly infinite capacity for self-deception possessed by a young woman in love" (*Exile* 186). I read Galesia's acts of "self-deception" as enforced upon her by the engendered conventions of romance that required women to hide their inner desires. Barker stresses the distance between the heroine's "Outside of Indifferency" and her inner "Heart full of Passion" to underline the artificiality of the courtship game and the extent to which it forces the heroine to act against her nature (17). The narrator, Galesia, moralizes on the essential fictionality of the amatory game when she states, "Thus a Mask is put on sometimes to conceal an ill Face, and sometimes to conserve a good one, and the most Part of Mankind are in Reality different from what they seem" (17). During courtship the lovers, and particularly the heroine, who must cover up her natural sexual desires, necessarily don false "Masks" to disguise the true "Reality" of their feelings. By emphasizing how the rules of courtship require her heroine to engage in acts of artifice, Barker exposes the very artificiality of the ideological notion that courtship is the natural female endeavor. In so doing, she dismantles the frame of the amatory narrative, which is centered on "the importance of women and their power in love" (Spencer, *Rise* 184). Contrary to the amatory plot's gender expectations, Barker creates a heroine whose power comes not from her moment in the amatory struggle, for though Galesia plays the part of the silent

beloved she fails to attract Bosvil, but rather from her agency in writing, as she pursues literature, not marriage.

The fact that Galesia fails to win Bosvil's love despite obeying the courtship codes further exemplifies how Barker uses the amatory frame to challenge the cultural belief that love and marriage are the woman's sole pursuits. Spencer observes that "The paradox of this heroine's text is that because Galesia behaves like a proper heroine, she is prevented from fulfilling a heroine's destiny" (Creating 171). Galesia never oversteps the bounds of femininity by expressing her love of Bosvil. Rather, she assiduously follows courtship conventions, confessing, "it was with great Difficulty that I restrain'd my foolish Tongue from telling the Fondness of my Heart" (24). Yet for all her obedience Galesia still does not gain Bosvil's constant affection, remaining unmarried yet un-ruined, as their amours never progress beyond blushes and sighs. King describes the novel as an "ironized romance ... [which] presents the portrait of a heroine who exists in a kind of sexual limbo outside the confines of the amatory plot in any of its expected manifestations" (*Exile* 191). The only conventional ending Barker submits her heroine to is that of betrayal, which Galesia laments when she writes, "*For what is more disgraceful to a Maid, / Than to be scorn'd like me, like me betray'd?*" (40). On the one hand, Bosvil's betrayal renders her the stereotypical "scorn'd" and humiliated maiden, whose innocence is exploited by an inconstant lover. On the other hand, however, it frees her to write, a non-conventional role for the romance heroine.

According to Spacks, the heroine's rejection by her lover causes her to "[feel] alienated even from her own sex. She can neither share her society's values nor believe in her right to adhere to hers" (*Imagining* 67). Galesia is acutely aware of the implications of her intellectual efforts, stating, "many count a studious Woman as ridiculous as an effeminate Man, and learned Books as unfit for our Apartment, as Paint, Washes, and Patches for his" (37). Ironically, however, Galesia's failure to read Bosvil's "indifferent Heart" through his "outward Grimaces of a Lover" reveals that though her brother doubts she will be able to withstand the first difficulties of English grammar, in the end, it is the grammar of courtship, of paint, washes, and patches, that confounds her (17). Barker creates in Galesia a heroine whose penchant for poetry and illiteracy in the language of love contradicts the amatory novel's supposition that the heroine's natural tendency is courtship and her goal marriage. Galesia's betrayal by Bosvil therefore provides a paradoxically positive ending for the heroine; though her never-married status separates her from her sex, it also enables her to satisfy her true intellectual inclinations. Thus, the heroine later affirms, "Had [Bosvil] been true, I'd liv'd in *sottish Ease*, / Ne'er study'd ought, but how to *love* and *please*" (117).

Spencer, among other critics, reads Barker's Galesia narratives as fictional autobiography, writing that "Barker wrapped her life-story in the conventions of romance" in order to make her choice of the single and intellectual life understandable to her readership (Creating 167). In addition to Spencer's argument, I suggest that Barker also uses the amatory frame to

question the cultural judgment that because marriage is the woman's sole purpose, never-married women must either be virginal maidens on the marriage market or unproductive spinsters. A woman's virginity guaranteed her marital value by proving to the potential husband that she "was void of all suspicion," and therefore good in person and dowry (Fletcher 392). Spencer explains that "The daughter's virginity was an asset to be handed over to a financially and socially suitable husband" (*Rise* 109). As an "asset," virginity increased the maiden's worth and enhanced her exchangeability. Barker, however, turns virginity into the female quality the heroine embraces in order to evade the marriage market. Galesia's sexual chastity, rather than ensuring her a husband, releases her from marital exchange, for she "*vow*[s] *a Virgin to remain*" in order to "*cast off*" her lover's "*Chain*" (15). Instead of serving as a commodity, her virginity acts as a means of self-fortification and even assertion against submission to marriage.

That the heroine sees chastity as a way to escape marriage is epitomized in her poem "A *Virgin Life*," where she writes, "Since, O good Heavens! you have bestow'd on me / So great a Kindness for *Virginity*, / Suffer me not to fall into the Powers / Of Man's almost Omnipotent Amours. / But let me in this happy State remain" (139). Galesia employs virginity as a shield against male predation, not as an asset to attract male attention. King observes how in the heroine's poem, Barker "uses conventions derived from popular contemporary forms and classical retirement verse to unmask the fictions that bind women to men and marriage and to re-imagine in positive terms female existence outside

matrimony" (*Exile* 61). In so doing, Barker also dismantles the conventions of the amatory novel that uphold the ideological fiction she "unmasks," the fiction that women's lives must follow the trajectory from virginal maid to wife. Through Galesia's affirmative choice to use her virginity to remain single, Barker seeks to "redefine the single life" for women (King, *Exile* 63). Single, never-married, virginal women, she suggests, might not necessarily be maidens awaiting marriage, and furthermore, a woman may claim her sexual chastity as her own, rather than submitting it to be used as a commodity for exchange between men.

Spencer reads Barker's emphasis on Galesia's chastity as evidence of her effort to establish the woman writer along the lines of conventional morality to render her more acceptable to the reading public. In her view, Galesia's idolization of the "chaste Orinda" and her versification of virginity, which links poetry with chastity, demonstrates Barker's dedication to proving that "a woman writer – even when she wrote novels – could be chaste, moral, and respectable" (Creating 179). According to Spencer, then, Galesia presents and maintains her virginity solely to satisfy the ideological expectation that a woman must "protect her reputation for sexual chastity or 'honesty'" (Hobby 2). To be read, a woman writer had to appear reputable, or sexually chaste, for women's bodies and their works were inextricably linked. Barker does express anxiety over her identity as a woman writer, as revealed when the muses warn her of the ramifications of her literary pursuits: "*Since, since thou hast the Muses chose* / Hymen *and Fortune are thy Foes* ... / ... *By all the World misunderstood*: / *In*

best of Actions be despis'd" (25). Yet the fact that she turns virginity from a commodity that facilitates marriage into a shield that protects against it also suggests a more subversive use of female chastity. King writes that Barker "associate[s] [virginity] ... with refusal of a matrimonial order that ill-serves women's interests," rather than as one of the "self-effacing feminine virtues in which Philips and others were inclined to place it" (*Exile* 66). Barker establishes Galesia's chastity to turn female virginity into a defense for and justification of the heroine's refusal to be circumscribed in the marriage ending imposed upon her by engendered social and literary conventions.

While Barker asserts authorial agency over the amatory novel by paradoxically using virginity to release her heroine from marriage, she also works to debunk the ideology that only in marriage can women truly contribute to society by creating a productive yet single heroine. With the rise of the middle class and the separation of home and work, women's access to occupations decreased, and attitudes toward the never-married woman, or spinster, began to change. Spencer explains how "The word first used for unmarried women because spinning was such an important occupation among them, was losing its occupational reference" (*Rise* 13). She writes, "A spinster was becoming an unmarried woman of no particular occupation" (Spencer, *Rise* 13). Where the woman's role was to marry and produce children, and where her occupational options were becoming increasingly confined to the domestic space, unmarried women appeared necessarily and negatively unproductive. In fact, as King writes, "By the time Barker wrote *A Patch-Work Screen* the heroic

virgin had undergone a change of key to become the diminished figure of the spinster, slightly peculiar, out-of-step; an odd woman" (*Exile* 162). To validate the heroine's choice to never marry, and to free her from the reductive gender ideologies that would diminish her role because of her unmarried status, Barker presents a heroine who contributes to and partakes in society through her literary productivity and medicinal activities.

Ironically, Galesia only becomes productive once she is released from the threat of marriage. While still engaged in the amatory struggle with Bosvil, she confides, "I spent my days in Sighs, and my Nights in Tears; my Sleep forsook me, and I relish'd not my Food; nor had I made any Friend or Confident, into whose Bosom I might discharge my Griefs" (19). Galesia can neither sleep nor eat, converse with others nor act for herself; she can only obsess over her lover. By the time Barker meets her again in the *Patch-Work Screen*, however, Bosvil has married another and the heroine has discovered in her singleness a productive life as a writer and healer. She therefore reappears in the text after she is found "*walking to stretch her Legs, having been long sitting at her Work*" (53). Furthermore, while Galesia expresses anxiety over the fact that her intellectual interests alienate her from her female contemporaries, it is only through her literary work, work she can do because she refuses marriage, that she rejoins her sex and, finally, the community.

After the Lady meets her she asks her "to stay with her some time, and assist her in her SCREEN" (74). When the Lady opens Galesia's boxes she finds, instead of patches of cloth, evidence of the heroine's prodigious output of

"*Romances, Poems, Love-Letters*" since her release from "*Bosvil's* Fetters" (74, 37). The Lady at once accepts the heroine's work, despite it not being needlework, and invites her to join the community of women patch-workers, having "therefore resolved to have these ranged and mixed in due Order, and thereof compose a SCREEN" (74). King explains how in Barker's time "the word *work* in a female context meant needlework" and that Barker places Galesia's literary efforts in the context of needlework to link woman's writing with conventional female endeavors (Coming 99). In Barker's text, she asserts, "Writing for print publication emerges as an extension of traditional forms of women's work" (King, Needles 80). The patch-work frame provides a welcoming context for Galesia's writing both because she finds a friendly audience in the Lady and her maids and because it explains women's writing in understandable terms of female work.

The frame of needlework also, however, subverts the ideological assumption of the never-married woman's unproductiveness, for the heroine's writings not only entertain the patch-workers, but also enhance the screen. Through the Lady's response to Galesia's "Anatomy" poem, Barker suggests the usefulness of single women's literary work: "these melancholy *dark Patches*, set off the light Colours; making the Mixture more agreeable. I like them all so well, I will not have *One* lay'd aside" (92). Furthermore, the patch-work frame serves as a way for Galesia to display the literary work she has produced since her claim to an independent, virgin life. To present the single woman's literary productivity is, in effect, to contradict the cultural judgment of the never-

married woman as an unoccupied spinster. Galesia's trajectory from the languishing lover to the studious single woman offers a positive vision of the never-married woman who, rather than being out-of-step and odd, connects with and contributes to her community. Through Galesia, Barker reveals the falseness of the notion that women can benefit society only in marriage and "takes seriously the single life on its own terms" (King, *Exile* 63).

The heroine's medicinal work provides another example of how she contributes to both her immediate audience of patch-workers as well as the general community. After resolving not to pursue love and marriage, Galesia devotes herself to "learning the Use of Simples for the Good of [her] Country-Neighbours" (15). When Barker finds her again in the *Patch-Work Screen*, the heroine has established herself as a renowned healer. Galesia relates to the Lady, "several People came to me for Advice in divers sorts of Maladies, and ... I began to be pretty much known" (116). Through her healing activities, the heroine partakes in and benefits her society in a positive and productive way. King suggests that in Galesia, Barker imagines "a meaningful existence for a woman apart from her subjected position within the family" (*Exile* 65). Never-married and a self-proclaimed virgin, Galesia chooses the role of the community caretaker, refusing to be "subjected" to the wifely position of familial caretaker. Moreover, the heroine derives satisfaction from the knowledge that her work aids the community; as she states, "The Pleasure I took in thus doing good, much over-balanced the Pains I had in the Performance" (116). For Galesia, the

pleasure of contributing to society outweighs the pain of romantic rejection and the risk of cultural condemnation.

While Galesia enjoys her occupational freedom, she also concedes that mothers and wives cannot so simply shirk domestic duties for intellectual pursuits. She writes, "I am not so generous ... to pass my Word for [Learning's] good Behaviour in our Sex, always, and in all Persons; for sometimes it becomes a Rival to their Duty, deluding them from the Care of their Children and Families, the Business allotted them by the Hand of Heaven" (37). On first reading, Galesia's statement appears to accept the gender ideologies that dictate marriage and consequently motherhood as the woman's natural and sole purpose. Yet the heroine's assertion that marriage is "the Business allotted" women by the "Hand of Heaven" is curiously contradicted by the fact that she repeatedly justifies her choice of the single life as designed by providence. She confesses that even her "Mother began to think that Heaven had design'd [her] for a *Single Life*, and was a little more reconcil'd to [her] studious Way" (141). When read against her own defense for her single, studious life, Galesia's statement ironically serves to suggest that some women may, in fact, be providentially designed for purposes other than marriage and motherhood. Furthermore, in emphasizing the realistic work aspect of marriage, Barker dismantles the amatory novel's conventional depiction of marriage as the simple and happy conclusion to courtship.

Finally, Barker presents a single, virginal, and productive heroine to expose the falseness of the cultural and generic ideology that love is the sole

female pursuit and to assert agency over the narrative by offering her heroine an ending other than marriage. Backscheider contends that "In the hands of men, courtship novels were powerful means of gendering. In women's hands, however, they are revealed for what they are – novels of inscription and conscription" (*Spectacular* 142). Inscribed in the amatory genre is the woman's role as wife; however, Barker refuses both the social and literary conscription of women to marriage when she frees her heroine to pursue an independent life. King observes that the Galesia narratives "[unfold] with a strange disregard for the pull of amatory conventions, either in its seventeenth-century heroic forms or the early eighteenth-century seduction-and-betrayal incarnations" (*Exile* 190). I suggest, however, that it is not that Barker writes with a "strange disregard" for her genre's expectations, but rather that she exerts authorial agency over them by challenging the social and literary conventions that seek to confine her heroine to silence and submission.

Whereas Barker sets up a series of paradoxes to destabilize the amatory novel's gender ideology that love is woman's essential aim, Haywood examines the contradictions of the sexual double standard that is encoded in the seduction narrative. A woman's reputation depended upon her sexual virtue, for "chastity was the overriding measure of female honour" (Fletcher 377). Unlike men, who could engage in sexual activity without necessarily damaging their reputation or honor, women could not be both sexual and reputable. Because women were seen as possessing sexual voraciousness and because sexual women were deemed bad, it was imperative that female sexuality be overcome: the perfect

woman perfectly controlled her desires. Fletcher thus explains, "A woman [had to] take hold of her sexuality and make its proper direction the rule of her life" (393). That women had to repress their sexual desires while men could pursue them epitomizes the "the hypocrisy of an age in which men had the reputations of libertines, while women denied ... their sexuality" (Perry 153). In *Fantomina*, however, Haywood challenges the hypocritical gender standards of the period by creating an openly lustful heroine who, for a time, satisfies her sexual passion without losing her reputation.

To act on her sexual desires without exposing her promiscuity, Fantomina turns to disguises, which allow her to separate her masked, lustful, private self from her unmasked, seemingly reputable, public self. Fantomina models her use of disguises on the public masquerade, which Castle claims "protected the reputations of middle- and upper-class women ... and ... removed social constraints – including sexual ones" (33). In effect, Fantomina privatizes the masquerade to turn the temporary freedom from sexual constraints that women could find within (and only within) the bounds of the institution into a long-lasting reality. Croskery writes, "by creating a 'private masquerade' ... the heroine ... literalizes the metaphor, utilizing the powerful masquerade trope against itself in order to explore the role masks play in *creating* desire in both the spectator and the masked agent" (81). Fantomina also privatizes the masquerade to explore the real possibility for women to fulfill their sexual desires in life, not just in culturally sanctioned institutions.

In her first identity as the lower-class prostitute, however, Fantomina struggles with the implications of her disguise and the potential consequences to her reputation of her intrigue. Though she tries to protect her chastity by "providing herself with a Lodging, to which she thought she might invite him without running any Risk, either of her Virtue or Reputation," it is at her lodging that she experiences the confrontation between her sexual desires and her reputation (230). When she realizes that entertaining Beauplaisir in the role of the prostitute will inevitably end in her ruin, she is "Shocked ... at the Apprehension of really losing her Honour" (230). Ballaster writes that in the initial seduction scene between Fantomina-as-prostitute and Beauplaisir, "Haywood employs her characteristic rhetoric of victim and victor ... and it appears that Fantomina will go the way of her sisters, seduced, abandoned, and falling into hysteria" (*Seductive* 188). Haywood does describe Fantomina in this first scene of seduction as the victimized heroine who, "tearful, - confused, altogether unprepared to resist in such Encounters," falls into "[t]ears" once finally "undone" (230). Yet the heroine's initial seduction and ruin does more than merely provide an example of the conventional narrative of persecuted femininity. I argue that Haywood emphasizes the distress Fantomina suffers at the moment of crisis to register the effects on women of the ideological expectation that the virtuous woman will overcome her overwhelming desires.

Fantomina is "confused" not only because she finds she cannot fight off Beauplaisir's physical advances, but also because of "the extreme Liking she had to him" (230). As many critics have observed, Haywood's fiction often

foregrounds "the overwhelming power of passion" and the "power of female desire" (Croskery 71). When Fantomina admits her "extreme Liking," she realizes the force of her passion and the heroic efforts it will take to quell. She also realizes that to submit to her overwhelming physical desires will mean the devastating loss of her reputation. Croskery explains how in Restoration comedies, "The paradox of the rake's victory thus becomes the double-bind of the persecuted maiden, forced to choose between the task of repressing her irrepressible desires or facing sexual betrayal, familial ostracization, and/or social ruin" (76). Fantomina knows that by acting on her passion she risks "the Danger of being exposed" and the reality of being "made a Theme for public Ridicule" (230). Yet to deny her desire is to repress an irrepressible liking for her lover, for in fact, Fantomina's passion is uncontrollable: "Strange and unaccountable were the Whimsies she was possessed of, - wild and Incoherent her Desires" (229). She is not in control of her passion, for the "wild and Incoherent" desires possess her, but to remain within the bounds of reputable femininity she must control the uncontrollable. The heroine's emotional confusion and turmoil in the first seduction scene thus serve to highlight the difficulty women experienced as a result of the double standard's paradoxical demands on them to direct their overpowering desires to entirely virtuous, not promiscuous ends.

Through the model of the masquerade, however, Haywood releases Fantomina from the role of the victimized heroine and the double standard, for disguises allow the heroine to maintain the appearance of chastity even as she

pursues sexual gratification. Ballaster explains that "The anonymity of the masquerade provides women with the opportunity of maintaining public reputation and indulging private sexual desire" (*Seductive* 181). After her first undoing, Fantomina recognizes that to keep her ruin a secret but to continue the amour, she must maintain her false identity, for the anonymity of her real identity, or rather Beauplaisir's ignorance of it, secures her reputation. She thinks: "it will not be even in the Power of my Undoer himself to triumph over me; and while he laughs at, and perhaps despises the fond, the yielding *Fantomina*, he will revere and esteem the virtuous, the reserved Lady" (232-33). The heroine only yields to Beauplaisir in her disguised form, always remaining in control of her sexuality when in public and unmasked. In fact, as Croskery writes, Fantomina "realiz[es] that her control over her own desire depends upon a presentation of self that capitalizes upon an ostensible, not an actual, loss of agency" (75). That the heroine submits to her lover only when masked illustrates how she maintains agency over her sexuality: she deliberately projects her desires onto an alternative identity so that she can continue to manage both her lover and her respectable public reputation.

Not only does Fantomina successfully trick Beauplaisir, who "stood amazed at the prodigious Likeness between his little Mistress and this Court beauty; but was still as far from imagining they were the same," but she also fools the whole of her society, continuing to appear at assemblies as "the celebrated Lady" (233). Fantomina, like the male libertine, simultaneously enjoys sexual satisfaction and an honorable reputation. Croskery observes that

the heroine's "deliberate and successful manipulation of her role ... demonstrates the manner in which those social norms that identify a sexually active female as morally compromised victim are themselves social fictions" (77). In creating a heroine who maintains her respectable reputation even while pursuing her sexual desires, Haywood destabilizes the link between female chastity and reputation. To write a heroine whose reputation does not, in fact, depend on the truth of her chastity is to suggest the fictionality of the gender ideology that judges female sexuality but excuses male promiscuity.

While the privatized masquerade frees Fantomina to embrace her sexual desires repeatedly without losing her reputation, it also exposes the very constructedness of femininity itself. Craft-Fairchild calls Haywood's novel a "Masquerade of Femininity," arguing that Fantomina's repeated masking of her identity in the various roles available to women reveals the "constructed nature of femininity" (51). The fact that the heroine can exchange her identities as she changes her dress epitomizes how female roles themselves are simply social constructs produced by cultural interpretations of femininity. To Craft-Fairchild's argument I also add that it is specifically the construction of sexual women as bad or immoral women that Haywood dismantles. When Haywood creates a heroine who, for a time, is both sexual and reputable, she "undercuts the ... ideology implicit in the victor/vanquish'd scenario of persecuted maiden stories in which the loss of sexual virginity is tantamount to the loss of virtue itself" (Croskery 77). By presenting a heroine whose virtue stands despite her sexual transgressions, Haywood refutes the ideology that female goodness

stems from a perfectly controlled sexuality and consequently reveals chaste female virtue as a constructed fiction of femininity. For in Haywood's text, what is fact is the heroine's uncontrollable passion and what is fiction is her chaste reputation. Finally, Haywood asserts authorial agency over the cultural and literary conventions of the amatory plot to suspend the link between female sexuality and virtue and to envision a positive image of women's sexuality.

If Fantomina privatizes the masquerade to enjoy a release from restrictive gender ideologies, Haywood-the-author invokes the metaphor of the masquerade to act out a carnival of the amatory plot by reversing the gender hierarchy of the seduction narrative. Ballaster describes the "traditional tale of seduction/betrayal" as one of the "victory of the masculine 'plot' over the female 'form'" (*Seductive* 169). Male sexual power and female vulnerability are therefore inscribed in the generic frame of the amatory novel. Haywood, however, inverts the power paradigm of the narrative when she creates a sexually aggressive, predatory heroine. On the title page, Haywood signals her play with the conventional sexual hierarchy by quoting from Edmund Waller: "In Love the Victors from the Vanquish'd fly. / They fly that wound, and they pursue that dye" (226). Here Waller reverses the sexual power paradigm operative in the real world, giving the woman sexual power over the male rake, who falls victim to her beauty, but he does so in conventional poetic imagery so that the heroine's power remains circumscribed by literary and gender conventions. In effect, Haywood's choice to open her novel of female sexual assertion with Waller's quote reveals her project: to turn the imagery of female

sexual power into actuality. Fantomina finds real power in her sexuality because Haywood literally turns the romance "world upside-down," enacting a metaphoric masquerade over the generic conventions of the amatory novel to transform her heroine from the stereotypical vanquished beauty into the real-life victor (Castle 6).

The heroine's letter to Beauplaisir as Incognita best exemplifies Haywood's reversal of the amatory narrative's engendered power paradigm. The heroine confesses to Beauplaisir, "I am infinite in Love" with both "your Wit and Person" (242). Beauplaisir, however, has never heard of Incognita before and thus has not previously expressed his desire for her. In fact, when he responds to the heroine's letter the narrator writes that he "had never seen the Person to whom he wrote" (243). That Fantomina has expressed her love first and that she has done so to a man who believes he has never seen her before demonstrate how she breaks, with total disregard, the courtship rules that require women to hide their "interest in a man" until he "declare[s] his in her" (Spacks, Ev'ry 27). In penning her unsolicited love for Beauplaisir directly to him, the heroine writes female sexuality into the plot as the driving force in the amatory struggle. Haywood explicitly challenges the social and literary conventions that confine women to the role of the chaste and silent beloved when she creates a heroine who instigates sexual intrigues.

Furthermore, when Fantomina breaks the engendered codes of the courtship game to announce her desire first, she turns the aggressive rake into a mere receptacle of female desire. As the heroine initiates the amatory plots, she

generates an "inversion of traditional gender opposition," placing herself in the empowered role of the pursuer (Ballaster, *Seductive* 190). No longer the predator, Beauplaisir now finds himself the pursued, the victim rather than the victor. Haywood's metaphoric masquerading of the amatory novel's sexual hierarchy effectively releases her heroine from the conventional role of the silent beloved because, as Castle writes, "masquerade inversions worked to unveil the false consciousness represented by ideology itself" (88). That women's role in the seduction narrative must necessarily be that of the pursued is revealed by Haywood as a "false consciousness" produced by the gender ideologies that govern the generic frame of the amatory plot. Finally, in *Fantomina*, Haywood exercises authorial agency over the amatory frame and the gender ideologies it inscribes by turning the entire romance narrative on its head to render her heroine the sexual aggressor and her rake the vulnerable, as he is gullible, sexual object.

Though both Barker and Haywood claim agency over the amatory plot to work through the contradictory gender ideologies encoded in the genre's conventions, only Barker finds for her heroine a final release from the marriage-or-ruin ending. For Fantomina, the closure in marriage or ruin is finally only delayed, not avoided, as in the end she suffers the ruin of her reputation and the exposure of her promiscuity, exclaiming, "Oh, I am undone! - I cannot live, and bear this Shame!" (247). At the novel's conclusion, the link between female chastity and reputation is brought back to bear on Fantomina, whose punishment reinstates the double standard that "severely punished women for

any breach of chastity" (Spencer, *Rise* 109). Though many critics search for a positive ending for Fantomina, her conclusion is at best ambiguous, for she no longer makes her own choices and is banished from her own narrative by her mother, as Haywood engenders the final voice of social morality female. Croskery observes that "Behn, Davys, Haywood ... all re-create and thereby promote ideologies of female subordination within their works; they also highlight the contradictions inherent in eighteenth-century ideologies of gender, thereby subverting the dominant discourse" (22). If Haywood cannot finally release her heroine from the conventions of the amatory novel, she does effectively critique the paradoxical gender expectations that lead her heroine to the inevitable end of public ruin.

Barker's Open Ending: *A Patch-Work Screen for the Ladies*

Despite the authorial agency Behn, Davys, and Haywood assert over their narratives, none are finally able to release their heroines from the social and literary conventions that circumscribe female agency. The author who perhaps comes closest to achieving a lasting vision of female agency, then, is Barker who, in *A Patch-Work Screen for the Ladies*, refuses to enclose either her heroine or her narrative in the conventions of gender or genre. Critics variously read Barker's *Patch-Work Screen* as an example of the traditional framed-nouvelle and as a new and specifically female generic form. Richetti judges Barker's second Galesia narrative as wholly conventional, calling the novel a "deliberate [attempt] to market a very old product – the framework narrative in which a collection of tales can be told – with new ideological

wrappings of the female moral sensibility" (*Popular* 237). In his view, Barker's text remains within the boundaries of literary conventions despite its feminine focus. Josephine Donovan also locates Barker's novel in the framed-nouvelle tradition, a form she sees as specifically enabling for women writers because, she argues, it allowed for "the expression of particularized individual cases" (Donovan xi). The form of the framed-nouvelle does allow Barker to contain a number of individual examples of the cost to women of marriage, seduction, abandonment, and ruin, such as the ruined "young Girl" who suffers from a sexually contracted disease, the woman forced into desperation because her father and husband fail to provide for her, and the pregnant and abandoned Belinda (113). Through the framed-nouvelle, Barker can express the woman's negative experience of the double standard from a variety of viewpoints and through a multiplicity of examples.

While Donovan reads Barker's text in the framed-nouvelle tradition, she also suggests that Barker attempts to create a new generic form specific to female writers and concerns. She writes that Barker "seems to be torn between using ... the format of the framed-nouvelle tradition, which she inherited, and moving toward a new form in which the central focus is on the 'history' and development of the central, female protagonist" (Donovan 57). Spencer also argues that in *A Patch-Work Screen*, Barker finds a new narrative form for the woman writer: "Jane Barker was ... offering an alternative pattern for the novel, with the creation of an unmarried heroine who achieves her identity through study, the practice of medicine, and writing" (*Rise* 69). I agree that Barker's

creation of a single, productive, and intellectual heroine destabilizes both the cultural and generic conventions of the amatory novel, which focused on the "heroine's journey to identity through marriage" (Spencer, *Rise* 69). Yet Galesia's ambivalence about her unconventional identity as a single and literary woman complicates a reading of the novel as entirely defiant of social and literary conventions. I therefore argue that it is only in the non-ending, or rather open ending, of the novel that Barker-the-author releases her narrative from formal constraints to present a lasting vision of female and authorial agency unachieved by Behn, Davys, and Haywood.

As the author, Barker defies literary convention by writing a generically unbounded narrative that lacks any final summation or moral judgment on the protagonist's actions. Instead, she ends the novel with the never-married Galesia continuing to share literature with the Lady, who recites to her "An *Ode* In *Commemoration* of the *Nativity* of *Christ*" as consolation for her mother's death (167). Richetti reads the pious verse with which Barker ends the novel as the only new generic element: "What is new is the insistent pious frame of reference; the framework is a deliberate attempt to sell female fiction to a wider audience by making it impeccably respectable" (*Popular* 239). To read her ending as simply a market choice, however, overlooks the way in which the non-ending presents the possibility of a continuous female agency.

Moreover, Barker's refusal to enclose her narrative or heroine offers a final display of authorial agency, as she chooses not to adhere to the conventions of the framed-nouvelle and to instead open her novel to the

potential for women's ability to make their own decisions. She has Galesia decide, for herself, not to relinquish her agency to a husband, but rather to assert it through her literary efforts, as her works come together to make "Four Folds of a *Screen*" which the Lady will have "fram'd, to see how it would look" in a display of female literary work (166). That Galesia not only remains unmarried, but continues to write for a welcoming audience illustrates how Barker's non-ending becomes an open ending for women. Barker opens the doors of cultural and literary conventions to envision society's acceptance of women who choose, through assertion of female agency in the public and literary world, to take action over their own lives.

If the lives of the heroines in the texts by Behn, Davys, and Haywood finally conform to formal and social constraints, the authors, like Barker, do not write simply conventional narratives. All four women writers claim authorial agency over the moral and amatory frames of their novels to expose the contradictory gender ideologies inscribed in generic conventions. Craft-Fairchild writes, "To offer counter ideology is not to subvert ideology; simple role reversals that do not question the roles themselves cannot finally produce lasting change" (5). In the fictions of Isabella, Galesia, Amoranda, and Fantomina, the female authors question the gender ideologies that lead the heroines to their circumscribed conclusions by presenting visions of female agency and by examining the cost to each heroine of her efforts to direct her own life. Behn and Barker depict the painful process by which their heroines come to claim agency through passive self-suppression and self-induced

suffering. Davys and Haywood create heroines who must pay the price of their active agency by succumbing to social condemnation of female speech and sexuality.

Yet each author also, if only temporarily, imagines for her heroine a time of female power through agency, for as Spacks writes, the "plots of eighteenth-century novels illuminated history, politics, and manners of their age not only by embodying prevailing ideology but ... by reshaping ideology closer to the heart's desire" (*Imagining* 5). In writing fictions that display and deal with the desire for and limitations against female agency, Behn, Barker, Davys, and Haywood embody the restrictive gender ideologies that confine their heroines. They also, however, exert authorial agency over cultural and novelistic conventions to reshape ideological gender restrictions to include the vision of their "heart's desire": the possibility for women to direct and control their own lives through independent action.

Conclusion

Women in the late-seventeenth and early-eighteenth centuries were not to assert themselves, and particularly their voices, in public. Hobby explains the cultural restrictions on female action when she writes, "Women were not supposed to enter the public world in any form, and that prohibition extended to a ban on 'making public' their words" (1). To write and thereby assert herself in public through words was, for the woman writer, an unfeminine act, a deviation from the socially constructed idea of femininity as silent and submissive. Spencer thus argues that "a woman writer seemed, by the very act of writing, to

be challenging received notions of womanhood; and to this extent all early women writers ... were engaged ... in feminist discourse" (*Rise* x). I suggest, however, that it is not merely in the act of writing as women that Behn, Barker, Davys, and Haywood challenge "received notions of womanhood." Instead, it is in the act of asserting female writerly authority over the social and generic conventions of the available literary frames that the four authors question the restrictive gender ideologies that impose textual and contextual limitations on women.

The four writers chose conventional genres because, as Backscheider notes, they were available and "commercially viable," but they also turned the cultural and literary constraints perpetuated in and demanded by the moral and amatory plots into opportunities to criticize the boundaries placed on female agency by ideological notions of femininity (*Spectacular* 146). The early women writers of this study thus engaged in what Hobby identifies as the effort to "turn constraints into permissions, into little pockets of liberty or autonomy" (8). Each author takes control over the frame of her novel when she writes female agency into the generic conventions of the narrative by creating a heroine who temporarily manages to evade the obedient mould of femininity and to assert her own will. Isabella defies heavenly and earthly patriarchal laws to act upon her desires either for marriage or for freedom from it, while Galesia refuses the role of the wife to live instead a life of modesty as a single writing woman. Amoranda acts with disregard for notions of female conduct to entertain suitors and willfully plot against them, as Fantomina satisfies her own

desires for sex and power despite the engendered expectation to remain obediently chaste. To write stories of temporary female disobedience, or rather of female desire for independent action is, in effect, to voice women's choice of will, for as Fletcher contends, "Speech represents personal agency" (12). The narratives speak the heroines' claims to agency, allowing them to exercise action and voice; it is only when the social morality closes in around the heroines that they are silenced in death, marriage, or banishment. Where the heroines cannot sustain the agency they claim, the narratives of their temporary moment of power continue to represent and give voice to the possibility for women's ability to direct their own lives.

Furthermore, in choosing to write representations of female action into the frames of their works, Behn, Barker, Davys, and Haywood exert agency over the novelistic terms of gender representation. Backscheider suggests that "Even as [women writers] negotiated their place in society and in the literary marketplace, [they] were struggling to create new means of representation" (*Spectacular* 69). In creating heroines whose desire is for personal agency, for freedom from gender constraints, the authors question the hegemonic paradigms that define female desire and identity as solely directed toward and dependent on male models of authority. While no ideology is monolithic, even where hegemonic, fiction "depends for its effectiveness" on it, on "a body of assumptions and attitudes" which it presents, responds to, and in the works of Behn, Barker, Davys, and Haywood, destabilizes (Richetti, *Popular* 11). To present women's desire for agency is therefore to force a reconsideration of

femininity as potentially vocal and active, not silent and submissive. Through the act of writing and the creation of resistant heroines, the writers negotiate "[t]he central theme ... of female gender construction," which Fletcher identifies as "humility and obedience" (368). In fictions of female agency, Behn, Barker, Davys, and Haywood seek to inspire a redefinition of ideological assumptions of modest and obedient femininity. Moreover, the authors themselves refuse to remain quiet or within social and formal boundaries, instead, using a "series of strategies" to voice the contradictions of the gender ideologies that would confine their works and lives (Hobby 7).

In this thesis I have demonstrated how the writers' common dedication to representing forms of female agency links their works. Despite the critical inclination to read Behn and Haywood as transgressive writers on one side of women's writing, and Barker and Davys as didactic authors on the other, they all exhibit textual authority as they challenge the engendered restrictions of text and context. Such a comparative reading of the authors does not, however, deny their individual legacies and experiences; it is rather to hear their voices simultaneously. King argues that Barker's life presents a "singular literary career" which must be considered "not in narratives of continuity, lineage, and influence but rather in contemplation of the strangeness of her own stranded practices" (*Exile* 234). The lives and literary careers of Behn, Barker, Davys, and Haywood are undoubtedly discrete, as each author wrote from her specific historical moment, geographical location, and personal experience. Yet it may be that the critical inclination to separate the writers and to read them in

opposition overlooks the textual nuances, such as the depictions of passive or active female agency and the expressions of ambivalence toward engendered cultural prescripts, which connect the works.

A comparative reading of the short fiction by Behn, Barker, Davys, and Haywood must also be sensitive to the unique formulaic and thematic strategies each writer develops in order to engage with the problem of contradictory gender ideologies. Williamson contends that the work of early women writers takes an "assertive approach to woman's condition and creates a set of terms that are used to define women's major problems and the solutions to them" (17). The four authors of this thesis do all deal, assertively, with the dilemmas specific to women, but their texts elucidate different issues through varying viewpoints, ranging from questions of female piety and virtue to marriage, male authority, and female chastity. What links them, then, is not simply their shared gender or common feminocentric focus, but rather the fact that each writer, through her own set of textual strategies, works through the culturally inscribed paradoxes that generate and perpetuate social and literary fictions of femininity. It is at best debatable whether the fact that these four disparate women writers all endeavored to free their texts and heroines from cultural and generic conventions suggests that they collaborated in the creation of a female literary tradition.

The question of an emerging tradition of women's writing in the early period is a vexed one that alters depending on whether the critic defines the terms of a tradition as based on a common dedication to writing the female

condition or on authorial acknowledgement of other writers. Spencer argues for a female literary tradition based on textual content, writing "we will find [women writers] building, out of the contradictions of 'femininity,' an identity for themselves as writers and a female tradition of literature" (*Rise* 33). She would therefore see the works of Behn, Barker, Davys, and Haywood as working together in the formation of a specifically female literary heritage. On the other hand, Ballaster argues, "It is ... difficult to speak of a 'woman's tradition' in the novel of this period; if women read each others' work they did not, for the most part, openly acknowledge the influence" (Women 201). The extent to which women writers knew of each others' work remains uncertain, for whether or not they acknowledged having read other female authors, the cost of books meant that most would probably not have read all the works by their contemporaries, and thus their knowledge would have been somewhat limited. The fact that critics define a female literary tradition according to various criteria leads not to a final answer, but rather to an impasse reflective of disagreement over the terms of the debate as well as of gaps in historical evidence.

Perhaps a discussion of the development of a tradition of women's authority in literature, rather than of the emergence of a specifically female literary tradition, would be more constructive for a debate on early women's writing. What is certain about early women's writing is that female authors would have been aware of the fact that they were "in a special *position* because of society's attitude to their sex," and thus would have thought of their act of

writing in gendered terms (Spencer, *Rise* ix). In fact, as Williamson suggests, early women writers "not only acknowledge but insist on the fact that they are women" (35). She argues that women writers used their gender awareness to "create a widespread consciousness among women ... of the extent of their oppression" and to "invent a critique of society" (Williamson 36). Early women writers, then, found in cultural and literary constraints access to writerly authority which they used to create works and heroines that resisted, for a time, social and generic confinement. In so doing, the female authors reflected, as they depicted, the woman's desire for control over her text and context. In *The History of the Nun*, *Love Intrigues* and *A Patch-Work Screen for the Ladies*, *The Reformed Coquet*, and *Fantomina*, Behn, Barker, Davys, and Haywood, whether considered pious or erotic, didactic or transgressive, all assert their authority as women and as writers to question and ultimately weaken the contradictory gender ideologies that define the boundaries of cultural and literary conventions and to provide a vision of woman's ability to exercise agency over both her lived and literary experience.

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