

Popular Fiction by Women

1660-1730

AN ANTHOLOGY

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CLARENDON PRESS · OXFORD

1996

Introduction

Two critical studies appeared in the 1950s that reinvigorated the study of the eighteenth-century British novel: A. D. McKillop's *The Early Masters of English Fiction* (1956) and Ian Watt's seminal *The Rise of the Novel: Studies in Defoe, Richardson, and Fielding* (1957). But the unspoken masculinist assumptions of both of these influential and powerful books are now embarrassingly apparent, since during the last twenty-five years or so numerous literary historians have begun to complicate the history of the novel in Britain in the late seventeenth and eighteenth centuries by reading beyond and around the works of the male masters on whom McKillop and Watt concentrated exclusively. What this revisionist history has recovered and re-evaluated is a mass of fiction by women during the eighteenth century that in actual fact dominated the production of the early novel in Britain. So that today no discussion of the subject or courses on the 'rise' of the British novel can afford to ignore the women writers in this anthology, most of whom may be said to be an important part of the history of the novel or, at least, form a set of rival or counter-traditions to the realistic and moral novel traced by older literary historians. Reading backwards from the perspectives and values of the nineteenth- and twentieth-century novel and imposing what we can now see is a falsely teleological line of evolution for the slow emergence of the novel in the early eighteenth century, critics like Watt and McKillop (and many others who followed in their path) tended to treat the extant narrative from those years (much of it by women) as the inchoate mass from which the masters triumphantly emerged. In this scenario, Richardson and Fielding were the originators of the modern novel because they revolutionized what they saw as the weak handling of narrative techniques and the diffuse arrangements of fictional materials by their inept predecessors and hapless contemporaries, taking the loose sense of plot, character, and setting they found all around them to create the extended narrative of complex moral and social characters and themes that we now think of as the standard recipe for the realistic novel. According to this story, in place of the faceless, formulaic repetitions of booksellers' hacks and financially distressed female authors, they produced individualized

masterpieces of social observation and psychological depth which point the way to the great tradition of the modern novel in the centuries to come.

Although Richardson and Fielding did accomplish something like that, radically incomplete. What we now think of as the main tradition of the novel as exemplified by the canonical male masters is, strictly speaking, the initiation and imposition as a culturally superior form of a certain kind of fiction. Both in terms of their numerical presence in the literary market-place and their influence upon the full-blown novel promulgated by Richardson and Fielding, women's fiction is the most important narrative produced from 1680 to 1740. With the revisionary books on the eighteenth-century English novel written in the 1950s and especially in the 1960s, a sustained effort to understand the place of fiction by women began and is today one of the major studies of those in eighteenth-century literature, the novel, and women's history and literature. Increasingly in recent years feminist critics and novel specialists have placed these writers and their texts in the contexts of their time and of literary history with illuminating results. The success of Aphra Behn rivalled or even surpassed that of all of her contemporaries except John Dryden by any measure—quality, popularity, longevity. Dryden passed over numerous male poets when he invited Behn to contribute to his edition of *Ovid's Epistles* (1680), and he praised her as a writer on several occasions.¹ Eliza Haywood's *Love in Excess* (1719) was one of the four best-selling books of the first half of the eighteenth century: only Daniel Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe* (1719), Jonathan Swift's *Gulliver's Travels* (1726), and Samuel Richardson's *Pamela* (1741) equalled it. Haywood, Aubin, and Defoe absolutely dominated prose fiction in the decade of the 1720s. The distinct varieties of narrative produced by the writers in this anthology point to the rich possibilities for fictional representation, many still very much alive and recognizable today, and to the active experimentation underway with traditional and new forms of fiction in those years.

Often entitled *lives*, 'lives and adventures', histories or secret histories, or novels, sometimes translated or adapted from the French *nouvelle* or the Spanish *novelas*, sometimes imitations or adaptations of continental or earlier English models, and sometimes original English inventions, the variety of sobriquets suggests both how rich the tradition was and how young the form that would be the English novel was. Recent books such as Ros Ballaster's *Seductive Forms*, Joan Dejean's *Tender Geographies*, and Linda Kauffman's *Discourses of Desire* have pointed out how important fictions in the development of the modern novel such as Marie-Madeleine de Lafayette's *La Princesse de Clèves* were and how English writers drew upon, popularized, and adapted the enormous French heroic romances of the seventeenth century, the multi-volume explorations of the moods of love with stylized aristocratic characters

¹ James Winn, *When Beauty Fires the Blood* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1992),

and settings) The *nouvelles* and the romances such as Madeleine de Scudéry's *Artamène, ou le grand Cyrus* (1649-53) and *Clélie* (1656-60) were deeply concerned with contemporary politics, with the influence of a nation's history on its present, and in many ways were the successors of medieval and Renaissance romances in verse and prose in that they explored in stately, baroque prose with many interpolated stories and digressions the courtly ethos of love and honour that had been the obsession of European élites for centuries. Between 1685 and 1740 works of prose fiction moved away from the short forms related to the French romance and *nouvelle* with their interpolated 'histories' of lives, and the Spanish and Portuguese tales like *Five Love Letters from a Nun to a Cavalier* and Cervantes's *Exemplary Novels*. They tended to become long narratives unified by a central character or two with some psychological depth who interacted in significant ways with society. Working within the often complicated, fantastic framework of older forms, they inscribe the beginnings of psychological realism. To a large extent, the development of the English novel is the history of the development of the psychological novel and of the working out of the means of constructing social commentary driven by moral judgement.

In addition, the market for fiction in these years in Britain clearly required something shorter and less elaborate, less stylized, more immediately appealing to a wider range of taste, and more practical as well as affordable for a new generation of readers whose leisure time for reading and financial resources were not unlimited. Most of the writers in this anthology call these texts 'novels' in their prefatory manner. 'A small tale, generally of love,' is Samuel Johnson's definition of 'novel' in his 1755 *Dictionary of the English Language*, and what he had in mind was precisely the shorter fiction produced by Behn, Manley, Haywood, Aubin, Davys, Barker, and many others. Between 1680 and 1740, these women were, with Defoe, the most popular writers of fiction in England. And it is worth noting that Defoe shared some measure of their neglect (except for *Robinson Crusoe*) until the mid-1950s when Watt's and McKillop's studies appeared.

These texts continue to raise a number of important questions about the virtual disappearance from literary history of this body of fiction by women, and, inevitably, about the history of the English novel, about canon formation, and about aesthetics.² One sociologically-oriented explanation is that such fiction, along with other parallel efforts in different modes and narrative forms, is essentially the precursor of modern mass market or popular fiction, highly readable and in effect disposable entertainment, often topically

² In 1979, Annette Kolodny wrote that reading the newly rediscovered texts by women writers 'inevitably raised perplexing questions as to the reasons for their disappearance'. 'Dancing through the Minefield', *Feminist Studies*, 6 (1980), 2. William Warner raises a variant on this question: 'How is the eclipse of an influential strain of popular fiction to be understood?'; in *Licensing Pleasure*, in John J. Richetti (ed.), *The Columbia History of the British Novel* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994), 13.

scandalous or sensational or pornographic or merely sentimental.³ In this view, much of this material was aimed at readers conceived as having shorter attention spans and limited educational backgrounds (not just women, of course, but an expanding middle-class urban audience of literate but not formally educated consumers), and it offered simple and even cartoonish renditions of adventure in exotic places or of criminal careers, or more often of melodramatic, romantic, and erotic situations. As 'popular' fiction, these texts are necessarily ephemeral, limited in their appeal and effectiveness to the cultural and ideological moment that produced and marketed them, offered (often with crudely huckstering title-pages and advertisements) by opportunistic booksellers for a particular or targeted audience whose needs they served or hoped to please for profit.

But even from this critical approach and understanding, these texts are indeed significant and repay close study (if not of their textual details, for the patterns and formulas they display across a range of examples) precisely because, as popular literature, they initiate the specifically modern phenomenon of formula and mass market fiction, and in so doing dramatize the cultural fragmentation characteristic of modern life in which popular literature is a set of commodities targeted at what the producers hope are particular levels of the market who will respond in predictable ways. And like other forms of popular entertainment, such critics would insist, this fiction is at least superficially quite conservative, promoting current ideology and prevailing values. (Women's fiction by these lights is amatory and appears as a species of escapist propaganda for the status quo, a form of ideological ratification of the myths of patriarchal culture about the special and redeeming weakness of the virgin-martyr who preserves moral order in her resistance to seduction and betrayal or illustrates the necessity of female rectitude in her tragic weakness and emotional vulnerability.⁴ To be sure, such an approach fails to illuminate or to do full justice to self-consciously individualized works such as Manley's and Behn's, which add to popular scandal and easy eroticism an intellectual and political sophistication and a proto-feminist signature missing, for example, from the fictions of Aubin and some of Haywood; nor, many would say, to the importance of this fiction in the history of the novel. Indeed, one might argue that each of the fictions in this volume exploits popular formulas and bends or adapts those popular patterns for its own political, ideological, comic, or tragic purposes, which is precisely what on a different scale Richardson and Fielding sought to do in their novels.

³ In *Factual Fictions: The Origins of the English Novel* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1983), Leonard Davis offered the provocative thesis that the novel emerges out of an intensified interest in contemporary happenings that he calls the novel/news discourse. And many early novels claim, however casually, that the events they offer are true and recent—news, in other words.

⁴ See John J. Richetti, *Popular Fiction before Richardson: Narrative Patterns 1700–1739* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1969; repr. with new introduction by the author, 1992).

Nearly an entire generation of feminist critics would agree with this last statement, although they have offered other explanations for the reading experience that give rise to some of the objections to the texts as serious literature, and they ask us to realize as we read that our aesthetic criteria are culture-bound and socially constructed. Toni Bowers puts the current mood succinctly: 'Rather than denigrate (or praise) amatory fiction wholesale, critics might better ask why we define "good" literature as we do, how our assumptions about literary value still work to valorize some voices and exclude others, and how our capacities for pleasure might be augmented by respectful engagement with works we have been trained to resist or dismiss.'⁵

And this statement leads into the second most common feminist explanation: it may be the case that our inability to read some of these texts with pleasure or sympathy points to the inadequacy of traditional reading strategies and critical methods, which have made these texts 'unreadable'; that is, both tedious and uninterpretable. Annette Kolodny puts it strongly when she says that the patriarchal critic 'enters a strange and unfamiliar world of symbolic significance' (5). For those who hold this view, then, these works are not repetitive or formulaic; such qualities are these writers' means of dramatizing the universal and replicated condition of women in the patriarchy. Haywood's work, for instance, is filled with doubled characters and thematically reinforcing reiterations; in *The British Recluse*, Bellamy is the phallic master signifier as it doubles Cleomira, then doubles her again and again in Melissa, Miranda, Belinda, and more.

This same generation of feminists has used the rich arsenal of sophisticated critical methodologies to reveal more than the sociological value of the texts. In looking at the plots and myths these women writers created and the influence they might have exerted on historical women and the literary marketplace, they have begun to explicate the forms they used and created. Joining the critics giving new attention to the non-realist novel, they have revealed unions of form and content and effective statements of personal and public engagement worthy of serious attention. (They are arguing that, for instance, Eliza Haywood is a major contributor to the history of the early novel whose work is a sustained critique of her society, male-female relationships, and class politics, and that these characteristics should be recognized and integrated into studies of the eroticism and wild fantasies also typical of her texts.)

From any of these perspectives, these texts reward close study. Not only did they initiate the specifically modern phenomenon of formula and mass market fiction, but they also helped shape the English novel form, introduced some of its major concerns and themes, and expanded the ways it participates in social debate. As many critics have noted of late, these fictions thereby stand in some sort of an essential or even an enabling relation to the canonical novels of mid-century, and serious attention must be paid to them.

⁵ Toni Bowers, 'Sex, Lies, and Invisibility: Amatory Fiction from the Restoration to Mid-Century', *The Columbia History of the British Novel*, 70.

William B. Warner has asserted forcefully that Richardson and Fielding were aware of their dependence and their rivalry with women's novels and sought to occlude their adaptation of this popular or formula fiction. Warner sees the conflict between the new novel of Fielding and Richardson and the older tradition of Tracy female novels in rather stark and dramatic terms: 'by claiming to inaugurate an entirely "new" species of writing, Richardson and Fielding both seek to assert the fundamental difference of their own projects from these antagonists—the notorious trio of Behn, Manley and Haywood—who continue to circulate in the market as threatening rivals in a zero-sum struggle to control a common cultural space and activity.'⁶ At the least, as Michael McKeon has argued, they help to create the novel as a set of generic possibilities and unspoken assumptions or expectations about fiction that displaced the older dominant patterns of romance and allegory. The new narratives of the 1740s and after can come into existence precisely because the novel itself now exists as what Karl Marx calls a 'simple abstraction', a 'quasi-objective category' in relation to which Richardson and Fielding can define themselves dialectically: separate from their precursors and contemporaries but dependent on them for defining their own particular complexity and independence, they simultaneously cancel and fulfil them.⁷ The male masters needed the female producers of fiction, McKeon argues, if only to transcend them and bring fiction to a higher level of development.

To be sure, for feminist critics the kind of importance McKeon attaches to women's fiction, however complex and dialectical, is insufficient (even a bit condescending) and falls far short of evoking the special power and relevance (and pathos) of women's narratives. Critics like Ros Ballaster find in women's amatory fiction from these years a powerful articulation of female identity and self-consciousness available nowhere else in the culture of the time, an articulation which revises and subverts traditional masculinist constructions of the feminine. Ballaster argues that before the 1740s female amatory fiction offers a 'politically engaged and fantasy-oriented' fiction that is a powerful alternative to those 'naturalizing mechanisms' of human psychology projected by the realist novel.⁸ Even the category of amatory fiction for critics like Ballaster has its own powerful *raison d'être* and is not simply or even dialectically important because it helps to provoke what becomes the main tradition of the novel. At its most compelling in the scandalous and amatory tales of Behn, Manley, and Haywood, in their bounding eroticism and emotionalism and their sometimes wild and fantastic intensities, amatory fiction by women forms a kind of deliberate counter-statement or alternative tradition to the measured social realism and moral analysis of the male novel.

Many critics see how incomplete 'amatory' is as a descriptive term and how serious issues manifest themselves wherever we look. In these early novels women enter public discourse and, through narrative enactment and projection in fictional characters, publish their opinions on the most absorbing topics of the day: the intersections of religion and politics, the family and marriage, the nature of woman and female sexuality, the limits and abuse of authority, and the rights and obligations of monarchs. Jane Barker begins her *Love Intrigues* with the characters worrying about the personal consequences of yet another war; Delarivière Manley attacks the Duchess of Marlborough as a manipulative monster and sexual predator but places her and other women in Queen Anne's court at the centre of national affairs and the struggles for power;⁹ in an apparently pious, other-worldly fiction, Elizabeth Rowe strikes out at the hypocrisy and materialistic values of the Church that had imprisoned her father. In the decades when Englishmen were required to take often contradictory vows or, in effect, lose their citizenship, many women writers joined in exploring and problematizing the binding nature of oaths. Alpha Behn's *The History of the Nun*, for instance, can easily be read as a troubling allegory about making and keeping vows that concludes with an Absolutist Aesopian moral parodying the impractical commandment of successive governments: 'Never break a vow. Mary Davys includes Whig-Tory satires in her *Familiar Letters*, and dedicates her plays to Princess Anne. Feminist critics and even general readers have also embraced books by women as one of the few places in which women could speak for themselves, represent women's experiences, could express their needs, their nightmares, and their utopian hopes, and escape the masculine myth of the female. The thin line between seduction and rape, the short interval between sexual counsel and surrender and then their aftermath in abandonment and betrayal speak, say feminist readers of these texts, to contemporary realities of abused and abandoned women, of 'date rape' and other routine dangers and humiliations that women still face every day and all the time. There is, in short, a stirring and powerful contemporary resonance for many twentieth-century writers in these eighteenth-century fictions.¹⁰ The relationship of these fictions to modern romances, 'gothics', and novels written for women is also relevant.

But yet even at their most wildly escapist and emotionally thrilling, these fictions can be said to partake of the moral and social functions narrative fiction serves. As J. Paul Hunter has recently observed, the eighteenth-

⁶ William B. Warner, 'The Elevation of the Novel in England: Hegemony and Literary History', *English Literary History*, 59 (1992), 577-96, quotation from 580.

⁷ *The Origins of the English Novel 1600-1740* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1987).

⁸ Ros Ballaster, *Seductive Forms: Women's Amatory Fiction from 1684 to 1740* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992), 10-11.

See Frances Harris, *A Passion for Government: The Life of Sarah, Duchess of Marlborough* (Oxford, 1991) for an intriguing portrait of Sarah and other women being bred to a life in court life and influence.

⁹ We are often reminded that sentences such as this must include men; as one of our male characters is commented, 'I have a wife, a mother, sisters, and a baby daughter—I have a stake in men and this literature.'

century novel is directed at problems or dilemmas that are specific to particular persons and social circumstances, and these fictions are often attentive to such situations. Hunter poses some typical questions that novels of the time seek to answer: 'How is an innocent servant girl to act when her wicked master decides it is his right to seduce her?' [Pamela]¹¹ Such practical and specific questions (and ostensible cautionary purposes) are at the heart of these fictions, and are sometimes exploited for subtle purposes as they are in Haywood's *Fantomina*. Although some would say that the emphasis in much of the fiction lies not so much in solving the problem or negotiating a way around it as in dramatizing in exciting and involving ways the internal and emotional effects, others would argue that closure tends to serve the dominant ideology, and these fictions by their very open-endedness highlight cultural issues in need of thought and address. Without falling into essentialist notions of gender, perhaps it is possible to say that male novelists of the period tend to dwell on problem-solving and a kind of pragmatic didacticism, whereas some women writers present a tragic absolutism at work in social and moral circumstances that pushes them to narrate the inevitable effects without possibility of satisfactory resolution. Like all generalizations, this one has its limits, and readers of this anthology will find that it hardly applies to political satire like Manley's *The History of Queen Zarah*, whose central figure is a strong and scheming self-promoter, to social comedy like Mary Davy's *The Reformed Coquet*, or to the erotic playfulness of Eliza Haywood's *Fantomina*, where sexual freedom and mastery of her male lover are temporarily and subversively achieved by the heroine's clever machinations.

To a greater or lesser degree, each of these texts displays the novel form's characteristic ability to move from interior consciousness to external forces and events, and protagonists come to know themselves and to change more than most earlier fictional characters. Each text explores forms of power, means of influence, and social mores, often with devastating explication of their implications. As such they are small steps toward the dilemma that the classic European novel has faced since its beginnings—the conflict between the free self who narrates and the confining or determining realities which that self both experiences and must employ to understand experience. The gendered experience of their authors may have determined that their plots often move by means of forces outside the character, such as a father's plans for his daughter's marriage, coincidences, or accidents rather than by the protagonist's psychology or initiatives.

In these texts and in many more like them during these years, women (in current critical parlance) write women and women's bodies. Women's ambitions, needs, emotions, aspirations, sexuality, and independence are often in this fiction quite different from what the main tradition of the British novel offers as their prevailing representation. Scrutinized as women's writing these

¹¹ J. Paul Hunter, *Before Novels: The Cultural Contexts of Eighteenth-Century English Fiction* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1990), 94.

texts point (sometimes by implication and negative example and sometimes quite explicitly) to how love might be experienced and expressed, of what fulfillment and happiness might mean in another moral and social order. In some cases, they dispute the patriarchal myth that volcanic emotion and irresistible sexual passion overwhelm weak woman's limited reason and give us instead women characters with self-possession, self-respect, intelligence, and courage; qualities which are most strongly marked, of course, in the authors themselves, whatever their characters may have to do within the patterns of fiction. Woman's sexuality and awakenings to sexual consciousness figure in all of them, and they complicate the stereotypical image of woman as the seduced, fallen woman who was 'swept away' by her treacherous body and tumultuous emotions. Eliza Haywood's *Fantomina* constructs an elaborate masquerade to enjoy in various disguises the sexual favours of Beauplaisir, and in so doing she exercises social and sexual privilege peculiar to her class but not to her sex. Comic and liberating, her plot cancels the usual pattern whereby the promiscuous male enjoys the monogamous woman and then abandons her when he is sated with her charms. For *Fantomina*, Beauplaisir is a sex object she manipulates for her pleasure.

While we might predict that one of Elizabeth Rowe's heroines would stand firm and say that she would 'never comply with any . . . Schemes' to compromise her virtue (Letter IV), even the pious Rowe gives us 'warm writing' in letters that depict attractions between men and women. In none of these fictions is the moment of loss of virginity the pivotal and definitional moment that gives meaning to a woman's life and character. These writers also open up the possibility of a respectable and fulfilling choice other than heterosexual marriage; while this is debated in *Love Intrigues*, discussion of celibacy and other arrangements is opened in the work of Aubin, Davys, Haywood, and Manley. Some feminists have argued that women's texts have a utopian urge and seek to portray the 'couple of the future' for whom sexual passion is a natural part of a companionate marriage. At the least, fiction such as we have selected complicates the stereotypes of female passion and sexual relationships, and this anthology has no repetitions but rather interesting variations on the kinds of short fiction women authors produced in this period.

We include the major women writers of the period and bring together prose fictions that are representative both of their work and of their versatility, texts that are revisionary in form and content, and yet have some common subjects, episodes, narrative strategies, and concerns. Some of the most striking examples of double vision—seeing themselves simultaneously from within and without—are in these sections. Galesia imagines murdering Bosvil, and embroiders the fantasy to imagine women building a statue to honour her, even as she notes her feelings of helplessness. At one point she responds to a change in Bosvil's behaviour by looking in a mirror 'to see if my person was changed in that fatal three weeks'. In a variety of entertaining, original ways

they portray anger, always a vexed topic for women. Mary Davys has her heroine lament comically, 'what an assiduous creature is man, before enjoyment, and what a careless, negligent wretch after it.' In this text and several others, women write 'revenge fantasies', nearly a sub-genre in themselves. Several contemplate the retired life; incest figures into several, and a few take up such rarely opened topics as suicide.

Readers of this volume will notice that there is a noticeable shift in the construction of the feminine within these stories and of course beyond them into those novels by women such as Frances Sheridan, Sarah Fielding, Charlotte Lennox, and Frances Burney who write in the wake of Richardson and Fielding. Pious and deeply moral writers like Jane Barker, Penelope Aubin, and Elizabeth Singer Rowe represent both in their exemplary personal lives and in their fiction a distinctly separate idea of female writing and self-understanding and self-presentation. As Janet Todd has argued, between Aphra Behn at the end of the seventeenth century and Mary Wollstonecraft in the 1790s there is 'a century of sentimental construction of femininity, a state associated with modesty, passivity, chastity, moral elevation and suffering'.¹² As Todd, Jane Spencer, and others evoke it, female writers could not in the end afford to mimic male freedom like Behn, Manley, and Haywood or to create a subversive female plot in which subordination and submission became means of self-assertion and female glorification as they do in the texts by Aubin, Davys, Barker, and Rowe.

Indeed, although the stories in this collection can all be grouped in a number of ways, they are each distinct and particular to their authors. Our book begins with the woman writer of whom Virginia Woolf wrote, 'all women together ought to let flowers fall upon the tomb of Aphra Behn' and with Delarivière Manley, the other pioneer professional writer. The Behn and Manley selections are overt and explicit in their narrative purposes, and we might even say that as authors they lived under an earlier and less prudish dispensation when female wit and intelligence could express themselves more freely and openly than the generation of Frances Burney and Charlotte Lennox. Manley's *Queen Zarah* (1705) is short on plot, since it is simply a thinly fictionalized version of the nefarious schemes of the Marlboroughs and other Whig politicians she wished to vilify. But *Queen Zarah* sparkles with ferocious wit and bracing political hatred; it delights in Zarah's self-serving and inventive energy even as it denounces it, and Manley savours the erotic electricity of the corrupt court she evokes and attacks. *The History of the Nun* (1689) is a study of unfortunate Fate and unlucky Fortune, and the reader is invited to lament the chances and circumstances that lead to Isabella's transformation from female saint to double murderer. Like *Queen Zarah*, *The History of the Nun; or The Fair Vow-Breaker* offers readers an inside view of an exotic (and to English eyes) scandalous and corrupting milieu, a convent. Not

surprisingly given her Tory and Jacobite leanings, Aphra Behn's (and Eliza Haywood's) cloistered convent is not like the monasteries of later Gothic fiction, a scene of secret lust and corruption, but, as it was to their contemporary the Duchess of Mazarine and many others, a sanctuary and a decorous court where the outside world comes to chat and gossip at the visitors' grate with the daughters of the Flemish 'quality' who have chosen the religious life. Its chief interest lies in its analysis of the psychological and sexual effects on a young girl like Isabella of such an artificial and constricting existence. Drawn irresistibly to Henault and after anguished hesitation to break her vows, she is drawn just as compellingly some years later to acts of violent self-preservation when the long-absent and presumed-dead Henault returns and threatens the calm stability of her privileged life with Villenoy's. The effects of Behn's wonderfully unjudgemental tale are nearly tragic and certainly painful, since Isabella is a victim of circumstances and her own fidelity to her instincts for virtue and for survival in a male world.

Jane Barker's *Love Intrigues* has already achieved nearly canonical status. Praised by modern critics for its artful composition and psychological turn, it is one of the first novels to move smoothly between the inner life of the heroine and the external world to which she is forced to respond. It takes as its subject the frustrations of trying to understand another human being, especially when social codes restrict the expression of honest feelings. As the heroine attempts to interpret Bosvil's words and actions, what others tell her about him, and what initiatives are open to her within courtship rituals, Galesta becomes a very early bearer of women's experiences, including self-consciousness about the body, the 'double vision' of seeing the self from within and without simultaneously, and the ambivalences associated with the writing life. Barker uses a variety of artful strategies to give heightened insight into Galesta's thoughts and feelings. Among them are her changes of dress, the poems included in the text, and allusions to plays and other kinds of literature. Anger, always a difficult emotion for women writers to convey acceptably, is well done. In one passage, she compares her experience to the cynical description of court promises being as worthless as whores' vows in a poem by John Wilmot, earl of Rochester.

Penelope Aubin's *The Strange Adventures of the Count de Vinevil* is the best example in this volume of popular fiction in the strict sense, of crudely imagined representations of good and evil opposed, in this case of Muslim treachery and lust versus Christian innocence and purity. Aubin's novels rehearse the edifying spectacle of Divine Providence coming to the rescue of beleaguered innocence, and their popularity points to a widespread need for such soothing certainties in what believers saw as an increasingly secular age. Ardelisa is a virginal innocent lusted after by Osmih, a merciless and martial Turk, who does succeed in killing her venerable father, the Count de Vinevil. Things look very dark for a time as treacherous Turks lurk around every corner, but her young lover the Count de Longueville is a capable young man

¹² Janet Todd, *The Sign of Angellica: Women, Writing and Fiction, 1660-1800* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1989), 4.

who eventually, thanks to the lucky twists and turns of the plot, finds her alive and marries her (although not before she tests his constancy). In spite of the simplicity and general *maiveté* of the tale, Aubin was certainly shrewdly alert to the popularity of stories set in exotic places; and following the example of Defoe's recent bestseller, *Robinson Crusoe* (1719), she takes care to isolate her Christian refugees from their terrible sojourn in Turkey on a deserted island in the Mediterranean, where they survive by virtue of the foraging abilities of their faithful and devoted servants and are rescued by a Venetian ship that takes them back to Christian Europe and happy marriages all around.

Eliza Haywood may be the most controversial and most important writer in the collection. In a sense, as Margaret Doody has put it, her novels belong 'lesh 'the seduction novel . . . and it is to this genre that Richardson's work ultimately belongs.'¹³ But she is like all the writers in this collection a pioneer in her own right, the successor to Behn and Manley as the most prolific and successful woman writer of her day in Britain. Through the 1720s and 1730s her novellas dominated the market, and she was in terms of popularity no less than the Barbara Cartland or Danielle Steele of her day, or so at least her publishers tried to present her and to describe the effects of her work on selling readers. Certainly Haywood is the most revisionary of the writers in this collection, even in her uses of familiar plot lines. For instance, *Adonina's* energy and passion are a marked contrast to the anguished submission to the feminine role, and her lack of remorse reveals the contradictions in definitions of 'woman'.

In their different ways, *Fantomina* and *The British Recluse* predict the marked adaptability Haywood would display in the post-Richardson era when she switched her narrative mode to the longer or 'dilated' and more monumental novel then in fashion, producing books such as *The History of Betsy Thoughtless* (1751) and *The History of Jemmy and Jenny Jessamy*. Both of the short novels reprinted in this volume display a sharp, criticism of the short novels and record female triumph of several sorts, even in her more formulaic tales of tumultuous passion the corruption.

The male establishment is a given. Taken all together, Haywood's works are as much a critique of patriarchal arrangements as they are often a celebration of female emotional intensity. Pathos and anger share with erotic arousal and explorations of women's sexuality. To gain the perspective of women watching men and them an alien, secret society. She can also meld class privilege with power in ways that have startling, contemporary resonance. *Belinda* in *The British Recluse* is nearly kidnapped by a rake as an object, but the narrator remarks, 'Had such a piece of

¹³ Margaret Doody, *A Natural Passion: A Study of the Novels of Samuel Richardson* (Oxford, 1974), 149.

ultimately been attempted by a meaner Man, he certainly had been secured; but Quality made everybody unwilling. . . .

Within the larger history of the English novel, *The British Recluse* can be used to explore a pivotal moment in the history of the novel. Traces of earlier fiction are obvious, as in the extravagantly emotional letters Cleomira writes, which seem modelled after *Five Love Letters between a Nun and a Cavalier*. Obviously related to the French *nouvelle* and romance, the text places *Belinda* in much the same position as the Princesse de Clèves in that she feels too passion for Worthy but slowly learns what ideal love would be. The nucleus of *The British Recluse* became the story of Betsy and Trueman in what is regarded as Haywood's best full-length novel and a major contribution to the fictional strain represented by Richardson and Burney, *The History of Miss Betsy Thoughtless* (1751).

Of all the texts in this anthology, the excerpt from Rowe's popular *Friendship in Death, or Letters from the Dead to the Living* (1728) may seem most strange to the reader. When Rowe wrote these little fictions, letters from the dead to the living were something of a literary fashion. John Dee's *A True and Faithful Relation of what passed for many years between Dr. John Dee . . . and Some Spirits* (1659) was still popular, and Thomas Brown's *Letters from the Dead to the Living* (1702) was successful enough for him to write several more volumes of them. Translations of such books by French intellectuals (Bernard Le Bovier de Fontenelle's *Dialogues of the Dead* [trans. 1708], François de Salignac de La Mothe Fénelon's *Fables and Dialogues of the Dead* [trans. 1722]) sold alongside such humorous English books as Sheppard in Egypt . . . *Being a Letter from John Sheppard to Frisky Moll* (1725). The year before publication of her book, Daniel Defoe's *An Essay on the History and Reality of Apparitions* had included stories of appearances of spirits, including conversations held with them. Such books contributed to a larger effort mounted by religious believers in these years to defend religion against what they saw as a rising tide of irreligion and infidelity, deism and atheism. Religious publications outnumbered all other kinds at this time, and most types of writing offered advice. Rowe's little stories of warnings from the other side of the 'reality' of the after-life were exceedingly popular, and, like popular fiction in other forms, they often turn on bizarre incidents, strange coincidences, or doomed love. In fact, in spite of the pious purpose, many of Rowe's epistolary fictions in *Friendship* are formula stories, familiar plots with conventional characters and predictable outcomes. One is from a nun, and another intertwaves the eighteenth-century obsessions with babies switched at birth and with incest.

Mary Davys's *The Reformed Coquet* is a well-plotted, lively novel in which narrative devices that would remain popular throughout the century and highly original touches are integrated. Like so many novelists of the century, she explicitly points out the importance of the drama to her art, and heroine and narrator sometimes speak with the witty economy of Restoration drama. Some of her fops and other characters were still walking the boards of Drury

Lane and Covent Garden as she wrote. Her use of disguises is sophisticated; some characters use them for evil, some for benign, even idealistic purposes, and one, Altemira, to express her social position. Indeed all of the disguises are symbolic and are an original contribution to the novel's ability to convey internal states of mind within socially symbolic episodes. Davys also makes a significant contribution to novelistic style. Her narrator, as Henry Fielding's will be, has a firm, friendly relationship with the reader; she promises, for instance, that 'the Reader shall know by and by' what saves the heroine. She can sound Austenian, creating a combination of mock lament and serious accuracy that reminds us of *Emma* when she writes, 'What an unhappy Creature is a beautiful young Girl left to her own Management. . . . ' Her characters echo each other, giving humour and nuance to observations about gender and human nature. A prowling rake can admire a ceiling painting of the rape of Helen. Quite early she had demonstrated considerable flexibility and effectiveness with combining comic, satiric, and narrative styles, and this novel adds strong unity and suspense. Just as *Miss Betsy Thoughtless* expands upon the story and characters in *The British Recluse*, Davys reworked the story of Lord Lofly and Altemira, deepening and exploring social and personal issues, in *The Accomplished Rake*.

Although we often think of romances and fictions such as these as having an almost exclusively female audience, they were read and enjoyed by both sexes in the eighteenth century. A testimonial poem ('By an unknown Hand') introduces Haywood's best-selling *Love in Excess* (1719) by depicting Haywood as a champion of her sex and a promoter of love's power:

A Stranger Muse, an Unbeliever, too,
That women's Souls such Strength of Vigour knew!
Nor less an Atheist to Love's Power declar'd,
Till you a Champion for the Sex appear'd!
A Convert now, to both, I feel that Fire
Your Words alone can paint! Your Looks inspire!

No more of Phoebus rising vainly boast,
Ye tawny Sons of a luxurious Coast!
While our bless'd Isle is with such Rays replete,
Britain shall glow with more than Eastern Heat!

This paragonist speaks as a man and describes the effects of these novels on a male sensibility, for Haywood's novels and those of the other writers we have gathered here were clearly intended for both men and women. Only Davys's novel has a specific, warm address to women, yet of all the stories we have selected, *The Reformed Coquet* has been treated by modern critics as the most traditional and the most clearly and smoothly linked to the 'mainstream' novel of mid-century and after. Amoranda, the coquette of the title, matures (albeit abruptly) under the stress of the surprisingly violent and graphic inci-

ents that make up the plot) and comes to value good sense as she falls in love with the man who delivers her from two sets of kidnappers. With a fine sense of comic control and with some of the sexual candour and near-licence of stage comedy, Davys has reminded some readers of Fielding, and *Reform'd* novellas have something of the qualities of his novels in the high spirits, the satiric edge, and the satisfyingly sentimental resolution of their plots.

Despite Davys's realism, many critics recognize that these fictions are fantasy machines; they see that as surely as one of the authors' goals was to give comic pleasure, others were to figure a female Imaginary, a glimpse of the Utopian hope of a new kind of man, a different model for marriage, and a better, more respected position for woman. We now see these women and their creations as scandalous not just because they dared to depict women's sexuality and some men's rapacious commodification of it but also because they treated women who were economically independent, who had the capacity to protect themselves or even exact revenge, and whose characters or 'nature' deviated from the expected or socially sanctioned. In all of these texts, women show the unsettling ability to move from victimization to aggression. Women's texts use familiar paradigms and myths to express not only the social realities of women's position in eighteenth-century society but the larger ideological realities of the age. In doing so, they created new literary forms and invigorated old ones.

As *The Reformed Coquet* makes especially clear, part of the challenge for readers of this volume will be to judge whether there are any particular qualities in these fictions that mark them as distinctively by women and that separate them from the mainstream of British fiction in the eighteenth century. Do they constitute, taken together and separately, a counter-tradition or a rival and competing set of narrative choices to the male novel of mid-century? The diversity of these stories, their affinities with the mainstream in some cases and their clear differences from it in others, may make the answer difficult and complicated. Whatever the answer the reader settles on and whatever critical perspective one brings to reading this fiction, one thing is clear: fiction by women is a crucial part of the literary history of the British eighteenth century, and the dialogue about the issues these texts raise is far from over.