A SPATIAL HISTORY OF ENGLISH NOVELS 1680-1770

Dissertation

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ABSTRACT

This dissertation provides a spatial history of English novels in the period 1680-1770. Demonstrating that space is a dynamic source of narrative, I argue that spaces are crucial to the development of new types of novels. Re-organizing novel history according to space allows me to consider eighteenth-century novel types as standalone genres rather than progressive steps toward the formation of the novel as one single, coherent genre. Thus, a spatial history of novels differs from conventional literary histories which situate major novels and authors within a linear model of chronological development and that view eighteenth-century novels as preliminary formal experiments that eventually contribute to the emergence of the nineteenth-century realist novel.

Space can register in novels in a number of ways, including geographical distance, topographical location, descriptors of movement, or architectural layout. My study considers, in particular, the spaces that constitute a character’s immediate physical environment. Each chapter examines a key space as central to a type of novel that flourished during the eighteenth century: gardens in amatory and pious novels, 1680-1730; staircases, hallways, and closets in the domestic interior in courtship novels of the 1740s; urban homes in mid-century problem marriage novels; and sickrooms in women’s sentimental novels of the 1750s and 1760s. I argue that each of these distinct genres
developed around certain architectural spaces because those spaces created the potential for new stories about a particular type of female character: wealthy heiresses; female domestic servants; wives in the aspiring middling ranks; and genteel widows and orphans. My project, therefore, corrects the critical tradition that tends to view space as merely setting, or background for action. Instead, I argue that the plots of eighteenth-century novels are essentially bound to and determined by specific spaces.

I use the concept of intertextuality to theorize both the significance of a space as it reappears in novels over time and its relationship to genre formation. Genres emerge when key spaces and the plot structures they support appear repeatedly in novels; the formulation of a genre crystallizes the meanings and values associated with its central space. In addition, intertextuality allows me to trace the significance of space in other historical and cultural texts, including architectural pattern-books, treatises on landscape improvement, conduct literature, periodical essays, and personal letters. Together, intertextuality and genre allow me to conceive of novel history as consisting of cycles of formal change that hinge on a space’s accumulated meanings.
For Serguei
And
For Mom and Dad
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INTRODUCTION

Architecture as a learned profession appeared in England in the sixteenth century, and by the seventeenth century, architectural plans, perspectives, and elevations had become common modes for representing space.1 In the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, architects and printers worked together to produce architectural pattern-books, first in response to the need for practical building plans in post-fire London, and later as a means of selling one’s talents to wealthy landowners remodeling their houses or building new homes on their country estates and in London.2 The westward expansion of London during the period 1660-1720 saw the rise of noblemen’s great houses and the speculative development of squares and townhouses for “polite” society, including the gentry as well as newly wealthy merchants and businessmen.3 Garden manuals in the same period offered landowners advice on improving the grounds of their estates through information on tree propagation, recommendations for plant selection, and new garden designs, including the English landscape garden.4 By the mid-eighteenth century, another new profession had gained in popularity: the “upholder,” an eighteenth-century equivalent of our modern day interior designer. Often hired by people in the aspiring middling ranks with new wealth and the desire to emulate their superiors, an upholsterer claimed expertise in how to arrange furnishings and display objects in the household according to fashion and taste.5 The growth of these professions in architecture, landscaping, and interior
design testifies to a new interest in domestic space in seventeenth- and eighteenth-century life.

By the eighteenth century, new social, economic, and family activities demanded redesigned domestic spaces. Social gatherings that involved tea-drinking, card-playing, and conversation replaced formal dinners and dancing; hosts of these events had to use the rooms of their houses in new ways. The occupants of older houses began “to throw the whole apartment open for assemblies, with card-tables in the withdrawing room and the guests parading through the unoccupied bedchamber and closet to admire their fittings and decorations.”6 The nobility, gentry and newly wealthy families from the middling ranks built new houses with more accommodating floor plans. For those in the aspiring middling ranks, a prosperous business might require a shop and warehouse to manufacture and store goods, and such a business would also provide the owner with the means to purchase new luxuries for the household.

Eighteenth-century novelists drew on the proliferation of ideas about and images of domestic space and, arguably, helped shape them in turn. Everyday spaces are crucial to some of the most fascinating moments of eighteenth-century novels, inspiring new narrative possibilities: the summerhouse introduces sexual adventure into a staid country estate by enabling a rake to kidnap an heiress, the staircase allows illicit communication between the master and a maid, the street door of an urban lodging permits intrusions on the family gathered around the hearth, and the sickroom dramatizes a woman’s difficult transition from wife to widow as she weeps at her husband’s bedside.
This dissertation provides a spatial history of English novels from 1680 to 1770. I argue that space is a dynamic source of narrative and that spaces are crucial to the development of new types of novels, specifically, amatory novels, courtship novels, problem marriage novels, and sentimental novels. A spatial history of novels offers a corrective to conventional literary histories that situate major novels and authors within a linear model of chronological development and that view eighteenth-century novels as preliminary formal experiments that eventually contribute to the emergence of the nineteenth-century realist novel. Re-organizing novel history according to space allows a consideration of eighteenth-century novel types as standalone genres and not necessarily as progressive steps toward the formation of the novel as one single, coherent genre. Rather than presenting a history of the novel, the following chapters, by taking space as a critical category for analysis, offer a spatial history of novels.

Space can register in novels in a number of ways, including geographical distance, topographical location, descriptors of movement, or architectural layout. Each of these types of spaces appears frequently in eighteenth-century English novels. My study considers, in particular, the spaces that constitute a character’s immediate physical environment. Accordingly, I use space in a broad sense to refer to both open space and the physical features that organize it. A space, by contrast, refers to a particular type of physical environment, such as a room; thus, the term, spaces, refers to the collective of several individual types of environments. The spaces of my study, therefore, are gardens, passageways in the domestic interior, urban homes, and sickrooms. Architectural feature refers more specifically to a built, physical element that organizes a space. A
summerhouse, an obelisk, a staircase, and a doorway are all architectural features significant to my work.

In the past three decades, space has become a theoretical topic of inquiry for scholars in the humanities and social sciences. The increasing interest in space responds, in part, to the concept of “lived space” developed in mid-twentieth-century philosophy, including Gaston Bachelard’s *The Poetics of Space* and Maurice Merleau-Ponty’s *The Phenomenology of Perception.* These studies conceive of lived space as the humanly experienced and embodied counterpart of the theoretical space of geometry and physics. In other words, *lived space* refers to the spaces in which humans experience everyday life and implies a subject who experiences and reacts to space and who perceives space through how it affects his or her daily life. Literary and cultural critics have adopted this notion of lived space to analyze the rich meanings that both actual spaces and representations of space in art and literature acquire through human perception and experience. Studies in cultural geography, new historicism, and cultural materialism investigate both secular and spiritual spaces, from the common and everyday to the unusual and unique, in order to better understand the social, political, and economic organization of societies and the cultural processes that shape them. Drawing on the wealth of critical theory on space, my project introduces space to eighteenth-century literary history, a field in which it has remained a relatively minor interest.

I view space in eighteenth-century English novels as both realistic and constructed, or more precisely, mimetic and synthetic. Novel spaces are mimetic in the sense that they resemble actual spaces and their resemblance contributes to the novel’s
realism. While the mimetic nature of novel spaces traditionally has led scholars to relegate them to the function of background setting in the service of realism, I complicate this view by attending to the ways in which novel spaces are also synthetic, or constructed in language and by narrative and, therefore, also artificial. The paradox of novel spaces is that they are constructed to serve the narrative by supporting the unfolding of the plot, but that plot arises out of and depends on their mimetic qualities. Thus, in eighteenth-century novels, the mimetic (realistic) and synthetic (constructed) functions of spaces are inseparable and interdependent.

The interdependence of the mimetic and synthetic qualities of novel spaces is crucial to how these spaces help to define genre. 11 Genre denotes a group of novels that demonstrate a family resemblance. 12 I recognize genre as conjectural rather than prescriptive, acknowledging that the categorization of genres is imperfect and malleable. 13 For the purposes of this study, the primary marker of genre is the repetition of a specific space in a group of novels. 14 In my use of space to define distinct novel genres and to position these genres in literary history, I build on Franco Moretti’s definition of genres as “temporary structures,” or “morphological arrangements that last in time, but always only for some time.” 15 Moretti’s focus on the temporary nature of genre informs his insight that genres evolve in 20-30 year cycles in which they become popular, flourish, and then wane. Employing Moretti’s definition of genre, I argue that space is a dominant component in determining the structure that constitutes a new genre and that other components are subordinate to space. 16 While it is widely acknowledged that distinct types of novels took shape throughout the eighteenth century, I show that, in
fact, one particular space structures each of these types, constituting individual genres. My spatial history of novels offers one answer to Moretti’s call for a literary history that does not theorize “the novel” as a single unified and coherent genre, but that offers instead a theory of “a whole family” of novel genres that collectively constitute the larger idea of the novel.  

I combine Moretti’s model of literary histories of genres with the concept of intertextuality to theorize the coalescing of genre around a familiar space and the way in which a space accumulates meaning that shapes its literary life in later novels. Julia Kristeva defines intertextuality as “the transposition of one (or several) sign system(s) into another.” Intertextuality indicates that texts weave together ideas, images, language, and meaning drawn from previous texts. Following Kristeva’s model, I view spaces within novels as signifying systems, or as entities that carry with them associated meanings and values. The intertextuality of space among novels not only informs generic distinctions, but also illuminates the literary life of a space over time and across genres. Moreover, intertextuality enriches my structural analysis of genre by enabling me to theorize the significance of historical co-texts. I trace the intertextuality of space beyond novels, attending to the appearance of particular spaces in previous and later literary works as well as eighteenth-century periodicals, personal letters and journals, conduct literature, and architectural pattern books. I examine representations of space in these historical and cultural contexts as evidence of how spaces operated in everyday life in order to better understand its role in novels. These cultural co-texts influence the role of space in novels, and novel spaces, in turn, further shape the cultural significance and
perhaps even the everyday functions of their actual counterparts. Thus, intertextuality illuminates the dynamic re-articulation of a space that creates new and multiple meanings associated with that specific space. As a result of my focus on the intertextuality of novel spaces, my project joins two seemingly disparate traditions of literary criticism: a historicist interest in cultural co-texts of novel production and a structuralist interest in the formation of literary convention.

Together, the concepts of intertextuality and of the life cycle of genre allow me to conceive of novel history as consisting of cycles of generic change that hinge on a space’s accumulated meanings. As a key space and the structure that it supports reappear across novels, intertextuality produces genre; the formulation of a genre crystallizes the meanings and values associated with its central space. Intertextuality also illuminates the fading of genres and the emergence of new spaces. Just as genres wane at fairly predictable intervals in Moretti’s formulation of literary history, spaces rise and fall in terms of their narrative power and resonance with the pressing issues of an age. Over time, intertextuality informs the literary life of a space as it re-appears in subsequent genres, carrying with it all of its previous associations.

Another component that has shaped my study is narrative theory’s interest in how structure produces meaning. In narrative theory, *narrative* refers to the joint entity of a story and its telling. As a primary element of narrative, space structures narrative through the organization of other narrative elements, including character and plot, and, thus, space is integral to producing meaning. Intertextuality and genre allow me to theorize the relationship between space and narrative. My investigation shows that space
can shape narrative in three distinct, but often overlapping, ways. First, a space can enable or permit an action through its physical qualities, acting as a stage that allows the occurrence of events that constitute the narrative. Second, a space can prompt a character’s actions, seeming to cause, rather than simply allow, events to occur. Third, a space can organize events, shaping the telling of the story rather than the story itself. All of the spaces that I attend to operate in accordance with at least two of these relationships; often a space’s centrality to genre originates in what it can permit and results in firm associations that seem to cause events in later novels. Each chapter shows that space is always an organizing principle of narrative in the sense that both its physical qualities as well as what it can permit to happen are critical to the telling of a story.

Literary historians have tended to view spatial detail in eighteenth-century literature as merely increased attention to setting and as a component of formal realism. Ian Watt’s seminal study, The Rise of the English Novel (1957), identifies description of the physical environment as a fundamental component of formal realism. Watt argues that the use of familiar settings distinguishes the novel from earlier literary genres such as epic and romance, which tend to feature far more stylized settings. Although he gives examples of how Daniel Defoe, Samuel Richardson, and Henry Fielding describe general setting and particular places differently from previous writers, he does not elaborate space as a component of the new plots and characters that the novel features. Instead, Watt focuses on time as the aspect of realism that primarily influences plot. Watt theorizes that “the novel’s closeness to the texture of daily experience directly depends upon its employment of a much more minutely discriminated time-scale than had
previously been employed in narrative.” In regard to character, he explains that the novel is interested in “the development of its characters in the course of time” and that “the novel’s detailed depiction of the concerns of everyday life also depends upon its power over the time dimension.” While many literary historians have followed Watt’s emphasis on time, only a few have picked up the threads of his brief inferences that space, too, is important to the novel. I offer a fuller engagement with Watt’s cursory treatment of setting by arguing that the novel’s new plots and characters are as dependent on space as they are on time. I show that by setting narratives in newly particularized spaces, eighteenth-century novelists find new possibilities for the stories that they can tell.

My theory of novel space and character combines Watt’s theory of formal realism as dependent on particularities of time and space with Catherine Gallagher’s concept that fictional character is independent of actual referents. Gallagher argues that fiction depends precisely on nothingness, explaining that the idea of nothingness, or of telling a story with no actual referents, made fiction possible as a discursive category distinct from either truth-telling or lying. Defining fictional character as an entity for which “there is understood to be no particular, embodied referent in the material world,” she explains that because fictional characters are “conjectural, suppositional identities belonging to no one, they could be universally appropriated.” Therefore, “a story about nobody was nobody’s story and hence could be entered, occupied, identified with by anybody.” By adding space as a primary constitutive component of character to Gallagher’s formulation, I assume a definition of character in which the particularities of space create
character fictionality through which the character becomes common property that can be altered and reproduced in various stories and genres. In other words, the realistic qualities of novel space contribute to the plausible existence of a person who fits the character type represented. By creating a sense of particularity, space supplies components of a character’s identity, including rank and wealth so that the character represents a realistic, familiar entity without representing an actual person.

Space is also a critical component for structuring plot in eighteenth-century English novels. Plot is the unfolding of a series of events in time or space. This definition suggests that while space may not be considered a necessary element for plot, it can be equally as important as time or even the supporting element of plot in the absence of temporal structure. My theory of novel space and plot builds on Patricia Meyer Spacks’s claim that eighteenth-century fiction is “both profoundly realist – that is its plots speak the realities of the culture from which they emerge – and consistently daring in its exploration of formal, psychological, and social possibility.” Spacks argues that eighteenth-century plots “illuminate the history, politics, and manners of their age not only by embodying prevailing ideology but, often, by reshaping ideology closer to the heart’s desire.” While Spacks shows that authors adapt and revise plots to express changes in social and cultural norms, I contend that in order to do so, authors must first adapt and revise actual and literary spaces to serve the changes in plot conventions.

My study of space offers a view of novel history as a collection of multiple formal and thematic trajectories, rather than one dominant coherent process of development. At
the broadest level, a pattern of intertextuality of space runs throughout eighteenth-century canonical and non-canonical novels produced by both male and female authors. Organizing literary history according to space rather than temporality restores space as a crucial component in the development of the novel.

Space has been characterized in a number of ways by scholars of eighteenth-century novels, and yet, none of these studies conceive of space as a means of organizing literary history. Moretti treats setting in terms of geography, mapping the events of novels across a city, a country, a continent, or the globe; he considers how the geographical location and movements of characters constitute meaning in the text. Similarly, topographical setting has garnered a great deal of scholarly attention. In fact, detailed attention to specific localities, including recognizable nations, regions, towns, city districts, or even streets has been the default exploration of space in eighteenth-century literature. Cynthia Wall analyzes topographical space to demonstrate that authors employed literary texts as a means of participating in the rebuilding and reorganizing of post-fire London. In contrast, Simon Varey considers the architectural settings of novels by Defoe, Richardson, and Fielding, and argues that architectural space symbolizes a character’s sense of individual identity. Whereas Varey characterizes the import of setting as psychological and symbolic, I argue that its significance is also structural and generic. Tita Chico similarly attends to architectural space, tracing representations of the dressing room from early satirical portrayals of this space as a symbol of illicit sexual behavior to later representations of the dressing room as a site for the display of virtuous motherhood. A few other brief studies attend to the ways in
which familiar eighteenth-century spaces shape a character’s environment in novels, but, like Chico’s, they tend to analyze one particular kind of space, such as closets or urban streets, and they lack an extended consideration of the rise and fall of different spaces over time and how they relate to genre. In contrast, each of my chapters takes up a small group of novels to investigate their similar treatment of a central space; as a whole, the project explores a period of nearly one hundred years.

In writing a spatial history of novels, I theorize the ways that space underpins aspects of the novel that literary histories tend to focus on, including narrative components like character and plot as well as ideological processes like constructions of gender, the separation of spheres, and the formation of the modern subject. My project builds on and enriches these studies by using a critical framework that privileges space as the organizational impetus underlying assumptions about each of these phenomena. A spatial history of novels, thus, presents a theory of genre formation that widens the scope of novel history. Major studies of eighteenth-century novels have continually sought a theory of literary history that is broad enough to include disparate genres and periods and still precise enough to characterize the relationships between novels and their historical and cultural contexts. A spatial history of novels demonstrates that the repetition and revision of novel spaces bolster genre formation and ties this repetition to the historical moment.

Moreover, organizing novel history around space differs significantly from the single line of chronological development that most literary historians construct. Rather than viewing novels as only developing along a linear chronological model, a spatial
history of novels provides an overview of the overlapping rise and fall of genres. As the opening overview of eighteenth-century architecture suggests, eighteenth-century men and women were intensely interested in thinking about, designing, building, organizing, and caring for living space. Each of the following chapters examines a specific domestic space that was central to everyday life and to novels. Each space defines a distinct novel genre that features a gendered character type: gardens, wealthy heiresses, and women’s amatory and pious novels 1680-1730; domestic interior passageways, servant women, and courtship novels of the 1740s; urban domestic interiors, wives in the middling ranks, and problem marriage novels in the 1750s; and sickrooms, widows and female orphans, and women’s sentimental novels 1750-1770. Each of these genres, in turn, cements the lasting literary significance of each space and its association with a character type and plot.

The chapters feature four periods in which new novel genres emerge and flourish. These periods range from a single decade to more than 50 years. The choices that I have made in determining which novels best exemplify each genre have been driven by four primary interests. First, I select many of these novels because the study of space provides insight to a contribution to novel history that has been neglected or mischaracterized by critical scholarship. This is often the case with the novels by women that I consider in this study, including the novels by Penelope Aubin and Mary Davys in chapter one and those by Frances Sheridan, Sarah Scott, and Sarah Fielding in chapter four. Second, some novels appear in this study because their popularity at the time of publication indicates that they would have been major influences on contemporary and
later novelists, a relationship that is further illuminated by responses that mimic or consciously revise a particular treatment of space. Eliza Haywood’s *Love in Excess* (1719) in chapter one and Samuel Richardson’s *Pamela* (1740) in chapter two were both extremely popular novels that inspired imitation as well as revision and mockery. Third, I have chosen a novel if it represents an initial intersection between a plot structure and a specific space that marks the starting point for the emergence of a genre and for the literary life of that specific space in novels. Aphra Behn writes *Love Letters Between a Nobleman and his Sister* (1684-7) about 30 years before Haywood and her contemporaries produce the rest of the novels that I examine in chapter one, and Behn’s treatment of the garden appears repeatedly in the later novels. Similarly, Daniel Defoe’s *Moll Flanders* (1721) initiates the novelistic treatment of urban space as associated with troubled marriage nearly 30 years before novels by Henry Fielding and Eliza Haywood explore the same association. Finally, I examine a few novels because they serve as counter-examples or anomalies of how a space generally operates in narrative. Elizabeth Singer Rowe’s use of gardens in *Friendship in Death* (1728) differs drastically from the role of the garden in most other novels of the period; Haywood’s *Anti-Pamela* (1741) and *The History of Miss Betsy Thoughtless* (1751) each introduce alternative possibilities for how interior domestic spaces or urban domestic spaces might shape plots about women.

As these criteria for choosing exemplary novels suggest, several threads of investigation knit the chapters together thematically. The first and last chapters address periods in which women writers collectively revise key literary spaces in order to create formal alternatives to predominately male literary traditions. These chapters identify
genres in which women novelists rewrite spaces that had been featured in literature as sites associated with sexual desire; revisions of the garden and the bedroom structure new plots and enable new sympathetic characterizations of two female types, the elite heiress and the destitute widow or female orphan. Alternatively, the second and third chapters examine two types of domestic space, interior passageways and urban homes, which support new genres emerging at midcentury and encompassing writing by both men and women. Eliza Haywood and Henry Fielding feature prominently in these chapters as authors who employ domestic spaces as sources for creating narratives about women in the serving and middling ranks.

Chapter 1 examines the garden and elite female characters in women’s amatory and pious novels 1680-1730. Throughout its long literary history, from ancient myth and the Biblical accounts of Eden to Edmund Spenser’s *The Fairie Queene* (1596) and John Milton’s *Paradise Lost* (1667), the garden conventionally operated as a static trope and a symbol of illicit sexual desire, female vanity, and women’s vulnerability to temptation. Aphra Behn’s *Love Letters between a Nobleman and his Sister* (1684-7) and Eliza Haywood’s *Love in Excess* (1719) employ the garden in ways that acknowledge this traditional literary meaning while they also begin to reshape the garden as central to women’s intellectual and creative capacities. In the 1720s, Haywood’s contemporaries, Mary Davys, Penelope Aubin, and Elizabeth Rowe, continue to refashion the garden as a space of sociability and spirituality, crafting narratives structured by the garden as a space of retreat rather than a site of seduction. I consider the novels in the context of contemporary garden design manuals that were increasingly interested in directing
landowners to reject French and Italian influences in gardening and instead create English landscape gardens, a shift in attitudes toward gardening that drastically limited women’s involvement in gardening. I address both amatory and pious novels in this chapter precisely because they share the garden as central to plot and character development. The resulting genre encompasses tensions between older constructions of the garden as a sexualized space and the new plots and characters that it supports. The intertextuality of the garden throughout women’s amatory and pious novels in this period shapes the appearance of the garden in later courtship novels, sentimental novels, and gothic novels through the turn of the nineteenth century.

By the 1740s, the garden began to fade as a central literary space and with it the popularity of women’s amatory and pious novels. The second chapter examines the ways in which concerns over domestic interiors, as spaces shared among persons of differing ranks, took center stage in the novel, as well as in other texts of the time, including conduct literature, periodicals, and architectural pattern-books. Taking the novels of the 1740s Pamela controversy as exemplary texts, I argue that the paradigm shift in literature that has long been identified with Samuel Richardson’s writing in the 1740s was, in fact, rooted in a shift in concerns about domestic space. In examining Richardson’s Pamela; or, Virtue Rewarded (1740) and two “anti-Pamela” texts, Henry Fielding’s An Apology for the Life of Mrs. Shamela Andrews (1741) and Eliza Haywood’s Anti-Pamela; or, Feigned Innocence Detected (1741), I demonstrate that the domestic interior enabled a narrative of cross-rank courtship during an era of growing concerns over the social mobility of the lower ranks. In these novels, domestic interior passageways, such as
hallways, staircases, and internal doorways, enable interactions between master and servant. While scholars have traditionally understood the numerous responses to *Pamela* as parody, satire, or overly-sentimental imitations, my attention to the domestic interior as a dynamic source of narrative allows me to study all of these novels as interdependent innovations that constitute an emerging genre.

Chapter three follows the trend of domestic space in the novel into the decade after the *Pamela* debate to illuminate the emergence of the urban domestic interior as a central novel space. Attending to the intertextuality of the urban domestic interior at midcentury reveals a family resemblance among novels that constitutes the genre that I call “problem marriage novels.” Novels in this genre feature stories of financial and moral threats to the ideal domestic harmony of marriage and family. The resemblance among these novels has been neglected by novel histories that situate eighteenth-century novels as precursors to nineteenth-century novels about courtship. Daniel Defoe’s *Moll Flanders* (1721) and *Roxana* (1724) are early explorations of the problem marriage plot while Eliza Haywood’s *History of Miss Betsy Thoughtless* (1751) and Henry Fielding’s *Amelia* (1752) are later iterations. Each of these novels employs living quarters in London to explore the vexed relationship between middling-rank morality and the vices of the London underworld. Thus, I situate these novels in contemporary debates about traditional forms of marriage, new marriage laws, and the urbanization and population growth of London. The crowded nature of mid-century London along with its association with vices such as gambling and prostitution constitutes urban lodgings as spaces in which respectable middling-rank families might unknowingly live side-by-side with the
criminal under-classes. Problem marriage novels have traditionally been grouped separately under other generic headings, such as conversion narratives, picaresque novels, didactic courtship fiction, or sentimental novels. Their common use of urban domestic interiors, however, places them in conversation primarily with each other and, hence, produces a new genre through the intertextuality of urban domestic interiors.

The fourth chapter examines the sickroom in women’s sentimental novels of the 1760s, a genre that demonstrates ties to the problem marriage novel spatially and thematically. Women’s sentimental novels are particularly interested in exploring the fate of the genteel woman left destitute by the loss of a loved one. Novels like Sarah Fielding’s *The History of Ophelia* (1760), Frances Sheridan’s *Memoirs of Miss Sidney Bidulph* (1761), and Sarah Scott’s *A Description of Millenium Hall* (1762) use the sickroom to stage events that drastically change the life of a female character. As in the first chapter, I uncover the ways in which women writers redefine a sexualized literary space, the bedroom, and reframe it as a sentimental space, a sickroom. I examine women’s sentimental novels in light of contemporary accounts and historical studies of widowhood, women’s financial dependency, and illness. I consider how the sickroom embodies an intersection between medical practice and notions of propriety that together determine who has access to see, treat, or counsel the sick. Women’s sentimental novels specifically employ the sickroom to dramatize transitional moments in women’s lives and to construct the widow and the female orphan as sympathetic characters. This conjunction of space, character, and plot is altogether distinct from the episodic and fragmented structure usually association with the male sentimental tradition, which is
typified by the works of Laurence Sterne and Henry Mackenzie. Moreover, sentimental fiction by women collectively establishes the sickroom as associated with gentlewomen’s dependency and sensibility, which continues to shape novels by radical women writers in the 1790s.

From 1680 to 1770, novel genres feature specific spaces as central to the structuring of plot and character. Each of the four genres that I study depends on a single domestic space. While I maintain that space and genre are interrelated throughout literary history, these four eighteenth-century genres are exemplary of the ways in which one specific space can operate as the organizing and productive principle of a narrative. After 1770, courtship novels by Frances Burney, Maria Edgeworth, and Jane Austen as well as gothic novels and radical novels exemplify a treatment of novel spaces that is fundamentally different from the genres that are featured here. In these later novels, the tension among several familiar spaces structures the plot and blurs generic boundaries. The reappearance of gardens, passageways in the domestic interior, urban homes, and sickrooms in these genres both depends on and alters the meanings that these spaces accumulated throughout the century. Moreover, novels after 1770 tend to feature a multiplicity of spaces explicitly in order to disrupt generic conventions associated with any single space. In contrast, when multiple spaces appear in a novel before 1770, they tend to support an overall generic tone and purpose indicated and shaped by a dominant space. For example, even though the garden appears as a significant site in Richardson’s *Pamela*, its operation in the novel does not disrupt the courtship plot set into motion by the domestic interior; rather, it furthers this plot, operating much like an extension of the
domestic interior. Additionally, as the sequencing of my chapters shows, novels continually moved inward during this period, from the outdoor space of the garden to the interior, contained space of the sickroom. As novels coalesce around increasingly interior, defined, and limited spaces, genres too become more narrowly defined and impermeable to the formal conventions of other novel genres. After 1770, novels begin to move outward again, both in terms of novel spaces and in terms of the integration of formal conventions from multiple genres. The later novels are not necessarily further developed or more fully representative of the world than the earlier texts, but they do represent a character’s world in a different way, as shaped by the tension among a multiplicity of spaces rather than by one dominant space. Thus, I have restricted my study to the period 1680-1770 in which new genres coalesce around the intertextuality of a single space. Ultimately, by exploring novel spaces in this period, my dissertation offers a re-organization of novel history and calls for continued consideration of space as a significant critical category in literary history.

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NOTES


2 Eileen Harris, British architectural books and writers, 1556-1785 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 32.


4 John Dixon Hunt, The Figure in the Landscape: Poetry, Painting, and Gardening during the Eighteenth Century (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1976), 25.


10 I adopt James Phelan’s use of the terms *mimetic* and *synthetic* in which mimetic refers to the realistic quality of a narrative component and synthetic refers to the constructed nature of a narrative component. For the purposes of this study, I do not equate mimetic space with purely realistic space as in a traditional Aristotelian approach. Rather, I believe that the synthetic quality of space precludes strictly realistic representation. James Phelan, *Experiencing Fiction: Judgments, Progressions, and the Rhetorical Theory of Narrative* (Columbus, OH: Ohio State University Press, 2007), 5-6.

11 In my conception of the relationship between space and genre, I am drawing on M. M. Bakhtin’s influential theory of the chronotope, or “the intrinsic connectedness of temporal and spatial relationships that are artistically expressed in literature.” For Bakhtin, chronotope “has an intrinsic generic significance,” and “it can even be said that it is precisely the chronotope that defines genre and generic distinctions.” Bakhtin identifies distinct chronotopes, demarcated sometimes by a spatial referent (the road, the wilderness, the castle), sometimes by an action (the act of meeting and parting), or sometimes by a temporal description (adventure time). Bakthin insists, however, that “in literature the primary category in the chronotope is time,” and later theorists have followed his precedent, focusing on the temporal qualities of literary texts while neglecting space. A spatial history of novels necessarily maintains a focus that is distinct from chronotopic studies. Thus, while my study is indebted to Bakhtin’s notion of the generic significance of chronotope, my study differs from Bakhtin in my emphasis on space as well as in my broadening of the idea of genre to include different types of novels as stand-alone genres. In each genre that I investigate, I acknowledge the significance of chronotope by identifying a temporal structure associated with that genre’s central space, but my analysis is focused on articulating how particular qualities of space inform genre. Because the term chronotope has a critical history of resonating with the
primacy of time in narrative, and the term inherently refers to both time and space, I do not use the term in my analysis. M.M. Bakhtin, “Forms of Time and of the Chronotope in the Novel,” in The Dialogic Imagination, 84-5.

12 Hans Robert Jauss describes genres as “groups or historical families” that “cannot be deduced or defined, but only historically determined, delimited, and described.” Hans Robert Jauss, “Theory of Genres and Medieval Literature,” in Toward an Aesthetic of Reception, trans. Timothy Bahti (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1982), 80.

13 In a special issue of PMLA, scholars explore various ways of conceiving of genre; collectively, the essays reinforce the idea that genre is open, fluid, and evolving. Wai Chee Dimock, the editor of the issue, emphasizes this point in the introduction: “The membership – of any genre – is an open rather than closed set, because there is always another instance, another empirical bit of evidence, to be added.” Wai Chee Dimock, “Introduction: Genres as Fields of Knowledge,” PMLA 122:5 (October 2007): 1377.

14 I draw on John Frow’s suggestion that contemporary genre theory should work towards “a poetics in which the structural components of genre are taken to be historically specific rather than obedient to a purely formal logic.” My identification of space as a defining feature of genre depends on structural analysis of shared conventions among texts and historicizing of the process of formal repetition that generates identifiable genres in eighteenth-century England. John Frow, “‘Reproducibles, Rubrics, and Everything You Need’: Genre Theory Today,” PMLA 122:5 (October 2007): 1628.


16 Structure refers to the arrangement of narrative components (space, time, characters, and events) in a literary work.

17 Moretti, Graphs, Maps, Trees, 30.


19 Gerald Prince defines narrative as the recounting “of one or more real or fictitious events communicated by one, two, or several (more or less overt) narrators to one, two, or several (more or less overt) narratees.” Through its recounting of events, narrative represents “a particular mode of knowledge.” Gerald Prince, A Dictionary of Narratology (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1987), 58-9.


22 Gallagher, 168.

23 David Brewer elaborates the notion of character as common property by investigating the phenomenon that he calls “imaginative expansion,” or “an array of reading practices in eighteenth-century Britain by which the characters in broadly successful texts were treated as if they were both fundamentally incomplete and the common property of all.” David Brewer, The Afterlife of Character 1726-1825 (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2005), 2.
In this description of plot, I follow a recent trend in narrative theory toward the study of space as a necessary element of narrative. Peter Brooks theorizes plot as “the logic or perhaps the syntax of a certain kind of discourse, one that develops its propositions only through temporal sequence and progression,” and he views narrative as a system of understanding that humans use to comprehend reality, particularly the “problem of temporality.” In contrast, Susan Stanford Friedman and David Herman view space as an equally essential component of narrative. Friedman acknowledges space “as an active agent in the production of narrative,” and Herman explains that spatial reference is “not an optional or peripheral feature of stories, but rather a core property that helps constitute narrative domains.” Peter Brooks, *Reading for the Plot: Design and Intention in Narrative* (New York: Knopf, 1984), xi; Susan Stanford Friedman, “Spatial Poetics and Arundhati Roy’s *The God of Small Things,*” in *A Companion to Narrative Theory,* ed. James Phelan and Peter J. Rabinowitz (Oxford: Blackwell, 2005), 194; David Herman, *Story Logic: Problems and Possibilities of Narrative* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2002), 296.

Spacks’s description of eighteenth-century plots as both realistic and experimental is echoed in Phelan’s distinctions between mimetic and synthetic qualities of narrative elements. While Phelan offers the distinction as a general theory of narrative, potentially applicable to any historical period, Spacks applies her similar distinction specifically to describing eighteenth-century novels. Phelan, 5-6; Patricia Meyer Spacks, *Desire and Truth: Functions of Plot in Eighteenth-Century English Novels* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990), 3.

Spacks, 5-6.


Melissa Edmundson’s analysis of Jane Austen’s *Mansfield Park* (1814) traces the heroine’s movement from the white attic to the East room as a sign of her increasing acceptance into the family. Edmundson, however, limits her study to the single novel and does not connect its use of spatial detail to other texts that represent country house interiors. Melissa Edmundson, “A Space for Fanny: The Significance of her rooms in Mansfield Park,” *Persuasions: The Jane Austen Journal On-line* (Winter 2002).

Alex Woloch uses the term “space” to refer to how much attention a character takes up in a novel. His application of the term “space” is entirely different from mine; he does not consider the imagined physical environment of the character. Eve Tavor Bannet and Janet Todd each examine the repetition and revision of plot structures in women’s novels, but they do not attend to the ways in which the repetition of key spaces supports these authorial borrowings and adaptations. Michael McKeon elaborates the separation of traditional knowledge from modern knowledge, aligns this with the formation of public and privates spheres, and investigates the novel’s early association with the idea of a “secret history” according to this pattern. McKeon examines changes in the design and function of actual spaces over the course of the eighteenth century and demonstrates how these changes manifest the new division between traditional and modern knowledge. Nancy Armstrong argues in two separate studies that the domestic novel demonstrates that the first modern subject was necessarily female and that the novel participated in the formulation of the idea of the individual. Alex Woloch, *The One vs. the Many: Minor Characters and the Space of the*
Michael McKeon conceives of genre formation as a dialectical process and employs this theory to characterize the novels of Samuel Richardson and Henry Fielding as articulations within the single project of redefining the conceptions of truth and virtue according to new constructions of rank and gender. John Richetti similarly characterizes eighteenth-century novels as collectively involved in the process of reconciling the terms of self and society by expressing identity as socially defined, and J. Paul Hunter understands the novels of Defoe, Richardson, and Fielding as responding to new urban life, political anxieties, and personal concerns that were culturally mediated through new forms of print culture, including ephemera, pamphlets, and journalism. Michael McKeon, *Origins of the English Novel 1600-1740* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1987); John Richetti, *The English Novel in History 1700-1780* (New York: Routledge, 1999); J. Paul Hunter, *Before Novels: the Cultural Contexts of Eighteenth-Century English Fiction* (New York: Norton, 1990).

34 Recently, scholars have begun to uncover new ways of understanding literary history that are not indebted to a single chronological narrative of progress. Rachel Carnell challenges Whig histories of the novel by evaluating the terms of formal realism through early eighteenth-century authors’ grounding in partisan politics. Carnell argues that understanding the partisan political groundings of authors helps us to view the development of the novel as part of discursive debates over several possibilities for conceiving of the individual, rather than as a form that strictly reinforced only one of those possibilities: “Thus, the development of novelistic realism corresponds not with the rise of one particular type of Enlightenment Whig individual, as Ian Watt suggested, but with the competition among different versions of political selfhood, each of which sought to be perceived as universal human selfhood.” Carnell continues, however, to employ a one-directional concept of the novel’s “rise” to characterize the development of generic conventions over the first half of the century. Shannon Miller re-conceptualizes the critical approach of studying “influence” in order to offer a nuanced analysis of the relationships among *Paradise Lost* and the poetry and fiction of women writers in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Miller re-defines the concept of influence as “interpretive recursiveness” that operates beyond a unidirectional relationship between writers. Rachel Carnell, *Partisan Politics, Narrative Realism, and the Rise of the British Novel* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006), 4; Shannon Miller, *Engendering the Fall: John Milton and Seventeenth-Century Women Writers* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2008), 6.


36 My periodization of genres differs slightly from Moretti’s claim that each genre, except courtship novels, has a life-cycle of about 20-30 years. My own reading and analysis suggests that Moretti is accurate in this estimation in relation to the height of popularity and production of each genre, but I trace more varied periods of the emergence and development of each genre. For example, gardens seem to slowly become central to women’s fiction over the last 20 years of the seventeenth century and the first decade of the eighteenth century, while domestic interiors more quickly take center stage in courtship novels through the production of just two to three years. Moretti, *Graphs, Maps, Trees* 14.
CHAPTER 1

GARDENS IN WOMEN’S AMATORY AND PIous NOVELS 1680-1730

In Jane Austen’s *Mansfield Park* (1814), a critical scene for both plot progression and the revealing of character unfolds in a landscape garden. Maria Bertram and the rakish Mr. Crawford, claiming only to be desirous of gaining a better view of the house, impatiently pass around the edge of a locked iron gate and brave the depth of a ha-ha to escape the enclosed “wilderness” and, more importantly, the sight and company of the other characters. Before Maria and Mr. Crawford cross over the gate, Fanny Price warns Maria that she may tear her gown on the iron spikes or fall into the ha-ha. Her cautions cannot stop the determined and infatuated Maria:

> Fanny was again left to her solitude, and with no increase of pleasant feelings, for she was sorry for almost all that she had seen and heard, astonished at Miss Bertram, and angry with Mr. Crawford. By taking a circuitous, and as it appeared to her, very unreasonable direction to the knoll, they were soon beyond her eye; and for some minutes longer she remained without sight or sound of any companion. She seemed to have the little wood all to herself. (73)

Maria’s actions and Fanny’s reflections invoke two conventional, and contradictory, characterizations of the garden in eighteenth-century novels: a sexualized space that serves as a site for seduction, clandestine meetings, and other illicit activities; and a contemplative space that promotes meditation and sociability in the service of female virtue. The *Mansfield Park* scene is well-known and often discussed by scholars of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century literature. The garden scenes of early eighteenth-
century novels by women are less familiar, but these earlier depictions of the garden shape the significance of Maria’s and Fanny’s conflicting situations in the garden almost a century later. Maria’s actions in the garden mark an older literary tradition that associates the garden with female transgression; Fanny’s experience in the garden suggests a newer tradition associating the garden with female reason and spirituality.

Between the mid 1680s and 1730, a period demarcated roughly by the publication of Aphra Behn’s *Love Letters between a Nobleman and his Sister* (1684-7) and Elizabeth Singer Rowe’s *Friendship in Death* (1728), the garden consistently appears as the dominant space in popular fiction. In the same period, new theories of garden design were articulated and illustrated in architectural and gardening books intended for wealthy estate owners wishing to improve their property. Old theories of garden design were refreshed by additions of new features, such as the “wilderness” and the “grotto,” that supported the elite practices of sociability and personal meditation. Literature responded to these new garden designs. Women’s amatory and pious novels used them to revise older literary meanings of the garden to serve new narrative purposes. In this female-authored body of literature, the garden shapes the direction of the narrative through its support of female sociability, creativity, and wit.

I include women’s amatory and pious novels in the same genre precisely because both types of novels depend on the space of the garden. In female-authored “pious” fiction, including Penelope Aubin’s *Madame de Beaumont* (1721) and Mary Davys’s *The Reformed Coquette* (1727), the garden initiates a series of trials through which a virtuous heroine must pass before receiving her reward in the comforts of marriage, family, and an inheritance, which often includes possession of the very garden that began her distress.
This plot resolution differs from the conventional formula of amatory fiction which relates the details of a scandal or seduction enabled by the garden. In these novels, the woman’s seduction results in a once-virtuous heroine left destitute and abandoned, as in Eliza Haywood’s *The British Recluse* (1722), or transient and living by deception, in Behn’s *Love Letters* (1684-7).

The garden shapes women’s amatory and pious novels through two distinct functions. Amatory novels employ the garden as sexualized space and revise it to support female agency. In pious novels, the garden functions as a social space that supports female reason and virtuous sociability. Novels by Behn and Haywood tend to reinforce the traditional role of the garden as a sexualized space, but they also use the garden’s potential to support plots of female agency. The novels of Haywood’s “pious” contemporaries, Penelope Aubin, Mary Davys, and Elizabeth Singer Rowe, more fully illuminate an alternative meaning of the garden as a space of female sociability, meditation, and creative expression. In pious novels, the amatory garden operates as an established literary convention, and female characters exercise creative power by employing the space of the garden and all of its associated meanings to their advantage. Thus, in women’s pious novels, the relationship between the garden and the female protagonists mirrors that between women writers and literary space. Like the female protagonists who revise the purpose of garden spaces, women writers creatively revise and multiply the narrative potential of the literary garden and, thereby, create a new novel genre. After 1730, the intertextuality of the garden in later novels invokes both sets of meanings and values.
Ancient myth, religious doctrine, and medieval and early modern literature associate the literary garden with sexual desire, female vanity, and transgression. Before 1680, the symbolic importance of the woman-in-the-garden derived primarily from the Biblical account of the Garden of Eden. John Milton’s *Paradise Lost* (1667) and other early modern literature, including Edmund Spenser’s *The Faerie Queene* (1590), reinforce the literary garden as a symbol of sexual desire, temptation, and transgression. In each of these texts, the garden space and female characters are collapsed into symbols of beauty, desire, and temptation.

In many ways, the garden maintains this association today, but the recovery of women’s literature offers evidence of an alternative characterization of the garden. In the early modern period, some women’s writing, primarily poems and personal manuscripts, conceptualizes the garden as a space of creativity, as a symbolic site of gendered social relations, and as an important space in the everyday lives of elite and middling rank women. Women writers in the early eighteenth century incorporate within fictional narratives this female-authored version of the garden as a space with a practical and social function. The revised garden produces new plot possibilities and with them, a new generic group.

Milton’s description of Eden in *Paradise Lost* (1667) exemplifies the garden’s cultural and literary capital in England before 1680. While much literary criticism has focused on the garden’s role as a symbolic trope, early eighteenth-century women’s writing seems to key into a characteristic of the garden that Milton scholars often neglect, its function as a lived space. Milton creates a garden with physical details that make it
visually and sensually imaginable as well as functional within the everyday life of the first couple.

Milton’s Paradise is clearly a garden to be experienced rather than only viewed, a quality that drives Satan to plan his revenge through the destruction of Adam and Eve because they are privileged with the experience of the Garden of Eden, not just the prospect of it. In book four, Milton first introduces Eden through the eyes of Satan who stands on a hillside to look over the border of the garden. The description then turns wholly to presenting the beauty and glory of the place, complete with sensory details:

Of goodliest trees loaden with fairest fruit,
Blossoms and fruits at once of golden hue
Appeared, with gay enameled colors mixed:
On which the sun more glad impressed his beams
Than in fair evening cloud, or humid bow,
When God hath show’d the earth; so lovely seemed
That landscape: and of pure now purer air
Meets his approach, and to the heart inspires
Vernal delight and joy, able to drive
All sadness but despair: now gentle gales
Fanning their odoriferous wings dispense
Native perfumes, and whisper whence they stole
Those balmy spoils. (lines 147-59)

Milton details the types of trees that provide shade, fruits, and color, giving an impression of luxury and plenty. He continues by describing the purity of the air, the gentle breeze, and the delicious scent. The description emphasizes the activation of all senses in the original garden: touch, sight, smell, taste, and sound. Scholars often cite these details of the garden to show that it resembles an English garden or to argue for its value as a precursor to the English landscape garden. In fact, these details, along with Milton’s later description of Adam and Eve’s activities, characterize the garden as a domestic space, a setting for everyday life and a source for structuring a marriage-like relationship.
Milton carefully describes Adam’s and Eve’s activities in the Garden of Eden as a joint effort at tending to the plant-life that provides sustenance, shelter, and pleasure. The couple balances both domestic labor and domestic pleasure, working in harmony together to maintain their home and enjoying each others’ company in hours of leisure. The garden of Milton’s epic is not just a spiritual site or a source of aesthetic pleasure, but also it is the first couple’s home and the everyday environment in which they live, work, and build a companionate relationship.

Milton’s garden is also a representation of the setting of the “first sin” and, as such, clearly depends on the garden’s traditional function as a sexualized space and a site of illicit behavior. More importantly, his adaptation of the creation story, the original narrative source for the literary garden emphasizes its role as a functional domestic space, as a source of joy for the couple, and as a site for a whole range of emotional and physical experiences, including love and happiness, solitude and meditation, temptation and deception, and finally reconciliation between Adam and Eve. By incorporating this range of human emotions, Milton recognizes the competing possibilities for this space and begins to draw together physical details and emotional and social experiences. The tension that remains between the peace and happiness of the garden and its ability to be infiltrated by illicit desire informs the garden’s centrality to amatory and pious novels by women.

As English women writers reframed it, this tension between competing functions constitutes the garden as a significant site for dramatizing women’s experience in particular, rather than the human condition more generally. In novels by Aphra Behn and Eliza Haywood, the garden is both a sexualized space and a site for illicit behavior, but
they also introduce new narrative functions of the garden. By providing particularities of
time and space for their gardens, such as locating them in the English countryside at the
turn of the eighteenth century, as in Haywood’s *The British Recluse* (1722), women
writers subordinate the garden’s symbolic significance to its secular, practical, and
narrative functions. These novels use the garden to create new, dynamic female
characters. In amatory and pious novels, the garden shapes narratives in which female
characters adapt to their environment and change nearly instantaneously in response to
events that the space of the garden enables. Thus, as early eighteenth-century women
writers adopt and revise the garden, female characters transition from static symbols to
dynamic models. In amatory and pious novels, the garden supports narratives in which
female characters adapt to their environment, changing nearly instantaneously in
response to events that the space of the garden enables.

In women’s amatory and pious novels, the literary garden draws on both actual
garden design and earlier literary treatments of the space. The evolution of female
characters depends on the garden space which supports a pattern of suspense and
surprise. The features of the literary garden that support this pattern and constitute its
narrative power in novels resonate with actual garden design of the period.
Contemporary garden design privileged the layout of paths and placement of objects to
 evoke a series of responses: suspense as one wandered through the garden; surprise at
finding a statue, grotto, or orange grove hidden behind a curve in the path; and
contemplative reaction to the new discovery. In his list of rules for garden layout in *New
Principles of Gardening* (1728), Batty Langley describes the ideal design for “serpentine
meanders” that wind through the garden to reveal pleasing prospects, secluded seats, and
objects for contemplation. Langley declares that, along these paths, clearings should be placed at certain distances from each other. In each clearing, a new “surprise” should be positioned to delight those that walk along the path. Such surprises could include a fruit garden, a fountain, a statue, or a group of pines. The surprises heightened the multiple senses: not just visual, but also aural, olfactory, and even tactile. Langley professed this type of design in order to promote variety as providing the most pleasure in a garden. The actions of walking, discovering, and contemplating shape the experience one has in the garden and become central to the ways in which women writers structure their novels around the garden space.

Langley’s emphasis on the experience of the garden draws on garden design before 1730 and combines these ideas with the emerging notion of the English landscape garden. Historical and critical emphasis on the eighteenth-century landscape garden has obscured earlier elements of garden design that, in fact, inform the literary garden in women’s novels of the period. In the first half of the century, debates over gardening, evident in garden manuals, personal letters between landowners and gardeners, and periodical essays, pitted new models of the English landscape garden against an older highly formal French-Italian style of garden design. While the older formal style consisted of intricately designed knots and parterres enclosed by high walls that separated the designed garden from the fields and woods beyond, the English landscape garden included sweeping vistas, natural looking wildernesses and streams, and hidden boundaries. From the 1730s through the end of the eighteenth century, some male property owners and garden design enthusiasts leveled older formal gardens in efforts to create sweeping landscapes of lawns and wildernesses. These renovated gardens featured
designs founded on the concept of visual appreciation. In her study of the relationship between landscape garden theory and theories of vision, Katherine Myers explains that landscape gardens were designed to be viewed from a specific point from which tricks of depth and size created the illusion of two-dimensionality. The ability to “see” a landscape garden correctly, as if it were a painting rather than an actual landscape, became an indication of refined taste. In contrast, English garden design previous to the popularity of the landscape garden often focused on multiple sensory experiences, not just a visual appreciation of the garden. Earlier gardens sought to please all of the senses through paths that wound through a garden allowing one to experience the garden from within instead of just from a designated viewpoint.

Another effect of the renovation of landscape gardens was to minimize women’s involvement in garden design and care. John Dixon Hunt explains that horticulture and agriculture were seen as having a central role in England’s recovery from the Civil Wars, and in the late seventeenth century, new theories of gardening and garden design promoted horticulture as a moral and intellectual activity for men. Jennifer Munroe explains that as gardens and gardening became associated more intensely with symbolizing rank, wealth, and power, and, as the profitability of gardening increased, the major work of designing large landscape gardens became conceptualized as primarily a masculine activity. Meanwhile, women were designated the use of smaller gardens, usually kitchen gardens or small flower gardens. Flowers, botany, kitchen gardens, and the design of sociable or intimate garden spaces were considered consistent with feminine arts and crafts, hobbies, interests, and housekeeping duties. Thus, the traditional aspect of garden culture as a woman’s domain preceded the male domination of landscape
garden design. As men came to dominate decisions and plans for the outdoors, women’s involvement in the process of gardening decreased, and the value of the male “view” of the garden replaced the value of women’s experience of creating and maintaining the garden.

Women novelists draw on the earlier tradition of women’s active participation in gardening and combine that with the emergent function of gardens as space of sociability. Restoration and early eighteenth-century gardens were designed to encourage the newly valued social disposition of English men and women by providing an appropriate site for friends and family members to walk, talk, and view the landscape together. Viewing the landscape became an activity associated with masculine sociability in the eighteenth century as it involved evaluating, appreciating, and advising one another on the improvements of an estate. Contemporary illustrations indicate that the use of the garden for social purposes was a commonplace activity, especially in comparison to later paintings of “picturesque views” which usually depicted landscapes without human presence and with built structures only just visible far in the distance. By the end of the eighteenth century, the landscape garden was fully realized in garden literature and practice, and artistic sensibilities correlated with its privileging of a visual prospect. The earlier paintings, however, remind us that the English landscape was, in fact, not a prospect emptied of human activity, but that English gardens thrived as spaces of sociality, conversation, and sensory experience.

The plots of women’s amatory and pious novels depend on the idea of a sense-stimulating garden, the concept of the garden as a space associated with women’s appropriate housekeeping activities and artistic endeavors, and the garden as a site that
supports sociability. Amatory fiction develops out of the ability to step into these gardens to discover a person lurking at the borders, a couple stealing a clandestine interview behind a thick grove, or a young woman reading a private letter in a garden wall recess. “Serpentine meanders” and their potential to reveal hidden surprises, as elaborated by Langley, enable the plots of women’s amatory novels. Rarely do these novels include a description of the view of a landscape, like those in Austen’s or Ann Radcliffe’s novels, written a century later, that focus on the “picturesque” nature of a scene. Instead, these novels present garden features piece-meal, focusing on a specific spatial aspect that serves the narrative structure. In amatory fiction, gardens often shape seduction scenes through the interplay of intoxicating and stimulating plant-life and the design of the paths that create the ever-present possibility that someone else in the garden will turn a corner at just the wrong – or right – moment. In pious novels, heroines overcome the garden’s intoxicating effects and actively use the garden space to their advantage.

In amatory novels, the multiplicity of sensual stimuli in the garden inspires storylines of sexual desire and seduction. In Eliza Haywood’s *The British Recluse* (1722), at a critical moment in her seduction, Belinda associates the garden setting with the story of Adam and Eve in Paradise. This scenery influences her actions. Meeting the rakish Sir Thomas Courtal in “the little woods” behind her house, Belinda feels justified in her actions by the nature of her surroundings. She explains that the woods compliment lovers because of the canopy of the trees, the murmurings of the boughs, and the cooing of the doves. In this moment, she thinks of Courtal and herself as Adam and Eve “without fear or shame,” and the thought of the garden leads to her illicit desires (211).
In a similar vein, Haywood’s *Love in Excess* (1719) emphasizes how the sensory experiences of the garden stimulate characters’ actions. In the seduction scenes in this novel, the characters feel “intoxicated” by the odors, beauty, textures, and sounds of the garden.

The gardens in *Love in Excess* require characters to move along various paths where they meet, pass messages and fall under others’ observation. The winding gardens allow characters to interact unexpectedly in ways that contribute to plot. Acts of hiding and looking described here are linked to garden spaces throughout Haywood’s oeuvre. In this instance, the ladies walk one evening in the “wilderness,” during which the Count attempts to seduce Melliora:

The ladies walked in the garden for some time, and Melantha searched every bush, before she found the Count, who stood concealed in the porch, which being covered with jessamin and fillaree, was dark enough to hide him from their view, tho’ they had passed close to him as they came out. […] he watched their turning, and when he saw they were near an alley which had another that led to it, he went round and met them. (121)

The acts of hiding and looking described here are linked to garden spaces throughout Haywood’s oeuvre. The physical elements of the garden bring the characters into contact with each other and provide opportunities for them to act out the desires that they must conceal indoors in the presence of others. The garden’s function as a sexualized space empowers Melantha to pursue her individual desires, and the spaces of the garden become the means of her (albeit failed) attempts to seduce the Count. Likewise, the Count uses the garden to attempt to seduce Melliora, the other female protagonist. His attempt is also thwarted and Melliora preserves her chastity. In *Love in Excess*, the
garden is not a solely male-dominated space; it has the potential to serve competing male and female desires.

Similarly, in *Philidore and Placentia* (1727), the physical features of a garden make the process of hiding and discovery possible, thereby generating a critical turn in the plot. The premise of this tale is that a young indigent nobleman disguises himself as a servant to be near to his beloved, Placentia. While in the garden, Placentia hears her servant Jacobin (Philidore in disguise) singing, and she begins to suspect that he is not what he seems. The garden enables Placentia’s discovery because it has darkened alcoves covered with branches and “little close arbors, where one might lie, and in the noon of day enjoy a midnight’s shade” (160). These garden features create spaces in which Philidore can conceal himself and indulge in an activity, singing, that would reveal his identity to his mistress and to other servants. Importantly, the winding paths and obscure alcoves also allow Placentia to approach unseen and discover him there.

Along with the intoxicating and concealing effects of garden plant-life, architectural features, including grottos, summerhouses, gates or fences, and windows, shape the actions of characters who seek the garden as a space of relative license. In Aphra Behn’s *Love Letters*, several important moments in the plot depend on the architectural features of gardens, including windows of the country estate overlooking the gardens, garden access through a backdoor, and a secluded grotto deep within an extensive walled garden. The romance between the protagonists, Sylvia and Philander, commences with the exchange of letters through a window over the garden; it progresses when Sylvia arranges for a servant to let Philander into the garden so that he can come to her chamber by way of a back staircase (41). By providing access to the garden, a space
associated with illicit behavior and permeability, the window and the backstairs structure the development of a romance and eventual seduction.

Although Behn and Haywood employ the garden in many ways according to its traditional associations, they also depict the garden as a place of women’s creativity and individual agency. In each scene that arises out of the physical features of the garden, a female character attempts to manipulate those features according to her desires. In Behn’s novel, Sylvia communicates with Philander through passing notes in the garden, an act forbidden by her father. When she allows Philander into her chamber, she decorates it with flowers and vines from the garden to imitate the intoxicating effects and sexual desire of the space. In Love in Excess, Melantha searches and finds Count D’Elmont in the garden and she also suggests playing a game in the wilderness in hopes of being able to accompany him alone. Later, Melantha prevents Count D’Elmont’s seduction of Melliora by coming upon them in the wilderness. The Count’s thwarted seduction encapsulates the dual meaning of the garden: the garden supports Melantha’s illicit behaviors by providing seclusion, and it preserves Melliora’s chastity by enabling discovery.

The garden’s alternative meanings create the tensions that drive the plot of amatory and pious novels. Women’s relationship with gardens and gardening resonated with a web of social issues, including emerging constructions of gender, management of property, and ideals of marriage and courtship. Throughout the early eighteenth century, periodical essays, pamphlets, and poetry made clear the significance of the garden to English life generally and to women’s experiences in particular. Two passages of The Spectator issued less than a month apart depict the relationship between women and
gardens through fictional female characters, one who exemplifies feminine virtue through her use of the garden and one who challenges the limits of femininity through her interconnected practices of gardening and reading. The description in Spectator 15 (March 17, 1711) of Aurelia’s retired life and her rural garden contrasts with that in Spectator 37 (April 12, 1711) of Leonora’s elaborate garden of her own design.

Aurelia’s garden is in line with a tasteful appreciation of landscape and with the use of the space for reflection and for conversation with her husband. Leonora’s garden, however, draws a mixed response from the Spectator. His tone shows he is uncertain of the tastefulness and morality of her garden, yet his lengthy and detailed description seems appreciative of the garden’s beauty and sense of fantasy. Leonora’s country-seat is

Situated in a kind of Wilderness, about an Hundred Miles distant from London, and looks like a little enchanted Palace. The Rocks about her are shaped into Artificial Grottoes covered with Woodbines and Jessamines. The Woods are cut into shady Walks, twisted into Bowers, and filled with Cages of Turtles. The Springs are made to run among Pebbles, and by that means taught to Murmur very agreeably. They are likewise collected into a Beautiful Lake, that is inhabited by a Couple of Swans, and empties itself by a little Rivulet which runs through a Green Meadow, and is known in the Family by the Name of The Purling Stream.

Just before the Spectator offers this account of the garden, he describes Leonora’s reading habits and their effects on her estate: “As her Reading has lain very much among Romances, it has given her a very particular Turn of Thinking, and discovers itself even in her House, her Gardens and her Furniture.” Although the speaker seems enamored of the delightful features of the garden, his admiration is laced with a criticism of Leonora’s romance-inspired taste. At the end of the passage, he laments that a woman so susceptible to the impression of books had not turned her attention to something more edifying. The Spectator is clearly disturbed by the potential for romances to influence
the design and decoration of property, which should function as a symbol of (male) rank and wealth.

The difference between the Spectator’s descriptions of Leonora and Aurelia provide insight about the social connotations attached to gardens and garden design. The Spectator describes Leonora as “susceptible to impression” and as having developed a “particular Turn of Thinking” in response to romances. In contrast, he explains that Aurelia has “true happiness” and is wise in her choice of how to spend her time. The central difference between the two women, aside from their reading practices, is that Aurelia is married to “her bosom friend” while Leonora is widowed and intends never to marry again. Aurelia’s delight in the garden walks is acceptable because she enjoys them with the company, advice, and approval of her husband and for the purposes of spiritual meditation. Aurelia’s appreciation of the garden is pointedly different from Leonora’s delight in her romance-inspired garden. Leonora fulfills her own desire when she creates the luxurious, beautiful, and fantasy-like garden for her own personal enjoyment and from her own sources of inspiration. Furthermore, in contrast to the wordy and indulgent descriptions of Leonora’s gardens, the Spectator’s description of Aurelia’s garden lacks detail, implying that it is rather mundane or expected, although we know it must be well-kept from a comparison of the family and grounds to a small “commonwealth.” The two Spectator passages illustrate multiple concepts associated with the garden, including wisdom, economical housewifery, and proper companionship as well as fantasy, sensual experience, and self-indulgence. The conflicting notions of what the garden could or should do and what it could or should mean about its proprietor make representations of the garden extraordinarily poignant in narrative.
The Spectator’s treatment of two distinct types of gardens and their female proprietors parallels the conflicting and changing role of the garden in women’s novels. In this period the emerging conception of the garden as a space of female sociability and creativity combines with the older literary tradition of the garden as a place of danger and sexual licentiousness, found in the novels I’ve been discussing so far. Novels like *The Adventures of Count de Vinevil* (1721) and *Madame de Beaumont* (1721), two of Penelope Aubin’s most popular novels, show evidence of both of these meanings of the garden. Aubin’s novels position the garden as a transitional space between the known, proper, secure world of respectability and the unknown underworld of danger and adventure.

The popularity of Aubin’s novels has commonly been attributed to her ability to weave together the conventions of amatory novels and adventure tales, two of the most popular types of novels in the 1710s and 1720s. Aubin’s work combines these two types of novels by using the garden as a formal device that marks the transition between the seduction narrative and the adventure tale. Aubin’s integration of these two types of narratives depends on the garden as a sexualized space, but one that suggests a keen threat to the safety and sociability of the domestic space. When the garden’s threat challenges the safety of the domestic space, a new kind of female character emerges – the protagonist of the adventure tale.

In *Madame de Beaumont* (1721), the rakish Glandore accosts Belinda in the summerhouse, “at the bottom of the Grove, which was a quarter of a Mile distant from the House” (60). In this relative seclusion from interference within the confines of the private property, Glandore confesses his passion to Belinda. He threatens this happily
married protagonist with kidnapping and rape. Several typical aspects of the summerhouse, a common architectural feature of the garden, permit this confrontation to occur. It is situated among the “gardens, groves, and fields” that Belinda often walks through as she awaits the return of her husband, Lluelling, from his journey to find her father in France. The summerhouse has a door that can be locked, preventing Belinda from escaping, and it is far enough from the house that Belinda will not be heard if she screams for help. When Belinda refuses Glandore, he binds, gags, blindfolds and abducts her. In this scene, the summerhouse enables the kidnapping of Belinda and initiates a lengthy narrative about Belinda’s journey and her struggle to return home.

The qualities of the summerhouse and the garden in which it stands enable an event that produces a transition from the domestic world of marriage to a world of travel, adventure, and danger. As Belinda’s long struggle to return home again indicates, a journey across fifty miles of countryside to an obscure castle can seem like a journey around the world. Furthermore, the heroine’s determination to avoid rape and to return to her husband and mother motivates her to draw on her physical, mental, and emotional strength in ways that are rarely required of or attributed to English women in the upper ranks. The summerhouse, therefore, not only aids Glandore’s kidnapping of Belinda, it permits danger and adventure to invade a calm domestic arena in a way unimaginable in the confines of the domestic interior.

The events that the garden enables cause a transformation in the female protagonist. At the beginning of the novel, Belinda is a modest, well-mannered, and polite heiress raised by a kind and sensible mother. The attempted seduction and successful kidnapping in the garden require her to exhibit physical strength and mental
agility. The garden, by acting as a portal to a new world and new plot, transforms the female protagonist from a passive and sexualized figure to an active, self-preserving, and multi-faceted heroine.

In contrast to its function in Madame de Beaumont, the summerhouse in Aubin’s Count de Vinevil (1721) enables a return to a world of manners and sociability from a foreign world of danger and adventure for Violetta, a Venetian woman kidnapped by Turkish forces and granted to one of their Generals who forces her to join his seraglio. In this novel, the summerhouse functions as a space of re-entry to respectability. In the summerhouse, Captain Feuillade proposes marriage to Violetta. His proposal encompasses the recuperation of a “ruined” woman through an offer of the protection and respectability of marriage that would allow her to re-enter proper society. Although it is an exception to conventional uses of the summerhouse, this plot development reifies the summerhouse’s function as a portal both at the level of the story – it moves a character from one path in life to another - and at the level of the text – it moves the story from the conventions of adventure tales to the emergent conventions of domestic fiction.

By inspiring the actions of both villainous characters, like Glandore, and virtuous characters, like Belinda, the garden establishes a tension between male and female desires that pious novels resolve through female wit and creativity. In The Reformed Coquet (1727), Mary Davys invokes the older meanings of the garden through classical epic and the masculine perspective, but in the end rewrites the garden as a space for female creativity. The rakish Lord Lofty views a painting on the ceiling of a garden seat while he plans his seduction of Amoranda, the novel’s heroine (258). The painting that he contemplates is of Paris abducting Helen of Troy. These architectural features of the
fictional garden promote Lord Lofty’s plotting to seduce Amoranda. The representation of classical myth in the garden nods to the traditional sexualization of the space that derives from its function in classical myth and religious doctrine.

The multitude of possibilities in the garden provides the heroine with a means of self-expression that demonstrates her wit, creativity, and virtue. Davys employs the garden to structure the turns of her plot throughout the novel, from Lord Lofty’s initial wanderings in garden paths as he contemplates the seduction of Amoranda, to the scheming of rival suitors to abduct Amoranda from the summerhouse, to the final staging of a marriage in the orange grove. The summerhouse abduction scheme consciously mocks the garden as a convention of amatory novels. The features of the summerhouse, and Amoranda’s manipulation of them, contribute to a sequence of events that result in a comic scene of cross-dressing, fist-fighting, and general mayhem that occurs with no risk to the heroine. The summerhouse first becomes central to the novel when two of the heroine’s suitors, Froth and Callid, meet there, and, realizing Amoranda is not seriously considering marriage to either of them, begin to scheme against her. Callid explains the plan:

I have often heard Amoranda say she passed her whole Evenings in this Summer-house when the Weather is hot; now where would be the difficulty of whipping her out of this low Window into a Coach provided ready and carry her to a House which I have taken care of, keeping her with the utmost privacy, till she resolves to marry one of us, and the other shall share the Estate. (263)

When Froth complains that Amoranda and her maid will surely scream when taken, Callid suggests “a pretty little Gag for a minute or two, till we got them into the coach” (263). The plan thus far closely resembles Aubin’s summerhouse scene: use the warm
weather and the opportunity of the woman’s routine behavior that leads her to a summerhouse positioned in the garden away from the main house, gag her to prevent screaming, place her in a coach, and take her to another house. The potential for danger is clear, and it draws on the convention of amatory novels to figure the garden as a space of surprise. The tone of Davys’s work, however, negates the dangerous associations of the summerhouse. Davys presents the schemes of Froth and Callid as ridiculous, as if these two have indeed read many novels in which rakes kidnap heiresses from summerhouses and they assume that it must be as easy as those novels convey. Froth’s and Callid’s scheming is generated out of both a common use of the summerhouse, as a cool place to pass the evening, and their familiarity with the conventional fictional use of the summerhouse as a site for seduction attempts and kidnappings. Together these properties inspire Froth and Callid to plan and follow through with Amoranda’s abduction. In addition to mocking conventional garden plots that use the summerhouse as a pivotal space, Davys revises these plots by drawing on physical features of the summerhouse that permit potential eavesdropping. Amoranda’s housekeeper informs her of the intended kidnapping:

‘Madam,’ said she, ‘I went this Afternoon into my little Room over the Summer-house, where you know I dry my Winter-Herbs, and while I was turning them, your Ladyship came in with Mr. Froth, and Callid came to you. You may please to remember, Lord Lofty gave you an opportunity of leaving them, which you had no sooner done, than they began to lay a most dangerous Plot against you.’ (266)

The particular architectural features of the summerhouse permit Amoranda’s housekeeper to eavesdrop, an act that becomes critical to Davys’s plot revision. With the information provided by the eavesdropping housekeeper, Amoranda plans to frustrate the suitors’
schemes, thereby revising the types of stories that are generated by the summerhouse and
the garden. The scheming and counter-scheming that depends on the summerhouse
culminates in a comic scene that transforms the garden from a site for kidnapping or
seduction to a site for a female-generated “frolic.” This farce of the garden space
ridicules the potential danger of the summerhouse by suggesting that such threats can be
easily frustrated when a woman recognizes the typical plot pattern by associating it with a
key space. Because she is aware of the possibilities associated with this space, Amoranda
foils her abductor’s scheme. She instructs her guardian and a servant (dressed in the
appropriate ladies’ apparel) to sit in the summerhouse in place of herself and her maid:

Callid ran as he thought to Amoranda, and catching her in his Arms, cried,
No Resistance, Madam, by Jove you must along with me. Froth did the
same by the supposed Jenny, and just as they were a going to gag them and call their Associates, who waited in the Land for the Sign, to their
Assistance, the two Ladies began to handle their Cudgels, and laid about them with such dexterity, that the Ravishers were almost knocked on the head, before they could believe they were beaten; so great was their
surprise, and so little did they expect to meet with such resistance: but when they found the blows came faster on, without regard to either Sex or Quality, they began to draw their Swords; [...] All this while the two Ladies laid on so unmercifully that they began to cry Quarter and beg for Mercy, when the Noise reached the House. (274)

By Amoranda’s design, the attempted kidnapping turns into a beating of the two foolish
suitors and the summerhouse becomes a stage for frolic and farce.

Although Davys’s summerhouse scene bears striking resemblances to Aubin’s
(Callid and Froth seem almost to take Glandore’s successful kidnapping of Belinda as a
model for their own designs), Davys effectually erases the threat of rape that exists in
Aubin’s novel. For Davys, the garden allows her protagonist to thwart the suitors’ plans
and display her own creative agency. Instead of succumbing to the sexual threat,
Amoranda recognizes an alternative narrative potential of the garden and summerhouse. Amoranda does not allow the surprises lurking in the summerhouse to shape the story. Instead, she uses the properties of these spaces to surprise others and to create her own story.

Amoranda’s manipulation of the features of the garden reveals her awareness of the narrative expectations associated with the garden. In effect, Amoranda authors a new story through both conventional treatments of the garden and her original adaptations of them. Later in the novel, Amoranda further reshapes the typical amatory plot when she tricks Lord Lofty into marrying Altemira, a woman whom he had previously seduced. She again uses the summerhouse, playing on its common function as a space of sociability in which she and Lord Lofty could have tea and pass the evening, and the garden, taking full advantage of the darkness of the groves at night to marry Lofty to Altemira without his detecting the deception (285).

The heroine’s use of the architectural features of the garden for her own agenda depends on the multiple narrative possibilities for the garden. The garden no longer enables only narratives of seduction, kidnapping and other threats; for a savvy heroine, the garden can now also provide the means to create new narratives. Davys’s employment of the garden resonates with the garden’s role in Haywood’s *Love in Excess*, where a female character attempts to use the garden to satisfy her desires. Davys, however, develops this possibility further, allowing her heroine to succeed in revising the garden plot. Davys’s treatment of the garden marks the conventionality of the garden in novels as well as its multiplicity of meanings, two characteristics that continue to shape its appearance in novels throughout the eighteenth century.
Davys’s revision of the literary garden draws on both the older tradition of the garden as a sexualized space and new treatments of the garden as a social and meditative space. Elizabeth Singer Rowe’s *Friendship in Death* (1728), however, drastically deviates from the trend of employing both old and new meanings, and instead, it characterizes the garden as a virtuous, desexualized space that serves sociability, solitude, and spirituality. Rowe’s pious treatment of the garden establishes a counterpoint to the tension in other women’s writing between the older model of the garden as sexualized space and the new model of the garden as a didactic, sociable, and spiritual space. Letter XVI of Rowe’s novel relates the story of a woman appearing after death to warn her brother that he has only a few weeks to live. She explains that she “chose the Opportunity, when I found you in a clear Moon-light Night, sitting in a pensive Posture, by the Side of a Fountain in your Garden” (88). Several of the letters depend on similar moments when characters seek the solitude of the garden to indulge their grief or to contemplate the loss they have experienced. Rowe’s letters consistently describe a spirit’s visit to a loved one as dependent on a moment in which the living are prepared for the meeting by features of the garden that inspire contemplation. Solitary walks in orange groves, moments of contemplation by a fountain, or moonlit wanderings along a garden path are deemed appropriate times for the dead to approach the living with the least amount of shock or surprise.

Previous to Rowe’s figuration of the spiritual garden, a few other pious women authors crafted narratives that privileged the garden’s function as a space of sociability. Jane Barker’s *Love Intrigues: or, the History of the Amours of Bosvil and Galesia, As Related to Lucasia, in St. Germain’s Garden. A Novel* (1713) directly attaches the
garden’s social function to female friendship. St. Germain, near Paris, was James II’s residence after 1688, and the characters who relate the “histories of amours” are exiled Jacobite supporters. The tale begins by framing the relation of the story in the setting of the garden. In the garden at St. Germain, the two female protagonists speak in relative privacy, walking and talking together as part of their daily activities. While the historical details of the St. Germain garden and the Jacobite protagonists are not regularly adopted by other writers, the role of the garden as a safe space for marginalized women in a more general sense becomes central to the garden’s function in later didactic novels.

After 1730, women novelists continue to invoke the new meanings of the garden to structure didactic narratives that relate stories of virtuous triumph over temptation and vice or that emphasize the importance of rational contemplation. In mid-century didactic fiction, the garden provides a basis for narratives of the reformation of female vices. Sarah Fielding’s *The Governess; or, Little Female Academy* (1749) emphasizes the sociability of the garden as manifested in story-telling, adopting the type of garden that supports narration in Barker’s *Love Intrigues*. Fielding’s text uses the garden as a framing space for story-telling and toys with the amatory connotations of relating one’s “adventures.” In this didactic novel, a group of girls between the ages of eight and twelve mimic, even as they purify, the adult uses of the garden as a setting for telling of one’s past “adventures” as well as for sharing stories with a moral purpose. The girls choose the garden for the site of their meetings initially because it was first the site of a terrible fight amongst them over who would get to eat the nicest apple. The struggle over the apple invokes the conventional garden through layers of intertextuality: from
Classical myth, the Trojan War originating in the garden of Hesperus where Paris awards an apple to Venus, choosing her as the fairest goddess in exchange for her promising to give him Helen of Troy; and, from Judeo-Christian tradition, Eve eating the fruit, traditionally depicted as an apple, of the tree of knowledge. The symbolic meaning of the site combines with its beauty and seclusion to make it an appropriate location for the subsequent meetings that mark the development of friendship and improvement in manners of the young women. Yet, the words of the girls as they ask one another to relate their “adventures” also resonate with the romance plots of an earlier generation of fiction; the girls clearly desire to figure themselves as virtuous and well-intentioned heroines beset by the temptations of the wide world, even if those are no more than the insatiable desire for a shiny apple, or the uncontrollable impulse to harshly scold a younger sibling. Fielding’s revision of the garden privileges the use of the space as a site for the development and expression of female virtue, through patience, generosity, modesty, and amiable and polite sociability. The staging of female education in the garden employs a powerful spatial reminder of women’s weaknesses as the basis for vigorous reformation and redefinition of female virtue.

Throughout the eighteenth century, the tensions among the potential meanings of the garden shape the plots of courtship novels like Samuel Richardson’s *Pamela* (1740) and *Clarissa* (1748), Frances Burney’s *Evelina* (1778) and *The Wanderer* (1814), as well as Jane Austen’s *Mansfield Park* (1814). In these novels the multiple meanings of the garden generate a host of narrative possibilities. Gardens in these novels are sites of attempted seduction or illicit behavior, and they are also spaces of female sociability, spirituality, and meditation. Sometimes the garden operates simultaneously on both
levels for a single heroine, and sometimes its functions vary according to different characters. In either case, the resonance of the garden with earlier novels by women informs the characterization of the heroine and the ways in which the space structures the plot.

In Richardson’s novels *Pamela* and *Clarissa*, the garden clearly links Richardson’s novelistic treatments of space in general to the authors of amatory fiction. In *Pamela*, Mr. B’s first overt advances on Pamela occur in the summerhouse. Like the summerhouses in fiction by Haywood, Aubin, and Davys, Richardson’s summerhouse marks a shift in the narrative that shapes the subsequent plot developments – Mr. B’s intentions toward Pamela become clear and the narrative takes shape as a seduction plot. Later, when the Lincolnshire garden provides a site of solitude and meditation for Pamela and when Mr. B discovers Pamela’s gown in the pond and believes that she is dead, the garden shifts the narrative again and the courtship plot begins to take shape. In *Clarissa*, the garden is both the heroine’s only space of relative liberty and her primary point of access to Lovelace, through the passing of letters through the garden wall. Clarissa’s communication with Lovelace through the garden is made possible by his having hired a corrupt servant to ensure that she has solitary access to the garden, and it ultimately leads to his kidnapping and rape of her. The garden’s enabling of Clarissa’s “escape” from the imprisonment of her father’s house reflects the earlier constructions of this space as a portal from the known and disciplined domestic space to an unknown space of adventure and danger, but here, the garden shapes a tragedy. Richardson’s treatments of the garden, therefore, reinforce the conventions established by the women writers of amatory fiction, but they also reveal shifting attitudes toward the garden’s narrative potential.
Over thirty years later, Frances Burney’s *Evelina* (1778) demonstrates the further developments in this shift through the protagonist’s intense self-awareness about her use of a private garden. Evelina enters the garden at the house of her friend, Mrs. Beaumont, several times for the purposes of exercise, meditation, and solitude, as well as for social visits, all common and acceptable uses of the garden. She is, however, consistently interrupted in these activities, accosted by an overbearing suitor who corners her, a drunken rake who takes her hand and refuses to relinquish it, and a virtuous suitor who continually suspects her of having ulterior motives for being alone in the garden. Evelina must become aware of others’ access to and surveillance of the gardens as well as the way her well-intentioned actions appear to others. Because the garden is linked to narratives founded on such events as secret meetings, elopement, and illicit sexual behavior, Evelina’s presence in the garden exposes her to unjust suspicions and accusations. Similarly, in Burney’s *The Wanderer* (1814), the protagonist Juliet, suffers unwanted attentions in the garden that resonate with the garden’s association with sexual threats. The locked doors and windows of a summerhouse and the possession of the key by a rake both align the scene with earlier representations, including those in Aubin’s and Haywood’s novels. The danger of physical harm, however, while a real possibility, is transferred in these novels to the danger of social harm. Juliet and Evelina primarily fear potential observation of conversing privately with men in the garden and, therefore, being suspected of having pre-arranged a clandestine meeting.

By the end of the eighteenth century, novels regularly employ the garden in ways that invoke each aspect of its earlier association with women’s novels, including its characterization as both an illicit and a meditative space. The competing meanings of the
garden are evident in the emergence of two distinct gothic traditions in the 1790s. The garden as a space of license, relaxed surveillance, and intoxicating influence enables numerous sexual encounters in Matthew Lewis’s *The Monk* (1796). This novel’s convent and monastery gardens function as sites for secret meetings that result in consensual sexual activity as well as seduction and rape. Rather than provide a site of security and meditation for the penitents, the gardens in *The Monk* provide relative license that plunges the otherwise constrained lives of the penitents into a horrific world of lust, greed, and violence. In contrast to *The Monk*, the novels of Ann Radcliffe feature gardens that are spaces of spirituality, meditation, and calming solitude, invoking the garden of pious novels of the 1720s. In both *The Mysteries of Udolpho* (1794) and *The Italian* (1797), gardens provide a calming influence and usually function as sites of relative security. In the *Mysteries of Udolpho*, after spending weeks of turmoil and fear in the castle, Emily is sent to a cottage on the sea shore. Although she at first fears the intentions of the evil Montoni, her aunt’s husband and the proprietor of Udolpho, she quickly finds that walking in the gardens surrounding the cottage calms her spirits and restores the mental and emotional peace that had been disturbed since she was taken to Udolpho (411). In addition, early in the novel, the garden surrounding Emily’s home at La Vallee was a source of consolation, joy, and sociability for Emily and her parents.

While the competing meanings of the garden shape two separate gothic traditions in the 1790s, they meet again in the novels of Jane Austen to create tensions that drive the plot and inform characterization. By the early nineteenth century, Austen’s novels clearly mark the revision of actual and literary gardens to be more thoroughly disciplined extensions of the domestic interior. In Austen’s novels, garden paths are continually the
sites of serious reflection and of conversations that lead to reconciliations and unity between lovers. Yet, as demonstrated by the passage from *Mansfield Park* that opens this chapter, illicit associations of the garden remain. Although most of Austen’s novels treat the garden as a space of sociability and as a backdrop for conventional courtship practices, *Mansfield Park* allows a more licentious conception of the garden to pervade the narrative. Maria’s use of the garden as a site for the satisfaction of her illicit sexual desire in the midst of the other characters’ considerations of the prospect, design, and future improvements of the space evokes the earlier function of the garden as sexualized and experiential space. Rather than treating the garden as a two-dimensional landscape to be admired visually, Maria realizes that it is a space that stimulates all of the senses and encourages active experience – that it is a space that can serve her own desires.

The dependence of amatory and pious novels on architectural features within the garden provides another point of intertextuality between amatory and pious literature and novels produced later in the century. Summerhouses, windows overlooking gardens, and entryways that provide access from the house to the garden are significant to the unfolding of amatory plots as distinct architectural features of the domestic interior. The garden continues to scaffold critical parts of didactic, courtship, and gothic novels, invoking its distinct functions in amatory and pious novels. The garden, however, is subordinated to the domestic interior as the primary productive spatial source for these novels. The domestic interior and the physicality of its architectural design – staircase banisters, rooms that open onto a long gallery and doors with locks and keyholes – shape the plots of courtship novels, problem marriage novels and sentimental novels along with most other new genres of the period. Importantly, all of these novel types tend to feature
characters of the serving and middling ranks as well as women in the positions of widow and female orphan. Thus, the change in the central space correlates with the change in character type, and most novel genres move indoors to explore the narrative possibilities of a range of domestic spaces that were central to the everyday lives of women in these ranks. In the next chapter, I examine the emergence in the 1740s of the domestic interior as the dominant space of courtship novels, a phenomenon that has all but obliterated our memory of the innovative work of early eighteenth-century women writers who crafted the literary gardens that remain an essential counterpart to the domestic interior of novels throughout the eighteenth century.

NOTES

1 The garden appears in the following novels published between 1684 and 1730: Aphra Behn’s *Love Letters Between a Nobleman and his Sister* (1684-7), *Oroonoko* (1688), and *The History of Agnes de Castro* (1696); Delariviere Manley’s *The Secret History of Queen Zarah and the Zarazians* (1705), and *Bath Intrigues* (1725); Jane Barker’s *Love Intrigues* (1713); Eliza Haywood’s *Love in Excess* (1719), *The British Recluse* (1722), and *Philadore and Placentia* (1727); Daniel Defoe’s *Robinson Crusoe* (1719), *Moll Flanders* (1722), and *Roxana* (1724); Penelope Aubin’s *The Strange Adventures of Count de Vineuil and his Family* (1721), and *Madame de Beaumont* (1721); Mary Davys’s *The Reformed Coquette* (1724) and *The Accomplished Rake* (1727); Elizabeth Singer Rowe’s *Friendship in Death* (1728). This period also aligns politically with the arrival of William of Orange (1688) and the ascendancy of George II (1727). Many noblemen redesigned their gardens in the Dutch fashion to express their support of William of Orange, which may have fueled the interest in gardening and the publishing of garden manuals in this period.


3 Shannon Miller’s study of *Paradise Lost* offers a revised theory of influence that considers women writers as both influencing and influenced by Milton’s work. My claims here depend on a similar approach that uses Milton’s poem as a major text that exemplifies a broader literary trend. Shannon Miller, *Engendering the Fall: John Milton and Seventeenth-Century Women Writers* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2008), 6.


Alexander Pope cites garden design as a measure of taste in the *Moral Essays*. In “Epistle to Burlington,” also published under the title “Of False Taste,” Pope emphasizes visual-effect as the priority in landscape design: “Let not each beauty ev’ry where be spy’d,/ Where half the skill is decently to hide./ He gains all points, who pleasingly confounds surprises, varies, and conceals the Bounds” (lines 53-6). Pope agrees with Langley that surprise is an important element of garden layout, but he attaches this primarily to the sense of sight. He promotes the ha-ha by praising the concealment of boundaries, demonstrating that the prospect is the most important aspect of taste in landscaping. Alexander Pope, *The Poems of Alexander Pope: A One Volume Edition of The Twickenham Pope*, ed. John Butt (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1963), 590.

10 John Dixon Hunt, *The Figure in the Landscape: Poetry, Painting, and Gardening during the Eighteenth Century* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1976), 25-6.

11 Munroe, 6.


13 Hunt, 27.

14 Hunt, 28.

15 The second set of volumes of *The Copper-Plate Magazine* (1792-1802) consists primarily of “picturesque prints” of English houses and grounds. In contrast, earlier paintings depicted gardens as active social spaces. The painting, *The Orange Tree Garden, Chiswick House, Middlesex* portrays men sitting, standing, and gesturing as if in conversation while overlooking the garden, and Henry Danckerts’ depiction of Ham House in 1675 portrays the garden filled with people (and dogs) milling about the statues. *The Copper-Plate Magazine: Or, a Monthly Cabinet of Picturesque Prints*, volumes 1-5 (London, 1792-1802); Jane Brown, *The Art and Architecture of English Gardens: Designs for the Garden from the Collection of the Royal Institute of British Architects 1609 to the Present Day* (New York: Rizzoli, 1989), 47.

16 The landscape garden, of course, did not eliminate such possibilities altogether, as shown by the excerpt from *Mansfield Park* that begins this chapter. It even introduced new features, like the ha-ha, that generated additional possibilities for narrative.

17 Later in the century, Charlotte Lennox would develop a lengthier explanation of the influence of romances on a young woman’s perception in *The Female Quixote* (1750). The protagonist Arabella views everything through the lens of romance to the extent that she believes her gardener is a nobleman in disguise, as if she and her gardener were characters, like Philadore and Placentia, in an amatory novel or a seventeenth-century French romance.
CHAPTER 2

SHARED DOMESTIC INTERIORS AND THE NOVELS OF THE 1740S

PAMELA CONTROVERSY

As for the young Gentleman, I never saw him til this Morning as I was coming up Stairs [...] he did not speak a Word, but stared at me when I stopped to let him pass, and I made him a Curtsy.

Syrena, the protagonist of Eliza Haywood’s *Anti-Pamela; or, Feigned Innocence Detected* (1741), describes meeting one of her many suitors on a staircase during her daily activities as a servant (86). As part of her everyday labor, the staircase and hallway in her place of employment are sites where she routinely interacts with the master of the house, his son, and other servants. The passage epitomizes the domestic interior’s role in shaping novels from the 1740s onward. In previous decades, the outdoor space of the private garden anchored the plots of women’s amatory and pious novels. As the literary garden and, with it, the popularity of woman’s amatory and pious novels fade, interior domestic spaces, rather than outdoor spaces, emerge as essential to a new novel genre. Staircases, passageways, and closets – complete with details of marble banisters, wooden chair-rails, metal keyholes, and iron and glass windows – shape the plots of courtship novels throughout the second half of the eighteenth century.

Samuel Richardson’s *Pamela; or, Virtue Rewarded* (1740), Henry Fielding’s *An Apology for the Life of Mrs. Shamela Andrews* (1741), and Eliza Haywood’s *Anti-Pamela; or, Feign’d Innocence Detected* (1741) collectively shape the literary life of the
domestic interior, establishing it as a space associated with the emergent social and moral order at stake in courtship novels, including the pressing issues of women’s economic and moral autonomy, social mobility, and rank conflict. As the opening example from Haywood’s Anti-Pamela suggests, in these novels, the domestic interior enables the transgressive cross-rank relations that constitute the plots of eighteenth-century courtship novels. Scholars have typically understood the relationship between Pamela and the new genre of courtship novels in two ways. Some critics contend that Richardson’s novel breaks from the tradition of amatory novels and models a new didactic novel that contemporaries and successors adopt, thus creating a new genre; others suggest that Pamela actually epitomizes the older amatory conventions and that a new type of novel emerges when Henry Fielding rejects the conventional formal qualities of Richardson’s novels and amatory novels. William Warner offers an alternative view of the issue, suggesting that a new type of novel emerges from what he calls “the Pamela media event,” referring to the popularity of Pamela and the numerous published responses as an event that redefines the novel as acceptable entertainment. I take up an element of the novel that none of these critical traditions has yet considered – the representation of domestic interior space and its role in structuring a new novel genre that features cross-rank relationships. The centrality of domestic interior space to the novels that participate in the Pamela debate constitute the beginnings of a new genre, courtship novels.

In Samuel Richardson’s Pamela, the hallways, staircases, and doorways of Mr. B’s Bedfordshire and Lincolnshire estates enable interactions between a servant girl and her wealthy master, and they structure the transformation of a seduction plot into a marriage plot. Henry Fielding’s Shamela and Eliza Haywood’s Anti-Pamela employ the
domestic interior to present alternative plot outcomes that critique Richardson’s portrayal of the relationship among space, gender, and rank. Analyzing the role of domestic interiors in *Pamela, Shamela*, and *Anti-Pamela* together illuminates its centrality to plots of cross-rank relationships, a link that continues to shape courtship novels well into the twentieth century. In addition, these novels increase elite anxieties over the stability of social hierarchy as they employ the familiar space of the domestic interior to dramatize the permeability of distinctions of rank.

In *Pamela*, staircases, hallways, and closets, spaces that ideally promote household organization, actually enable events that scramble social hierarchy and household order. The design and function of these spaces enable the temporary reversal of social and moral roles: the master spies on the servant, the servant behaves as if a lady, aggressor and victim slide into performances of the roles of husband and wife. The scenes of temporary destabilization result in astonishing upward social mobility for the lady’s maid and a subsequent re-ordering of the space of the household to reflect the servant’s new position as mistress of the house. Fielding’s response pointedly mimics the spatial qualities of Richardson’s novel in order to ridicule the notion of a virtuous woman servant. The domestic interior in *Shamela* directly aids the servant in seducing her master, resulting in upward social mobility for the serving woman through her cunning rather than through her virtue. In contrast to Richardson’s and Fielding’s novels, Haywood’s *Anti-Pamela* uses the staircases, hallways, and closets to preclude a servant’s social mobility. The overcrowded rooms of a mantua-maker’s house that doubles as a shop and the close proximity of master and servant in a country estate are catalysts for the protagonist’s plummet through the social ranks to become a common prostitute and
eventually an exile. Haywood associates Syrena’s fall with her attempts to use to her advantage the staircases, hallways, and closets of the domestic interior where she works. Domestic spaces in these novels are central to the questions and solutions that they pose about master-servant relations, female virtue, male desire, and social hierarchy. Through their dependence on the domestic interior to explore this web of problems, these novels constitute a new genre.

Regulation of social order in the household anchors the novel plots of the *Pamela* controversy: staircases, hallways, and closets are sites of encounter between master and maidservant, which is also an encounter between superior and subordinate, upper rank and lower, rich and poor, man and woman. The literary spaces of the *Pamela* controversy resonate with the historical functions of these spaces and with their imagined role in the life of servants and apprentices. Cultural and historical studies of eighteenth-century architecture and family life as well as conduct literature of the period inform my understanding of the sudden prominence of the domestic interior in 1740’s novels. In part, the concern over regulating encounters between ranks and genders can be attributed to shifts in conceptions of the family. The domestic interior brought persons of differing ranks into regular contact. Labor was inexpensive, and servants were typical even within small households. Most humble households had at least one servant, while larger households employed five to ten servants depending on the owner’s income. In addition to the presence of servants, the business and social responsibilities of the genteel housewife required entertaining guests of ranks both above and below her own. Despite changing conceptions of home and family, a household was not in itself a private or exclusive unit, nor did it enforce a separation of ranks and genders; rather, its everyday
functions included a range of personal, business and social purposes that necessitated communication across ranks and between genders.

Although the practical functions of the household precluded strict privacy, architectural designs and prescriptions for proper conduct in these spaces according to rank and gender promote an ideal vision of the domestic space as a private domain. Privacy was a determining factor in seventeenth-century changes in floor-plans and functions of the elite domestic interior: “The family sought privacy from domestic servants; males and females increasingly were thought to require segregation from each other [...] and all members of the household sought privacy from the outside world of uninvited visitors.” To accommodate this new value of privacy, symmetrical models of domestic design replaced linear models, providing two or more sets of apartments separated by a corridor rather than a single set of rooms in direct succession with each room opening onto another rather than onto a corridor. Households filled with people of different ranks, ages, and genders depended for their daily operation on an organization of space intended to uphold the social hierarchy.

Throughout the seventeenth- and eighteenth-centuries, domestic space was re-organized to support changes in social hierarchy and ideological distinctions of rank. After the Restoration, landowners began to entertain tenants and freeholders in areas separate from the main hall and parlor, in opposition to traditional customs of country estates. Because “some spaces were deemed more appropriate to polite guests than others,” domestic spaces could signify not only the formality and purpose of the event, but also the rank of the guest. A formal dinner in the dining room might involve a few genteel guests, and the best china and linens, while having tea in the parlor with a
mantua-maker would be less formal and could serve both social and business purposes.

The nuances of rank and its mapping onto living space are exemplified by Francis Grose’s construction of a “table of precedency” in regards to the rooms and floors of a London household with areas available for rent:

First then in order of all those who occupy only parts of houses stand the tenants of stalls, sheds and cellars, from which we take our flight to the top of the house in order to arrange in the next class the residents in garrets; from thence we gradually descend to the second and first floor, the dignity of each being in the inverse ration of its altitude, it being always remembered that those dwelling in the fore part of the house take the pas of the inhabitants of the back rooms, and the ground floor, if not a shop and warehouse, ranks with the second story.9

Grose’s “table of precedency” for those who were likely to rent lodgings plays on the custom of precedence that dictated seating at dinner and the entrance and exit of persons according to rank within a neighborhood. In both cases, distinctions of rank actively organized the everyday buildings, floors, and individual rooms of English housing, and the potential for disruption of a static relationship between rank and space existed in both city residences and country homes. Space was subject to social manipulation: if a person of low rank found the means, he or she could rent a respectable lodging and thereby appear of higher rank. In a private home, a servant could disobediently choose to use a main staircase at an inopportune time, or a master could frequent the back staircases to promote – and conceal – interactions with the servants.

The domestic interior’s anchoring of plots that revolve around the co-habitation of servant and master differs from the conventions of novels written before 1740. In novels before 1740, cross-rank romance rarely occurs, and, when it does, it usually transpires in spaces outside of the characters’ homes, in taverns, public gardens, or secondary
residences. In women’s amatory and pious novels as well as in the novels of Daniel Defoe, the scenes that take place in the domestic interior typically are not central to the plot. Instead, spaces outside of the domestic interior, such as a garden, wilderness, sea, or foreign land, provide the foundation for generating the essential action of the plots. While these earlier novels represent outdoor spaces as central to the dramatization of men’s and women’s experience, the novels of the *Pamela* controversy re-define the type of space that can give rise to new experiences, opportunities, or dangers for women. The traditional figures of the picaro and the noblewoman move through geographical space and their plots are typically anchored in gardens and other lush green spaces. In contrast, Pamela, at the outset, has the position of a typical servant girl, whose life is circumscribed by an enclosed space limited to a few rooms, including primarily her late lady’s sitting room, dressing room, and the housekeeper’s bedchamber.\(^{10}\)

The inevitable interaction between persons of different ranks in the domestic interior along with a long-standing conception of family that included servants in addition to biological relations created the potential for master and servant to develop an affectionate relationship as a basis for marriage between them.\(^ {11}\) Investigating the problem of master and servant intimacy, Kristina Straub reads *Pamela* in relation to eighteenth-century writing on domestic service in order to argue that the novel is a “highly innovative, and, hence, controversial intervention in representations of the woman servant’s sexuality.”\(^ {12}\) Straub elucidates Richardson’s solution to the “servant problem” as an imagining of “morally conscientious servants whose autonomy allows them choices that confirm, rather than challenge, a class- and gender-based domestic
“order” and as the transforming of illicit male sexual desire into “an affective and erotic connection across class lines.”  

We need to understand the spatial component of the master-servant relationship in order to identify *Pamela* as primarily concerned with representing and reforming master-servant relations. After all, masters and servants most readily come into contact with each other in the seemingly private spaces of the domestic interior; in relation to the master-servant question, the actual and fictional household becomes a contested space. One of the most famous scenes in *Pamela*, when Mr. B peers through a keyhole to view the unconscious Pamela sprawled on the floor, highlights the spatial dimensions of master and servant interactions. The scene is traditionally understood as undermining the didactic, religious, and moral claims that Richardson and his fans make for the novel. Eighteenth-century critics and twenty-first century scholars alike have treated this scene as evidence of Pamela’s erotic physical being, at odds with the “moral and spiritual autonomy” shaped by her letters. To return to this scene with a focus on space reveals a new and significant aspect of it: the master stands, hunched over, in a passageway looking through a keyhole into a room in his own house. The location of the scene, a hallway in the domestic interior, exposes the master to the potential observation of others: Mrs. Jervis, honest John, or any other domestic could come upon him and catch him spying, an action usually associated with disloyal servants prone to gossip. The spatial elements of the scene, therefore, position Mr. B as a perpetrator, even while they reinforce the master’s proprietary rights over the entire household and the people in it. To focus on the spatial aspects of this scene shifts our attention from Pamela and places it on Mr. B as the transgressor.
By enabling the dramatic interaction of *Pamela*, hallways, staircases, and closets dramatize the conflicts between traditional conceptions of social order and new potential aspects of the relationship between masters and servants, including the possibility of mutual esteem and marriage. Early in the novel, Mr. B’s sister, Lady Davers, identifies the potential of the domestic space to produce improper interactions among ranks; she states that Pamela is “too pretty to live in a Batchelor’s House; and that no Lady he might marry, would care to continue [Pamela] with her” (16). The premise of the story depends on exactly the spatial organization with which Lady Davers takes issue – the sharing of domestic space between a pretty maid and a rakish gentleman.

Significantly, Pamela’s reporting of Lady Davers’s conversation with Mr. B illustrates one feature of the domestic interior that is vital to the plot: the potential for eavesdropping and gossip. Pamela’s retelling of the conversation between Mr. B and Lady Davers is only possible because Mrs. Jervis, the housekeeper, repeats the exchange to Pamela, who then records it in her letter. Additionally, later in the novel, Mr. B accuses Pamela of attempting to ruin his reputation by spreading gossip about his actions.

Conduct writers of the period worry about the properties of shared domestic space that created the potential for servant eavesdropping, spying, and other types of subversive surveillance. Exemplifying this typical concern of conduct literature, Richardson’s own conduct manual, *The Apprentice’s Vade Mecum* (1734), instructs apprentices to keep the master’s secrets, explaining that servants and others taken into a household must have extreme regard for the reputation of the family.16 Most conduct literature addressed to servants and apprentices imagines that the temptation to spy, eavesdrop, and gossip is overwhelming. Peter Earle describes the “gossip of servants, whose lives were largely
spent, if [court] depositions can be believed, with their eyes glued to cracks in partitions, crevices in walls and the inevitable keyhole.”17 Employers considered gossip about themselves and their families to be the worst of crimes committed by servants because the damage that such gossip could cause to one’s reputation could affect both financial credibility and social standing. Business owners and professionals worried that servant gossip could damage their reputations in the neighborhood, and genteel landowners wanted to protect their reputations within social and political circles.

The plot of Pamela, however, depends just as greatly on the ability of the master to spy in his own house, a reversal of typical assumptions about the domestic space. In Pamela, the master steals letters, peeps through keyholes, cross-dresses, and hides behind screens and in closets to listen to his servants, all in pursuit of his sexual desires. The reversal of this conventional association between rank and space is crucial to perpetuating the plot, as when Mr. B intrudes upon spaces that have been designated for Pamela’s use. Robert Folkenflik’s interpretation of Pamela highlights the ways in which Mr. B’s actions disrupt the social hierarchy customarily supported by the domestic interior:

The whole house, as Mr. B never tires of reminding her, is now his. And yet it is also not his. These rooms, so solidly there, are in a sense the violated social order. The shock is not only what is happening to Pamela personally, but that the whole topography of the house has been perverted.18

Folkenflik identifies Mr. B’s lecherous redefinition of the spaces of the house, but he does not investigate how the features of the domestic interior may have actually enabled that violation. The resulting intimacy between Mr. B and Pamela is not merely represented by the closets; it is shaped by the ways in which the closets and other interior spaces facilitate private interactions between master and servant.
Like Folkenflik, most critics have tended to treat space in *Pamela* as symbolic of Pamela’s psychological state and the degree to which she demonstrates individual agency or its lack. Historicist interpretations of space yield different and important insights into *Pamela*. The small, enclosed spaces in *Pamela*, like closets, wardrobes, and bed chambers have been recognized repeatedly as important elements in Richardson’s writing, and they are usually interpreted as representative of the heroine’s body, mind, or status.¹⁹ Such symbolic interpretations depend on an understanding of these types of rooms as solely private spaces claimed by a single person and intruded upon by another. An historical interpretation of those spaces provides an alternative understanding of these common domestic rooms. Dressing rooms in particular developed new social functions in the middle of the eighteenth-century as they “were invariably also used as private sitting rooms.”²⁰ Newer and renovated houses featured dressing rooms that were quite large and handsomely furnished. These dressing rooms “were not so different from studies – except that the owner came down from his bedroom in the morning, and saw people on business while his toilet was being finished off by his valet.”²¹ Rooms like the dressing room and closet had a multifaceted function in the domestic interior, providing more than simply a private space of retreat for the master or mistress. Although McKeon identifies the closet as fitting under a broadly defined notion of “private space” by the eighteenth century, he traces the closet’s history carefully to reveal its multifarious origins.²² By identifying the closet’s origins as a man’s “cabinet of curiosities” and a place for secret meetings and private conversations among intimates, he emphasizes that “private” is not interchangeable with “individual” or “personal.” Rather, the original functions of the closet usually involved two or more people, as a collection of curiosities
was shown-off to a special guest or as a group of counselors secretly met with the King to devise political strategies.\textsuperscript{23} While the cabinet of curiosities and the gentleman’s closet were spaces reserved for primarily masculine endeavors and male sociality, the lady’s dressing room and closet were more likely to serve as sites for private activities, such as reading or meditation, and as spaces of shared sociability among men and women.

To understand the varied use of the closet in domestic life reveals how this space inspired plots of cross-rank interactions in novels. As a space both private and social, the closet is significant to the plot in ways other than its representation of Pamela’s “personal space,” a sheer fiction for a servant, and her individualism. This is a critical commonplace, arising, in part, from Nancy Armstrong’s influential claim that Pamela is the first character in the novel to embody individual subjectivity.\textsuperscript{24} The actual functions of the closet make Mr. B’s intrusion on Pamela plausible and provide opportunities for their interactions to evolve from seduction attempts to courtship. After her mistress’s death, the first interactions between Mr. B and Pamela that indicate Pamela is in danger take place in the dressing room where Mr. B can meet Pamela alone. Pamela’s accustomed use of her lady’s dressing room for writing provides the premise for Mr. B to find her there; she reports, “As I was folding this Letter, in my late lady’s Dressing-room, in comes my young master!” (12). Later, Mr. B’s gifts of clothing presented in the dressing room seem inappropriate even to the unsuspecting Pamela, who comments that she “was inwardly asham’d to take the Stockens; for Mrs. Jervis was not there: If she had, it would have been nothing” (19). Pamela’s description is telling: had Mrs. Jervis been there, the gifts would have seemed legitimate. It was both possible and likely to involve Mrs. Jervis in these interactions, but Mr. B chooses not to do so. The closet provides the
means by which to create privacy by excluding other parties. Mr. B selects the closet as the space in which to give Pamela fine gifts precisely for its qualities as both a wardrobe storehouse and a space that excludes others. As a wardrobe storehouse, the closet seems to Pamela to be an appropriate site for sorting out her late mistress’s property and precludes any suspicion on her part about Mr. B’s motives. As a space that easily excludes others and affords privacy, the closet prevents other servants from observing Mr. B’s treatment of Pamela and potentially advising her of his illegitimate intentions.

Mr. B’s intrusion on Pamela when she is in her lady’s dressing room is shocking because of the mismatch between the conventional use of the space and Pamela’s lowly rank. Pamela’s use of the closet is in deep conflict with her rank as a servant girl. She uses the closet in much the same manner that a lady of the house would, to read and write, to conduct her devotions, and even to hold private conversations, welcomed or otherwise.

The conventional organization of domestic space enables the opportunism of a rakish gentleman by aiding his disruption of the system of rank and space that structures genteel households. Mr. B frequently takes advantage of typical features and functions of the spaces of bedchambers and closets to engage in illicit cross-rank interactions. The scene in which Pamela discovers Mr. B in Mrs. Jervis’s closet evolves out of the idea of the master transgressing conventional spatial codes. The very idea of a master’s transgression is complicated by the fact that the master has a right to be anywhere in his house, and the servants have only a secondary right to occupy those spaces.25 Pamela’s attempt to leave various spaces, such as interior rooms and the summerhouse, when Mr. B enters them emphasizes this convention; she is acknowledging her master’s primary right to go where he pleases on his estate. Yet, when Mr. B takes this right to its extreme,
so far as to lead him into the closet of his housekeeper, he clearly transgresses an understood convention of the spaces of the house; the language of Pamela’s reaction registers the shock of such a lapse in propriety.

The specific situation of a housekeeper’s room and closet permit the master’s actions, and the conventional uses of bedchambers in general add subtle irony to Pamela’s exclamations. Mirroring the typical housekeeper’s room, Mrs. Jervis’s room is separate from those of the lower maids and contains its own closet. In part, Mrs. Jervis is allowed personal space and separation from the other servants’ quarters because of her rank as a gentlewoman, who has fallen on hard times after the death of her husband. The architectural features of the typical housekeeper’s room make it possible for Mr. B to hide in a space within the larger room and to startle Pamela and Mrs. Jervis without worrying that the women’s screams will be heard by others in the house. The language of the characters’ exclamations reveals the disruption of spatial organization by referring to details of the room – the bed, the size of the room, the situations of the characters in the space. Upon hearing Mr. B declare that he would just “expostulate a Word or two” with Pamela, Mrs. Jervis advises “don’t hear a Word, except he leaves the Bed, and goes to the other End of the Room.” Pamela responds “Aye, out of the Room! […] expostulate To-morrow, if you must expostulate” (63). The details of the room as well as the time of the attack, at night just as the women are going to bed, give the lie to Mr. B’s claims that he only wishes to “expostulate” with Pamela. Mr. B wishes to “expostulate” in a bedchamber at night, and Pamela’s recognition of a seeming incoherence between Mr. B’s claim and the space and time he has chosen to speak with her leads to her demand that he leave the room.
The space of the bedchamber and the time of retirement to bed, however, were associated with conversation in imaginative representations of marriage. Seventeenth- and eighteenth-century illustrations of the “curtain lecture” depict it as an intimate conversation shared between husband and wife when in bed at night, as a moment when the wife was free to give reproof to her husband.²⁷ Thus, Mr. B’s wish to “expostulate” also signifies his appropriation of a married couple’s privilege, to converse in bed at the hour of repose, and disrupts the conventions of master-servant relations. The spatial resonances of this scene with the traditional “curtain lecture” imply a multitude of conflicting narrative possibilities that range from the licit to the violent. Mr. B’s condescension to speak to Pamela in this intimate setting could be demonstrative of his growing fondness for Pamela and his unconscious consideration of her as a future wife. Alternatively, it could indicate his intent to rape her, claiming a husband’s “rights” even outside the bounds of marriage, or it could convey Pamela’s vulnerability to seduction when treated so like a wife. In other words, the space of the bedroom and the closet within it multiplies narrative and interpretive possibilities, supporting a new novel genre that encompasses both seduction plots and courtship plots. In this way, the spaces of the domestic interior take the place of the garden in structuring novels. The garden’s dual meanings as sexualized space and space of sociability structure women’s amatory and pious novels while the multiple narrative possibilities of the domestic interior support the narratives in courtship novels.

The bedroom scene reframes the master-servant relationship. As interior spaces invert conventional gender and rank roles (the master hides in the closet, again acting as spy in his own house), the interactions between master and servant transition from
seduction attempts driven by rakish desire to steps in courtship motivated by newfound virtue. Through this transition, sexual risk is tied to commonplace characteristics of the domestic space. The link is evident in numerous conduct books as well as in other novels, including the anti-\textit{Pamela} novels written by Fielding and Haywood. Thomas Seaton’s \textit{The Conduct of Servants in Great Families} (1720) treats with particular attention the necessity of servant women avoiding a licentious master and being aware of the spaces in which they may cross paths. He states that the women of any family should be able to tell when the master is likely to make sexual advances, and they should “contrive not to be where he may probably come, so long as [that humor] is like to last.” If the master looks for them, “they must conceal themselves” and if found, “they must cry out against any Treatment that is very Rude and Shocking;” finally, if he continues to pursue them with frequency, “they must by all Means quit the Service, however profitable.”

Pamela’s obedience to prescriptions for servant behavior, like Seaton’s advice, reforms Mr. B’s illicit desire into legitimate affection. Such prescriptions are intended to protect servant women’s chastity and to reinforce the ideological separation of ranks by policing illicit male desire. The link between the domestic interior and master-servant interaction that conduct literature elaborates, however, actually supports the reform of male desire by producing interactions that alter the protagonists’ understanding of themselves and their relationships. Pamela acts properly according to Seaton’s instructions. She avoids Mr. B as much as possible, she acquires a bedfellow in the seemingly trustworthy Mrs. Jervis, and she asks to leave her position to return to her parents. Yet, every second that she remains in the house creates the possibility for Mr. B
to scheme against her. Thus, the domestic interior has a dual function: as Seaton’s advice suggests, it is the catalyst for the master’s attempts to assault or seduce the lady’s maid, and it is also the mechanism that supports the underlying courtship narrative that emerges by the second half of the novel. If Pamela were to leave Mr. B’s house, the plot would fail to reach resolution.

The legal strictures of domestic service provide another reason for Pamela to remain in Mr. B’s service. Richardson references this context in several ways, including the fact that Pamela must complete a vest that she is embroidering for Mr. B before she can legally leave his house, unless he formally dismisses her. Servant mobility in general, and for young women in particular, was not as easy as many conduct books, like Seaton’s, and other writing on domestic service represent. Pamela herself outlines the multitude of problems that she would confront if she were to attempt to travel alone to her parents’ house, from traveling by foot in torrential downpours to accusations of thievery and possible imprisonment to suffering a violent assault and robbery herself. Pamela, therefore, remains where she is, in Mr. B’s house and, at least in part, subject to his will.

When Mr. B, later in the course of the novel, deceives Pamela into traveling to his Lincolnshire estate, the domestic space becomes even more of a prison, and Pamela is confined by force rather than by social and economic coercion. In this part of the novel, the spaces of the Lincolnshire estate, including again closets, staircases, and hallways, continue to further the overall scheme of the novel as it transitions from a tale of attempted seduction to a courtship plot. Significantly, the garden at Lincolnshire aids this transition when Pamela’s contemplation of suicide prompts Mr. B to reconsider his
intentions toward her. The role of the garden in inspiring virtuous male behavior positions it as an extension of the novel’s interior domestic spaces and differs from the role of the garden in amatory novels, in which the garden often inspires illicit desire.

Many critics have tried to account for the length of the last part of the novel after Mr. B marries Pamela. The significance of space to Pamela’s new status as wife offers a persuasive account of the novel’s protracted ending. Although Pamela’s coerced residence in Mr. B’s Lincolnshire estate eventually draws the plot toward its seeming conclusion, the revolutionary marriage of master and servant, a new conflict arises within the domestic interior that perpetuates the narrative beyond the moment of marriage.

After Mr. B and Pamela marry, Pamela must learn to use household space according to her new position as wife and the legitimate mistress of Mr. B’s household. New conflicts arise as Mr. B places Pamela in the traditional position of mistress of the house. During a surprise visit to Mr. B’s Lincolnshire estate, Lady Davers, who believes Pamela is still a mere servant and likely a kept mistress, expects Pamela to follow the spatially-oriented rules of servant behavior. She becomes agitated when Pamela carefully uses space to express her own status as the new mistress of the house. Pamela seats herself by a window and refuses to respond to Lady Davers’s demands that she attend table, serve wine, or continue standing in her presence. She also rejects the invitation of Lady Davers’s serving woman to sit down at table with her and the housekeeper Mrs. Jewkes. Pamela’s negotiation of space indicates that she is attempting to satisfy Mr. B’s injunctions – that once married to him she should never act beneath her station – by asserting her authority both over the space of her household and over her own body.
within that space. The domestic interior and the system of rank that governs it create the means of playing out rank conflict in narrative.

Counter-fictions to *Pamela* use the same interior domestic spaces found in Richardson’s novel in order to critique his construction of gendered, rather than rank-based, virtue and to complicate his portrayal of upward social mobility for an exemplary servant. In *Shamela*, Henry Fielding parodies *Pamela* by showing how the domestic interior could produce a narrative in which a serving woman seduces a gentleman. In *Anti-Pamela*, Haywood envisions the domestic interior as productive of a working woman’s social decline, which contrasts markedly with Richardson’s story of upward mobility for a young woman of the serving ranks. As the novels of the *Pamela* controversy employ the domestic interior to debate the potential consequences of master-servant intimacy that destabilizes traditional rank hierarchy, that space accumulates meaning as representative of elite anxieties over rank conflict and social mobility. This quality informs the domestic interior’s centrality to popular courtship novels throughout the century and into the nineteenth century.

In *Shamela*, the domestic interior provides a servant woman with the means and opportunity to seduce a gentleman. Unlike Richardson, Fielding depicts servants as always opportunistic and virtue as characteristically absent in the lower ranks; following from this premise, the domestic interior produces an opportunity for upward mobility, not through virtue and mutual affection, but through cunning deception. Fielding’s revision of the scene from *Pamela*, described above, in which Mr. B hides in Mrs. Jervis’s room exemplifies his technique. By contrast with the original bed chamber scenes in Richardson’s novel, Fielding’s novel uses the domestic interior to suggest that the servant
women are complicit in their masters’ seduction attempts. In *Shamela*, the master can only enter the room because Mrs. Jervis and Pamela have purposefully left the door unlocked to allow him access (246). Although Fielding revises the character of each of the protagonists in order to imagine an alternative outcome, he employs the same domestic interior space that Richardson does, registering that space as a codification of larger anxieties over master and servant relations and the stability of social hierarchy.

Fielding’s revision of the role of the domestic interior in cross-rank relations exposes the complex nature of the domestic space. As eighteenth-century architectural pattern-books reveal, houses were designed to accommodate and reinforce an ideological separation of ranks. Daily operations of a household along with the comfort of the master and mistress required persons of different ranks to live in close contact. Eighteenth-century houses were designed to regulate these daily interactions with architectural features such as back-staircases and galleries. Abraham Swan’s pattern-book, *A Collection of Designs in Architecture* (1757), illustrates how such features reinforce a separation between ranks: “The Best Stairs are carried up in the Center of the Back Front; the Back Stairs go up in the Passage by which the Servants enter the House.”

Such designs began to appear more and more often in architectural pattern books published from the late seventeenth century onward, including Pierre Le Muet’s *The Art of Fair Building* (1675) and James Gibbs’s *A Book of Architecture* (1728). Girouard identifies a correlation between these shifts in architectural design and social hierarchy, and he explains that houses built in a “circuit” (rooms organized around a central staircase and a hall communicating to each room, rather than along a linear layout from the front to the back of the house) typically provided servants access to the upper apartments by means
of a back staircase. Back-staircases and galleries, as well as the location of servants’ quarters on a different floor or in a separate wing of the house were design features intended to keep servants out of sight of the master and his guests as they moved about the more elegant spaces of the house. While these features supported an ideological separation of ranks by providing the physical means by which to keep social hierarchy in place, the very need for distinct spaces suggests that such separation was continually under pressure within the domestic interior. In Fielding’s parody, the pressure on boundaries of rank erupts into a comedy in which a conniving servant uses the means provided by conventions of the domestic interior to manipulate a foolish gentleman into marriage, achieving her own goals of social ascendency.

Haywood’s *Anti-Pamela* presents an alternative outcome of the domestic interior’s potential to enable social mobility. The protagonist’s working experience of domestic space, much more historically typical than the experience represented by either Richardson or Fielding, produces a narrative altogether distinct from their stories of rapid social ascent. The heroine’s lack of private space and power over the space in which she works is a catalyst for her gradual socio-economic descent from apprenticeship to domestic service to prostitution. Thus, while the spaces of all of these novels are mimetic, their synthetic functions range from ideal and unrealistic to stereotypical, supporting plots that represent only the most extreme possibilities in actual experience.

Haywood expands the narrative possibilities of domestic space by featuring Syrena’s experiences in both the interior of a country house and a townhouse which doubles as both home and shop for her employer. These two types of domestic interiors place Syrena alternately in the positions of seduced victim and seductress. The crowded
household of a London businesswoman and her family initiates the seduction plot of
*Anti-Pamela*, whereas the availability of unoccupied rooms in Mr. B’s country houses at
his Bedfordshire and Lincolnshire estates produce much of the plot of *Pamela*. In *Anti-
Pamela*, the plot depends on the features of a middling-rank family’s urban home, in
which the rooms are not only small but also fully occupied. Syrena’s lack of available
private space, in particular a dressing room with a mirror, ultimately results in her
seduction and social decline.

The mantua-maker’s house where Syrena serves as apprentice reflects the typical
organization of houses that were both home and work for shopkeeper families, with
rooms serving multiple functions at different times of the day and night. The crowded
nature of the house forces Syrena to conduct conventionally private and personal
activities within a more public and social arena. Syrena describes her sleeping quarters
and her morning routine:

> Mrs. Martin, my Mistress’s Sister, and I, lie in a dark Closet, within the
> Dining-Room; so I go there as soon as I am up, to comb my Head and put
> on my Cap in the great Glass; but I am always in such a Hurry to get my
> things on before my master and Mistress come down, that I never minded
> who observed me. – I was observed however, and all my Motions
> watch’d, from the first Day I came it seems. (60)

This passage highlights several significant aspects of the working woman’s experience of
space: as an apprentice, Syrena sleeps in a small room adjoining one of the main rooms
for common family use, shares this closet with another member of the family, and has no
additional space for dressing or performing her toilet. These conditions result from the
common practice of “living-in,” which meant that an apprentice would reside with his or
her master’s family. The practice of “living-in” was the typical arrangement for
apprentices until very late in the eighteenth century when they would sometimes be boarded in separate lodgings to promote family privacy. For Syrena, “living-in” and the daily organization of household space that it requires – using the dining room as dressing room – enables the neighbor to observe her through a window every morning as she finishes dressing (61). This neighbor eventually seduces Syrena, an event that initiates her social decline.

The crucial difference between Haywood’s novel and Richardson’s novel is that the domestic interior in Anti-Pamela is linked to both upward and downward social mobility and different types of interiors offer different types of servant mobility. In Pamela, the domestic interior is directly linked to upward social mobility for an exemplary servant, but Haywood’s novel demonstrates that the same spaces can initiate social decline and support criminality. Initially, the novel seems to condemn the crowded nature of a shopkeeper’s house because it results in the seduction of a well-meaning, albeit misguided, apprentice; in much of the latter part of the novel, however, Syrena uses domestic space to promote her own newly formed aims as a con-woman and prostitute. Each time one of her schemes fails, Syrena makes a major change in occupation, dwelling, and social status. When Syrena becomes a lady’s maid in a gentleman’s house, its staircases and hallways help initiate two parallel seduction plots by promoting encounters between Syrena and the master, Sir Thomas, and between Syrena and Sir Thomas’s son. Syrena targets Sir Thomas’s son in the hope of a legitimate marriage and covertly encourages Sir Thomas’s seduction attempts in order to procure a settlement. This section of Haywood’s novel more closely aligns with Pamela’s experience of the domestic interior as a space of sexual threat for servant women, but Haywood’s
protagonist capitalizes on opportunities presented by sharing domestic space with the master and his son.

The plot hinges on accidental encounters in corridors and on staircases between Syrena and the men of the house and on the relative amount of privacy and license shared between Syrena and other servants in their personal quarters. Mrs. Mary, Syrena’s new bedfellow at Sir Thomas’s, warns her to avoid Sir Thomas as much as possible because “he loves a Girl in a corner” (86-7). This information is useful to Syrena, both in the way Mrs. Mary intends it, to help protect Syrena’s chastity by giving her warning, and as Syrena considers using it, to help her advance economically by ensnaring Sir Thomas and acquiring a settlement. The shared bedchambers between servants that makes possible the exchange of knowledge about the family suggests that a classed and gendered solidarity among servant women could emerge out of the organization of domestic space in a country household, while the shared space across ranks increases the likelihood of sexual threat to the chaste servant girls and financial or social opportunity to the less than chaste.

*Anti-Pamela* dramatizes emerging concerns over the instability of distinctions among ranks by figuring domestic space as an arena in which a gentleman’s sexual desire and a maid’s self-serving complicity come into contact. With the growth of consumerism and the increasing potential to “make one’s fortune” by industry, mercantilism, or a good marriage match, persons in the lower and middling ranks became increasingly desirous and capable of emulating their social superiors. The upper ranks worried that the lower ranks’ growing ability to dress and act like their betters would inspire disregard for traditional distinctions of rank. Furthermore, marriage was already treated by many in
the upper ranks as an economic exchange that could secure fortune, property, or a title; it, therefore, also may have seemed the most likely method for a person in the lower ranks to improve his or her social standing.

Haywood’s novel manifests these concerns in its depiction of passageways and staircases in Sir Thomas’s house. These architectural features enable both intentional and accidental meetings between Syrena and the men of the house. Syrena reports:

As for the young Gentleman, I never saw him till this Morning as I was coming up Stairs […] He did not speak a Word, but stared at me when I stopped to let him pass, and I made him a Curtsy. […] As I was crossing the passage, I saw the young Gentleman again, coming out of his Father’s Closet; I made him another Curtsy, and blush’d, and I thought he look’d a little red too, but did not speak a Word. (87)

The description resonates with Seaton’s warning that a servant woman who senses a sexual threat from the master should avoid the spaces where they commonly cross paths. Haywood’s construction of the domestic interior as a space of encounters between ranks and genders emphasizes the physical proximity of domestic servants to their masters; this condition makes unexpected meetings likely and cross-rank romance imaginable.

Domestic space structures the reversal of the outcome of Richardson’s plot. Syrena’s “anti-Pamela” experience depends on differences in the rank and occupants of the domestic interior from those of Richardson’s novel, even while it remains similar in kind in terms of common architectural features and everyday functions. Pamela has access to unoccupied spaces where she could conceal herself, hold private conversations with Mr. B, or write the personal letters that ultimately brought her master to love and desire her as a wife rather than as a mistress. Syrena’s initial lack of space led to her first
seduction before she learned to use the conventions of the domestic space to aid her own schemes as a seductress. Pamela is rewarded with marriage and social ascendency, while Syrena is punished with banishment and disgrace.

Although the plots of *Anti-Pamela* and *Pamela* demonstrate strikingly different outcomes of the cross-rank dynamics arising from the domestic interior, both of these outcomes employ space in ways that differ significantly from earlier novels. Syrena’s move to London as a young apprentice and her later removal from London frame her story; the narrative focus on Syrena’s experience within a limited household space coincides with the plot structure of Pamela’s confinement as a prisoner in the domestic interiors of the Bedfordshire and Lincolnshire estates. In contrast, in amatory novels and adventure tales of the first half of the eighteenth century, travel to an unfamiliar place often initiates or perpetuates the plot. Syrena’s story, however, ends abruptly when she is sent to a far-away, unfamiliar location. The plot culminates in Syrena’s exile to the estate of a kinsman in Wales, where she cannot harm the prospects of her brothers by her infamous reputation. Her punishment effectually precludes any further narrative because Haywood’s story is driven by the question of what happens to a working woman in the domestic environments of London and its immediately surrounding countryside. This conclusion introduces a plot device that will continue to be a common resolution in domestic and courtship novels: the geographic marginalization of transgressive women.

Thus, understanding how the domestic interior functions as a narrative source illuminates significant parallels between *Pamela* and *Anti-Pamela*. Each novel explores relations among rank, space, and gender and situates the domestic interior as central to cross-rank romance and social mobility. Although exhibiting exemplary fortitude,
Pamela passively accepts the possibilities brought about by the domestic interior; in *Anti-Pamela*, Syrena seizes and acts on the possibilities presented by the domestic interior, consciously participating in the unsettling of the system of rank. Both novels, however, restore the alignment between space and rank in the end, either by redefining the transgressors within proper rank and space hierarchy or by geographically and socially removing the transgressor and her disruptive behavior.

In contrast to Pamela and Syrena, Shamela continues to disrupt conventions of the domestic interior by succeeding in marrying her master, but refusing to play successfully the role of a gentleman’s wife. Because Fielding’s novel is a parody, Shamela is not cast away from society as Syrena is, nor does she receive the introduction to genteel behavior that Mr. B provides Pamela upon their marriage. Continuing to scheme in an effort to satisfy her own desires, Shamela prevents any attempt to re-establish a traditional social hierarchy in the domestic interior, as evidenced by our last information about her, that she has been caught in bed with the parson.

Richardson and Fielding both present novels in which domestic space produces marriage and social ascendency, but Richardson’s novel ultimately figures the domestic interior as affirming a rigid social hierarchy. In contrast, Fielding’s parody frames the domestic interior as continually disrupting that system as a space that is subject to individuals’ desires. Haywood’s perspective on the domestic interior as a space that fosters seduction plots and social decline for women presents yet another possibility: the domestic interior exposes the weaknesses of the traditional social hierarchy even as it works to affirm that system. Together, *Pamela*, *Shamela*, and *Anti-Pamela* exemplify the
ways in which the novels of the 1740s establish an association between the domestic interior and certain types of stories about relations across ranks and between genders.

Later in the decade, Richardson joins Haywood in exploring the power of the domestic space to generate a seduction plot, but he revises the literary role of the domestic space by featuring two elite protagonists, rather than a woman in the serving ranks. In *Clarissa* (1748), the domestic interior in several forms, from the great house of a rich family to a brothel in London to the garret above a shop, becomes so restrictive that it over-determines Clarissa’s fate. The appearance of urban lodgings and other domestic spaces in the metropolis in *Clarissa* as central to the plot aligns with the novels of the 1750s. Just as Lovelace’s abduction of Clarissa and removal of her into the city threatens her chastity, virtue, and propriety, in novels of the 1750s, urban domestic spaces are beset by threats rooted in the vices associated with London. In addition, urban domestic interiors enable plots that move beyond courtship to explore complex issues of marriage. In the next chapter, I examine the space of the urban domestic interior in a group of novels that I call “problem marriage novels,” in order to suggest that the focus on courtship novels has resulted in literary historians overlooking this category of mid-century novels.

Yet, the courtship novel remains popular and continues to evolve for an exceptional period of time, and although new spaces emerge to shape new genres, the spaces of passageways, staircases, and closets in the domestic interior continue to enable interactions vital to courtship plots. While urban lodgings and public spaces in London and Bath structure much of Frances Burney’s novel *Evelina* (1778), the resolution of the courtship plot depends on Evelina’s temporary residence in Mrs. Beaumont’s spacious
home in Bath, where her relation Lord Orville is a frequent visitor. Residing with Mrs. Beaumont enables Evelina, a liminal figure in terms of her rank as an orphan without a paternal name, to interact regularly with the elite and wealthy Lord Orville. Invoking the role of the domestic interior as a space that enables cross-rank interaction, the main hallway, staircase, and library of Mrs. Beaumont’s house enable the two to share interactions that become the building blocks of their increasing affection for one another. Evelina’s status as an orphan with unknown parentage makes it impossible for Lord Orville to openly court her, and he must rely on social gatherings and formal visits at Mrs. Beaumont’s house as the means for him to see and converse with her.

The domestic interior remains central to producing plots that turn on conflicts over cross-rank interactions well into the nineteenth century, as the novels of Emily and Charlotte Bronte follow in the footsteps of Jane Austen’s work. In Charlotte Bronte’s *Jane Eyre* (1847), the domestic interior of Thornfield generates interactions between Jane, a governess, and her employer, Mr. Rochester, that eventually lead to their mutual esteem for each other. The domestic interior also perpetuates the narrative by producing shocking twists in the plot, most notably the discovery of Bertha, Mr. Rochester’s first wife, kept captive in the attic. The burning of Thornfield in many ways could be identified as an end-point to the trajectory of the domestic interior’s role in the courtship novel. In the Victorian period, the domestic interior comes to symbolize more stringently than ever women’s separate domestic sphere and their role as both moral center and domestic ornament.

As the domestic interior becomes more symbolically aligned with an idealized figure of woman as wife and mother, it loses the power to dramatize the wide range of
women’s experiences that produced the eighteenth-century courtship novel. The centrality of passageways and closets of the domestic interior to the *Pamela* controversy gave rise to cross-rank courtship novels and a genre that flourished for nearly 80 years, an anomaly in the face of the average 20- to 40-year life cycle of most popular genres. Yet, during this period, other genres vie with courtship novels in popularity. The emerging genres clustered around new spaces: middle class lodgings in cities are central to problem marriage novels, the coach and the inn structure picaresque novels, and the sickroom is vital to sentimental novels. As these genres gained popularity, authors of courtship novels responded by featuring the new spaces alongside staircases, hallways, and closets, forging ties to new trends even while their representations of these specific interior domestic spaces continued to invoke the questions at the heart of the 1740s *Pamela* controversy.

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**NOTES**

1 Michael McKeon argues the novel was part of a dialectical process of resolving new definitions of virtue as distinct from rank with old values of aristocratic honor. Michael McKeon, *Origins of the English Novel 1600-1740* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1987).


7 “Up till the early eighteenth century, [tenants and freeholders] were still being entertained on occasions in the hall and even in the parlour; in the course of the century they were exiled to the steward’s room, or to a separate tenants’ hall or audit hall in the servants’ part of the house.” Mark Girouard, *Life in the English Country House: A Social and Architectural History* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1978), 189.
My work necessarily builds on Cynthia Wall’s examinations of literary space. In *The Prose of Things*, Wall describes *Pamela* as adhering to the convention within amatory fiction of mentioning physical objects and architectural features only as they are required for describing the action of a scene. Alternatively, I am suggesting that the features of familiar and common spaces are the impetus for Richardson’s imagining of the plot. Cynthia Wall, *The Prose of Things: Transformation of Description in the Eighteenth Century* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2006).


Earle, 172.


25 Folkenflik, 588.

26 Girouard notes that a typical housekeeper “lived in some comfort in her housekeeper’s room, with a store-room and sometimes a still-room next door to it.” Girouard, 208.

27 McKeon suggests that illustrations of the “curtain lecture” enact the domestication of the folk tradition of the skimmington ride that revises the event by bringing it inside the house, situating it as a genteel custom, and transforming the wife’s physical abuse of her husband to verbal reprimanding. McKeon, *The Secret History of Domesticity*, 244.

28 Seaton makes clear in his instructions that “rude and shocking” behavior would include any type of sexual advance, linking changes in acceptable relations between masters and servants to an emerging code of manners among the genteel. Seaton, 144-5.

29 When Pamela at first decides to leave Mr. B’s service and return to her parents, even her preparations for leaving are turned against her and provide Mr. B with an excuse for further assault. Dressed in a new set of humble country clothes, Pamela meets another servant on the staircase who fails to recognize her (55). The incident on the stairs sets up the following scene in which Mr. B pretends not to recognize Pamela because of her clothing, and it also indicates that Pamela was aware of the potential for this mistake.

30 For more on servants being legally bound to their masters for a period of time or until the completion of a task, see Robert J. Steinfeld, *The Invention of Free Labor: The Employment Relation in English and American Law and Culture, 1350-1870* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1991).

31 Straub, 50.


33 Girouard, 206.

34 Hill, 101.

35 Syrena’s movement about London is similar to other heroines of early eighteenth-century novels, including Daniel Defoe’s *Moll Flanders* (1721) and *Roxana* (1721), Haywood’s *Fantomina* (1725), and the anonymous *London Jilt* (1683).

36 Straub, 8.

37 Seaton, 144.

38 The removal of the protagonist to Wales at the conclusion of the novel marks a break from the conventions of English amatory fiction. In Penelope Aubin’s *Madame d’Beaumont* (1721), for example, much of the story is set in Wales and depends on a depiction of the Welsh countryside as vast, unfamiliar, and nearly unpopulated. In contrast, in *Anti-Pamela* and later courtship fiction, characters sent to Wales disappear from the narrative, and the primary action of a novel rarely takes place in Wales. This geographical pattern is also true of Tobias Smollet’s *The Expedition of Humphrey Clinker* (1771), in which Wales operates as a setting for the beginning and end of the novel but is not central to the primary plot development.
This plot device has antecedents in Haywood’s earlier amatory fiction. In *Fantomina* (1725), the protagonist is sent from London to a convent in France after giving birth to an illegitimate child. Fantomina and Syrena share other similarities as well. In particular, they both use the spaces of London to satisfy their own desires. Public and social spaces, however, rather than domestic interiors are more influential in shaping the plot of *Fantomina*. The device of sending transgressive women away from the location of a narrative becomes a much more common and serious punishment in literature of the latter part of the century.

CHAPTER 3

URBAN DOMESTIC INTERIORS AND MID-CENTURY PROBLEM

MARRIAGE NOVELS

Throughout the 1740s and the first few years of the 1750s, continuations of Samuel Richardson’s Pamela (1740) and other popular novels, including Sarah Fielding’s David Simple (1744) and Henry Fielding’s Tom Jones (1749), follow their protagonists after their marriages, which had marked the conclusion of each of the original stories. Novelists as well as artists, politicians, and everyday readers expressed increasing interest in the state of marriage that, at the very least equaled their interest in courtship. Between 1743 and 1745, William Hogarth painted Marriage-a-la-Mode, a series of illustrations that satirize elite marriages as pure economic exchanges that actually support aristocratic pre-occupation with luxury and vice. In 1753, the passing of Lord Hardwicke’s Marriage Act instituted new procedures required for marriages to be considered legal, including the calling of banns and parental consent for minors. In 1755 and 1756, Eliza Haywood published two conduct books focused on marriage, The Wife and The Husband, in which she outlined the ideal and complimentary roles of middling and genteel men and women in raising a family and maintaining a household. Such depictions of marriage by writers, artists, and politicians indicate that it was an institution central to the cultural and economic fabric of England. At stake in the efforts to define marriage legally and economically were pressing issues that ranged across boundaries of
rank, including increasing England’s laboring population, protecting the property and inheritance of the wealthy ranks, and policing women’s sexuality. Novels participated in debates over these issues by exploring the potential benefits of and threats to marriage, and the urban domestic interior was central to these explorations.

At mid-century, novels featuring financial and moral threats to the ideal domestic harmony of marriage and family constitute a new genre that differs from courtship novels. While the interior spaces of great country houses shaped the plots of Pamela and anti-Pamela novels, urban domestic interiors, with their crowded conditions, proneness to intrusion, and exaggerated displays of wealth (often beyond the occupant’s means), structure the plots of what I call “problem marriage novels.” In the urban homes of these novels, the spaces of the kitchen, dining room and hearth support scenes of domestic harmony while doorways and windows enable intrusions that threaten to destroy a marriage. The domestic space is intended to support relative security and stasis in the family but the urban space conventionally produces chaos and the experience of chance. In the case of the urban domestic interior, the kitchen, dining room, and hearth do, in fact, support stability. As points of contact with the city, however, doors and windows allow the chaos of the city to intrude on the security of the home. Thus, urban domestic interiors structure plots in which family stasis is continually under siege and turned to chaos by nefarious actions enabled in urban space.

This chapter examines the ways in which urban domestic spaces available to the aspiring middle ranks, consisting of wealthy businessmen, merchants, and the lower gentry, structure stories about threatened marriages. Novels by Daniel Defoe, Henry Fielding, and Eliza Haywood feature virtuous heroines who must confront the challenges
of living in the city in order to preserve their husbands’ reputations, businesses, future prospects, or other assets and, in turn, preserve their marriages. Studies of eighteenth-century novels tend to focus on courtship novels, perhaps as an impulse to construct a literary history for Jane Austen’s most popular, and canonical, novels. My exploration of urban domestic spaces, however, highlights “problem marriage novels” as a parallel genre that features narratives about women’s experience after marriage rather than during the period of courtship. These novels are especially interested in a woman’s role as the manager of the household and as the source and support of the family’s morality. As discussed in chapter two, courtship novels tend to feature narrative patterns based on domestic interior passageways which allow an unmarried woman to frequently interact with a single man. Usually, such passageways are located in other people’s houses, that is, houses to which the female protagonist has little or no right of ownership or access. In contrast, in problem marriage novels, the domestic interiors of houses that should be by custom the managerial domain of the female protagonist structure narrative patterns that test a woman’s ability morally and virtuously to maintain herself and her family. Additionally, the situation of these houses in London, rather than in the countryside, open them up to intrusions that threaten the wife’s efforts to protect the peace of hearth and home. Focusing on the role of the urban home in supporting both narrative and ideological functions in eighteenth-century fiction delineates problem marriage novels as a formal generic group that has been neglected by conventional literary histories. In problem marriage novels, the urban domestic interior is crucial to the depiction of both positive and negative examples of marriage and wifely virtue.
Novels by Daniel Defoe, Henry Fielding, and Eliza Haywood use urban domestic spaces to dramatize conflicts between the family as the fundamental moral unit and the common activities of social life in the city. By the mid-eighteenth century, social theory had long been touting the concept of the family as the moral center of society, emphasizing that the stability and harmony of private family life was essential to supporting a cohesive, cooperative, and thriving society. As Alison Conway explains, progressive Whig ideology vigorously promoted a view of “domestic and personal life as the origin of social unity and cooperation,” or, in other words, the integrity of the private sphere promoted the integrity of the public sphere. In such thinking, industrious and efficient families who supported themselves financially, kept themselves and their property clean and orderly, and exhibited moral rectitude were the essential fabric of a prosperous nation.

Problem marriage novels intensify this emerging ideology through narratives anchored in the urban domestic interior in its many variations – lodging houses and elite townhouses, St. James’ residences and rented rooms in the “verge of the court.” Although both residents of a few rooms within a lodging house and those who lived in the entirety of a townhouse would rent their quarters, the experience and rank of the residents would have been quite different. In a lodging house, an individual or family would rent one room or group of rooms within a larger building, sharing the main entrance, stairway, kitchen, and possibly other common rooms, like a parlor. A more well-to-do individual or family who could rent an entire house would have the whole of the building and all the interior spaces for their own use, unless they chose to let out rooms. Thus, the configurations of housing type, proximity of landlords and neighbors,
and ranks of residents were innumerable, but in each situation, intrusion on a family’s
designated domestic space was likely.

The spaces of urban domestic interiors structure the repetitious cycle of several
key plots that explore how vices associated with urban life have destructive effects on
family life. Such patterns include adultery, attempts to seduce a married woman or
prostitute one’s wife or friend, excessive gambling and drinking, and spending beyond
one’s means. Significantly, these acts are not limited to male characters in mid-century
novels, as may be supposed, but instead are carried out by both male and female
characters who are, in some way, associated with the potential for corruption in the
metropolis. The urban domestic interior’s vulnerability to intrusion and interruption, a
particularity that distinguishes it from the more isolated country house, enables a
narrative that turns on the tension between the greater urban space, the outdoor and non-
domestic spaces of the city, and the smaller, limited urban domestic interior, an enclosed
space increasingly associated with family life.

The narrative power of the urban domestic interior also arises from its association
with the terms of what Margaret Hunt identifies as a “female marital economy.” In
Daniel Defoe’s *Moll Flanders* (1722), Henry Fielding’s *Amelia* (1751), and Eliza
Haywood’s *The History of Miss Betsy Thoughtless* (1751), the urban domestic interior
supports characterization of the female protagonist by structuring her relationship to a
female marital economy. Hunt defines this concept through four principles that
consistently appear as central to the marital court cases brought by London women: first,
in the event of separation or death, a wife was entitled to money or goods equivalent to
what she had brought to the marriage; second, a wife had “the right to maintenance,” or
in other words, the right to be provided by the husband with enough money to support herself and their children; third, the husband could not use violence or threats to extract money from his wife and relatives; and fourth, friends and relatives could sue on behalf of a wife, since a wife could not testify against her husband in court.  

In problem marriage novels, the relationship between a heroine and her domestic space indicates how the female marital economy operated as an ideological underpinning of marriage. Daniel Defoe’s urban domestic spaces embody a female marital economy by enabling the heroine to move transiently and flexibly through the city, defining a female moral code through the taking and leaving of domestic spaces. In contrast, Henry Fielding’s and Eliza Haywood’s urban homes define a woman’s virtue as dependent upon her willingness to sacrifice the rights of female marital economy for the sake of maintaining a stable domestic space. The later novels suggest that absolute virtue is impervious to physical environment, but they still differ in their constructions of virtue. Fielding’s heroine demonstrates virtue by privileging the wellness of family and marriage above all other considerations; Haywood’s heroine ultimately sacrifices marriage in order to protect her own well-being and to uphold a larger sense of virtue and moral code. In *Moll Flanders*, Moll’s transient and temporary relationship to domestic interiors frames her approach to marriage as an inexact state, unregulated by law and flexible within social strictures. Moll’s decisions about her homes and how they represent her marital status are central to her negotiation of the gap between her shifting legal and social status as wife, widow, or whore and her personal sense of entitlement to wifely “rights.” In Haywood’s *The History of Miss Betsy Thoughtless* and Fielding’s *Amelia*, the kitchens, dining rooms, and hearths serve as markers of rank, the primary sites of interaction
between spouses, and gauges for the financial and moral health of the family. Through these functions, urban domestic interiors structure cyclical plots. The spaces of harmony in the urban home anchor the starting and ending points of each cycle in which domestic tranquility is established, disrupted, and re-established, while doorways and windows introduce the disruptions that initiate each cycle.

Together, the urban domestic interior and the cyclical plot pattern support constructions of female virtue that depend on a wife’s relationship to the terms of a female marital economy. In *Betsy Thoughtless*, a perceived agreement in the terms of a female marital economy among Betsy, her brother, and Lady Trusty, Betsy’s friend and parental figure, empowers her first to demand from her husband adequate financial support for the household and eventually to leave him when she discovers his infidelity. Alternatively, in *Amelia*, the protagonist’s sacrificing of a wife’s expectations or “rights” in order to help repair her husband’s fortunes, to provide for her children, and to avoid the stigma of a public suit, is featured as an indication of her extreme virtue and perfection. In both of these novels the urban domestic interior mediates between domestic harmony and metropolitan living, dramatizing the terms of an emerging conception of marriage that acknowledges a wife’s basic rights to monetary support and freedom from physical abuse.8

Thus, in problem marriage novels, the urban domestic interior develops an association with the terms of a female marital economy as well as with the emerging role of women in promoting morality through their influence in the private sphere. Women’s sentimental novels of the 1760s and 1770s evoke the urban domestic interior as a peaceful domestic realm beset by outer chaos to explore women’s experiences after
marriage, as widows or wives separated from their husbands. In both problem marriage novels and sentimental novels, the urban domestic interior ultimately supports the deterioration of an ideal feminist vision of marriage in the middling ranks. In such a vision of marriage, the wife is the central figure for and manager of the family’s economic, social, and moral welfare. Problem marriage novels demonstrate that this vision is inconsistent with living conditions in London. The female characters featured in these novels are only able to create and maintain domestic harmony after they have escaped the disruptive cycle of metropolitan married life and left their urban homes for secluded country houses.

Previous to the 1750s, marriage in England was a less definitive and regulated state, especially among the lower ranks, than it came to be by the end of the eighteenth century. Daniel Defoe’s novels feature this characteristic of early eighteenth-century marriage as central to their plots. Bridget Hill explains that before the Marriage Act of 1753, the law allowed “a variety of forms, both regular and irregular, constituting legal marriage.” While regular marriage consisted of the publication of banns or the acquisition of a license and a church ceremony, irregular forms of marriage included verbal declarations of intent to marry, espousals made before witnesses, or claims by a couple that they were already married. Once consummated, any of these forms were considered legal marriage, making it difficult to dissolve any match that was later considered unsuitable. Additionally, bigamy and illegitimacy were easily concealed because records were not kept for such marriages. Those who wished to marry secretly, avoid parental interference or forgo the expense of a “regular” marriage could usually find a parson who would conduct a license-free ceremony for a fee. The passing of the
Marriage Act instituted regulations for legal marriage and made all other agreements, including those contracted by traditional customs, no longer legal.\textsuperscript{12}

Two of Daniel Defoe’s novels, \textit{Moll Flanders} (1722) and \textit{Roxana} (1724), illustrate the loose regulation of marriage, particularly as it commonly played out in London in “Fleet marriages.” These novels represent early iterations of the mid-century problem marriage plot through the ways in which metropolitan spaces, particularly lodgings and streets in the areas of the city occupied by the lower and middling ranks, structure stories about failed or irregular marriage. Like amatory novels, written in the same period, that featured married or widowed heroines as often as single, marriageable heroines, Defoe’s protagonists pass through various states of courtship, married life, widowhood, and, of course, “whoredom.” In \textit{Moll Flanders}, the space of the metropolis structures Moll’s movement through these states, allowing her to pass from lodging to lodging and in and out of marriage with relative ease. Eighteenth-century records indicate that marriages and residences were similarly temporary. In reference to housing in London, Peter Guillery notes that, throughout the eighteenth century, “there was great mobility, with a large floating population changing lodgings frequently.”\textsuperscript{13} The plot of Defoe’s novel employs this experience of transience in the city to illustrate the potential transience of marriage; Moll’s marriages and her homes are continually changing. Aligning with social and legal norms of the time, marriage in the novel is unregulated and easily contracted. For men and women of the lower ranks who are willing to simply agree on separating without seeking legal action to do so, marriage is also easily dissolved, a characteristic of lower-rank marriages that continues well into the nineteenth century despite increased legal regulations. Whenever Moll marries, she and her new
husband establish a household and when the marriage dissolves, they part ways, Moll usually taking with her any valuables that she can and finding new lodgings that will support a new alias. Moll describes her first liaison as being “as good as” marriage. Verbally engaged to be married to the eldest son of her benefactors, she believes their agreement to be as sound as a legal marriage (68-9). Moll’s belief in the legality and binding nature of their agreement aligns with the common social and legal assumptions about what constituted marriage. Moll’s later legal marriage to the younger son is the most stable and regulated marriage in the novel, but from there the relationships deteriorate because the contracts are not binding.14

Urban domestic interiors that are taken up and abandoned at will structure the story of Moll’s marriages and liaisons. The handling of domestic space and the depiction of marriage for a woman like Moll, of variable rank, from an orphan and servant girl to a middling rank merchant’s wife, are marked by instability and vulnerability to the chaotic flux of eighteenth-century metropolitan life. The movement from lodging to lodging, district to district, and even from England to colonies, creates a sense of urban domestic space as lacking permanency and as subject to chance and fortune. Moll’s second marriage to the gentleman-tradesman dissolves when he is arrested for debt. He sends her a note saying that he will try to escape to the continent and that she should take anything of value and leave their lodgings immediately (92-3). Moll describes her own condition as “complicated” because her situation seems similar to that of a widow as she was left without a husband and had only a small inheritance of goods on which to live, but she actually still remained married and could not marry again (94). She moves to the Mint (which later becomes known as the “verge of the court” and reappears in Amelia)
because she is unknown there and can take lodgings by presenting herself as a widow named Mrs. Flanders (94). When neighborhood rumors begin to circulate that “the widow had no money,” she removes to another place where she is not known and uses another name (104). Thus the urbanization of London, its population growth, and the expansion of middling rank housing allow Moll anonymity as she relocates from district to district and house to house.

Moll’s relationship to the homes that she shares with her husbands, legal or otherwise, indicates that her view of marriage aligns in part with the emerging notion of a wife’s “rights” within marriage, or Hunt’s “female marital economy.” Moll does not hesitate to follow her gentleman-tradesman’s advice to take what she can carry and leave their house, because she views these possessions as rightfully hers upon the abandonment of her husband. Yet, Moll is barred from seeking any legal aid by her own criminality as well as by her lack of a male friend or relative who could testify for her in court. As a result, Moll moves in and out of lodgings as easily as she moves in and out of marriage and widowhood; her marriages are vulnerable to interruption and discontinuity just as her lodgings are impermanent. Moll’s story is shaped by her complicity in the chaotic, unregulated experience of metropolitan space. When Moll follows her arrested husband’s instructions, takes what she can and moves to the Mint, the metropolis is figured not only as ruining a man and his marriage through temptations to luxury and vice, but also as providing the opportunity for an abandoned wife to recover from this distress. The community of the Mint and Moll’s having been formerly unknown to people living there allows her to begin again as if widowed, although she is still technically a “married” woman. In other words, the metropolis, by its sheer size and
population, offers Moll the opportunity to repair her circumstances and start virtually a new life separate from her past.

Thus, the critical difference between Defoe’s novels and mid-century problem marriage novels is that the flexible moral standards of Defoe’s heroines allow them to benefit from the chaos and vice of the metropolis, while the later heroines’ strict virtue places them in continual conflict with the metropolis. Defoe establishes an association between urban spaces and shrewd women who alternately become wives, kept mistresses, and thieves, and the plot rises out of their various attempts to gain financial security through any of these means. In contrast, Fielding’s and Haywood’s mid-century novels feature middling rank women who remain virtuous, and the plot derives from their struggle to provide and maintain a peaceful and comfortable home for their families without sacrificing their own virtue, rank, or reputation to do so, all in the midst of a corrupt urban world.

Significantly, while urban domestic space structures the plots and characters of all of these novels, Defoe’s heroines emerge from the intersection of urban space and economic individualism, while the later heroines emerge from the nexus of urban space, household economy, and new constructions of middling rank virtue. The philosophy with which Moll confronts the trials and opportunities of the city provides insight on how heroines and their relationships to the city change between the time of *Moll Flanders* and the time of *Amelia*. During her widowhood before her second marriage, Moll explains her firm belief that “a woman should never be kept for a mistress that had money to keep herself” (91). In other words, a woman with money always had the potential for either independence or a good marriage-match and should not settle for the state of dependence.
and ruined reputation that comes with being a mistress. She continues, “Thus my pride, not my principle, my money, not my virtue, kept me honest” (91). Such a philosophy, that holds money as a moral center, is fundamentally different from that of the heroines of the 1750s who are kept honest purely by their sense of virtue, even in the face of debt, ruin, and poverty brought on by their husbands. Defoe’s heroines profit by the vices that urban lodgings encourage and enable, including prostitution, thievery, and deceit. In the novels of the 1750s, the heroines are tempted by the promise of profit – payment or gifts for prostitution, career advancement for their husbands, the lure of a more profitable marriage or an illicit relationship – but they ultimately reject these temptations. The heroines’ resistance to temptations, driven by both innate virtue and legal and social strictures that threaten potential ruin instead of profit, intersect with the relentless pressures of the unpredictable metropolis to structure narratives about wives that differ distinctively from Defoe’s novels about women in the city.

Defoe’s portrayal of a female protagonist in the city illuminates another critical component of later problem marriage novels; in London, families of the respectable middling ranks often lived side-by-side with or above and below the criminal classes. Faramerz Dabhoiwala explains that “distinctions between honest and dishonest society had always been blurred, especially in fiction and in religious discourse” – creating a view that society was “infiltrated throughout by whoredom.” Additionally, Dabhoiwala suggests that “women who engaged in prostitution were not, as a group, socially or economically distinct from respectable society;” rather, “they were part of wider metropolitan communities.” This characteristic of urban society as a realm in which criminality and respectability were sometimes indistinguishable on the surface is central
to the plots of problem marriage novels which portray illicit actions and temptations that threaten legal marriages. The anonymity and posturing that the metropolis enables contributes to the vulnerability of urban domestic interiors to unexpected and dangerous intrusions, a characteristic that structures the plots of midcentury problem marriage novels.

In novels written at mid-century, just a few years prior to the Marriage Act of 1753, authors imagine what a marriage would be like for a genteel woman unwilling to abandon both husband and children, an action that would cause her to become an economically vulnerable social outcast. Imagining marriage in this light, according to both a “female marital economy” and the strictures that would become crystallized by the Marriage Act required imagining a stable urban domestic interior, circumscribed as a space marked-off from the chaos of the city and in which the marriage and family could find harmony. In this figuration of marriage and the urban domestic space, the metropolis is an antagonistic space for the virtuous woman rather than a space of opportunity for the morally flexible women in Defoe’s novels and some amatory novels, including Haywood’s Fantomina (1725). The metropolis in mid-century problem marriage novels perpetuates the threats to marriage and female virtue; relief comes only from leaving the metropolis after a trial period of strict adherence to an emerging set of principles, virtue, and moral rectitude associated with the wife’s role in the family unit.

Mid-century problem marriage novels thus employ the space of the urban domestic interior to create plots that explore a web of concerns facing eighteenth-century marriage, including the need for a secure and protected space in which a woman’s virtue as mother and wife can be preserved even in the midst of the urban environment where
her husband must seek opportunities to provide for his family. In other words, new notions of virtue and family in the middling ranks were at odds with the necessity of people in these ranks seeking advancement in the city. Janet Todd’s examination of the shifts in constructions of gender and sensibility explains that by mid-century, propriety seemed to have prevailed over the raciness of the Restoration, especially for women. Periodicals like The Spectator, written for polite society, began encouraging a new sense of propriety early in the century as part of their larger goal to create a genteel rank inclusive of the gentry as well as wealthy professional and business families who exhibited refined tastes and rational sensibility. Todd explains that within this larger social project, “The family, woman’s proper milieu, was the unit of society, and paintings and novels emphasized the domestic affections that could be encouraged in its bosom.” Furthermore, Todd notes that genteel women’s superior morality to men was an accepted notion and the sexual double standard was regarded as natural and necessary. Amelia and Betsy Thoughtless represent the wife as the proper director of the domestic interior, but the placement of this space within the metropolis complicates her abilities to maintain an ideal peaceful and nurturing environment.

In Fielding’s Amelia, the urban domestic interior structures the plot and illuminates character through its correlation with spatial hierarchies of rank. Both the geographical location of a home and the architectural location of particular rooms within a house indicate rank. Amelia’s former friend, Mrs. James, is annoyed by having to climb “two pair of stairs” to visit Amelia (179). Her irritation results not only from the physical exercise, but also because the floor of the house on which Amelia’s lodgings are
located indicates that Amelia has fallen to a rank with which Mrs. James would not normally socialize.

Studies of eighteenth-century London emphasize the extreme population growth of the metropolis over the course of the eighteenth century, from about 575,000 at the end of the seventeenth century to about 900,000 by 1801. This population growth resulted in several major changes in the nature and experience of London spaces. Development of new fashionable and wealthy districts in the West End began in the seventeenth century and continued at a fairly steady pace throughout the eighteenth century. Social segregation emerged spatially over the course of the eighteenth century as “the ‘comfortable’ middle classes” became more concentrated in the western suburbs or in the City, and “people on lower incomes” lived in the eastern and southern suburbs. As the population of these districts increased at a faster rate than that of the wealthier, and more spacious, districts, by mid-century, over-crowding became a problem for the lower ranks and even for the middling ranks. The crowded manner of living in London meant that a shopkeeper, well-to-do artisan, or a respectable widow might live in one or two rooms of a house and let the rest as lodgings. Furnished lodgings were paid for by weekly rent and were available for all classes so that letting lodgings was a great industry. For all ranks, but especially for persons living on the edge of financial security and acceptance into the next wealthiest group, the common pleasures of city life could quickly deteriorate their finances and leave them struggling to regain ground, financially and socially. As M. Dorothy George makes clear in her seminal study of life in eighteenth-century London, “temptations to drink and gamble were interwoven with the fabric of society to an astonishing extent, and they did undoubtedly combine with the uncertainties of life and
trade to produce that sense of instability, of liability to sudden ruin, which runs through so much eighteenth-century literature.”

Roy Porter explains that eighteenth-century men and women tended to think of society in terms of groups loosely identified as the “upper order,” “middling ranks,” and “laboring people,” and that more specific groupings were based on a range of other factors, including wealth, occupation, region, religion, family, or political loyalty. When it came to marriages, the sons of the landed elite could make an advantageous match by marrying a rich commoner’s daughter, but the upper orders were unlikely to desire their daughters to marry into trade families because they feared that their inheritance would be invested and lost in supporting the business. Peter Guillery, in his examination of the London small-house, provides a delineation of rank according to income. The upper income group, between 2 to 3% of the adult male population, would have earned more than £200 annually, while the “middling sort,” 16 to 21% of the population, earned £80 pounds annually. The working population, 75% of the total population, was divided into two groups: unskilled or semi-skilled laborers and skilled laborers. To this delineation of ranks in London, Guillery adds the caveat that in experience, “class separation was, of course, perceived rather than real.” These studies of rank each suggest that although income levels and occupation did create wide gaps between the experiences, lifestyles, and living spaces of some of the groups, all of these ranks inter-mixed in the public and social spaces of London, as well as within private and domestic spaces, in which master and servant, or landlord and lodger, lived side by side.

George Rudé describes the system of rank according to Defoe’s own conception of social groups, and delineates the occupations and financial status that would constitute
each group named by Defoe in an article in *The Review*. In Defoe’s classification, the “rich” consisted of the mercantile and financial bourgeoisie of the City of London. Rudé explains that some of the wealthiest merchants had the means and ambition to live like the aristocracy, at “the polite end of town,” and that by the 1750s and 60s, some directors of wealthy companies were able to live in the style of the upper orders with ease. In Defoe’s grouping, the “middle sort” included a variety of social groups that ranged from rich merchants to those in working trades. The highest group of the middling sort, the lesser merchants, may have had an annual income of about two-thirds that of a “gentleman,” or about £140, in 1696, and slightly more than a gentlemen, or about £800, in 1805. After this group, however, the incomes of the middle sort fall off sharply, with lesser clergy, those in arts and sciences, and shopkeepers and tradesmen earning between one-sixth and one-third of a gentleman’s income.

Fielding employs the urban lodging and its association with a character like Mrs. Ellison, a seemingly genteel landlady who actually helps a nobleman seduce her tenants, to explore the problems that arise from the mixing of ranks within the metropolis. The urban domestic interior is subject to mixed and disguised rank in a way that the country estate is not, and this mixing becomes especially threatening in such areas as the Verge of the Court where the Booths must reside while they are in London. Although London had some areas populated mostly by the wealthy and some that were inhabited primarily by the poor, there was not rigid segregation among the classes. People of varying ranks would easily come into contact on a regular basis, or even live in close proximity to one another. In *Amelia*, the lodging house highlights the ever-pressing chaos of the city and the tension between the public-social functions of the city and the private-domestic
concerns of the home. On first coming to London, Booth and Amelia rent lodgings in the house of Mrs. Ellison, who is described as being “of a good family” despite the fact that she “was reduced in her Circumstances, and obliged to let out Part of her House in Lodgings” (193). Mrs. Ellison’s presenting of “a noble Lord” as her cousin seems to support her claims to a good family. Regardless of whether or not Mrs. Ellison really is from a good family, the situation of Mrs. Ellison, as well as that of Amelia and Booth, illustrates the potential for deceit in the city. As this novel indicates, having a convincing “back-story” and plausible family connections were sufficient to establish one’s reputation as having a respectable house or business. This representation of the flexibility of urban identity resonates with earlier fictional accounts of city life, including Moll’s movement about the city through which she can assume false identities that go unquestioned as long as she maintains the ability to support her appearance.33

The moving of lodgings introduces new story lines and structures the cyclical plot of the new novel genre. Some people in the middling ranks changed lodgings frequently:

Eternal removals indicate that discontent and altercation exist but too frequently between the landlord’s family and the lodger. Kitchens used in common by both parties are sources of discord; the cleansing of stairs ascended by all the inhabitants of the house is another; and the late hours of the latter a third. It is therefore common to see the street almost obstructed every quarter-day with cart-loads of furniture.34

In the novel, this pattern of changing domestic spaces enables the introduction of new characters and ends one story line while beginning another, thus supporting the cyclical structure of the plot. The shuffling of domestic spaces in Amelia demonstrates the problems inherent in finding appropriate and safe lodgings in the city and structures a cautionary tale of the ease with which a virtuous and once genteel woman might fall
subject to the conniving of a woman of lower rank and less moral rectitude. When Amelia finally discovers that Mrs. Ellison has been coordinating the noble Lord’s seduction attempts, she immediately removes her family from Mrs. Ellison’s house. The insult and loss of business prompt Mrs. Ellison to have “locked up all her Rooms” by the time Mrs. Atkinson returns to collect Amelia’s things and pay for the lodgings (343). This scene marks the power that Mrs. Ellison has over Amelia and her family as their landlady. She has access not only to all of their rooms, and therefore to their possessions, but also through their shared living space, she is able to insinuate herself and her friends into their lives. The incident, along with the more extended plot of the Lord’s attempts to seduce Amelia, illustrates the danger of living with a person ultimately unknown, as well as the necessity of moving once that person is discovered to be deceitful or dangerous.

The association between troubled marriage and the urban domestic interior is delineated in Fielding’s novel through the differences between the spaces of courtship plots and those of problem marriage plots. Characters relate narratives about their courtships as part of their histories told to other characters. Booth tells Miss Mathews about his courtship and elopement with Amelia; Mrs. Bennet tells Amelia about her courtship with her late husband. These inset stories employ a different set of spaces than those that shape the primary story of Booth’s and Amelia’s marriage. The dominant spaces of the inset courtship plots are country estates, gardens, fields, woods, and cottages. The primary story about the Booths’ struggles revolve around Booth’s debt and imprisonment in London, and most of the story about the Booths’ marriage takes place specifically in lodgings within the “verge of the court.” The contrast between the two types of plots and their spatial details establishes the experiences of courtship and early
marriage as located in distant and dreamlike places, separate from the familiar urban environment, and existing only in the memory of the characters. Meanwhile, the experience of troubled marriage and family-rearing is associated with spaces that are close and present, enclosed by the limits of the metropolis.

In *Amelia*, the urban domestic interior’s vulnerability to sudden intrusion structures a narrative in which Amelia’s virtue is illuminated by her constant struggle to establish marital and domestic stability within the midst of the chaotic and unpredictable nature of the metropolis. The domestic space’s vulnerability to disruption, permeation, and instability is the formal embodiment of the transient nature of urban domestic space for middling Londoners. Booth’s removal from the country to the city in order to avoid arrest for debt, which actually results in his arrest for something else, initiates the plot of *Amelia*. Having brought the couple into the metropolis through a series of events, the novel then explores what happens to a man and wife when they are forced by debt to live within the “verge of the court.” This movement into the metropolis, and particularly into this area of the metropolis, introduces new threats to the marriage, most prominently seduction attempts on the wife and philandering by the husband.

The domestic interior more specifically structures a cyclical narrative that moves through domestic harmony and stability, disruption and turmoil, and finally returns to stability. The temporary nature of domestic space in the city for the struggling middling ranks supports narratives about threats to marriage and domestic harmony by structuring plots that turn on moments of disruption and sudden transition. The architectural portals of the lodging house, the door and window, continually function as narrative portals. These spaces come into focus as they introduce people or events that disrupt the domestic
interior. Through their physical mediation of the social and business life of the outer
city-space and the family life of the inner domestic-space, such portals create shifts in the
narrative trajectory, initiating paths of conflict and resolution that repeat once stability
has been re-established in the domestic interior. At a critical moment in Amelia, the
family is startled when “a Footman’s Rap at the Door shook the Room” (202). Mrs.
Ellison looks out the window and sees that it is her cousin, the Lord, which sends the
group into “some Confusion,” but Amelia’s genteel education enables her to act
according to the customs of welcoming the “best company” (202). In this scene, two
architectural portals, the door and the window, permit a disruption to the domestic
interior that enables the plot development to shift in focus to the noble Lord’s activities
and enhances characterization by providing Amelia with a purpose to display her genteel
refinement.

The doorway is also at the center of Booth’s fear of disruption and Amelia’s calm
acceptance of this possibility, attitudes that frame their relationships to the space of the
urban domestic interior. After being released from jail and settling with his family in
lodgings within the verge of the court, Booth “trebled [sic] at every knock at the door”
because he feared that Miss Mathews would inform Amelia of their affair (178). Every
knock on the door, every letter, and every interruption of routine has the potential to
change dramatically Booth’s situation and the direction of the narrative. Amelia counters
Booth’s fears by bolstering her own with the knowledge of the wellness of her family,
setting up the visual field of the domestic interior as opposed to possible threats from the
outside in the form of news or persons: “While I have you and my Children well before
my Eyes, I am capable of facing any News which can arrive: for what ill News can come
(unless it concerns my little Babe in the Country) which doth not relate to the Badness of our Circumstances? And those, I thank Heaven, we have now a fair Prospect of retrieving” (179). Amelia strives to maintain the stability and peace of her home and of her family and marriage, and indeed she succeeds in doing so. No matter what the interruptions bring, she perseveres in protecting her husband and her children, primarily through preserving her own virtue. The problem marriage heroine is shown to be impervious to space rather than directed by it. This quality of the relationship between space and character differs from amatory and pious novels, in which the heroines’ experiences in the garden shaped their identities.

As implied by this example, characters in the novel become correlated with spaces and their values, and characterization reflects the conflict between the domestic interior and the chaos of the urban space that structures the plot. Amelia is associated with preserving the domestic interior despite the chaos of the city, and Booth is associated with causing potential disruption to the domestic space because of the city. Amelia’s efforts to maintain family unity and a moral code are manifested in her attempts to have a family dinner and Booth’s constant, though unintentional, foiling of those attempts. In one scene, Amelia has dinner with her children, assuming that Booth has chosen to dine abroad, but when he returns, she discovers that he has not eaten. Here, the chaos of the city disrupts Amelia’s meal time through the absence of Booth, and later his presence disrupts her peace as his attempts to conceal something fail and increase her awareness that something is wrong.

The kitchen, dining table, and hearth frame ideal domestic scenes, enclosing the family unit. The boundaries of such scenes are established only to be penetrated by the
chaos of the city. The kitchen and dining table are spaces that link the urban domestic interior with the chance and chaos of the greater urban space by their sheer vulnerability to disruption. After the family moves to Mrs. Bennet’s house, Amelia prepares a special dinner with Booth’s favorite dishes and is disappointed when he informs her that he has previous engagements, which is actually a cover for having to meet Miss Mathews because of her threats to contact Amelia. The food for this meal is paid for by the money Amelia makes pawning a miniature portrait in a gold and diamond frame. Because of the cost of the meal, Amelia eats very little herself, but she feeds her children and prepares two of Booth’s favorite dishes. The picture of Amelia in the kitchen cooking portrays her as adept at every economical office, from the highest to lowest. The narrator compliments Amelia’s virtues by claiming that she is drawn in the most amiable light as “dressing her Husband’s Supper with her little Children playing round her” (488). The narrator employs the space of the kitchen to craft a sentimental vignette that establishes Amelia’s unceasing virtue and patience in the face of their financial trouble. When Booth returns, he tells her that he cannot dine at home, disappointing Amelia’s expectation that they would enjoy a fine meal together and making her efforts to procure sustenance for their family meaningless (489). The scene stages Amelia’s wifely behavior at home in direct contrast with Booth’s irresponsible activities abroad, not only his affair with Miss Mathews, but by extension his drinking, gambling, and frequent imprisonment, all of which have required Amelia to seek her own means of raising small amounts of money for support of her family. The kitchen and dining table, as well as the hearth where Amelia educates, entertains, and cares for her children, serve as spatializations of the emerging construction of virtue that Amelia represents. The
The association genders the labor of childcare and home-making and equates these activities and their appropriate spaces with female virtue.

While the kitchen, dining room, and hearth support the characterization of Amelia as exemplary of ideal female virtue, the antagonism between the external spaces of the metropolis and the urban domestic interior structures the characterization of Atkinson, a former playmate of Amelia in her youth and a firm friend of her and Booth in the course of the story. As a soldier, Atkinson is at his best and “prettiest” when walking along the street, passing by the window, knocking at the door, or rushing to a jailhouse or tavern to assist Booth or Amelia (188-9). He is most awkward when actually within a domestic interior, such as in Mrs. Ellison’s parlor. By the end of the novel, Atkinson marries Mrs. Bennet and becomes increasingly comfortable in the interior domestic spaces most familiar to a gentleman, but he continues to maintain his authority in the chaotic outside urban spaces, bridging the gap between the two types of spaces and the ideological conflicts they represent. Correlating with Atkinson’s character, the threat to the urban domestic interior of intrusion is realized most potently when Atkinson is assigned to guard the house from men who may break in to arrest Booth. Atkinson’s offer to take up residence at the doorway, inside or out, enforces his status as mediator between city and home. He asks, “Shall I walk about all Day before the Door? Or shall I be Porter and watch it in the Inside, till your Honour can find some means of securing yourself?” (206). Taking up the Office of Porter, Atkinson settles himself in Mrs. Ellison’s back-parlour for three days.

The association of indoor and outdoor space with gendered labor as a marker of virtue in this novel differs from previous literary treatments of domestic space. In
Samuel Richardson’s *Pamela*, Henry Fielding’s *Shamela*, and Eliza Haywood’s *Anti-Pamela*, all written a decade before *Amelia*, the gendered associations of domestic labor precluded the existence of virtue in women of the serving ranks. Similarly, in women’s amatory and pious novels of the 1720s and earlier, characteristics of female virtue, including wit, creativity, sociability, and spirituality were associated with the outdoor domestic space of the garden and with leisure activities rather than labor. In *Amelia*, female virtue is firmly constructed as defined by domestic labor, and the display of the virtue is supported by the urban domestic interior as a space for which women are responsible.

The novel’s resolution comes about only when Amelia’s paternal home is restored to her through the discovery of her sister’s forging their mother’s will. A return to the country, to her inheritance, and to her original genteel rank concludes Amelia’s history by removing her from the urban space that enabled a narrative cycle and precluded any progression toward a resolution. With their return to the country, the Booths presumably find domestic peace and tranquility, free of interruption, intrusion, seduction attempts, or chance accidents.35

Fielding’s novel brings the duties of the wife into sharp focus by using the urban domestic interior to contrast the ideal wife, Amelia, with other female characters, as well as with a husband who grossly fails to fulfill his part in the conduct-book ideal of marriage. Amelia persistently resists seduction attempts by several different men without the help of Booth, who is usually either absent or too involved in his own troubles to realize the danger that Amelia faces. Such attempts are caused, in part, by the necessity of sharing lodgings in a crowded city, a necessity brought on by Booth’s accumulation of
debt through his extravagance in trying to live above his means. In this light, the sexual threat to Amelia’s virtue comes from a similar source as the moral threat to the heroine’s virtue in *The History of Miss Betsy Thoughtless*: Booth and Munden share the inability to live within their means and to resist temptation of the vice and luxury that is available in the metropolis.

In Haywood’s *The History of Miss Betsy Thoughtless*, the urban domestic interior structures the plot of the fourth volume by functioning as a site of marital conflict. Unlike the lodgings in Fielding’s novel, the urban domestic interior in *Betsy Thoughtless* is a genteel townhouse. The businessman’s London townhouse dramatizes the conflict between husband and wife as the site in which temptations to vice and the cost of luxury frustrate the wife’s attempts to create and maintain domestic harmony. The establishment of a household upon marriage was common practice, and among the middling ranks, families might rent or own an entire townhouse or rent a few rooms or a floor within someone else’s house.36 In Haywood’s novel, when Betsy marries Mr. Munden, she becomes the mistress of his household and takes on the management of servants, furnishings, and meals. As the space at the center of the conflict between Betsy’s management and Mr. Munden’s proprietorship, the urban domestic interior structures a problem marriage plot by dramatizing a web of conflicts: between genders, between the criminal world and the respectable world, and between tradesmen and genteel families, both of middling rank. Located within the metropolis, the domestic space is infiltrated by the demands, temptations, rewards, and dangers of urban living in ways that threaten the heroine’s marriage and that create discord between husband and wife.
The urban domestic interior’s vulnerability to intrusion structures a narrative that turns on the disruption of ideological boundaries between conventionally opposed terms: wife/whore, private/public, moral/corrupt. Betsy Thoughtless begins as a courtship narrative and coming-of-age tale of a misguided coquette, so naïve that she does not recognize the implications of her actions as detrimental to her reputation, which she believes depends only on her intentions. The third volume of the novel, however, tells of her married life, after she consents to marry a suitor primarily because she finally recognizes the impropriety of her past behavior. Immediate marriage seems to her and her family to be the only remedy for a reputation on the verge of suffering irreparable damage. Betsy’s realization of her past mistakes inspires her with a desire to fulfill her wifely duties to the fullest of her abilities, and she applies herself with earnestness to managing her household and acting as helpmate to her husband, Mr. Munden. Mr. Munden’s vices, however, intrude upon their home-life, manifested in the domestic space as conflicts over the household budget, separate bedrooms for husband and wife, and eventually in a struggle for power within the household between Betsy and her husband’s mistress.

Betsy’s attempt to keep a table appropriate to their rank without an appropriate allowance from Mr. Munden reveals the conflict among domestic interests, public interests, and the display of rank. Mr. Munden refuses to limit his spending for his own entertainment and must instead limit his household allowance:

Not being of a humour to deny himself any of those amusements he was accustomed to abroad, he became excessively parsimonious at home, insomuch that the scanty allowance she received from him for housekeeping would scarce furnish out a table fit for a gentleman of an estate far inferior to that he was in possession of. (498)
Mr. Munden’s unwillingness to sacrifice his own pleasures and Betsy’s desire to maintain a household commensurate with their rank lead to two major confrontations with her husband over the insufficient household budget and Betsy’s pin-money. Because a wife’s right to money to maintain herself is one of the fundamental notions of Hunt’s “female marital economy,” Betsy’s insistence on keeping her pin-money for her own use and her demand that Mr. Munden allow more money for household expenses represent the heart of this conception of marriage. Although Betsy has not borne any children to Mr. Munden, her right to a maintenance and access to at least the amount of money and goods that she brought to her marriage is extended to the upkeep of their home. As the mistress of the house, Betsy insists on being allowed an adequate budget to supply their table. Munden’s suggestion that she use her personal allowance, her pin money, to supplement that budget violates the terms of the “female marital economy.” Betsy eventually puts an end to the opportunities for argument by refusing to join Munden in the domestic spaces where the conflict most often arises, the dining room and the bedroom. After a particularly brutal altercation, in which Mr. Munden kills Betsy’s pet squirrel, Betsy declares that she “would never eat, or sleep with him again,” and “she kept her promise […] and ordered a bed to be made ready for her in another room” (508-9). Because earlier references in the novel indicate that Betsy already has a separate bedroom for her use, this statement emphasizes her efforts to create total physical separation from Mr. Munden. Betsy’s use of the bedroom as a tool to sustain conflict differs from the bedroom’s typical role in amatory novels as a space that sustains and promotes desire.
In Haywood’s novel, the urban domestic interior is connected with an emerging conception of marriage through the wife’s role in ordering and caring for that space, a role that could easily conflict with the husband’s actions and desires outside of the home. In other words, although women were increasingly associated with the domestic labor of house-keeping, their management of the home-space continued to be monitored and constrained by men. Haywood’s and Fielding’s figuration of the relationship between female characters and domestic space, therefore differs markedly from amatory novels that use the garden to support female agency and Daniel Defoe’s novels that associated the metropolis with women’s ability to enact economic individuality.

Haywood addresses the problem of maintaining domestic space and tranquility in marriage within the geographical bounds of London most acutely when Betsy agrees to provide protection and assistance to her brother’s cast-off mistress, Mademoiselle de Roquelair. As in Fielding’s novel, the doorway is a particularly vital narrative marker, and a loud knocking at the door late at night signals that a crucial interruption of the domestic interior is impending. Mademoiselle de Roquelair demands to see Betsy and explains that she has been abandoned by Betsy’s brother, to whom she had been mistress for some time. Betsy offers her protection until Mademoiselle de Roquelair can remove to a convent. Within a few days of having moved into the house, Mademoiselle de Roquelair becomes Mr. Munden’s mistress. When Betsy’s and her brother’s plans to help Mademoiselle de Roquelair enter a convent in Europe threaten Mr. Munden’s affair with her, the real convenience of the situation for Mr. Munden is revealed in the following conversation:
Mademoiselle de Roquelair protested that death was less cruel than being torn from her dear Munden thus early, - thus in the infancy of their happiness, - and gave some hints, that she wished he would hire private lodgings for her; but she knew little of the temper of the man she had to deal with: - he loved her as a mistress, but hated the expense of keeping her as a mistress; he therefore evaded all discourse on that head, and told her he fancied that, by pretences such as already had been made, she might still continue in the house. (588)

Although Munden drinks, dines, and philanders as if he were the wealthiest nobleman in town, his income as a businessman is far from supporting such hobbies. The main appeal of Mademoiselle de Roquelair is that she lives in the same house as Munden and does so under the protection of his wife. As such, she does not require the cost of keeping a second house. Munden’s reasoning that it would be more economical to keep his mistress in his own house is at base simply a more vicious form of the capitalist and patriarchal economic rationale that dictated the situating of business and home in one building, the renting of lodgings in one’s house, and the common standards of keeping servants; all of these systems centered on one’s self-interest in using money and space efficiently. Patriarchal capitalism ideologically divided women’s sexual labor from their reproductive and productive labor, but in practice this division created a financial crux for men like Munden, who believed all of his resources should be used to support his investments and profitability. Thus, paying for an extra lodging would be less rational than simply housing his wife and mistress under the same roof.

In Haywood’s novel, urban domestic spaces highlight the skewed thinking that rationalized the sexual double standard in which men could keep mistresses with relative social and legal immunity. The processes of organizing and re-organizing domestic space in the novel expose this common practice to be irrational and detrimental to
domestic harmony, marriage and the family, emerging as central to social unity.

Munden’s activities throughout the novel threaten Betsy’s comfort and power within their home; their most violent arguments are over the household budget with Munden blaming the lack of funds on Betsy’s housekeeping. Eventually, Munden’s refusal to give up his mistress or to provide her with separate lodgings causes the most serious threat to the peace and stability of Betsy’s domestic space. Munden’s keeping a mistress in his own house, under the pretense of his wife’s protection of her, obliterates the distinctions that separate the roles of wife, mistress, and servant. Mademoiselle de Roquelair’s sexual displacement of Betsy – as the mistress of Munden – quickly transitions into a spatial displacement of Betsy as mistress of the house. Betsy’s loss of power over the domestic space is made clear when Mademoiselle de Roquelair refuses to leave at Betsy’s request:

“You will not turn me out of doors?” cried Mademoiselle de Roquelair. – ‘I hope you will not oblige me to an act, so contrary to my nature,’ replied Mrs. Munden. ‘Say rather contrary to your power,’ returned that audacious woman, coming up to her with unparalleled assurance, ‘This house, which you forbid me,’ pursued she, ‘I think Mr. Munden is the master of, and I shall therefore continue in it till my convenience calls me from it, or he shall tell me I am no longer welcome.’ (588-9)

Mademoiselle de Roquelair suggests that she has secured her place in the house through Munden, surprising Betsy, who had thought that Mademoiselle de Roquelair only remained there through her offer of protection. Betsy recognizes the shift in power and the implications it holds for the true nature of Mademoiselle de Roquelair’s relationship with Munden, and she immediately decides to leave the house to go to her brother.

Through the shuffling of characters and domestic space, the novel first disrupts and then re-establishes a spatial hierarchy based in rank and moral female rectitude. Betsy and Mr. Thoughtless, genteel and virtuous people though once at fault, take up
residence together in his house and Munden and Mademoiselle de Roquelaire, lower ranking and vicious imposters, in a separate house. Betsy’s brother not only approves her conduct and offers his protection, but he also asks “her to take upon her the sole command and management of his house and family, and assigned the best apartment for her particular use” (595). In effect, Mr. Thoughtless’s treatment of Betsy re-establish spatial hierarchy by making Betsy the rightful mistress of a male family member’s household, and stabilize social hierarchy, which had been defective throughout the novel, by placing the reformed Mr. Thoughtless and Betsy in an upper middling rank household. The plot unfolds as a correction of the spatial organization of urban domestic interiors that had structured the novel. Betsy takes the place of Mademoiselle de Roquelaire as mistress of her brother’s house, but it is a place that should have been hers when she was unmarried and orphaned. Such skewing of the spatial and social hierarchies created endless difficulties for Betsy in her attempts to perform her roles of daughter, sister, marriageable woman, and wife in appropriate conduct-book like fashion. Earlier in the novel, Betsy had not been invited to live at her brother’s house because Mademoiselle de Roquelaire lived with him in every way as a wife except for the title. Betsy, as a respectable single woman, could not consort with a known mistress, thus she was barred from her traditionally rightful position as her brother’s housekeeper and the mistress of his table. When Betsy discovers Mr. Munden’s affair and leaves his house, Mr. Thoughtless reverses his previous mistake and sets the social and spatial hierarchies to rights. He welcomes Betsy as the proper mistress of his house, placing her firmly in a stable and respected position as well as firmly within a safe and comfortable domestic space. This shuffling of domestic space again emphasizes that women’s command over
space is contingent on men. Two spaces over which Betsy should have had management were denied to her by the men who owned and occupied those spaces.

While Betsy and Amelia, as potentially ideal wives, both must relate to domestic space in ways approved by their husbands or male relatives, their experience of male constraint differs. Because of Booth’s absence and neglect, Amelia is able to act according to her own sense of right, portraying a virtue that is impervious to the influence of the city or interruptions of her domestic space. Betsy’s virtue would also be impervious to space after the turning point mid-novel when she regrets her previous behavior, decides to marry to save her reputation, and commits herself to being a model wife, if she had the license to act according to her own moral code. Her husband’s presence, however, precludes this possibility. Descriptions of his corpulence, bad breath, drunken stumbling, and physical assaults demonstrate his over-bearing physical and spatial presence. His vices are overly-present as well and even take on physical, bodily form in the presence of his mistress as an occupant in his house. Mr. Munden’s presence constrains Betsy’s managerial control over the domestic space, and the ultimate sign of this constraint comes in Mademoiselle de Roquelair’s insistence that Betsy cannot turn her out of the house without Mr. Munden’s approval.

Thus, in a crucial move, Haywood’s heroine leaves her home because she has lost all sense of her wifely role in the urban domestic space. Betsy threatens to seek a legal separation with the support of her friends and family, a move that differs markedly from Amelia, Moll, and even Roxana, who all avoid taking their complaints to court. Amelia never even considers this option because she is the ideal wife who dotes on her husband
no matter how much he disappoints her, and Moll and Roxana are unable to seek legal aid because of their own criminal histories.

In her study of marriage cases recorded in the records of the Court of Exchequer, Hunt explains that women seeking litigation over some aspect of “troubled and crumbling marriages constituted a significant proportion of legal business in the early modern period,” with women making up about 14.4% of plaintiffs in 1627 and 21.2% by 1819. While couples in a small number of these cases sued for legal separation, more often they had lawyers negotiate private articles of separation, or they would just simply abandon the marriage. Hunt situates her analysis by explaining that marital cases seem to come disproportionately from metropolitan litigants. She hypothesizes that because of the increased access to the courts, the relative cheapness of a lawsuit, and the courts’ willingness to take seriously domestic conflicts over money, London women would have been more likely to have the courage, knowledge, and money to be able to go to court. Her analysis shows that most of the cases focus on small matters of permission and liberty, and she connects this focus to the historical period as a moment when a new conception of “how marriage ‘should’ operate” was beginning to emerge. The novels of the 1750s illuminate the ways in which the space of the urban domestic interior situated within the metropolis enabled stories that played out the conflict between new conceptions of how marriage should operate, and the legal and practical obstacles to actually constructing a marriage that operated in this way.

Haywood’s portrayal of a failed marriage and a wife’s decision to leave her home and to seek protection and support from friends and family members arises from potential conflicts between husband and wife over the urban domestic interior as well as women’s
relationships to family members’ houses. Richardson’s *Clarissa* famously addresses a situation in which a virtuous young woman might find herself abandoned by friends and family, alienated from her paternal home, and, therefore, left with little or no means to recover her health, fortune, or reputation. Haywood’s novel offers a response by employing the urban domestic interior to explore the potentially disastrous consequences of marrying purely to please family and friends. Her protagonist is seemingly trapped in a threatening home by bad decisions and limiting social conventions of marriage. Unlike Richardson, however, Haywood introduces alternative homes for Betsy, including her brother’s urban lodgings and her friends’ country house. Betsy eventually finds protection and support in these interiors owned by a reformed male family member and generous friends, all of whom are willing to defend not only her “virtue” but also her “rights” as a wife.

The novels that I call problem marriage novels have traditionally been grouped under other generic headings, including conversion narratives, picaresque novels, didactic courtship fiction, or sentimental novels. Yet, their common use of urban domestic space places them into conversation primarily with each other and, hence, produces a new generic group through their shared narrative patterns and thematic concerns. Attending to the role of urban domestic interiors in plots about marriage reveals an intertextuality of space among authors who are often cited in literary histories as exemplary of disparate novel genres. The repetition of the space of the urban domestic interior in these works marks them as a generic grouping usually neglected by literary historians. Haywood is typically understood as representing a literary tradition at odds with the work of Defoe and later, of Fielding, but the role of urban domestic space in supporting a narrative about
troubled marriage in the work of all of these authors illuminates a less oppositional relationship among them. Together, the novels by Defoe, Fielding, and Haywood create a legacy of the urban domestic interior as vital to imaginative explorations of some very real tensions between marriage and city life.

As a space that collapses rank, marriage, wealth, and morality into a web of relationships both with people and with objects, the urban domestic interior structures plots that move from courtship to marriage to adultery in the midcentury novel. Together, the works of Haywood, Fielding, and Defoe shape the literary life of urban domestic interiors as spaces associated with troubled marriage.

This legacy informs the appearance of urban domestic interiors in novels throughout the second half of the eighteenth century. In Frances Burney’s novels, urban domestic interiors structure plots about the pitfalls of social and legal strictures on female behavior. Throughout her novels the threats and opportunities that the metropolis poses specifically for women, married or not, are central to the narratives. Burney’s work resonates with Defoe’s early versions of the married heroine as much as it does with that of Fielding or Haywood. Burney’s later novels, in particular, take up the issue more fully and integrate “female difficulties” with the city. In The Wanderer (1814) and Cecilia (1782), marriage is at the heart of the protagonists’ struggles, and the intersection between marriage and city life creates complications that drive the plot – Lady Julia Granville of The Wanderer and Cecilia both contract secret marriages that result in precarious experiences in the city. Cecilia’s secret marriage leads to her searching the city for her husband only to be locked in a garret of a lodging house because the tenants found her delirious in the street. Cecilia’s languishing, out of her senses, in a garret and
eventual discovery by young Delville, her husband, depends on the space of urban lodgings as well as on the space that would become central to women’s sentimental novels, the sickroom.

In the 1790s and early 1800s, novels by Maria Edgeworth continue to employ the spaces of the kitchen and hearth of urban domestic interiors to anchor plots concerned with marriage. In *Belinda*, urban domestic space enables the heroine to observe variations of marriage relationships and different models of femininity. In particular, staying with Lady Delacour at her London residence allows Belinda to observe the differences between Lady Delacour’s marriage and Lady Anne Percival’s marriage. The organization of Lady Delacour’s urban home exhibits “fashionable” marriage as the husband and wife have appropriate separate spaces for their personal and social uses, with Lady Delacour holding court in the drawing room and seeking solitude and private conversations in her dressing room. Lady Anne Percival, on the other hand, uses the domestic space to foster family unity and cohesion. She is first introduced when Clarence Hervey, the male protagonist, accompanies Charles Percival home and they find his wife, “in the midst of her children; who all turned their healthy, rosy, intelligent faces towards the door the moment that they heard their father’s voice” (98). In this instance, the urban home’s proneness to interruption reveals to an outsider a picture of family happiness with the wife at center stage. The two types of domestic interiors and the marriages, illustrated by Lady Delacour and Lady Anne Percival, continue to shape aspects of the larger courtship plot as Belinda forms friendships with both women, spends time in both homes and constructs her future expectations of marriage from her observations.
Significantly, Edgeworth, like Burney employs a pseudo-sickroom as one of the primary spaces of her novel. Both Edgeworth’s and Burney’s uses of the sickroom resonate with a cycle of genre formation that occurred between the 1750s and the 1780s, between the emergence of problem marriage novels and the time when Burney and Edgeworth begin writing. In this period, women’s sentimental novels depend on the space of the sickroom to structure their plots, but they retain the spaces of urban domestic interiors to structure subplots and inset narratives. In Francis Sheridan’s *Memoirs of Miss Sidney Bidulph* (1761), the urban domestic interior appears frequently in association with marriage problems; the urban domestic interior enables the protagonist’s husband, Mr. Arnold, to begin an affair. He meets his mistress, Mrs. Gerrard, at the house of a shared acquaintance while he is in London on business. As in this instance, in formal and thematic terms, sentimental novels in many ways adopt conventions of problem marriage novels. Sentimental novels often follow a cyclical pattern of repeated female suffering dealt with through women’s patience and fortitude followed by reward.

Urban domestic interiors in these later novels function as spaces that initiate a wife’s troubles and then recede into the margins of the plot, differing from novels of the 1750s that employ urban domestic interiors to structure narratives that follow the process of how a marriage survives or fails under the pressures of the metropolis. As the space of the urban domestic interior recedes to the margins, the sickroom emerges as a new space central to the plots and characterizations of women’s sentimental novels. The sickroom, rather than the urban domestic interior, structures the primary plot of Sheridan’s novel. In the next chapter, I examine the centrality of the sickroom to Sheridan’s novel along with other sentimental novels by women.
NOTES

1 David Brewer’s notion of “imaginative expansion,” or “an array of reading practices in eighteenth-century Britain by which the characters in broadly successful texts were treated as if they were both fundamentally incomplete and the common property of all,” includes this type of textual adaptation of character. David Brewer, The Afterlife of Character 1726-1825 (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2005), 2.

2 Haywood’s conduct literature reifies newer constructions of gender that saw men and women having different abilities and therefore complimenting each other in a marriage relationship as well as in society more generally.

3 In her analysis of the masquerade in Henry Fielding’s Amelia, Terry Castle describes the city as “the archetypal scene of chaos and dissolution.” Terry Castle, Masquerade and Civilization: The Carnivalesque in Eighteenth-Century English Culture and Fiction (London: Methuen, 1986), 244.

4 Austen does explore problem marriage in Lady Susan as well as in some of the sub-plots and marginal characters of her courtship novels, but this aspect of her literary ouvre has yet to receive adequate critical attention.


6 “Verge of the court” refers to the area around Whitehall and St. James’s Palace which was under the jurisdiction of the Lord Steward of the Royal Household; because the civil authorities had no power in this area, it became a safe-haven for debtors.


8 Such an ideal of marriage was not actually strictly supported by law, and thus only an achievable reality for those with enough power and support (by male family members or friends) to persuade the husband and/or the courts to uphold these “rights.”


10 Hill, 90.

11 Hill, 91.

12 Eve Tavor Bannet outlines the ways in which the Marriage Act of 1753 constituted a re-definition of marriage. She points out that although the Marriage Act did not change the moral validity of promises exchanged or of consummation, it did change the legal consequences of these promises. Most significantly for the history of women’s marital rights, after the Marriage Act, a woman who trusted such promises and as a result became pregnant without the legal forms to support the validity of her marriage could no longer take legal action to gain recognition as a man’s wife and support for her children. Eve Tavor Bannet, “The Marriage Act of 1753: ‘A Most Cruel Law for the Fair Sex,’” Eighteenth Century Studies 30.3 (Spring 1997): 242.

14 Similar notions of marriage are evident in *Amelia* when the doctor advises Amelia’s mother that another suitor should not even be permitted to address her daughter because she has been promised to Booth. Samuel Richardson’s *Clarissa* (1748) also turns on the unregulated nature of marriage in the period and associates the problems that arise from it with a sense of domestic space as false and irregular. Clarissa and Lovelace would be bound as if in marriage through the old norms of verbal promises and binding actions that were considered to represent marriage. Lovelace’s abduction, confinement, and rape of Clarissa would automatically be considered evidence of their marriage and these actions play out in a space that Lovelace would have Clarissa believe to be home but is in actuality a brothel.

15 Ruth Yeazell traces the emergence in the English novel of the concept of female virtue being defined by a code of modesty, explaining that novelists saw modesty as consisting of a “series of changing responses” and not as a set of rules or a fixed condition. My attention to urban domestic interiors builds on Yeazell’s assessment by illuminating the workings of this code of modesty within marriage and in relation to a wife’s management of her home. Ruth Yeazell, *Fictions of Modesty: Women and Courtship in the English Novel* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984), ix.


17 Faramerz, 101.

18 Another of Defoe’s works from earlier in the century, *Good Advice to the Ladies* (1702), further illuminates the darker side of marriage for women who may be naïve about the commonness of men’s vices. In this poem, Defoe advises ladies not to marry because men will keep whores, get drunk, deprive wives of money, and behave hypocritically. This picture of marriage, when compared with the fiction and conduct literature of mid-century suggests that throughout the eighteenth century these types of male behavior, behavior that is also commonly associated with the metropolis as a place that offers temptations and easy availability of the means to such vices, continue to make marriage difficult for women. Peter Earle, *The Making of the English Middle Class: Business, Society and Family Life in London 1660-1730* (London: Methuen London, 1989), 246.


22 Guillery, 30.


24 George, 100.

25 George, 265.


28 Guillery, 11.


30 Rudé, 55-6.

31 Rudé, 58.

32 Earle, 205.

33 London supports similar plot structures in The London Jilt (1683) and Eliza Haywood’s Fantomina (1725). In each novel, the heroine is able to obscure her identity through movements in and around London.

34 James Peller Malcolm, Anecdotes of the Manners and Customs of London during the Eighteenth Century (London, 1808), 486.

35 Raymond Williams identifies a cyclical pattern of idealization of the country in historical accounts of country life and city life. In every age, writers, philosophers, and historians insist that they are currently experiencing the great paradigm shift from an idyllic way of life in the country to a new industrial, urban, technological, or otherwise modern way of life. Raymond Williams, The Country and The City (London: Chatto & Windus, 1973), 9-12.

36 Earle, 205.


38 Hunt, “Wives and Marital ‘rights,’” 123.


CHAPTER 4

SICKROOMS IN WOMEN'S SENTIMENTAL NOVELS 1750-1770

In descriptions of sentimental fiction of the eighteenth century, shops, cottage doorways, and drafty garrets tend to be featured as the settings of poignant moments. The meeting between Yorick and the grisset in Laurence Sterne’s *A Sentimental Journey through France and Italy* (1768) occurs in a shop, and, in Henry Mackenzie’s *Man of Feeling* (1771), Harley describes an evicted peasant pausing at the door of his cottage. Although these scenes, and their settings, have shaped contemporary accounts of the sentimental novel, women sentimental novelists in the 1750s and 1760s actually featured a different space as central to their stories: the bedroom when it functioned as a sickroom. Women’s sentimental novels of the period rewrite the bedroom, an eroticized space in novels throughout the long eighteenth-century, by reframing it as a sentimental space in the form of a sickroom. Moreover, the role of the sickroom in structuring the plots of women’s sentimental novels suggests that, at mid-century, women novelists departed from the novel conventions of their male counterparts. In particular, sentimental novels by women employ the space of the sickroom in support of continuous plots rather than as the setting for inset and fragmented sentimental episodes.

Attending to the narrative function of the sickroom as a space that makes stories about “virtue in distress” possible reveals that in some strains of the sentimental mode, story was just as important as sentiment – or, more precisely, that the two were...
interdependent. This chapter, therefore, presents a new trajectory of sentimental novels that reveals a continuous development of the conventions of the sentimental mode from the 1760s through the 1790s and beyond the turn of the century. Previous scholars have traced shifts in women’s writing from the raciness of the Restoration and early eighteenth century to the mid-century didacticism and to radicalism late in the period. These studies, however, tend to emphasize the influence of male sentimental novelists on later women writers. Studying the sickroom brings the work of writers like Sarah Fielding, Frances Sheridan, and Sarah Scott to our attention as important contributions to the genre of sentimental novels.

Traditional accounts of sentimental novels privilege Laurence Sterne’s *A Sentimental Journey through France and Italy* (1768) and Henry Mackenzie’s *Man of Feeling* (1771) as exemplary of the genre and deduce from these examples that sentimental novels are necessarily episodic and fragmentary. R. F. Brissenden’s seminal study, *Virtue in Distress: Studies in the Novel of Sentiment from Richardson to Sade*, establishes this precedent. In describing the similarity between *Le Voyageur Sentimental* (1786) by François Vernes and Sterne’s *Sentimental Journey* (1768), Brissenden remarks that in each novel the story is “almost nonexistent” and serves only as a “pretext” for sentimental episodes. Along the same lines, John Mullan explains that Mackenzie’s *Man of Feeling* uses episodic structure for the sake of creating “poignant moments” and lacks an overarching narrative development. Stephen Bending and Stephen Bygrave recapitulate this long-standing critical assumption by stating that the sentimental novel “tends to be structured episodically or fragmentarily, often featuring tableaux or ‘scenes’ of those in ‘distress.’” The critical focus on novels by Sterne and Mackenzie seems to
be driven by an assumption that the use of an episodic or broken narrative structure indicates originality while sentimental novels with a continuous narrative are somehow less original and more formulaic. My attention to the sickroom offers a correction of this oversight by demonstrating that women’s sentimental novels use the sickroom to create original plot structures.

In women’s sentimental novels of the 1750s and 1760s, the sickroom supports a continuous, non-fragmented, narrative by staging a sentimental scene that contributes to the development of plot. In other words, attending to the sickroom illuminates the presence in women’s sentimental novels of what Ian Watt calls the “interpenetration of plot, character, and emergent moral theme.”6 Watt’s description refers to the unique presence in the novel of a central story that integrates and depends on each component of narrative as it moves forward. Viewing the sickroom as integral to the construction of a strong central narrative in women’s sentimental novels reveals a new trajectory of literary history that has been overlooked because of the common focus on works with episodic and fragmentary structures, like those by Sterne and Mackenzie. Specifically, the sickroom creates potential for stories about women that expose the dangers of sentiment and of the legal and social conventions that increasingly restricted women’s roles to domestic responsibilities and that figured women as primarily feeling, rather than reasoning, beings.7 Rather than employing episodic structures to evoke transient sympathy, women’s sentimental novels use the sickroom to create continuous plots that expose potentially tragic outcomes.

The sickroom appears in sentimental fiction by both men and women, but the women writers that I address here use this space in distinctive ways, primarily for
narrative development, rather than for fragmentation or the creation of a stand-alone episode. In women’s sentimental novels, the sickroom is a critical space for initiating drawn-out tales of suffering by supporting the representation of exemplary female sufferers. My distinction of specifically “women’s” sentimental novels follows Janet Todd’s identification of separate male and female sentimental traditions. Todd distinguishes between earlier sentimental novels written by men, which featured faithful wives as female exemplars and those written after mid-century by women, which shifted the focus to motherhood, in order to exalt the mother without confronting the problems of her legal and social subordination as wife. Furthermore, according to Todd, the novel of sentiment, popular in the 1740s and 1750s, is a genre that “praises a generous heart and often delays the narrative to philosophize about benevolence,” while the novel of sensibility, popular in the 1760s and onwards, instead “honours above all the capacity for refined feeling.” Like other literary critics, Todd identifies a formal component to the interest in refined feeling, explaining that the novel of sensibility “stops the story to display this feeling in the characters and elicit it in the reader in its physical manifestations of tears and trembling.” Although my analysis builds on Todd’s precedent of viewing women’s and men’s sentimental fiction as having distinct characteristics, my focus on space reveals differences in plot structures that have been obscured by the focus on character as well as critical assumptions that sentimental novels are necessarily episodic and fragmentary.

Other scholars have attended to spaces that consistently appear as sentimentalized; yet, they tend to be interested specifically in the new institutional spaces of eighteenth-century culture – charitable hospitals, shops, colonial estates – that make
their appearance in popular novels as well as ephemera. In contrast, the sickroom is a familiar everyday space with a long history in both culture and literature, which informs its appearance in sentimental novels. The space of the sickroom shapes some of the most popular and best-selling novels of the first half of the eighteenth century: Eliza Haywood’s *Love in Excess* (1721), Penelope Aubin’s *Madame De Beaumont* (1721), Sarah Fielding’s *The Adventures of David Simple* (1744), Samuel Richardson’s *Clarissa* (1748), and Henry Fielding’s *Tom Jones* (1749). In *Love in Excess*, the sickroom of Melliora’s father is the site of the initial meeting between D’Elmont and Melliora, and in *Tom Jones*, Squire Allworthy’s sickroom is where Tom’s grief proves his gratitude toward Allworthy and emphasizes the injustice of his disinherition in his guardian’s will. I recognize that the sickroom is indeed a literary convention for expressing and evoking emotion by the time that it appears in women’s novels in the 1760s. I demonstrate, however, that women’s sentimental novels at mid-century use the sickroom in radically new ways, and not simply as a means to evoke emotion. In particular, women writers employ the sickroom as a site that produces new relationships for women. These relationships, in turn, generate narrative possibilities beyond those typically presented in depictions of the long-suffering wife or the benevolent man of feeling.

As a space that stages scenes in which female characters must face their futures as widows or orphans, the sickroom dramatizes transitional moments in women’s lives. Furthermore, women writers aestheticize the dependent woman in the sickroom by displaying her as a virtuous and sympathetic character. These novels adopt the everyday space of the sickroom as a site in which virtuous female characters confront the pitfalls of emerging notions of sensibility. These notions figure ideal femininity as based
in feeling rather than reason and as expressed in physical and emotional weakness, which prevents women from engaging in intellectual, political, or commercial activities. The critical commonplace of assuming that the sentimental operates only at the level of evoking momentary feeling before passing on to a new scene has overlooked the ways that women’s novels of the period develop sentimental conventions that enable both a critique of sensibility and the presentation of alternative ways of constructing female virtue. In particular, women writers employ the sickroom as a space that features women’s vulnerability in order to explore the ways in which this association between the sickroom and sensibility might enable radically new types of relationships for women, including the adoption of female children by persons unrelated by blood or marriage, male-female friendship, and female communities.

Treatments of the sickroom in novels become increasingly sentimental as the century progresses. Eliza Haywood’s *The History of Miss Betsy Thoughtless* (1751) exhibits characteristics of the sentimental sickroom that become fully developed and integral to narrative development in women’s sentimental novels a decade later, including the figure of the grief-stricken wife at the bedside of her husband and an emphasis on the wife’s virtue and spirituality. In the novel, the title character is finally released from her marriage with a miserly, adulterous, and abusive husband by his death. Haywood leads up to the moment of Mr. Munden’s death with a moving sickroom scene in which Mr. Munden repents and asks Betsy’s forgiveness, and Betsy quite generously promises not to leave him again. The pair shares the most affectionate moment of the marriage just before Mr. Munden’s death:
He began to make solemn protestations of future amendment, but his voice failing him through extreme weakness, a deep sigh, and tender pressure of his cheek to hers as she leaned her head upon the pillow, gave her to understand what more he would have said – on this she assured him she was ready to believe every thing he would have her, intreated him to compose himself, and endeavour to get a little rest; - “in the mean time,” said she, “I will order things so that I may lie in the same room with you, and quit your presence neither night nor day.” (615)

After Mr. Munden has breathed his last, Mrs. Munden retires, sincerely affected by his death:

Mrs. Munden had not affected anything more in this interview than what she really felt; - her virtue and her compassion had all the effect on her that love has in most others of her sex; she had been deeply troubled at finding her husband in so deplorable a situation; the tenderness he had now expressed for her, and his contrition for his past faults, made a great impression on her mind, and the shock of seeing him depart was truly dreadful to her. – The grief she appeared in was undissembled, - the tears she shed unforced; - she withdrew into another room, where shutting herself up for some hours, life, death, and futurity were the subjects of her meditations. (615-616)

In Haywood’s novel, the sickroom scene dramatizes the death of Mr. Munden and Betsy’s proper expression of grief in order to bring about the eventual resolution of the novel in the form of Betsy’s second marriage with a properly genteel and affectionate husband, Mr. Trueworth. The novel concludes in just two brief chapters following the death of Mr. Munden. In contrast, rather than employing the sentimental sickroom as a space that hastens the culmination of narrative, the novels that I address in this chapter employ the sickroom as a space that supports and structures a narrative throughout its development. Together, the novels by Sarah Fielding, Frances Sheridan, and Sarah Scott resonate with Haywood’s initial treatment of the sickroom, but they centralize the sickroom as the key to the interconnectedness of narrative, space, and emotion that shapes sentimental novels throughout the latter half of the eighteenth century.
More precisely, the sickroom in any eighteenth-century novel usually represents a re-framing of the bedroom and, thus, the sickroom must always resonate with alternative literary depictions of the bedroom. Amatory fiction from Aphra Behn’s *Love Letters between a Nobleman and his Sister* (1684-8) to Eliza Haywood’s *Fantomina* (1725), consistently eroticizes the bedroom as a space of female sexual awareness and rarely represents it as a sickroom in which men and women form lasting ties. Additionally, in Samuel Richardson’s *Pamela* (1740), several of Mr. B’s assaults on Pamela occur in bedrooms in his house where Pamela had supposed herself safe; yet, *Pamela* also employs the bedroom as a sickroom at a critical moment in the plot when Mr. B asks Pamela to return to him and she willingly does so, moved by a written description of Mr. B’s suffering. The power of the mental image of the sickroom here suggests that the multiple narrative possibilities for the space of the bedroom ultimately depend on its present function. Thus, by reframing the bedroom as a sickroom, women novelists de-sexualize the bedroom, instead inscribing it as a powerful aesthetic and sentimental space.

In Sarah Fielding’s *The History of Ophelia* (1760), instead of functioning as a space of sexual awakening for female characters, the bedroom operating as a sickroom serves as a space of female education. In the sickroom, Ophelia learns to read others’ facial and bodily expressions and develops the ability to analyze and manage her situation with propriety. Furthermore, critical turning points in the plot depend on the construction of the sickroom as a space that enables the increasing affection between the protagonists and as a site of seclusion and reflection for Ophelia. Raised in seclusion under the guardianship of her aunt, Ophelia has no means by which to understand social
conventions or typical interactions until Lord Dorchester, a nobleman infatuated with Ophelia’s charming innocence and natural beauty, kidnaps her from her home in rural Wales and takes her first to his country estate and then to London. After Lord Dorchester’s abduction of Ophelia, the primary impetus for the narrative that ensues, the sickroom structures the development of the plot as Lord Dorchester and Ophelia alternatively express their affection for one another and suffer the physical effects of excessive attachment and jealousy. Moreover, the function of the sickroom as a retreat for Ophelia completes her characterization as a paragon of virtue by preventing her from outwardly approving of or complying with many of Lord Dorchester’s actions, including kidnapping and dueling. Ophelia’s recurring retreat into the sickroom necessitates her absence from spaces of action while her physical suffering exhibited in the sickroom testifies to the sensible distress that Ophelia experiences in response to Lord Dorchester’s libertine behavior.

The de-sexualization of the bedroom as it is transformed into the sickroom sentimentalizes male-female relations by obscuring the oppressive and misogynist acts that underlie both courtship and seduction. In the first sickroom scene in the novel, Ophelia has fallen ill from the shock and distress of being kidnapped by Lord Dorchester and recovers in a rural cottage, too ill to travel to London or to attempt an escape and return home. Believing that death will soon release her from the grief she experiences, Ophelia records her surprise at Lord Dorchester’s behavior as her attendant in the sickroom:

Lord Dorchester was differently affected, he seemed to suffer from Anxiety, more than I did from Sickness. He was scarcely out of my Chamber, and attended me with a watchful Care, a tender Attention, which
appeared far above the honest good-natured Humanity of the poor Cottager’s Wife. If I was worse than common, it was more visible in his Countenance, than in mine. One would have thought his Existence depended on my life. (54)

Watching Lord Dorchester’s suffering inspires Ophelia with compassion and leads her “almost” to forget that he had caused her distress. In other words, by enabling a rakish nobleman to appear as a gentle nurse, the sickroom replaces his former immoral behavior with his best characteristics, enabling Ophelia to admire Lord Dorchester rather than despise him. The first sickroom scene in the novel, therefore, also serves as the first indication of the strong affection that will develop between Ophelia and Lord Dorchester. Lord Dorchester’s attendance on her demonstrates his affection, and his desire for her to recover shows his attachment: “Every Look, every Word, and Action expressed his Love in such legible Characters, that I sometimes was ready to believe his Professions, though I thought his Affection must be of a strange contradictory Nature” (55). The sickroom teaches Ophelia about love, attachment, compassion, and suffering, but in doing so it also re-inscribes her dependence on Lord Dorchester, a stranger and libertine, and now her only source of protection and care.

Fielding’s sickroom revises the sickroom of Samuel Richardson’s Clarissa (1747-8). Clarissa’s sickroom effectively precludes any developing affection between Clarissa and her abductor or anyone else, because it signifies her approaching death. Although Ophelia at first believes that she will die soon, when this does not happen, the sickroom becomes a catalyst for initiating further narrative rather than for bringing closure.

Further complicating the sickroom’s centrality to Ophelia’s and Lord Dorchester’s relationship, is the fact that Ophelia’s sickroom is really just a bedroom in a
small cottage, and later in the novel, her sickrooms are a bedroom in an inn and her own bedroom in the London townhouse that Lord Dorchester provides for her. Yet, despite their resonances with previous literary bedrooms, Ophelia’s sickrooms elide the potential for eroticization of the bedroom by the emphasis on illness. In these bedrooms turned sickrooms, Lord Dorchester becomes increasingly concerned with Ophelia’s wellness and as such loses his desire to seduce her into being a kept mistress. Ophelia observes his growing attachment, while the reader perceives that her illness, on display in the sickroom, appeals to Lord Dorchester’s compassion and thus protects Ophelia from his improper advances. The sentimental sickroom, thus, embodies a set of ideological processes: privileging physical weakness and excess emotion as characteristics of ideal femininity, obscuring the misogynist underpinnings of conventional male-female relations, and providing a means for transforming an initial sexual desire and malevolent impulse into lasting affection and benevolent actions.

Through this matrix of functions, the de-sexualized bedroom emerges anew in *The History of Ophelia* as the equally sentimental and rational sickroom. Moreover, Fielding’s treatment of the sickroom suggests that sensibility and reason are not mutually exclusive and that both are qualities of ideal feminine virtue. During times of extreme distress, Ophelia’s confinement in the sickroom provides periods of retreat and reflection that assist her in maintaining her virtue and acting with propriety despite her precarious status as simultaneously a naïve orphan, a potential kept mistress, and a marriageable young woman. At a critical moment in the novel, Ophelia’s confinement to a sickroom coincides with a significant decision that she makes about how to respond to Lord Dorchester’s actions. This instance of decision-making within the sickroom illuminates
this space as central to Ophelia’s progress in learning about “the world.” When Dorchester, refusing to see Ophelia home from a social gathering, implies that she favors others above him, her distress at his abandonment results in a fever that causes Ophelia to retire to her bedroom, which at that moment becomes her sickroom (123). While she is recovering from the debilitating shock, she considers her options for her future life. Ophelia’s retreat to a sickroom is immediately followed by her resolution not to accept Lord Dorchester’s income any longer:

I found myself extremely ill, and was soon unable to sit up. My Maid, truly alarmed at my Condition, sent for a Physician, who declared me in a high Fever, and ordered me to be kept in Bed. But the Pains that afflicted me, could not draw my Attention from my Lord’s Behaviour. My first Resolution was to refuse the Income he offered. (123)

This passage swiftly moves the protagonist from naïve shock to mature rationality; Ophelia determines that refusing Lord Dorchester’s income will signal to him that he cannot make recompense for, first, taking her from her aunt and, then, leaving her “in a strange Land, unfriended and unknown” (123). Within the space of the sickroom, Ophelia suffers from a disorder brought about by an abrupt change in circumstances, the loss of Lord Dorchester’s protection and affection, and makes a decision that will create yet another change as she will have to find a new means of providing for herself without the support of Lord Dorchester. In the sickroom, Ophelia recognizes the potential for perfidy and inconstancy in one she had trusted, and she begins to realize the vulnerability that women can suddenly face when abandoned by friends. Through Ophelia’s illness and concurrent realizations about the state in which Lord Dorchester has left her, the space of the sickroom is linked to a drastic change in fortunes, an association that echoes Ophelia’s suffering in a sickroom immediately following Lord Dorchester’s initial
kidnapping of her from her aunt’s cottage. In contrast, however, the sickroom that
Ophelia retreats to upon Lord Dorchester’s abandonment functions as a space of
reflection and reason rather than as the emotionally-charged sentimental space that
shaped the first few hours of Ophelia’s kidnapping.

The centrality of the sickroom to Ophelia’s socialization connects the literary
representation of this space to its historical context, a world in which illness and death
were common experiences that could define an entire life. Roy Porter explains that by
shaping individual lives, social ties, and a sense of the self, sickness was “one of life’s
dominating threats and key experiences” in eighteenth-century Britain. The role of
health care, treatments of illness, and medical knowledge in the everyday lives of men
and women establishes the experience of the sickroom as a commonplace of everyday
life, and as one that could have a multiplicity of meanings in the culture.

The work of G.S. Rousseau and Roy Porter has inspired a wave of scholarly
interest in the relationship between illness and literature in the last thirty years. This
scholarship includes attention to representations of illness in sentimental fiction.
Candace Ward’s study of the prevalence of fever illnesses in novels reveals that
“contemporary physicians’ accounts of fevers strikingly mirrored fictional accounts of
the same disorders” and that “medical literature often reflected the style of the novels
themselves, displaying the same vocabulary, punctuation, and tone” associated with
sentimental novels. Similarly, some descriptions of the sickroom in sentimental novels
reflect accounts in personal diaries and letters, especially seventeenth-century diary
accounts of illness and death which suggest that the sickroom was then associated with
piety through prayer for the sick and confession and absolution for the dying. The
Countess of Warwick writes a detailed account of her husband’s illness and death in her diary in 1673, recording her constant attendance on him, her presence within the sickroom, and her need to leave the sickroom when overwhelmed by grief or in order to seek seclusion outdoors for meditation. Similarly, Frances Burney famously records her attendance on her husband in a section of her journals titled “Narrative of the last illness and death of General D’Arblay” (1820).  

More importantly, however, the sickrooms of women’s sentimental novels contrast strikingly to representations of illness in other contemporary mediums. During much of the eighteenth century, the sickroom was used in prints, poetry, and drama to satirize greedy doctors, unfeeling landlords, and others who lacked compassion for the poor and sick, following instead only commercial self-interests. In *Bodies Politic: Disease, Death, and Doctors in Britain 1650-1900*, Roy Porter discusses satiric eighteenth-century caricatures of doctors and patients, including, perhaps most famously, plate five of William Hogarth’s *A Harlot’s Progress* (1732) in which a patient is treated for venereal disease. In this illustration and others that Porter analyzes, the sickroom is employed as a space of satire in which the poor and sick suffer at the hands of greedy doctors, apothecaries, and quacks as well as unfeeling landlords demanding either the rent or the room. This picture of illness and medical care has remained a commonplace in assumptions about eighteenth-century medicine; yet, the presence of the sickroom in sentimental novels suggests an alternative construction of illness. Sarah Fielding and other women novelists re-write the familiar space of the sickroom as a space of women’s agency as well as suffering, and above all as a space that inspires compassion for women from family members, clergy, doctors, and strangers alike. Such depictions of illness
resonate with the earlier diary accounts of the sickroom as a space in which spirituality is heightened through grief and distress.

In particular, the sickroom as sentimental rather than satiric space operates through the aestheticization of female suffering that also replaces the former sexualization of the bedroom. In Sheridan’s *Memoirs of Miss Sidney Bidulph* (1761) and Sarah Scott’s *A Description of Millenium Hall* (1762), such aestheticization moves beyond the balance of sentiment and reason presented in *The History of Ophelia*, and the sickroom becomes a means of figuring excess emotion and vulnerability as characteristics of an ideal femininity. While these novels continue to employ the sickroom in supporting continuous narratives that feature the limitations experienced by dependent women, the grounding of women’s experiences in the sickroom initiates a cycle of suffering rather than offering a solution to female dependency. Such an alternative solution is presented only when the women of Millenium Hall are able to break from their pasts as defined by the sickroom and create new stories within the “healthy” domestic interior.

In *The History of Ophelia*, the sickroom’s function as a space of reflection and education where Ophelia learns of social conventions for behavior depends, in part, on common practices in treating and caring for the sick. Porter explains that health care and medical interventions were “major foci of social interaction, communal ritual, rites of passage, objects of consumption, calls on services, junction-points between private and public worlds.” Spatially, the sickroom offered increased contact among persons of different ranks and was a domestic counterpart to the public spaces of contact, such as an inn. In a sickroom, a clergyman, a surgeon, and perhaps even a lawyer might be present.
in their official, professional roles; relatives of the sick may be present to receive final blessings, ensure their inheritance, or simply to visit and attend to the sick; and a maid, a footman, or other servants would await commands for aiding in the patient’s relief or the relief of those attending him. A crucial sickroom scene in Fielding’s novel draws on this characteristic of actual sickrooms. During her recovery from one of her many fainting spells, Ophelia observes the Doctor’s surprised countenance when she embraces Lord Dorchester upon seeing him at her bedside when she had supposed him to be fatally wounded in a duel. Although Ophelia’s ability to understand the significance of the doctor’s surprise at her behavior does not develop until sometime after this incident occurs, her initial observation of it implants the incident in her memory for later reflection. Without the doctor’s presence at that moment, there would have been no means for Ophelia to feel a check on her behavior. The potential for display in the actual sickroom, thus, informs its function as a space of education in *The History of Ophelia* by putting private emotion and actions on display for outside observers.¹⁸ In contrast, Sheridan and Scott each use the sickroom as a space of display that alters the emotions and actions of the observer rather than the sufferer, thereby initiating new developments in plots about widows and orphans. Therefore, through the alternative conception of the sickroom as a sentimental space of display rather than a satiric space, women novelists introduce a radically new possibility, the opportunity for unprotected, suffering, or destitute women to form innocent non-kinship relationships with wealthy and, usually, benevolent strangers, male or female.

In Sheridan’s *Memoirs of Miss Sidney Bidulph*, the sickroom enables a plot that explores the vulnerability of a widow under eighteenth-century social and legal
conventions by grounding that plot in the aestheticization of female suffering.

Furthermore, the aestheticized space of the sickroom enables both Sheridan and Scott to reframe the sentimental tableau, a convention of sentimental fiction of the period, as central to narrative development. The continuous first person perspective of *The History of Ophelia*, which is framed as a retrospective letter written by Ophelia to “a Lady,” precludes the use of tableau to present the heroine in the sickroom because that space is always described by Ophelia who observes and reports on other characters. In contrast, in Sheridan’s novel, interruptions in the heroine’s journal-writing caused by her immense grief and exhaustion in attending to her ill husband, allows an alternative narrator to insert his own description of the sickroom, a sentimental tableau describing Sidney’s posture at her husband’s bedside. Similarly, the tableau appears in Scott’s *Millenium Hall* because the protagonists of the vignettes do not narrate these stories themselves. Mrs. Maynard, who has heard the histories from the women and retells them to the visiting gentleman, is at liberty to construct sentimental tableaux of the women at critical moments in their histories, moments that most often occur in the sickroom.

Scholarship on the sentimental novel has tended to theorize the sentimental tableau as an extra-narrative moment, a moment during which the temporal action pauses and the scene takes on great emotional value, but lacks positive narrative value. The tableau is indeed vital to episodic sentimental novels. Mackenzie’s *Man of Feeling* and Sterne’s *Sentimental Journey* include numerous tableau moments in which a scene is described in detail in order to induce an emotional response in both the protagonist and the reader. In these novels, such scenes are rarely connected to integral plot developments, but instead operate as detached and independent sentimental episodes.
The “Story of Le Fever” in Laurence Sterne’s *The Life and Opinions of Tristram Shandy, Gentleman* (1756-67) sets a brief episode in the sickroom for the primary purpose of creating a sentimental scene that will simultaneously praise male sentiment and evoke an emotional response from the reader. In contrast, the sickroom scene in *Sidney Bidulph* employs the tableau as a spatially-oriented scene that is central to the construction of a narrative that features the struggles of widowhood by moving beyond the period of courtship and marriage. Sheridan’s use of the sickroom demonstrates that the tableau can serve to perpetuate a continuous narrative and to pause it to dwell on emotion.

The rhetorical poignancy of a tableau depended on the inter-connectedness of the sense of sight and the feeling of sympathy that was a central notion in Enlightenment theories of the passions. In *Characteristicks of Men, Manners, Opinions, Times* (1711), Shaftesbury develops the concept of “inborn conscience,” which refers to a person’s ability to evaluate behaviors through a correlation of moral judgment with instinctive aesthetic tastes. David Hume and Adam Smith each in turn build on this concept in their treatises concerning the forces at play in human behavior. In *Treatise of Human Nature* (1740), Hume privileges the passions over reason as a primary source of motivation; in *The Theory of Moral Sentiments* (1759), Smith theorizes that the feeling of sympathy results from an individual’s ability not simply to observe suffering and feel pity but to imagine himself in the position of the sufferer.

Scholars of sensibility and sentimental fiction have noted the influence of this strain of thought on the popularity of sentimental novels. Barbara Benedict situates sentimental fiction in the context of Enlightenment constructions of sympathy in order to conclude that sentimental fiction “corporealizes even ideal love like piety or patriotism,
portraying feelings as visible on the body where they can be sympathetically observed.”

She argues that in sentimental fiction, “sympathy operating through spectatorship […] is offered to the reader as one way to socialize private feeling.” Similarly, William Wandless argues that authors use sensibility to make visible the “inward, spontaneous reactions” that were typically covered by self-command and formal austerity. He explains that the “vivid representation of bodies, especially bodies in distress, could affect audiences more profoundly than speeches, sermons, and harangues.” While these scholars focus specifically on how Enlightenment constructions of sympathy influence depictions of the body in sentimental fiction, I propose that the role of the sickroom in the sentimental tableau is similarly shaped by the belief that observation can inspire emotion. Specifically, the sickroom serves sentimental novels as a familiar space in which the process of display and observation occurs, and as a space in which women are commonly the objects of that process either as the sick themselves or as attendants on the sick.

In Sidney Bidulph, the sickroom tableau dramatizes Sidney’s transition from bourgeois wife to widowed mother by allowing others to observe her piety and grief as she attends to her husband. The key sentimental tableau is Sidney at the bedside of her dying husband. Set in the sickroom, the scene reveals the centrality of this space to changes in fortune for women. Moreover, the sickroom provides an impetus for the next stage in the novel: Sidney’s experience of widowhood, raising her children, and a potential second marriage. Sidney’s husband, Mr. Arnold, has suffered an injury while hunting and has languished for several days. When he grows worse, Sidney sends for a minister, but the parish minister and that of the next parish are both away. Sidney decides then to read the service for the sick. Mr. Main, the surgeon and the brother of
Sidney’s servant Patty, describes the scene, focusing on the posture of Sidney kneeling at the bedside:

Surely nothing ever appeared so graceful; her fine hands and her fine eyes lifted up to heaven, while the book lay open before her on the table. Such a reverential, such an ardent, yet such a mournful supplication in those fine eyes! She looked like something more than human! After having in this posture offered up a short petition in silence, she began the service. (286)

The scene employs standard conventions of the tableau, including the temporary pause of the main narrative and the extended description of the physical characteristics of a woman in distress, but, importantly, Sheridan employs the conventions of the sentimental tableau to serve her narrative, building the plot around them, rather than including them merely for the sake of a sentimental moment.

Sheridan’s sentimental tableau provides a vivid, detailed description of a grieving woman, and, like similar scenes in other sentimental novels, it features a virtuous woman exhibiting fortitude in the face of grief. This focus of the sentimental tableau draws the reader’s attention to the wife’s grief, not to the dying man. In this way, the sickroom serves the narrative by shifting focus to the grief and future difficulties of the heroine, not to the death of another character. By providing both a reason and site for drawing together the heroine, her dying husband, and outside observers, the sickroom creates the potential for a new kind of story that is interested in how a virtuous woman responds to her husband’s death and in what her life will be like after that death, as a widowed mother.

The sickroom, therefore, perpetuates the narrative by its potential for displaying an intensely private moment for outside observation. As discussed above, in *The History*
of Ophelia, this potential for display was evident in Ophelia’s recollection of events in a sickroom, and it re-enforced the novel’s employment of the sickroom as an educational and rational space. In Sidney Bidulph, however, the potential for display in the sickroom more pointedly serves the rhetorical device of the tableau. Thus, the sickroom serves as a means of representing a male perspective which aestheticizes the grief and vulnerability that a woman experiences when entering widowhood. Accounts of actual sickrooms available in diaries and letters of the period exhibit the ways in which the sickroom was central to women’s experience. Women were responsible for caring for their husbands, children, or parents when they were ill. Furthermore, many of these accounts indicate that a woman’s efforts at nursing the sick would be observed by a range of visitors. The Countess of Warwick’s account of her husband’s illness and death in her journal of 1673 records the attendance of several different doctors and clergymen as well as numerous visits by friends and family members over several months of illness. After her husband’s death, Lady Warwick records briefly her own sufferings and the presence of a clergyman in the room to pray with her each day.

The realities of the sickroom, thus, offer the possibility for strangers or outsiders to observe the private interactions between husband and wife, parents and children, doctors and patients, or masters and servants. In other words, the bedchamber functioning as sickroom dramatizes the mediation between public and private that domestic interiors encompassed – a quality noted by historians and literary critics alike.24 The sickroom provides an ideal site for setting the sentimental tableau, as the space of the bedside literally and figuratively frames the joined efforts of a rather unexpected group of figures. In some ways, it also provides public access to a typically private space – so that
a wife’s private concern for, attendance on, and conversation with a dying husband is on display for all attending parties as well as readers.

Additionally, the presence of observers in the sickroom enables the creation of a tableau that features the novel’s heroine by initiating a shift in perspective and a momentary change in narrators. The shift in perspective in Sheridan’s novel is particularly notable because she presents the novel as “memoirs” that consist primarily of Sidney’s first-person letters and journal entries, kept for the benefit of a female friend residing on the continent. When Mr. Arnold is first injured, Sidney requests that her servant Patty take over the journal writing because Sidney is too busy and too distraught to write. Then, in a second shift in narrator, because Patty is too upset to be capable of recording the events, Mr. Main, her brother and the physician, records the final moments of Mr. Arnold’s life, constructing within that brief entry a sentimental tableau that describes the posture and expressions of Sidney as she kneels at Mr. Arnold’s bedside to read the service for the sick. These shifts in narrator and the shift in perspective accompanying them emphasize the ways in which illness and the sickroom are central to shaping plot, specifically that when illness becomes central to the plot, the demands of the sickroom initiate a change in narration. Ultimately, the sickroom enables the inclusion of a male perspective within the letters and journals of a female character.

The sentimental sickroom, through its resonances with earlier literary bedrooms, its aestheticization of gentlewomen, and its support of narrative continuity enables narratives that present the possibility of radically new relationships for women. Functioning in processes of education, emotional release, and observation and display, the sentimental sickroom plays a vital role in mid-century formulations of potential new
social configurations. In Sarah Scott’s *A Description of Millenium Hall* (1762), the sentimental sickroom specifically gives rise to new relationships for women, particularly an all-female community based in reason and benevolence.

In *Millenium Hall*, the aestheticization of a mourner in a sickroom becomes the impetus for moving the plot forward. This process illuminates the narrative implication of the sickroom in *Sidney Bidulph* and *The History of Ophelia* as a space that initiates interactions between the virtuous female orphan or the widow and persons unknown to them or their friends. In the vignettes of *Millenium Hall*, the sickroom’s display of female virtue initiates interactions between unexpected parties, such as a destitute young orphan and a wealthy stranger at an inn or a young woman who believes herself an orphan and an ill stranger who turns out to be her mother. In Scott’s novel, therefore, an association between the sentimental sickroom and the fates of dependent women becomes more fully realized than it had been in the novels by Sarah Fielding and Frances Sheridan. Although *The History of Ophelia* and *Sidney Bidulph* do feature an orphan and a widow, respectively, and the sentimental sickroom is an important part of their stories, the novels ultimately do not envision a practical alternative to the outcomes of either marriage to one’s seducer or continual suffering and grief. In contrast, *Millenium Hall* presents the sentimental sickroom as not only a vital part of the dependent woman’s experience of grief, but also as a mechanism that ultimately leads to an alternative system of ethics that enables women to live well.25

By de-sexualizing the bedroom and employing the sentimental sickroom to represent the social and legal constraints that dependent women faced, each of these novels, and most fully *Millenium Hall*, confronts a major concern in eighteenth-century
society: the fate of widows, orphaned young women, and other women left fatherless without a source of income or any male support or protection. Karen Bloom Gevirtz has investigated the appearance of widows in eighteenth-century English novels, providing an important contribution to scholarship on representations of women in the novel. She argues that in the eighteenth century, the figure of the widow becomes consistently representative of anxieties surrounding women’s participation in the emerging commercial culture and market economy of England. The widow was an important literary figure for over a century before the sentimental novel came into fashion. For this reason, the association between the sickroom and the widow in the sentimental novel stands out as a particularly fascinating phenomenon in literature. Neither of these conventions is a radically new element in fiction in the 1760s, but when they come together in sentimental novels, they produce new stories about a particular aspect of women’s experience. By placing the widow or another woman destitute of male support or protection on display for fictional observers as well as for the reader, the sickroom illuminates the dependency and limitations experienced by women in these positions.

In 1696, about one-sixth of the adult female population of England and Wales were widows, and during the eighteenth century, widows made up about eight or nine percent of the total population. For the majority of these women, widowhood led to poverty; and, even when a widow’s family could comfortably support her, she was still considered a dependent, a role which often involved an uncomfortable sense of obligation. Bonham Hayes’s 1720 will made a provision for his widow to be allowed to live for free in part of the house that his son inherited, and the autobiography of William Stout (1665-1752) describes a conflict over housekeeping between his widowed mother
and his brother’s wife which resulted in his mother coming to live with him.\textsuperscript{28} These accounts exemplify the precarious position of the majority of widows, with the exception of the very wealthy, as dependent on a husband’s foresight to include a provision for her support or, in the absence of that, on a son’s generosity. In addition to the problems of widowhood, female orphans were potentially even more vulnerable to indigence when left without male protection or support. The problem of orphans in general was a concern throughout the eighteenth century. Unwanted infants and toddlers were often left at the homes of noblemen or wealthy clergymen, sometimes with notes asking for assistance. One issue of \textit{The Daily Post-Boy} in 1735 recorded two instances of children abandoned on doorsteps in well-to-do areas of London; both children were sent to the workhouse.\textsuperscript{29} The plight of widows, abandoned children, and desperate mothers evidenced in these accounts informs the role of the sickroom in sentimental novels. Lacking support from their own relations, widows and other dependent women had to rely on relationships with other people who were able and willing to help them. Such sources of support could also lead to potential dangers, including seduction, poverty, abandonment, or the indignity of being a “toad-eater,” a lady’s genteel companion who was essentially an upper servant. Therefore, a woman was rarely capable of accepting every offer of assistance and the truly benevolent and generous stranger could be easily deterred by the potential for his or her actions to be misconstrued.

One potential solution to this catch-22 was the cultivation of disinterested benevolence, a concept adopted in eighteenth-century thought from ancient Stoicism. Although the critical tendency has been to assume that Stoicism and sensibility are incompatible, some recent studies have shown the contrary. Margaret Anderson suggests
disinterested benevolence, or the human capacity to sympathize with persons wholly
unknown and unconnected to one’s self, a central feature of sentimental texts, was
informed by the principles of ancient Stoicism. In *Millenium Hall*, the sickroom not
only initiates disinterested benevolence in characters that assist the protagonists of the
vignettes, but ultimately enables the formation of a female community that operates
according to an ethical system grounded in the concept of disinterested benevolence.

The first individual “history” related by Mrs. Maynard in *Millenium Hall*, Louisa
Mancel’s, illustrates the capacity of the sickroom to inspire not only sympathy but also
action in an observer who is completely unknown to the sufferer. Mrs. Maynard begins
her tale with an apology for the types of spaces that will be encountered: “You may
perhaps think I am presuming on your patience, when I lead you into a nursery, or a
boarding-school” (78). The statement implies that a young woman’s history should begin
somewhere else – perhaps a drawing-room, a dressing-room, a ball-room or a garden.
Despite this apology, the history does not begin in a nursery or boarding school, or in any
of the spaces more commonly associated with coming-of-age stories featuring young
women. Instead, the history of Miss Mancel begins in a sickroom. Furthermore, Louisa
Mancel’s history actually begins with an account of the stranger Mr. Hintman’s activities
on the day that he first meets Louisa. Stopping at an inn outside of London to conduct
some business with a man lodging there, Mr. Hintman hears from that man a brief history
of the illness and distress of a gentlewoman and her niece lodging in the same house.
The man had come to the maid’s assistance when he heard loud groans from the
gentlewoman’s room, and, thus, his initial description of Louisa depends on the sickroom
as a semi-public space and as a stage for dramatizing female distress:
By her bed-side stood the most beautiful child I ever beheld, in appearance about ten years of age, crying as if its little heart would break; not with the rage of an infant, but with the settled grief of a person mature both in years and affliction. I asked her if the poor dying woman was her mother; she told me, no, - she was only her aunt; but to her the same as a mother; and she did not know any one else that would take care of her. (78)

This man’s description inspires Mr. Hintman with a curiosity to see such a beautiful and distressed child. Upon his entrance to the bedchamber where she has been placed, a second sickroom, Mr. Hintman’s view of the child allows for the construction of a tableau that features the child, frozen in grief and positioned as a spectacle for any interested parties at the inn:

She, who had cried most bitterly before the fatal stroke arrived was now so oppressed, as not to be able to shed a tear. They had put her on the bed, where she lay sighing with a heart ready to break; her eyes fixed on one point, she neither saw nor heard […] [Mr. Hintman] allowed he never saw any thing so lovely; and the charms of which her melancholy might deprive her, were more than compensated in his imagination by so strong a proof of extreme sensibility, at an age when few children perceive half the dreadful consequences of such a misfortune. (80)

The sickroom aestheticizes suffering through the interplay of grief and beauty as Louisa’s grief makes her seem even more beautiful to the male beholder, and her beauty makes her situation seem even more tragic. The aestheticization of suffering that is on display inspires Mr. Hintman not simply to feel for Louisa, but to act for Louisa, adopting her as his own daughter and placing her in an elite boarding school. The sickroom features Louisa’s suffering, allowing the narrative focus to remain on Louisa’s plight, not on Mr. Hintman’s benevolence. Through this focus, the act of disinterested benevolence brought about by the sickroom’s potential for display initiates the story that ends with Louisa joining the community at Millenium Hall.
The sickrooms of Louisa’s history, her aunt’s sickroom and then her own, provide a means for Mr. Hintman to become involved in Louisa’s life by placing Louisa’s beauty and suffering on display. The sickrooms are located in an inn outside of London, where the suffering aunt is exposed to the observation of strangers, including the landlord, servants, and any other lodgers, and where people from all ranks might happen to be staying, dining, working, or visiting, as is Mr. Hintman. The intersection of the public space of an inn and the semi-public space of the sickroom allows for Louisa’s tragedy and her reaction to it to become a spectacle for strangers. While the combination of her beauty, grief, and youth wins Mr. Hintman’s “protection,” it also subjects Louisa to later sexual threats from him, and it does not inspire him to provide full and lasting protection through his will. In other words, Scott’s construction of the sickroom does not elide the eroticization of the bedroom as easily as does Fielding’s. Fielding’s sickroom provides the impetus for changing Lord Dorchester’s sexual desire into compassion that allowed for an affectionate relationship that would eventually result in marriage. In contrast, the trajectory of Louisa’s history reveals a reverse process in which Mr. Hintman’s initial compassion for Louisa as a sufferer in a sickroom develops into sexual desire for Louisa once she is removed from the sickroom and grows to adulthood. Mr. Hintman’s desire and improper behavior toward Louisa later in the story resonates with the sexual associations that underlie any male-female encounter in the bedroom. Thus, the sickroom in Millenium Hall once again re-inscribes the dependency of a female sufferer on the compassion and protection of a male observer, similarly to its implications in The History of Ophelia. Sidney Bidulph is an exception to this motif, as the tableau of Sidney’s grief does not result in her dependence on the male observer; rather, Sidney’s social rank and
wealthy family prevent her dependence on the disinterested benevolence of a male stranger for a period following the death of her husband. In *Millenium Hall*, the conversion of Mr. Hintman’s compassion, an appropriate sentimental response to a sickroom scene, into inappropriate desire ultimately forces Louisa to leave his guardianship and seek out the retirement of a rural estate and the protection of an all-female community. Louisa’s history begins in the sickroom, because that is the space that initiates the narrative of how she came to be an unprotected orphan who joined her friend Mrs. Morgan in founding the society of Millenium Hall. The sickroom determines the rest of Louisa’s history and, thus, also the history of Millenium Hall, justifying Mrs. Maynard’s choice to begin her histories with Louisa’s and the sickroom.

Formally, through Scott’s use of the frame of a first-person letter and a series of vignettes related by one character to another, the novel combines Fielding’s and Sheridan’s models for representing the sickroom in epistolary form. Within these vignettes, the sickroom scenes are shaped by who views and describes them to other characters as well as by the story-telling of Mrs. Maynard. On one hand, Scott employs a single narrator writing a continuous letter, much in the manner of the epistolary framing of *The History of Ophelia*. On the other hand, the women’s personal stories are provided in inset vignettes related to the narrator by Mrs. Maynard, who had been told them by the protagonists. Therefore, although a male narrator creates the letter that provides the “description of Millenium Hall,” a female narrator within that description maintains control over the construction of narratives about women’s experiences. Thus, the male letter-writer is purely the means of communication to a larger audience while Mrs. Maynard functions as a narrator who actively shapes the stories as she wants them to be
told. The sickrooms in these vignettes are critical to the novel because they initiate the action of many of the women’s histories, and the descriptions of the sickroom draw attention to the levels of narration through the conventional sentimental devices of tableaux and inset narratives.

Mrs. Maynard’s power to construct the women’s stories as she wishes, in effect re-claiming power over depictions of the sickroom from novels and illustrations that use it to evoke transient and inactive emotion, mirrors the development of women’s sentimental novels as they move from tales of suffering and tragedy in the sickroom to accounts of the women’s tranquility, domestic order, and charitable actions at Millenium Hall. In the other histories of the women at Millenium Hall, the sickroom repeatedly plays a central role. It functions as the site of the final reconciliation between Mrs. Morgan and her formerly neglectful and abusive husband, echoing Haywood’s use of the sickroom a decade earlier, and as the means by which Miss Selvyn learns the identity of her mother, Lady Emilia. As each appearance of the sickroom marks an important transition in a woman’s life, the sickroom becomes central to the eventual formation of the all female society at Millenium Hall. All of the women at Millenium Hall are either widows or orphans. Some of them are of genteel rank and contribute whatever fortune they have to the support of the society, while others, like Mrs. Maynard, are dependents taken in by the benevolence of the society. The novel moves the conventional story of the widow or female orphan from the world in which the sickroom dominates experience to a world in which the rural countryside and a peaceful, yet educational, drawing room fundamentally shape the women’s lives. In Millenium Hall, the sickroom establishes a premise for tales about widows and orphans, but it then recedes as the description of a
utopian society gains control of the narrative, presenting a fictional world in which the
sickroom no longer has the power to leave women destitute and vulnerable.

In addition to distinguishing sentimental novels that feature male protagonists
(men of feeling) from those that feature female protagonists (women of feeling), Janet
Todd explores how novels figure women’s association with sentiment differently. In
part, her analysis examines how the early connection between sexuality and sensibility
became problematic in representing women – a woman of sensibility had to be
represented sympathetically which meant virtuously, and, therefore, she could not be
prone to the same sexual impulses and missteps as sentimental heroes like Sterne’s
Yorick. My analysis of three novels from the 1760s has shown that the sickroom
resolves this problem by de-sexualizing the bedroom and re-inscribing it as a space that
figures the destitute woman as a sympathetic character. A woman’s grief, loss, and
suffering, portrayed pathetically in the sickroom, work to justify later actions that might
otherwise be seen as corrupting, such as participating in commerce or living singly in a
lodging house or garret, all experiences confronted by the protagonists of Fielding’s,
Sheridan’s, and Scott’s novels.

Through their collective recoding of the amatory bedroom as the sentimental
sickroom, which enables the introduction of the virtuous widow or female orphan,
women’s sentimental novels at mid-century altered the literary lives of both the space of
the sickroom and the character of the dependent woman. After the 1760s, the sentimental
sickroom continues to be a narrative-shaping space in women’s writing into the early
nineteenth century. Gothic novels, radical novels, and novels of ideas at the turn of the
century all invoke the sentimental mode when they adopt the space of the sickroom for its
pathos and its narrative value. In later novels, the intertextuality of the sickroom from women’s sentimental novels informs narratives that simultaneously expose the ill effects of social and legal constraints on women and critique the value of female sensibility.

The sickroom becomes a sign of a novel’s relationship to the sentimental tradition. The sickrooms in Frances Burney’s novels exemplify the potential for this space to be both fundamental to the plot and to express ambivalence about the values of sensibility and the sentimental novel tradition. Within the demands of the sentimental genre, the novel *Cecilia* (1782) may have begun most appropriately with the sickroom of Cecilia’s uncle and guardian. The scene of the Dean’s deathbed with Cecilia mourning at his side would have been the ideal sentimental tableau, evoking sympathy for and interest in the heroine and initiating the tale with the moment at which Cecilia becomes both heiress and orphan, that is, a ward of non-relatives. The novel, however, does not begin with such a sickroom, but instead narrates Cecilia’s situation to us by recounting the circumstances of her being left heiress and ward of three different guardians. The first sickroom that appears is that of her potential suitor Mr. Belfield who is wounded in a duel. Although Cecilia visits Belfield’s sister in an outer room of his lodgings, she never enters the sickroom and that space is never described in detail. Yet, it does have narrative significance: by accidentally taking shelter under the doorway of the building in which Mr. Belfield is suffering, Cecilia brings suspicions upon herself as a concerned party in Belfield’s health. As the novel progresses, sickrooms begin to pile up: Delvile, another potential suitor and son of one of Cecilia’s guardians, falls ill and is confined to a sickroom, from which Cecilia is excluded by propriety; Mrs. Charlton and Mrs. Delvile are simultaneously confined to sickrooms in which Cecilia attends to each mother-figure
with daughter-like care and which constitute the most sentimental sickrooms of the novel; and Cecilia experiences confinement to a sickroom when strangers find her raving and roaming the streets of London calling for Delvile. They assume she is insane and lock her up in a room until they can bring her to her senses or find out her identity and friends. In her treatment of the sickroom, Burney simultaneously evokes the meanings of the space from earlier sentimental novels, using the space as both a narrative catalyst and a sentimental stage, and critiques conventions of contemporary formulaic sentimental fiction for dwelling on emotion and sensibility rather than presenting accurately the conditions that leave women in these positions.

Novels like *Cecilia*, which either lack sickroom descriptions or represent the ill effects of confining a seemingly disordered woman, use the sickroom to mark their resistance to both particular literary conventions and the values of sensibility more generally or to support their mocking of such values. In Maria Edgeworth’s *Belinda* (1801), although Lady Delacour believes that she is fatally ill, she does not retire to a sickroom. Her dressing room, a space that represents women’s vanity and participation in luxury and commerce, serves as a private space where she can attend to her wounded breast and where she can control who has access to the space and to her body. The dressing room differs from the sickroom by excluding rather than allowing access to doctors, clergy, family, and others. The lack of a sickroom in a novel in which one of the primary characters is haunted by illness suggests that *Belinda* functions as an anti-sentimental novel.

The sickroom continues to mark ambivalence toward the sentimental tradition throughout the works of Jane Austen and further into the nineteenth century. In Jane
Austen’s *Sense and Sensibility* (1811), ambivalence toward the sentimental novel tradition is evident in the role of the sickroom to open the novel and initiate the narrative. Mr. Dashwood’s sickroom is at the center of the beginning of the novel. Moved by the “strength and urgency” of his father’s deathbed plea, Mr. John Dashwood promises that he will “do everything in his power” to aid his step-mother and half-sisters (3). The sickroom of Mr. Dashwood initiates the narrative about a widow with two daughters of marrying age, while it also introduces tensions among the Dashwood family. John Dashwood’s subsequent reasoning himself out of offering monetary assistance to the women negates the earlier power of the sickroom to inspire disinterested benevolence, even while the space of the sickroom maintains its role as narrative catalyst. Austen’s novel demonstrates the ways in which later authors attempted to adopt the narrative usefulness of the sickroom from sentimental women writers of the 1760s while remaining ambivalent towards the associations of that space with sensibility. Throughout *Sense and Sensibility*, the sickroom recurs as a space that serves to perpetuate the narrative, place sensibility on display, and provide a means by which to critique excessive sensibility.

Featuring the sickroom as a site of socialization, as a dynamic space of sentimental tableau, and as providing a premise for story and story-telling, feminist writers like Mary Wollstonecraft, Mary Hays, and Amelia Opie frame the sickroom as central to women’s experience and as a space that makes it possible to tell stories that expose women’s vulnerability to the system of laws and conventions that dictate behavior. Elizabeth Dolan argues that women writers of the Romantic-era commonly use a “physical, embodied mode of seeing” to represent illness, and “they invent narrative forms designed to make the social causes of suffering culturally visible.” Focusing on
Charlotte Smith and Mary Shelley along with Wollstonecraft, she explains that these writers experimented with narrative form to express connections between the individual experience of suffering and its social context, causes, or ramifications. Dolan’s work discovers a significant intersection between the individual suffering body and the critique of anemic social justice for women in Great Britain, and I would suggest that the sickroom is critical to the representation of this relationship. Using the space of the sickroom as a premise for stories that explore the precarious positions of widows and female orphans, Wollstonecraft and Opie simultaneously invoke the sentimental mode through the intertextuality of the sickroom and critique the values of sensibility, previously constitutive of virtue in female characters like Sidney Bidulph, as detrimental to women.

The sickroom’s intertextuality, therefore, complicates the critiques offered by these novels. In the sickroom, women portray the positive characteristics of a sensibility that inspires them to care for others and to rationally consider the consequences of their feelings. At the same time, the sickroom is a space where extreme sensibility can cause physical and mental illness and provoke rash, harmful decisions.

While Wollstonecraft’s unfinished Maria (1798) has received the most critical attention as a novel that connects confinement, mental disorders, and social injustice, Wollstonecraft’s earlier novel, Mary, A Fiction (1788), is a more revealing example in terms of the importance of the sickroom for radical novelists. The earliest sickroom in the novel is also one of the most fascinating and draws on the centrality of the sickroom to sentimental narratives about women. The protagonist, Mary, is called to her mother’s sickroom to be married there so that her mother can witness the marriage before dying.
In one moment within the sickroom, “The clergyman came in to read the service for the sick, and afterwards the marriage ceremony was performed” (26). The same day, Mary’s mother dies and her new teenage husband leaves for the continent to complete his studies. Although losing a mother that never really attended much to Mary nor cared about her education does not really alter Mary’s situation in life, gaining a new under-aged husband changes her situation drastically. The two events are combined in the sickroom as a space appropriate for staging significant life events and also as a somewhat sacred space where services are read, counsel and confessions are given, and blessings are pronounced.

The sickroom continues to be a driving narrative force throughout the novel, as Mary travels with her closest friend Ann to a hotel for invalids in Portugal. This hotel is essentially a house consisting of only sickrooms. Mary meets Henry there, and her affection for him is demonstrated by her increasing attention to his health and comfort while his is expressed in his sharing her grief at watching Ann’s health decline. At one point, Henry tells Mary, “I would give the world for your picture, with the expression I have seen in your face, when you have been supporting your friend” (48). Henry’s ideal image of Mary evokes the sickroom of earlier sentimental novels like Sidney Bidulph and Millenium Hall – a space fit for the display of beauty and suffering together. Henry’s favorite mental picture of Mary is not of her attending to himself (that would re-enforce in his mind that he is the sick one), nor is it of Mary serving tea, doing the honors of the table, or conversing with guests (typical domestic functions of married women which would remind Henry that she is not and cannot be his wife). His ideal image of Mary is of her supporting a sick friend, for whose illness she feels immense grief. Like many
sentimental heroes and readers before him, Henry ultimately desires to contemplate
uninterrupted an image of “virtue in distress.”

Later in the story, Mary enters another sickroom to help a sufferer – this time a
stranger who is poor and has many children. This sickroom disrupts Henry’s ideal image
of Mary as the suffering attendant on the sick, as she is exposed to and contracts a fever
from the woman to whom she attends (84). Henry’s ideal image of Mary, therefore,
places Mary in danger of much more severe physical suffering. Through Henry’s
evocation of the aesthetic pleasures of a woman in the sickroom, the sentimental
sickroom shapes Wollstonecraft’s story as a response to the sentimental tradition. Mary,
A Fiction exposes the real and extreme dangers of the sickroom for women, such as
contracting a fatal illness or accumulating obligations to strangers, and thus moves
beyond the sickroom’s association with displaying female fortitude in the face of
suffering, a mode so highly valued in the sentimental tradition.

In Mary Hays’s Victim of Prejudice (1799), the multiple sickrooms consistently
reveal the pitfalls of constructing sensibility as the single factor that constitutes female
virtue. In Hays’s novel, the sickroom functions as a central space by recurring at critical
moments, much as it did in the sentimental novels of a generation earlier. However,
Hays offers a critique of sensibility as an obstruction to sound reasoning and self-
sufficiency. In Hays’s sickrooms, sensibility verges on overcoming social prejudice
through disinterested benevolence. Because of his sensibility, William, the son of a
gentleman, bursts into Mary’s sickroom to beg her forgiveness, disobeying the orders of
adults who wish to discourage their unequal attachment. Yet, in these sickrooms,
sensibility always results in an outcome that is life-threatening or socially debilitating; the
result of William’s sentimental outburst is his contraction of scarlet fever, and at the conclusion of the novel, Mrs. Neville, Mary’s only remaining friend, makes a deathbed speech in which she blames her excessive sensibility for all of the mistaken decisions of her life and even for her impending death.

The sickroom appears again as a means of critique of sensibility in Amelia Opie’s *Adeline Mowbray* (1805). Adeline’s attendance on the chronically ill Glenmurray demonstrates her selfless fortitude and fidelity, constructing a definition of virtue that is independent of social convention. The plot and the politics of the novel depend on the ever-present sickroom which signals Glenmurray’s imminent death. The sickroom’s association with the sentimental mode troubles Adeline’s presence in that space. Earlier sentimental novels consistently used the sickroom to elaborate on the suffering of orphans, widows, and seduction victims. Although none of these situations precisely describes Adeline’s experience, in the course of the novel, her suffering is associated with the material realities of each of these states of female vulnerability. Fatherless and disowned by her mother, Adeline depends on Glenmurray for protection in a similar manner to Ophelia’s and Louisa’s dependence on men who are non-relations, placing her in the position of an orphan. Her co-habiting with Glenmurray additionally causes her to be viewed by the world as a kept mistress and by her friends and family as victim of seduction, being persuaded by Glenmurray to act against virtue. Finally, after Glenmurray’s death, Adeline’s grief at losing him as well as her destitution is as overwhelming as any widow as she begins to determine how she will support herself in his absence. In the novels of the 1760s, the sickroom makes it possible to represent these positions in new, sympathetic ways, but these novels ultimately do not imagine the
possibility of revolutionizing social and legal constraints that create the vulnerable situations that the heroines face. In later novels, the sickroom becomes a means for critiquing excessive sensibility by representing the complexity of women’s experience in these vulnerable social positions and by perpetuating narratives that explore potential outcomes for such women.

NOTES


2 In his study of 1790s Jacobin and Anti-Jacobin fiction, Gary Kelly identifies the imagery of the prison to represent society as confining and isolating the individual as a “carryover from the sentimental novel,” and he acknowledges that the first-person confessional narrative mode of the seventeenth century passed through early eighteenth-century fiction and into sentimental fiction before it appeared in 1790s’ Jacobin fiction. Eleanor Ty more specifically links the novels of women writers of the 1790s to the conventions of earlier sentimental novels, arguing the Jane West, Mary Robinson, and Amelia Opie employed images of female suffering to “further their own political purposes” through creating an “imaginative sympathetic response” in their readers. Here, I examine in detail how the sentimental conventions that these scholars acknowledge were dependent on the space of the sickroom as it was central to women’s sentimental novels. Gary Kelly, “Jane Austen and the English Novel of the 1790s,” in Fettr’d or Free? British Women Novelists, 1670-1815, ed. Mary Anne Schofield and Cecilia Macheski (Athens, OH: Ohio University Press, 1986), 286; Eleanor Ty, Empowering the Feminine: The Narratives of Mary Robinson, Jane West, and Amelia Opie, 1796-1812 (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1998), 13.


7 Claudia Johnson explores how sentimentality informs 1790s’ constructions of the relationship between politics and gender, acknowledging that the spectacle of suffering womanhood from sentimental writing of the 1760s and 1770s is an important motif in writing of the 1790s. The connection that she identifies between the two eras, however, depends most on how “sentimental novels presented us with sensitive men, men who shed tears.” My study of the sickroom, in contrast, reveals that women’s sentimental novels were more interested in female characters and women’s experience in the sickroom. Claudia Johnson, Equivocal
Ann Jessie Van Sant investigates sentimental fiction in relation to the scientific activity of gazing and considers several important sentimental spaces, actual and fictional, in which display and observation were commonly encouraged, including most notably hospitals for penitent prostitutes. In a similar vein, Markman Ellis’s examination of the inter-connection between the sentimental novel and contemporary political controversies surrounding anti-slavery and slavery reform opinion, the utility and economics of canals, and the movement for charity for the relief of penitent prostitutes leads him to consider how these debates were manifested in actual and fictional spaces. Lynn Festa explores the relationship between the sentimental mode in fiction, the treatment of colonized and/or disenfranchised populations in sentimental novels, and the larger practical and ideological processes of building an empire. Ann Jessie Van Sant, *Eighteenth-Century Sensibility and the Novel: The Senses in Social Contexts* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1993), 117; Markman Ellis, *The Politics of Sensibility: Race, Gender, and Commerce in the Sentimental Novel* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 4. Lynn Festa, *Sentimental Figures of Empire in Eighteenth-Century Britain and France* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2006), 2.

I use the term “dependent woman” to refer collectively to widows, orphans, and other female characters that lack the support and protection of a male relative, such as a husband, father, or brother. Actual women in such positions were rarely provided with their own means of support (although a few would have had their own fortunes or a substantial jointure), and in sentimental novels, widows, orphans, and other female characters usually must seek support or assistance from female relatives or total strangers.


See G.S. Rousseau’s “Literature and Medicine: State of the Field,” *Isis* LXXII (1981), for an overview of scholarship on this topic as well as a call for more work to be done, to which many have responded during the past three decades. Also, see Roy Porter, ed., *Patients and Practitioners: Lay Perceptions of Medicine in Pre-Industrial Society* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press,1985) and Roy Porter, *Bodies Politic*.


This passage of Burney’s journals first came to my attention through John Wiltshire’s article on the passage. Wiltshire argues that Burney conscientiously constructs a narrative about the illness and death of her husband in which she figures as a virtuous and passionately attached wife and most other persons figure as unfeeling professionals who do not care if her husband survives. John Wiltshire, “Love unto Death: Fanny Burney’s ‘Narrative of the Last Illness and Death of General d’Arblay’ (1820)” *Literature and Medicine* 12.2 (Fall 1993).

Virginia Cope investigates the relationship between recollection and education in Enlightenment concepts of self-identity, stating that “creative recollections become a form of intellectual property.” Ophelia’s experience in the sickroom falls under this framework: the process of recollecting the doctor’s expression of surprise creates new knowledge for her about propriety and social relations. Virginia Cope, *Property, Education, and Identity in Late Eighteenth-Century Fiction: The Heroine of Disinterest* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), 89-90.

Anne Patricia Williams argues that a tableau stops both the narrative and the action in order to create emphasis on emotion. Anne Patricia Williams, “Description and Tableau in the Eighteenth-Century British Sentimental Novel,” *Eighteenth-Century Fiction* 8.4 (1996): 465-484.


Adam Potkay shows that the classical understanding of “ethics” as encompassing a general project of living well or flourishing was central to eighteenth-century thought. I am adopting this concept to refer to the general benevolence, reason, and prosperity that shapes the women’s lives at Millenium Hall. Adam Potkay, *The Passion for Happiness: Samuel Johnson and David Hume* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2000).


Wandless argues that the collaborative narration of Mrs. Maynard and the gentleman narrator resolved the problem of how to place the secluded society on display for pedagogical purposes. Wandless, 262.

32 Todd, 8.

33 Dolan, 3.

34 Dolan, 14.
CONCLUSION

TOWARD A SPATIAL HISTORY OF LITERATURE 1660-1780

This dissertation has traced the intertextuality of space in eighteenth-century novels and their historical and cultural co-texts to show that novel genres coalesce around specific spaces. Re-organizing novel history around space produces an account of eighteenth-century novels that features a series of overlapping genres rather than the coherent development of a single genre. While conventional literary history, indebted to chronology and a narrative of progress toward the nineteenth-century realist novel, tends to offer accounts of the “rise of the novel” in this period, my spatial history offers a new formulation of novel history that illuminates the rise and fall of several novel genres as well as the proliferations, divergences, and borrowings among these distinct novel genres.

My dissertation, therefore, poses an intervention in literary history by acknowledging space as a critical component of eighteenth-century literature. Turning our attention to how space operates as a dynamic source of narrative rather than mere background setting opens new avenues of inquiry for scholarship not only in novel history, but also in eighteenth-century literature and culture more generally.1 Because my research indicates that specific novel genres were indebted to the narrative possibilities of particular spaces, I have kept the scope of this study limited to novels at the exclusion of drama and poetry. While I have attempted to work against a single chronological narrative of “the rise of novel,” I recognize that many novel genres were indeed new in
this period, and in fact, my argument depends on this view. Perhaps the very newness of novels allowed spaces, with all of their literary and cultural meanings, old and new, to play a formative role in the novelistic conventions that developed. In contrast, drama and poetry of the period were drawing on very old traditions that may have limited the free range of play that space could have in these genres.

Yet, my study of space in novels suggests that focusing on space throughout literature might produce new insight into the role of space in the other major literary genres. Studying other spaces, particularly public spaces such as theatres, the Exchange, streets, or parks, may prove critically significant to an account of drama and poetry. For the sake of offering some conjectures on a spatial history, however, I will limit my discussion to the spaces I have already examined in novels and to what these particular spaces may reveal about the other major genres. Four potential avenues of inquiry seem particularly ripe: the intertextuality of the garden demonstrates a space’s accumulation of meanings as it appears across the three major genres; treatments of domestic interior passageways and of urban space reveal lines of cross-genre influence; urban space illuminates the relationship between space and new shifts in the formal conventions of poetry and drama; and the sickroom’s strong association with sentimental novels reveals the potential for genre to limit spatial intertextuality.

The broad view of literary space during the eighteenth century suggests some general patterns, with periods of divergence as well as some overlap among novels, poetry, and drama. The garden has a long literary and cultural life in both religious and secular texts. Perhaps because of its long literary life, the garden is arguably the most common space across all three major genres in the eighteenth century. Even though
women novelists’ reshape its meaning in the period 1680 to 1730, its earlier resonances continue to inform its role in literature throughout the century. Meanwhile, the other spaces – interior domestic spaces, urban spaces, and sickrooms – seem to draw their literary significance from contemporary social and economic factors and, thus, their appearance in each genre fades during various periods.

In the Restoration period and the early decades of the eighteenth century, gardens appear consistently in poetry both as objects of description and as sites for action. In “A Nocturnal Reverie” (1713), Anne Finch, Countess of Winchilsea, provides a description of being outdoors at nightfall, detailing the sensory experiences of sounds, smells, and touch that are part of being in a garden at night. As in pious novels, like Rowe’s Friendship in Death (1728), the garden in Finch’s poem is associated with meditative calm, and this association is created through a detailed account of aspects of the garden that provide a quiet and calming space. In contrast, in Aphra Behn’s “The Disappointment” (1680), the garden is not described in much detail, and it serves as a site that not only permits, but encourages, seduction. The contrast between the two poems suggests that the idea of the garden as a site for seduction is commonplace enough that Behn needs very little detail to create this sense of the space, but Finch must use excessive detail and description to reshape the garden as a space of solitude and meditation.

In the early part of the eighteenth century, the garden, and outdoor green spaces more generally, arguably have the most elaborated literary life in the oeuvre of Alexander Pope. Although his well-known mock epics, The Rape of the Lock (1712) and The Dunciad (1728), feature urban space, much of his work draws on and contributes to the
symbolic and narrative power of the garden. However, while Pope’s use of gardens demonstrates an intertextuality of the space, it shows little cross-over of meaning among genres. Women’s novels reshaped the garden as it appeared in epic narratives, but Pope’s poetry demonstrates continuity with another type of seventeenth-century poetry – the country house poem. The poetic value of the garden as a symbol of prosperity, taste, and pleasure remains fairly static in Pope’s poetry.

In the latter half of the century, poems like Thomas Gray’s “Elegy Written in a Country Churchyard” (1751), Oliver Goldsmith’s *The Deserted Village* (1770), and most of William Cowper’s *The Task* (1785) tend to depend on country gardens, churchyards, landscapes, and other outdoor scenery as sources for descriptive meditations. While only one of these poems, *The Task*, features a domestic garden, they all use outdoor spaces as sites of solitude, spirituality, and contemplation, drawing on the garden’s intertextuality with women’s pious novels and poetry at the beginning of the century.

Another way to investigate space across genres would be to explore how a space’s accumulation of meaning through its association with a new genre, the phenomenon at the heart of this study, influences that space’s role in the other major genres. Staircases, hallways, and closets of the domestic interior are vital to the plots of Restoration comedies. These are the very same interior spaces that later emerge as central to courtship novels. These spaces in drama, however, lack the association with cross-rank interactions that dictates their role in courtship novels after 1740. William Wycherley’s *The Country Wife* (1675) unfolds primarily in London lodgings with details of front and back staircases, screens, and rooms with multiple doorways enabling the action of the play. Other Restoration comedies, including *The Man of Mode; or, Sir Fopling Flutter*
(1676) by George Etherege and *The Way of the World* (1700) by William Congreve, use the same architectural features – doorways, windows, double entrances, and closets – to reveal to the audience aspects of the characters’ relationships to each other, including primarily their social alliances and sexual liaisons. Although these domestic interior spaces eventually become the linchpins of courtship novels, within the Restoration comedies, they have little to do with cross-rank interactions. In contrast, courtship novels after 1740 use interior passageways, staircases, and closets both to mark characters’ positions within a social hierarchy and to forward the plot through enabling their interactions. Thus, courtship novels solidify new meanings for domestic interior passageways and reshape the appearance of these spaces in subsequent literary texts.

Similarly, the literary life of urban spaces that develops in the Restoration and early eighteenth century through poetry and drama ultimately influences its appearance in mid-century problem marriage novels. In turn, its centrality to those novels creates new meanings that the space carries back into the other major genres. Immediately after the Great Fire, poetic descriptions of London tended to praise the rebuilding of the city. John Dryden’s *Annum Mirabalis* (1673), which describes London rising anew from the ashes of the Great Fire, might be considered the beginning of the literary life of London that evolved over the course of the eighteenth century. By the 1700s, urban spaces appear regularly in both poetry and drama. Anne Finch contributes to the country/city divide that shapes many perspectives on English life throughout the century and that continually appears in literature. “*A Ballad to Mrs. Catherine Fleming in London from Malshanger Farm in Hampshire*” (1719) compares the noise and trouble of city streets to the calm of
the country, providing a detailed description of a county seat and the lifestyle of the residents.

The dramatic use of urban space in the early decades of the eighteenth century shapes the intertextuality of urban domestic interiors that informs their centrality in mid-century novels. John Gay’s *The Beggar’s Opera* (1728) alters the possible meanings of urban spaces through its sentimental treatment of criminality and corruption in the vicinity of Newgate. George Lillo’s *The London Merchant* (1731) similarly associates the urban domestic interior with temptations to vice. After problem marriage novels reshape urban spaces as central to questions of marriage, later drama continues to employ urban domestic space to portray troubled marriage. These later dramas often satirize both the husband and the wife in London marriages, rather than sentimentalizing the wife as the mid-century novels tended to do. In Richard Brinsley Sheridan’s *School for Scandal* (1777), one of the characters describes London as troublesome for his new marriage because of his wife’s indulgence in the extravagance and luxury available in the city. Here, London retains the associations with luxury and vice that can disrupt domestic harmony, but the roles are reversed and the wife, rather than the husband, is represented as seduced by vice.

A third way to approach an investigation of space in poetry and drama would be to mine what is new in these genres in the long eighteenth century and to ask what, if any, role does space play in that shift. The mock-forms of the eighteenth century are a ripe field for this type of exploration. Writers like Alexander Pope, Jonathan Swift, and John Gay crafted mock-epics, mock-Georgics, and even a mock-opera around urban spaces. Because epic, Georgic, and pastoral poetry conventionally featured natural green spaces
as well as realistic and mythological landscapes, the use of urban spaces by eighteenth-century writers results in a new genre that self-consciously exposes the contrived nature of those formal conventions. Pope’s *The Rape of the Lock* and *The Dunciad*, Swift’s “Description of a City Shower” (1710), and Gay’s *The Beggar’s Opera* all use urban spaces to support new mock-forms.

While most of the spaces that I have traced as central to novel genres appear to be significant for poetry and drama, the sickroom remains an anomaly. While illness, sincere or affected, does appear in these genres, the space of a patient’s rest and treatment is rarely addressed explicitly. Instead, a space might be considered itself sick or diseased, as in Swift’s “The Lady’s Dressing Room” (1732), or the idea of illness or a sickroom may stand in for another social, economic, or moral ailment. Pope’s “Epistle to Dr. Arbuthnot” (1735) begins with a command to shut the door in an effort to barricade the speaker against personal and professional attacks. The diction suggests that the speaker’s vulnerability to such attacks is a disease and that confinement is the only cure. While these and a few other isolated examples can be found, the sickroom does not seem to appear often enough as a central space in poetry and drama to justify making a broad claim for its literary significance in these genres. Its centrality to women’s sentimental novels specifically and to sentimental novels and later courtship novels in general is much more apparent. Perhaps the increasing exclusion of women from writing drama and poetry in the latter part of the century contributes to the limited intertextuality of the sickroom as it becomes associated with stories about dependent women.

By focusing on the intertextuality of space in literature, we can reformulate literary history to ask new questions about the formation of genre, the process of
influence, and the significance of historical and cultural co-texts. Conceiving of literary history as organized by the intertextuality of space, therefore, not only offers a new view of the history of novels, but offers original questions for the study of literature across genres and over time.

NOTES

1 A few studies have considered the representation of space in eighteenth-century drama and poetry, but the field lacks a fully developed theory of the intertextuality of space. Seventeenth-century country house poems have garnered much critical attention, and recently this body of scholarship has experienced a turn toward the relationship between spatial description and form and away from the psychological or symbolic function of space. Cynthia Wall offers an investigation of topographical space in literature, arguing that writers in Restoration and eighteenth-century London used poetry, non-fiction prose, and novels to help redefine the spaces of London after the 1660 fire. Raymond Williams traces treatments of the country/city divide throughout eighteenth-century literature, but reflects more on how these treatments shape ideological values associated with the country and the city rather than how those spaces structure literary genres. Heather Dubrow, “Guess Who’s Coming to Dinner? Reinterpreting Formalism and the Country House Poem,” *Reading for Form*, Eds. Susan J. Wolfson and Marshall Brown (Seattle, Washington: University of Washington Press, 2006) 80-98; Cynthia Wall, *The Literary and Cultural Spaces of Restoration London* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1998); Raymond Williams, *The Country and The City* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1973).

2 For example, *Windsor Forest* (1711) describes groves, forests, and shades in order to praise the Stuart monarchy, associating the landscape of Windsor with Queen Anne, and *Essay on Criticism* uses the symbolic power of the garden to comment on literary excellence.

3 The *Moral Essays*, in particular, employ descriptions of great estate gardens for the purpose of either praising or criticizing a well-known figure. In “Epistle to Burlington” (1731), a well-designed landscape garden represents the epitome of good taste and proper estate management.

4 Outdoor spaces are central to some drama of this period, particularly heroic dramas. While this consideration may be a promising avenue for future spatial histories of literature, I focus on comedies here in order to suggest the ways in which their use of indoor space develops the narrative possibilities that shape courtship novels after 1740.

5 Oliver Goldsmith’s *She Stoops to Conquer* (1773) plays on the association of the domestic interior with social hierarchy and exposes the instability of that hierarchy. Although the heroine is not actually of the serving rank, the hero’s mistake in thinking her home to be an inn hinges on qualities of that domestic space.
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