THE FEMINIZATION OF WIT:
SATIRE BY BRITISH WOMEN WRITERS, 1660-1800

DISSERTATION

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* * * * *

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INTRODUCTION

There is no critical tradition that approaches satire as a feminized mode of perception and creativity. Conventional views of satire do not posit gender as a factor in its construction. Although the proliferation of feminist scholarship during the last twenty-five years has drawn attention to satiric exploitation of female images in literature authored by men, we have not defined the generic features of satire as dependent upon, or expressions of masculine or feminine habits of mind. Rather, we have viewed the role of gender in satire and other literary forms as reflecting social conditions in which the work is produced. To discuss gender and its role in creativity as anything other than a product of competing discourses and cultural situations is to risk having one's argument denigrated for its essentialist premises.

There may be unoccupied territory between the premises of essentialism, which sees human difference originating in genetic factors, and the premises of historically focused readings of satire, which suggest that meanings are generated by the "multiform transactions" occurring among all constituents of a society at any given historical moment. For example, stereotypes may reflect both custom and genderized habits of mind. In satiric literature female traits may function as more than convenient metaphors of what is foolish or disgusting, or (occasionally) perfect. As well, they may be signifiers of different perceptual patterns and language uses marking male-authored work. Femaleness may be a convenient metaphorical construct for expressing

1
misogyny, and it may reveal ignorance of, or estrangement from certain aspects of shared human experience. Pope's Queen of Dulness, Swift's Celia, Johnson's Pekuah, Fielding's Mrs. Booby, and other renowned satiric portrayals of femaleness have as much to tell us about the author's readiness to see women as Other, as about satire's dependence on alogical signifiers.

We also commonly address the intersections between satiric accomplishment and a famous writer's affective state--Pope's tragic accident, Swift's madness, and Johnson's melancholy come to mind--yet we have not looked at gendered features of expressiveness in eighteenth-century satire. While we have learned to see satire as having unique status as an exploiter of the slipperiness of words--as being always a politicized act, and often an agent supporting misogyny--we have not considered whether satiric strategies have any relation to forces and energies we must designate as psychological. The slipperiness of satire in male-authored work includes a tendency to ignore or deny the power of gendered identity to influence meaning construction. This evasiveness is perhaps consistent with satire's always politicized projects, which rely on displacement of blame and distortion of fault in order to expose threats to existing values. Thus, noticing where male satirists' use of feminized metaphor makes gender a factor in satiric representation is crucial, but not sufficient. Given the ubiquity of despised femaleness in satiric metaphor, it seems appropriate to examine also how gender may serve epistemological functions in satiric creativity.
As Lacanian debates of such matters indicate, metaphor itself (by
which we construct stereotypes) and all verbal or social constructions
of gender may be signifiers of common developmental experiences in which
we advance from merged identity with a female figure towards individu-
ation, from undifferentiated habits of perception toward awareness of
contrast and contradiction. The earlier stage of our experience is
designated by French theorists as "semiotic." What I will be arguing
here is that satire relies on and expresses modes of perception that
remain semiotic. If so, it is not surprising that satire occupies a
marginalized place in taxonomies of literary form—as a mode, rather
than a fully legitimized genre, as a transgression of allegedly norma-
tive patterns of signification. Its evocations of linguistic chaos are
traces of the originary experiences from which we emerge to see the
world through gendered eyes. And it is easy, like St. Paul, to have a
strong desire to "put off childish things," to forget our continuing
relation to the phase of our personalized history in which our sub-
jectivity was dependent on maternal care.

Satire is thus a strong reminder of the psychological sources of
literary invention and of the feminized aspects of universal, develop-
mental experiences which we do not entirely discard. Our neglect of
this feature of satire's operations undoubtedly has many sources, but
one reason for denigrating and avoiding 'ahistorical' approaches to
literary works or genres may be a commonplace (culturally constructed?)
resistance to acknowledging maternal power. If 'growing up' into
healthy subjectivity depends upon being appropriately related to our
personal history and to the maternal care so crucial to our growth, the
literary products of our adulthood may, inevitably, reflect this process and its difficulties. If gendered subjectivity is a constant factor in all of our endeavors, it is plausible to assume that particular kinds of literary work may point more directly to gendered features of perceptual habits.

I will be arguing here that satire is a mode of literary expression that points quite obviously to the interdependence of early and late forms of subjectivity, to both symbolic and semiotic operations of language. Therefore, it provides greater opportunity to notice how allegedly masculine and feminine responses and ways of seeing the world pervade both men's and women's writing. This view of satire precludes my offering the following chapters as support for a claim that women's and men's satiric work should be judged differently. Rather, I suggest that women's satiric writing—a relatively neglected field—is particularly helpful in exposing the epistemological and perceptual assumptions of satire and the semiotic features of satiric expression.

Women satirists of the eighteenth-century often emphasize the gendered aspects of their point of view and sometimes address the gendered aspects of creativity itself. As a result, their satiric writings expose resemblances between cultural clichés of femaleness and the ubiquitous, 'feminized' uses of language characterizing all satire: its excesses and non-linear, emotionally grounded expressions. Satire affirms the chaotic dimension of life, at once ridiculing what is contrary to accepted values, yet reveling in verbal contradiction, words' powers to convey multiple meanings simultaneously. Here too there is a close link between femaleness and satiric form. Within and beyond the
margins of intellectual discourse, indeterminacy is often associated with women's habits of mind, then denigrated because of that association. Satire, like women, wears the garb of perversity, and by doing so underscores our dependence on idea structures that are at once categorical (ordinate and inordinate) and transcendent, surpassing neat categories of reality.

Satire's ostensible purpose is didactic, reformist. However, it insists upon our embrace of values that could only be believed and defended if the world were constituted by easily recognized good and evil, and if words were determinate, corresponding with reality in predictable ways. Although all language is referential enough to serve as an agency of communication, satire emphasizes its instability and unreliability. Satire's exploitations of the disorderliness of language point to the similar features of our perceptual habits. Satire, like all literature, is energized by multiple and contrary desires—to mock, expose, correct, suggest discontinuity, imply its own rectitude—largely because we see the world through the grid of inconsistent habits of mind. Our simultaneous desires are a form of incoherence and resemble semiotic experience: the place of denying or refusing existing boundaries; not seeing, or refusing the limits of personal identity or words.

In this respect, satire is very like l'écriture féminine—a term which French theorists apply to women's writing when it is liberated from obligations to linguistic and literary precedent. Of course, l'écriture féminine is a deliberate enterprise; its primary methods are exaggeration and excess, disruptions of logic, spontaneity, inconsistency, simultaneous meanings. By these means satire too finds ways of
validating desires that propriety does not allow, modes of awareness that seem excluded from and opposed to the privileged, more determinate functions of language. Such procedures reflect the insufficiency of ordinate signifiers. Their denigration may suggest alienation from pre-verbal, semiotic experience and the femaleness with which it is associated.

Satire's affinity with semiotic experience may be more prominent in the work of women satirists because their identity as women inevitably highlights satire's methodological links with femaleness: feminized metaphor, and linguistic performances which flaut the traits (see above) for which women are ridiculed. In other words, a woman's satiric work does not expose only prevailing ideas about femininity as she intrudes on a literary marketplace dominated by men, or uses conventions that have been established by men, designed to imply woman's exclusion from literary creativity. As a woman's writing emulates existing satiric conventions, her female identity draws attention to the feminized features of those conventions. It remains true that women write as 'outsiders', encroaching on intellectual activity presumed alien to them. Yet their writing, even when it seeks to conform, always asserts the differences of female identity and implies the universal female experience of being seen as an embodiment of what is indeterminate. By writing in spite of exclusion and by grasping at the authority implied by a satiric stance, they flaut the boundaries (laws, customs, literary precedents) that usually define and limit women's creativity. In turn, this accentuates the contradictions of a satirist's role--speaking for shared social values by attempting to
redefine them and by exposing their ineffectiveness; speaking from the place of authority (man's world) while using language and metaphor accenting the nature of femaleness.

This project examines women's writing in several genres because formal differences in the satiric works of women poets, playwrights and novelists do not overshadow their satiric enactments of semiotic modes of perception. Rather, satiric domination of generic differences in their work point more dramatically to satire's links with semiotic habits of mind. In my first chapter, I look at conventional ways of defining wit in eighteenth-century satire and at other critical approaches to the subject. My second chapter examines Centlivre's play, *The Busie Body* (1709), in which the heroine, Miranda, embodies satire's privileging of simultaneous desires. In the third chapter, which considers the work of several women poets, I show how conventional satiric displacement resembles the allegedly 'feminine' modes of consciousness that are used to rationalize women's inferior social rank--which these poets refuse. In my final chapter I demonstrate how repression of psychological experience makes Lennox's novel, *The Female Quixote* (1752), at once a conventional didactic work (a cautionary tale about female desire) and a satiric critique of English culture, focused on the social and personal costs of denying women's freedom.

While it remains appropriate to view eighteenth-century satire by men and women as expressing the period's concern with reason's importance in human conduct, women's satiric writing is preoccupied with personal desire and with social constraints on its expression. As such, their work refuses to serve as a compliant broker of patriarchal enter-
prise, and it affirms satire's role as a formal embodiment of what other modes of expression deny.
NOTES

1Throughout this study I will be using the word "satire" as if its most recognizable attributes were self-evident; these include, a critical stance, wit or humor manifest as ironic verbal and organizational devices, including sarcasm, and invective. I do not mean to suggest that satire is an ahistoric enterprise, or that its definition has not been contested (e.g., in Dryden's "Original and Progress of Satire," 1693). For convenience, I use the word to signify what Weinbrot calls "an omnibus definition" (The Formal Strain, 225), yet my argument contributes to our reconceptualizing satire, seeing it as an epistemological (as well as formal) structure which mirrors the habits of mind we have stereotyped as feminine.

2Brodhead, quoted in Levine, 26.

3While I refer to Kristeva's Lacanian hypothesis about "symbolic" and "semiotic" phases of developmental experience to explore subjectivity and satiric strategies in this project, my argument transcends dichotomies. Kristeva posits the divided mind of any speaking subject as constituted by seemingly opposed habits of mind and expression: namely, the semiotic desires and rhythms of the unconscious (associated with maternal, pre-Oedipal experience and with expressive femininity) and the symbolic functions of logic and aesthetic realization (associated with patriarchy and power). The phrase "divided subject" when used by French feminist theorists also implies the possibility of a bixsexual wholeness; Cixous, Irigaray, and Kristeva each assert the mixed nature of sexuality, tending to see human bisexuality or homosexual responsiveness to the presence of the internalized Other as a counterforce to phallocentrism. While the psychological paradigm to which I refer is oppositional, neither Lacan nor Kristeva views knowledge or speech as enacting a dynamic of simple gendered difference. Kristeva especially, describes the speaking subject--male or female--as continuously moving toward and away from psychic unity and stability, always expressing both semiotic and symbolic forms of perception. This is the feature of subjectivity I link with satire. Throughout this project when I refer to "semiotic modes of perception," I mean the capacity to see things as undifferentiated; the phrase, "semiotic modes of response" or "semiotic expression" refers to the influence of unconscious, or un-named desires on an author's work, and to their literary expression as linguistic or perceptual disorderliness. See Kristeva's "La Femme, ce n'est jamais ca," Tel Quel 59 (1974) 19-25; "Polylogue," trans. as "Polylogue (‘H’)," Contemporary Literature 19 (1978) 336-50; "Le Temps des femmes," trans. as "Women's Time," Signs 7 (1981) 13-35. For a broader approach to these ideas, see Kristeva's Desire in Language: A Semiotic Approach to Literature and Art, ed. Leon S. Roudiez.
CHAPTER I

TRADITIONAL AND NON-TRADITIONAL VIEWS OF EIGHTEENTH-CENTURY
ENGLISH SATIRE

Introduction

Prior to the political revival of feminism and the emergence of a feminist tradition of scholarship during the last quarter-century, critical studies of eighteenth-century English satire entirely excluded discussion of women's writing.¹ The most obvious sign of disregard occurs in the vocabulary by which traditional analysis of satiric texts and theories proceeds: terms such as, "Augustan," "Juvenalian," and "Menippean" refer to male models and to modes of interpretation which presume the satiric canon limited to men's work, which do not consider gender as an important factor in the act of reading or inventing literature.² The critical neglect of women writers of satire implicitly enhances male literary achievement, yet undermines the latter's historicity, by isolating it from the whole body of satiric writing and from genderized aspects of cultural life. An absence of women's texts in this field of scholarship and the concomitant absence of critical attention to women's writing until recently makes the history of satire incomplete.
In addition, by ignoring women's contributions to the eighteenth-century
canon and to satire--one of its dominant literary forms--men whose
scholarship has constituted eighteenth-century studies prior to the
rebirth of feminist discourse have used power in ways that complicate
our present work of defining the questions raised by women's early writ-
ing. Tania Modleski claims,

the most crucial factor in men's traditional disregard and
contempt for women's writings and women's modes of existence
[is] male power. This fact of power renders asymmetrical the
process by which men and women acquire competency to read one
another's texts and guarantees that the majority of men will
not gradually become 'appreciators' of women's texts, since
there is no compelling reason for them to begin to be inter-
ested in what women have to say (123; my emphasis).

Modleski implies that women's writing during any historic period
is not read or judged similarly by male and female readers. The pos-
sibility that existing social arrangements deny women and men full or
clear understanding of one another's work makes re-examination of our
notions of literary genre even more necessary. Added to the particular
omissions of women's work in the critical history and theorizing of
satire, our knowledge of women's differentiated status in eighteenth-
century culture supports the likelihood of their different relation to
what men have defined as the generic attributes of satire. And since
recent scholarship has not yet surveyed this field in earnest, women
satirists collectively are the embodiment of what we do not know about
literary satire.³ On the other hand, because their work is framed by
historic misrepresentations and theoretical gaps in our understanding of
satire, the way women use satiric method is the likeliest subject for
profitable rethinking of what makes satire a unique form of expression.
Specifically, women’s satirical work may represent what we have not explored about the psychosexual aspects of creativity pertinent to satiric writing. Guilhamet contends that satire’s "unifying qualities tend to be formal or structural rather than thematic, ethical, or psychological" (3). However, this view (not unique to Guilhamet) begs the question of whether literary form can be discussed adequately without examining the psychological factors shaping authorial and scholarly habits of mind which help to determine literary value. Gender is one of these factors, perhaps an originary influence on literary form; whether gender is a social construct or/and a biological force, it is the most universal constituent of human response, and therefore needs to be included in discussions of any literary form, historic pattern, or particular text. In this case, by ignoring women’s satiric literature critics have left unexamined the maleness of canonical satire. As well, until feminist eighteenth-century scholars redefined the field of inquiry, literary analysis focusing on politicized topics of eighteenth-century satiric literature generally ignored those aspects of political experience which determine women’s reality. Such limited intellectual proccupations are tacit arguments that public affairs are separable from or superior to gender: the personal or general psychological circumstances which determine identity and meaning.

Now that we have access to facsimiles, anthologies, and definitive editions of women’s literary work during the long eighteenth-century, it is possible to explore both theoretical and critical approaches to their satiric writings and other literary efforts. I use these resources to look at women’s particular satiric work and at the nature
of satiric performance--specifically, at satire's relation to habits of mind that have been associated with femaleness.

Canonical eighteenth-century satire and most interpretive approaches to it have presumed the satirist's embrace of an us/them mentality; however, we have not asked whether women's satiric work is always similar in perspective or method. John Sitter, a critic interested in the work of male writers and who writes about them persuasively, claims that eighteenth-century satire is grounded in a "shared language," even while it reflects a variety of intellectual positions ("About Wit, 138-9). However, the inferior social rank and education of eighteenth-century women writers prevent their full access to what Sitter calls the "ordering rhetoric" by which men of the period mediate reality (138). What women satiric writers share, linguistically, remains to be discovered. This is true, in part, because critical vocabularies for analyzing satire lack terms facilitating our appreciation of how the genre may use what have been designated as masculine and feminine habits of mind. (The issue of whether these habits are stereotypic formulations, or actual differences, remains unresolved; but it remains important to address gender as a factor in literary invention.) Therefore, although we have studied the way male satirists exploit linguistic indeterminacy, we have not looked at the oppositional premises of their literary work as related potentially to their sex.

In other words, my focus on the importance of genderized psychological content in eighteenth-century literary work does not participate in a critical tradition legitimizing this effort. However, the drama, poetry, and fiction explored in my next three chapters
demonstrate that women's texts force our notice of such content, partly because women satirists transvalue language and literary conventions that are misogynist. Such resistance to received ideas and "orderly" modes of thought is typical of all satiric work; still, in women's satiric literature persistent focus on the way gender shapes perception underscores the blank places in our theorizing about satire. When linguistic and ideological 'transgressions' occur in women's writing the radical, subversive functions of satire (in relation to existing epistemologies and existing social values) are more clearly seen. Women writers' marginalized relation to society and to literary tradition is a reminder that satire's relation to social structures, language, and creative method is peculiarly distanced and self-aware. In this respect, it is a literary product which, like the presence of a woman in a room of men, insists on our attention to social and psychological realities. I am arguing that the peculiar marriage of oppositional thought and linguistic ambiguity in eighteenth-century satire points to a conceptual paradigm in satire's operations which generally echoes the male-female split in ways of thinking about human nature. This is not to affirm—as stereotypes would have it—that men differentiate and women equivocate, but that satire is a literary form in which linear (allegedly male) and alogical (female) modes of perception and expression collaborate to produce a profoundly skeptical text.

My methodology reflects these paradoxes; like satire, it rejects some of what it seems to approve. I assume difference in order to expose its conceptual limits. My account of the unique features of women's satiric praxis assumes the usefulness (or the ubiquity) of a
binary model for explaining difference. Women satirists do the same, especially when they address inequalities of power and the social injustices or personal frustrations which are the latter's consequence. At the same time, I am exploring the limitations of an oppositional perceptual scheme by noticing how both women's writing and satire resist it. In other words, the question addressed by this dissertation--"What are the characteristics of satiric writings produced by women writers of the eighteenth-century"--is focused on how women use linguistic/conceptual paradigms and literary traditions usually marked by misogyny, the privileging of oppositional thought, and denigration of alogical procedures. As women writers of the period subvert misogynist premises of the literary traditions they inherit, their work foregrounds how satiric thought resists binary constructions of reality that seem to 'justify' its projections of fear or anger. Women's satiric writing also reveals how satire exploits both masculine and feminine modes of discourse and transcends their implied, gendered limits.

Not surprisingly, my account of women's satiric writing during the eighteenth-century will at times replicate their creative methods; it will be marked by disruptions and ellipses at least as often as it appears linear, authoritative, and unified. Some of these maneuvers typify satire, as such; some, as women writers use them, characterize their special, gender-determined literary predicament or procedures. I too seek to locate meaning in a feminine cognitive geography which, like women's pleasure, is "diverse, multiple in its differences, complex, subtle" and incompatible with habits of mind that are "too strictly centered" (Irigaray, quoted in Suleiman, 49).
Discriminatory Uses of Wit in Eighteenth-Century England

Exclusivity Neither writers of the Restoration and eighteenth-century, nor their critics limit the term "wit" to one static definition, although by the late 1600's it was used commonly to signify our general powers of reasoning, the intellectual faculties shared by all people. Still, literary references to the word during this period often stress the idea that wit is a sign of superior mental powers. As such, wit refers generally to mental agility and fluent expression of ideas, most valued when it is expressed as satiric cleverness.

It is important too that in critical or philosophical discussions, seventeenth and eighteenth-century thinkers discuss wit as if its primary meanings were ahistorical: as if conceptual and verbal agility were natural accidents subject to improvement by personal effort. Endorsing Locke's theories about cognition (wit, in Locke's view, being the ability to notice comparisons, or to assemble related ideas quickly), many men of the period stress the importance of judgment as a component of wit. Addison devotes six Spectator essays (nos. 58-63) to probing wit's nuances and explaining differences between "true Wit [which] consists in the resemblance of Ideas, and false Wit [consisting] in the Resemblance of Words" (No. 62, par. 4). Davenant's notion of wit as "dexterity of thought," Hume's equation of wit with good taste, or the skill of pleasing a listener, and Dryden's insistence that wit is "propriety of thought and words" imply that a wit is evidence of a personal superiority that sets a man apart from others.
Addison, Pope, Locke, Dryden and others writing in the early decades of the period discuss literary wit as a habit of mind or cognitive talent, without acknowledging that the generic "mind" being explored is identical with their particular, shared intellectual experience, or that their theories apply only to a limited number of fortunate people. In fact, "propriety," "taste," "skill," and "judgment" were commonly viewed as attributes of society's elite—men who enjoyed superior education, social rank, and prominence. Used this way, without open acknowledgment of the word’s relation to social rank, "wit" becomes a shibboleth, a self-aggrandizing performance which slyly perpetuates class bias and hierarchies. The common eighteenth-century practice of using "wit" as a correlative noun makes it discriminatory uses obvious. As in heroic, epic literature, an attribute becomes an epithet: men capable of wit are called 'wits'; those who lack the title are thereby demeaned.

**Competition** In other words, wit’s intellectual role in eighteenth-century English thought is complemented by its social and political uses, although the opinion-makers just mentioned discuss its meanings as if wit were an innate quality, not derived from social privilege. Yet, in spite of belief in wit as proof of a man’s ability to be original, most writers of the period who enjoy reputation for wit embrace imitation as the most appropriate path to literary success. Their work relies on already existing models of satiric poetry or prose. This apparent contradiction underscores the privileging functions of wit in another way. Our generic expectations of satire are strongly defined by eighteenth-century literature which is, in turn,
strongly determined by male psychological response to dead literary
idols. Both satire's importance and its makers' reputations derive
from association with previously legitimized literature, much as blood
line determines men's social rank. The English educational system which
valorized classical writers bestowed on such precursors the power to
generate "anxiety of influence" in their privileged eighteenth-century
imitators—which helped shape notions of wit as the ability to imitate
earlier literary examples of irony or rage.

Traditional readings of Restoration and eighteenth-century satire
often highlight its imitative urges, particularly its ties with English
Renaissance interest in the Latin verse satires of Horace, Persius,
Juvenal, and other Roman writers. Of course, neither satirists nor
their critics have viewed literary imitation pejoratively; rather, as
the critical work of Elkin, Gallaway, Weinbrot, and others demonstrates,
eighteenth-century Englishmen saw literary imitation as their spur to
achievement, as well as a tribute to the literary achievement of their
intellectual forefathers. Still, the same writers reveal a desire to
use established genres to display their personal talents or national
distinctiveness. For example, in Book I of The Dunciad (1728) Pope
makes it very clear that his own inventive use of satire is the standard
by which dulness should be judged (Ingram, 144). Thus, when we acknowl-
dge that Donne, Marston, Jonson, and later Butler, Rochester, Dryden,
Pope, Swift, Johnson and their contemporaries were trying their hand at
a literary form having a priori value, we point to the spirit of rivalry
pervading their efforts.
Imitation is more than purposeful construction of similarity with older literature; because it derives from awareness of difference between past and present, foreignness and native culture, ideals and opportunity, it displays its author’s sense of self as a result of contrast. Imitation suggests that what is ‘other’ may be appropriated, that personal identity or literary form may not be stable. The cultural Renaissance in Europe and England assigned value to the ‘otherness’ of Greek and then Roman aesthetic norms. This idealization of classical literature is an historic event, but related to human desire for standards by which identity can be measured, as well as to discovery of ancient manuscripts and their distribution.

English satire may also valorize ancient literary forms because of an urge to deprecate predecessors not long dead— as if a writer’s temporal and cultural closeness blocked appreciation or pointed too obviously at the competitive features of existing literary values. English literary tradition prior to the Restoration seemed to many writers of the eighteenth-century an incomplete and inferior prototype for their efforts. Chaucer, for example, was re-examined more generously only after Dryden’s praise in the preface to his Fables, Ancient and Modern (1700); Milton’s greatest work was not yet widely esteemed; and neither Shakespeare’s drama nor metaphysical English literature enjoyed the prestige of continental literary works or ancient literature. Sometimes, recent English writings could serve as examples of literary achievement worth copying, as Pope’s adaptation of Dryden’s Mac Flecknoe in the original Dunciad (1728) illustrates. However, ancient writers conveyed the prestige of their entire civilizations; literary
forms such as epic were esteemed in part because they represented a way of life seen as both noble and coherent. Moreover, as representative of a dead, changeless culture (seen nostalgically from the vantage of rapidly changing English society), Homer, Virgil, and their peers loomed as champions whose record inspired a competitive response which might be directed against non-English culture. An English writer contending with Ovid's or Virgil's fame measured his ability against intellectual forefathers whose cultural distance made the challenge less ungrateful than raising one's lance against English writers of the recent past. At the same time, because classical writers were far removed in time and place, such competitive acts of emulation or imitation could be masked as tributes to ancient glories.

Dryden is a good example of how brilliant satire and literary criticism are associated with competitive impulse; he typifies English writers' concern with their nation's intellectual stature, as well as their own reputations. The elegance of English wit that Eugenius describes (Essay Upon Dramatic Poesy, 1668) as superior to ancient models, or the wit illustrated by Dryden's "nimble spaniel" in the preface to Annum Mirabilis (1667) indicate that after ancient literary forms were adequately translated, they were not simply adapted to contemporary language and situation, but revised to highlight avowed English virtues of literary expression.

Honoring literary values that are located in the past also facilitates critique of contemporary rivals. That authorial identity is at stake in literary imitation and that imitation is energized by desires to honor tradition and surpass it can be seen too in the jealousy and
discord marking English writers' criticism of one another during this period. One sign of the trend is Pope's ironic treatment in "Peri Bathous" (1728) of Grub-street writers' reliance on a "Rhetorical Cabinet" of trite topics and epithets. Like Swift's work, Pope's satire often takes the form of mock advice and usually ridicules his subject by implying his own superior intellectual abilities. Rivalry also pervades the conflicted nature of English attitudes about French literary culture. When Dryden makes poetic doctrine borrowed from the ancients a foundation of his own work, it is to challenge and surpass the prestige of contemporary French critics such as Boileau and Dacier and to construct an authoritative, English voice for literary criticism and for satiric invention.

Satiric writings in the journalistic press--topical poems and essays such as Dryden's "Absalom and Achitophel," (1681) or Swift's ironic defense of his religion and the Test Act in "An Argument Against the Abolishing of Christianity in England" (1708) are additional evidence of wit's service to national pride and civic responsibility. Such writings also illustrate how satire nourishes hostility while seeming to help resolve social issues. England's various national crises during the period I am discussing contribute to literary fashions which discredit and thereby disempower individuals or groups who challenge existing values--such as, the importance of inherited property or intellectual wealth. Although consequences of the execution of Charles I in 1649 account for much political instability in English culture during the following hundred years, the English sense of being threatened from within takes numerous forms. Satiric literature of the period
addresses social and religious rivalries, the challenges to received ideas posed by skeptics such as Butler and Hobbes, the empirical theories of Locke, and many more localized political issues.

As a response to rapid or pervasive historic change, satire may seem a plea for virtue, moderation, and tolerance—Swift's Houyhnhnms and Johnson's Imlac come to mind. Nevertheless, satire's inevitable effect is further polarization of the society it rebukes.

The major feature of Augustan satire was its development of a...rhetoric which reflected its total cultural domination and its successful exclusion of the emerging bourgeoisie from elite status. Those writers (Settle, Shadwell, Behn) who were important voices in the new middle-class culture became the "dunces" of Augustan satire (Selden, 74).18

Such politicizing of satiric hostility may be masked by putative interest in reform, or in the aesthetic pleasure of linguistic manipulations, but the aggressive uses of satire in relation to present crises and its self-serving adaptation of literary traditions reveal that satire's competitive impulses emerge from belief in a dichotomized world. In other words, the greatness of eighteenth-century English satire owes as much to self-aggrandizement and to competitive aggression, as it does to formal precedent.

The idea of wit as a voice supporting established values by criticizing transgression—which is how critics often discuss satire—downplay the adversarial uses of it in eighteenth-century English culture.19 Wit is always implicitly oppositional because it serves our desire to classify and segregate people, and is a means by which someone's worth and identity is established by contrast with others who lack similar attributes. More specifically, wit is satiric (critical)
because it differentiates the possessor of wit from his less witty subject and sometimes from his audience. While wit's spectators may be flattered by association with ironic superiority, they remain vulnerable to its barbs. Elkin observes that for eighteenth-century Englishmen satire was "part of the hurly-burly of their lives: from the mid seventeenth century, [it was]...increasingly a favourite weapon for both public controversy and private slander" (5).

Of course, if we accept the most common definition of satire as a creative mode of attack, then it is not correct to point to the aggressive uses of wit in eighteenth-century culture as typical of men's literary efforts and not present in women's satiric work. Works by both men and women satirists are grounded in an oppositional epistemology, and their resemblance points to satire's underlying skepticism about all modes of knowing. Its primary aggressiveness or hostility is directed (indirectly) at the idea of certainty. Nonetheless, women satirists tend to represent the problem of certainty as important because related to issues of personal freedom—particularly women's lack of legal, creative, and social freedom. Whatever their apparent subject matter, men satirists of the period tend to use wit to sustain the author's cachet, his identification with an influential, elite group (or one striving for pre-eminence) and with its political agenda. Lacking opportunity to belong to an elite group, women satirists emphasize wit's critical uses, but with less self-aggrandizement.

Thus, wit's powers to confer prestige differ for men and women. Not only are male-authored satires the works by which English satire has been defined, but the male audience implied by such works and by their
critics enjoys the privilege of being normative. Sterne’s idealized reader is a man whose intellectual acuity and enjoyment of his masculinity generates an implied camaraderie with Sterne’s narrator. Lennox’s overtly implied reader is a female who is needy and probably weak, requiring warning about the dangers of French Romance; her covert reader—the one who notices that Lennox’s use of anti-Romance is ironic, masking her strong protofeminist critique of English culture—cannot be acknowledged by Lennox because women’s enjoyment of a wit focused on male culpability is not as acceptable in 1752 as it was in Aphra Behn’s time. Of course, any reader’s pleasure in wit may be paid for with cynicism. As Bredvold remarks about Samuel Butler, the satirist does not help any man [sic] “love his species” (17).

Satire’s Exploitation of Femaleness Nonetheless, most eighteenth-century male satirists encourage their audience to be particularly distrustful of women. Satires written by men during all historic periods have contributed to male privilege by equating femaleness with human weaknesses which are not associated with gender when the satiric object is male. Pejorative metaphors of femaleness in canonical eighteenth-century satire need revaluation in this light. Where femaleness is portrayed in male-authored texts by accusation, inuendo, and figurative language as the non-logical, helpless, repulsive, or inscrutable aspects of human nature, such uses expose the principles of competitive differentiation and displacement of blame energizing satire. As we see woman represented in Rochester’s Phyllis ("Song," 1680), Prior’s Cloe ("A Better Answer," 1718), Swift’s Celia ("The Progress of Beauty," 1719), Fielding’s Lady Booby and Mrs. Slipslop (Joseph Andrews, 1742)
Johnson’s Pekuah (Rasselas, 1759), and Sheridan’s Lady Sneerwell (The School for Scandal, 1777) she is either pitiable or despicable, rather than a fully human figure.  

Swift is a good example of the complex motives and contradictory literary expressions of men’s views of women during the eighteenth-century. While he often equates femaleness with what is repulsive (as in the poem above and in Gulliver’s Travels, 1726), he also resists the tradition he exploits (as in "Cadenus and Vanessa," 1726). Battestin argues that Swift rejects many of the ideals and aesthetic assumptions of Augustan poetry, with its valorization of Art as imitation of the feminized la belle Nature, but while Swift may resist the period’s feminization of Nature (which implicitly locates woman beyond human actuality and denies her moral responsibility), he still makes female figures the agency of his scorn for Art’s effort to mask human corruption. Celia’s stinking chamber-pot and disguised physical imperfections ("The Lady’s Dressing Room," 1730) illustrate the misogyny latent in Swift’s scatological vision, as well as his equivocal attitude about vain men who believe themselves better than Celia.  

Readers reluctant to notice the misogynist aspects of satiric tradition commonly offer as rebuttal the fact that satire exempts no one from its glare. Obviously, men’s foibles are exposed by it too. However, while particular men and generically male ‘humanity’ are frequently satirized in in male-authored literature of the period, satiric scorn directed at man collectively or at individual men attacks behavior without suggesting that the satiric object’s sexual identity is an innate cause of his stupidity or vice. Men as sexually identified
beings are not represented as incapable of better behavior. Perhaps excepting Swift's Yahoos (even there, female Yahoos are more repugnant than males), satirized men are contrasted with men who typify the sex's potential goodness and its strengths. Thus, men who are the butt of satiric jokes are to some extent feminized, and this makes the trope of female fault an ironically powerful literary agency. Stereotypic images of femaleness are used to denounce both women and men.

Conversely, heroines usually named as admirable females in the period's canonized satiric literature (Richardson's Clarissa, Fielding's Fanny, or Sophia, Pope's Belinda, Johnson's Nekayah) remain figures whose virtues are inseparable from their vulnerabilities—whose admirable qualities, in fact, are constituted by their acceptance of a dependent role. In this light, satire's formal counterparts (didacticism, sentimentalism) achieve a similar critique of femaleness, even as they appear to sympathize with it. While satire shows us men's sexual temptations, neither men's foibles or moral culpability nor men's virtues are represented as caused by their sexual identity, as such. However, the venial, stupid, lustful, and cruel behavior of female characters in male-authored satires are often attributed to their femaleness. Celia's and Belinda's vanity, or The Queen of Dulness' destructive powers are presented as a feminine trait.

This feature of satiric competition during the eighteenth-century and in other periods merits a closer look. As Eve Sedgwick explains, woman is not a human identity in misogynist literary representations, but the means by which men relate to one another as enemies or friends. 26 Femaleness as a satiric trope of inadequacy is the linchpin
of an important conceptual and social triangulation, in which a male author and the men he posits as his real audience comprise two alternate locations of agreed-upon truth, while "she" (or the bodily grossness associated with femaleness) signifies falseness or error. The faults being assigned to woman take on an intensified ugliness by being located elsewhere than the male self, and, in circular fashion, they appear proof of the difference (male superiority) which man's desire invents and by which he confirms his solidarity with other men. Ironically, the inadequacy ascribed to femaleness in male thought and expressed by satiric metaphor is an idea that is as tenuous as any other in a literary form where all is uncertain. Satire's reliance upon metaphors of femaleness and upon all metaphoric language exposes the purely strategic nature of satiric oppositions. In such cases, satire's misogyny has an epistemological function which backfires, undermining the credibility of a satiric work's implicit argument about a dichotomized world in which right and wrong have identifiable location or predictable existence.

Women's Troubled Relation to Wit

Where it occurs, this pattern of misogynist displacement of human weakness onto woman's nature is a strong indicator of the differentiating principles by which human knowledge is constructed. Literary constructions of woman's otherness signal a desire by men to know the self as different and to project outward what they do not wish to acknowledge about themselves. Women writers at times manifest the same urge to avoid self-knowledge, but their status as the inferior sex makes the
habit of evasion a feature of their individual experience, rather than a pervasive literary paradigm. Their *à priori* reputation as embodiments of weakness and error sustains their relative powerlessness in society and within the literary marketplace; thus, it is not surprising that women's wit lacks a consistent, metaphoric strategy for criticising men. Unlike the latter, they possess no linguistic traditions that support political and social arrangements benefitting their entire sex. Rather, as women confront despised images of themselves in language, they learn to internalize the faults being displaced from male accountability and ascribed to their femaleness; they learn to define themselves as an embodiment of humanity's troubles.

Since a woman satirist's work is not supported by precedent or by the existing social values which validate a man's satiric efforts, the features and effects of women's wit during the Restoration and eighteenth-century employ are unique, as well as typical of generic satiric procedure. First, women satirists write as outsiders; they imply different, more qualified authority for their narrative voice. Specifically, women's regular exclusion from intellectual enterprise and their more limited opportunities to publish satiric work limit their chances of acquiring identity as 'wits'. These factors are strong constraints on their wit when it does find a public hearing. Being presumed incapable of wit does not foster its development, and being persuaded that wit in a "lady" is despicable tends to censor a woman's participation in satiric literary endeavor. Women who embrace the role of writer, or of 'wit', during the long eighteenth-century inscribe their work with defensiveness, often using confessed doubt regarding the
worth of their talent as a strategy to make the reader more friendly to a woman writer.

Usually lacking formal learning and urged to be private, modest, innocent, and quiet, the relatively few bourgeois or aristocratic Englishwomen of the period who attempt literary wit often frame their work apologetically. Fanny Burney's complexly ironic apologies to the editors of The Monthly and Critical Reviews in her Dedication of Evelina (1778) is one glaring example of how difficult it is for eighteenth-century women to assert themselves intellectually and artistically in a society persuaded of female defects and the moral inappropriateness of woman's public speech. Katherine Philips protests in 1702 that she would "never be able to show my face again" if she acknowledged having translated Corneille's Pompey, or if she published it (Spender, 25). Elizabeth Singer Rowe confesses ruefully in 1728, "I know that I should let Dryden and Otway lie stupidly by me [while I] spend an hour in reading a sermon" ("To BELINDA," 22). Likewise, Elizabeth Rowe and Mary Chudleigh, possessing obvious literary gifts and ambition, nevertheless view their satiric talents as inordinate or blocked by social constraint. 29

For women writers of the period, the economic and social value of respectability is generally incompatible with and aggressive, intellectual self-assertion. Those, like the "matchless Orinda" who earn literary praise, often achieve fame by dying too young, or, like Burney, by seeming to echo what men already believe about women's natures and social roles. 30 Those who desire to be known as wits equal to men and writing with similar freedom--Behn, Pix, Haywood, Manley,
Inchbald—risk being identified as immoral women and treated as such. But whether they are obedient daughters or objects of scorn, eighteenth-century women are denied full subjectivity as makers of wit and as social critics. Johnson’s famous remark about the absurdity of women’s desire to write being like the dog who walks on hind-feet may be more typical of his views and his compatriots’ than his generous support of Lennox and Burney. Women wits who succeed are viewed as exceptions to their sex’s general incapacity. Still, women’s limited access to fame, fair critical assessment, or blanket approval of their writing efforts does not extinguish female wit, although, as in Burney’s case, it is often submerged in heavy compliance with men’s views of woman’s nature and role.

Second, women of the period are implicitly discouraged from aspiring to the role of ‘wit’ by literary conventions which focus elsewhere than on the concerns of women’s lives. Male-authored satire often addresses social controversies in which women play no controlling part. The king’s competence, his ministers’ venality, the relative worth of ancient and modern books, the prevalence of greed, injustice, and other vices, are important topics in eighteenth-century satire, but ones for which women’s opinion is not sought or valued. This is not to say that women have no opinion about such matters, or that their lives are not influenced by such things; rather, satire’s focus on the social importance of rectitude and women’s exclusion from the arena of public debate make satiric writing an enterprise concerned with matters which women have little or not power to influence. As a literary form which gives
domestic or private experience import only as they affect general, social welfare satire implicitly devalues women's concerns.

Having little credibility as wits and seeing their nature and identity represented as absurd, repulsive, or (as Eve's daughters) blamable for human suffering, eighteenth-century women find their role as appreciators of satire also devalued. On any occasion when femaleness is used as trope for what man's wit defines as gross or ridiculous, women in the audience are deprived of the pleasures of vicarious superiority which satire confers upon those who witness its attack. Such enjoyment is possible for women only if they embrace men's view of them as it is embodied in misogynist metaphor. Doing so, they deny their own value and habits of mind, and such complicity helps make their literary wit a misrepresentation of their intellectual talents. Clara Reeve's denunciation (in The Progress of Romance, 1785) of sexual content in work by Behn, Manley and Haywood is an example of how women who are educated and intellectually astute still glibly repeat the standard male view of women's alleged carnality. Reeve's breadth of historicized literary knowledge does not prevent her embrace of men's judgments of Behn, etc. as demonic women who wrote bad books (Jones, 184-6).

Unfortunately, women's readiness to enjoy satire at their own expense (especially when the wit has sexualized content, which risks their reputation for respectable femininity), only reinforces their inferior position in the society at large or in literate company. A worse identity as "lewd" females is bestowed by male critics on exceptional women of the Restoration who participate in the creation of
satire as actresses or playwrights, but women writers throughout the eighteenth-century have difficulty publishing their work unless it pleases men. In the creative arena where they intrude, what is "lewd" in women is viewed as "morally emancipated" in men (Bredvold, 28), and what is wit in male satiric invention is proof of woman's untrustworthiness in theirs.

Aphra Behn--the first Englishwoman to earn public recognition for literary wit--boldly argues against such prejudice in the appendages of her plays, most plainly in the epilogue to Sir Patient Fancy (1678):

I here and there o'erheard a Coxcomb cry,
Ah, Rot it--'tis a Woman's Comedy...

What has poor Woman done, that she must be Debar'd from Sense, and sacred Poetry?
Why in this Age has Heaven allow'd you more, And Woman less of Wit than heretofore?
We once were fam'd in story, and could write Equal to Men; cou'd govern, nay, cou'd fight. We still have passive Valour, and can show, Wou'd Custom give us leave, the active too, Since we no provocations want from you....

We'll let you see, whate'er besides we do, How artfully we copy some of you: And if you're drawn to th' Life, pray tell me then, Why women should not write as well as Men.33

Thus, women who write satirically remain handicapped by their lack of wit's idealized prerequisites: learned, aristocratic masculinity. Not having the social credentials is equivalent to not having the talent. As a result, their literary efforts are regularly ignored or ridiculed by male critics; and the protofeminist aspects of their wit often remain overlooked.

A Different View of Wit
Behn’s complaint may be our earliest example of a writer’s appeal to include women writers in a discussion of Restoration and eighteenth-century satiric literature and to expand the meaning of "wit." Her work and other women’s inventive, satiric writings not only disprove the claim that women have weak minds; their wits’ protofeminist features also suggest that the deliberate exclusivity of satiric enterprise is not an inevitable product of historic circumstance, but that both wit (and all literary form) and social arrangements owe their nature to male desire and habits of perception. What the remaining chapters of this dissertation will demonstrate is that women’s wit embraces and trans-values literary conventions inherited from men, and exposes the psychological dimensions of all satiric language.

Using wit to express their talents, their hope for recognition, and grievances, women satirists feminize the genre--by association and by drawing attention to the ways wit is not, inherently, a masculine endeavor. Rather, by appropriating the role of ‘wit’, eighteenth-century women satirists accentuate wit’s ambiguous relation to knowledge and identity: its tropes of devalued femininity, its fascination with unsavory and sexualized vice, its exploitations of linguistic ambiguity. That is, by being women writers they underscore wit’s reliance on femaleness, not just as a trope, but also as a conceptual pattern.

The feminized features of satiric procedure remain unexplored, but the abundance of misogynist metaphors in satire are a clear signal of wit’s participation in what it denigrates. For example, when Locke associates the word "Judgment" with reasoned, discriminating thought and literal language, he explains Wit as "Eloquence":
[the] artificial and figurative application of Words...invented...for nothing else but to insinuate wrong Ideas, move the Passions, and thereby mislead the Judgment.... Eloquence, like the fair Sex, has too prevailing Beauties in it to suffer itself ever to be spoken against. And 'tis vain to find fault with those Arts of Deceiving, wherein Men find pleasure to be Deceived (An Essay Concerning Human Understanding, 3.10.34). 34

In Locke's view, wit is suspect by being like the "fair sex"; the feminized aspects of "Eloquence" prove it an inferior verbal gift. His remark points to contradictions between satire's reputation as conceptual and verbal agility and its darker reputation as a deceptive form of literary expression, the enemy of truth. 35

Women wits expose such contradictions by noticing the self-serving features of male satire. That is, they challenge the veracity of literary form and the philosophic ideas supporting it by displacing images of hypothetical, corrupt femaleness with their own ways of seeing and representing female experience. Their transgression of male satirc tradition is proof that satire as an expressive mode has no necessary subject. This, in turn points to the politicized features of definitions of satire and its conventions. Feminizing the mode by their use of it--demeaning its cachet, pointing to satire's conventional associations with what is low or despicable--women writers of satire demonstrate that satire's elegant superiority is only a mask, a device, only a formal consensus achieved by men which serves their competitiveness. Women, allegedly inferior beings, are capable of using every known satiric strategy to undermine the ideas advanced by men's writing--which suggests that satire cannot reveal truth, but only its author's desire. Women satirists' protofeminist subtexts are, as well,
an important sign of changing social circumstances for women in eighteenth-century England. But their work's theoretical import has received less attention.

In each literary form examined here (plays, poems, and fiction) women satirists demonstrate that the vantage from which they see folly or wrongdoing and on which they build an authoritative, critical voice is off-center. That is, women's literary personae can only stand where women do: lower than, apart from, alongside men, but not in men's shoes. Because her social status is inferior, when a woman satirist employs an arrogant voice, or a tone of sophisticated wit, her self-awareness as a critic of society or persons includes awareness of her tenuous position of author/ity. If male-authored satire is one step removed from self-disclosure, women's literary wit remains slightly diffident. Women satirists regularly alude to their subordinate social rank, to their intellectual exclusion, and to the strength of biased and prescriptive ideas about womanhood and women's inventiveness. This too is a critical window of opportunity to notice satire's relation to knowledge. In women's satiric writing, where femaleness is accorded fully human subjectivity, or where stereotypic notions of gender are challenged, or where the language of wit appeals to non-oppositional habits of mind, we have evidence of perceptual habits that differ from those evident in men's satiric work and in their critical interpretations. Women's appropriation of a satirist's authority forces our awareness of satire's preoccupations with point of view and our notice that gender influences the latter in powerful ways.
As women write satiric literature they appropriate conventional
dramatic, poetic, or prose forms, including the satiric convention of an
'us/them' paradigm. At the same time, they resist the conventional,
binary scheme of reality posited (more emphatically) by men's satiric
work. Male wit of the eighteenth-century presumes a world in which dif-
ference is ubiquitous and oppositional; age, social class, nationality,
sex, motive, intellect, beauty, talent—all occur within a hierarchical
scheme. Women satirists often look directly at such premises, as they
look for ways of subverting demeaning metaphors of femaleness pervading
the literary models they inherit. This may be a self-protective reac-
tion, but it also indicates that women writers possess a theoretical
acuity about literary procedure that is directly related to their social
distance from power. That is, their reactive constructions of literary
situations in which woman's nature or experience is validated shows
awareness of how the oppositional mind energizes misogyny. Women
writers of the period mock the 'us/them' paradigm, even as they use it.
And their satire is more just by being focused on conduct. They
ridicule a habit of mind, rather than making maleness the site of all
that is regrettable about human nature. All of the satires by women
examined in my subsequent chapters ridicule men, but do not project
maleness as the embodiment of human error.

Women's satiric writing also challenges the notion of absolute
gender difference by mocking the reluctance of male writers to see dif-
ference as complementary. For example, heroines of Restoration comedies
authored by women make connivance and escape from the play's dilemma a
shared project; their male characters tend to compete with or mock one
another and only occasionally help one another's schemes. Women satirists are more apt to imply female solidarity as they resist both misogynist stereotypes and men's competitive, often violent ways of gaining control of women's lives. In this respect, women's wit—as perceptual habit and as literary form—is a phenomenon which is discontinuous with the traditions of literary discourse created by men. Of course, to use wit to protest female stereotypes and to criticize whatever demeans women or excludes them from full participation in public life is to participate competitively in the literary arena. Women's simultaneous compliance with literary convention and swerve from it indicates that the most enduring generic features of satire may be its perceptual assumptions and the skepticism they generate, rather than its subjects or themes.

Can Wit Be Evaluated A Historically?

To discuss women's wit by focusing on gender as a psychological, as well as social experience does not ignore history. It presumes that historical forces include some personalized agencies that are less measurable than others. This approach is no less credible than defining wit as the product of individual genius, or discussing literary genres as if their essential features were ontologically fixed—as criticism so often does. Instead, a feminist, psychologically inflected approach to eighteenth-century literary wit offers a way to notice how femaleness as metaphor or as authorial identity determines satiric textuality and to notice, by contrast, how traditional critical approaches to satire often discount this kind of knowledge. And it helps us notice that satire's
skepticism may be linked with the psychological dimensions of its procedures; that is, epistemological shifts during the eighteenth-century may need to be evaluated as signs of men’s desire to sustain a particular sense of self as masculine, as well as evidence of new scientific discoveries and change-producing political and economic events.

Certainly, the pattern of resisting change in ubiquitous enough in historical narrative to provoke study of its psychological origins. Nussbaum and Brown argue that (male) eighteenth-century literary critics have resisted hermeneutic change, preferring to rely more heavily on appreciative formalist readings that seek to describe a stable core of meaning in the text, or on a positivist historicism, unreflective about its theoretical grounds or its political implications.... Leading journals in the field...publish essays that...assume their methodology is natural or consensual.... [Thus] there has been no concerted impulse...to confront the issues that contemporary theories raise (4-5).

Women’s writing is the portion of eighteenth-century literature which has been de-historicized by being denied critical and theoretical attention most often. While discussing ‘women’s writing’ as a unified subject may seem to beg the question of whether the creative work of individuals can be described in general terms that indicate their shared traits, we shall never answer that question unless we study women’s literary work with theoretical tools, as well as by other methods. My project assumes that their work is at once a neglected part of literary history and a potential source of new information about how literature is a product of our ways of seeing culture and historic event. The various feminist perspectives employed in my discussion allow us to notice how particular creative methods or themes (such as, collaborative
heroinism) occur repeatedly in women’s writing and how they illuminate satiric procedure.

Perhaps most important, a feminist theoretical approach to satire may enlarge our notion of historicity to include habits of mind and their links with features of our bodily experience and identity which (like women themselves) have been ostracized from literary analysis. Eighteenth-century satire makes the human body an important trope, generally in order to mock our physical desires and bodily weaknesses. As I have indicated above, femaleness is so often the metaphoric agency for this scorn that critical neglect of its role in satiric strategy can only be the product of complicity with the denigration of women such metaphors perpetuate. The female body is our original environment, yet men’s lack/loss of that milieu and women’s possession of it by sharing their mother’s sex inevitably seem to shape their ways of seeing the world. Since the ways body and mind influence one another serve as our most immediate circumstance, is may be fair to claim that our attitudes about physical femaleness and maleness are ‘historicized’ by the unique and common features of our sexual identity. Bodily experience may be as important to our perceptions as nationality, year of birth, social rank, education, or the maelstrom of event in which we live.

What gets included in or excluded from ideas of historicity may be just as subject to rivalry as any other human enterprise. How we know who we are may be the epistemological question which underlies historic research. Satire’s pertinence to this question derives from its stress of the arbitrary ways we use language to define and answer questions and its focus on our ability to infer meanings, as well as on language’s
capacity for multiple, simultaneous signification. Satire plays with all of these issues, virtually insisting on our using theoretical tools to study its formal attributes.\textsuperscript{42} Since satire privileges excess, alogical procedures, simultaneous meaning, I will be discussing these traits as evocations of what Lacan refers to as semiotic experience--that early phase of psychological development associated with the feminine in which an infant has no separate sense of identity because the only perceptual means available to him or her are indirect (reflections of what the mother sees), thus undifferentiated. Lacan, feminist, and other linguistic theorists imply that knowledge is a product of desire, that language conveys more about us than about its alleged signified content.\textsuperscript{43}

In Restoration and eighteenth-century literature, the predominance of satire (and of Locke's influence) points to heightened awareness in the educated community of how ways of seeing determine meaning. At the same time, satiric conventions imply that sexual desire and sexual identity influence ways of seeing. For example, John Collier's objections to "smuttiness of expression...and lewd application of Scripture" in English comic drama and John Dennis' argument that "nothing but passion can please us" in defense of the same plays being criticized by Collier ironically affirm the confused relation of desire, literary form, and interpretation (respectively, 391 and 409 in McMillin; my emphasis). This awareness of how meaning is constructed by perspective makes literature of the period authored by men or women appropriate for readings that credit psychological experience as a feature of historic circumstance and of generic form.\textsuperscript{44}
Satire as an Polymorphous Literary Mode

At present, critical re-examination of historic influences on eighteenth-century literature is growing more inclusive. Still, we have not looked at the mingled influence and signs of linguistic indeterminacy, changing social structures, flexible literary forms, and challenges to gender as semiotic features of satire, or any literary genre. This is understandable in part because, by definition, semiotic experience (as a historic phase of human development) is chaotic, resistant to analysis. While what Lacan refers to as symbolic linguistic structures appear to support logical analysis, in contrast, semiotic modes of expression reflect the chaotic features of human desires and the insufficiencies of language. In spite of satire's repuation as a destroyer of language's systematic meanings, both male satirists of the eighteenth-century and their critics have been inclined to view satiric enterprise as what Earl Miner calls "a cognitive and moral science of human life," ("The Restoration," 98; my emphasis), representing the powers of reason, rather employing than the full repertoire of our modes of understanding.

Even more recent revaluations of satire's serendipitous relation to logical and literary form do not notice that its contradictions resemble the apparent dichotomies and persistent untold aspects of gender difference. Thus, Guilhamet argues that satire is precisely the right form to [attack] the lack of form in the objects of satire.... Although the Janus head [of satire] looks to chaos...as its object of attack, the second face gazes intently toward the golden age of genre, when order prevailed.... Satire is essentially a borrower of forms, but
as such it is not to be confused with those host structures. Indeed, it is the characteristic dynamic of satire to de-form those structures... The apparent instability of satire... is a normative condition by which the host genres are deformed and restructured... By piecing together what is left over from a disintegrating past, the satirist forms a prism through which the present can be refracted...[in order] to reflect on contemporary shortcomings (164-66).

Although he notices that satire "looks to chaos" (my emphasis) and concedes that the most significant feature of satire is "the art it employs to make [its] subject real and threatening" (166), Guilhamet does not consider that satire participates in formlessness. Its subversions of form create a chaos in which the residues of its "host" genre(s) evoke our memory of structure, pattern, and systematic meaning--but the satiric text in our hands is an embodiment of form which transgresses form and points to form (or meaning) as an interpretive act, a consensual idea, rather than a fixed attribute. Like ourselves, it is simultaneously one and the other, logical and associative, systematic and shapeless, male and female. Its distinctive methods are at once systematic and resistant to modes of perception that differentiate reality.

Our investigative field is already mapped if we work with existing, dichotomized critical premises, searching only for the ways binary habits of perception work in satiric texts to demean and disadvantage women. The latter are important observations, but they resemble standard approaches to satire such as Miner's and Guilhamet's that bare the difference between obvious and latent content or procedures in satiric texts. They do not focus our attention on how satire becomes, formally, what it seems to decry--a state of disorder. On the other
hand, if we examine satiric disorderliness as a potential sign of semiotic modes of perception, and these, in turn, as essential constituents of literary invention, we expand the critical horizon. We may discover that satiric refusals of stable meaning and coherence have something to tell us about our dependence on both reason and intuition. We may revalue the perceptual habits now associated with femininity.

By being ironic all satire is a display of simultaneous meanings, but it may be easier for us to notice formal transgressions and satiric disorder in women's texts because women themselves are believed to be less logical and, during the eighteenth-century, less familiar with the literary precedents they use. As well, since their satiric subjects are often closely tied with their personal predicaments, their writings are, simultaneously, critical and a virtual plea for understanding which we then respond to with the full panoply of disciplined and personalized (unsystematic) habits of observation. In other words, their satiric work is different by producing different acts of reading. We cannot read a woman's text as we read a male-authored work of satire because gender difference is an inescapable part of the habits of mind we bring to self-definition and to reading. Women's writing underscores, in turn, how satire demands that our acts of reading encompass rational and intuitive modes of understanding--both deductive powers and what we might call "body-knowledge," or habits of understanding grounded in experience. Whether we refer to these complementary cognitive processes as the symbolic and semiotic aspects of language and knowledge, or call them differential and associative functions, our reliance on both is dramatically revealed by satiric literature. At the same time, satire
transcends such binary ways of describing its functions; it is always resisting whatever is posited as normative—even its own definitions.

It is appropriate to indicate satire's simultaneous dependence and transcendence of analytical and associative modes of understanding as "polymorphous" because we have already linked these perceptual differences (stereotypically) with gender. Polymorphous is a word which indicates a capacity for taking on any convenient guise, or wearing the signs of both genders while challenging the idea of gender. Like androgyiny (the more bifurcated version of this idea), our polymorphic capacity to signal a particular identity and its 'opposite' and its ephemeral nature is relatively unexplored. Like the unexamined features of women's satiric work in contrast with already defined canonical texts, the term signifies what we do not yet know about human sexuality. Thus, to propose thinking about satire as a polymorphous literary mode accomplishes more than including women writers in our discussion. It implies the importance of inventive, associative, and emotion-driven perceptual habits which certainly receive critical attention elsewhere, but remain excluded from our theoretical discussions of satire. And, to look at satire's formal indeterminacy as polymorphous is to credit all modes of perception equally. This stance is also appropriate because it replicates satire's challenge to prevalent, but misleading ideas.

In women's satirical writing the polymorphous features of satire become more obvious because women's bodies and their fashionable disguises are perenially foregrounded; sexuality is believed to be their chief attribute. Having an already inflected identity, their work is displaced from association with whatever formal structures it uses. On
the other hand, what we refer to as 'indirection' in our analyses of satiric literature is a prime example of wit's dependence on 'feminine' ways of thinking. As we explore wit from this perspective we may invent another vocabulary to indicate the modes of signification now associated with femininity, but to date woman is the ubiquitous sign of deviance from allegedly neutral, male-defined logic. Therefore, I will use the concept, "the feminization of wit" during England's eighteenth-century to refer to both a historic development of increasing opportunity for women to publish their writing, and a pattern of perceptual habits that have been associated with femininity, but also are typical of satiric procedure and, in fact, signs that femininity is (polymorphically) larger and more complex than stereotypes indicate.

Women's inordinacy as writers in eighteenth-century English society and as those who who challenge existing ideas about femaleness inflects our reading too. We read their satiric work more aware of its potential subversive content and thus grow more aware of satire's essential skepticism.
NOTES


2 Such labels, indicating formal differences in classic and eighteenth-century satires also point more directly to satire's support of misogyny. For example, Juvenalian satire in its classical Greek and its eighteenth-century guise (as in Pope's Dunciad) excludes feminist concerns by using female tropes to carry much of the burden of its scorn.

3 Throughout this study I will be using the word "satire" as if its most recognizable attributes (a critical stance, wit or humor manifest as ironic verbal and organizational devices, or as sarcasm or invective) were self-evident. I do not mean to suggest that satire is a static enterprise--always the same during any historic period--or that its definition has not been contested (e.g., in Dryden's "Original and Progress of Satire," 1693). For convenience, I use the word as if it possessed in critical discourse what Weinbrot calls "an omnibus definition" (The Formal Strain, 225), yet my argument contributes to our reconceptualizing of satire as being an epistemological (as well as formal) strategy which mirrors the habits of mind we have stereotyped as feminine.

4 Biographies of all canonical eighteenth-century satirists and general studies of the genre demonstrate how often literary satire was politically controversial. See also Goldgar, Walpole and the Wits: The Relation of Politics to Literature, 1722-1742; Loftis, The Politics of Drama in Augustan England; Weinbrot, Eighteenth-Century Satire and studies of particular texts (including, Dryden's "Absalom and Achiropel," Swift's Gulliver's Travels, Pope's "First Book of Horace Imitated," Gay's The Beggar's Opera, the plays of Fielding, and many others).

5 Important contributions to study of women's literature during the period include the Garland collection of more than 200 eighteenth-century plays, edited by Paula Backsieder; Lonsdale's Oxford Anthology of Eighteenth-Century Women Poets; and Todd's definitive edition
of the works of Aphra Behn, as well as *A Dictionary of British and American Writers 1660-1800*, edited by Todd.

6 Derived from "witan" (Old English), the word originally meant "knowledge," and by the late Medieval period was used to differentiate our intellectual faculties (reason, imagination, memory, fancy, common sense) from the five physical senses. The *Oxford English Dictionary* (*OED*) offers a modern definition of wit as "that quality of speech or writing which consists in the apt association of thought and expression, calculated to surprise and delight by its unexpectedness."

7 By reminding us in his Preface to *Gondibert* (1651) that wit is "dexterity of thought," Davenant also underscores the indeterminate aspect of both words and thought.

8 In *The Formal Strain* Weinbrot declares that imitation "is not a restrictive but a liberating form which enlarges the poet’s possibilities for metaphor and insists that the reader be aware of his moment in history...the Imitation is internationalist...[encouraging] expansion of consciousness" (219-20).

9 Alvin Kernan observes in *The Cankered Muse* that the earliest recorded satire is associated with "primitive ritual activities such as formulaic curses and the magical blasting of personal and tribal enemies" (6-7). If so, its legitimacy is of the highest type, being linked with supernatural forces. The importance of origin to satire is evident too in disagreement concerning the word’s history: about whether savage attacks on vice were first associated with the dirty, lascivious woodland deities called "satyrs," whether Greek satyr plays were precursors of tragedy or comedy, whether the word signifies an amalgam of subjects and methods.

10 Not all literary critics view satiric imitation as a sign of the egoism of the poet. For example, Weinbrot describes Augustan verse satire’s best use of received tradition as "neither worshipping nor breaking of icons" (*ECB*, 128). He views the notion of ‘anxiety of influence’ as "perfectly useless" in discussing the conduct of Pope and his generation (129). This is a curious dogmatism, especially in light of Weinbrot’s willingness to discuss formal verse satire of the period as expressions of response to Roman models; his approach discounts psychological motive. See Weinbrot’s *Eighteenth-Century Satire*, *passim*. Still, much criticism of English uses of classical satire ratifies the latter’s iconic value and suggests that literary influence is an emotionally charged dynamic.

11 The concept of "anxiety of influence" is defined in Harold Bloom’s book by that title. Bloom’s interpretive method may now be commonplace, or scorned in favor of more agreeable ideas, but its implications for the subject of genre remain unexplored in the case of genre’s relation to gender. When we use his idea to read satire and the obviously patriarchal story of its development, it enables a clearer view of how the competitive, emotional aspects of satiric
invention often take the form of misogynist sexual aggression.

12 Early English satire that emulates classical writers tends to be in verse; however, later prose satires also adapt ancient models (or parody more recent adaptations) and display competitive/assertive intent similar to the pattern I am describing. Weinbrot’s *Eighteenth-Century Satire* loosely categorizes so-called “Augustan” satires as “punitive satire, formal verse satire, and apocalyptic or revelatory satire,” admitting their overlap (53). The first attempts to “punish an adversary rather than correct him,” the second, usually written in heroic couplets and modelled after specific writings of the ancients, attacks one vice while praising its counterpart virtue, and the last type focuses on a “terrible situation within or without us...to suggest massively destructive results” (53-54). By contrast, Guilhamet discusses satire as “culminating” during the Restoration and early eighteenth-century and resisting generic limits, finding its greatest audience “when the high Renaissance regard for genre was giving way to formal promiscuity and the outright rejection of traditional forms” (164).

13 Seeing literary history as a linear and progressive narrative of how genius transcends its forefather’s poetic victories is a self-fulfilling prophecy, offering a convenient method of accounting for repeated themes or literary structures. The practice is hoary and seemingly beyond question; the classical writers admired and emulated by English satirists were themselves legitimized by affiliation with still earlier literature, Latin satirists probably having drawn upon traditions of the Greek Satyr play and Old Comedy. In *The Anxiety of Influence* Harold Bloom offers a programmatic analysis of how English poetry is related to jealousy and the desire to please compelling a man to emulate an earlier writer. Bloom’s theory assumes literary creativity is a product of competitive relation between writer and precursor, replicating the dynamic of son-father rivalry; however, Bloom glosses the psychoanalytic dimension of this pattern.

14 P. K. Elkin, Howard Erskine-Hill, Ronald Paulson, Doris C. Powers, Howard D. Weinbrot and others typically discuss English satire as a literary project in which choices about literary technique made by ancient writers are determining ones. Jacobean or Restoration or eighteenth-century writers adapt literary forms discovered in Greek and Roman manuscripts, and (as Milton and Pope illustrate) the highest ambition of Englishmen who write is to produce a vernacular epic and prove English language and culture comparable to ancient civilizations. The desire is nostalgic, saying more about desire itself, than about literary form.

15 The way hostility shapes satire is evident too in discussions such as The Augustan Defense of Satire by P. K. Elkin, which presents eighteenth-century satirists as embattled within their culture, accused of wielding “dangerous weapons” and of being “tainted” by “pandering to the worst in men’s natures” (44, ff).
The same complexly ambivalent pattern of relation to ancient writers influences virtually all canonical eighteenth-century satirists; for example, Johnson's adaptations of Juvenal in *London* (1738) or in *The Vanity of Human Wishes* (1749) are at once emulative and visionary, part of the ironic tradition, part of its changing course, and also typical of omnipresent poetic efforts to find answers to human contradiction.

It is also accurate to say that English satire is a typical product of phenomena referred to as the Enlightenment. In *Literature and Insubstantiality* Frederic Bogel asserts that it is misleading to treat British and Continental styles of thought during the period as if they were ontologically distinct. It is disturbing that Bogel's work, purporting to be a synchronic literary history revising our understanding of the unity of eighteenth-century English literature, examines the "impovery or insubstantiality" of experience, the "loss of transcendence," and the "ambiguities of otherness" (Ch. 6, and passim), especially with respect to melancholia, without considering how questions of being and knowing relate to sexual aspects of personal identity and sensibilities. That Bogel is conscious of important ties between literary forms and constructions of identity makes more frustrating his neglect of the relation of authorial maleness or femaleness to the many varieties of "tensional structures that only mimic" the actual disharmonies and disruptions and tensions characterizing eighteenth-century literature (202). See also Earl Wasserman's discussion of *concordia discors* in *The Subtler Language* as the failed chief metaphor of eighteenth-century English literature.

Ironically, exclusionary groups in English society (such as Dissenters, mutually hostile political factions, the aristocracy, gentry, and successively lower social-economic groups) were not actually self-contained; a Whig might be a Dissenter, or the monarch's associates might include those lacking noble status. Literary production of the time is a similar hybrid of aristocratic and bourgeois intellectual tastes, and to the extent that Selden's use of the term "Augustan" implies strict uniformity in literary values, it is misleading.

John Sitter's essay, "About Wit," which echoes the abstracted quality of the eighteenth-century commentators he mentions, relates the oppositional functions of wit to Locke's premise that wit and judgment are antithetical.

Conversely, comedy is usually affable, or Horatian in its tone, presuming tacit agreement that humanity is liable to make mistakes. Satire, as the product of wit, carries a burden of indignation or disgust that may be disguised by clever language or plot, yet the subject of ridicule remains implicitly separate from the author and his or her audience.

In this light, what Bakhtin and Castle explain as "carnivalesque" features of European sociopolitical realities during
the period finds its psychological and philosophical counterpart in literary satire’s play with the elusiveness of personal identity and linguistic meaning.

22 At least one anonymous writer of the period argued that the best people disdained wit. In The Weekly Register (22 July 1732) he claims, "Few people of distinction trouble themselves about the name of wit, fewer understand it, and hardly any have honored it with their example. In the next class of people [the growing middle class] it seems best known, most admired, and most frequently practiced; but their stations in life are not eminent enough to dazzle us into imitation" ("On Wit," in McMillin, 385).

23"Feminist" is a word which was not in use during the eighteenth-century; however, many women writers (from Behn to Wollstonecraft) inscribed their awareness of misogynist English laws, customs, and attitudes in what they wrote. By using the term "protofeminist" to indicate such awareness, I do not suggest that women of the period define themselves or judge their society in the way contemporary feminists do. By using it I point to literary signs of eighteenth-century women’s consciousness of their reputation for inferiority and their discontent. To the extent that such features of their literary work encouraged women to think and speak about discrimination against their sex, women’s protofeminist literary themes participate in the history of women’s efforts to improve their lives. Katharine M. Rogers and other feminist scholars use the word "feminist" when survey "the new consciousness" and increased discussion of such matters produced by social changes at the end of the seventeenth-century (1-11). See her Feminism in Eighteenth-Century England and Lawrence Stone, The Family, Sex and Marriage in England: 1500-1800.

24 The important difference between satiric portraits of evil or foolish men (such as Wycherley’s Pinchwife, Fielding’s Bilifil, Sterne’s Uncle Toby) and of female satiric figures is located in the implied reader’s perceptual options. If male, he is enticed to notice "man’s" (i.e., universal, human) folly as enacted by male or female characters, while also enjoying the privileged status of male observer/judge granted by the satirist’s perspective—which he shares. Where the disdained figure is female, the male reader enjoys additional distance/privilege, since femaleness represents actual difference from his identity. If female, the reader shares the author’s perspective only by dissociating herself from her actual identity: to notice universal human traits in a satirized male figure she must envision herself as comprised of irrelevant female attributes and important, "universal" ones; to enjoy the satiric treatment of female figures she must embrace the perspective of a man. Furthermore, male objects of ridicule are usually presumed capable of wiser choices (e.g., Colley Cibber would not be amusing in Pope’s representation of him were he entirely, mentally incompetent); whereas in female or feminized figures error, grossness, or folly is often ascribed to woman’s nature than to her choices.
25 Battestin argues that Swift’s Strephon has "missed the point by turning misogynist" in response to Celia’s secrets (218); however, while Swift may indict Strephon’s blindness to the scene’s allegedly larger implications about the absurdity of men’s belief that human art might replicate divine art, it remains true and important that Swift sees femaleness as an inappropriate metaphor of human corruption. He at least credits Strephon with some powers of discernment—a typical distribution of human capacity: male mind, female body.

26 See Sedgwick’s Between Men: English Literature and Male Homosexual Desire, especially Chapter 3’s discussion of Wycherley’s The Country Wife (1675); 49-66.

27 By hiding maleness within the cloak of generic humanity and displacing onto female or other sub-human figures any admissible sins, satire confirms Lacan’s belief that the hegemonic form of human discourse is "phallocentric" in its premises. The term is Derrida’s mocking summary of Lacan’s concept. See The Lives and Legends of Jacques Lacan for Clément’s discussion of Derrida’s critique of Lacan’s essay about Poe’s "Purloined Letter," in which Lacan insists upon the relatedness of textuality and psychological paradigms, such as fear of castration (189-92).

28 The hegemony of binary thinking in satiric tradition (attack of a vice and praise of its opposite virtue) is discussed by Weinbrot (11-20); he does not indicate that such praxis also implies an oppositional view of reality that pervades social arrangements, as well as literature.

29 For an example of feminine self-effacement, see Chudleigh’s "To the Reader," in which she claims, "'Tis only to the Ladies I presume to present [my essays]; I am not so vain as to believe anything of mind deserveth the Notice of Men" (Lonsdale, 147). Rowe grants men the advantages of physical strength—if only they "cou’d keep quiet among themselves" about it—but protests that "neither [sense] nor Learning, nor so much at Wit must be allow’d us, but all over-ru’d by the Tyranny of the Prouder Sex; nay...some of 'em won’t let us say our Souls are our own, but wou’d persuade us we are no more Reasonable Creatures then themselves.... We complain...that here’s a plain and an open design to render us meer Slaves, perfect TURKISH WIVES...and are forc’d to Protest against it, and appeal to all the World, whether these are not notorious Violations on the Liberties of Free-born English Women? This makes the Meekest Worm amongst us all, ready to turn a gen when we are thus trampled on; But alas! What can we do to Right our selves? stingless andharmless as we are, we can only Kiss the Foot that hurts us" ("Preface," Poems on Several Occasions, Lonsdale, 144). Rowe then discusses the women writers who have presumed to usurp male intellectual privilege: Sappho, Aphra Behn, Anna Maria Van Schurman, Katherine Philips.

30 Philips’ early death, like Anne Killigrew’s, allows men to praise her work as a sign of her character, rather than of her talent,
thereby sentimentalizing her literary efforts. The attractions of sentiment and the cult of sensibility are related to male desire to restrict feminine freedoms; see Armstrong, *Desire and Domestic Fiction*. For discussion of the powerful forces obstructing women's free exploration of their intellectual talents during the eighteenth-century, see Spender's Introduction and Chapter One in *Mothers of the Novel*; Jones, *Women in the Eighteenth Century: Constructions of Femininity*; and Nussbaum, *The Brink of All We Hate: English Satires on Women 1660 - 1750*.

31 This might seem to imply that I ignore the possibility of important individual differences among women readers or writers of the period. My discussion includes several authors and three different literary genres in order to avoid such overgeneralization; however, the theoretical focus of my study also addresses the controversy about whether "woman" is a valid collective noun, or only the antonym of maleness.

32 This applies most consistently to ladies' attendance at the theatre. David Roberts argues that women theatre-goers during the Restoration comprise a heterogeneous audience, exercise their right to pronounce judgment on the tastefulness of plays, and enjoy having their approval courted by playwrights and critics. This attention eventually contributes to changes in theatrical decorum and the increasing popularity of sentimental drama. See The Ladies: *Female Patronage of Restoration Drama, 1660-1700*.

33 *Works*, IV, 115-16. Unless otherwise noted, quotations from Behn's writings are taken from Montague Summers' edition of her works, and abbreviated in this way by short title, volume, and page number.

34 Sitter's essay points out the inconsistencies in Locke's notions of Wit and Judgment, noting that Locke's own epistemological system should have prevented his belief in the possibility of a language (of Judgment) that "names things as they are, without figure and...without allusion" (145).

35 In *Arguments of Augustan Wit* he does not discuss the subject in terms of gender, but by arguing that Locke's theory seems to indicate "that wit makes similarities and knowledge perceives them" (151), Sitter points to the easy reversibility of genderized notions of abstract ideas.

36 One of the early attempts to classify satire occurs in Francesco Sansovino's *Discorso in materia della satira* (1560), which emphasizes satire's asssociation with all that is contemptible (cited in Guilhamet, 2).

37 The oppositional premises of male satire are replicated in traditional criticism of the mode. In his study of Swift and Pope, Allan Ingram entitles a chapter, "Acts of Exclusion," Weinbrot's *The Formal Strain* emphasizes the "discrimination" and "distinction" char-
acteristic of Augustan efforts to imitate classical satire. Even
Bogel's Literature and Insubstantiality in Later Eighteenth-Century
England dichotomizes creative trends of the period by discussing past
and "newly-examined" present as "spheres of...substantiality" that
contrast with eighteenth-century anxieties about the philosophic
"impoverishment" of modern life (x).

38 Ironically, such restraint is a feminization of wit that may
have contributed to the growing taste for sentimental narrative and
the eventual nineteenth-century valorization of the gender differences
which in eighteenth-century literature fueled satire.

39 Male writers of the period regularly imply that rivalry is an
inherent trait of maleness; the pattern is evident in Horner and
Dorimant, in Imlac's seemingly benign manipulations of Rasselas, and
in Shandy's of his implied reader.

40 Any critique of what others do embraces the binary mode of
perception; in order to evaluate male literary practice or describe
women's writing we are obliged to posit gender (temporarily at least)
as a stable, coherent factor in human experience. This procedural
dilemma is not unique to feminist inquiry.

41 Bosker, for example, affirms that the "doctrine" of literary
"types" or "kinds" was as strong in Johnson's day as it had been earli-
er in the century. He cites Goldsmith's admiration for the ancient
practice of keeping genres distinct, in conformity with the diversity
found "in nature itself" (86).

42 In this respect, satire is a precursor of literary theories
that privilege the reader's responses to a text. Not surprisingly,
some critics using this approach also write wittily. See, for exam-
ple, Stanley Fish's...

43 While I refer to Kristeva's Lacanian hypothesis about symbolic
and semiotic phases of developmental experience to explore sub-
jectivity and satiric strategies in this project, I do not embrace its
dichotomies. Kristeva posits the divided mind of any speaking subject
as constituted by seemingly opposed habits of mind and expression:
namely, the "semiotic" desires and rhythms of the unconscious (associ-
ated with maternal, pre-Oedipal experience and with expressive femi-
ninity) and the symbolic functions of logic and aesthetic realization
(associated with patriarchy and power). The phrase "divided subject"
when used by French feminist theorists also implies the possibility of
a bisexual wholeness; Cixous, Irigaray, and Kristeva each assert the
mixed nature of sexuality, tending to see human bisexuality or
homosexual responsiveness to the presence of the internalized Other as
a counterforce to phallocentrism. While the psychological paradigm to
which I refer is oppositional, neither Lacan nor Kristeva views knowl-
edge or speech as enacting a dynamic of simple gendered difference.
Kristeva especially, describes the speaking subject--male or female--as
continuously moving toward and away from psychic unity and
stability, always expressing both semiotic and symbolic forms of perception. Throughout this project when I refer to "semiotic modes of perception," I mean the capacity to see things as undifferentiated; "semiotic modes of response" or "semiotic expression" refers to being controlled by unnamed desires, expressing such desires in disorderly ways. See Kristeva's "La Femme, ce n'est jamais ça," Tel Quel 59 (1974) 19-25; "Polylogue," trans. as "Polylogue (‘H’)," Contemporary Literature 19 (1978) 336-50; "Le Temps des femmes," trans. as "Women's Time," Signs 7 (1981) 13-35. For a broader approach to these ideas, see Kristeva's Desire in Language: A Semiotic Approach to Literature and Art, ed. Leon S. Roudiez.

44 While I refer to the male-defined literary conventions that were functioning as aesthetic and perceptual norms when these women wrote, this is not a comparative study of genderized satire. By examining only how women's drama, poetry, and fiction achieve satiric effects and also how they display perceptual habits that seem associated with womanhood, I hope to demonstrate that literary wit relies upon all of the habits of mind that have been arbitrarily split and associated with one gender.

45 An important collection of essays indicating changes in eighteenth-century scholarship is found in The New Eighteenth Century: Theory, Politics, English Literature, edited by Felicity Nussbaum and Laura Brown.

46 Sir Joshua Reynolds understood the importance of what we call semiotic meanings; in Discourse 13 (1786) he argues that "the imagination is the residence of truth. If the imagination be affected, the conclusion is fairly drawn; if it be not affected, the reasoning is erroneous, because...the effect itself [is] the only test, of the truth and efficacy of the means. There is in the commerce of life, as in art, a sagacity which is far from being contradictory to right reason, and is superior to any...exercise of that faculty [because] it goes at once, by what appears a kind of intuition, to the conclusion" (cited in Simon, 58).

47 Women's presumed inability to judge or emulate literary form is tacitly confirmed by Alexander Gerard in An Essay on Taste (1759), where he argues that judgments about literature cannot be formed "without a vigorous abstracting faculty, the greatest force of reason, a capacity for the most careful and correct induction, and a deep knowledge of the principles of human nature [derived from education]." Vicesimus Knox agrees that only those "who have enjoyed the benefits of a good education...can pronounce on a work, that it is good or bad" (cited in Messer-Davidow, 52).
Chapter II

REVISIONARY ACTS: SUSANNAH CENTLIVRE'S The Busie Body

Introduction

Centlivre's The Busie Body (1709, Drury Lane) is an intrigue comedy that is typical of its genre because it reveals sexual desire as a generator of wit and because its wit is expressed as disguise or bodily concealment, or as verbal subterfuge. It is also typical of Restoration and early eighteenth-century drama's proccupation with conventional literary types: imprisoned heroines, disinherited protagonists, parasitic hangers-on, lusty schemers, ridiculous dupes, selfish fathers. And it illustrates conventional dramatic predicaments for dramatic heroes and heroines—such as lack of consent to marry; lack of money; lack of sexual gratification, or physical freedom, or sanctioned identity; lost, stolen or misread communications; schemes to deceive characters who possess what the hero or heroine wants.

The deceitfulness and lawlessness of wit are particularly important features of women writers' uses of dramatic satire. For example, Centlivre and other women playwrights often use wit to disguise their rejection of women's alleged inferiority and of misogyny in English social arrangements or literary tradition.
Perhaps just as important, the work of early women writers is a thievery of literary forms which they are disqualified to use because men believe they lack adequate intelligence for creative literary work. Citing the journal of Celia Fiennes (1696) as evidence, Kendall declares,

There were good reasons, in the age of Anne, why men's characterizations of women were so limited. Men and women of the upper and middle classes were reared separately and educated differently; courted each other formally; and even within marriage, typically interacted with each other in highly structured ways, which did not lead to much depth of understanding. Thus [men] were simply unable to write knowledgeably about the nature of women's lives, the concerns of women's hearts, or the ways women related to each other when no men were present. Yet all literature provided a textbook that women might read, if they sought understanding of male psychology. Female playwrights, therefore, had a much richer conception of the character of woman than did their brothers; and they had considerable insight into the character of man, as well (11).

Not surprisingly, the history of the Restoration and eighteenth-century drama shows that women playwrights took advantage of existing gender stereotypes and public concern about relations between the sexes. Their plays focused on the latter, often ridiculing the idea that women were less rational beings than men. Kendall asserts that "women's plays usually feature female protagonists who are intelligent, independent, and personally forceful" (10).

By becoming writers, and especially by writing satirically, women's 'unlawful' literary efforts also provide opportunity to take advantage of the speech and thought patterns commonly associated with their stereotypically defined limitations--impulsiveness, silliness, helplessness. In this light, satire's affinity for associative, non-linear uses of language makes it a more 'femininized' literary effort.
I am not suggesting that eighteenth-century men and women consciously define satire as a feminized form. Instead, I propose that the existing stereotypes of femaleness against which early women satirists write draw our attention to formal qualities in satire which have not been discussed as having anything to do with gender.

Yet, satiric plots and characterizations that stress women's legal, economic, and social disadvantages raise the question of how satire's traditional procedures might be congenial for women writers. Is satiric wit an enterprise which demands intelligence and creativity that women lack—-as eighteenth-century stereotypes claim? Are women-authored works of wit from the period spurious examples of satire? Have they hidden their alleged irrationality in formal qualities that give an appearance of literary integrity to works which are essentially non-satiric? Or, are women writers drawn to satire because its linguistic and logical operations are particularly congenial? And does this possibility support gender bias, or does it indicate that satire is the expression of mental processes which have been labeled as female, but which are a feature of all human response?  

While all satiric fault-finding posits a desirable stability in human affairs, its chief expressive trait is its resistance to order. Traditionally, femaleness has served as a metaphorical embodiment of disorderliness. Consequently, there already exists an association between femininity and satiric invention. Critical neglect of this affinity may be a variant of the longstanding neglect of women's contributions to satire. In any case, satire's use of language and of gen-
eric traditions is self-serving in ways that undermine the implied orderliness of language and genre. Its procedures are slippery, which is to say that satiric strategies are effective by being at once deceitful and collaborative—surprising, manipulating the reader, but including the reader as a partner in the satiric point of view. This fusion of victimhood and partnership in the implied reader’s role in any satiric genre is a familiar experience for women writers and readers. It replicates their social predicament. And although a woman satirist takes on a slightly more authoritative role than her readers or other women writers, the alleged inferiority of her femaleness makes her relationship to culture, language and literary form self-conscious. Moreover, the duplicity of satiric strategy is a trait associated with females since Eve’s mistake was broadcast. In this respect, the woman writer brings advantageous experience to the satirist’s project of complicit deception. Thus, there are close correspondences between femaleness and satire. Generally, both are defined by their association with indefiniteness, lack of restraint, and ‘lawlessness’, or resistance to prescriptive ideas. Both therefore challenge the binary, oppositional view of the world which satiric projects seem to support.

I have chosen Susannah Centlivre’s *The Busy Body* to illustrate feminized aspects of dramatic satire because the play is representative of its author and of comic practices that are standard, while also being typical of women’s comedies during the period. More strongly than most comedies, women’s plays frequently reject the powers of law, or other forms of social control affecting marriage. They usually credit female
desire as potentially inventive and strong. They empower their female characters by granting them the symbolic privilege of looking critically at men's bodies and at men's conduct (giving them, in Lacanian terms, an objectifying "Gaze"). That Centlivre's use of such practices (although submerged in her play's conventions) adds to her work's popularity is likely. She writes plays at a time when middle-class resistance to the licentiousness of drama is strong, but when the stage is still a forum where various opinions about women's status can be expressed. Centlivre's Prologue to The Busie Body reflects this possibility, along with her doubts: "Be kind, and bear a Woman's Treat to Night;/ Let your Indulgence all her Fears allay,/ And none but Women-Haters damn this Play."

Centlivre is a satirical rather than a comic playwright in this case because The Busie Body forsakes important conventions of comic resolution. In it she suggests that marriage is an inadequate guarantee of happiness. As well, her ridicule of human folly emphasizes that men and women have different degrees of culpability because they are differently related to laws and to customs having the force of law. She offers us a variety of ways of seeing her heroine's predicaments and conduct, underscoring that the act of looking is not a static or determinate experience, but characterized by shifts in perception and pointing to perception itself as the locus of meaning. Centlivre thus makes her play an argument against belief in stereotypes of any kind, because they derive from à priori ideas, rather than from experience. Moreover, she invents a female lead character whose distinguishing fea-
tture is awareness that what people believe can be altered by changing the circumstances influencing their perception. Miranda is a typical comic heroine by being quick to use the multiple meanings of language to serve her desires, and she is an embodiment of the radical ideas energizing Centlivre's work.

Miranda's desires are themselves multiple and have a complicated relation to social morés and to dramatic convention. As the heroine of a comedy, her desire to select a husband is conventional, but her readiness to admit uncertainty about her choice is a bolder move:

Well, Patch...my Fate is determin'd, and Expectation is no more. Now to avoid the Impertinence and Roguery of an Old Man, I have thrown myself [at] a young one; if he should despise, slight or use me ill, there's no Remedy from a Husband, but the Grave; and that's a terrible Sanctuary to one of my Age and Constitution.5

Conventionally, resistance to marriage is a posture assigned to a rake or the comic romantic hero. In addition, Miranda points realistically (if sardonically) to hazards pervading women's lack of legal freedom: forced marriages, vulnerability to a husband's abuse, and lack of choice about divorce. Moreover, Miranda is equally concerned about gaining control of her own money. Given her several goals, and the prescriptive and coercive forces of law and custom, Miranda must embrace several roles. Each is an avatar of desire. As needed, she is coquette, trickster, helpless female and cunning narcisist--Sir George Airy's potential lover and his mocking "Incognito". He is fooled because he does not assume the possibility that a woman's desires might alter her appearances; whereas she remains ever aware of her need for multiple identities. In fact, Miranda embraces different roles and strategies as
if she owned no fixed identity, or as if her subjectivity were constituted only by desire, not by any permanent attributes.

Without exception, Centlivre's male characters are unable to predict or interpret Miranda's unprogrammatic responses (in spite of the fact that they, as men, presume female fickleness and believe themselves superior to it). Contradictions between male characters' beliefs about women and Miranda's performance, between male incompetence and male arrogance serve as the slippery ground on which Centlivre's ridicule of misogyny is built. Centlivre's male characters embody the fixed subjectivity, or already-defined roles usually assigned to female characters by male authors.

However, while Centlivre's male characters are exposed as ineffectual and unimaginative figures in a comic plot that moves predictably toward marriage, The Busie Body, like any satire, is more than a structure of simple oppositions. Miranda's wit disproves the absurd belief that helplessness and lack of cleverness are attributes of femininity; at the same time, her wit illustrates the contingency of truth—that well-manipulated circumstances and language confer foolishness on anyone. In other words, The Busie Body does not objectify either men or women as a class. Sir Francis is absurd, Sir Jealous is mean, Sir George is often naive, but Isabinda and Charles are also flawed, and Miranda has moments when she is confused. The play ridicules individual foibles and the socially endorsed habits of mind that make people proud and too apt to trust the appearances of things, or words. Centlivre presents her heroine's cleverness as a model of flexible subjectivity
for anyone, rather than limiting it to her gender. It is this refusal of the 'laws' of gender roles--because laws themselves are absurd--that makes the play typical of a metasatiric, protofeminist inflection in women's writing.6

As a schemer and a Truewit Miranda is a model satirist, embracing any useful role or idea, exploiting the difficulties of knowing what is true in order to get what she knows she wants. Miranda's use of deceit to ridicule and trick her lover, her guardian, Sir Jealous, and Marplot (the play's nemesis) while seeming to appease them is not merely typical of eighteenth-century comic plotting, but an example of satiric reliance on simultaneity--on the chaotic or boundary-less aspects of identity and language.

Although Centlivre's entire play illustrates how satire can endorse a woman's point of view, there are particular, important scenes in The Busie Body that show her ability to exploit dramatic conventions for metasatiric and protofeminist purpose. These include Miranda's escape from Sir George's threat to unmask her in St. James Park (Act I; 10-13); the famous "Dumb Show" in which Sir George as courting lover tries to induce Miranda to speak (Act II; 19-24); and the eroticized 'monkey scene' in which Sir George is concealed behind a chimneyboard and spoken of as if he were a pet monkey (Act IV; 51-56).

In each episode Centlivre foregrounds Miranda's project of escaping the physical, economic, and emotional constraints imposed on her identity as a female. Just as important, Centlivre achieves this by repositioning Miranda as the subject rather than object of judgmental
looking in each scene, as maker of her own 'laws' regarding how she participates in the specular aspects of conversation. The play reverses conventional, comic objectifications of women by presenting Miranda's silent gaze as a sign of her ironic view of her circumstances, much like her creator's satiric view of the stagecraft and conventional roles she exploits. Finally, Centlivre's exclusion of Sir Francis from the play's last scene serves as a symbolic punishment of patriarchal powers that too often validate male desire, masculine freedom, and male-defined laws in such comedies, usually at women's expense (Act V; 69-72).

St. James Park - Miranda's Escape from the 'Law' That Women Should Be Seen and Not Heard

In Act I of The Busie Body Miranda's stage entrance introduces her as a plotter intent on deceiving the man (Sir Jealous Traffick) whose Spanish-style, unabashed patriarchy holds Miranda's friend Isabinda captive in her own home--kept away from "the sight of all Men," as the play's Dramatis Personae informs us. Sir Jealous' zeal to deny his daughter freedom is expressed in speech as a tirade about the need for more rigid English laws. He wants election to Parliament so that he can propose a bill requiring women to wear veils: "He swears it is the height of Impudence to have a Woman seen Bare-fac'd even at Church" (8). In addition to granting the audience a laugh at the double meaning of "Bare-fac'd," Centlivre uses Sir Jealous' obsession to indicate that her heroine and female collaborators stand outside the law, judging its
inequities and looking for ways of subverting legal and customary con-
strains on women’s freedom.  

In this scene Miranda also flouts the customary ‘law’ that women
should be seen, but not heard. While Isabinda’s confinement represents
men’s power to silence women and hide them from other men’s eyes,
Miranda’s excursion is an ironic commentary on the general limits placed
on all women’s freedom to speak and be seen. Her initial purpose in
coming to St. James Park disguised is to meet her friend Isabinda to
discuss how to avoid a forced marriage between the latter and a Spaniard
chosen by her father. The masked secrecy of Miranda’s encounter in the
park with Isabinda’s maid and later with Sir George emphasizes that
Centlivre’s play is about comic subversion of what is legitimate. This
is a standard move, generically speaking. Centlivre adds to convention,
however, by taking every opportunity to show her heroine’s verbal and
visual tricks as motivated more by rebellious than erotic desire. In
general, the play offers us a carnivalesque view of tensions between
personal desires and socially legitimized ones, but its particular
attention to such conflict is strongly protofeminist. 9 As Isabinda’s
maid, Patch, observes, both her lady and Miranda show "the same gay,
cheerful Spirit" that hides their "real Design" of refusing compliance
with man-made laws. The park scene grows increasingly less comic and
more satiric as its events reveal dangerous aspects of social laws and
of certain men’s greedy abuse of their legal privileges.

The historicized reality of women’s legal dilemma helps Centlivre
present Miranda as a strongly individualized figure. 10 In defiance of
Sir Jealous and generalized misogyny she proclaims, boldly:

Ha, ha, ha, how the old Fool torments himself! Suppose he could introduce his rigid Rules--does he think we cou’d not match them in Contrivance? No, no; Let the Tyrant Man make what Laws he will, if there’s a Woman under the Government, I warrant she finds a way to break 'em" (8).

The remark plays salaciously with stereotypes of "Woman’s" appetite for being "under" man’s bodily rule, but also suggests that law itself is only men’s "Contrivance" for justifying their desires and their arrogation of power to themselves.

By focusing first on her subplot, in which Miranda and Isabinda will defeat Sir Jealous, Centlivre underscores that the conventional appearances of society and comic plots hide and deny female desire. Miranda and Isabinda’s cheerfulness cover their scheming and the seriousness of its necessity. They are motivated by "Melancholy and Despair" about Sir Jealous’ power to sell his daughter’s body to a Spanish merchant, while legitimizing the sale as a marriage arrangement. In Miranda’s case, her desire is to help a woman by deceiving a man. Thus, Centlivre shows woman’s desire to be more complex than the standard comic preoccupation with marriage and the sexual gratification and social acceptance it confers. Rather, Miranda’s primary desire is for freedom from laws that limit her conduct, largely because she wishes to define and gratify her erotic satisfactions in her own way. The fact that she wants such freedoms for another woman too indicates the deliberateness of Centlivre’s challenge to received ideas.

The subplot concerning Isabinda’s freedom underscores The Busie Body’s rejection of conventional comic views of women’s desires and
usual fate. Comedy generally defines women as preoccupied with escaping the constraints of parental law and getting a husband of their choice. Conflict between the protagonists' sexual desires and patriarchal power is the agency by which character and social values are exposed in comic plots, but The Busie Body is different by focusing on the power of a heroine's desire to solve her own problems. This makes the play strongly critical of prevailing ideas about gender, in contrast with male-authored comedies of the period which offered heroines "who were 'feminine' [by being] passive and helpless, whose only desires were to be loved and protected by a strong man" (Kendall, 10). As Centlivre's play exposes contrasts between men's and women's freedom, or between youthful desire and aged greed, it also hints that such problems are not serendipitous, but the result of men's deliberate decisions and power to control women's lives.

The park scene's masquerade features underscore Miranda's entrapment in her female identity. Unlike Isabella, Miranda is able to escape from the constant presence of her guardian, Sir Francis, and to disguise herself in order to move in the social world as an adult having some autonomy, but her freedom too is limited by being female. She must mask, or risk her respectability; but even a mask is not adequate protection from danger, as Sir George's threats and attempts to buy her favors soon prove. While Miranda's mask lets her move more freely in the outer world it remains a sign of her vulnerability. She too faces a predicament related to her sexual identity. Her doddering guardian, Sir Francis Gripe, intends to marry her and to keep control of her
inheritance of £30,000. She has been pretending to prefer Sir Francis to any young suitor so that she may gain time to assess Sir George’s merit as a lover and plot her escape from Sir Francis’ plans. Her personal motive for coming to St. James Park is to observe Sir George secretly because she suspects him of being a moral gadfly.

Thus, Miranda’s first scene emphasizes her inordinate position with respect to all of the laws that constrain her: those regulating a woman’s movement, speech, economic liberty, and matrimonial choice. Her first-scene role—that of a respectable woman who has no legitimate means of protecting herself—appears to confirm a necessary opposition between her pretenses and her desires. In contrast, her view of this predicament transforms it into an example of the play’s skepticism and, for her, into opportunity. The park becomes a place where signification is exposed as subject to desire. The gap or discrepancy between legitimate conduct and desire takes on the spatial and natural attributes of openness and covertness. The absence of walls and the presence of trees comprise a region that has only a marginal relation to law and custom. Within this self-generated, lawless space of relative freedom (resembling the satirist’s intellectual home), Miranda defines herself as a figure who is not captive, but an inventor of possibility and a judge of the men whose power over her life remains real.

Therefore, when Sir Francis and Sir George come onstage together and Miranda and Patch move out of their sight to watch them and listen to their discussion, Centlivre’s conventional stagecraft emphasizes that the power of specularity (or gazing) is a male privilege. Miranda must
hide in order to use it. What Miranda observes without a right to do so ("peeping" out often, as if hearing required verification by sight, 9-10) is a scene that makes her personal vulnerability explicit and acute. Sir Francis and Sir George are negotiating the financial cost of access to Miranda's body. Sir George agrees to pay Sir Francis one hundred guineas for ten minutes with Miranda, in order to persuade her to be his lover. Sir Francis stresses that Miranda is his property to sell or lease when he pulls out a "Paper" which lists the conditions agreed to and reads aloud its legalized terms: "Imprimus, you are to be admitted into my House in order to move your Suit to Miranda, without Lett or Molestation, provided I remain in the same Room" (10). Sir George adds the proviso that the old man remain "out of Ear shot," which makes the planned meeting with Miranda one in which contractual security depends entirely on what may be seen. Thus, their agreement stresses important relationships among looking, control over another person, and legal sanctions--the play's chief concerns. Each man intends to watch Miranda's conduct without telling her his motive, and (in Sir Francis' case) without letting her know that he is present.

The old man's gaze in the present scene is focused on his Paper and on the gold coins removed from the suitor's purse, betraying the narrowness of his way of seeing life. Sir George, of course, is the play's comic hero; we recognize his desperation to see Miranda as a sign that he can be reformed, and his potential merit is confirmed by his self-doubt: "if she should be cruel....if she should really be in Love with this old Cuff....but then what hopes have I to succeed, I never
spoke to her" (10). The uncertainty of his hopes and his speech are
evidence that Sir George is a redeemable rake. As well, he participates
in the play's satiric skepticism about knowable truth when he confesses
his doubts and admits to himself that there are features of his plan he
cannot foresee. Such traits link him more closely associated with
Miranda than with other male characters who never consider a range of
possibilities because their perceptual habits of mind are rigidly oppo-
sitional.

In turn, the eavesdropping Miranda recognizes in Sir George's
doubts a measure of safety for herself during the planned meeting, which
empowers her to move out of hiding to confront him in the guise of a
woman of the streets he has met before--his "Incognito." Her teasing
comment about the risks a man takes in trying to buy opportunity to win
a woman's "favour" puts into speech what neither her guardian nor suitor
considered during their negotiation: that the women they view as
objects to be purchased or gambled with are commodities easily damaged
or destroyed. She says about women, "They are the worst Things you can
deal in...and I fear you'll never see your Return...Ha, ha!" (11). Her
remark provokes his claim that the woman he intends as a "Meal" after
indulging in a taste of the speaker's sweetness will be worth ten times
his bet. The compliment to an allegedly absent Miranda is given at the
expense of her presently disguised self, whose only apparent appeal for
Sir George is her "Wit" and her sexual availability. Again, Centlivre's
wit is grounded in the assumption that verbal signifiers have only
indirect ties with their speaker's motives.
These exchanges alert us to notice a counterpoint between Sir George's legitimized-by-custom rakishness and Miranda's risk of violating the social law which defines a woman's honor and worth by her chastity. Her risk is made more real to us because in the play's first scene we saw him confessing to his friend Charles his own "whimsical posture": a preference for "the sensual pleasure" of entertaining a beautiful woman rather than for the intellectual delights of courting a witty one. That is, Sir George prefers seeing to hearing as a means of entertaining his lusts. (This has ironic importance in the "dumb scene" of Act II.) Therefore, his claim to the disguised Miranda standing in St. James Park that the woman on whom he bets will be worth all of his expense if only she is "Mistress of thy Wit" (11) does not ring true. Clearly, if Sir George is to prove a hero worthy of marriage (comedy's reward) he must learn to represent himself honestly and to see beyond the masks of conventionality, beyond oppositional habits of mind. Miranda's self-protective project is the discovery of whether he can do so.

Spying, of course, reverses the usual direction of appropriative looking. Here it is not a woman who is being assessed as if she were innately and inadequately "other" than the observing man, but Sir George who is objectified. When a woman is the object of a man's gaze, and when his looking at her is prompted or perpetuated by sexual desire, the tacitly superior social status of masculinity helps make that gaze an act of appropriation, as well as a declaration of the man's intent or interest. In such a case, looking is a manifestation of both desire and
power to possess. Conventionally, men’s roles in comedies of intrigue involve active pursuit of a mate or mistress, usually by deceitful means. Miranda takes on this role. The project of ‘looking for a woman’ also implies how men look at femaleness—often, as trophy, or source of sensual gratification. It is this predatory aspect of male desire that is conventional in comedies of the period and which Centlivre appropriates for her heroine. Thus, Miranda’s strategy for determining Sir George’s worth as a potential husband is at once a carnivalesque feature of The Busie Body by showing a female as the pursuing looker, and it supports her play’s social satire by showing the dangers risked by a woman who attempts to reverse the appropriating effects of gaze.

Ironically, as The Busie Body presents its deceitful heroine as a judge of the legitimacy of male privilege, it implies that the justice of such privilege is suspect. What can be counterfeited by an inferior may not be inherently superior or just. Miranda’s authority derives from being prescient, as well as witty; she is able to see more than her friends and her adversaries notice. Through her eyes we see women’s legal dilemmas and the generally inadequate and sometimes ridiculous features of all of the play’s male characters. At the same time, Centlivre’s characterization of Miranda as an exploiter of men’s rigid perceptual habits challenges the trustworthiness of any point of view. Miranda’s apparent heroinism may be constituted by superior understanding of the role of perception in naming truth, yet her knowledge does
not confer much power (which makes us more hesitant to credit her point of view).

We see this in her readiness to admit vulnerability on several occasions: in St. James’ Park, during the "Dumb Show" scene, and in the monkey scene she experiences and confesses various non-heroic emotions: fright, almost overwhelming passion, and speechlessness. Her wit may resemble the conventionally superior wit of the all-powerful rakish heroes who are the controlling figures in earlier comedies, but Centlivre makes Miranda a hybrid of wit and insecurity. She is at once the heroic figure who pursues a desired goal without scruple, using all of her resources, and a stereotypically female embodiment of unprotected desire. Therefore, in Miranda’s case, the law of genre that grants a play’s protagonist special powers serves a satiric purpose. It constructs her superiority as relative and tenuous, yet as challenging unjust social laws which fail to protect woman’s interests or safety. Whereas male protagonists in comedies are assigned authority by both literary precedent and social arrangements buttressed by laws which privilege maleness, Miranda’s heroinism is a more purely invented construct. That is, the play implies the superiority of (female) imagination (Miranda’s and Centlivre’s) which critiques what is customary.

The general importance of the St. James Park scene is its role in defining the gendered dimension of specularity as a key concern in The Busie Body. Throughout the play, Miranda and Sir George (and lesser characters) enact reversals of conventional ways of granting power to an observer and implying a looked-at figure’s unprotected state. If we see
the play as amusing, we participate in this reversal of specular conventions and endorse its implied, feminist view. As we develop sympathy for Miranda, our observations are conflated with Centlivre’s satiric vision. The act of looking at Miranda’s feminized vulnerability makes us complicit spectators of her eagerness to escape the confines of social custom and law and complicit critics of such restraints.

Miranda’s conduct and costuming in the park scene underscore her awareness that her safety is dependent upon her resistance to being seen. Anything less than the control associated with seeing all the truth and controlling how much others see makes her the victim of others’ scheming, a dispensable commodity whose value may be determined by a man’s desire—as Sir Francis and Sir George demonstrate. Her use of a mask and costume are conventional signifiers of erotic desire, but Miranda’s performance makes them signifiers of ability to notice how power is related to seeing. Their extravagences are material manifestations of her protean way of seeing things.12

By being costumed as an "Incognito" (Sir George’s later reference to her as a "Gypsie" indicates the general type of disguise, 13), Miranda participates in the traditions of masquerade, a conventional form of lawlessness, or freedom to express otherwise prohibited forms of subjectivity. Terry Castle’s Masquerade and Civilization emphasizes that popular masquerades held at the Haymarket in London during the early eighteenth-century and later at the Carlisle House in Soho Square virtually institutionalized costumed forms of disguise as agencies of inordinate behavior.
Like...satire, the masquerade projected an anti-nature, a world upside-down, an intoxicating reversal of ordinary sexual, social, and metaphysical hierarchies. The cardinal ideological distinctions underlying eighteenth-century cultural life, including the fundamental divisions of sex and class, were broached.... It served as a kind of exemplary disorder. Its hallucinatory reversals were both a voluptuous release from ordinary cultural prescriptions and a stylized comment on them" (6, my emphasis).13

At the same time that Miranda’s disguise is a customary form of transgression, it signifies a personalized project that is more clearly inordinate. Miranda’s mask and costuming give her an appearance of "dishabille" (8) and this disorderliness ironically confirms the laws and social customs against which she struggles because they deny the legitimacy of women’s desire. Furthermore, Miranda uses costume to resist the ‘laws’ of masquerade (of lawlessness) that condone male purchase or theft of female "favours."14 As the play advances she becomes increasingly adept at using various forms of visual and verbal deceit to empower herself.

However, in this scene, as an Incognito, Miranda barely escapes from the forcible violation of her hidden respectability and her right to remain untouched. When Sir George takes hold of her threateningly ("Remember you are in the Park, Child, and what a terrible thing would it be to lose this pretty white hand," 11), she counters a threat of rape (the forced exposure to his sight, and perhaps his sexual power) with barter. She suggests trading Sir George’s putative "Honour" in exchange for her own promised confession of who she is, where she lives, and why she has often masked herself to walk in the park "like some troubl’d Spirit" (11). That is, she offers hearing in place of seeing.
He agrees to the bargain only when Patch interrupts the negotiation with a blurted truth: "Suppose, Sir, the Lady shou'd be in Love with you" (12). The interjection disrupts the customary positions of both parties by robbing their formulaic language of its value. In effect, Patch's remark privileges alternative points of view (associating her with Miranda's role as a critic of programmatic male response). Sir George redirects his attention from his lust to Miranda's view of him, and she redirects her attention from fear of his grasp to inventing a way of using words for her advantage.

This is not to say that Centlivre credits words as more powerful than an appropriating gaze, but to notice how words reflect Miranda's satiric perspective. Sir George's physical aggression toward Miranda has been preceded by a mutual display of verbal wit that has merged the issues of identity, authority, and seeing. Sir George's belief that Miranda is an Incognito he has previously met robs her of individuality. She is just another woman; their current encounter is just a conventional situation, not a personalized exchange, but a 'contractual' one: a man's trade of pleasure for compliments. He defines her as a "Dish of Chocolate" he means to enjoy before his "Meal" (marriage); she accuses him of having violated laws imposed by "the God of Love" who punishes unruly lovers with the stigma of "Husband" (11).15

As in all masquerade scenes, their badinage is ironic testimony to the insufficiency of language. Words are surrogates or foreshadowings of the more primary objective of bodily exposure and touch. Sir George's desire is conventional in masquerade context: to unmask
Miranda, "to know...what kind of Flesh and Blood [her] Face is."

Miranda's desire is to "quit the Place in search of Liberty" (11-12). In Sir George's eyes their verbal exchange has been an implicit agreement to advance further into intimacy, but Miranda refuses her predetermined role by protesting his rude grasp of her. Of course, her offer to slap him is a symbolic equivalent of his physical aggression. Their resort to gesture indicates that their mutual verbal threats are weaker agents than touch for conveying and gratifying desire. The act of looking is granted power because it is a metonymic form of touch, as Sir George's insistence on inquiring "into the Reality" of Miranda's identity and her refusal of him indicates.

Sir George does not master saying, touching, or looking in this scene. On the other hand, Miranda uses words and sight as agencies of control. First, she quotes Sir George's words during an earlier meeting (his pledge of "Honour," that he "never would, directly or indirectly endeavour to know her till she gave him Leave," 11) as a means of threatening his reputation as a gentleman (at least, among those who frequent his chocolate house). Then she invents a story (or relates the truth?) about seeing him at a "Birthday Ball" in Paris and being charmed into loving him. The act of storytelling, or confessing, is an exchange for Sir George's agreement to look away as she speaks. Her control of the situation is constituted by giving him a verbal substitute for the sight of her face. Since he has agreed to turn his back because she has indicated that her feminine modesty requires more shield than a mask and costume ("if you look upon me I shall sink, even masked as I am," 12),
Sir George does not look at her during her verbal self-exposure. Thus, her storytelling is largely the agency by which Miranda’s visual control is maintained, giving her time to move slowly offstage as she speaks.\(^{17}\) (Yet, the probable fictitiousness of her story about a Paris Ball also implies that language is another form of masquerade. Her gradual backing-off-stage at the conclusion of Act I therefore resembles that of an effaced narrator whose use of irony is strengthened by an absence of overt commentary.)

By controlling the specularity of the park encounter with Sir George Miranda begins to define herself as a plotter whose self-serving wit will be protean: fusing verbal irony and bodily gestures—especially, the manipulative powers vested in gazing—to keep control of her circumstances.\(^ {18}\) Her performance in this scene combines the forethought and spontaneous invention that will characterize her behavior later in the play: exploiting conventional female helplessness or compliance, while remaining aware of their falseness; mocking the credulity of those who do not notice how appearance and desire may be contrary.

In this light, Sir George’s monologue at the scene’s conclusion (spoken without knowledge that Miranda has exited) becomes a verbal self-exposure, revealing to us his gullibility, pride, and, ultimately, his readiness to admit fault: "A Curse of my Folly-- I deserve to lose her; what Woman can forgive a Man that turns his Back" (13). His winsome foolishness echoes the way their conversation has been, like language itself (according to Lacan) "a play of absence and presence" (Cixous, "Castration," 37). Miranda’s pretence is successful because
Sir George mistakenly believes that her words are reliable. In other words, Miranda's desire masters the limited means of signification and self-protection available to her in the park scene, foreshadowing her control of the play's later events and leaving Sir George still to be proved worthy of her love.

Centlivre gives Miranda a heightened self-consciousness by characterizing her as one who controls what she sees, rather than showing her to be the vulnerable object of scrutiny by men. Still, if her desires were fundamentally selfish and unexamined we would be justified in seeing her character as a simple, gendered reversal of the Restoration rake. But her defensive position vis-à-vis custom and law is enhanced by her generous devotion to Isabella's plight and her eventual recovery of Charles' money and legal autonomy from Sir Francis' control. This prevents our seeing Miranda as a programmatic reversal of the rake whose personal gratifications are obsessive and whose ironic point of view does not encompass himself. Like the satirist whose distanced perspective of human folly becomes a potentially neutral space in which wit is generated and in which self-awareness thrives, Miranda moves offstage from the park scene into an imaginative space in which she invents plans to protect her interests and also expose the stupidity or cruelty of her adversaries. Since Miranda does not have economic law or sexual 'laws' on her side, she must invent principles for her conduct that hide the disparity between her appearances and her desires, a creative strategy which lets her keep a semblance of social legitimacy, while enlarging her personal freedom.
Miranda's getaway from Sir George's threat of violence illustrates her perceptual freedom, as well as literal escape from conventional views of femaleness that constrain women's lives. In the next crucial scene marking Miranda's progress towards self-determination she manages to transcend the conventionality of her masked role in the park. In Act II Miranda functions as plotter/trickster who uses silence to mask her desires and the act of looking to test Sir George's honesty. The "Dumb Show" exposes the defensiveness of Miranda's wit, but it shows her readiness to acknowledge the contradictory nature of her desires for a young husband, personal freedom, and economic security.

The "Dumb Show": Miranda's Mastery of Desire

The satirized view of specularity of Act II's third scene in Sir Francis' chambers is underscored by an earlier conversation involving one of the principals. In the act's first scene we see Miranda persuading Sir Francis that she prefers him to any young suitor and will prove her loyalty by refusing to speak to Sir George when he comes to court her. Sir Francis rejoices, believing that his pleasure in receiving one hundred guineas will be doubled by Miranda's trick. "Dumb! I can but laugh, ha, ha, to think how damn'd Mad he'll be when he finds he has given his Money away for a Dumb Show" (15).20

The scene is specular in several respects. Sir Francis observes the action from a hiding place at the bottom of the stage, and sees only physical gestures that either conform to or violate his notion of what courtship ought to be. His role as voyeur is accented each time he
emerges to protest what he sees-- Miranda giving Sir George her hand to raise him from his knees; Sir George's taking her hand again, embracing her, kissing her, sighing; Miranda's holding up her hands or shaking her head as if to communicate something to Sir George secretly. While Sir Francis lacks ability to understand what he sees, Miranda's looking is entirely self-aware. We share her ironic perspective by noticing that the scene would be a parody of courting, even without Miranda's satiric control of it because Sir George is ridiculous. He poses as a hero of Romance, using the archaic and formulaic language of fiction in his addresses to Miranda.

Shake off this Tyrant Guardian's Yoke, assume your self, and dash his bold aspiring Hopes; the Deity of his Desires, is Avarice; a Heretic in Love, and ought to be banished by the Queen of Beauty. See, Madam, a faithful Servant kneels and begs to be admitted in the Number of your Slaves" (20).

(His more genuine thoughts and feelings are first expressed as asides.) Yet, it is Miranda's knowing silence that makes Sir George display his real feelings. He is forced into self-awareness and forced to step out-of-character as a Romantic suitor as he grows increasingly frustrated by Miranda's silence. As in Act I, Sir George's words and actions reveal aspects of his true character that are not heroic; his formulaic claims of devotion rapidly shift to self-praise, complaint, instruction, desperate questions, pleading.

Although Sir George resorts to his wits in this scene to circumvent Miranda's refusal of his advances, his efforts to be inventive only show that his perceptual habits are conventional. Presuming to know her mind, or believing himself able to change it, Sir George improvises a
dramatic scenario in which he speaks for himself and also for her. "I perceive, Madam, you are too apprehensive of the Promise you have made to follow my Rules; therefore I'll suppose your Mind and answer for you" (22). The Sir George-authored scene (a mini-drama occurring within the "Dumb Show" scene which indicates Centlivre's mastery of dramatic irony) exposes his wit as deficient—a form of dumbness. Inventing her 'answers' to gratify his own hopes, he assigns to Miranda (and speaks aloud for her) the words of an impromptu romantic letter, which we inevitably hear as an ironic counterpart of Miranda's impromptu, sanguine narrative in Act I about falling in love with Sir George at a Birthday Ball. While Miranda's earlier inventive story secured her escape from danger, leaving the hero duped and angry, Sir George's ersatz letter serves Miranda's purposes (again, without his awareness) by disclosing that her suitor is charming, without scruples, and strongly attracted to her.21 Sir George's impromptu dramas are clever, but not signs of acute perception. He lacks awareness that his performance is less than successful (as he defines success). Rather, it indicates his readiness to impose his will if his wishes are not granted. That he is a "Bloody-minded Fellow" (20), quick to anger and to enforce his desires violently is underscored each time he threatens to use his sword when Sir Francis interrupts the courting scene. Moreover, his cleverness is not wit because it does not suggest ability to notice and expose other people's duplicity.

The scene is an example of complexly displaced discourse by which Centlivre once again implies that the power of gazing is superior to
verbal performance. We hear Sir George speaking words he pretends to be reading from a page which he pretends has been written by the woman he courts—whose simultaneous identity as "Incognita" and Miranda remains unknown to him, and whose imagined 'voice' thus has no referent. The letter and Sir George's anger at Sir Francis' interruptions underscore the limited scope of imagination marking all of the play's male characters. Here, Sir George's attempts to be inventive only show him as a puppet, pointing to Centlivre's insight that language has a tentative link with truth and to her play with the idea coexisting, contrary realities.²² The romantic epistle Sir George 'invents' is less invention than recollection of clichés. It concludes with a rhymed verse that is a projection of what he wishes Miranda would say and credits her only with stereotypic feminine desire:

"Great Love inspire him;  
Say I admire him.  
Give me the Lover  
That can discover  
Secret Devotion  
From silent Motion;  
Then don't betray me,  
But hence convey me" (23).²³

These sentiments only confirm her suspicions of Sir George's rakish intentions. She was wise earlier in the scene to "strike down" to the floor the paper prop serving Sir George's improvisation. It represents his predetermined ideas about the role she should play and it presumes (incorrectly) that she is willing to be directed and spoken for.²⁴ Using her body to signify refusal of the paper's contents is a gesture that refuses stereotyped romance in its written form and customs which presume women's bodily helplessness. Given that Miranda's general
predicament in the play is defined by the words of men (inheritance and marriage laws) that work to her disadvantage, she is acting consistently to prejudge the letter as yet another means of restricting her freedom.

Sir George's use of the letter confirms his acceptance of received ideas and formulaic language. His ridiculousness therefore indicts the laws of signification by which men justify their power and status. The pretended (female) letter-writer's plea to the god of love for conveyance to her lover also exposes the limited scope of Sir George's desire. He is not wooing Miranda with conscious intent to marry her (Miranda is still poor, deprived of her estate), but projecting interest in a casual affair. The voice and sentiments he attributes to Miranda (when he reads the letter she ostensibly wrote) exclude the possibility of a female desire different than his notions of it. His desired construction of her is limited to stereotypes of femaleness: confessing love and admiration for him and a helpless willingness to surrender to his plan. Miranda's actual desires are registered by her more knowing, ironic strategy of withholding information and agreement while watching the progress of Sir George's frustration and judging his habits of mind.

We share knowledge of her purposes and also see her struggles (manifest in asides) to stay faithful to her strategy of silence as her heart responds to Sir George's wooing. His mistakes prove charming: "Oh, that I durst speak--" (20); "Oh Heavens! I shall not be able to contain my self" (20); "How every Action charms me--" (21). Having multiple reasons for doing so (her need to deceive her guardian, her decision to test Sir George's sincerity, and her need to prevent Sir
George's discovery--by hearing her voice--that she is the same woman he encountered in St. James' Park) strengthens Miranda's control. As well, she is helped by Sir George's urging her to signify her thoughts by moving her head or sighing in response to his questions. This allows her to seem to comply with her suitor's plan to violate the agreement with Sir Francis, but Miranda's silent 'answers' are not more truthful than Sir George's earlier reliance on the prescriptive language of Romance. Neither programmatic form of communication is freely expressive of personal desire. However, Miranda uses the sign language knowingly, seeing discrepancy and ironic congruence between gestures Sir George requests and the actual, warm condition of her heart.26

The concluding irony of scene three in Act II is that Sir Francis gives Miranda the one hundred guineas pledged by Sir George. From Miranda's point of view, the money represents a symbolic prepayment of the monies bequeathed by her father and held "in trust" by her guardian. The latter's attempts to bribe Miranda to marry him by promising her access to her estate seven years earlier than the will's terms allow only underscore Miranda's entrapment by law and custom. Moreover, Sir Francis' surrender of the one hundred guineas without realizing that both he and Sir George have been tricked by Miranda is Centlivre's satiric highlighting of her heroine's need to protect her interests by using the same means (entrapment and deceit) that rob her of autonomy. Miranda exits the stage immediately after Sir Francis hands her the gold, once again leaving Sir George talking to her absent self and resorting to threatening, versified clichés to save face. He warns Sir
Francis, "She that to Age her Beauteous Self resigns,/ Shows witty Management for close Designs" (24). Sir George imagines only that Miranda would be unfaithful to an aged husband; his inability to imagine her desire for self-determination helps us notice again that Miranda's view of her predicament and of the men who want her is that of a satirist, rejecting their way of thinking and behaving, noticing that they do not question their own procedures.

From Miranda's protean perspective, the "Dumb Show" has multiple benefits: it earns her money which she may use to further her plans to help Isabinda and Charles, or to escape Sir Francis' presence, and it has confirmed Sir George's interest in her. From our perspective, Miranda's successfully silent "show" accentuates her powers of self-control and her understanding of how looking, generally, is a manipulative act. By keeping silent and refusing Sir George's enticements, she exhibits the rationality and discipline traditionally credited to men, and she disproves stereotypes of femaleness that define a woman's nature as entirely affective, presuming her to be glib, overwhelmed by any emotion, driven by sordid or malicious lust.

From our perspective, Miranda's heroinism is not conventional, but pertinent, since she transvalues clichéd ideas about women that concern persist in our century. She serves as an historicized example of contemporary claims that women have always recognized misogyny in men's notion of womanhood as "indefinite, indefinable...unable to recognize herself, outside the Symbolic" (Cixous, "Castration," 46). Centlivre's reliance on mute, feminized inscrutability to valorize Miranda turns
the cliché on its head, using it to demonstrate inadequacy in men’s ways of seeing and narrating the world. Her play also suggests that the familiar, symbolic system of language is not our only communicative resource; rather, meanings proliferate as we transgress or play with the commonplace uses of words and customary body language. Thus, the scene is strong proof of women’s ability to step outside of the realm and concepts by which they are defined, to satirize epistemological blind spots in the men who look at them.

The Monkey Scene: Exposures of Miranda’s Desires

Miranda’s clever use of the power latent in specularity occurs in scenes that are eroticized. In fact, the play’s comic progression toward marriage is constituted by an incremental shift of sexual desire from the masculine body to the feminine—-from Sir George’s early admission to Charles that he is in love with two women (or, so he believes), to Miranda’s declaration in Act V that she intends to marry Sir George.27 I will say more below about Miranda’s ironic view of marriage and sexual pleasure. Through-out, the progressive redefinition of sexual power as woman’s natural prerogative is central to the play’s revisionary project.

In St. James Park Sir George’s sexual desire is powerful in two ways; it is conflated with his physical strength, which threatens Miranda’s safety and it is shown as being more dangerous to her because it is legitimized by the courtesies and rules by which masquerade courtships proceed. Moreover, while the laws of society (criminal and other-
wise) seem to protect women of Miranda's class from sexual abuse, her mask and costume are signals that she has removed herself from their safety. In the park she virtually concedes the superiority of man's sexual advantage, and he defines Miranda in almost exclusively erotic, rather than personal terms.

In the "Dumb Show" scene he and she both view one another as potential sources of erotic pleasure. The scene is a dance of desire between the principals, Miranda's growing attraction to Sir George being stimulated by his vacillation between a formulaic wooing and outbursts of sincere effort to persuade her of his love.28 (Miranda vacillates too, between the urge to confess her sexual fascination with him and the need to conceal her strategic purposes for silence.29) In other words, erotic desire in the "Dumb Show" is gendered and is deconstructed as a gendered concept. Male characters (Sir Francis and Sir George) generally embody its stereotypic forms by looking at Miranda as a sexually attractive female whose favors may be leased or won by persuasion. Miranda too sees Sir George as attractive, a potential suitor and husband whose worth she intends to assess. However, she positions herself as a spectator of her desires, even while they affect her, emotionally. As we have seen, her strategy during the "Dumb Show" is that of a satirist who deliberately endorses social arrangements that are enforced by law, only to expose their flaws. The scene's hilariousness is constituted by its revelation that erotic desire may be hidden, alleged, and confessed at the same time, by the same person. The scene is essentially comic by illustrating the complimentarity of male and female
desire, but essentially satiric in its representations of Miranda's self-aware and judgmental role. As she appropriates the initiatives and control usually allowed to the male suitor or credited as masculine traits, she shifts the scene's focus from her body to the mutuality of eroticized gazing.

In the play's next importantly eroticized scene too—the "monkey scene"—Centlivre underscores the importance of specularity and its simultaneous effectiveness as an agency of comic and satiric perspective. Once again, Miranda and Sir George adapt comically to unanticipated events. Whereas in the park and "Dumb Show" scenes the protagonists' erotic desires are foregrounded as troublesome, here desire is symbolically displaced onto Marplot's and Sir Francis' intrusions, onto the evocative shapes of Sir George's hiding place and a half-eaten orange, and onto the china broken when he escapes from being discovered in Miranda's chamber. These actions and objects are eroticized by association; earlier, similar scenes about looking have prepared us to notice specularity as a feature of sexual desire. Here all features of the dramatic action are eroticized by Miranda's spontaneous invention of a lie which personifies Sir George's love as monkey-lust.

The fourth scene of Act IV (51-57) is known as the "monkey scene," because during its action Sir George is hidden behind the chimneyboard and discussed as if he were an unruly, pet monkey needing restraint. Like an earlier scene in which Charles is hidden by Patch in a closet of Isabella's chamber (48), such dispositions of the body generally signify
the aspects of sexual desire that are taboo or thwarted by social laws and patriarchal power. As well, in Centlivre's day, allusions to a monkey were assumed to be sly references to sexual desire.30

The "monkey scene" is a riotous display of sexually aroused characters engaged in looking at or hiding what they desire. Centlivre makes the scene a mockery of her character's inability to control erotic desire, while she mocks the figure whose ignorance (or virginity) causes confusion and threatens to reveal Miranda's deceit of her guardian. Marplot (the play's busy-body) insists upon seeing/learning other people's secrets and is ignorant of the sexual energies his conduct might expose; at the same time, his energetic curiosity is an avatar of sexual power. Miranda has contrived to invite Sir George into her chambers when Sir Francis is sent on a fool's errand. Her need for secrecy has made use of a late hour, a back-stair access, and her maid as surrogate of herself (to show Sir George the way)--all conventional comic means of evading social regulation of lovers' desires. As well, all comprise evasions of being seen.

The scene's crisis is precipitated by Sir Francis' unexpected return, caused by Marplot's gossip about Miranda's annoyance with Sir George and the possibility that she might shoot him. However, it is an orange, the symbol of doddering Sir Francis's unseemly lust, which threatens Sir George's discovery. Sir Francis' act of peeling an orange identifies him with the lust of young fops in the Pit who dally with orange-girls willing to sell their sexual favors. The fruit's feminine roundness, its reputation as a delicacy in the early 1700's, and the act
of eating something succulent also imply sexual enjoyment, particularly during the disclosing act of peeling the fruit, which Sir Francis does as he enters the room.31 The orange and Sir Francis' seemingly careless request also underscore that erotic pleasure may be constituted by threats of discovery and censure. The old man's impulse to discard its peel in the fireplace threatens to discover Sir George hiding there, behind a screen. Sir Francis' apparently innocent or thoughtless urge to use the fireplace also points to desire's uncanny link with its own disclosures. He moves toward his rival's hiding place as if possessed of a non-rational certainty of its importance.

From our perspective, and Miranda's, Sir Francis unwittingly embodies the fact that hidden, unconfessed desire makes articulate the objects onto which it is displaced. Although Miranda and Sir George are preoccupied with hiding or denying their desire to be with each other, the erotic nature of this compulsion is manifest is the roles assigned to the scene's important objects.

Significantly, it is not Sir Francis who exposes Sir George's illicit presence. The impotent old man is deflected from the fireplace by Miranda's claim that the chimneyboard or screen serves to trap a wild pet monkey in the fireplace hole. Marplot, the embodiment of unruliness and of youthful (but asexual) energy is guilty of discovering Sir George, raising an outcry, and bringing Sir Francis back on stage with Miranda almost in time to see Sir George escape.

Marplot's sneaking back into the room to "peep" at the alleged pet monkey contravenes Miranda's instructions and becomes an ironic version
of the satisfactions of seeing what is forbidden. Generally, the comic (disruptive) functions of Marplot's intrusive gaze into other people's affairs indicate how looking may be a violation of privacy and a sign of one's refusal to be self-reflexive. When an obsession, as it is in his case, such prying may be a substitute for sexual experience or desire. Since Marplot remains entirely unaware of his own lack of self-control and lack of discernment, it is fitting that he does not find what he expects behind the screen. Ironically, when Marplot sees that it is Sir George who is hidden there, he screams "Undone, undone!", an expression frequently associated with violation of sexual chastity and reinforcing the scene's focus on the illicit nature of stolen looks at someone's body. In this case, Sir George is first hidden, then looked at, and since the act of hiding his body is initiated by Miranda it points to her role as subject rather than object in the act of looking. Her refusing to look at him (or pretending the absence of a presence) here functions as an ironic example of the power of gazing and its relation to desire. The refusal to look is a variant of conventional comic stagecraft--which often employs the device of hiding a body or a glance--and a reversal of social customs that assign powers of discovery to men. Miranda's control of what she looks at emphasizes the importance of sight as a primary agent of sexual expression and personal authority.

These symbolic confusions of identity and desire in the "monkey scene" stress Centlivre's (and satire's) reliance on simultaneity, and her satiric alertness to the difficulty of seeing things as clearly
opposed or discrete. Sir George’s elevated social rank and his by-now confirmed identity as Miranda’s romantic choice are temporarily erased by his placement in the chimney hole and by references to him as a "monkey." His self-sufficiency is erased by the scene’s general predicament. In addition, Marplot’s vocal cries and state of shock are displaced expressions of the desires and fears that Miranda, Sir George, and her maid Scentwell must hide. The women too are threatened by discovery, but the fool’s role in this scene is shared by Sir Francis, Sir George and Marplot. Of course, it is a standard comic ploy to use a socially marginalized figure like Marplot as the means by which romance is either promoted or threatened, but here Sir George’s ignominious position is linked with Marplot’s ignorance. While each uses his wits to escape being found and punished, neither is credited (seen) by us as a self-determining figure. The power of self-determination remains associated with Miranda, who has planned the tryst with Sir George and who exploits chance, as well as forethought to bring about what she desires. 

Still, Centlivre does not present Miranda as eager for marriage. In the third scene of Act IV where Miranda ponders the wisdom of choosing Sir George as a prospective husband (and earlier in the play when she asks Patch for a judgment about him, 9), she emphasizes that self-definition and freedom of choice are as important to her as marriage. What makes Miranda an appealing heroine as well as a clever one is her willingness to admit that choice is a troubling freedom: "Well, let me reason a little with my mad self. Now don’t I transgress all Rules to
venture upon a Man, without the Advice of the Grave and Wise" (51). Of course, her point is that those who are supposed to be wise (father figures such as Sir Francis and Sir Jealous) are not to be trusted; they have abdicated the moral responsibilities associated with their legal powers. Her attempts to use reason to reach a decision are, of course, not as powerful as her desire for Sir George; however, as we see her struggle with the contradictions of men's unreliability, her own self-doubt, and her erotic attraction to her suitor, we observe a strongly satiric revision of the helpless passions of conventional femininity.

In contrast with most dramatic heroines, Miranda possesses a more fully human subjectivity that is at once self-critical and self-confident. It is her legal predicament—her lack of real autonomy—which keeps her suspicious of marriage. She is aware that a husband might be just as ready as a guardian to keep her subordinate. This stifles expression of her sexual desire for Sir George and predetermines her manner of representing herself. The "monkey scene" is therefore strongly Miranda's scene because its displacements of desire are typical of her subjective dilemma. She almost always resorts to indirect ways of acknowledging the erotic features of her interest in Sir George: calculating, plotting, disguising herself, lying, pretending, withholding information, etc. The exception to this pattern only helps confirm that she does love Sir George. When she proposes marriage to him she does so directly: "Time's but short and we must fall into Business: Do you think we can agree on that same terrible Bugbear, Matrimony, without heartily Repenting on both sides [?]" (52). Even this candor accents
her self-satirizing stance, her distanced position from her own desires. And her references to "agreement" and "repentence" and "sides" evoke language commonly used in legal disputes, again reminding us of her problematic relation to law.

In other words, Centlivre invents a heroine who is not essentially comic because she must see more than her own desire. She must, like a satirist, notice and judge the false premises supporting customary definitions of what is good or possible for women. After marrying Sir George (offstage, between Acts IV and V), Miranda reflects that she has avoided marrying a repulsive old man, but cannot see herself as entirely wise or safe:

Now to avoid the Impertinence and Roguery of an old Man, I have thrown my self into the Extravagence of a young one; if he shou'd despise, slight or use me ill, there's no Remedy from a Husband, but the Grave" (58).

These are not the effusions of a girl like Isabinda, whose love is stronger than her practicality.34 They are the rational views of a woman who has authored her own plot to protect her interests. Centlivre allows desire its plausible role in the play's narrative of romance, but shows its troubled relation to female identity by underscoring Miranda's continual alertness to the risks of inferior legal status.

In effect, Miranda's relation to desire resembles the satirist's relation to his or her subject; she acknowledges its powers with the wariness of one who is also its voyeur. For her, erotic desire is not isolated and sovereign, but a part of her entire, self-protectively coherent subjectivity. From the vantage of contemporary theory she exhibits at every point in the action what some feminists consider a
distinctive feature of woman's erotic nature--"silent, multiple, diffuse" (Irigaray, "This Sex," 103). That is, Miranda's desires for independence and for the sexual gratifications of loving Sir George are not functionally different. They are simultaneous. This illuminates Irigaray's claim that woman's habits of perception and capacities for sensual pleasure are "much more diversified...complex, subtle, than is imagined [by anyone] too strictly centered on [only one desire]" ("Ce Sexe," 28)\textsuperscript{35} The importance and value of undifferentiated experience in The Busie Body also illuminates Miranda's conversation with Marplot about women's reputation for being unpredictable:

\begin{quote}
Marplot. Why, look you, Madame!.... when you talk'd of a Blunderbuss, who thought of a Rendezvous [sic]? and when you talk'd of a Monkey, who the Devil dreamt of Sir George?
Miranda. A sign you converse but little with our Sex, when you can't reconcile Contradictions. (56)
\end{quote}

Her witticism alludes to misogynist jokes about women, but also undercuts the latter, since it makes Marplot, a man after all, the embodiment of lack. What Marplot views as contradictory interpretations of Miranda's message to Sir George are proof of her ability to exploit the simultaneous meanings of language.

Because Miranda's way of seeing things is not limited by received ideas and because she recognizes contradictions in her conduct and among her motives, sexual and political satire are not separate features of The Busie Body. All that occurs in the play is eroticized, and all is politicized by Miranda's ability to tolerate what I call the polymorphous nature of truth. For her, personal and social issues are not discrete; her desire for sexual fulfillment occupies the same stage (or
psychological space) with her desire to escape from legal and customary
restraints of women’s freedom. Thus, Miranda’s wit serves her whole
subjectivity triumphantly. We see her success in getting her man and
her money, her generosity in securing Charles’ estate for him, and her
support of Isabella’s more conventional desires for romance and mar-
riage.

Miranda’s Relinquishment of Her Role as Satirist

In the scene just discussed Miranda makes a monkey out of both Sir
Francis and Sir George. Her guardian is the more ridiculed because he
leaves the stage in Act IV unaware of being tricked. This is made more
amusing when his first comment in Act V is a confession: "thy poor Gar-
dee has been abused, cheated, fool’d, betray’d" (59). It is important
too that in the play’s final scene Sir Francis leaves the scene cursing,
refusing to forgive Miranda, concede Charles’ right to his estate, or
grant his blessing to Isabella and Charles (Act V; 69-72).

Conventionally, comedies end with weddings, or with preparations
for one. Both male and female desires are represented as fulfilled by
the play’s celebratory ending. But marriage is the primary means by
which patriarchal legal and economic power is kept hegemonic. Although
The Busie Body is typical of many comedies of the period by exposing the
conflicts existing between young love and economic realities—powers of
the purse usually being held by fathers or their surrogates—comedy as a
genre meliorates such conflict. The genre’s lightheartedness is con-
stituted by its formalic resolution of whatever blocks personal happi-
ness. Still, in *The Busie Body*’s final hubub of comic joyousness in which lovers are united in marriage and money problems solved, Centlivre implies that patriarchal power is not generally diminished by Miranda’s victories over two of its representatives.

Marriage grants Miranda no additional power; in fact, her wit’s triumph and her passionate gratification occur at the expense of some of her freedom.36 Having married Sir George, Miranda has not gained the legal status of a man, and having openly admitted loving Sir George she has lost some of the strategic advantage of secrecy in her war with Sir Francis, whom she despises. Miranda’s desire for autonomy has been subordinated to her desire for Sir George. (Ironically, in light of the play’s allusions to commodified sex, she has ‘purchased’ him with some of her hard-won freedom.) She is the play’s hero, but because she is female and because marriage defines her legally as an unfree agent her rewards and gratifications will be limited. After Miranda marries Sir George (offstage, between Acts IV and V), and wonders about the wisdom her choice, Patch gives her savvy mistress small comfort when she argues that for a prosperous couple "nothing but Complaisance and good Humour is requisite on either side to make them happy" (58). Miranda is quite aware that her own appetite for self-determination (her "Constitution") is likely to prove as troubling to married harmony as Sir George’s taste for sexual dalliance.

By conducting the marriages of both couples offstage prior to the *The Busie Body*’s final scene Centlivre submerges comic celebration in order to emphasize the play’s more serious, protofeminist content.37
She hints that her protagonists’ erotic desires are only one feature of a legal arrangement that is complicated by inequalities of power. The point is made more forcibly in Act V when we see Miranda’s continuing need to cater to her guardian and trick him into escorting her to Isabinda’s wedding. When all tricks are revealed and Miranda’s married state is known, she does not speak again. Sir Francis’ verbal response is vehement, but also a form of inarticulateness: "Confound you all!" (71). Nevertheless, because his remark is a curse it is a signifier of both impotence and power; Sir Francis may be unable to express his anger more volubly, but his words carry the force of threat. They suggest the possibility of revenge that may trouble the newly married couple’s future happiness. His identity as a villain remains intact. In contrast, Miranda’s ‘success’ alters her identity. She has achieved her goal of securing her fortune and her choice of husband, but her silence betokens the dearth of opportunities for self-expression (functional wit) for a married woman. Her role as heroine is contracting to that of mere wife. 38

Centlivre compensates for her heroine’s newly acquired inarticulateness by offering us a visual tableau that bespeaks the play’s concern with power and injustice. The playwright disposes male bodies in this scene with a panache that bespeaks Miranda’s now muted verbal wit. Centlivre uses the prostrate body of one of her male characters (Charles) to represent the continued disadvantage of youth in relation to patriarchal power, and she uses the rage of another male (Sir Francis) to expose the hostility that energizes greed for money and for
control of young people's lives. There is a strong reiteration of The Busie Body's thematic emphasis of specularity in the moment when Sir Francis stalks away from Charles who is kneeling and waiting for his father's blessing. It is not only an uncomic scene because it foregrounds the unkindness energizing Sir Francis' character. It also strongly indictsthe conventional arrangements of father-son ties and underscores the marginality of women in patriarchal society. Charles remains focused on his father, rather than on his bride. Visually, the scene indictsthe complicity of men in a power structure that privileges fathers.

Instead of placing her heroine centerstage during the play's final scene, Centlivre keeps our gaze focused on Sir Francis's unchanging hostility toward the freedom of choice which has been Miranda's self-defined goal. Thus, Centlivre's refusal to invent a way of including Sir Francis in the festivities is more than a scapegoating gesture, or a swerve from comic convention to assert the playwright's imaginative license. It implies the illegitimacy and moral flaws of social arrangements that have comprised her heroine's troubles. Sir Francis' exiting rage only accents his greed and lust and manipulations of the law for his own advantage as despicable. Centlivre's exclusion of Sir Francis from the play's last scene may be vindictive—a symbolic punishment of the unjust laws and misogynist customs that usually validate male desire and masculine freedom in such comedies, often while denying legitimacy to the erotic features of women's desire or denying women's ability to invent a different destiny than marriage. Sir Francis' parting words
"Confound you all!" 71) are Centlivre's subtle, final mockery of his impotence, his lack of wit in contrast with Miranda's successful "confounding" of words and body language to deceive him.

Like the play's confounding of gender roles, the unresolved matters implied by Sir Francis' exit (father-son relationship, guardianship, inequitable laws) are matters related to identity and personal responsibility which cannot be understood using received ideas. Sir Francis' exclusion from the happy comic ending is also a reminder that laws are the products of perceptual habits and customary uses of language.

Still, that Sir Francis' defeat is represented as exclusion from the community of friends and lovers is a symbolic triumph for Miranda. His exit (absence) at least embodies (makes present) one of her chief satisfactions. Marrying Sir George and seeing Sir Francis leave makes Miranda a partially triumphant wit--partially, because her legal subservience to a man persists and may redound to her disadvantage again. It is the play's subplot which softens these dark possibilities. Miranda's service to Charles and her loyalty to Isabinda make Miranda's wit a sign of the value she accords community. Therefore, it is worth noting that Sir Francis' exclusion from the play's final moments coincides with the reuniting at last of Miranda and Isabinda. Their friendship is no longer an offstage tie, frustrated by patriarchal control, and displaced by duties to an unloving man who insists upon having their exclusive attention. Nor is their relationship entirely erased by comic convention which posits no future other than wedded bliss. The women's
relationship (mediated by another woman, Patch) attains its desired goal of togetherness, and this feature of the play too accents female capacity for several, simultaneous loves. Centlivre rewrites dramatic convention by suggesting that both friends and lovers are essential to a woman’s happiness. Miranda’s and Isabinda’s solidarity helps to further legitimize the pleasures that thrive outside/beyond patriarchal law.42

In spite of the persistence of misogynist laws and laws that make children their fathers’ chattel, Centlivre makes the stage space formerly occupied by Sir Francis a symbolic gap or slightly wider opportunity for Charles and Isabinda’s happiness, as well as for Miranda’s. For her, his absence is filled by Sir George’s apparent love and by her somewhat changed relation to law and to the monies she now controls.43 Lest we miss her point that conventional social arrangements have a hostile basis, or that male power is arbitrary, Centlivre adds to the standard rhetoric of comic resolution ("we’ll bury all Animosities" 72) a verse spoken by Sir Jealous which urges parents to "submit" their authority to Providence so that their children will be free to love.

By my Example let all Parents move,  
And never strive to cross their Children’s Love;  
But still submit that Care to Providence above (72).

In light of the malfeasance and apparent defeat of fathers in The Busie Body, his recommendation must be heard as another ironic exposure of patriarchal hypocrisy. Sir Jealous is not a plausible spokesman for God’s fatherly love, although the verse conflates Sir Jealous with God—that is, he speaks imperatively, demanding obedience to a new law of
conduct. It is a self-contradictory command. To give young people freedom to choose their lovers denies the traditional notion of God as a Law-giver who demands obedience and whose laws (when obeyed willingly) prove kind rather than oppressive. In Judaic-Christian dogma, freedom is generated within the confines of obedience to God’s commandments. Sir Jealous’ new generosity robs parents of their God-given role as God’s surrogate authorities. In other words, the verse is deceitful, sounding like a conventional piety about love’s triumph over constraint, while hiding the fact that a parent who “submits” his children’s fate to God’s providence is not endorsing free choice, but acknowledging the powers of God’s will. Centlivre complies with comic tradition by giving Sir Jealous a seemingly forgiving speech, but the verse she invents to serve this purpose is profoundly satiric, only emphasizing that men’s readiness to arrogate to themselves the role of Father/God is ridiculous.

Although Sir Francis’ exit signals the heroine’s metamorphosis from wit to wife, from strategist to silent companion, and although Sir Jealous’ final words confirm the persistence of laws and traditions which are not entirely rational, Miranda’s wit has been the agency by which injustice is identified and protested. The play’s more conventional protest against social regulation of erotic desire is feminized because Miranda’s sexuality is only one aspect of her character; her womanhood is not limited to sexual desire, and her desire for Sir George is powerful, but not gratified mindlessly. Thus, Centlivre’s achievement as a wit seems to be affirmation of desire’s polymorphic nature; in
other words, Miranda embodies woman's (and satire's) capacity to seek and relish multiple pleasures simultaneously.
NOTES

1 Later in the eighteenth-century century the conventions of comic drama included foolish (rather than absent) mothers. Frances Sheridan’s Mrs. Friendly (The Dupe, 1763) and Mrs. Tryfort (A Journey to Bath, 1765) typify mother figures who represent femaleness as ridiculous, although benign. The increasing literary taste for sentimental characters does not change this pattern of denying motherhood’s importance and undermining its role as a sign of women’s intellectual credibility. Such bias indicates strong belief in oppositional sexuality—radically split, predetermined traits of femaleness and maleness.

2 The conventional problems of intrigue comedies are, typically, variants of lack or insufficiency. As such, they are expressions of an inherent quality usually assigned to femaleness. In this respect, even male-authored comedies of the period always offer us a feminized plot and express feminized desires, although they may include male characters who appear in control of events and whose desires energize the action. In women-authored plays such as The Busy Body, female characters lack happy circumstances; they do not lack wit or other personal strengths. We see them inventing ways of expressing their desires and gratifying them. They refute the idea of femaleness as inherently insufficient and they write female desire as a creative impulse, as well as a reactive one.

3 I am using the word "feminine" to signify longstanding, stereotypical postulates about woman’s nature. Literary satire often uses such stereotypes, but I assign these biased notions of femininity to satire. That is, I discuss satiric vision as a way of seeing and a mode of signification that resists the linear, binary thinking usually credited, stereotypically, as an attribute of masculinity, and I argue that the feminine features of satiric discourse (simultaneity, excess, indeterminacy) are its distinguishing traits. For a discussion of conventional uses of "feminine," "female," and "feminist" literary effort, see Elaine Showalter, A Literature of Their Own, especially "The Female Tradition," (3-36).

4 This is not only Centlivre’s most popular play, as Richard Frushell documents in his Introduction to the Garland facsimile edition of her work, but it is more successful than most plays of any type for a century following its premier (xi, xxvii-xxix). The play’s popularity seems remarkable enough to make it a candidate for status as one of the period’s most important comedies. It was performed 475 times in London between 1709 and 1800, performed often during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries at playhouses in Ireland, Australia, and America, and frequently produced "by desire" of royalty or people "of quality," or as a benefit to help young actors and "box-
keepers, numberers, and house-keepers" (xli). Frushell observes that the play is the first to bear Centlivre's name on the title page. He adds that the dedication to John, Lord Summers displays "that curious ambivalence between pride in her work and self-effacement because of her sex" which critical readings "cannot ignore" (xxxix). His Garland edition (1982) is the first complete collection of Centlivre's plays.


6 At the same time, the play's strongly revisionary exploitation of conventionally comic roles and stagecraft marks it as typical of satire's ambivalent relation to genre. See Chapter One, note 23 for explanation of my use of the word "protofeminist" in this project.

7 Isabinda's house-arrest illustrates what Christine Fauré calls "the containment of women's importance within an internal dimension" ("The Twilight of the Goddesses," 86).

8 By emphasizing her play's fundamentally serious subtext about personal legitimacy and personal freedom in its first scene, Centlivre implies that Miranda's heroinism is constituted by her resistance to all that seems unquestionably proper. She does not derive legitimacy from the legal system against which she struggles, but from her authentic desires. Heinzelman claims that "in literature...woman's's legitimacy is only tolerated when she speaks under the sign of the imaginary, when her voice is confined within...a discourse marked as fictional, as not true" ("Women's Petty Treason," 89). Still, Miranda is a threat to eighteenth-century notions of legitimate authority, largely because her satiric view of life supports an autonomous manner of living. Her rebellion against and triumph over Sir Francis Gripe and Sir Jealous Traffick confirms the selfishness of 'fatherly' care and exposes the legal system's unjust restriction of women's social and economic rights. Miranda's disguises and deceitfulness are thus validated as alternative, credible agencies of subjectivity because her adversaries too are shown as subjectivities constituted by desire, rather than by a stable, reliably authorized self.

9 Several contemporary critics discuss carnivalesque as a way of representing the body, disguise, gender, abjection, parody, and excess that emphasizes the symbolic features of social organization and how marginalized members of society daily critique its operations. My argument also sees carnivalesque aspects of The Busy Body as celebratory and as a mode of critique which rejects any specific locus of authority, but I stress psychological features of social experience in order to demonstrate the satiric and protofeminist quality of Centlivre's methods. See Bakhtin, The Dialogical Imagination, Castle, Masquerade and Civilization, and Russo, "Female Grotesques."

10 Rogers documents that woman's legal disadvantage was reinforced
by religious dogma and by her self-protectiveness: "The Church preached that a wife owed her husband [or father] obedience to every order that was not actually unlawful...moreover, she was obligated to obey cheerfully.... Since her husband was legally entitled to severely restrict her activities, friendships, spending power and children, it was in her interest to prevent him from wanting to wield his power" (Feminism in Eighteenth-Century England, 10).

11 Not surprisingly, in comedies condoning brutality in conduct or language, male resistance to marriage is usually displaced onto the curmudgeonly or callous older men who serve as blocking figures to young lovers' plans. If the young male lover is eager for marriage, yet unable to grasp power and pleasure (for example, Charles, in The Busie Body), his eagerness and impotence are excused by a lack, such as poverty, which in effect feminizes him. For another reference to feminized heroes see Richard Steele's Preface to The Conscious Lovers (1722) in which he defends both Bevil and Wilks as effective foils to the brutal "Goths and Vandals" in the audience and on stage (61).

12 See Chapter 2 in Castle's Masquerade and Civilization for discussion of varieties of extravagance in costumes. Castle observes that eighteenth-century masquerade costume was generally classified as, "the domino, or neutral costume; 'fancy dress', in which one personated one of a general class of beings; and 'character dress', in which one represented a specific figure, usually a historical, allegorical, literary, or theatrical character," (58). Miranda's mask and costume of an Incognito, or Gypsy, might have carried additional power to suggest women's sexuality or desire for autonomy, depending on its particular features.

13 Centlivre's interest in masquerade is confirmed by her writing one of the earliest poems published about the subject: "The Masquerade: A Poem" (1713). In Masquerade and Civilization Castle says that masquerades were "topical" in London from 1710 [one year after The Busie Body was first performed] and that they were a "ubiquitous feature of urban public life in England from the 1720's on," although often preached against and satirized (2, 9). However, according to Castle, their literary importance dates from 1673, the performance date for Dryden's Marriage a la Mode, which probably "provided a model for similar episodes in eighteenth-century comic drama" (111). I see Centlivre's Sir George as a variant of Dryden's Palamede, who claims, "I'm [her] is nothing to be known; she's all terra incognita and the bold discoverer leaps ashore and takes his lot among...the savages without the vile consideration of safety to his person or of beauty" (quoted in Castle, 110). Centlivre shows Miranda as the one who is the bold adventurer, making Sir George a more likely lover for Miranda by feminizing him, showing him as being controlled and as relatively powerless to control her.

14 While masquerade seems to empower all classes and both sexes to exchange sexual "favours" freely, Castle documents the greater risk for female participants (and for their ironic counterparts, trans-
vestites). "Sadistic and psychopathic" behavior were encouraged by
the event (44-45); and for women, abduction from the masquerade scene,
rape, pregnancy, and disgrace were dangerous risks that proved
masquerade's complicity with male privilege.

15The phrase "God of Love" is especially important here, and not
only because it connotes allusions to religion and the mythology of
romance (another example of Centlivre's satiric play with simultaneous
meanings and indeterminate subjectivities). Miranda's female
predicament--being defined legally and by social custom as inferior to
men--has its origin in a cosmology which names God as the first Law-
giver and posits human laws as manifestations of His will. In her
discussion of eighteenth-century women's relation to law, Susan Hein-
zelman claims that women rarely if ever enjoy the "illusory self-
sufficiency" granted men because the "jurisprudential and theological
discourses, each complicit in generating the other, arrogate to them-
selves the entire universe of the real" ("Women's Petty Treason," 92).
Miranda's confidence allows her to challenge her exclusion from
legitimacy (as "Incognito") and to question a system of discourse that
does not acknowledge its reliance on indefiniteness. The doubled
meaning of her remark about "the God of Love" indicts God's neglect of
women's humanity, even as it hints of Sir George's rakish life at
women's expense.

16Miranda and Sir George's ambivalent relation to language in
this scene hints that wit is a metonymic form of the bodily posturing
and alogical features of comedy. Like Miranda's mask, verbal wit is a
partial disclosure of motive and identity. Wit alludes to desires
that are potentially threatening to social stability and personal
safety if freely expressed. Were it to occur, Miranda's forcible
unmasking would also bear a metonymic relation to rape, which would
weaken the play's wit by moving desire into the realm of the "seen."
In this light, of course, verbal wit serves existing social arrange-
ments, rather than challenging them.

17Sir George's patience during this event feminizes him, particu-
larly since his patience is signified by a bodily posture that
represents compliance, willing vulnerability, and sometimes with
cowardice that leads to flight. As Miranda as gazes at Sir George's
back, his body occurs to her and to us as a stable signifier, a proof
of weakness and of his unwitting compliance with her verbal trick.
Since Miranda is the one who flees while Sir George mutters to him-
self, the scene is an enactment of the unreliability of language,
literally and metonymically.

18Nevertheless, Miranda acts as if she understands that a fully
human subject is defined by desires which take form as language
(Kristeva, "Time," 23). She knows that her only hope of evading the
danger she confronts as a female in the public world is to appropriate
the power of language to defend her desires.

19Reversing the 'laws' governing male and female ways of con-
structing a self, Miranda teaches him "to be aware of lack, to be aware of absence" (Cixous, "Castration," 47) and leaves him in a state resembling the hysteric female.

20Miranda's plotting in Act II begins with another subversion of contractual agreement. She distorts the information Sir Francis offers her about his gamble as she pretends to share her guardian's delight: "Ha, ha! what does the odious young Fop mean? A Hundred Pieces to talk an Hour with me" (14). The original agreement allowed Sir George ten minutes. She misstates Sir Francis' story so that he will be confused about how much time the courting will take and so that she and Sir George will have more time than the original negotiation confirmed. Miranda's wit is matched by Sir George's readiness to take advantage of the mistake when Sir Francis reminds him, "one Hour, remember is your utmost Limit, not a Minute more" (19).

21Once again Centlivre closes a scene showing Sir George baffled and exposing his true colors. At the end of Act I he berates himself ("A Curse of my Folly--I deserve to lose her" 13); here he turns his frustration outward, threatening Sir Francis with reprisal if the old man marries Miranda: "Actaeon's Horns she Means, shall Crown thy Head" (24).

22The non-satiric quality of Sir George's inventiveness is manifest in his disguised role as Meanwell in Act V; as such, he plays a go-between, a broker of conciliation who finally persuades Isabella to accept Charles (who wears Spanish garb) as her prospective husband. Neither Sir George nor Charles create the idea of disguising themselves as Spaniards to gain access to Isabella; and because the idea is hatched by Patch, the maidservant, the plays heroes are further emasculated. Charles has one small moment of cleverness (albeit not as himself, but while impersonating Don Babinetto), when he prompts Sir George (as Meanwell) to solve the problem of five thousand crowns due Sir Jealous from Seignor Diego by claiming that they have "brought it in Commodities" rather than cash (63).

23As doggerel and as part of his playful response to Miranda's mute control, Sir George's verse seems evidence too of his relish for a joke, even at his own expense. Still, pretending momentarily to be a female is a gesture without risk for Sir George because he retains his masculine role as suitor. The script he 'reads' also confirms his stereotyped habits of mind, even if we concede his playfulness. He versifies a courtship in which the lovers have already defined roles based on received ideas about gender and sexual desire.

24The paper which Sir George treats as a letter may not be a letter. If it is something else, only an improvised signifier of his desire for Miranda, it is doubly counterfeit. First, since Sir George does not know Miranda's mind or heart, the paper is a fake representation of her feelings and intentions; second, if the paper lacks content, it represents the potential insincerity of Sir George's pledges of devotion. It is merely a projection of his desire to win her.
favor—a vehicle for the expression of his extempore invention of Miranda's alleged words.

25 Conventionally, masterplotters in comedies of intrigue are drawn as univocal figures, not self-doubting, not wrestling with opposed desires. Apart from asides, other occasions when Miranda judges her own motives and conduct occur as a monologue (the fourth scene of Act IV where she reasons with her "mad self" about whether to marry Sir George, 51) and a confession to Patch about the risks she is taking in doing so (the first scene of Act V, 58).

26 The "Dumb Show" also gives us an ironic view of The Busie Body's relation to literary history. There are precedents for Centlivre's revisionary approach to this scene. F. P. Lock observes that Centlivre adapts both Boccaccio and Ben Jonson's use of a similar comic situation (71). Lock does not notice that Centlivre shows us a female character inventing and controlling the scene. There is precedent too in earlier women's writing for mocking the objectifying male gaze. In Behn's comedy, The Luckey Chance (1687), one hero is tricked into making love to a woman he cannot see and another is too shy to gaze at his beloved (III.iii; IV.i). Centlivre makes her scene more humorous and more powerfully revisionary by positioning Sir Francis as both a watcher and an interrupter of the interview. The guardian's role not only accentuates looking as the crucial action of the scene, but it also presents us with a male observer whose gaze is self-deluded. Sir Francis thinks he is watching her dupe the young man, whereas she is also fooling him. In addition, Sir Francis does not know how to read the sign-language Sir George proposes to evade Miranda's silence.

Sir George is made the ridiculous object of Miranda's gaze (and is constrained, secondarily, by Sir Francis' observations). Even Sir George's inventiveness (sign language, a mini-drama, the letter) is clichéd. He remains unable to imagine any motives or roles other than conventional ones for Miranda, her guardian, and himself. This contrasts vividly with the heroine's ability to see opportunity in any unexpected predicaments and to see absurdity in the commonplace assumptions governing men's behavior. Sir George and Sir Francis typify the limitations of what Irigaray names "the masculine logos," which presumes that meanings have predictable forms (Amante, 85).

27 From another perspective, the play's action is constituted by Miranda's successive moves toward freedom and away from her conventional (legal) status as a commodified, female source of someone else's pleasure.

28 In this light, Sir George's angry threatenings of Sir Francis and his improvised responses to Miranda's silence in Act II are both proofs of his sincerity—and ironic evidence that language as a conventionalized communication system is inadequate.

29 Her wavering might seem to justify the stereotype of woman's contradictory nature to which Marplot and Miranda later refer (41; 56); however, Centlivre ensures our awareness of her ridicule of the
cliché by having Miranda express her desire in the "Dumb Show" in the form of ironic, melodramatic sighs and by revealing to us earlier that her heroine's embrace of more than one manner is strategic.

30 The four objects used in this scene--chimney-board, orange, the non-existent monkey Miranda says she keeps hidden, and broken china--enhance the sexual meanings of Sir George's curled-up, hidden body. The "chimney-board" is a screen used in summer to cover the fireplace opening (OED, 11), and by its relation to an "oven-shaped hole" and to "natural vents for humours or fumosities of the body" (OED, 6b) has a close link with the female body with sexual orifices, and with privacy granted to bodily functions. Thus, when Sir George is shoved into the fireplace to ensure his safety, the action is an ironic comment on his desire for sexual access to Miranda. It may allude to his fears of her "incognita" aspects. Anxiously hiding a body also suggests the tensions generated between propriety and turbulent sexual energy. The association of desire with ungoverned energy is made obvious too by reference to a "monkey." Used as a metaphor in the eighteenth-century and earlier, it commonly signified giddy desires, a ridiculous lack of control, being troubled with "Vapours," and specifically female cunning or disorderliness that was viewed with contempt (OED, 1a, 2, 2b, 18a, v).

31 Similar uses of fruit and broken china occur in other comedies of the day, such as The Man of Mode, Love in a Bottle, The Way of the World.

32 The monkey scene's dramatization of desires and taboos associated with a displayed or hidden body may also point to a feature of comic and satiric writing that Kristeva identifies as a typical project of feminine writing: "the enigmas of the body" ("Time," 32). If women writers are indeed preoccupied with the body's powers of signification, it may be that satire's frequent obsession with the human body is another aspect of its feminized relation to other language and other literary forms.

33 Moreover, the rounded shapes of material objects that are erotic signifiers in this scene (chimney hole, orange, curled and furred animality, china cups) mark the scene as an expression of Miranda's desire by their strong association with the female body.

34 In Act III Isabella and Charles fail to invent any solution to their troubles other than eloping without financial security. Isabella says, "thou shalt List for a Soldier, and I'll carry thy Knapsack after thee" (31).

35 As Susan Suleiman observes, woman's psychological patterns are manifest in her sexuality; both are characterized by "a melting together of diffuse, multiple, functionally nondifferentiated elements" ("(Re)Writing the Body," 49).
Uphaus and Foster comment that the law which "compels obedience from a wife is the law of coverture, where a woman places herself in the protection of her husband, giving up her legal existence as an individual to her husband. It is no exaggeration to say...that a wife becomes a servant" (12).

The Busie Body may also be seen as a modified example of what Robert Hume refers to as the "hard comedy" of the Carolan period; its treatment of patriarchal authority mingles resignation and cynicism. See "Concepts of the Hero in Comic Drama, 1660-1710," (75).

Miranda's silence is profoundly ironic; it is partially 'justified' because now the law speaks for her. The papers Sir Francis signed in Act III (39) which grant Miranda free choice of a husband and access to her inheritance have legitimized her actions, but since both statutes and customs still limit female freedom, Miranda is now less able to express her desires than when she defined herself in opposition to law. Her subjectivity is relocated within the boundaries of conventional conduct, and therefore she has no more need of wit to assert her desires. However, her silence also represents her continuing resistance to law; she has just been accused by Sir Francis of cheating him out of his consent, reaching her goals by illegitimate means (70). As Doody observes, under English law when women were accused they "had to be given a voice....women as felons were legal beings," although ordinarily they had no legal rights to act for themselves ("Those Eyes Are Made So Killing," 58). By refusing her option to speak Miranda implies that Sir Francis' accusation is unjust, that his conduct and the law's treatment of her are at fault and her trickery remains warranted.

Robert Hume's discussion of heroism in comic plays of the period ("Concepts of the Hero") follows an argument established by Charles McDonald, who contends that these plays have no heroes or heroines, only protagonists and antagonists. While neither critic focuses on how law and its assumptions about gender determine the patterns of hostility that comedy attempts to resolve, their arguments imply the importance of uncomic features of Restoration plays.

The scene is strongly conventional in an epistemological sense too because, as Cixous reminds us, in the masculine view of things, human will, desire, and authority are derived from the father. Woman does not have a natural right to power; she remains "unthinkable" because "she is not coupled with the father (who is coupled with the son)" ("Sorties," 92).

Miranda's final words represent her concern with the power of legal documents and express her last opportunity to act as a free agent. She says to Charles, "There, Sir, is the Writings of your Uncle's Estate, which has been your due these three years [gives Charles papers]," (70).

Miranda's loyalty to Isabella affirms the possibility of what
Irigaray calls "the comedy of the other" *(Amante,* 85)* and serves as an example of the strong emphasis on female friendship in other plays by Centlivre (e.g., *The Wonder,* 1714) and by her peers: Agnes Trotter (*Agnes de Castro,* 1695), Mary Pix (*Queen Catherine,* 1698; *Double Distress,* 1701; *Czar of Muscovy,* 1701; and *Conquest of Spain,* 1705), Jane Wiseman (*Antiochus,* 1701), Mary Davy (*The Northern Heiress,* 1716). Kendall views these thematic correspondences as an important feature of early women playwrights' work (10-11).

43 Admittedly, in her treatment of Sir Francis Centlivre replicates the habits of mind which create laws and customs against which her heroine has struggled. Exclusion is a self-defeating way to deal with difference. As Cixous argues, women must resist this temptation and insist upon an Other defined positively, "validated in its entirety, affirmed in a manner that destroys the very idea of strangeness," including "all forms of racism, all the exclusions, all those instances of outlaw and genocide that recur through History" *(Castration,* 50).
Chapter III

SUBJECTIVITY IN WOMEN'S SATIRIC POEMS

Introduction

Feminist scholarship has changed the way we think about women's poetry. Until the last quarter of this century literary critics either ignored women's poetic endeavors, or were inclined to see women-authored poems as pale copies of men's work. Moreover, women's poems were alleged to be too preoccupied with 'feminine' topics to merit serious attention; thus, they were classifiable only by the author's century or predominant themes and judged as products of women's deficient intellectual talents. Theodore Roethke offers one example of this attitude. He castigates women's poetry generally for lacking

range—in subject matter, in emotional tone—and lack of a sense of humor. And one could...add other aesthetic and moral shortcomings: the spinning out; the embroidering of trivial themes; a concern with the mere surfaces of life...hiding from the real agonies of the spirit; refusing to face up to what existence is; lyric or religious posturing...stamping a tiny foot against God or lapsing into sententiousness...lamenting the lot of the woman; caterwauling; writing the same poem about fifty times, and so on ("The Poetry of Louise Bogan," 133-4).

Oswald Doughty's treatment of Anne Finch is an example of similar, unexamined critical premises applied to judgment of an early woman poet. Doughty comments in 1922 about Finch that she deserves "an honoured but
not too exalted seat" among the period’s "minor" poets, that "much of her work is artificial...constrained and stilted," yet she is also "afflicted" by a taste for melancholy (42). Although Doughty claims her poems are typical of her time, he objects that "her poetry does not sing" (46, English Lyric in the Age of Reason). Even Roger Lonsdale, whose recent anthology of eighteenth-century women poets makes their work much more accessible, participates in the tradition of assuming an unknown woman poet is important, first, if she has ties to an important man. For example, Lonsdale’s commentary about Esther Lewis stresses Dr. Samuel Bowden’s encouragement of her poetry, rather than mentioning the scope of her interests or her satiric methods.

Such critical performances are self-exposing. As well, they have contributed to the mistaken idea that early women writers had as little critical attention and as few sympathetic readers during the eighteenth-century as during the last one hundred fifty years. However, Uphaus and Foster make the point in their rationale for an anthology entitled The "Other" Eighteenth Century that Ballard’s 1752 volume of women’s memoirs, Duncombe’s poem celebrating women writers ("The Feminead," 1754), Mary Scott’s poetic response to it ("The Female Advocate," 1774), Thornton and Colman’s 1755 two-volume edition, Poems by Eminent Ladies, and the support of women writers by major publishers (e.g., Joseph Johnson) are a few signs that women writers of the period contribute to a developing and eventually flourishing tradition of women’s writing...[and have] an awareness that they are writing about women for women and, second, a strong sense that as women writers they belong to an ever-increasing community of women writers (1-3)
Nevertheless, archival and revaluing efforts by Lonsdale, Nussbaum, Uphaus and Foster only demonstrate that the subordination of women during the eighteenth-century makes their literary enterprise difficult during their lifetimes and contributes to later critics' habit of ignoring their work. The few women whose reputations as poets were alive even before recent, revisionary anthologies and interpretations were issued are exemplary chiefly for their specialness. Mary Leapor receives attention largely as a "natural wonder," partly because her poetry is viewed as a "laboratory in which...different contributions to genius of nature and education" might be studied (Rizzo, "Mary Leapor," 192).

Critical reluctance to validate women's poetry replicates what Patricia Meyer Spacks calls a "persistent mode of male imagining in eighteenth-century England:

> the vision of women, naughty and nice alike, as essentially changeless, as negotiating life's vicissitudes under the guidance, indeed the control, of a single dominant feeling. ("Female Changelessness," 273)

The willingness of scholars to examine earlier critical premises, republish women's writing, and revalue their work has produced recognition of the variety of female voices. We are finding unforeseen complexity in their poetic creativity. Rather than being weighed in the balances constructed by traditional expectations of poetic genres or by received ideas about men's poetic achievement and found lacking, women's poems are being valued for their abundance of information about women's experiences and habits of mind.² We are discovering too how women
invent poetic strategies for resisting male privilege and misogyny, as this chapter will demonstrate.

Still, there is little agreement concerning how to define appropriate criteria for analysis of women's poetry or other writing, beyond looking for traces of women's consciousness of a female literary tradition, or noticing their efforts to make literature disclose the disadvantages of being female.³ These traces may point to gender, but do not answer our questions about the aesthetic distinctiveness of women's poetry, if any exists. Nor is feminist discourse unanimous about whether female creativity is socially and historically constructed, or the expression of 'natural', innate habits of perception shared by all women, whatever their cultural and racial identity.⁴ In other words, we have not developed ways of analyzing women's writing that help us refute the old taxonomic prejudices about "minor" works of literature. Having exhumed much of the body of women's literary work in English, we need to know whether there are repeated features of their creativity and whether any of the latter will allow us to argue their literary value on equal ground.⁵

In the case of women poets of the eighteenth-century, feminist criticism has only begun to explore the field.⁶ Moreover, and regrettable, new studies have not succeeded in avoiding the pitfalls of earlier ways of reading women's poems: as either rebellious (and burdened with the author's reputation for wickedness), or pervaded by the "sensibility" or didactic impulses long associated with femininity.⁷ For example, Marilyn Williamson's study of British women writers (Raising Their Voices, 1990) uses 1750 as a cut-off date because she
believes that the ideology of domestic femininity ascendant after that date effectively silences protofeminist women writers. While it is undeniable that women writers of the eighteenth-century display their culture’s values, it is also clear that scholars who question whether there are gendered aspects of women’s poetic praxis are obliged to look at the unresolved issue of how sexual identity effects creativity.

The need for critical review of women’s poetic achievement is greater in the case of satire. Few scholars, feminists included, have concentrated on satiric method in poems by women, nor is there a theoretical approach to satire which considers gender a factor worthy of attention. And it is strange that we have neglected theoretical investigation of the literary mode most prominent in English women writers’ earliest published literary work. Plays, poetry, and fiction produced by eighteenth-century women are invariably and bravely satiric. We are beginning to notice women poets’ resistance to misogyny, but we do not know how to describe the effects of their identity as women on their satiric procedures. This suggests that there may be important questions we have failed to ask about satire itself by ignoring half of the poems in its archives.

Especially during the eighteenth-century, satire is an important signifier of our perceptual habits, as several great early users of the genre knew: Earl Miner argues that "from Hobbes to Dryden, we discover a concept of [satiric] literary art as a cognitive and moral science of human life...even better than the speculations of the natural philosophers" ("The Restoration," 98). This larger-than-narrative value is a product of satire’s use of metaphor. I will be arguing in
this chapter that metaphor is a primary sign of the structure of human perception, serving the latter’s narrative (or continuous) and discontinuous modes of knowing. Metaphor challenges our notions of genre and linguistic referentiality by forcing attention to what is unsaid, to the apparently auxilliary signifiers that buttress denotation. In this way, metaphor highlights the process by which we construct meaning from implied ideas and points to aspects of our comprehension which are not themselves linear or coherent. By making us doubt the reliability of denotation and keeping us conscious of our role as agents in the construction of meaning, it undermines the 'laws' of narrative and referentiality on which generic history and trust in language are built. Satiric metaphor particularly emphasizes that some of our perceptual habits resist narrative, instead of supporting it. We might say that metaphor is that which unites logical and alogical awareness; it represents a "crossing of the bar" of repression that allows meaning to emerge "as a poetic or creative effect" (Lacan, quoted in Stanton, 174).

Again, the examples of women’s poetic praxis discussed below demonstrate that metaphor is not simply the means by which satiric point of view is conveyed, but a model of our ways of understanding things. If metaphor is a sign of our reliance on non-narrative modes of thought, satire is a meta-metaphoric procedure, insisting that we notice the complementarity of story and image. In its most obvious guise, satiric metaphor is a mask; in women’s poetry it generally serves the poet’s project of revising the conventional story of woman’s inferiority. It allows her to speak with invented or assumed voices, lets her use tones or vocabulary or ideas ordinarily prohibited to women in public dis-
course. I am not suggesting that women use satire only as a literary weapon, or as a costume in which they hide to protect their respectability. In addition, many of the women poets to whom I refer pose philosophic challenges to their readers. They create satiric personas who allude to learned matters, or boldly confront the illogical procedures which support received ideas. For example, Chudleigh and Thomas both notice that Locke’s idea of the mind as tabula rasa implies equality of the sexes.

In women’s writing, satiric metaphor supports escape from prevailing ideas about gender—the limitations of acceptable voices and the static features of denotation. Their work underscores that satiric metaphor is potentially anarchic, an image/embodiment of desire that (almost) expresses what seems inexpressible, may be understood using alogical faculties, or may provoke our analysis of what attracts or repels us. In effect, satiric metaphor temporarily displaces conventional ideas and substitutes an image which implies a threat to their continuation.

In this light, satire itself is a metaphor of our proliferating imagination, pointing to the disadvantages of linear/binary thinking commonly associated with manly thought and with manly satire’s aggressive modes of attack. In other words, although critics have avoided looking at gender’s role in satiric hostility, satiric literature always has been read as proof of men’s power to manipulate words and society. Although satire is a form of attack, the metaphoric aspect of satire embodies both aggression and accommodation; it presents us with an image which attracts us in order to stimulate our revulsion. But this claim
is insufficient because it suggests, once again, that the world is bifurcated. It is more accurate to say that satiric metaphor points to the polymorphous nature of perception--its randomness, simultaneity, and indirect features. Women writers of satire often make these features of perception and signification obvious, because their resistances to received ideas about femaleness underscore the possibility that meaning and language have tenuous ties. Their work expresses simultaneously their objections to misogyny, their desires for affirmation, and their awareness that language is impression, rather than a system of fixed meanings.

I want to examine women's poetry by discussing features of their praxis that draw our attention to satire as a polymorphous literary mode--as a sign system which uses but also refuses binary, oppositional procedures and premises. Poetry that is satiric demands particular focus on its author's implied subjectivity--its "imperatives, boundaries, and gaps" (Meese and Parker, 10). The word "gaps" indicates those characteristics of a speaking subject which contradict the idea of a unified self and a coherent system of signifiers (and, by implication, the idea of linear narrative). As Julia Kristeva reminds us, meaning is always "a strange body," not an absolute signification, but a dynamic flux, or "play" in which desires and signifiers mingle ("Talking about Polylogue," 111). Meaning in women's writing is particularly elusive because the historical and social constructions of their identity as women have been oppressive, thus responsible for our ignorance of how women as speaking subjects perform their verbal dance. Poetry written by women--and satiric poetry above all--invites us to notice, in its
metaphors, how the speaking female voice is charged with a latent emotional force that words cannot fully express; how meaning is indicated by the lacunae too often devalued as typical of women's writing, as well as by conventional patterns of signification; how what is not said comprises a kaleidoscopic pattern of signs that reveal, fleetingly, the speaker's relation to language and society.

Investigating women's satiric poetry thus requires our learning a different, more flexible grammar of response to metaphor which concerns sexuality. I am arguing that our different relation to the content of satire in the case of women's writing generates a more alert consciousness of the radical implications of satiric method. Satiric writing by men or women acquires its ironies by emphasizing repressed knowledge; that is, by pointing to the unreliability of linguistic constructs—such as sex stereotypes, slang, other culturally coded allusions—which seem to picture a divided or hostile world. Although satire's admitted project is often reformist, its procedures destroy confidence in the means (language) by which wrongdoing is condemned. It presents us with textuality that insists upon our notice of its subversive or poly-logical linguistic operations and heightens our awareness that the satiric stance is arbitrarily chosen. And since satire tends to depend heavily on sexualized metaphor, its signals that the meanings of words are not fixed suggest that received ideas about sexuality and gender roles may be equally tenuous. Satire implies that linguistic subjectivity in any of its various forms is a convenient idea, rather than evidence of a speaker's permanent, personal traits or static cultural values.
I reach these conclusions by two paths of argument. I acknowledge the traces of gender marking subjectivity in women's poetry as meaningful--signs of eighteenth-century women's cultural experience--but I find that women's satiric poetry generally deconstructs received ideas about sexual identity and gendered cultural values. Second, I see the inscriptions of female subjectivity in women's satiric poems as blatant evidence of satire's privileging of associative, metaphorical (polymorphic) modes of expression.

Poetic Refusals of Oppositional Limits to Feminine Subjectivity

Women satiric poets of the eighteenth-century often make subjectivity their theme, although they do not use this word, nor do they contextualize their awareness of woman's social and linguistic dilemmas with the rhetoric of psychology, as I shall do here. Still, their poems regularly focus on how women's lives and modes of expression are constrained by men's opinions and power. To put this another way, they use satiric poetry in an effort to reimagine female subjectivity.

As with men's writing, we read available female-authored texts as indices of attitudes, literary values, and talents possible to the sex at a particular historic moment, not seeing these signs as rigidly characteristic of the person or gender. A common feature of women's satiric poetry during the long eighteenth-century is its rebelliousness concerning what they see as the disadvantages of being female. Although the women poets discussed below work within the boundaries of inherited literary form--generally conforming to the patterns of rhymed couplets, stanza structures, use of antitheses, parallel ideas, and other poetic
devices standardized by male poets—they adapt the satiric mode to convey ideas which are not found in men's poetry; specifically the idea that men do not understand or correctly value women's individuality.

At times their protest is elegant; more often, it resembles Juvenalian invective. Sarah Fyge Egerton prefaces one of her poems with the claim, "our sex is confined to [too] narrow a sphere of action," and in the poem asks a question which expresses her rage, but lacks any poetic grace: "Shall I be one of those obsequious fools/ That square their lives by custom's scanty rules?" ("The Liberty," cited in Rothstein, 34). There is more invention in Martha Sansom's line, "We're a sort of midnight witches,/ Men are our obedient switches" ("To Lady E__ H__" [1726], 88), but her phrasing is not elegant. Women poets seldom imply the calm Horatian tolerance which might contribute to their verses' refinement.

The consistent assertiveness of women's poetic satire and its preoccupation with misogyny indicates the extent and strength of social, physical and intellectual limits of women's freedom. Elizabeth Thomas urges her friend, "Clemena," to admit that marriage is a shameful, grim, "nauseous" bondage because "different licences" allow men to indulge their brutality and selfishness. The "wretched Nefario" who typhifes husbands in her poem subjects his wife to "sordid tyranny" ("Epistle to Clemena. Occasioned by an Argument she had maintained against the Author" [c. 1700; pub. 1722], 34-7) An unidentified Miss W-- writes "The Gentleman's Study," (1732) as a scathing rebuttal to Swift's misogynist poem, "The Lady's Dressing Room," (1732); in it she exposes disgusting personal habits of "odious men" whose dirty bodies are addi-
tionally loathsome for being clothed in silk and gold and for signifying "fraud, lies, deceit...And pride" 130-4. Elizabeth Tollet's "Hypatia" (1724) protests that man ("stupid," "senseless idiot") keeps woman ignorant of higher learning so that he may boast of his superior reasoning; she argues too, more elegantly, that women's domestic "servitude" makes cultivation of their minds impossible, and "fallow left, an hateful crop succeeds/ Of tangling brambles and pernicious weeds" (99-100).

Tollet's anger about the scorn directed at "a lettered [educated] bride" is echoed in Mary Leapor's "Mira to Octavia" (c. 1746) where the poet boldly appropriates for herself intellectual freedoms she knows forbidden: "outlawed poets censure whom they please" (200-2). Elizabeth Teft's "On Learning. Desired by a Gentleman" (1747) argues that men who deprive women of education are cowards--"had we full lengths to run,/ We should eclipse your starlight with our sun"--and that even in their "native dress" women's thoughts can compete with men's learned ones (217-18). Esther Lewis writes "A Mirror for Detractors. Addressed to a Friend" (1748) in the spirit of "Areopagitica," to argue that preventing women from writing and publishing ("And say in print whate'er they please") is motivated by men's fear of women's wit and that "men of sense" should defend women's desire to do more than "dress...darn...flower [and] knit" (226-30). Even the conservative Clara Reeve's poem, "To my Friend Mrs. ... On her holding an Argument in Favour of the Natural Equality of both the Sexes..." (1756) is an example of satire that combines anger about woman's intellectual and social confinement with belief that the female mind is "light and various;/ Loose, unconnected, and precarious."14 She argues that her own
education has resulted in nothing but envy, jeers, disdain: "For what
in man is most respected,/ In woman's form shall be rejected" (248-9).

Reeve's resentment of men's scorn and many women's belittling of
female intelligence is a common theme in the poems analyzed below.
Ironically, an important consequence of women's resentment of misogyny
is their tendency to limit the implied speakers of their poems to a
hostile, or embattled subject position. However, while the most obvious
superficial feature of their poetry is its oppositional mode, these
protofeminist satiric poems do not trust stereotypically masculine or
feminine views of the world. In other words, their poems generally
imply a persona whose self-definition transcends existing ideas of
womanhood. And as they stretch the limits of what we call subjectivity,
their poems convey their heightened consciousness of how perspective
generates meaning. In this respect, their work is metasatiric--aware of
both general satiric distance from their topic and having that distance
intensified by writing as women, whose sexual identity is supposed to
prevent their thinking or writing seriously. Presumed incapable of
doing either well enough to be able to play with language as well, women
poets 'inherit' an embattled subjectivity which they must either adapt
to satiric purpose, or use as a cloak of abjection, self-protectively.

I do not mean to suggest that only analysis of perceptual
paradigms will disclose characteristic features of women's writing, but
to indicate a method of analysis which has been neglected in the case of
eighteenth-century poets. Feminist critics who focus on ideological
aspects of women's literary specificity notice social and political evi-
dences of their embattled subjectivity. For example, Donna Landry
argues that the social radicalism of working-class women poets during the period is manifest in common strategies of literary appropriation "from master [sic] texts by men" (9) usually as "a buried idiom of subversion" (219). In contrast, Luce Irigaray theorizes that women writers mimic the dominant discourse and are able to do so because the ascribed otherness of femininity situates women, psychologically, "elsewhere" than within the language they use ("This Sex," 152). That is, women are always thinking and writing from outside the fence erected by men's fears of them.

I am arguing that both Landry's and Irigaray's ideas about the adaptive features of women's subjectivity are manifest in their writing. For example, Susannah Centlivre's "An Epistle to the King of Sweden, From a Lady of Great Britain" (1717) uses a female persona to mock the passivity of Charles XII and the credulity of people who believe he will lead an invasion of Britain (75-6). I will quote it fully here and then comment on it.

To thee--rude warrior, whom we once admired,  
And thought thy actions spoke thee half-inspired,  
While justice held the balance of they cause,  
And every language sounded thy applause;  
But since ambition and revenge prevails,  
Thy glories languish, and our wonder fails--  
To thee a woman sends with generous care,  
And warns thy rashness timely to beware.

Fame now a tale fresher date has told,  
Beyond thy mad romantic feats of old:  
Our malcontents thy numerous squadrons boast,  
Describe thy pennants waving on our coast,  
And, to the fearful, cry "Britannia's lost!"  
But we, who know the genius of our isle,  
At their report, and thy invasion, smile.

Are not dames in every climate famed,  
Les Belles Angloises by every nation named?
Are not our youth in foreign fields admired,
Alike by valour and by love inspired?
And shall those fair ones, who the morning pass
Consulting that dear friend to love, the glass--
To set the favourite, and the patch to place,
To bow, and glance it, and charm his eyes--
Fall to thy Gothic rage a sacrifice?
No, to thy terror learn, our British youth
Are famed for honour, constancy and truth:
Each would as soon consent thy cause to aid,
As yield the fair to whom his vows are paid.
Unlike the passive females of thy land,
The arbitrators of the war we stand.
At flirt of fan our arméd legions fly,
And they who dare offend, must dare to die.
We know thy daring heart is nursed in blood,
Wild as the fiercest savage of the wood;
With fame like this, in northern slaughter shine,
Rough as the frozen bear, thy neighbouring sign;
But here thy brutal force no crowns shall gain:
By love, as well as arms, our monarchs reign;
Can we our George and his loved race disown,
To find thy barren chastity a throne?

No! in thy shaggy rug rude slumbers take,
And dream of conquests thou shalt never make;
At distance be thy leathern doublet worn,
No risk thy life to purchase certain scorn;
For now the wormwood damsels apprehend
The dismal consequences of such a friend:
Begin to tremble at the truths they hear,
And vow their champions shall for George declare;
They fear thy taste should lead young James astray,
And quite unman their monarch every way;
In his excuse they still would have to tell,
"Though war’s his foe, he loves exceeding well;
The proof from whence he sprung is not to fight;
His surgeon proves hereditary right."

But if by thy example he should grow
Cold as thy rocks of ice, and hills of snow;
Should he clean linen hold in dire disgrace,
And sable crape his ivory neck enchase;
Should he, like thee, on shives of coarsest bread
Rudely with dirty thumbs his butter spread;
Banish the generous juice of grapes away,
And with small acid tiff his thirst allay;
Swallow lean hasty meals of tasteless roots,

And eat, and drink, and live, and reign in boots;
Should he, like thee, regardless of the fair,
Lie down to sleep, and only wake to war;
Could he in arms like gallant Brunswick shine--
Yet would his female friends his cause decline,
Nor justify a Right so slovenly, Divine.

Consult thy safety; send no armies forth
Beyond the confines of thy frozen north:
Since of our British fair this truth is told,
We love the chaste, but we abhor the cold:
But if thy daring folly will proceed,
Fate drives thee forward, and thy fall's decreed.

One of the poem’s ironies is Centlivre’s creation of a female speaking subject who addresses a political topic and presumes to advise an important political figure, thus appropriating to herself authority and insights usually ascribed to men. Centlivre’s ironic construction of this poem would not be possible apart from widespread belief in the intellectual and social differences marking femininity and masculinity. Her literary invention is contextualized by the xenophobia sometimes resulting from oppositional habits of mind and by presumed natural boundaries of conduct and speech beyond which femininity is thought not to exist. Thus, when Centlivre’s persona announces,

To thee a woman sends with generous care,
And warns thy rashness timely to beware (my emphasis; 75),

she posits woman’s conventionally self-sacrificing kindness as motive for her writing, and by embracing a traditional feminine role she creates opportunity for expression of her scorn. In other words, the substance of Centlivre’s poem is first personalized, made a feature of implied contrast between a permitted, compliant female voice and a bold, self-directed one. She violates the laws of discourse governing English and European culture by speaking publically about men’s affairs, and her speech is inordinate too because the content of her remarks demonstrates
her disapproval of a man's uses of power. In both respects she spurns the controlling idea of men's world view: that difference is the perceptual means by which we know ourselves and others. As her poem ridicules the king it exposes "the mighty difference" between appearance and reality, between what is normative and what is taboo, similarly scorned by Elizabeth Thomas, her contemporary. At the same time, Centlivre's poem implies there is little difference between famous, powerful men and ordinary citizens, no difference between a woman's powers of judgment and a man's.

"An Epistle to the King of Sweden" illustrates it author's resistance to men's oppositional view of the world, as a place where those who possess what others lack (and vice versa) hate one another. Her critique requires her to construct a persona whose subjectivity becomes the strongest element in the poem's argument; that is, she personifies the ability to see all sides of the king's nature and performance, to escape the limits of binary perception. Her satiric strategies are at once oppositional and sign of the simultaneity of truth, discrediting the king and discrediting à priori determinants of anyone's identity (including her own). The poem uses conventional satiric reversals to suggest Charles XII's weakness and the absurdity of those who praise him for valor or aggressive plans. Each manly trait ascribed to him by stereotyped epithets ("rude warrior," mad romantic feats," thy Gothic rage," "daring heart," "rough as the frozen bear," "thy brutal force") emphasizes the king's notoriety as an ascetic man disinclined to fight. Of course, this method depends on the poet's implied audience being aware of Charles' reputation, but the device of satiric reversal
also depends upon Centlivre's ironic self-flagellation. She uses femaleness as the vehicle of Charles' poetic humiliation, yet, ironically, by this means also constructs for herself a persona (or, subjectivity) more bold than the famous or petty men she describes.

Initially, Charles is feminized by association with the poem's female speaker, since only a man lacking masculinity or other prescribed virtues would be fair game for feminine scorn. More important, the poem implies Charles' weakness as the obverse of manliness by assigning him a romantic, rather than political objective, and by implying that he would be unable to achieve it (because he is probably impotent). Centlivre recasts his imminent "invasion" of Britain as a hoped-for romantic conquest of Englishwomen ("shall those fair ones...Fall to thy Gothic rage a sacrifice?") and she identifies his chief enemies as British young men famed for honour, constancy and truth:

Each would as soon consent thy cause to aid,  
As yield the fair to whom his vows are paid (75).

The implied fickleness of English youth, ready to join the conqueror's rapine, emphasizes the frailty of Charles' alleged valor. Thus, the poem's most obvious satiric reversal is a romanticization of warfare in which women would be victimized. However, Centlivre locates power to speak and to judge in her poem's female figures (as well as in her persona) by first conceding stereotypes of femaleness, then showing the latter's superiority. Charles' imagined conquest and British readiness to embrace his cause occur in the poem's hypothetical future at the expense of women whose preoccupations with beauty earn them the name of "fair ones."
Yet they are not empty headed beauties. The poem implies additional features of their femininity that reinforce the authority of its female speaking subject even as she seems to endorse stereotypic views of women's preoccupation with appearance. Centlivre's persona warns Charles to beware that Englishwomen, "unlike the passive females" of his country, have power to command men with a mere "flirt of fan." The phrase implies conventional ridicule of women's delusions that beauty is a form of power comparable to men's control of government. Still Centlivre ascribes political intelligence and political fears to the Englishwomen ("wormwood damsel") whose initial disappointment in Charles derives from recognition that he would be an impotent lover, but whose concerns extend to the realm of governmental affairs. They claim authority to dictate their lovers' political allegiance ("their champions shall for George declare"), to judge their monarch's manliness, to "excuse" his mistaken alliance with Charles, to decline his cause if he copy Charles' faults.\(^{17}\)

The metaphoric equation of war and romance thus serves to valorize women, extending the range of their power while portraying men as warriors manqué. Although Centlivre alludes to conventional opinion that women are only interested in men's romantic competence--

They fear thy taste should lead young James astray,  
And quite unman their monarch every way (76)--

she denies men their usual, privileged autonomy and speech. Charles is further demeaned by another binary opposition that shows him coarse, cold, having dirty linen and thumbs, no appreciation for table manners or fine food, in contrast with James, his implied (and implicated)
friend, who has an aesthetically superior "ivory neck." The contrast is not complimentary to either man. James (Edward Stuart, the Old Pretender to a throne assumed by George I in the year Centlivre wrote this poem) is feminized by being described as vulnerable to influence by an unsophisticated man who lacks beligerent courage. James is further demeaned by the suggestion that he is a playboy whose royalty is proved by his surgeon (who would have treated the venereal disease acquired by James' efforts to love "exceeding well").

Thus, Centlivre appropriates the oppositional structures typical of satire. She appears to exploit a simple inversion of the us/them mentality by which women are usually mocked. Her poem uses satiric contrast to indicate that both men and women, writers or not, share the perceptual habit of defining and expressing themselves by contrast with someone different. But Centlivre transcends the boundaries implied by notions of having and lacking. Although Lacanian psychology argues that anyone's subjectivity is characterized by a divided mind (influenced by both "semiotic" desires and rhythms of the unconscious (associated by French theorists with maternal, pre-Oedipal, pre-linguistic experience and with expressive femininity) and by the symbolic functions of logic and aesthetic realization, Centlivre's poem shows the satiric mind to be polymorphous, not divided.18

As I have indicated, Centlivre's method exploits masculine and feminine subjectivities, adding her satiric stance as another possible form of subjectivity. In turn, this undermines the satiric convention of conceding subjectivity only to the author, its idealized readers, and its privileged characters--because at any given moment in the poem our
implied reader position is in flux and the characters she "privileges" (e.g., Englishwomen) are being mocked. Rather than defining fault within a binary scheme, she offers us a kaleidoscopic view of differences: 1) the female speaker of the poem posing as friendly advisor to Charles XII, 2) British Stuart-loving "malcontents" who boast of Charles' military might, 3) the speaker mocking Jacobite rumor-mongers who credit Charles with invasion plans, 4) the speaker mocking fearful Englishmen who believe "Britannia's lost!", 5) the speaker mocking fair ladies who spend their mornings consulting "that dear friend," their mirror, 6) the speaker mocking passive Swedish women, 7) the speaker mocking Charles' asceticism and the wild, primitive features of (stereotyped) northern European culture, 7) the speaker posing as friend to the fair ladies ("We"), boasting of their loyalty to King George, convinced of their power to sway their lovers' political allegiance, 8) the speaker mocking the triviality of women who reduce the importance of Divine Right to rule to questions of neatness or slovenliness, sexual ardor or coldness, 9) the speaker mocking the validity of Divine Right by referring to James' putatively inherited promiscuity and by suggesting that George's "loved race" (his Hanoverian heritage and preferences) might be no better than the "barren chastity" of Charles XII.

Centlivre's use of many simultaneous subject positions is characteristic of the semiotic features of women's writing, according to some feminist theorists--its excesses, indeterminacy, alogical and simultaneous signs.\(^{19}\) And as she plays, linguistically, she personifies the satirist's generic affinity with semiotic modes of knowing. As Elizabeth Meese observes, every text illustrates our impulse to
"explode" the borders of denotation, to resist the "entrappping self-other dichotomy" (x). Meese argues that women's writing exposes the force of this impulse "to write other unarticulated but nonetheless (im)pertinent" aspects of consciousness that oppositional thought represses (181, my emphasis). The serial presentation of Centlivre's multiple personae in this poem that I imply above (1, then 2, then 3, etc.) seems a conventional feature of her text. That is, we approach satire expecting it to offer a variety of perspectives, and our à priori reasoning deflects our attention from the kaleidoscopic aspects of this satiric procedure. When we notice that each persona in Centlivre's poem is represented by the first person (singular or plural), and that the subject position of each persona depends on its intersection with what precedes and follows it, we realize the poet's technique transcends sequence. Centlivre satiric position is, in fact, a continuously shifting (yet interdependent) set of positions. This is what I mean by satire's polyvocal, or polymorphous aspect.

In the last instance (# 9 above--the speaker mocking the validity of Divine Right), Centlivre's persona reverses an opposition between the despised foreigner and her British king which she had earlier exploited; now the Swedish king's actual asceticism is made normative by contrast with King George's implied un-Englishness. It is likely that Centlivre also means to imply difference between Charles' asexual habits and George's sexual improprieties: the latter brought two mistresses with him when he arrived in England in 1714 to take the throne, having dissolved his marriage ten years prior. My point is that Centlivre's simultaneous identification with several diverse subject positions illu-
minates the paradox of satire's procedures. As it uses an oppositional structure (unworthy object, superior satiric perspective) it demonstrates the inadequacy of a dualistic world view.

Therefore, the dominant feature of Centlivre’s poesis is its satire, which is to say, its implied epistemological challenge to the hostility which energizes it. This is not true only of a woman’s satiric work, but generally characteristic of the mode. Nonetheless, in the satiric works of Centlivre’s male peers the polarized aspect of irony is often expressed as differences between masculine and feminine traits, frequently to the latter’s disadvantage. Centlivre’s poem is conventional in this way too; she mocks men’s and women’s stereotyped, sexualized conduct. However, she does not limit her definition of ridiculous conduct to gender; rather, she implies that gender is an agency by which we can notice disparity between reputation and action, then notice the tenuous basis of such differentiation. Just as important, by associating herself with other females in the poem who judge men’s inadequacy, Centlivre feminizes satiric perceptual habits. She assigns greater awareness of truth’s indeterminacy to multiplied female personae and thereby undercuts the stereotypic representations of femaleness on which her poem seems to depend. While Centlivre addresses and describes her poem’s male figures (Charles, James, British Jacobites and young lovers), she allows her female avatars speech—the activity that most vigorously confirms one’s self-aware engagement with personalities and events.

Centlivre’s satire accomplishes an objective of what Cixous refers to as l’écriture féminine, the project of stealing or appropriating
standard (male) discourse in order to disrupt and explode its premises, us/them, in/out ("Laugh of the Medusa," 887). Centlivre’s poetic control of a slippery persona who adopts numerous subjectivities reminds us that it is not appropriate to name the contradictions employed by satire as its primary distinguishing feature. While satire’s reformist functions presuppose that its obvious meanings exist at the level of oppositional structure; but its implications and complexities—hence, its characteristic marks—occur within a system of flux, taking form as a dynamic construct of shifting subjectivities. Centlivre’s poem and all satire in this respect achieves jouissance—the joyous, playful aura of linguistic indeterminacy. And since jouissance is associated with womanhood (specifically, maternal influence during our pre-conscious experience of undifferentiated identity as infants), it feminizes literary forms in which it is present.

As women invent satiric poems to express their understanding of how society mandates intellectual and emotional confinement for women, and how language upholds the social restrictions of their femininity, they also discover that irony offers escape from those limits. As I have shown in Centlivre’s case, this secondary gain is expressed as a paradigm of confirmation and subversion: using the stereotypic flaws ascribed to women by men to demonstrate the inadequacy of these prejudices, as ideas and as means of confinement. Ironically, in women’s satiric poems the alleged inadequacy of female thinking is revealed as the principle on which satire is built—a polyvocal, perversely polymorphous embrace of difference that makes difference less powerful.20
Women’s Poetic Resistances to Being Excluded from Power

The act of looking at femaleness from the vantage of maleness excludes women from full subjectivity by mistaking their physical attributes as signs of inadequacy. Originally, this habit is learned when maleness and femaleness are recognized as physical, sexual traits, but it appears to govern identity formation and habits of mind thereafter. Since this visual realization of difference is displaced onto speech which already reflects men’s and women’s different access to power, men’s perceptions of what femaleness is, or is not, determine what women can or cannot say. This is why I stressed above the importance of Centlivre’s denying speech to her male subjects and constructing her satire from several, implied women’s voices. Doing so is a radical subversion of prevailing idea that lack of thought is responsible for women’s voicelessness.

While ideas of difference in intellectual capacity define the psychological and social space within which women are permitted to exist (silently), their continuous exposure to men’s visual gazing at them as if they were functional objects—sources of delight, terror, revulsion, pity—adds to the confinement of their existence. It excludes them from privileges enjoyed by men. We have no evidence that such exclusion is not a sign of men’s desire, rather than a sign of women’s nature.

As women’s satiric poems construct a vantage from which women may see and speak, beyond the boundaries of a priori definitions of their female natures, their work defies the epistemological validity of their exclusion from speech and power. Women poets invent a variety of rebut-
tals for habits of mind that exclude woman from the realm of logic and control of language and of their lives. Anne Finch's "Adam Posed" (1709) dramatizes men's inability to understand or name femaleness. It offers us a scene in which "our first father" unexpectedly encounters "a vain, fantastic nymph" whose "airs...her antic graces,/ Her various fashions, and more various faces" would have puzzled and thwarted Adam's effort to assign her a name (12). I will quote it fully here and then comment further on it.

Could our first father, at his toilsome plough,  
Thorns in his path, and labour on his brow,  
Clothed only in a rude unpolished skin,  
Could he a vain, fantastic nymph have seen,  
In all her airs, in all her antic graces,  
Her various fashions, and more various faces;  
How had it posed that skill, which late assigned  
Just appellations to each several kind,  
A right idea of the sight to frame;  
T'have guessed from what new element she came,  
T'have hit the wavering form, or given this thing a name!

Finch's reputation in her own era and within our taxonomy of female poets is not that of a rebellious, 'immodest' figure (as Cavendish, Behn, Chudleigh and even some of their more apologetic successors were reputed to be). She occupies a respectable niche. In part because her verses were so frequently circulated and praised among the wide circle of her literary acquaintance, critics do not often find a radically subversive spirit in her poems. Still, it is important to notice that Finch's alleged conventionality in this poem--where the act of looking is the poem's chief activity--accompanies a feminine gaze which is at once judgmental, self-assured, and provocative.

In several respects Finch's poem appears to ape precedent by satirizing the frivolousness of young females ("nymphs") and implying
that a good character is marked by predictable, static, recognizable traits, rather than by the nymph's experimental embrace of poses and fashions. As well, Finch seems to concede that Adam's divinely assigned project of naming earth's species indicates superior male authority and points to definable, knowable aspects of all living beings. At the same time, her poem challenges the Biblical myth by imagining a female creature not extracted from Adams rib; not already known, but a surprise. "I've guessed from what new element she came, I've hit the wavering form, or given this thing a name!" is clearly beyond Adam's ability. Thus while a nameless nymph signifies the outlandishness of giddy young femaleness in eighteenth-century England, it also challenges the notion of Adam's competence. The nymph personifies too Finch's implied idea that some aspects of femaleness have an independent, mysterious existence apart from the subject positions assigned them by men. Adam's implied, startled stare and the perceptual limits signified by his speechlessness indicate that Finch is rewriting the Biblical myth of man's authority over woman (and challenging Divine prerogative and omniscience). Adam's limitations are further underscored by Finch's presentation of him "at his toilsome plough, / Thorns in his path...Clothed only in a rude unpolished skin." By pointing to a time after the Fall from innocence, Finch's description also counteracts Adam's earlier authoritative role as God's agent in the naming and classifying of life-forms.

As well, within the event imagined by Finch both male figures are excluded from the realm of choice and consciousness. The poem positions God in the implied past, associating him with Adam's ignorance of the
nymph's existence; and it assigns Adam (or, "names" him) to the realm of physical labour and lack of understanding. Adam's labour at his plow is presumed suspended by sight of the nymph, a stasis comparable to the male project of fixing the identities of living things by looking at them and naming them: "a right idea of the sight to frame" (my emphasis). Finch needs no vocabulary of psychology or literary theory to demonstrate an awareness that identity is the product of a differentiating gaze. Moreover, she alleges the inadequacy of such looking.

In her story of a nymph's naming, there are gaps, un-nameable signs of life. Instead of female subjectivity being delimited and imposed by man's gaze, Finch offers the alternative of not-knowing, not-saying, not-controlling apparent difference. In other words, Finch presents for our and Adam's amusement the fantastic, un-nameable aspects of femaleness which expose the limits of taxonomy and exclusion. It is the nymph's "antic," "various," "waver" qualities that supply the poem's dynamic and its epistemological challenge. Paradoxically, her alleged faults embody what we might call the elusiveness of the subject--the perversely polymorphous, polyvocal energies that exposes the fallacies and injustices of binary thinking. Significantly, Finch and the nymph return Adam's uncomprehending stare and notice his speechlessness without being altered themselves by either of his deficiencies. Yet, presumably, Adam too remains who he was before the encounter. The poem implies a mode of exchange which does not require selfhood to be subordinated. Still, its final lines declare the improbability that Adam will "guess" the nymph's origin or "hit" an understanding of her nature, and by leaving the scene unresolved Finch suggests not just important
differences between men’s and women’s sense of self and habits of seeing, but also important, ungraspable features of identity.

Finch is not alone in posing poetic challenges to belief in a fixed gender identity, inferior female subjectivity, or to exclusion of femaleness from the acts of looking and judging. Sarah Fyge Egerton’s poem "The Emulation" (1703) condemns the "impositions" of man’s control of women’s lives, mocking the former’s fears that women educated in arts, sciences, philosophy or poetry might excell them (31-2). The poem associates women’s present lack of freedom with that of "vanquished kings" and enjoins women to see themselves as potential rulers of Wit’s empire. I will quote it fully here and then comment further on it.

SAY, tyrant Custom, why must we obey
The impositions of thy haughty sway?
From the first dawn of life unto the grave,
Poor womankind’s in every state a slave,
The nurse, the mistress, parent and the swain
For love, she must, there’s none escape that pain.
Then comes the last, the fatal slavery:
The husband with insulting tyranny
Can have ill manners justified by law,
For men all join to keep the wife in awe.
Moses, who first our freedom did rebuke,
Was married when he writ the Pentateuch.
They’re wise to keep us slaves, for well they know,
If we were loose, we soon should make them so.
We yield like vanquished kings whom fetters bind,
When chance of war is to usurpers kind;
Submit in form; but they’d our thoughts control,
And lay restraints on the impassive soul
They fear we should excel their sluggish parts,
Should we attempt the sciences and arts;
Pretend they were designed for them alone,
So keep us fools to raise their own renown.
Thus priests of old, their grandeur to maintain,
Cried vulgar eyes would sacred laws profane;
So kept the mysteries behind a screen:
Their homage and the name were lost had they been seen.
But in this blessed age such freedom’s given,
That every man explains the will of heaven;
And shall we women now sit tamely by,
Make no excursions in philosophy,  
Or grace our thoughts in tuneful poetry?  
Wit's empire now shall know a female reign.  
Come, all ye fair, the great attempt improve,  
Divinely imitate the realms above:  
There's ten celestial females govern wit,  
And but two gods that dare pretend to it.  
And shall these finite males reverse their rules?  
No, we'll be wits, and then must men be fools.

Egerton's most graphic lines emphasize the power of looking to grant or exclude someone from privilege:

Thus priests of old, their grandeur to maintain,  
Cried vulgar eyes would sacred laws profane;  
So kept the mysteries behind a screen:  
Their homage and the name were lost had they been seen.

She asserts that the act of looking controls what it sees, makes it as helpless as a captured king— which, in her view, makes the one who controls a "usurper." Taking her examples from Old Testament religion and from recent politics (Charles I may be the "vanquished" king to whom she refers), she attacks the centers of male power, indicting all ritualized acts of exclusion as signs of men's desire to hide the emptiness of their claims to privilege and power. Her lines presume that women’s freedom to look closely at men's control of looking would result in loss of male privilege.

Like Finch, Egerton notices that identity is conferred by the gaze of another; however she proposes that women would not limit their power to look at men in order to define themselves as superior. She transcends mere reversal of the trope, suggesting that women would use greater freedom to look (constructing their own subjectivity) to gaze at or "emulate" divine female models— probably, the nine muses and their mother, Mnemosyne. She credits women generally with knowing that
female qualities exist apart from men’s view of them and that women possess their own inherent power. There are "ten celestial females" who govern wit, "And but two gods dare pretend to it" (32). Again, a woman poet’s reversal of oppositional habits of mind hints that there is life outside the boundaries of prescribed femininity. Even within that narrow realm defined by men’s limited vision, Egerton’s act of writing poetry signals opportunity for women to control words and their experience.

Esther Lewis’ "Advice to a Young Lady lately married" (1752) seems to be less bold than Egerton’s strongly philosophic attack on men’s perceptual malfeasance, largely because Lewis addresses a topic presumed appropriate for women. She plays with the conventions of advice literature, offering an ironic set of rules for peaceful marriage (230-2). Written during the same year that Lennox’s novel, The Female Quixote, was published (see Chapter 4 of this dissertation), Lewis’s poem displays similar caution, masking her rebellion against male domestic tyranny with language that consistently exploits stereotypic ideas about women’s subordinate place. Her use of the standard rhetoric of advice books for girls functions, satirically, the way Lennox’s anti-romance posture does. I will quote the poem fully here and then comment further on it.

Dear Peggy, since the single state
You’ve left, and chose yourself a mate;
Since metamorphosed to a wife,
And bliss or woe’s ensured for life,
A friendly muse the way would show
To gain the bliss, and miss the woe.
But first of all, I must suppose
You’ve with mature reflection chose;
And this premised, I think you may
Here find to married bliss the way.
Small is the province of a wife,
And narrow is her sphere in life;
Within that sphere to move aright
Should be her principal delight;
To guide the house with prudent care,
And properly to spend and spare;
To make her husband bless the day
He gave his liberty away;
To form the tender infant mind:
These are the tasks to wives assigned;
Then never think domestic care
Beneath the notice of the fair;
But matters every day inspect,
That naught be wasted by neglect.
Be frugal plenty round you seen,
And always keep the golden mean.

Be always clean, but seldom fine,
Let decent neatness round you shine;
If once fair decency be fled,
Love soon deserts the genial bed.

Not nice your house, though neat and clean;
In all things there's a proper mean.
Some of our sex mistake in this,
Too anxious some, some too remiss.

The early days of wedded life
Are oft o'ercast by childish strife;
Then be it your peculiar care
To keep that season bright and fair;
For then's the time by gentle art
To fix your empire in his heart.
With kind, obliging carriage strive
To keep the lamp of love alive;
For should it through neglect expire,
No art again can light the fire.

To charm his reason dress your mind,
Till love shall be with friendship joined;
Raised on that basis, 'twill endure,
From time and death itself secure.

Be sure you ne'er for power contend,
Nor try by tears to gain your end;
Sometimes the tears which cloud your eyes
From pride and obstinacy rise.
Heaven gave man superior sway,
Then heaven and him at once obey.
Let sullen frowns your brow ne'er cloud
Be always cheerful, never loud;
Let trifles never discompose
Your features, temper, or repose.

Abroad for happiness ne'er roam;
True happiness resides at home;
Still make your partner easy there
(Man finds abroad sufficient care).
If everything at home be right,
He'll always enter with delight;
Your converse he'll prefer to all
Those cheats the world does pleasure call;
With cheerful chat his cares beguile,
And always meet him with a smile.

Should passion e'er his soul deform,
Serenely meet the bursting storm;
Never in wordy war engage,
Nor ever meet his rage with rage.
With all our sex's softening art
Recall lost reason to his heart;
Thus calm the tempest in his breast,
And sweetly soothe his soul to rest.

Be sure you ne'er arraign his sense;
Few husbands pardon that offence;
'Twill discord raise, disgust it breeds,
And hatred certainly succeeds.
Then shun, O shun that fatal shelf,
Still think him wiser than yourself;
And if you otherwise would b'lieve,
Ne'er let him such a thought perceive.

When cares invade your partner's heart,
Bear you a sympathising part,
And kindly claim your share of pain,
And half his troubles still sustain;
From morn to noon, from noon to night,
To see him pleased your chief delight.

But now, methinks, I hear you cry,
"Shall she pretend, O vanity!
To lay down rules for wedded life,
Who never was herself a wife?"

I own you've ample cause to chide,
And blushing throw the pen aside.
Although Lewis's poem was reprinted often (including in commonplace books), its ironic construction and Lewis' other writings that protest misogyny preclude its being relegated to the shelves of conservative, didactic literature.24 Rather than advocating women's acceptance of their pre-defined roles and identity, Lewis constructs a series of requirements for married "bliss"--all wifely obligations aping conventional wisdom--that indict men's behavior while seeming to encourage women's obedience.

Each stanza holds an ironic objection to the rigid, dichotomized system of belief about male superiority and female inferiority by which men demand female compliance with their wishes. First, Lewis's persona acknowledges that her friend, Peggy, has "metamorphosed to a wife," implying both the acceptable idea that woman's destiny is marriage and a subversive view of marriage as loss: the idea that woman possesses another, original nature which is lost or abandoned when she marries. The first stanza also emphasizes that Lewis' purpose in writing is to help Peggy avoid the "woe" that might be "ensured for life" if she has chosen a husband unwisely or does not conduct herself "with mature reflection." Recommending "reflection" indicates that Peggy needs to look more closely at both herself and her mate; this ascribes the subjectivity of an autonomous person to her and makes her husband and marriage (as men ordain it) vulnerable to Lewis' and Peggy's combined gaze. In addition, Lewis' warnings about "woe" imply a husband's power over his wife and a likelihood that he will misuse it.

The poem invites us (and Peggy) to notice that her husband thinks of his wedding day as the occasion when "He gave his liberty away,"
which posits the wife as spoiler of his happiness and points to resentment as a strong influence on his conduct. Lewis also warns Peggy that not caring for her appearance might make "Love soon desert the genial bed," indicating that her husband's protestations of "Love" are shallow and that he is prone to infidelity. Peggy should realize too that if she does not "keep the lamp of love alive...No art again can light the fire," which suggests that negotiation, conciliation and mutual adjustment have no place in a marriage governed by male desire.

In each stanza the poem reiterates hyperbolic imperatives ("always" and "never") that counteract the aura of possibility clinging to specific advice being offered: "always keep the golden mean," "n'er for power contend," "Be always cheerful, never loud;/ Let trifles never discompose," "If everything at home be right,/ He'll always enter with delight," "nor ever meet his rage with rage." Peggy's responsibility includes sharing her husband's cares (emotional state) or troubles (circumstances) and pleasing him "From morn to noon, from noon to night,"--another verse where hyperbole indicates that Lewis's persona speaks from a profoundly satiric position. Such exaggeration--allowing woman not a minute for her privately determined interests--indicates that conventional marriage excludes any idea of women's full humanity.

The husband's implied tyranny and bad temper receive more candid treatment in a stanza urging Peggy to "shun, O shun [the] fatal shelf" of books--the mistake of challenging her husband's "sense" by educating herself or disagreeing with him (my emphasis). Not only does Lewis echo here the ironic rage of her earlier poem ("A Mirror for Detractors, Addressed to a Friend," 1748) that boldly asks "Why are the needle and
the pen/ Thought incompatible by men?"—she also admits the probability that Peggy will think herself wiser than her husband and advises "Ne'er let him such a thought perceive." This warning about male pride is preceded by reference to the husband's penchant for tantrums (Should passion e'er his soul deform,/ Serenely meet the bursting storm"), his irrationality ("Recall lost reason to his heart"), and his need for mothering ("Thus calm the tempest...And sweetly soothe his soul to rest").

Her subtext of disdain for male behavior is accented by Lewis's reliance throughout the poem on obvious clichés about female subservience, but there is another, blatant sign that Lewis expects her reader to see the poem as satire, not instruction. The poem concludes dialogically, with Lewis's adoption of Peggy's persona; the latter objects to Lewis's presumption in laying down "rules for wedded life,/ Who never was herself a wife." Paradoxically, by speaking for Peggy Lewis denies the latter's freedom as a speaking subject, much as marriage does; yet by grounding Peggy's objection in her own (Lewis') lack of equivalent social status and married experience Lewis implies that Peggy has no quarrel with the poem's representation of man's flaws or woman's predicament. Peggy's alleged objection to Lewis' maidenhood also raises the possibility that Lewis understates her case, not realizing how difficult it is to be a wife: obliged to obey and be silent about the injustices she sees. In this last possible scenario, Lewis' poem becomes the unwelcome evidence of her superior freedom.

Conscious treatment of the disadvantages of being fixed by another's gaze and deliberate reversal of that situation is a repeated
feature in women's satiric poetry. Lady Mary Wortley Montagu's autobiographical poem, "Saturday," from her *Six Town Eclogues* (c. 1716) explores a woman's dismay at her changed appearance after recovering from small-pox (56-8). Here a woman poet dramatizes a female persona's self-examination to express her resentment of conventional social and literary narratives in which male eyes objectify a female figure. Again, the poem appears to satirize stereotypic female traits. I will not quote it fully here, but cite necessary passages as I comment further on it.

Her speaking subject's regrets, prompted by gazing at her face in a mirror, imply Montagu's awareness that society believes woman's first preoccupation is her vanity. She sees in pockmarks only a guarantee of social 'death': "Beauty is fled," and gifts and lovers, and showing off in fancy dress, and "empire" are "no more." As well, however, Montagu accords her persona memories of social events when others (especially men) were "awed" by her eyes. The poem emphasizes its speaker's power to construct social success by displaying herself and by returning admiring glances or intimidating rivals with her bold stare. Like Montagu herself (who improved her opportunities to learn Turkish language and culture by adopting native dress while living in Turkey during her husband's ambassadorship), the speaker exploits available subjectivities (as beauty, flirt, or surviving victim) in order to construct a new identity as chief mourner of her lost importance. Montagu thus gives mirror-gazing ironic importance; it is at once the sign of her persona's stereotypic vanity and of her strength: she is able to
see herself as she will be seen by the implied, repulsed or pitying looks of people she will meet.

**Simultaneous Meanings: Satire’s Polymorphous Subjectivities**

All of the objections to women’s exclusions from power discussed above rely for their ironic effect on a female persona’s capacity to exclude herself from limited, stereotypic notions of femaleness and to imagine other subjectivities. Women writers are not alone in the ability to imagine alternative fictions of identity, but it is important to credit them in this regard and, perhaps more important, to notice that their taste for such literary invention bears important relation to the nature of satire. I realize that looking at satiric strategies and then claiming that they are typical of satire is a blatant example of circular logic. But my argument is that our theorizing about satire, to date, has not noticed correspondences between satiric method and stereotypes of femininity, or the importance of satire’s misogynist tropes in light of its own resemblance to the traits it scorcs. In this light, satire is even more profoundly feminized, since it denies its own nature in the act of pleasing men. Its strong reliance on pretence and displaced meaning deceives even men who use it, apparently allowing them to write and judge satire without realizing that its movements are those of a [stereotyped] woman. They speak in false, without hearing themselves. Still, the "heteroglossic" features of satire’s multiplied subject positions (to borrow a term from Bakhtin) resemble the presumed disheveled state of women’s minds and their alienation from logical, referential functions of words. That satire exploits just such
'chaotic' modes of perception without admitting their associations with femaleness makes study of women's satiric work more revealing and more necessary.

As I have suggested, the women writers examined here use literary satire as a means of escape from the boundaries of femininity and from the objectifying gaze of male scorn by reversing literary conventions, but also by exploiting the slipperiness of language to construct a tenuous place where the variousness of female subjectivity may breathe and speak. The polyvocal, polylogical (polymorphous) features of their writing are especially typical of satire and of poetry. 26 Kristeva describes poetry as "the semiotization of the symbolic" (cited in Stanton, "Difference on Trial," 164). Seen from this vantage, satire is our most poetic form of any literary genre. Looking at the way women poets use satire forces our notice of how it always presumes the unfixed nature of subjectivity, as well as the variableness of linguistic signs. Perhaps because simultaneity and multiplicity, and oppositional structures that rely on proliferating meanings (serving chiefly as home base for women's tangent speculations) have long been considered descriptive of women's mental processes, and because the latter have been judged as inferior to the straightforward, focused, linearity of men's habits of mind, we have overlooked the strong resemblance between satiric performance and feminine perception.

Paradoxically, while women poets rely on dialogic poems which presume the usefulness of words as communicative signs (as well as allowing a female persona to embrace various modes of subjectivity), their poems often also acknowledge the insufficiency of words to convey
any subject position. Anne Finch, for example, argues in "Friendship between Ephelia and Ardelia" (1713) that words are inadequate means of expressing love and loyalty: "Words indeed no more can show" is the last line of a poem that repeats cliches of devotion and then asks, "Can Ardelia say no more?" (22). Her "Nocturnal Reverie" (1713) also concedes that language is not reliable: "silent musings urge the mind to seek/ Something too high for syllables to speak" (23). Neither is a satiric poem in its general tone, but each displays Finch's ironic consciousness of the limitations of language. More pertinently, Elizabeth Thomas' ridicule of male pretensions in "The True Effigies of a Certain Squire: Inscribed to Clemena" (1722)--inspired, apparently, by a man's scorn of Thomas and all bookish women--admits that the repulsiveness of the Squire "too fulsome is to be expressed" (38), suggesting that personal identity is constituted by more than language's representation of it implies.

Sarah Dixon writes a self-mocking poem ("Lines Occasioned by the Burning of Some Letters," 1740) in which she identifies written words as "magic lines...vain atoms"--a reference to eighteenth-century awareness of the unseen molecular structure things (178). This controlling metaphor displays her awareness that ideas are constituted by mysterious arrangements of almost indecipherable elements. And while her persona represents herself as capable of self-analysis, as well as scrutiny of another's motives, Dixon reiterates the idea that ability to see into the complexity of things does not give reality coherence. Her first stanza's concern with the chaotic effects of emotion makes the poem's
analytic procedures only one aspect of the speaker’s entire response. I will quote the poem fully here and then comment further on it.

Not all pale Hecate’s direful charms,
When hell’s invoked to rise in swarms,
When graves are ransacked, mandrakes torn,
And rue and baleful nightshade torn,
Could give that torturing, racking pain
These magic lines did once obtain;
There’s not a letter in the whole,
But what conspired to wound the soul.

But now! the dread enchantment’s o’er;
The spell is broke, they plague no more.
’Twas only paper daubed with art;
Could such a trifle gain a heart,
Obstruct the peace of early life,
And set the passions all at strife,
Admit no cure, till time erased
The fond ideas fancy placed?

Combustible I’m sure you are;
Arise ye flames! assist me, air!
Waft the vain atoms to the wind,
Disperse the fraud, and purge mankind.
The fatal relics thus removed,
Does Celia look like one who loved,
Who durst her future peace repose
On vows, and oaths, and toys like those?

Fallacious deity! to thee
The guilt, and the simplicity,
Who thought such cobweb-arts could bind,
To all eternity, the mind.
When honour’s fled, thy flames expire,
And end in smoke like common fire.

Thus the entangled bird, set free,
Finds treble joy in liberty.
Her little heart may throb and beat,
Nor soon the danger past forget,
Dread to forsake the safeguard wood,
And shun awhile the chrystal flood;
But with the next returning spring,
Retire to shades—you’ll hear her sing.

Dixon exploits a cliche of women’s emotional vulnerability in love affairs to emphasize words’ lack of enduring meaningfulness. Further-
more, she suggests the impossibility of separating words' linguistic and intentional functions by asking, "Who thought such cobweb-arts could bind," / To all eternity, the mind" (my emphasis). This image reveals both the deceitfulness displayed by her correspondent and the fact that words do not possess meaningfulness apart from motive. (And, of course Dixon hints that while words seem ephemeral, their power to shape human experience is strong.) Dixon's apparent motives include releasing herself from the power of words to hurt. Yet her conscious reliance on words to make a poem makes her satiric critique of the letter writer, herself, and language meta-critical: she works with the self-awareness of one whose performance is a repetition of what she allegedly scorns. Thus, Dixon's poem, the act of burning letters, and her final stanza's triumphal claim that she will recover from the letters' effect and "sing" are all proofs the "cobweb" elusiveness of language is less troublesome when it is recognized.

It is important that Dixon imagines herself expressing her triumph as birdsong, rather than as human speech, or writing. Her choice of metaphor in this case flaunts a desire to escape from the realm of words in which she has experienced pain and which she mocks as untrustworthy. Removing herself (hypothetically) from language and re-defining herself as a natural creature able to communicate apart from language's referentiality is, of course, a concession of the latter's power, as well as seeming to be a conventionally nostalgic poetic gesture of retreating to nature. However, Dixon does not turn to the natural world for solace (as women of the period--including Finch--so often do). Instead, she identifies herself with the freedom of a bird's natural
life: "Thus the entangled bird, set free,/ Finds treble joy in liberty." The phrase "entangled bird" suggest that the letters just burned had robbed her of an autonomous sense of self natural to her. In other words, Dixon's identification with birdsong may be seen as evidence of her ability to fuse sympathy with an ironic view of her vulnerability to linguistic manipulation:

There's not a letter in the whole,
But what conspired to wound the soul...

Does Celia look like one who loved,
Who durst her future peace repose
On vows, and oaths, and toys like those?

Assigning blame to misused words and referring to love as a "Fallacious deity" also define an ironic, multiple subject position. Using the trivializing metaphor "toys" and an epithet which deflates language's authority implies that her subordination to the power of words implied by the letter-writer's tricks was produced by fraud. She has been betrayed by established modes of communication, as well as by a person. Dixon's blanket condemnation of the entire system of signification is prompted by her awareness that she does not control it, but is exploited by it, even though she uses words, the constituting elements of the world in which she remains disadvantaged, to help solve her dilemma. Her poem is the new song by which she escapes the "danger" of emotional entanglement and the entanglements of linguistic traps.

From our vantage and imposing our conceptual rhetoric, Dixon's birdsong metaphor is also an example of semiotic modes of expression. To the extent that her metaphor succeeds in bringing to mind the inexplicable rhythms and trills of birdsong, Dixon's poem constructs for
her persona an escape from logical and monovocal signifiers. Birdsong as a metaphor represents her desire for emotional freedom, but also suggesting that this desire cannot be paraphrased, or contained within the metaphor. In this respect, her poem invents the possibility of unnameable, limitless subjectivity. Dixon’s voice transmuted to birdsong signifies the simultaneously vocal, material, identifiable, and unsayable aspects of her implied identity. For me Dixon’s birdsong image is a delightful example of woman’s capacity for jouissance, that capacity to transform pain into what is positive, or to transcend the limits of a defined sexual condition. By being an image of freedom, contextualized by her poem’s concern with the bonds of language and relationship, birdsong points to both new possibility and to repressed forms of subjectivity which, in Gayatri Spivak’s words, "play us," rather than being controlled ("A response...," 217).

Other women satiric poets too embrace metaphor to suggest the unsayable, at times drawing upon a wider range of semiotic modes of expression which disrupt our expectations of linear narrative and denotative meanings. Their satiric manipulations of language are themselves a sign that experience transcends signification, reminding us that in its most characteristic functions satire resists narrative (although it may construct a narrative frame). It counters narrative by relying primarily on images (metaphors) which portray apparent differences as inseparable: in Irigaray’s words, the constituent elements of metaphor are "always one and the other at the same time" (When Our Lips Speak Together," cited in Stanton, 166). For example, Lady Mary Wortley Montagu describes the vacillating loyalties of a young fop as
analogous to "the sands of Afric’s burning plains...no long impress remains" ("Epistle [to Lord Bathurst]," c. 1725; 64). Like Dixon’s arbitrary choice of birdsong, Montagu’s image has no necessary, logical tie with preceding lines in her poem--which chronicles the fop’s dilatory pursuits from season to season. "Afric sands" is a phrase that peremptorily calls to mind a vision of barren sterility. It not only represents personalized Lack--the absence of good sense and lack of potential for mature development by which Montagu’s preceding narrative has characterized the fop; her use of the image also suggests the inadequacy of narrative and denotative language generally to communicate her impressions of the young man. Let me grant immediately that "Afric sands" is a denotative phrase; nevertheless, its function in Montagu’s poem is as metaphor, as a sign of the entire process of meaning construction by which we understand the fop’s emptiness. In other words, this satiric metaphor appended to a story-line and conflating a youth’s behavior with features of a natural scene illustrates the mutually dependent relation of semiotic and symbolic modes of signification. It points to and generates but does not denote our capacity to fill in the gap between linear and non-linear thought. Montagu’s metaphor is a sign too of another semiotic mode of perception: her capacity for imagining the nature of a subjectivity very different from her own--a contrast enforced by her poem’s concluding representation of her loyalty to a hypothetical lover: impervious as a rock or marble to any passing influence.

Mary Leapor’s poem, "An Epistle to Artemesia" (c. 1746) offers an even more typical example of women poets’ fondness for satirizing their
own conduct or others' by constructing a serial dialogue. In this case, the polyvocality— or multiple subjectivity— of the text functions as metaphor. That is, Leapor's poetic shifts from the voices of one indifferent critic of her poetry to another constitute both the poem's narrative and its ability to signify her dismay at not being taken seriously as a writer. Taken collectively, the sequence of dismissals evokes our realization of Leapor's emotional state, although she does not refer to the latter directly. Like Dixon and Montagu, Leapor relies on particular as well as structural ironies, and where the former comprise metaphor they create gaps or disruptions in her poem's narrative. For example, she names her first critic "Delpho" to underline the cryptic nature of his response to her poetic efforts ("Why, perhaps they may," he replies to her question about whether her literary efforts will prosper) and she embodies his dismissive attitude in the "broad thumb" which moves "nimbly down the side" of her manuscript (204). His use of a thumb (rather than a more elegant index finger), and its primary condition ("broad") also dissociate him from the more sophisticated judgments presumed likely from an educated, as a rule more physically elegant person; these significations and the brevity of his glance at her work combine to persuade us that he is incapable, as well as unwilling to read Leapor's poems.

The dynamic features of this process allow reading, or understanding, but they deny fixed identity to any of its components— authorial intention, words, audience response. This is another way of saying that the process by which we realize the poem as satire is not predominantly binary, it is semiotic. The poem's general premise is oppositional—
Leapor vs. the stupid or cruel or jealous people who dismiss her poems or criticize her using time to write, rather than sewing to earn her bread. In addition, Leapor's dialogue of hostility is constructed as such by depending upon the referential functions of words, but its satiric realization exploits gaps in signification. These gaps or disruptions are created by the fluid indefiniteness of words and demand interactive collaboration to attain meaningfulness. They are also created by the mutually dependent relationship between words and desire. Irigaray reminds us that it is desire which "occupies or designates the interval" or gap in signification ("Sexual Difference," 118). As satire foregrounds its author's motives, or desires, it underscores its relation to the semiotic realm in which desire originates.

Here, the broad thumb signifies Leapor's helplessness in the face of his privileged position, yet it conveys Leapor's scorn by disrupting the logical, narrative apparatus of oppositional thought and yet, it also is the means by which her desire for recognition may be registered. Our understanding of Leapor's ironic perspective of male power over female lives, of her resentment, and paradoxical desire for the privilege signified by that thumb moving down the page occurs in the gap between the literal meaning of the phrase, "broad thumb" and its possessor's social/intellectual lacks. (The white space between the words in the phrase, "broad thumb" is a metonymic representation of the process by which we realize the manuscript reader's inadequacy). "Broad thumb" is a phrase/image existing in complex relation to all signifying elements of the poem in its entirety. The meanings we construct in response to this image are possible because the image is characterized by multi-
plicity, rather than by definiteness. It is semiotic in its nature and effects, indicating the poem's reliance on what is indeterminate or "repressed" to complement the binary us/them mentality which also shapes and conveys its meanings.30 Because Leapor's poem is satiric we notice these effects more readily, but any verbal inscription is a collaborative project requiring the multiplied effects of verbal denotation, authorial intention, inferences constructed by the reader, and words' relationship to semiotic experience, which enables them to signify more than they denote.

Let me say here that other critical approaches to satire might discover some of these implications about Leapor's reader. Certainly, many critics of satire emphasize its reliance on verbal indeterminacy (for example, Frederic Bogel examines the eighteenth-century satiric preoccupation with "insubstantiality," and Alfred Kernan discusses satire as chaos, or patterns of expression that resist order),31 but by conceptualizing satiric methods as examples of semiotic expression we bring to light its relation to the realm of unconscious knowledge and the role of femaleness in both conscious and unconscious realms of thought.32

To refer to the process of satiric construction as "semiotic" is to say that satire's subject position deconstructs itself.33 Women satirists do this with a vengeance, as it were. The socially constructed conflict between prescriptive ideas about femaleness and their personal experience and desires heightens their awareness of speaking from a position that is unstable. What matters here is that satire's exploitation of the reliability of referential, logical, linear dis-
course does not imply, simply, that there is an elsewhere, an Other procedure which is superior. It does not reactively privilege indeterminacy, enacting a reversal of received ideas by which it continues to participate in the symbolic order of discourse. Rather, satiric play with language illuminates the additional, and unmapped modes of signification which seem to be counterparts of linguistic reliability. It challenges the epistemological premises linked with the symbolic order. Dixon’s bird, Montagu’s desert, and Leapor’s "broad thumb" or her anaphoric sequence of unkind voices all illustrate the disruptive features of language, the potentially "semiotic" functions of metaphor, the "feminine" procedures against which logic defines itself and which are its complement.

H. James Jensen claims that "Satire’s essence is...illusive...so far, no one has isolated a general effect closely enough for generic definition" (The Satirist’s Art, x). Perhaps critical inability to reach consensus about the nature of satire’s appeal and influence is related to exclusion of femininity from the discussion. No matter how cogent the argument, refusal to consider the role of the femaleness in ways of thinking labeled "satiric" blocks our understanding of the perceptual dynamic on which satire depends.

Both satire and metaphor are literary gestures implicitly recognizing the unconscious by modeling (and circumventing) the difference between knowable, sayable ideas and those which can only be implied and inferred. They are literary embodiments of our psychological makeup and our genderization of what is apparent and what is implied. More specifically, metaphor’s relation to satire is comparable to and perhaps a
function of femininity's relation to language--an enabling role, but often discredited, seeming to represent insufficiency, yet functioning as that which privileged signifiers cannot do without. Let me illustrate this with a final, brief example from another poem by Mary Leapor which offers a woman poet's judgment of how women's natural functions have been demeaned by man's pride. Leapor's use of satiric metaphor points to what is unsayable about male habits of mind while also conveying scorn. "Man the Monarch" (c. 1746; 203-4) holds more insights and more complex attitudes about gender than I will suggest here, but I will quote it fully, and them comment on key passages.

AMAZED we read of Nature's early throes, How the fair heavens and ponderous earth arose; How blooming trees unplanted first began; And beasts submissive to their tyrant, man: To man, invested with despotic sway, While his mute brethren tremble and obey; Till heaven beheld him insolently vain, And checked the limits of his haughty reign. Then from their lord the rude deserters fly, And, grinning back, his fruitless rage defy; Pards, tigers, wolves to gloomy shades retire, And mountain goats in purer gales respire. To humble valleys, where soft flowers blow, And fastening streams in chrysalis mazes flow, Full of new life, the untamed coursers run, And roll and wanton in the cheerful sun; Round their gay hearts in dancing spirits rise, And rouse the lightning in their rolling eyes: To craggy rocks destructive serpents glide Whose moadsy crannies hide their speckled pride; And monstrous whales on foamy billows ride. Then joyful birds ascend their native sky: But where! ah, where shall helpless woman fly?

Here smiling Nature brought her choicest stores, And roseate beauty on her favourite pours: Pleased with her labour, the officious dame Withheld no grace would deck the rising frame. Then views her work, and viewed and smiled again, And kindly whispered, 'Daughter, live and reign.' but now the matron mourns her latest care,
And sees the sorrows of her darling fair,  
Beholds a wretch, whom she designed a queen,  
And weeps that e'er she formed the weak machine.  
In vain she boasts her lip of scarlet dyes,  
Cheeks like the morning, and far-beaming eyes;  
Her neck refulgent, fair and feeble arms—  
A set of useless and neglected charms.  
She suffers hardship with afflictive moans:  
Small tasks of labour suit her slender bones.  
Beneath a load her weary shoulders yield,  
Nor can her fingers grasp the sounding shield;  
She sees and trembles at approaching harms,  
And fear and grief destroy her fading charms.  
Then her pale lips no pearly teeth disclose,  
And time's rude sickle cuts the yielding rose.  
Thus wretched woman's shortlived merit dies:  
in vain to Wisdom's sacred help she flies,  
Or sparkling Wit but lends a feeble aid:  
'Tis all delirium from a wrinkled maid.

A tattling dame, no matter where or who—  
Me it concerns not, and it need not you—  
Once told this story to the listening Muse,  
Which we, as now it serves our turn, shall use.

When our grandsire named the feathered kind,  
Pondering their natures in his careful mind,  
"Twas then, if on our author we rely,  
He viewed his consort with an envious eye;  
Greedy of power, he hugged the tottering throne,  
Pleased with the homage, and would reign alone;  
And, better to secure his doubtful rule,  
Rolled his wise eyeballs, and pronounced her fool.  
The regal blood to distant ages runs:  
Sires, brothers, husbands, and commanding sons,  
The sceptre claim; and every cottage brings  
A long succession of domestic kings.

As Leapor retells the story of creation, contrasting the delightfully free, chaotic state of natural forms of life and the benevolence of a maternal Nature, with Adam's selfish, prideful use of the power to name, she invents a metaphor which conveys at once what is inexplicable and what is knowable and despicable about the first man. Describing Adam's eagerness to prevent Eve from sharing his "doubtful rule" over nature, Leapor tells us that he "Rolled his wise eyeballs, and pro-
ounced [Eve] fool" (Leapor's emphasis). The rolled eyeballs enact a semiotic movement comparable to the untamed energies of the non-human creatures who flee from Adam in early lines of the poem. Moreover, they indicate, simultaneously, Adam's complicity with God (his implied audience, for whom the rolled eyeballs convey awareness of a shared disdain for Eve), and Adam's inability or unwillingness to express reasons for his unjust treatment of Eve—naming her "fool", and perhaps abusing her in other ways, since she, like the animals, is eager to "fly" from him even prior to his verbal condemnation. Appropriately, since physical human eyes carry long-standing, traditional metaphoric association with the self-knowledge on which other insights depend, Leapor shows us a temporarily blind Adam in the instant that his eyeballs roll back. Not seeing Eve's value, he cannot see himself. The silence implied by that instant also evokes the unspeaking modes of understanding associated with semiotic experience—a silence that, for us, generates an ironic correspondence between Adam (the mythological first man, the child who is father to the sexual man) and the infant in psychological story whose undifferentiated identity with its mother is a condition which begins to change as he learns to speak.

Leapor's understandings are not offered with this theoretical context in mind, yet her metaphor clearly suggests too that when Adam views his consort "with an envious eye," his gaze discovers not female inadequacy, but that which threatens his pride and desires. Leapor (unwittingly) partially deconstructs the Lacanian aura of inevitability hovering about the male gaze. Although her poem shows the baleful effect on women of being looked at by men and misjudged, she also
implies that what Adam sees in Eve is present, not absent. And powerful enough to make him envy her.

In this theoretical context and at this point in Leapor's poetic narrative, Adam's naming of Eve ("fool") is an act equivalent to the moment in Lacanian story when man's gaze at the female body allows him to infer female inadequacy and to construct his own identity (in this poem, represented by his "tottering throne") from belief in that difference. Like the implied first man of Lacan's story, Leapor's Adam remains unaware of his error, but his ignorance does not prevent his using the mistake to advantage. Ever afterwards, Leapor claims, Eve and all women are enslaved by man's tyranny, woman's natural merit denied by the name she bears. For us, Leapor's image of rolling eyeballs suggests the unconscious features of Adam's decision and the widespread general consequence of devaluing womanhood that results from men's dissociation from what appears to be feminized indefiniteness. Her metaphorical suggestion of Adam's blindness is a reminder that satire is constituted by images of that which seems knowable and that which resists naming. The temporary state of his blindness is the image too of our simultaneous ability to admit and repress knowledge. Leapor's feminization of what is repressed is contextualized by Biblical myth, and remains timely.

We know that there is something beyond the allegedly unified subjectivity and its productions of seemingly coherent, linear narrative. The satirist knows it and makes the most of it. Satire points to what Irigaray calls "another 'syntax', another 'grammar' of culture" and signification (quoted in Stanton, "Difference on Trial," 159), but not in order to repeat the functions of binary perception by privileging one
fiction over another. It does not present the discredited feminine features of our comprehension as superior, but as an integral part of the entire process of meaning construction. By presuming and exploiting the indefiniteness of subjectivity, satire provides a literary site where the kind of perception not included in Adam's view of the world enjoys credibility. It is the place where "hapless" woman can "fly" and be the "queen" of all she views. In Leapor's poem satire re-embodies woman as "queen," and by associating this image of female power with free, untamed, wanton animals, Leapor implies that woman's "reign" and nature are not predetermined.

Women satiric poets exploit the polyvocal, polymorphous features of satire in ways that help make obvious to us the semiotic nature of the genre. Male-authored satire too depends upon semiotic modes of expression, but until this approach to satire gains adherents we are not likely to read many essays on the feminine aspects of Dryden's prefaces to his plays, or Pope's ironic rage, or Johnson's satiric moralizing. Meanwhile, another reason for using women's texts in this type of investigation, beyond our general need for more serious and comprehensive study of women's writing, is their tendency to foreground the desires motivating their work. Women poets and those writing other forms of literature tend to rely on personae closely associated with their autobiographical selves and thereby underscore both the desire signified by satiric metaphor and their consciousness of metaphor's power to express what they and more 'logical' signifiers cannot say.
NOTES

1 Doughty’s assessment of Finch is typical too of critics who judge women poets chiefly by measuring their work against other women’s poetry, and while he includes portions of her poems in his remarks, rather than dismissing her work outright, he cites no passages in which Finch reveals the limitations of being female. Doughty’s quotes are decontextualized extracts, unrepresentative of Finch’s poetic voice and offering little to attract a reader’s interest. She is included in his literary history, but his treatment of her may be worse than neglect. This critical trend has its counterpart (a double-bind) in demeaning representations of femaleness by male eighteenth-century poets. For rebuttal, see Felicity Nussbaum, The Brink of All We Hate: English Satires on Women 1660 - 1750.

2 Throughout this essay I will refer to "women" and "men" without qualification; let me acknowledge here that we lack proof of whether their respective, gendered identities are fixed and unitary, or whether their respective, literary achievements are ontologically different kinds of performance. Still, my argument indicates that noticing the semiotic features of women’s writing and of satire generally might be a useful approach to men’s writing as well.


4 As yet we do not know how to explain the different influences of culture, body, and mind on literary creativity. At least, our proliferating hypotheses suggest that our attempts replicate the complexity we describe. Robin Lakoff ("Women's Language") and Peggy Kamuf ("Writing Like a Woman") help raise questions about the influence of sexual identity on linguistic operations. The tensions between feminism and deconstruction concerning the issue of essentialism (the idea that sexual identity is biologically transmitted and immutable) have provoked a debate among Jonathan Culler ("Reading as a Woman"), Tanya Modleski ("Feminism and the Power of Interpretation"), Robert Scholes (Reading Like a Man), and others, including Gayatri Spivak ("In a Word," passim). One example of recent critical focus on essentialism is the special issue of differences 1/2 (1989); in it Diana Fuss’s article, "Reading Like a Feminist" offers a helpful review of the controversy, while arguing for the value of nominal essentialism—the importance of politics as "feminism's essence" (90). Another recent collection of essays about Julia Kristeva helps to clarify the non-essentialist components of French feminism; see Crownfield, Body/Text. Jane Gallop's essay about Luce Irigaray, "Lip Service," (in Thinking Through the Body) illustrates how feminist essentialism may also be deconstructionist (accommodating the elusiveness of subjectivity and meaning). See also Michèle Montrelay's complexly Freudian "Inquiry into Femininity", which makes a strong argument for the existence of specifically female "archaic" sexuality that is forgotten because repressed; Montrelay sees the jouissance of women's writing as a sign of universally shared femi

5 In "Aristotle's Sister: A Poetics of Abandonment," Lawrence Lipking attempts to define a feminine poetic by referring to the work of eighteenth-century women writers. He says that whereas men's literary achievement illustrates Aristotle's law of natural pleasure in harmonious form, conversely "a woman's poetics obeys another law of nature, the unsatisfied craving of children who cry to be held" (78). For Lipking, a female poetics must be seen as "the expression of a life, personal, incomplete, and proportioned to the self; employing whatever language and conventions one has been allowed to acquire; presented in fragments; and achieving, through sharing the emotions of loneliness and abandonment, a momentary sense of not being alone" (77, my emphasis). Lipking is less bellicose than Roethke, but his assumptions about women's inferiority are similarly unquestioned.

6 Todd's "List of Contributors" in her Dictionary of British and American Writers 1660-1800 is an excellent general source of information about feminist scholars whose work focuses on women poets of the
period. See also Ezell, *The Patriarch's Wife*, Chapter 4; Williamson's *Raising their Voices*; and essays by Gibson, Ollman and Messenger in Keener and Lorsch, *Eighteenth-Century Women and the Arts*.

7 For a survey of the nature and influence of literary sensibility during the period, see *Sensibility in Transformation* (Syndy M. Conger, ed.), especially Stephen Cox's essay, "Sensibility as Argument." Cox identifies the problematic aspect of sensibility for eighteenth-century writers as "the difficulty of discriminating, among all possible varieties of consciousness, the type that might offer the surest basis for one's social values" (72). His essay thereby privileges conscious components of literary method, even though he concedes that sensibility is "such a subtly individual state of consciousness" that its efforts to describe itself are "crude and insufficient" (73).

8 Williamson's chief contribution in this area may be her effort in *Raising their Voices* to show a continuous tradition of women's writing during the century. However, her method of segregating women writers according to their espousal of a conservative ("Orinda and her Daughters") or protofeminist ("Behn and her Daughters") position is overdetermined. She applies a narrow notion of subjectivity and of women writers' subversive strategies. While Williamson notices how such poets raise their voices to protest their inferior social position, her analysis of their literary methods does not adequately explore linguistic operations, and she implicitly endorses the idea that women's poetic voices are co-opted by the growing cult of bourgeois domesticity. Such an approach implies that the linguistic operations and psychological patterns of women's literary creativity are less important than social or political events and discounts the role of gendered modes of perception.

9 Todd says, "as the eighteenth-century wore on, poetry increased its sentimental content and style," but "a few women continued to use poetry satirically" (*Dictionary*, 14). She cites as examples Margaret Ogle's "crude" attack on Walpole (1742) and humorous political poetry by Henrietta Battier and Mary O'Brien. Todd's implied, working definition of satire restricts it to political topics.

10 Miner is discussing the art of satire as a literary activity which includes religious and secular topics and whose merit must be judged by its success in making issues "matter" to its readers ("The Restoration," 106). He does not address epistemological functions of satire directly.

11 Women who write learned, unsatiric verse include Mary Chudleigh, who uses Thomas Burnet's cosmogonic theories in her "Song of The Three Children Paraphrased" (1703); and Sarah Eyge Egerton, who embraces the theological ideas of Boyle and John Norris in "Poems on Several Occasions" (1706). Rothstein discusses their work as examples of women's poetic efforts to "analyze social relationships in terms of power" (*Restoration and Eighteenth-Century Poetry*, 34). It is worth
noting that later in the eighteenth-century women writers were more reluctant to engage men's ideas in so bold a manner; as a result, their satiric methods grew more subtle.


13 By "subjectivity" I mean the ephemeral, linguistically constructed position by which a person is identified by others and to which she refers when self-aware. In this discussion, therefore, "subjectivity" is a term emphasizing communicative strategies, rather than pointing exclusively to cultural and ideological determinants of identity, although my use of it does not deny their influence. Here it indicates self-consciousness in relation to social determinants. Humb says that the "reconceptualisation of the subject role has become a major aim of feminist researchers," many of whom protest the "dominant/domineering connotation" of the word "subject," when it signifies one who observes an objectified person or thing. The more commonplace notion of a subject reverses this meaning, makes a subject one who is observed, or "on whom research operations are performed, rendering her passive" (219).

14 Reeve's conservatism is manifest in an early gothic fiction and her most famous novel, The Old English Baron (first published in 1777 as The Champion of Virtue). In it and in Memoirs of Sir Roger de Clarendon (1793) she praises "an older, more hierarchical society," and indicates her belief that "subordination" is superior to the modern ideas contributing to the French Revolution (Jane Spencer, in Todd's Dictionary, 266).

15 Landry claims that between the two poles of passivity and stupidity which ensure women's subjection to male scorn "lie...many...actual practices of reading, writing, and self-representation by laboring-class women" (10), and while such literary efforts do not escape ideological constraint, women poets regularly exploit established genres, modes, tropes, and themes in similar ways (13).

16 Thomas complains that men insist upon their superior place in the scheme of difference, but do not necessarily prove their claim. See her satire of male pretension in "The True Effigies of a Certain Squire: Inscribed to Clemena" (1722) in Lonsdale, 37-9.

17 Centlivre's allusions here to the protocols of romance and her exaggerated claim of women's power over their suitors may be a response to Pope's "The Rape of the Lock," 1712-14. Her Englishwomen, however, are presented as knowing and caring about politics; Pope's female flirts are entirely petty.

18 When Lacan uses language conventionally (as if it has stable meaning), he does so in order to define femaleness as "Lack." While he claims that both the human and grammatical subject are
indeterminate, unknowable, ever-receding, he gives the symbolic realm of language (from which woman is excluded) stable and identifiable function in the story he tells of human identity-formation and language construction. See his *Écrits: A Selection*, Jameson, "Imaginary and Symbolic in Lacan," and Anika Lemaire's *Jacques Lacan*.

19 Strictly speaking, "semiotic expression" is an oxymoronic phrase, which I shall continue to use here to indicate the chaotic features of satiric procedure. Kristeva explains the term, "semiotic" as referring to "drives and their articulations," which must be seen as different from the symbolic realm of signification, which is always "a realm of positions" (Revolution in Poetic Language, 43). I work with the premise that semiotic drives necessarily influence language (the "symbolic realm"), and that it is appropriate to notice semiotic effects and 'expressions' of that which remains repressed.

20 To argue that non-linear thought surpasses logical thought in flexibility (by being indeterminate) is not to assign it superiority in yet another binary paradigm or to replace misogyny with misanthropy. We do seem obliged to retain oppositional modes of thought in order to grasp other possibilities--such as, the idea that difference is a microscopic view of the macrocosmic simultaneity of things.

21 Foucault "deduced that the rules or procedures which determine what is considered normal or rational...silence what they exclude.... This discursive mastery works not just by exclusion, but also by 'rarefaction' [each discursive practice tends to narrow the scope of its concerns and its procedures]" (Selden, Contemporary Literary Theory, 99). Foucault's work defines the unwritten rules that govern thinking and writing as a culture's "archive," or its "positive Unconscious." (Ibid.) While he rejects the period generalizations with which I am working, his more strongly historicized methods of naming repressed influences on literary work remains consistent with my argument that literary forms are related to psychological response and perceptual habits (both of which may be culturally constructed and related to physical aspects of sexual identity which we do not yet understand).

22 Barbara Mc Govern concedes that "Adam Pos'd" offers a vivid contrast between our "first Father" and the nymph, but she does not explain how the poem satirizes Adam "as much as" it mocks the female figure ("The Poetry of Anne Finch," diss., Ohio State University, 1987, 125-6). Finch's poem about Adam and Leapor's "Man the Monarch" (discussed later in this chapter) are curious foreshadowings of present-day feminist preoccupation with archaic (pre-Oedipal) experience. Finch's and Leapor's reference to an originary myth expresses a desire to escape from and revise the male-authored story in which women are defined as secondary, subordinate beings. For discussion of contemporary arguments about the originary role of maternal power, see Burke, "Rethinking the Maternal" and Stanton, "Difference on Trial."
23 Finch is one early poet who has received various kinds of critical attention during the last twenty years. For assessments of her work, see Lucy Brashear, "The Forgotten Legacy of the 'Matchless Orinda'"; Jean Mallinson, "Anne Finch: A Woman Poet and the Tradition"; Dorothy Mermin, "Women Becoming Poets"; Ann Messenger, "Lady Winchilsea and Twice-Fallen Women", "Publishing without Perishing: Lady Winchilsea's Miscellany Poems of 1713", and "'Adam Pos'd': Metaphysical and Augustan Satire"; Myra Reynolds, "Preface," The Poems of Anne Countess of Winchelsea; Katherine Rogers, "Anne Finch, Countess of Winchelsea: An Augustan Woman Poet" and her third chapter in Feminism in Eighteenth-Century England. Messenger's work, especially, demonstrates that Finch censored her desires for recognition and silenced her less 'acceptable' poems by not publishing them.

24 Although Londoalsdale admits that Lewis "had a defiant sense of herself as a writer," he describes her views about marriage as "basically conservative"; he mistakenly accepts the publication history of "Advice to a Young Lady" in common-place books as a sign of her uncomplicated conservatisn (226).

25 Bakhtin's concept of heteroglossia is more strongly ideological, and historical than linguistic; he underscores the social conflicts mirrored by language, and privileges the novel as the site where this is most apparent. See The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays.

26 Meese suggests that polyvocality is not only characteristic of women's writing, but is a necessary feature of women's political discourse: "The drama of and desire for polyvocal...feminism(s)...finds reinforcement through the production, analysis, and disturbance that comes to us through multiple, simultaneous figures....[They] challenge the identity positions of the differences inhabiting and composing our subject positions and our relationships.... As such, then, femininst criticism asks us to...(trans)form, to (re)write, to escape the (meta)logic" (Ex)ensions, 180-1).

27 In "Embracing the Absolute" Catherine Gallagher comments on Margaret Cavendish's "anticipation" of Leibnitz's ideas about the "infinite recessiveness" characterizing each particle of nature. Cavendish's poem, "Small Atomes of themselves a World may make" (1653) endorses what Gallagher refers to as a "radical perspectivalism," which impresses me as a foreshadowing of contemporary notions of polymorphism and polylogical modes of expression. "Because [Cavendish] assumes that each unit of matter englobes a self-sufficient and radically distinct consciousness, she is able to imagine that there is no privileged perspective of universal knowledge" (32).

28 Dixon's metaphor of birdsong is echoed in Cixous' maternal "music of things" and her association of feminine (or maternal) experience with the material world of nature. For analysis of this link in Cixous' work, see Stanton, "Difference on Trial," 165-6.
29 Leapor, like Finch, is being given serious critical attention. Landry emphasizes Leapor's ability to adapt neo-classical tropes (reading Pope was her strongest influence) to express both a sapphic valuation of female affection and a radical social critique (78-119). Landry identifies Betty Rizzo's investigation of Leapor as "ground-breaking" research, enabling recent evaluations of the poet (298; n. 1). See Doody, "Swift Among the Women"; Greene, "Mary Leapor: A Problem of Literary History"; and Rizzo, "Molly Leapor: An Anxiety for Influence." Landry's view of appropriate ways to read early poets differ from mine; she predicts that materialist feminism will prove a "more durable project than the...critical focus of l'écriture féminine" (284; n. 5).

30 Kristeva argues that expression of the semiotic not only disrupts all of the allegedly normal features of language--its semantic, syntactical, contextual orderliness--but also allows a return of repressed knowledge. She views any art which accommodates the semiotic as an act of "appropriating the archaic, instinctual and maternal territory" (quoted in Stanton, 164).

31 See Bogel's Literature and Insubstantiality (passim) and Kernan’s The Cankered Muse, where he claims that satire is "always crowded, disorderly, grotesque" (35).

32 Generally, satire's indeterminate features are discussed in the context of its regularities. There is a strong critical tradition (e.g., Battestin, Ehrenpreis, Elkin, Miner, Morton, Paulson, Tuveson, Weinbrot) that emphasizes the formal orderliness of eighteenth-century satire, its shared themes, its contemporary intertextuality and ties to classical literature, its relation to historical events (to the linear narrative of events), as well as the contributions of various rhetorical strategies to a satiric work's coherence. These approaches ignore links between satire's accommodation of non-systematic modes of knowing and the potential 'femininity' of its procedures.

33 Todd says, "the semiotic space [is] beyond the subject...as traditionally understood...[it] could also function as the locus of disruption, displacing the symbolic order where patriarchal language existed and where the male logos was king" (Feminist Literary History, 54).

34 Earl Miner explores differences between panegyric-constructive and satiric-deconstructive attitudes in his essay, "In Satire's Falling City"; in the same volume, Michael Seidel's "Satire and Metaphoric Collapse," argues that satire's impulse is decréative, originating as a negative response to "monstrosity" (that which resists form). Also see Jensen, The Satirist's Art. Both approaches assume the oppositional nature of binary constructs.

35 Seidel's theoretical conception of satire assigns it the role of a hostile Other: he defines satire as "unvital...a subversion of life's processes," a meta-literary "parody" of metaphor's inability to
convey meaning (116).

Stanton agrees with Derrida that "the symbolic order needs transgressions to sustain it; transgressions need the order to define their specificity; and thus, order and dis-order are inextricably bound one with the other ("Difference on Trial," 169; my emphasis). This idea accepts that systematic and nonsystematic modes of knowing are complementary, but implies that each is mutually limiting. I am arguing that satire's semiotic procedures explode the notion of limits.

At the end of Leapor's second stanza she condemns "Wit" as a "feeble" help to oppressed womanhood; however, her adjective, "sparkling" indicates that she limits the word's meaning to a verbal cleverness designed to enhance the speaker's reputation in frivolous social situations. Leapor's serious use of wit in her poem indicates that she values satire's potential, philosophical functions.
Chapter IV

EMBODIMENTS OF DESIRE: SEMIOTIC PATTERNS IN CHARLOTTE LENNOX'S

The Female Quixote

Introduction

The degraded literary reputation of Romance by 1752, when Charlotte Lennox publishes The Female Quixote as an Anti-Romance, seems almost irrelevant to her novel's success, given the more flourishing interest in quixoticism that pervades the eighteenth-century literary market.\(^1\) Publication in 1604 of the first part of The Adventures of Don Quixote (1604-14) brought the previously unlucky Miguel de Cervantes immediate popularity, and his eponymous hero became more famous during the next two centuries, acquiring status in Europe as what we might call a literary cult.\(^2\) Forty of the years between 1700 and 1800 (including every decade) saw the publication of one or more new translations, or repeat editions of Cervantes' work. Moreover, interest in quixotic heroism bred several imitations of the model in England. Fielding helped establish the trend with his translations of Cervantes' story and with his play, Don Quixote in England (1728; performed 1733), which relocates the two chief characters to an English inn. Smollett's The History of Sir Launcelot Greaves (1760-61) replicates Cervantes' episodes in eighteenth-century settings and offers Greaves and Timothy 175
Cervantes' characters. Many other eighteenth-century fictional heroes and their companions are permutations of the
Don Quixote/Pancho dyad: Hudibras and Ralpgo, Joseph Andrews and Parson Adams, Uncle Toby and Corporal Trim, Humphry Clinker and Matthew Bramble, (and Lismahago), Tom Jones and Partridge, Roderick Random and Strap. 3

Lennox was following well-established tradition by giving Don Quixote's story a new expression. Still, quixotism may be less important than Romance as an agency of her novel's satire. 4 Like quixotism, by the mid-1700's Romance signals its readership that pleasures of the text will unite ridicule and sympathy, but in Lennox's novel Romance also conveys satiric judgments of society that are remarkably well concealed, perhaps because they are protofeminist. The Female Quixote's reputation as a didactic work (allegedly mirroring Lennox's affinities with the world view of her friend, Samuel Johnson) has obscured the novel's use of Romance as both a scapegoat and a means of exposing misogyny embedded in the social structures against which Lennox's heroine, Arabella, struggles, all unaware. While it is obvious that Arabella's personal attributes are linked with the excesses of quixotism and that her 'adventures' emulate Romance plots, her 'History'--the form of narrative about which she is always intensely curious--remains unexamined. 5 Foucault's idea that "continuous history is the indispensable correlative...of the subject" (12), illuminates Arabella's chief problem: her inability to construct an adequate understanding of
her personal history, of its "continuous" relation to the fictional Romances which she believes are History.

In what follows I hope to demonstrate that Arabella's quixotic behavior is testimony to the effectiveness of Romance as a substitute for the personal narrative that Arabella cannot speak. Her inarticulateness reflects her lack of knowledge. When she announces to Sir George, "you will excuse me, if for certain Reasons, I can neither give you my History myself, nor be present at the Relation of it," Arabella implies, unwittingly, that she does not know her story, thus cannot articulate it. In spite of her reputation (within the novel and among Lennox's readers) for lacking self-control, her chief need is understanding of her complete 'History'. However, its repressed events are unspeakable in a society in which misogynist abuses are commonplace, where women are denied autonomy and a fully human sense of self. Furthermore, by being déclassé in 1752 when Lennox writes her novel, Romance embodies Arabella's (and Lennox's) reluctance to speak openly about her life; its denigrated form signals the taboo aspects of her unspoken experience. Romance serves Arabella (and those who scorn it) by being, like satire, a story whose meanings for her are concealed, but whose narrative strategies and excesses point to Arabella's femininity.

**Romance as a Rejected but Persistent Narrative Form**

That Lennox would use the cliches of Romance to illustrate a young woman's disadvantages in eighteenth-century English society is a clever strategy. It appeals to the mid-century taste for fictional heroines "in postures of distress: mad, ill, seduced, raped, or dying" (Todd,
The Sign of Angellica, 141). Too, it allows Lennox to grant Arabella (and, vicariously, her readers) freedoms that are not permissible within a society whose conduct books and novels define a "specific configuration" of acceptable (and marketable) femininity (Armstrong, 59). Lennox’s chief risk in making Arabella a female quixote enamored of Romance is the risk of being condemned for a lack of seriousness or propriety by the men who decide whether or not her novel is publishable, since, thanks in part to Cervantes, by 1752 the various forms of romance narrative are associated with unregulated desire and judged socially harmful. Writing in the Spectator Eustace Budgell warns of the moral dangers of "Romances, Chocolate, Novels, and the like Inflammers" (Day, 134). Budgell’s list also points to a long established belief that fictionalized story roused passions, disabled reason, and undermined moral values, whereas ‘true’ histories were exemplary and corrective. The opinion is echoed by Hester Chapone in a 1750 letter to Elizabeth Carter; Chapone chastises her friend for liking Romances, "the worst ...species of writing; unnatural...passions, false sentiment, false precepts, false wit, false honour, and false modesty, with a strange heap of improbable, unnatural incidents mixed up with true history" (quoted in Small, 91). By the end of the century Romance represents, in Mary Hays’ words, "everything we do not understand, or are unwilling to imitate" (Memoirs of Emma Courtney, 1796; quoted in Langbauer, 29). Tompkins confirms that all Romance narratives were "heavily snubbed" during the eighteenth-century by reviewers who were apparently "always fretful about resuscitations of the heroic romance" and fond of judging it to be "unnatural" (207 and n. 1).
By emulating Cervantes, Lennox dissociates herself from the Romances her heroine loves, constructing a satiric authorial posture which implies that Romance is an inadequate narrative form—or worse. However, as The Female Quixote appears to mock the allegedly dangerous influence of French Romance, it offers its readers a protagonist and a sequence of adventures that can only be enjoyed as Romance.\(^9\) The latter's reputation as a discredited genre is the means by which its pleasures are conveyed more or less safely, allowing Lennox's satiric view of her heroine's conduct to give the novel a didactic disguise and to hide more thoroughly her implied satire of eighteenth-century English ideas about women. It seems to warn her readers of Romance's alleged menace and thus conforms to the preferred model of socially useful fiction. Paradoxically, this generic self-consciousness only confirms the novel's identity as Romance and as parody, since both are marked by "the reflection of the work upon itself" (Bernard Anton, qtd. in Lubich, 310). This tactic of relying on narrative forms which have the simultaneous features of more than one generic identity allows Lennox to adopt multiple attitudes about her heroine and to bury Arabella's "true history" in the drama of competing ways of telling a story—but not entirely. At any point in The Female Quixote where a reader takes Arabella's part s/he stands where Romance's value and the validity of female desire for autonomy may be seen.\(^10\) As Lennox's biographer claims, the work does not "deteriorate" into a humorous form of teaching; rather it gives us, "primarily," the character of Arabella (Small, 116). In other words, the excesses of Romance serve novelistic purpose, exposing Arabella's psychological complexity (which Small dismisses,
117) and generating comedy by contrasting her delusions of grandeur with her social predicament as a relatively powerless female.\textsuperscript{11} Moreover, as parody The Female Quixote implies a certain sophistication in its readership, which counteracts the public trivialization of Romance. Although chivalric romances were for centuries produced and consumed by aristocratic, literate members of society, and although seventeenth-century Romances had aristocratic origins in France, in English translation they became associated with a female readership, not necessarily high-class. As the genre was dissociated from authenticity, enjoyment of Romance narratives became linked with weak intellectual capacity.\textsuperscript{12} By the middle of the eighteenth-century both Romance (a persisting theme, although submerged by novelistic methods) and the quixote myth (remaining popular in its own form, but as an anachronism) were pressured by growing belief that a reader’s interest in narratives seeming to have no direct correspondence with real life indicated the reader’s immaturity.\textsuperscript{13}

Such bias helps account for some of the critical neglect suffered by The Female Quixote. Its status as a ‘girl’s novel’ and a female-authored work add to this problem--both associations relegating it to the shelf of less important novels that were not expected to disclose anything new about eighteenth-century literary achievement or intellectual life. Wilson claims, "Few modern readers will find it worth while to face the longeur\textsuperscript{2} of The Female Quixote, for the sake of...occasional amusement" (26). Tompkins refers to the "patchy realism" of women’s early fiction, and charges that such books "do not proceed upon the level; there are \textit{irruptions} of crude romance and sudden
touches of authentic observation" which she finds puzzling (138; my emphasis). Todd refers to Arabella as a " tiresome" heroine (147), a coquettish figure who is finally "cured" when she learns that "ancient morals and manners" violate "laws and values of...Christian England" (The Sign of Angellica, 152). Todd argues too that Arabella bears no resemblance to the more plausible heroines of Manley or (early) Haywood, who feared seduction, not abduction, who were threatened by men within their known circle ("the father, the uncle, or the brother") rather than by strangers (154). Todd's reading overlooks the content of The Female Quixote's early paragraphs and the possibility that Arabella or Romance might embody patterns of psychological response that have some relationship with literary tactics such as exaggeration and murky metaphors.

Ross ignores the novel's formal and psychological ambiguities, setting up Lennox as "much more seriously" critical of Romance than Cervantes (459); she considers Arabella's fears of rape 'unnecessary," and her resistance to marrying Glanville a "perverse...treatment of her father" ("Mirror, Mirror," 460-61). 14 Kraft suggests that Arabella's adventures are a "psychological progress from romance heroine to novelistic character," but her argument privileges the novel as a literary form, seeing Romance in The Female Quixote being defeated by "a sentimental reading of reality" and by the novel's closing theological "debate," which Kraft assumes undermines Lennox's authority and Arabella's belief in Romance (92). Ironically, these detractions may underscore the usefulness of The Female Quixote as an example of literature that generates critical awareness of the psychological dimension of formal differences and tension among Romance, novel, and satire. As
Davis admits, it is sometimes appropriate to notice what texts do not say, to play the role of "psychoanalyst who discovers the order of the patient's unconscious in the disorder of free association--in what is repressed...or denied" (Factual Fictions, 8).15

Of course, in Lennox's era Romance's disorderliness enjoyed no such approbation. Doody explains that novels of the 1740's tended to repudiate Romance, and declares that by 1750 the genre was "officially dead" ("Introduction," xvii-xviii).16 If so, it is even more likely that Lennox's implied female readers stand in ambiguous relation to literary form: to scorn Arabella they must embrace male-defined standards of admirable femininity, rejecting the Romance model of powerful femaleness and the "dead" Romance plot generated by Arabella's delusions of grandeur.17 To sympathize with Arabella, they probably must share some measure of her desire for importance--an attitude which would make them more ready to notice how her ignorance and hubris endangers her in a society which limits female freedom. The contradictions ascribed to Lennox's implied readership at once suggest their intellectual competence and yet repeat Arabella's psychological instability (or, she mirrors theirs).18 By complicating her implied reader's stance Lennox counters stereotypic denigrations of the female reader and Romance.

Lennox's novel is at once conventional and daring in its uses of Romance, but she is not a lonely warrior, struggling to mask her affirmation of Romance's psychological validity in a literary scene where social norms and the apparent values of Romance are everywhere opposed. In spite of the disapproval of Romance against which she
writes, important components of French Romance (and chivalric romance) survive in eighteenth-century narrative long after its apparent demise as a fashionable genre. Hunter suggests that the new realism characterizing the novel tended to be a conflation of both factual and fantastic events ("News," 510), still appealing to a reader's appetite for wonder, but using different tactics ("Novels," 484-5). McKeon too emphasizes the "persistence of romance, both within the novel and concurrently with its rise" (3). Thus, romance and novel were not seen as opposed literary forms. However, Day confirms that most eighteenth-century discussion of Romance and novels failed to reach consensus about their generic differences (6-24). For example, Congreve's early attempt to differentiate Romance and Novel in his preface to Incognita; or, Love and Duty Reconciled. A Novel (1692) is not conceptually different than James Beatie's 1783 essay, "On Fable and Romance." Both writers denigrate Romance for its seductive uses of fantasy: Congreve objects to its "miraculous Contingencies and impossible performances" (A5b), Beatie condemns its "tremendous aspects, and frantik demeanor" (563). And both do so in order to create legitimacy for other forms of narrative which benefit by apparent contrast with Romance strategies—a classic case of resistance that affirms the power of its rival.

The Female Quixote's critique of French Romance is an enabling strategy for Lennox. Made acceptable by its camouflage of quixotism (a male-invention) and by the emerging popularity of the novel (also credited as a male achievement), Arabella's heroism is constituted as a lack of modesty. Not only is her indiscretion a displaced form of Lennox's hubris, which dares to speak the social causes of women's per-
sonal distress. As well, Arabella’s desire for the adventures of a Romance heroine acknowledges the latent intensities of women’s craving for autonomy. Lennox’s fiction, like Cervantes’ work, achieves social meaning by suggesting that contradictory forms of narrative bear some relation to tensions existing ‘outside’ the text: between genders, between aristocratic and bourgeois ideologies, and between naive and skeptical approaches to truth.20

The Dangers of Femaleness in Romance

Lennox’s feminizing of Cervantes’ model is an additional factor in her risk of violating literary and social custom. She requires of young readers a familiarity with Arabella’s favorite fictions--works by Madeleine de Scudéry, La Calprenède, Roger Boyle, Earl of Orrery--which they may not have read. As well, The Female Quixote’s didacticism requires female readers to affirm the illegitimacy of female desire for sexual experience and social freedom which Romance allows. Just as important, Lennox’s novel carries an implicit indictment of Arabella’s father and the socially pervasive, arbitrary male power that frames Arabella’s obsessive oddities.21 This simultaneous denial of the reader’s capacity for endorsing social norms and noticing social critique which makes Lennox’s work a satire is a particular risk because she is a woman writer. Her success depends upon the novel’s appearance as a cautionary tale satirizing a young woman’s foolishness—as a satire of inordinate female behavior, but not of male responsibility for the circumstances that make Arabella “mad.”
Furthermore, by making Arabella a female quixote—a 'mad woman'—Lennox flaunts an already established tradition of English heroinism that is focused on propriety. In *The Courtship Novel, 1740-1820* Green emphasizes that Jane Barker, Penelope Aubin, and Mary Davys (Defoe's contemporaries), had already appealed to "proper" women readers by accenting the "commonalities" of female identity, such as female concern with social approval, and "their new empowerment [in] issues relating to love and marriage" (44). In contrast, women readers of Romance were seen as jeopardizing their innocence, or losing their habits of modesty and discretion. In short, fictions authored by women in which women characters represented powerful, self-controlled figures had been squeezed out of the literary marketplace. The novel—especially those authored by women—gave female characters importance, but did not grant them the power to control men enjoyed by Arabella's adored Clelia, Cassandra, and herself.

Lennox also has a paradoxical relation to women's literary precedent because Arabella resembles Don Quixote, not only a male figure, but one whose adventures represent activities and a history from which women are excluded. On the other hand, as I will show, *The Female Quixote* illustrates the changing nature of "claims to historicity" (McKeon, 45 ff.) being made by the novel, in contrast with the kind of authenticity offered by Romance. Lennox forces us to remember the personal dimension of historic event. The most poignant ironies of Lennox's work concern Arabella's troubled relation to her own actual history; it is her efforts to make her life a Romance that expose the truth of her experience. Cervantes' model masculinizes and legitimizes Arabella, but it is
Romance which expresses her needs and desires. Moreover, Arabella's inability to differentiate History and Romance is at once her peculiar predicament and an embodiment of women's historicized silence. The social values that continuously shape habits of mind also contribute to Arabella's inability to see her history clearly, or to retell it directly because they teach women to censor what they think and say. Like Don Quixote, she embodies the tensions created by social change and changes in literary form, but in her woman's body such changes are more dramatically exposed.

The acceptability of quixotism and its implicit denigration of Romance in Lennox's plot and in society generally help create a market niche for The Female Quixote; however, Lennox's use of these strategies only confirms that by mid-century the novel is not a literary form as hospitable to female desire as Romance. It is true that Romance imposes formal constraints on Arabella's performance. She too functions within a system of rules about speech and demeanor, conforming to the protocols of heroism she admires. In this respect she is obliged to regulate the passionate expression of her desires, even though they are being validated by the French Romances she emulates. Furthermore, she lives in two worlds. She thinks of herself as Cassandra, but moves about in eighteenth-century English provinces, and London, and Bath. As an Englishwoman she resembles other eighteenth-century heroines--Moll Flanders, Clarissa, Evelina, or Miss Milner--whose natures are defined and conduct is limited by male definitions of what women ought to be and want.24
The Female Quixote's Importance

In spite of such potential difficulties, The Female Quixote was Lennox's greatest success (Small, 13). Samuel Johnson probably wrote its favorable review in Gentleman's Magazine (March, 1752: xxii, 146) and Fielding also admired it (Covent Garden Journal, March 24, 1752), although without adequate understanding of its heroism. Richardson, another of Lennox's supporters, commented that Arabella is "amiable and innocent" in spite of her excesses (quoted in Small, 85). Moreover, Lennox had imitators, but writers who copied the female Quixote model usually made their protagonists uniformly ridiculous. That is, they copied the didactic features of Lennox's novel without achieving its complexity of heroic characterization or its satiric texture. The Female Quixote occupies a unique place in eighteenth-century fiction by being a narrative about female experience that is formally experimental--a hybrid of discredited and newly fashionable literary forms, as well as of personal history and social commentary. In what follows I will discuss how Lennox's exploitations of Romance serve a protofeminist purpose and will amplify Paulson's judgment that Lennox subjects Arabella to "intense psychological scrutiny" (277). As well, I will demonstrate how Lennox's work contributes to our understanding of satire's semiotic functions and its anomalous (or Arabellesque) relation to other literary forms.

There are three general ways in which The Female Quixote illustrates semiotic modes of perception (seeing things as undifferentiated) and semiotic modes of response (being controlled by unnamed desires, expressing such desires in disorderly ways). In each
case satire is the agency of disruption or indeterminacy; that is, both Arabella and satire itself (the means by which her characterization is offered to us) are embodiments of differing kinds of experience: historicized events, which take their meaning from à priori and socially constructed ideas and which appear reasonable; and psychological experience, including the chaotic, or unknowable aspects of behavior.

Satire’s ‘Arabellesque’ features are a fusion of apparently clear linguistic references and murky fusions of words and emotional content. There are three occasions of semiotic expression in Lennox’s novel occur as we notice Arabella’s perceptual or epistemological difficulties: she confuses narrative genres, conflates human identities, and displays undifferentiated passions.

Arabella reads French Romance as History (rather than noticing how prescriptive, male-female relations classified as "romance" determine and distort her personal history). She does not know herself because she sees sameness, rather than otherness in those around her. This ignorance is not self-caused; nor is it a problem which can be solved by her acquisition of more information about the social world. It is an emotional disorder, requiring full disclosure of her personal history and needing the comforts of truthful instruction about human emotional response. Arabella’s unrecognized desire for a mother’s love and fear of sharing her mother’s tragic fate continually intrude on her blossoming sexual desire for Glanville, mingling passions that ordinarily are more separate (at least in our conscious account of courtship and marriage). As with all semiotic expression, these three kinds of evidence are intermingled within The Female Quixote; my categorical approach is a
convenience, serving our symbolic habits of mind, rather than indicating the novel’s structure.

Confused Genres: Arabella’s View of Romance as History

A Defense of Her Mistake

Arabella’s most obvious mistake is to read Romance as History. Her confusions are easily seen from a satiric perspective because they are expressed as disruptions of order, violations of the codes of conduct by which her society governs itself. She sees the gardener’s helper as a disguised suitor, views a passerby as an abductor, and so on; in each case, her responses have little direct link with the person’s identity or actual happenings. In general, Arabella’s view of the world is undifferentiated from her expectations of it. Her inability to notice differences between lived experience and books directs our attention to the actual similarities of Romance and History, and offers us opportunity to notice the semiotic, or intermingled features of all narrative genres. Moreover, The Female Quixote’s fusions of Romance and didactic fiction also point to the ephemeral features and permeable boundaries of literary forms.

A central paradox of The Female Quixote is that Arabella’s confusions about narrative genre are generally appropriate. Romance and History are more similar than different, the novel suggests. By copying the title and structural form of Cervantes’ tale and by embedding in Arabella’s adventures a cautionary tale for young readers, Lennox presents her novel as an Anti-Romance. It is as well an explosion of the myth that there are accurate and false ways of telling stories. Lennox
subjects History to her satiric barbs too. History's reputation suffers by association in Lennox's plot—with Arabella, of course, to the degree that we find her trust in all recorded narrative to be absurd, and with Sir George, whose false life history illustrates the possibility that History is an invention, a product of perverse desire; not simply a record of events, but an account rather easily distorted, whose form may mask a narrative constructed entirely of lies. 29

As well, the novel regularly exposes flaws in characters who represent allegedly clear thinking, those who trust History to be a record of conflict between agencies of discord and those supporting lawfulness and social order. Characters serving as foils to Arabella's excesses are those who appear in correct relation to 'real life' and its narrative counterpart, History. They believe both to be linear and self-evident, but their conduct is not similarly plain. Glanville's persistent experience of being "confounded," embarrassed, and often made "mad with vexation" by Arabella shows that he has a capacity for irrational response akin to hers. His knowledge of what is appropriate conduct and what is "true" about society does not protect Glanville from the intensity of his own emotions. Nor is his sister's jealousy of Arabella's beauty mitigated by her more accurate awareness of social protocols. Sir George's ability to invent a fictional autobiography, knowing its difference from both History and Romance, is not a virtue, but an exposure of his falseness; and his superior knowledge does not prevent his being driven by compulsive desire to defeat Glanville and win Arabella for himself. Sir Charles' disdain for his niece's trust in "improbable Tales" (62) prevents his notice of how History, as Arabella
represents it, is not an equivalent of "Jack the Giant Killer." Rather, her discourse resembles the narratives of historians she quotes—by being an arbitrarily organized set of references to places, persons, and events in which 'evidence' is a comprised of assertions based on already known agreement about what happened. Sir Charles' unquestioning trust in histories he has not studied is not much different from Arabella's trust in the veracity of fictions that are historically framed.

In other words, Glanville is not alone in his wretched state—continually puzzled, frustrated, enraged, embarrassed, and impotent in the face of his own intensely emotional reaction to Arabella's conduct. Lennox shows all of the characters connected with Arabella as involved in her fantasies, whether or not they do so willingly or with any understanding. They are shown as impotent to explain her conduct, unable to place her in a History that is coherent and more plausible to them because more familiar. In this respect, History as a concept fails them because Arabella not only embodies its potential misreadings, but she seems to exist on its margins, not part of the recognizable human scene which History describes.

Thus, Lennox's satire of Arabella's well-meaning 'opponents' further undermines History's reputation as inviolable fact. All resemble Arabella by being apt to confuse what is real with their desires. We might even say that to some extent they share Arabella's derangement, appearing different only because they privilege a respectable way of seeing and telling experience. As Miriam Small observes, the humor of The Female Quixote is constructed by showing us Arabella's oddities "in their effect upon stolid and unimaginative persons whom they leave in
hopeless confusion" (quoted in Auty, 70). This occurs so frequently that we may consider it a description of the novel's general strategy—to expose the intersections or overlappings of reasonableness and fantasy.

Both Romance and History express desire for a consistent, controllable world.\textsuperscript{31} Thus, Arabella is a plausible heroine because, although her conduct is socially unacceptable, her implicit expectations of a predictable world match those of her peers.\textsuperscript{32} She is an ironic Romance heroine because her lived experiences are not orderly and predictable—at least, what happens to her is usually unexpected, while still resembling events that are typical in Romance plots. However, since Arabella lives in the 'real world' of eighteenth-century England, the fact that her behavior creates 'adventures' points to the potential absurdity of ordinary life. People do misread the actions of others in a manner conforming to their unexamined assumptions. Therefore, Arabella's belief that a gardener, Edward, is a "Person of Quality," disguised in order to gain a chance to declare his passion for her is a mistake not different in kind from Mr. Hervey's "inconceivable surprise" that the Marquis should "bury" his beautiful daughter in an enforced "Obscurity" (9). Her belief that every strange man she sees looking at her may be a "Ravisher" is a reaction not based upon judgment of each circumstance; nevertheless, what she fears often occurs in the real world.

Ironically, Arabella's desire to be a Romance heroine is an oblique expression of her need for self-definition within a regularized system; she sees Romance as a means of acquiring a personal History worth having, an identity that is both admirable and socially useful.
That she is wrong is beside the point here. Her way of seeing possibility for creative self-expression within an orderly system of meaning is not really different from the perceptual habits of other eighteenth-century figures. Parson Adams, a man of integrity, sees life through the philosophies acquired by his bookish preoccupations. Harley, the man of feeling, sees life through the grid of sentiment and as if it were framed by art (Probyn, 162). Such apparently exaggerated, emotional characterizations are ironic reversals of their more serious counterparts—sober eighteenth-century thinkers who insist on the primacy of decorum and order.

*Arabella's Substitution of the Language of Romance for Genuine Communication*

Arabella's most obvious disorderliness is her insistence on using the language of Romance to express herself. She copies the diction of her favorite heroines, as if their words were required rituals. Romance and History share a ritualistic emphasis. They are patterned ways of thinking that assign an almost magical value to doing things or seeing the world the 'right' way. Unfortunately, Arabella's devotion to being right makes her as dogmatic as the historians she quotes, or anyone else who presumes to know and speak unquestionable Truth. While such demeanor appears acceptable in the "Reverend Doctor___" who attempts to correct Arabella's errors before she marries Glanville, Arabella's dogmatism is seen by all as a personal quirk that is potentially dangerous to society. Her frequent hazarding the physical safety of others and herself has a counterpart in the way she uses words.
Other characters in *The Female Quixote* experience a persistent dissociation from their usual sense of the world as an orderly place and from their trust in language as reliable because Arabella’s vocabulary seems incompatible with ordinary speech. Generally, her linguistic efforts to assert her dignity as a Romance heroine make her conversation and her demeanor humorless, wordy, intense, and autocratic, whether she is talking to herself, or, as Auty puts it, expressing a "grim determination" to assign her listeners feelings that are identical to hers (73). More important, Arabella’s language is not clearly self-expressive. Her soliloquy in Book IV, prompted by a letter from Sir George, is a good example of her habitual linguistic posturing that substitutes for self-aware speech. Although the letter remains unopened, she presumes to know its contents. In addition, her response is not rational, but entirely formulaic, especially in its self-preoccupation.

Presumptuous Paper! said she, speaking with great Emotion to the Letter: Bold Repository of thy Master's daring Thoughts! Shall I not be blamed by all, who hereafter will hear, or read, my History, if, contrary to the Apprehensions I have, that thou containest a Confession that will displease me, I open thy Seal, and become accessory to thy Writer's Guilt by deigning to make myself acquainted with it? (172-73)

That the letter itself proves as florid and abject as she could wish a lover’s epistle to be is another sign that in Romance fictions linguistic response to situation is rigidly predictable. Sir George uses every cliché in the book(s), and Arabella registers his language as authentic, because it is like her own and because the language of Romance constitutes her only available grammar. Moreover, Arabella’s thoughts about "the unhappy Bellmour" (as Sir George styles himself) are equally prescriptive. Considering his grievance—that he may die
because he cannot cease loving her, or obtain permission to tell her
so--she remarks,

my Will has no Part in the Miseries, that unfortunate Beauty
occasions; and that tho' I could even wish myself less fair,
in order to avoid giving so much Unhappines to others, yet
these Wishes would not avail; and since, by a fatal Necess-
sity, all these Things will happen...I must comfort
myself...by the Reflection that...I contribute nothing to the
Misfortune of those who love me (175).

Arabella's speech is emotive, but not self-expressive, not a
vehicle for exchange of thought; yet, her reliance on language that is
not her own does tell us something important about her. It indicates
her lack of ability to differentiate self and others, or ritualized
situations and language from actual event and appropriate response. As
such, her language is strongly evocative of semiotic experience. She
does not assume the differences of personality and experience that make
conversation possible; rather, she speaks as if to herself, unaware of
her listeners' 'otherness' and as if she and they were characters acting
out the prescribed feelings and poses of Romance, which she sees as a
model of life. This remains true even in the novel's closing chapters.
When Glanville attempts to know why Arabella and Lucy have been weeping
during their visit to the park at Richmond and why Arabella runs away
from him, their verbal exchange is typical of many where her language
has no direct or obvious link with what is happening:

Dearest Cousin, said Glanville, What is the Meaning of all
this? --How haave I disoblig'd you? --What is my Offence?...

Ask the inconstant Ariamenes, reply'd Arabella, the Offence
of the ungrateful Glanville. The Betrayer of Cynecia can
best answer that Question to the Deceiver of Arabella. And
the Guilt of the one can only be compar'd to the Crimes of
the other (351).
Even if Glanville were familiar with Arabella's favorite Romances, he would remain excluded from her meaning in this case because the character Arianses and Cynecia's History are the invention of Sir George--figures in the false life story he tells Arabella to win her admiration. Because Glanville does not share knowledge of Sir George's 'history', Arabella's language remains as obscure to him as his innocence appears to her. From our perspective, her allusions are not cryptic, but clear coded references to her belief in Glanville's infidelity. But Arabella does not choose this indirect way of speaking; she has no other. Like an infant for whom communication is limited to virtually inarticulate gestures that only a mother can interpret, Arabella lacks a vocabulary adequate to diverse social circumstance, yet she expects to be understood. In other words, Arabella's speech is not coherent, except to herself and to someone who knows and temporarily embraces a Romance vocabulary, such as the implied reader, Sir George, or the Countess who briefly befriends her.33

Most obviously, the language of Romance is marked by excess, and History represents itself as an attempt to make language conform to verifiable fact. This difference might seem to support Lennox's mockery of her heroine--except that The Female Quixote is a tale in which the untold (or unregarded), outrageous facts of Arabella's personal history are the point of origin for her inadequate view of the world. (More about this below.) Obliquely, Lennox suggests that as History in its guise of reliable narrative is selective, foregrounding some information and suppressing other facts, it participates in excess, helps to create the inordinate responses which Arabella embodies.
Self-Revealing Features of Arabella's Language

All experience in Romance is intensified, and to some degree dis-associated from fact because Romance privileges desire, rather than description of events. That is, Romance is an indirect relation of what occurs within its plot. In addition, both desire and event are mediated by the formulaic structures of Romance plot and diction. Not surprisingly, Arabella's way of speaking is both wordy and roundabout, only tangentially related to what is happening, yet always revealing the strong desire for prominence and control that motivate her. When Mr. Tinsel mistakenly enters Arabella's chamber, arousing her fears of ravishment, her unadmitted desire to make the predicament self-serving is evident in the language of proud victimization ("what makes that impious Man in my Presence! What am I to think of this? Am I really deliver'd or no?" (301) and by the language of command ("I absolutely forbid you, by all the Power I have over you, not to engage in Combat with my Ravisher here" (302).

Another example of the self-revealing features of Arabella's speech occurs when she praises Glanville for dealing with Tinsel generously. Although she has no direct knowledge of what Glanville has said to the man, and no awareness that Glanville was more abject than generous, she commends her suitor, but in ways he cannot fathom. She refers to Artamenes' clemency, she reads Glanville's shamed, downcast eyes as a sign of modesty, and she speaks about abstract virtue, rather than about the present circumstances:
Glory is as necessarily the Result of a virtuous Action, as Light is an Effect of the Sun which causeth it, and has no Dependence on any other Cause" (303-4).

Similarly, when Tinsel's cohort, Mr. Selvin, protests that there is no necessary link between his residence in England and "your Ladyship's Glory," Arabella again expresses herself indirectly, shifting the subject from her demands for his exile to the precedents of History, asking him how Thrasimedes' stay in Rome affected the Glory of the Empress Udosia (313). Her conflation of historical place (Rome) with fictional characters (Udosia and Thrasimond, from La Calprenède's novel, Pharamond) and her mistaken reference to Thrasimond as "Thasimedes" confounds Selvin. Her speech also dissociates Arabella, in Selwin's mind, from the linear thought typical of History as Selwin defines it. Thus, Romance provides her with rhetorical structures by which she can continue to think of herself as powerful and correct; but it offers her little direct opportunity to make a meaningful story of her personal experience.

Arabella's gestures and costumes are part of the language by which she communicates. When she appears at a ball dressed like the gallant Princess Julia (from La Calprenède's Cleopatra) in a dress whose design enhances her loveliness, Arabella's physical appearance is a conflation of illusion and actual identity. In her own eyes she appears as the Princess Julia she wishes to be and in ours she is a lovely, 'real' Arabella whose realness as a fictional character is defined by her not knowing herself. This may be an example of what Braudy calls "the distortions of reality" (111) created by Romance's prescriptive rhetoric. It also may be useful to credit Romance as a communicative agent, rather
than accept Braudy's judgment as the most likely. The programmatic features of Arabella's speech and gestures owe their rigidities and fixed forms to habits of mind. That is, Arabella's modes of communication do not simply expose her 'problem'; as well, the rhetorical structures of Romance themselves articulate valid, but different ways of seeing the world. In this light, Arabella's characterization enables our notice of Romance's 'excesses' as epistemologically grounded. We need not see Romance as either "an aesthetically organized form [which] falsifies through its excessive rigidity" (Braudy, 113), nor as a form of narrative expressing "distorted ideas of human nature" (115). The fusion of Arabella's absurdities with her actual loveliness and intelligent charms hints that narrative and rhetorical forms are not necessarily autonomous, nor only signifiers of historical circumstance, nor, as Braudy suggests, "a trap and a refuge from empirically based thought" (116). They serve too as important indicators of our perceptual habits.35

As well, Arabella's Princess Julia costume is a reminder that History's fundamental tools in constructing the separateness of past and present are images of sameness and difference. Here costume underscores Arabella's inability to define herself apart from precedent. Although earlier in the eighteenth-century people often costumed themselves as an admired historic or literary figure when attending a masquerade, Arabella does not dress as Princess Julia with any awareness of her multiple motives. Still, she does so to look beautiful, to signify her admiration for the Princess, to associate herself with the latter's
superiority, and to communicate her belief that she, Arabella, is special, heroic, destined for great adventures.

**Arabella’s Experience of Romance/History—a Model of Semiotic Simultaneity**

All of Arabella’s conduct suggests that what is past may be replicated in the present, or may refuse to stay confined to the past because of some compelling need or desire. Plot crises in *The Female Quixote* are created by her compulsive adherence to Romance heroism. This compulsivity points to psychological needs that are not ever satisfied, because not consciously understood or accepted. Thus, Glanville’s efforts to help Arabella see the value of reasoned response to particular situations would be useful only if his help and her reception of it occurred within a framework of shared knowledge about the causes of her compulsions. Of course, then his help would not be necessary. As it is, their conversations are seldom dialogical; they speak ‘different languages’ because their perceptions of the world are differently grounded. Glanville sees experience as if it is like History: for him people’s behavior either conforms to or violates an inherent orderliness of social structures and moral values. Arabella’s habits of mind are similar, but she privileges Romance as a model of what is normal—crisis, danger, thwarted desire, longing. Her outbursts of unreasonable demands and excessive emotion occur outside of the realm of what Glanville believes ordinate and commonplace. But just as she lacks ability to comprehend that History and Romance represent human experi-
ence using different protocols, he rejects the possibility that her view might be explainable and grounded in actual past experience.

Glanville is an exemplary and sympathetic figure because he applies his reason to the difficult task of understanding his beloved. He believes that knowing her better will help explain her conduct and that her increased understanding of the world (as he sees it) will persuade her to change. That is, Glanville's efforts to understand Arabella's rigidities are marked—and thwarted—by his fixed intention to change her way of thinking. His desire is a hegemonic as hers. All other characters with whom she has a continuing relationship (Lucy, Sir Charles, Sir George, Miss Glanville) reject her conduct intolerantly. Unlike Glanville, they do not try to understand, but their judgments of Arabella derive from received ideas too. They refuse the possibility that there is any plausible explanation for her actions, rejecting all but their existing view of the world with the same consistency Arabella displays in reading life through the lens of Romance precedent.

As Arabella's compulsions lead her to misread other people, to mistake their habits of mind as like her own, she effectively negates the features of their historic circumstances which they believe shape their lives. She removes Glanville and her other acquaintance from the historic present, which is constituted for them by familiar linguistic and social codes, all of which wear the appearance of reasonableness. When dealing with Arabella they step temporarily into her world of Romance, or her past, which is constituted by unacknowledged events expressed as powerful, sexual and social desires masked by narratives of heroic posturing, formulaic language, ritualistic deferrals of marriage,
and continual threats of forced sexual experience or death. In such a world Arabella and the companions who are forced into it by her use of language encounter narrative as a timeless phenomenon. For Arabella the historical dimension of Romance is not limited to fading, tenuous associations with known places and heroes who lived long ago. All that she reads in the pages of French Romance seems History, Truth, a Model for present conduct, repeated in the present. For her life wears an aspect of simultaneity, past events being not merely pertinent to her life, but recurring in the present.

Her conviction is supported by an important generic feature of Romance; its most characteristic narrative device is the récit—a form of History, an "interpolated narrative in which characters are persuaded to give their life histories" (Probyn, 20-21). In a récit present and past are conflated and the constructed features of Romance are submerged in apparent authenticity. While Arabella’s favorite occupation is listening to another person’s History, she has little capacity to judge difference between their life and hers, or to notice correspondences and disparities between what they say and their ‘real life’. In other words, genre differences do not exist for her. Arabella’s hearing and speaking occur only as repetitions of Romance, therefore, all story is the same kind of story. Furthermore, complexities or inconsistencies of motive do not exist for Arabella. She lacks ability to notice paradox in human character. In her eyes, people are either good or bad, their conduct appropriate or not. She is morally good, and she assumes that other people are like her. When Mrs. Morris tells Arabella the life story of Miss Groves, Arabella insists that the Writing-master with whom
Miss Groves elopes must be an honorable "Person of Quality"; she does not suspect him to be an ordinary man who uses the girl sexually and then abandons her.

However, Arabella’s eagerness to learn more History by listening to récits makes her vulnerable to Sir George’s plot to discredit Glanville and enhance his own heroism in her eyes. Sir George’s fabricated personal History copies "exactly...the Stile of Romance" (209), which reinforces Arabella’s readiness to believe it. His connivance with a young actress disguised as Cynecia, Princess of Gaul, to trick Arabella with yet another fiction that pretends to be History (341-49) is likewise successful. These false stories are occurrences in the novel where the threads of Romance and History are most entangled, and as Arabella responds to their conflated lies and truthfulness, her lived experience becomes more like a Romance by growing more crisis-driven. Finally, her trust in the exemplary conduct of her favorite heroines impells her jump into the Thames River in order to escape the possibility of being ravished by four passing horsemen when she is searching for Cynecia. This is the novel’s most dramatic example of story’s potential for confusing alleged reality, fantasy, and actual event. The event originates in a man’s conscious distortion of History and emulation of Romance, but Arabella’s jump and the confusions following it illustrate the capacity of all narrative--Sir George’s fiction, her interpretation of it, and Glanville’s--to confuse the perceptual boundaries which seem to distinguish fact from fiction. As well, the Richmond/Thames episode points the story’s origins: unrecognized desire,
which contributes disruption, or unorganized (semiotic) response to an apparent sequence of events.

The satire of such scenes is strengthened by our enactment of the same kind of simultaneous perceptions that enable the conflation of Romance and History by Arabella and her companions. We perform a comparable perceptual stunt in which we see the story and its underlying critique as one event. And there is more than simultaneously different understanding of event here; the Richmond melodrama also illustrates the sexual dimension of Arabella’s compulsions. Arabella’s fears of the horsemen are displaced signs of repressed knowledge that she loves Glanville and wants to marry him. Ironically, Arabella’s efforts and Sir George’s to make experience conform to Romance plots gratify their similar desires for power and sexual pleasure. A more conventional, didactic narrative of a young woman’s life would keep these more repressed. Ironically too, her Romance-inspired misreading of the situation in Twickenham Park (where the horsemen are only passing by), her plunge into the river, and subsequent illness return Arabella to a place of complete helplessness where her circumstances replicate infancy: a warm bed, being cared for by women, benefitting from the fatherly concern of Sir Charles, the devotion of Glanville, and the sacrificial suffering of Sir George (who has been stabbed by Glanville during a scene in which identities, motives, and passions are chaotically mingled, 357-58). Her attempt to escape ravishment by copying the famous Clelia’s heroic swim occurs within the framework of Romance, but produces desired change in her actual circumstance. Her illness and Glanville’s efforts produce Sir George’s confession; she is forgiven her
excesses by her family and friends, and the shock of her dangerous illness and being accused of wrongdoing prompt her admission of willingness to marry Glanville.

The lack of difference between Romance and History in *The Female Quixote* is a formal expression of Arabella’s undifferentiated subjectivity. Confusions of plot and confluences of the satiric point of view and a sympathetic one reinforce the chaotic or semiotic quality of her emotional experience. Romance is the primary agency of this disclosure because in fact and motive are not offered as distinct or necessarily opposed. In Lennox’s Romance, we are privy to characters motives because Romance is being characterized as an indicator of people’s habits of mind. Arabella’s heroinism remains intact because of and in spite of her dissociations from the logical/symbolic realm of History. (History denies the heroinism valorized by Romance, but it does not obliterate the latter’s appeal.) She is a coherent character, always trying to be like one version of womanhood and remaining heroic to the degree that her desires for attention or power and her exaggerated fears create the very circumstances that make her the focus of all eyes. Nonetheless, as a heroine whose conduct is unexplained and unrestrained, she is an example of the power of semiotic energy—an irrational figure around whom the novel’s emotional eddys swirl and whose subject position is always changing. By insisting that her life resemble Romance she also embodies the latent powers of actual womanhood—which are denied by eighteenth-century English culture, but find imaginative expression in Romance heroinism. The intensity of her
desires is a literary and psychological sign of the degree to which her culture disallows them.

Romance is the only form of History in which Arabella’s History as a woman can be written. It is not just that "the conventions of romance are what give women voice" (Langbauer, 44), but that Romance implies our capacity for semiotic modes of knowing and desiring that encompass the playfulness, contradiction, sexual energy and excesses. All of the latter are seen by Arabella’s mentors (Glanville and the Pious and Learned Doctor__) as contrary and inferior to History’s implied closures and its support for the unified nature of experience. Furthermore, by using the conventions of Romance as a guide for her conduct Arabella retains her human dignity, in spite of being out of touch with her reasons for embracing a personality constructed by someone else. As I will explore below, this lack of self-knowledge is not presented to us as Arabella’s fault. The Female Quixote’s ironies make very clear that Arabella’s embrace of Romance is "innocent." Arabella is arrogant, yet remains feminine (i.e., proper) and a sympathetic figure because she is unaware of her own complexity.

Conflated Identities: Arabella’s Inability to Construct a Self

Arabella’s social errors are manifold, yet accurate signifiers of her desire to be somebody. Her inability to know herself or to notice the uniqueness of others originates in deficiencies caused by her being motherless. Lennox makes it hard to miss the importance of this event in Arabella’s history and the power of her father’s reaction—retreat—to shape her life. She describes Arabella’s as
wholly secluded from the World; who had no other Diversion, but ranging...the Woods and Lawns in which she was inclosed; and who had no other conversation but that of a grave and melancholy Father, or [Lucy] 740

Lacking any actual woman mentor, she adopts fictional models of femaleness as examples of what to do and be. Lacking the emotional development that mothering would have supported, she cannot differentiate herself from the fictional females she admires. Her modes of perception remain infantilized--stuck in the semiotic realm where all is undifferentiated. Lennox grants her heroine a large measure of intelligence, but only the kind of mental processes that are impersonalized: she can cite examples to prove a point, construct a linear argument, notice discrepancies in other people's argumentation. As well, Lennox makes her feminine; Arabella wears the aspect of womanhood: loveliness, graciousness, kindness. But she does not possess an identity--a self--with which to recognize and express either her desires or self-control, nor does she have an adequate idea of what womanhood is. Romance heroinism fills this vacuum, offering her a surrogate subjectivity. Both the Marquis and Lennox seem to deny her complex emotional needs, but Lennox's subtle satiric project reveals them by emphasizing Arabella's impulsive pursuit of heroinism.

Considering her deprivation of the experiences all human beings need to construct self-awareness, Arabella's obdurate belief in the possibility of being a heroine is a heroic stance--or would be, if she chose it self-critically. Instead, her heroism serves only Lennox's readers as a sign of her inner turmoil.41 This emotional chaos proliferates. Like semiotic experience, Arabella's inchoate identity,
repressed early history, and current adventures are inseparable and marked by disorder, unregulated desires, and displaced meaning. Paradoxically, these patterns of characterization are reliable, pointing clearly to emotional disturbance. Lacking the 'education' or nurturing experiences that a mother and women teachers might have provided, and lacking awareness that her ways of seeing the world remain infantilized, Arabella develops into a copy of one kind of literary female subjectivity, rather than as her unique self.

She grants the heroines of French Romance authenticity, not only because their characterizations represent her ordinary, callow desires for fame and autonomy, but because her desire for female exemplars is overpowering. She does not consciously choose French heroinism as a substitute for other ways of being. She embraces the Romances that had been her mother's antidote to the loneliness imposed on her by a husband who had "quit all Society whatever" (5) without question, because her experiences have prevented her learning skepticism. Rather, she is a young girl whose cognitive and emotional development—all of her perceptual capacities—have been stunted by emotional poverty. Arabella idolizes fictional heroines because they are the only female friends she has ever known, because their power satisfies her desire for a strong, mature self, and because she is literally unable to 'see' the difference between fantasy and reality. Her loss of her mother at birth, her lack of any female caregivers, and her imprisonment within the walls of her father's hurt pride and his remote mansion all deprive her of the affection, knowledge, and confidence she needs to be emotionally stable, or to answer the question, "Who am I?"
Fictionally, she is a copy of the quixote, but Arabella's "madness" is unlike that of Don Quixote, whose psychological and social identity as a gentleman "verging on fifty" is already established when he grows "odd and foolish" enough to clean his ancestral armour, rename himself and his horse, and seek "adventures... chances and dangers" (Don Quixote, 31-33). Don Quixote's belief in the accomplishments of the giant Morgante and The Knight of the Burning Sword is a result of having an empty mind--"nothing else to do." Arabella too has had little to occupy her except reading; she also misreads fiction as fact. Nevertheless, while her books too are the externalized cause of her pursuit of glory, her troubled relationship to reality is gender-bound, a product of her particular experiences as a helpless girl. In addition, she is not reading Don Quixote's favorite chivalric romances, in which Amadis of Gaul and Reynald of Mantalban perform heroically. She reads stories in which women (Mandana, Cassandra, Statira, Clelia, Cleopatra, Sysigambis) wield power over life and death by the words they speak or withhold. Their Histories have power to captivate Arabella because they 'mother' her, gratifying her desire for models of strong, mature womanhood, while offering her a mythology that gives women control of death.

What most critical treatments of Arabella's character have not emphasized is the importance of death in her own interpretations of experience, or in her actual history. Even critics who value Lennox's work ignore the event of Arabella's mother's death and her subsequent isolation from everyone except her father. They explain Arabella as a girl who lacks only more knowledge of the social world, implying that Arabella's problem occurs at the intersection of society and self,
rather than within her History and emotional life. Such approaches to The Female Quixote also suggest that her appeal for us or for Lennox's readers is limited to the satisfactions of watching a young, naive girl get smart about the need for self-control and acceptance of one's relative unimportance. But Arabella's sympathetic appeal is grounded in the fusion of her unconscious helplessness and her superior beauty and brains. As such, she is an example of the realism embedded in fictional females authored by women. As documents of reader response from the period show, other eighteenth-century protofeminist heroines generally earn their popularity by seeming plausible, complex, fully human figures rather than stereotypes.  

The Female Quixote's submerged story of psychological distress is an important part of the novel's covert appeal because it addresses universally real experiences of loss, grief, altered emotional development, and the tendency to deny what is too painful to see. At the same time, the surface history of Arabella's "adventures" allows us the pleasures of feeling superior to her comical mistakes and of enjoying her triumphs as a protagonist in a Romance of her own making.

Undifferentiated Passions: Arabella's Disallowed Desires for A Mother, A Husband, and Autonomy

The Female Quixote illustrates the difficulty of distinguishing forms of passion, as well as forms of narrative. Arabella's affection for heroinism and Romance seem to be the chief obstacle to appropriate expression of her affection for Glanville. This apparent difference in emotional focus is complicated by the fact that these two kinds of love
are not identical. Arabella does not need only to redirect her affections, as if her desire for a heroic role is the kind of emotional experience which might be satisfied just as well by a lover's devotion. Romance itself indicates otherwise by showing heroines who are worshipped by a lover continuing to express desire for power and fame. Rather, the divided nature of Arabella's affectional experience is an external, paradoxical sign that her capacity for love remains undifferentiated. This is signaled most clearly as she fails to register differences among emotions and experiences them with similar intensity. Whatever the provocation, she blushes, cries, secludes herself in her chamber, and wrestles with her confused emotional state, but does not recognize any pattern in her responses. Nor does she recognize her developing sexual nature and its role in her emotions. For her, there is no qualitative difference (that she is capable of understanding) between her desires and her actions, between her projected affection for Romance heroines and her affection for a person. Lacking her own subjectivity, she does not see people as individuals, but as examples of certain types of behavior. "Do not the same Things happen now, that did formerly? And is any thing more common, than (sic) Ladies being carried, by their Ravishers, into Countries far distant...? May not the same Accidents happen to me, that have happened to so many illustrious Ladies before me?" (261)

Her argument in the statement above implies unadmitted readiness for sexual experience, and it suggests that fear and love are not clearly separate experiences for her. Here too, Romance and History have a combined influence; her favorite narratives present love as a
dangerous enterprise, and her repressed personal story, in which love is lacking, associates its lack with women's suffering and the dangers of childbirth. Thus, it is not simply Arabella's affection for Romance that obstructs her relationship with Glanville, but also emotional disorder. Arabella's inadequate experience of nurturing love in childhood produces complex compensations and forms of denial that have prevented her development of a self and her learning the self-love which would make possible appreciation of Glanville as a the person he is, rather than as a 'hero'.

Arabella's adventures are a History of her courtship and also a History of her quest for the satisfactions of maternal nurturing. This shows in her eagerness to be the woman she lacked as a mother—an independent, outspoken, witty woman whose life was filled with excitement. (Given the improbability of such a model mother for women born into the upper strata of English society in the 1700's, this aspect of the novel's submerged, ironic protofeminist content is a nervy social critique.) As we see in Arabella's disdain of the shallow preoccupations of young women she meets at Bath (279), she is not eager for female companionship unless it promises to enhance her primary enjoyment—discussing her favorite books. Nevertheless, she has a very different response to the prospect of meeting the Countess of __. Without having met the Countess, but having heard Glanville's "enumeration" of the woman's "fine Qualities," Arabella declares that "she had already conceived a friendship with her" (323). Her enthusiasm is expressed in a speech that copies the dignified and yet hyperbolic diction of a Romance heroine, but it also points to Arabella's desire for intimacy with an
older woman: "tell her...that I long with Impatience to embrace her, and to give her that Share in my Heart which her transcendent Merit deserves" (324). Lennox underscores the intensity of Arabella’s eagerness to meet the Countess by contrast—having shown her entrance into the public rooms at Bath as a dramatic performance that combines coquet-tish gesture with a retiring dignity: "Arabella, at her Entrance into the Room, had pulled the [veil] quite over her Face, following therein the Custom of the Ladies in Clelia, and the Grand Cyrus, who, in mixed Companies, always hid their Faces with great Care" (263) However, on the morning when she is due to meet the Countess, Arabella expected her with great Impatience, and the Moment she enter’d the Room flew towards her with a graceful Eagerness, and straining her in her Arms, embrac’d her with all the Fer-vour of a long absent Friend (324).

The display embarrasses others in the room, but that does not prevent Arabella from continuing her effusions: "I have long’d to behold you...such is my Admiration of your Virtues, that I would have gone to the farthest Part of the World to render you that which you with so much Generosity have condescended to bestow upon me" (324).

Immediately, their conversation focuses on "Misfortunes" and suffering; specifically, about whether Elisa, Princess of Parthia, or Cleopatra more truly exemplifies an afflicted heroine. With passion, Arabella argues that Elisa’s greatest suffering was being subject to "the tyrannical Authority of the King her Father," who mandates her marrying someone she detests, whereas Cleopatra’s similar predicament (being "forced into the Arms of Tyberius...who was odious to the whole World, as well as to her") is made worse by threats to her life (325-
26). The conversation thus addresses topics having great personal importance for Arabella, but ones which she cannot express other than obliquely, by recounting an exploit from French Romance. She resists being controlled by a tyrannical father's will (even after he is dead). She did not choose Glanville, and she fears marrying him, not realizing that her repressed knowledge of her mother's experience in marriage is that it places a woman in isolation and involves the danger of death in childbirth. By showing the Countess' efforts to help Arabella see that the present age is one in which "Customs, Manners, Habits, and Inclinations differ...widely" from the settings of Romance (326), Lennox may seem to be satirizing Arabella's naivete, but ironies proliferate here because Arabella's History demonstrates that "Customs...and Inclinations" of men remain the same in eighteenth-century England. Moreover, Arabella's fears do not focus on abstracted "Customs," but on a woman's particular, bodily experiences.

Their discussion of the superior power of pain over pleasure includes the Countess' remark that she expects "some terrible Misfortune" to befall her, because meeting Arabella is such a delightful experience. Her emulation of the tragic tone of Romance first implies the Countess' kindness (using diction Arabella prefers); when the remark proves prophetic, our recollection of her words and our knowledge of Arabella's reasons for fearing "Misfortune" make the remark ironic. Her next meeting with Arabella is prevented by her own mother's "Indisposition," which is serious enough to require her to leave Bath (330). Lennox's removal of the Countess has received no critical analysis, but in the framework of my argument it is a crucial event in the novel.45 The
Countess' abrupt disappearance replicates Arabella's loss of her mother, and virtually ensures that Arabella will not examine her own History or its ties to her habits of mind. Her absence is a multiplied loss, redolent of Arabella's first abandonment and additionally a loss of potential instruction. But this too gets ironic treatment. The Countess has played a unique role as a sensitive, kind female mentor who demonstrates a singular power to influence Arabella and subtly suggest that most Romances are "idle Tales" (326) because "Custom...changes...Things" (328). However, the récit she tells is a conventional "History of a Wman of Honour" (327). She urges Arabella to consider woman's greatest ambition to be domestic "Harmony" and a life governed by "Sense, Prudence and Virtue" (327). This is practical advice, but not pertinent for someone with Arabella's perceptual problems. The Countess shows no readiness to explore Arabella's History. This absence of acuity and her literal absence indicate that she cannot provide Arabella with the mothering she needs—the combination of emotional support and insights which might complete Arabella's emotional development.46 Her failure is a counterpart of the Pious and Learned Doctor...'s failure (discussed below); they each embody the same, incomplete mode of understanding: affection or sympathy, but without intuitive and analytical discernment. Arabella needs both.

Being loved by the Countess—who has resolved at first glance "to rescue her" from scorn (323), and who returns the affection Arabella offers (329)—would teach Arabella how to love herself and others as individuals, rather than see them as duplicates of fictional characters. She would have as a model for her conduct a woman who could cite exam-
Page 216 is missing
entirely controls her responses. By chapter's end her "adventures"--created by her belief in the possibility of an exciting life--terminate, and Arabella, as we have known her, ceases to exist.

Her heroism and her identifiable character are erased by the Pious and Learned Doctor, a nameless clergyman whose ministrations to Arabella take the form of a debate in which he blames Romance for her distress and blames her for finding Romance credible. There remain only two short pages before the novel concludes. Not yet having acquired an understanding of the causes of her actions, or the nature of her desires, Arabella is forced into the world of real History, the realm where language corresponds with "facts," as men define them. Significantly, we do not again hear her speak with her recognizable voice. In addition, it is not her encounter with the Pious and Learned Doctor which alters Arabella's inner state most dramatically. By accusing her of risking other lives, the clergyman in effect softens the ground for her emotional reception of another unwelcome idea. It is after hearing from Sir George that he contrived a Romance about the Princess of Gaul and Glanville that Arabella is "struck with inconceivable Confusion" (383). Her request to be left alone for two hours and the "disagreeable Reflections" which occupy her suggest that she realizes that Romance is vulnerable to counterfeiting, that her trust in its absolute veracity may be misplaced. This is only a first step toward constructing an adequate subjectivity because it remains focused on Romance, without including her History.

Because nothing in her conversation with "the good Divine" has led Arabella toward genuine understanding of the reasons for her obsessive
interest in Romance, her self-examination during these two hours is abortive. She experiences shame, but it is a product of her mental assessment of two kinds of information which do not require her scrutiny of the link between her History and her devotion to Romance. First, it is possible for her to accept that her behavior was "rash and vainglorious" (366), since she is aware that at Twickenham her appeal to her female companions to jump into the river with her stressed the chance to display their heroism, the "Sublimity" of their virtue, and the "Grandeur" of their courage "to the World" (362). As well, she is capable of deducing that vanity is a flaw prompting the world's "Contempt and Ridicule" (383).

Second, her knowledge of Christian principles prompts her to feel shame in response to the clergymen's argument that her actions endangered others—and this idea may impress her more forcibly because the the Pious and Learned Doctor____ has said, vehemently, that Romance narratives

\[
\text{harden [the heart] to Murder...teach Women to exact Vengeance...[and] to expect only Worship,} \]

that Romance heroines smile at the spectacles of "Bloodshed and Misery" caused by their desire for power (381).48

Her response owes as much to his throwing the weight of his legitimized power and credibility as a Pious and Learned Doctor____ into his verbal harangue as it does to her understanding.49 Arabella's History of needing to placate a tyrannical father makes her self-blame predictable here.

Therefore, it is not accurate to view Arabella's encounter with the clergymen as a "conversion," providing her with a fully altered way
of seeing the world and herself. Regarding self-knowledge, Chapter XI is fruitless. Arabella never learns why she behaved as she did. Moreover, she never renounces the value of Romance in her experience. Rather, she admits only amazement that her desire to appear brave could have blinded her to the possibility of committing "the Crime of unnecessary Bloodshed" (381). She blames herself for this, and vows to abandon any interest in vengeance, and indulgence of her "Punctilios," but without ever examining the personal sorrows generating her desires for attention. (381). She is estranged from Romance without knowing the reasons for her devotion to it. Although cared for solicitously by Glanville, Sir Charless, and the the Pious and Learned Doctor__, (all expressions of male affection which may compensate, partially, for her father's conduct), her need for maternal love and womanly wisdom is not met. Therefore, she does not mature. Instead, she gets married. She surrenders her sense of autonomy, but not her (still undeveloped) self.

This alleged resolution of a young woman's conflict between need/desire for marriage and desire for self-knowledge and autonomy is a commonplace in literature. What is remarkable about Lennox's conformity to precedent in this case is that it coexists with a subtext of powerful social critique. She holds her ground and does not make her heroine renounce Romance and thus speak falsely. This is not an occasion when the novel's anti-Romance project triumphs. Romance has been Arabella's surrogate self, and by silencing her Lennox keeps her own integrity and her heroine's; of course, Arabella remains unaware of what might comprise her "integrity." Lennox thus also makes silent Arabella her loudest sign of her critique of a patriarchal culture's denial of
women's freedom. The abrupt end to Arabella's authentic articulateness at the end of Chapter XI implies that society's power constrains both her and Lennox, but also that Romance has served Arabella in ways that the clergymen's reasonableness does not. It has been the only agency of her self-expression.

By empowering Arabella, Romance in The Female Quixote indicts more popular forms of narrative as inadequate representations of female experience. Certainly, Arabella's story does not match the classic pattern of a Bildungsroman; she does not 'come of age' nor does she, within the pages of Lennox's novel make her "entrance into the world" as Evelina and other eighteenth-century heroines achieve that conventional goal. Arabella's experiences show that marriage may represent a false telos, a closure which forecloses the possibility (or likelihood) of personal fulfillment grounded in personal understanding. This judgment does not impose a twentieth-century psychological interpretation on an eighteenth-century heroine, for Lennox's avowed concern is the danger of being blind to real motives and real interpersonal obligations.

Throughout, the novel's satire establishes just this type of alertness as precondition for maturity and happy marriage. Ironically, even in her sadly immature and silenced condition, Arabella is a typical heroine because, as Myers claims, the standard eighteenth-century heroine is presented to us in a "novel of nondevelopment" (69).

Thus, we are obliged to see that Arabella's marriage to Glanville is a bittersweet conclusion to her story. Arabella does not offer Glanville the freely given love of a Romance heroine whose devotion to her
chosen lover strengthens her to endure great trials. She presents him with her servility and shame:

To give you myself...with all my remaining Imperfections, is making you but a poor Present...yet, since I am so happy as to be desired for a Partner...by a Man of your Sense and Honour, I will endeavour to make myself as worthy as I am able (383).

Her habits of dignified courtesy remain, in part because the speech is formulaic—although, this time the prescriptive rhetoric belongs, not to Romance, but to eighteenth-century notions of femininity. Her remarks are an idealized version of the response expected from a chaste young Englishwoman in the 1700's. Its dearth of any authentic signifiers is a profoundly ironic contrast with Arabella's earlier use of Romance diction in ways that did express her unrecognized emotions. When heard against still-vibrant echoes of the energetic, witty voice we remember as Arabella's, her submission to Glanville is abject and impersonal. Although the marriage of Glanville and Arabella occurs, it is not appropriate to view the novel's conclusion as dictated by "romantic solutions," which Braudy tells us "artificially dissipate conflict" (183). Since nothing about her personal dilemma has been solved, the conflict between Arabella's mistaken view of History and her real personal history remains.

Just as important, love in its passionate guise is missing from the speech I have quoted and from Lennox's final pages. Its absence cannot be explained merely by noting that novels of the day omit proposal and wedding scenes, or that social protocols of the period value an indirect expressions of affection. Lennox's concluding statement assures the reader that Glanville and Arabella were united "in
every Virtue and laudable Affection of the Mind" (383, my emphasis). Lennox's obligation to her didactic strategy may seem to account for this phrase. Still, in light of the novel's complex satiric strategies and Arabella's continuing perceptual and emotional needs and her unreadiness for marriage, Lennox's focus on their union of "Mind" (singular) implies that it is Glanville's view of the world which will predominate. Although a devoted suitor, Glanville is not willing for Arabella to remain a heroine; all of his efforts are directed to achieve "the Miracle" of her conversion to a normal, compliant woman (382).

Lennox's decision to make "Mind" her last word is her final cue that Arabella has not learned to love Glanville fully, that theirs may be a better marriage than Miss Glanville's with Sir George, but it will lack the passionate quality of Arabella's attachment to Romance. Although Arabella is aware throughout the novel of her increasing attraction to Glanville, she does not possess the mature subjectivity with which love is given. The 'madness' on which the novel focuses in its final pages is first social, since prevailing norms of behavior mandate Lennox's and Arabella's suppression of the real story of her life. Lennox hints that it is mad to accept a woman's coerced submission to marriage as equivalent to love.

In this respect, the novel's didactic story of a courtship is no more authentic in its representation of human emotion than the Romances it seems to condemn. The didactic message, in its relation to real History--psychological and cultural reality--is similarly grounded in denial. In the case of Romance, the potential limitlessness of women's desires are expressed, albeit framed as fantasy, in which 'real world'
circumstances are denied and distorted. In the case of their courtship's History, Arabella's identity and desires are denied, so that the apparent limitlessness of male desire for control of her life persists. Thus, The Female Quixote's seemingly conventional closure—marriage—is not an event in which sexual passion is discreetly validated; this is impossible because Arabella remains infantile. By denying her opportunity to construct an adequate self the novel lacks psychological closure and points to a likely continuation of Arabella's perceptual and emotional difficulties. This likelihood is a strong indictment of the social values and structures that make History's relation to Romance—her father's neglect of Arabella, with its consequences—the novel's imperative focus.

What I am suggesting is that the apparent tensions between narrative forms in the novel and the apparent split between didactic and satiric methods express Arabella's unadmitted psychological disorder. Her story suggests that it may be useful to acknowledge psychological experience as being related to aesthetic form and to investigate whether this symbiosis lends itself to the kinds of analysis we perform to historicize a cultural artifact. Specifically, Arabella's suppressed history may illustrate a crucial link between the conventions of satire at a particular cultural moment within a particular literary form and the psychological effects of social values to which satire responds.

Certainly, in Lennox's novel Arabella's sad beginning is the matrix from which Lennox's narrative strategies take their contradictory forms and functions. There is no genuine love generated within the courtship story of The Female Quixote because Arabella's requires self-
awareness in order to recognize love as an acceptance of someone's differences. Without the perceptual ability to differentiate herself from others, she is incapable of self-love or any other kind. The twinges of awakening sexuality that produce her confusions, blushes, tears, and rages in response to Glanville's conduct are as autonomic as her grandiose posturing.

That is, Anti-Romance disguises Lennox's satiric social commentary, allowing her to expose the falseness of conventional courtship practices and other social values. Conversely, Romance as valued by Arabella disguises the origins of her troubles. Lennox's strategies are models of confusion in the way that Arabella's habits of mind are confused—marked by inseparable, simultaneous desires and effects. Ironically, such formal confusions also confirm The Female Quixote's identity as a novel, rather than a Romance, if we accept Bakhtin's claim that the novel is defined by its "opposition...to all that is formalized, privileged...fixed" (Holquist, 414). What seem to be an opposition between the novel's anti-Romance and its novelistic story of a courtship is a functional similarity; both are exposed as inadequate forms of narrative for Arabella's experience. Only Romance, the form of story embraced by her mother and substituting for that missed relationship, indicates the salient facts of her history--albeit, indirectly.

Lennox is almost successful in privileging the courtship plot and anti-Romance conventions, but her satiric originality asserts itself. The effect of keeping Arabella's early history hidden (in the novel's first pages and in her abortive meeting with the Countess) is to deprive the novel of coherent form. It is a melange of formal conventions, as
chaotic—or semiotic—as Arabella's habits of mind. In a world that honors dignity, propriety, and honour, in which Romance (and the female desires it expresses) can only be denigrated, it is only excess—in the guise of satire, or innocence—that serves as the means by which another story can be told. At the same time, the presence and energy of society's arbitrary demands for coherent stories is the means by which excess acquires its inordinate role, and by which Arabella acquires her identity as both foolish and heroic. There is no end to the symbiosis. Thus, Arabella's silent sexual desire (potential love for Glanville) and unacknowledged desire for maternal care (and love) are not functionally different. Both are unadmitted, alogical needs which are thwarted by social arrangements and values which deny the excesses of private emotion validity. Both function as signs of what is repressed.

Given the novel's complexity, it is ironic that Lennox has been credited only with having emulated Cervantes successfully, or invented an energetic heroine whose adventures are an effective cautionary tale. Such criticism "turns a masterpiece of comic satire for grown-ups into milk pudding for the nursery." The novel is an important work of satire, not only because satire is the agency by which Arabella's true history is both hidden and expressed. Her complicated relation to fantasy and history express satire's universal traits: namely, subversion of the alleged integrity of genre and other aspects of form. Or, to use Davis' terms differently than he intends them, The Female Quixote demonstrates the capacity of Romance to "carry the burden of factuality and reliability" (37) by showing that the reliability of a fiction is constituted in part by its relation to the semiotic features of percep-
tion. Perhaps Lennox is wise to keep Arabella eternally unaware. As such, she continues to embody the capriciousness of perceptual habits (including our critical judgments), the social inequities lurking beneath didacticism, and the passions hidden by prescribed, feminine conduct.
NOTES

1I use a capitalized form of the word, "Romance," throughout this discussion to limit its meaning to the French Romances Arabella read. While Lennox's audience remains generally aware of "romance" as a term signifying older, classic chivalric romances, such as those written by Virgil or Tasso, The Female Quixote blames French Romances for Arabella's confusions. Similarly, I capitalize the word "History" to indicate Arabella's limited understanding of it, and use "history" to refer to her 'actual' personal experience.

2In England during the eighteenth-century editor/translators of complete editions of Don Quixote include Charles Jarvis, George Kelley, Peter Motteux, J. Ozell, Thomas Shelton, Tobias Smollett (who published more editions than his competitors), Capt. John Stevens, and Charles Henry Wilmot; Fielding's translation of Cervantes was partial.

3Lennox's quixotic heroine was also copied, perhaps most notably, in Jane Austen's parody of her favorite author (Northanger Abbey (1798; 1817, posth.) and in Maria Edgeworth's "Angelina; or, L'Amie Inconnue," Moral Tales for Young People (1801). In an Appendix to the 1989 Oxford Classic edition of The Female Quixote Duncan Isles describes Edgeworth's "Angelina" as "strongly influenced by Lennox's work," its heroine drawn to resemble Arabella; however, Angelina is "corrupted" by reading "novels of sensibility," rather than by Romance. A figure modeled after Arabella's Countess "befriends Angelina in Bristol, and, as part of her cure, makes [her] read The Female Quixote" (426). It is also possible to consider Radcliffe's Gothic Romances as a variant of Lennox's novel; see Ross, 11-13, and chs 4 and 7. Less familiar imitations include a comedy, Angelica or Quixote in Petticoats (1758); George Colman's farce, Polly Honeycombe (1760); a titular allusion in The Spiritual Quixote (1754; a life of Ignatius Loyola); a novel, Fizziwig; or the Modern Quixote (1763); a mockery of Methodism by Richard Graves, The Spiritual Quixote; or the summer's Ramble of Mr. Geoffrey Wildgoose (1773); a weakly plotted fiction, The Amicable Quixote (1788); Charles Lucas' anti-Godwinian The Infernal Quixote. A Tale of the Day (1801); and a work attributed to Lennox by Miriam Small, The History of Sir George Warrington; or the Political Quixote (1797). In addition, the American writer, Tabitha Tenney's Female Quixotism; exhibited in the Romantic Opinions and Extravagant Adventures of Dorcasina Sheldon (1808, 2nd ed.) was reissued frequently during the next century.

4Lennox's use of Romance also participates in women's literary tradition. "The prose romance was virtually the only extensive genre which women had successfully practiced" (Doody, "Introduction," The Female Quixote, xvi). While Doody refers here to the female authors of French Romance, she acknowledges their salutary influence on
English women writers of prose fiction after 1670.

Lennox's *The Life of Harriet Stuart* (1750) also frames a young woman's history by a world view which is prescriptive and tends to suppress actual historic experience: "real life is free of adventure...therefore safe, secure, and happy"; both Harriet's and Arabella's stories nevertheless convey "the potentially subversive message that, for women, whatever is, is not right" (Ross, *The Excellence of Falsehood*, 94).


Armstrong also claims that the "transgression" of prescribed roles for women is only possible much later in history, when authors have access to rhetorical strategies that locate themselves "outside of the reigning categories of their culture" (58). Still, Lennox's use of Romance is a "transgression" because its rhetoric and structures are marginalized by 1752. In the eyes of a reader who sees only the conventional didacticism of *The Female Quixote*, the novel's Romance elements occur as violations of literary and social norms.

The risk may have been minimized in Lennox's view by her successful publication of a first novel (*The Life of Harriet Stuart*, 1750) which also deals with the dangers to a young woman of reading Romances. See Duncan Isles' discussion of Richardson's and Johnson's support of it and of *The Female Quixote* in the Appendix to Dalziel's edition (419-28).

Lennox's (and Cervantes') ambiguous relation to Romance and to novelistic narrative underscore the difficulties we continue to have sorting out the two genres' traits. In *Factual Fictions* Davis summarizes various critical approaches to the problem of explaining the novel's relation to earlier narrative forms, and its relation to other cultural phenomena (1-7). Davis favors Foucault's practice of seeing works of art as products of competing discourses and locating the "intelligible" aspects of a work in its disclosures about how "strategies of power" continually change (9). Anti-Romance, and Lennox's equivocal (strategic) use of it, raises to the surface of narrative the tension between powers and desires located in the sociopolitical world and those located in authorial intention.

Davis' theory that a literary work's novelistic features are enhanced (perhaps dependent on) the reader's "ambivalence toward the interplay of fact and fiction" in the work (23) supports my argument that Lennox's novel is framed problematically. Lennox achieves this in several ways--telling us, briefly, in her novel's opening pages about the behavior of Arabella's father and the death of her mother; using the anti-Romance tradition to satirize her heroine; employing
satire to create a social critique at odds with the moralistic purposes of the novel's conventional didacticism (which echoes the preaching of conduct books). These conflicting signals about Arabella's innocence imply a reader who is, in Davis' words, "knowing, collusive" and simultaneously willing, or "gullible, belief-suspending" (23). In The Female Quixote Romance functions as an obvious cue for the first type of response (that the work is fiction), but, ironically, Romance also functions as a covert signal that Arabella's experience is grounded in her actual history; for the reader, her favorite Romances become surrogate forms of truth.

11McKeon suggests in The Origins of the English Novel 1660-1740 that Romance is a genre in need of revaluation. He argues throughout his chapter, "The Destabilization of Generic Categories," that "epistemological self-consciousness" is central to both the romance and its successor genres (56). Therefore, it would be naive to assume that the cliché characters of Romance were authentic cultural signifiers, but lacked importance as signifiers of how human psychology was explained. I suggest that Romance's hyperbolic indulgence of human passions serves, potentially, as a satiric view of them.

12 Langbauer describes Romance as "the chaotic negative space outside the novel that determined the outlines of the novel's form...the novel was unified, probable, truly representational because romance was none of these" (29).

13An early advocate of the idea that Romance and reality are not necessarily opposed, Northrop Frye calls the novel a "displacement" of Romance, using the same "general structure," but making narrative events seem more closely related to "ordinary experience" (38-39).

14Nancy K. Miller's The Heroine's Text also discusses the choice between lover and father as a typical predicament for fictional heroines of the period (149).

15Davis uses the word "psychoanalyst" as a metaphor: he thinks the reader's methods of interpretation must resemble the strategies of a psychoanalyst. Davis does not identify the ruptures or transformations of a text as potential signs of psychological experience. In addition, because he is arguing against a teleological literary history he dismisses the "influence" of Romance on the novel, denying that it could be a "forbear," or a "relative" of the later form (25). However, the discursive model which Davis finds useful can support my view (and those of critics who argue that Romance persists in eighteenth-century novels), namely, that Romance is one expression of the psychological energies that inform the "ensemble" of already written "texts" from which literary creativity draws.

16Nevertheless, as late as August 1790 The Monthly Review condemned the extravagance of Romance heroism in James White's novel Strongbow (1789), citing it as an example of the discredited fashion of imposing extravagant story on "true history" and following the bad
precedent set by Cassandra and Cleopatra (Tompkins, 207, n. 1). So the genre continued to be a scapegoat for dislike of excess.

17 In implying a readership alert to women’s actual difficulties, Lennox the satirist wears the garb of "historian." As Kernan argues in The Cankered Muse, "the picture of the world given in satire is taken as an attempt to portray the ‘actual’ world, the historic method" (2). Yet since she seems to be mocking her heroine, her heroine’s exploiters, and the society whose values contribute to her heroine’s plight and whose alternative modes of knowing are not more certain nor admirable, Lennox also stands where desire and fact mingle confusingly.

18 Jane Spencer discusses the way eighteenth-century women’s relationship to literary Romance was pervaded by contradiction. Women writers and readers were expected to be interested chiefly in love, and also alleged to have special ability to "exert a salutary moral influence on men," however, these aspects of femininity could counteract each other if stories of love were too "warm." Thus, Spencer argues, the simultaneous demand that literature delight the reader with a story dealing with passion and give the reader moral instruction was typical during the century. Of course, "didacticism could kill Romance" and later eighteenth-century fictions demonstrate this (32-33). These factors contribute to the ambivalent authorial voice in Lennox’s work and other literature by women of the period.

19 Beatie views Don Quixote as causing "the death of the Old Romance, and...birth to the New....it was from [Cervantes] they learned to avoid extravagance, and to imitate nature [and] probability" (cited in Day, 49). Beatie dissociates French Romances from the mainstream of Old Romance; admitting he has not read them, he still judges them "intolerably tedious and unspeakably absurd" (50).

20 Davis argues that Don Quixote "should not even be considered a novel," but be seen as a unique, "genderless...defiance of discourse" (12). His judgment rests upon belief that Cervantes’ work implies a different kind of reader and is not "close enough to life to serve as a model" (12-15). Moreover, Cervantes is an intrusive author, emphasizing his own cleverness, whereas a novelist (such as Defoe) "disowns" his relation to the narrative he writes and thus gives his protagonist greater verisimilitude (16). Davis argues, with Foucault, that Cervantes’ work is only novelistic where it creates illusions that the real world and the narrative world are the same (16-19).

21 Ross observes that in most women-authored fiction of the period "villains" include all men who believe their own world view to be "real" (in contrast with the "romantic illusions" of women); such men include the "fathers and brothers" of heroines such as "Clelia, Betsy Thoughtless, Harriot Stuart, and Arabella"; their "oppression of women was [constituted by] their denial that women were oppressed" (The Excellence of Falsehood, 151).
22 Doody speculates that anti-Romance sentiments were supported by anti-Jacobite feeling, by Whig focus on material reality, and by middle-class interest in fostering obedience to "powers already in place," and discouraging belief in outlandish, alternative historical plots ("Introduction," *The Female Quixote," xviii).

23 Generally, the eighteenth-century novel is a means by which Romance’s subtext of female sexual desire is vigorously suppressed. In novels authored by men the energy of female desire is contained (imprisoned) within female physical beauty (the Sophia Western paradigm), or it is shown to be impotent and self-blaming when threatened by male power (the *Clarissa* paradigm), or it is shown as ugly, selfish, and un-selfcritical (the Mrs. Booby paradigm), or it is coopted as a hero’s sentimental goodness (the Grandison paradigm).

24 Doody and Dalziel identify the female-authored romances to which Lennox alludes: Rober Boyle’s *Parthenessa. That most Fam’d Romance* (1676); La Calprenède’s *Cassandra: the fam’d Romance* (1652), *Cleopatra* (1674), and *Pharamond: or, the History of France. A Fam’d Romance* (1677); Mme de Lafayette’s *La Princesse de Clèves* (aka, *Zayde*, 1678); Madeleine de Scudéry’s *Artamène, ou le grand Cyrus* (1649-53) and *Clelie* (1654-60). See Doody’s introductory essay in the Oxford edition of *The Female Quixote* (xiv-xvii) and Dalziel’s Notes, (388).

25 Small reports that *The Female Quixote* was published without Lennox’s name on the title page in March, 1752; a second edition was issued in June of that year, the third in 1763, a fully credited fourth edition appeared in 1783, additional editions in 1799 and 1810, and "there were several translations into German, Spanish, and French" (13, 249-50).

26 Fielding’s review argues that Don Quixote is an inherently ridiculous figure, but that Arabella is absurd only when she talks about the fantastic behavior of others (the characters of French Romance); in her case, Fielding reasons, we are amused second-hand: "Ridicule...is conveyed, as it were, through our ears [rather than our eyes], and partakes of the coldness of History or Narration." However, he thinks that "Arabella is more endearing than Quixote." He also credits Lennox with exposing "all those Vices and Follies in her Sex which are chiefly predominant in our Days" (get page).

27 Tompkins mentions several authors who capitalize on Lennox’s success with the female quixote by inventing female characters whose passion for Romance narratives is a sign of feminine weakness: Miss Southern in John Potter’s *Curate of Coventry* (1771); Miss Williams in Herbert Lawrence’s *Contemplative Man* (1771); the protagonist of Mrs. Bennett’s *Ellen, Countess of Castle Howel* (1794); and that of C. M. Wieland’s *Reason Triumphant Over Fancy* (trans. 1773). Tompkins also points to Clara Reeve’s *Progress of Romance, through Times, Countries, and Manners: with Remarks on the good and bad effects of it on them respectively; in a course of Evening Conversations* (1785) as a late but significant "ghost" of taste for the genre (207, n. 2).
28 The personalized, obsessive aspects of Arabella's response to her favorite reading matter are underscored by her failure to notice one of her favorite author's demurers. Mlle. de Scudéry says in the preface to *Artamene*, "une fable ne soit pas une histoire, et qu'il suffise à celuy qui la compose de s'attacher au vraysemblable, sans s'attacher toujours au vray" (unnumbered Preface).

29 By showing Sir George's familiarity with Romance and his manipulations of it as more intentional than Arabella's uses of the genre, Lennox makes him a scapegoat and supports Arabella's innocence. His unrestrained desires are the less innocent counterpart of dangers to social stability embodied in Arabella's conduct. As the novel's confessed villain, Sir George bears an onus of guilt that is predictable in a novel structured didactically. But his villainy serves Lennox's other satiric purposes too. Just as important, his characterization implies that it is the degree of consciousness brought to bear on the act of telling or receiving a story--not simply its form--that determines its uses.

30 In part, negative reactions to Arabella illustrate both literary and social resistance to female agency. Glanville's disgust and shame about his fiancée's conduct is comparable to the disdain for fantasy and its energizing emotions which we see inscribed in narratives that present themselves as factual (such as "History"). Both kinds of resistance imply fear of the feminine power latent in Arabella's heroinism.

31 Melvyn New asserts, "universally the romance is that form of fiction best able to contain the activities and characters of a God-ordered world," because in Romance justice triumphs and virtuous people are never destroyed, although always in danger (34-35).

32 Eighteenth-century preoccupations with modes of knowing presume and express covert scepticism about an orderly world. Perhaps *The Female Quixote* is a forerunner of the late eighteenth-century novels which Eric Rothstein calls "epistemological" because they emphasize that "systems of inquiry establish systems of order"; Rothstein believes that both fiction and history serve the period as "avenue[s] to empirical knowledge" (*Systems of Order*, 245). He argues that late eighteenth-century novels embody the "historical plausibility" required by the period--a verisimilitude grounded in the variousness of human life; they express the author's role as reporter, rather than manipulator of events; and they value a narrative method typified by "particulate representation"--or an episodic structure, rather than a seamless, unified story (247-52). Within a discussion of epistemological concerns that included psychological patterns of response, each of these values might be claimed for Romance.

33 However, Sir George and the Countess cannot communicate with her effectively either, since her misreading of Sir George's conduct and her lack of opportunity to become the Countess's friend prevents true exchange of ideas, or true histories.
The counterpoise between excess and prescriptive form in Romance pervades the entire structure of *The Female Quixote*: for example, Arabella's characterization is balanced by Glanville's (initial) reserve and rationality; and her impulsive speechmaking and physical movements are opposed by Lucy's chronic incomprehension of her mistress' behavior and by the essentially static characterizations of the novel's surrogate father, Sir Charles. Excess is not limited to Arabella's conduct or her references to what Langbauer calls "too many [Romance] characters...too many texts," or the repetitiousness of her own adventures--"too many similar scenes" (36). Proliferating (semi-otic) excess is evident too in each disjuncture between "fact" and 'fiction', even in the lack of clear correspondence between original Romance narratives and the bad translations Arabella has read, and on occasions when her comments about their plots or heroic figures are mistaken. (Dalziel's notes for the novel indicate several such mistakes; e.g., 392, note 1 for page 62.)

Braudy argues that "à priori systems [manifest in] characters like Parson Adams...absorb all facts indiscriminately"(115), that such fictional examples of hegemonic "systematic thought" in Fielding's Joseph Andrews, for example, "limits a character's view of the world outside himself. [and] his own potential humanity" (116). In this view, Arabella and Adams are clones. At the same time, Braudy privileges a different kind of systematic perception; he implies that there is a more adequate and normative way of seeing the world than Adams'. It is possible to view the excesses of Arabella and Adams as having nothing to do with "right ways" of being; their behaviors are 'true' expressions of their characters and also monitory devices, warning against the hubris of believing another (contingent, constructed) set of perceptual habits is superior because it is different. Of course, here I slip into the trap of assuming that Braudy's slip is somehow more egregious than mine.

Lucy is a partial exception to the roster of intolerant characters. Although a maidservant, she is Arabella's only trusted friend and remains loyal; still, she is obliged to obey, and is not always strictly obedient (taking tips on occasion), and she remains perpetually confused by her mistress' conduct.

Beasley suggests that Romance is not really novelistic because its most important feature is "its fancied vision of transcendent regions of experience" ("Life's Episodes," 41). His reading begs the question of whether "fancy" is an authentic expression of desire.

Arabella's readiness to believe women moral and trustworthy is more consistent than her views of men. This is related to patterns of characterization in French Romance; the women are heroines, but men are either devoted suitors or dangerous enemies. Her arbitrary habits of response in this case too derive from her personal history, in which womanhood was distant—embodied in her dead and idealized mother and in her fictional idols, whereas manhood was present as a father whose care was at once protective and cruel.
Langbauer defines Romance as what the novel or the sociopolitical status quo "finds transgressive and threatening, and attempts to dispel by projecting into a separate genre or gender" (49). She sees Romance and women as agencies that expose the inconsistencies of whatever is normative, but her argument does not challenge other received ideas, such as belief that more value inheres in the thing being exposed than in the defining agent.

The Marquis' characterization is ironic (a dark precursor of Arabella's Romance postures) if we notice that he too embraces one story with obsessive zeal. But his favorite narrative is the story he tells himself about his own victimization. His emotional response to losing his political power, his retreat to a remote castle, and his self-involved "melancholy" may therefore foreshadow the caricature of romantic sensibility that Thomas Love Peacock invents in Nightmare Abbey (1818).

By implying a readership alert to Arabella's needs, yet conscious of distortions in the Romance version of life (which is always heroic, adventuresome, comprised of clear choices, fixed consequences, and probable triumphs), Lennox hints that the reader's pleasure demands a feminized version of scepticism. To like Arabella requires not accepting the way traditional values and received ideas problematize women's experience. It also requires not liking the Marquis' self-indulgence and neglect of his wife and daughter, or his assumption that they require nothing but himself. Unlike Lennox's ideal reader, Arabella does not know that she requires a feminized view of the world and of herself.

Fanny Burney's letters and diaries illustrate her readers' readiness to discuss her characters as if they were real people. In April, 1788 Mr. Wyndham comments to Burney, "How comes it that...the instant you have attached us to the hero and the heroine--the instant you have made us cling to them so that there is no getting disengaged--twined...them around our very heart strings, how is it that then you make them undergo such persecutions? There is really no enduring their distresses" (Diary of Mme. D'Arblay, IV; 138).

Romance's covert role in The Female Quixote as a signifier of Arabella's emotional history has a radical feature. Instead of supporting only the implied elitism of the class of readers who would be familiar with Romance narratives (or conscious that their having not read them is a matter of choice), the psychological verisimilitude of Romance and Lennox's particular use of it enlarges and homogenizes her novel's potential audience.

The privileging of passion characteristic of Romance is a signifier of psychological structures, as well as of social values that may constrain freely expressed feeling, including lust. That Romance powerfully conveys the dark "underside of consciousness" (Beer 57) is an idea supported by other literary genres which sustain the Romance valorization of passion: the novel of sensibility, Gothic fiction, the
introspectiveness or melodrama of nineteenth-century fiction and poetry, and the continuing market for popular romance. As Beer argues, what happens in any romance "is not simply unreal or artificial. Rather, it expresses the lost or repressed emotional forces of the imagination" (59-60). Ironically, by being hyperbolic, Romance endorsements of sexual passion and other emotional excess deflect attention from their larger, cultural meanings. In turn, it is prevailing cultural values which support hyperbole as a necessary way of both denying and expressing what is forbidden.

45The Countess’ disappearance may also represent the place where Lennox surrenders her heroine to market forces and the powerful influence of men (Johnson, Richardson) who are advising her about shortening the novel’s conclusion. Still, Lennox’s decision to cut her out strikes me as consistent with her novel’s refusal of Arabella’s need.

46Mitzi Myers argues that most heroines of the period get little support from mothers, that even women novelists rarely present positive images of motherhood: "mothers...are usually bad and living, or good and dead" (70). Myers claims that Burney’s Evelina is typical of women’s fiction by being "haunted by the missing mother and by obscure intimations of the mature maternal power from which the heroine’s entitlement derives" (70). In contrast, Myers says about Maria Edgeworth’s Rosamond stories (1796-1821) that they are characteristic of women’s writing by being "mothered texts," offering their themes within a "relational literary mode," and presenting a subtle "dialogic interplay of child and adult, daughter and mother [which] constitutes a double-voiced narrative of...considerable literary moment" (68).

47Scholars’ quickness to affirm Lennox’s didactic project, while ignoring the chapter’s (and the novel’s) protofeminist satire may be related to old habits of assigning importance to what famous men say or do, rather than giving attention to women writers’ strategies. In this case, Samuel Johnson’s alleged influence on Lennox displaces focus from her work to the question of whether Johnson wrote Chapter XI of Book IX, in which the discussion between Arabella and the "Good Divine" occurs. Small (13), Staves ("Don Quixote," 197), and Weinheimer ("Fiction," 7) assume that Johnson wrote or helped write the chapter; Fyvie (186), Duncan Isles in "Johnson and Charlotte Lennox," and in his Appendix to the Oxford Classic edition of The Female Quixote and Langbauer (42-43) argue that the chapter’s Johnsonian style and perspective are not adequate proofs of his authorship. Isles emphasizes that "there is absolutely no contemporary suggestion of [Johnson] having written it; linguistically, there appears to be nothing...that a good writer familiar with Johnson’s style could not have achieved" (Appendix, 422). The controversy is an example of general readiness to assume that women writers’ practical needs to gain male acceptance of their work will inevitably compromise their creative integrity.

48The subtext of allusions to Christianity throughout the novel,
and the complex relation of this embedded religious narrative to the
narratives of History and Romance which demand our attention is too
large a topic for discussion here. Still, it is crucial that
Arabella's willingness to change her mind is framed by the Pious and
Learned Doctor's focus on Christian principles and by Arabella's
own "Pious" preoccupations when facing the fact that her "violent Dis-
temper" may be fatal (366). One additional sign that her already
existing piety, rather than his argumentation, generates her shame is
the contrast between her argumentative response to him and her recep-
tivity to the Countess's references to Christian charity—although
talking with the Countess had not resolved Arabella's continuing per-
plicity about how to see herself or judge experience (329).

Moreover, since the novel's submerged story of Arabella's
troubled, 'true' history remains excluded from the realm of logic
represented by the final debate between Arabella and the clergyman,
we are obliged to notice the insufficiency of the symbolic order
(reason, law, and dogma) defended by the clergyman. By its refusal of
ideas and experience that do not conform to dogma, his world view is
exposed as a deadly antithesis to Romance; while his belief system
entirely excludes Arabella's emotional history from the realm of
'truth', Romance gives the latter coded expression.

Even Ross, who sees few of the novel's complexities, admits
that "since [Arabella] is unselfconscious, the novel cannot point out
a safe path from the world of innocence into the world of experience"
("Mirror, Mirror," 468).

After Mr. Roberts rescues Arabella from the river and carries
her to the house, he leaves her "to the Care of the Women, who made
haste to put her into a warm Bed" (363). Had Lennox allowed Arabella
to complete her psychological development by learning the historicized
nature of her obsessive interest in Romance, the river episode and the
care of women servants would serve, undoubtedly as what Joseph Camp-
bell calls "a symbolic return" of the hero(ine) to the place where
[her] troubles begin. Being dragged from the river, "senseless" and
seeming dead enacts Arabella's probable, worst fears (remembering the
deadly effect on her mother of her birth and fear of dying herself in
childbirth). Her greater readiness to look at her conduct after
recovery supports the river's symbolic role as a re-birthing experi-
ence. The care of the women, as successful as her physicians' efforts,
signify Arabella's need for the physical aspect of maternal
love; but without a female Guide, her journey toward psychological
health is hapless.

Like the Sign of Angellica, the silenced Arabella is a figu-
tion of what has not and cannot be spoken: a lovely woman's body
whose sexual uses will be the limit of her self-expression. Todd
argues that throughout women's writing, it is only "the sign of the
woman, not an essence of womanhood that can be studied" (10). See
Todd's study by the same name; especially, her "Introduction" (1-10).
53 Myers identifies "the woman's plot" as a "passage from orphanage or isolation to sensibility rewarded" and she condemns this paradigm because it suppresses the facts of women's marginalization by presenting romance, love, and marriage as satisfying (68). In Lennox's plot, Romance and the courtship story of romance with Glanville expose marriage as a social ritual having no necessary link with maturity in women's experience. Glanville never teaches her anything, and neither marriage nor the social world offer Arabella solutions to desires that control her, unacknowledged and undefined.

54 DuPlessis contends that "scripts of heterosexual romance, romantic thralldom, and a telos in marriage" that obstruct women's maturity were exposed as false only after twentieth-century women writers began to "write beyond the ending" (quoted in Myers, 69). Ironically, the latter project often brings the heroine, full circle, to the place where she regains access to the maternal origins of her identity and to the semiotic features of her powers of expression.

55 The novel of development most typical of the eighteenth-century is a Bildungsroman, but in its standard, masculinized form, it begs the question of what constitutes personal development for women or men. Even charming heroes like Tom Jones, or Joseph Andrews, are initiated into a spurious adulthood by progressing towards self approval that is grounded only minimally in self-examination; at least, we are not privy to the thoughts which make Tom ready to settle down with Sophia, which lead Andrews to notice Parson Adams' limitations. Their alleged maturity is as much constituted by compliance with social forms, as it is marked by personal change. Conversely, heroes of sensibility who demonstrate more self-awareness are to that degree feminized.

56 Braudy sees Fielding's Amelia (1751) as similarly concerned with "the relation of private perceptions to the world of external society" (182). This late novel by Fielding focuses "on the way public life and the institutions of society threaten the individual: mere spontaneity and exuberance [for example, in Tom Jones] are not sufficient to meet their attacks...worldly innocence and moral virtues are [not] self-sufficient values" (182).

57 This apt phrase is Jane Marcus', applied to a review of the film, Orlando ("A Tale of Two Cultures," 11).

58 In The Progress of Romance (1785) Clara Reeve may have addressed the injustice of locating the value of women's writing in their compliance with literary tradition or social definitions of femininity. She challenges the idea that women writers of fiction are accepted because male authors make femaleness more authentic by creating heroines such as Clarissa. Reeve's Hortensius (a man) says to Euphrasia (a woman), "Richardson is a writer all your own...your sex are more obliged to him and Addison than to all other men-authors." Euphrasia's reply is that women "have other redoubtable champions" (Quoted in Tompkins, 138). Euphrasia's "others" may refer to women
writers, as well as to male authors who are less prominent than the famous ones Hortensius credits.
CONCLUSION

This project indicates that satiric method is a more prominent feature than genre in the work of literary satirists during the long eighteenth-century in England. Whether they work as playwright, poet, or novelist, women satirists of the period find kindred uses for what I call the semiotic features of satiric expression: excess, alogical procedures, simultaneous meaning. Moreover, their work shares proto-feminist content. They use satire's ambiguities and transgressions of logic to convey dissatisfaction with women's social opportunities and with prevailing ideas about women's nature.

Still, such gendering of ideological meaning is not alone what makes women's satiric writing worthy of our attention. Their use of satire also draws our attention to its general attributes: satire's tendency to subvert (perhaps negate) the identifying structures of literary genres, its complex relation to didactic forms of literature (or, to 'truth' itself), and its privileging of imagination.

To some literary critics satire is a 'mode' or garb imposed on genre, a mask of the latter's enduring form. In this were so, satire would appear subservient to the structures of genre. It would be more like a very clever servant, who never acknowledges his own hidden agenda. The satiric voice would not overwhelm its host's generic form.
If satire were less strong, formally, than its generic host, any arrogance or boldness in a satiric voice or situation would seem dedicated to preserving generic form, as well as social order. Moreover, its boldness in the service of these goals probably would appear a product of philosophic certainty and optimism.  

However, satire’s energies are potentially destructive, or hurtful, as Pope’s eight year literary attack of Lady Mary Wortley Montagu demonstrates. When it is not the expression of personal or political hostility, satire remains at least deconstructive, by forcing our notice of human error and of ambiguities in language—which we use, commonly, as if it were a logical, reliable system. Satire’s persistent exposure of gaps between appearance and motive, between manifest meaning and latent sense requires our reconsideration of its relationship to genre. Satire is not the servant of already existing form, but the means by which we learn the limitations of received ideas, including traditional literary forms. In this respect, satire challenges all systematic thought. Its ‘parasitic’ or self-serving motions tend to submerge the identity of its generic host.

The work of eighteenth-century women satirists underscores this radical function of satire because as women they share satire’s alleged, off-stage role—watchers and critics of the famous, already validated and powerful ideas governing society. When they take the stage, as it were, they appropriate these ideas as skeptics. In the following short discussion I want to review skeptical features of the
women-authored works I discussed in earlier chapters as a way of emphasizing satire's generally resistance to any affirmation of truth.

For poetry, plays and fiction, one of the markers of genre is the way endings are appropriately conventional. I am not suggesting that all poems must conclude in similar ways, or that all final scenes in comedies must show us plans for a wedding. Rather, I am pointing to a pattern of expectation in the audience or reader which contributes to the work's generic identity. The satiric works I analyzed in earlier chapters display resistances to closure that illustrate satire's competitive relation to its host genre. This resistance occurs differently in the play, poems, and novel I discuss. Still, the pattern of refusal is similar, and it may be more prominent in the protofeminist work of women writers because their implied, ideal female readers (in any historic period) are constructed as agencies of deconstruction. They see the work's alleged generic identity and its politicized meanings as competitive signifiers whenever they notice how its author seems to comply with stereotyped expectations of women's nature or role, but uses such compliance as a disguise of her refusal and ridicule of such received ideas.

Even in the case of literary productions which seem non-satiric, we are almost obliged to read a woman's poem or a woman's novel produced during the eighteenth-century as if its generic conventionality is warped by the author's gender. This is so because genre is a taxonomic view of men's creativity. The woman writer appropriates a literary form from which she is in certain ways already excluded. She intrudes her feminized subjectivity on the genre and consequently moves us toward a
different type of conclusion. Of course, every man who writes novels
during the eighteenth-century and every male poet imposes his unique
vision on a literary form that is already related to precedent, but his
‘anxiety of influence’ or the swagger of his performance is not compli-
cated by his gender. She, on the other hand, having been defined as a
different kind of thinking being (and perhaps having different percep-
tual and creative habits, as well as a different world view), inevitably
makes a woman’s text of her play, poem, or novel, and signals that dif-
ference in observable ways. In the case of satiric writing, a woman
writer’s critical project makes her dissociation from literary genre
(and satire’s hostile relation to it) more obvious, particularly in her
work’s relation to closure.

For example, as I indicated in Chapter II, Centlivre’s play, The
Busie Body (1709), offers us the conventional satisfactions of seeing
both Miranda and Isabinda marry the men they prefer. However, Cent-
livre’s treatment of Sir Francis undercuts comedy’s conventional
patronage of happy endings and of existing social arrangements in
England during the period. Sir Francis’ exclusion and his being made
the embodiment of patriarchal fury about Miranda’s escape from the Law’s
usual constraints of women’s lives alters our view of the play’s conven-
tional affirmation that all is well. We must see that claim as an
ironic one. Centlivre’s mockery of Sir Francis’ frustration and of his
arrogant uses of legal power prevents our belief that the play’s resolu-
tion is complete or even entirely satisfying for Miranda and for us.
Furthermore, if we accept Miranda as the play’s protofeminist heroine,
we share with Centlivre a satiric view of the play’s genre; even before
the play's final scene we refuse comedy's implied argument that existing social, political arrangements foster personal happiness in equivalent ways for men and women. It is the play's female authorship which accounts for its view of women's disadvantage, and it is the play's heroism which throws a strong light on the socially deconstructive role of satiric wit. By enacting satiric revenge on Sir Francis, Centlivre gives more attention to what remains indeterminate or unresolved at play's end than to her characters' impending marriages. Sir Francis, after all, may return to have his revenge. As Centlivre's conclusion exposes comedy's rather inadequate representations of women's lives, it undermines our trust in dramatic comedy as a reliable system of signifiers about human experience.

Similarly, as women poets impose a satiric view of their lives on traditional rhyme schemes, imagery, and stanzaic structures, they suggest the difficulty of enclosing female experience within conventional poetic forms. In one sense, the implied, linear plan of poetic argument is a conventional means that is only useful to any writer as it is distorted; it is only a generic template on which her or his ingenuity operates. Generally, we might see any individual case of literary performance as a 'satire' of generic form; and this may be especially prominent in poetry, where the form is literally more visible and where, during the eighteenth-century, poetic conventions are relatively stable. In the case of women writers, it is more obvious that without the agency of satire, a poem cannot express female experience, because the latter requires a non-compliant agency to express women's ambivalence about inherited definitions of female nature or social roles. Satire is
almost an inevitable choice/opportunity for early women writers because it supports the woman poet’s effort to use what is already acceptable (her work’s generic identity) to say what has not been said about women’s experience because it is not acceptable: to suggest the complexities of women’s subjectivity. Not surprisingly, women’s poetry of the period (discussed in Chapter III) usually concludes by pointing to what remains to be said and done.

For example, having exposed Apollo’s unfair support of only young and lovely writers, Mary Leapor declares, "I’ll still write on..." ("The Headache. To Aurelia." 1746). Her apparent conclusion is a statement pointing to the continuation of her rebellion against disdain for women poets. Mary, Lady Chudleigh and Mary Monck also use poetry as a call to action, rather than as a statement about their lives whose form as a statement is adequate. In the last lines of their poems Chudleigh advises women to "be proud, if you’ll be wise" ("To the Ladies," 1703), and Monck’s White Witches "open show/ To mortal view" the betraying strategies of male Love, urging women to take advantage of this knowledge ("Masque of the Virtues against Love. From Guarini," 1716). Their poetic premise is that verse is not a sufficient expression of experience. Its meaningfulness occurs beyond the page, in its readers’ response. Likewise, in "Adam Posed" (1709) Anne Finch implies that even the richness of poetic language cannot fully express woman’s "wavering form." Her poem ends by asserting man’s (and the literary work’s) incapacity to give woman a name.

As I indicated in Chapter IV, Lennox’s novel, The Female Quixote (1752) is a remarkable example of female refusal of conventional narra-
tive closure. The Pious and Learned Doctor’s failure to lead Arabella toward understanding of how her history accounts for her obsessive interest in Romance forces Lennox’s reader to acknowledge that narrative is not necessarily incremental in the satisfactions it offers. At novel’s end Arabella has no more self-understanding than at its beginning; she has only acquired a different man to care for her. The Female Quixote’s unresolved ending exposes the insufficiency of marriage as a social arrangement and it also points to faults in conventional novelistic attitudes about women’s needs. But perhaps just as important, Lennox’s thematic concern with the adequacy of genre itself (Romance and History) intensifies the skepticism embedded in her novel’s final pages. She implies that only when we examine received ideas about what Romance is or what History is do we notice how such definitions conflict with or satisfy our desires, our imaginative sense of what Romance and History ‘should’ be. Arabella’s story has no ending, or remains an incomplete tale because her relation to narrative, her imaginative construction of what story is, never gets looked at—largely, because such examination would scrutinize how patriarchal power deprives women of fundamental liberties. In such a case, Lennox’s novel would no longer seem to be an anti-Romance; it would be in fact the polemical narrative which her satire disguises. Ironically, The Female Quixote’s satiric subtext gives the novel’s failure to resolve Arabella’s problem an aura of inevitability, almost the satisfactions of closure.

Whatever the generic form, women writers provide a different sense of an ending because their reference is to the different features of
women's lives and world view. Satire and women writers subvert logical supports for the idea of conclusion. They hint that the alleged finiteness of human events implied by closure and closure's suggestion that human difficulties can be resolved are heavy-handed, but groundless arguments for believing that there are direct correspondences between language and experience.

In each of the works just mentioned satire mates with a didactic feature of the text which is easily mistaken as the work's single, controlling idea. Centlivre may be hinting to women in her audience that female wit is superior to the cliches about womanhood that men perpetrate; or, that unjust laws regulating women's inheritance justify deceitful evasion of their effects. A poet such as Leapor or Finch may convince her reader that rhymed verse serves woman's need for self-expression. Lennox may persuade some of her readers that reading French Romances is dangerous, as well as unfashionable, and she may persuade others that English society denies women's right to full psychological maturity. If we focus on their work's didactic projects, we may view their satiric strategies as sugar-coating, or amusement, chiefly important by making the work's socially useful idea more palatable.

However, satire's effect is more profoundly radical than this, and women writers of satire use didacticism to disguise the critique of social values embedded in their work. As I have suggested by noting resemblances between stereotypic views of women's habits of mind and satire's methods (excess, alogical procedures, simultaneous meaning) satire enjoys a relationship to what is presumed normative in literature (the genre being used) that is at once a mirror of and destructive of
social order. When women seem to confirm men's superiority, their
dependence or submission stands as an implied challenge to the idea of
gender difference; their inferior status demands an explanation, and
usually men invent one which displays its logical shortcomings to those
who do not have secondary reasons for believing it. Thus, social con-
structions of womanhood always (potentially) deconstruct the societies
from which they emerge. Likewise, when satire seems to serve the larger
project of endorsing social custom or affirming existing ideas about
what makes truth credible, its presence in the text challenges and often
exposes the inadequacy of those didactic projects. Rather than being an
enabler of didacticism, it always exposes the insufficiency of didactic
premises.

Earlier decades of the historic period encompassed by my project
are commonly seen as a period in which empiricism and satire flourished,
and the later eighteenth-century more often seen as a period in which
didactic literature appears more strongly supported. However, satire's
relationship to didactic literary stance may not be fully explained by
considering a work's historical context. Kevin Cope sees satire as the
literary expression of skepticism. He observes that satire has a "natu-
ral affinity" with empirical approaches to knowledge ("Satire," 176),
arguing that it substitutes an "artificial moral pattern of experience
for both an accurate rendering of 'reality' and the objective truth
behind it" (181). Cope claims that satire, like empiricism, is thus an
"anti-realistic" procedure, pushing both ideal and real "into the void"
and replacing both with its own artifice (179).5
If, as Cope believes, satire disparages both 'objective' truth and "the repugnant features of experience" because both derive only from "conceptualizations of experience," (179), then the didactic aspect of satiric texts is a mask or agency for satire's self-assertion. It is a feature of desire—which is not entirely explainable by historicized causes. In women's satiric writing satire's capacity to disguise desire is more visible, because women's desires, generally, are inordinate. Women writers who appear to speak on behalf of cultural values which they have little power to initiate or change can only stand in ironic relation to their alleged, didactic purpose. This predicament itself exposes their work as a product of desire to say more than is allowed.

An eighteenth-century English woman satirist produces work that is always grounded in authorial consciousness of her intellectual marginality and her work's tenuous relation to public approval. This may make the didactic rationale of Lennox's novel or Centlivre's play necessary, but it does not make didacticism the work's chief attribute or effect. Only by invalidating the presumed, objective features of truth can the satirist accrue authority for her own vision; this accounts for the didactic guise in which most satire appears. In order to be effective at all, the satirist must simultaneously appear to defend what is already believed and expose the groundlessness of that assumption. Yet, satire's deconstruction of existing meaning implies the insufficiency or weakness of what is presumed true. And it implies that if 'truth' were adequately self-evident, it would need no defense. Satire's apparent, didactic support of existing values or 'truth' undermines the latter's
credibility. Satire privileges not ‘truth’, but its own imaginative representations of generic form and received ideas.

While women’s satiric writing helps to expose satire’s subversion of generic and social forms, satires authored by men manifest these same radical functions. We may be less aware of satire’s threat to order in male-authored work because men’s ordinate position in society at times deflects attention from ideological meanings signaled by inordinate features of their formal inventions. Thus, the model of satire constructed by my project is polymorphic—not limited to genderized metaphors of meaning. I am arguing that satire is a literary expression which is psychologically retrograde—a reversion to semiotic means which exposes the limitations of rationality. As well, I am suggesting that satire’s expression of the chaotic energies and undifferentiated perspective which we call semiotic is an antagonist of the symbolic orderliness of conventional features of language, literature, and social structures. In turn, satire’s exploitations of traditional literary forms and received ideas that have been credited to masculine habits of mind shed some light on gender conflict.
NOTES

1Kevin Cope refers to Ellen Leyburn and Alvin Kernan as examples of critics who believe that satire "observes definite generic rules"; he cites Northrop Frye and Edward and Lillian Bloom as critics who "reduce satire to a procedure for attaining an elusive ideal; and he describes Robert Elliott's approach to satire as "a form of magical exorcism" ("Satire," 169-70). Cope's position, which I will later amplify, declares satire to be entirely antagonistic to objective truth. Discussing Swift, Terry Castle also argues that, generally, satire does not recommend "an unstated, yet realizable mode of behavior"; it does not posit idealized innocence ("Why the Houyhnhnms Don't Write," 63).

2Cultural change alters the way women writers appropriate literary form. A text is more easily recognizable as a woman's text during the early modern period because women writers are creating new intellectual roles for themselves in a society strongly resistant to their efforts; the historic improvements in women's social status in Anglo-American cultures account for some erasure of the signs of women's unique relation to ideas and aesthetic form. At present, their cultural assimilation allows them greater freedom to assume their equivalent access to generic tradition--some of which includes the work of earlier women writers and women's definitions of heroism.

3Even women poets whose work appears flagrantly submissive to existing ideas about gender still make a subversive gesture by writing at all. Hannh More's zeal for being compliant with men's notions of proper femininity leads her to say, "A woman sees the world, as it were, from a little elevation in her own garden, whence she makes an exact survey of home scenes, but takes not in that wider range of distant prospects which he who stands on a loftier eminence commands" (quoted in Lonsdale, xl).

4It remains true that men also use poetry--satiric or otherwise--to change their readers' opinions. However, when the poet is a man his implicitly more legitimate use of the literary form deflects some of our attention from, or focuses it in different ways on the latter's constraints or limitations. We are more likely to assess the adequacy of his ideas by looking at the appropriateness of his formal choices, rather than to read the work through our existing prejudices about the author's competency to use the literary form--as we do in the case of women writers (whether our prejudice is irrational, or grounded in awareness of women's historic predicaments).

5Cope argues that empiricism's dependence on experience is only "nominal," ("Satire," 181), that Locke's system posits the
"unintelligibility" of experience (182). Cope says too that satire "cultivates...the ethical purpose which transcends and expels the real obstacles to its fulfillment" (183). Like a parasite, its relation to its generic or ideational host is entirely self-serving.
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