EUROPEAN ACADEMIC RESEARCH
Vol. I, Issue 12/ March 2014

ISSN 2286-4822
www.euacademic.org

Impact Factor: 3.1 (UIF)
DRJI Value: 5.9 (B+)

Generic Variety in Conduct Literature: The Negotiation of Desire

ALEXANDRA PRUNEAN
Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona
Spain
NOELIA SÁNCHEZ-CAMPOS
Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona
Spain

Abstract:

Within the context of the rise of domestic education and middle-class women readers and writers, conduct literature has made a substantial contribution to the understanding of social responsibilities and proper behaviour. The traditional representation of women is that they show humble submission and that they compliantly meet the rules and standards of society. However, we argue that women writers such as Lady Mary Chudleigh, Delarivier Manley, Susanna Centlivre, Elisabeth Singer Rowe, Eliza Haywood and Sarah Pennington have found ways to go beyond ideal models of femininity and to respond to this hegemonic society by negotiating the notion of desire and by creating alter-egos in conduct literature. The paper focuses on six different kinds of texts representing the generic variety of this sort of writing: a poem, a semi-autobiographical novel, a comedy, a three-part epistolary conduct book, a periodical and advice writing or a conduct manual. Through this approach we aim to show that this variety of texts is an attempt to illustrate the universal response to the existing social mores.

Key words: women writers, eighteenth-century conduct literature, passive obedience, impermissible desires, domestic sphere, alter-egos, generic variety.

The popularity of conduct books increased after the 1740s "in

keeping with the increased emphasis on domestic education and the growing number of middle-class women readers" (Poovey 1984, 15). The role of conduct books is to advise men, women, and also children on their social responsibilities, namely on a certain behaviour aimed at making a distinction between classes. This concept of "social mobility" refers to a modification of conduct in order for young men and especially women to become more attractive on the marriage market. Thus, given the new social context women need to be taught how to behave, think, feel and act in certain social situations in agreement with the interest of the patriarchal society. Conduct books dictate (not recommend) to women a life of chastity, placid acceptance of male dominance, limited reading and interpretative skills and emotional susceptibility.[1]

Furthermore, in *The Ideology of Conduct* Nancy Armstrong establishes a connection between conduct literature and desire by arguing that "conduct books for women, in particular, strive to reproduce, if not always to revise, the culturally approved forms of desire" (Armstrong 1987, 1). This opens up the way for an exploration about the ways in which conduct books offer suggestions on how to reconsider prevailing notions of desire. The domestic woman is depicted as "the most desirable woman to marry" (Armstrong 1987, 9) and such a woman is believed to accomplish a particular form of power, i.e. "the power of domestic surveillance" (Armstrong 1987, 9). It was believed that by submitting to that domestic sphere women could achieve much more power than any active attempt to seize power by directly challenging authority. Armstrong also notes the inconsistency that lays in the fact that proper behaviour had be taught and assimilated but, at the same time, such behaviour was expected to seem free-willed and spontaneous (Armstrong 1987, 74).

[1] "Stemming from the belief that impressionable young women were the primary readers of prose fiction, and were likely to be sexually aroused or emotionally absorbed in their reading, such prescriptive literature attempts to censor and supervise women's reading" (Steele 2012, 479).

George Savile, Marquis of Halifax's *Advice to Daughters* (1688), John Gregory's *A Father's Legacy to his Daughters* (1744) and Wetenhall Wilkes' s *Letter of Genteel and Moral Advice to a Young Lady* (1740) depict the typical eighteenth-century vision of what is considered to be a desirable and respectable woman. As Vivien Jones argues "in these texts, young women are taught 'natural' femininity in terms of negation and repression- silence, submission, 'abstinence or continence' (Wilkes)- and are offered an illusion of power based on sublimation and passive virtue" (Jones 1990, 15). Nevertheless, there are several texts written by women against this kind of conduct books and social indoctrination, for example Mary Astell's *A Serious Proposal to the Ladies for the Advancement of their Interest* (1701), Hester Chapone's *Letters on the Improvement of the Mind, Addressed to a Young Lady* (1773), Laetitia Matilda Hawkins's *Letters on the Female Mind, Its Powers and Pursuits* (1793) and Priscilla Wakefield's *Reflections on the Present Condition of the Female Sex, With Suggestions for its Improvement* (1798).[2]

Probably the most well-known and discussed female writers are Mary Wollstonecraft and Hannah More. Wollstonecraft in her "adult-centred tracts" (Hunt 1994, 46), namely *Thoughts on Education of Daughters* (1787) and *Vindication of the Rights of Women* (1792) advocates female education and equal rights and counteracts Rousseau's ideas of women being "passive", "weak", showing "little resistance" and made "specially to please man" (Rousseau 1979, 358). She considers that mothers should teach their children, especially theirs daughters, self-discipline, morality and how to reason from an early age. What Wollstonecraft strives to do is counteract preconceptions such as "women are said to be the weaker vessels" (Wollstonecraft 1787, 99) arguing that if

[2] This list is just a selection of conduct literature books generally considered as representative of this genre.

women are not given the chance of a proper education they will be useless to society and moreover, they will bring no substantial and positive contribution to it. She is not against marriage, however "early marriages are, in [her] opinion, a stop to improvement" (Wollstonecraft 1787, 93) and this is why women should first learn some useful skills and afterwards they will become better wives and mothers.

Likewise, in *Strictures of the Modern System of Female Education* (1799) Hannah More advocates for educational reform and argues that if women *appear* to be less rational than men this is because the education they have received is inadequate. She strives for educational reform and presents discipline and restraint as advantageous as, in her view, "discipline, however, is not cruelty and restraint is not severity" (More 1996, 161). Having an obedient and compliant attitude is presented as absolutely necessary; she believes this is something that women must acquire as soon as possible, since "it is of the last importance to their happiness in life that they should early acquire a submissive temper and a forbearing spirit" (More 1996, 162). More also argues that a certain amount of importance can be given to outer appearances but always in moderation, with some constraints, as those aspects that "add little to the intrinsic value of life, should have limitations" (More 1996, 152). Apart from striving for a change in the education for women, More also reflects upon the dangers of indulging passions. Her anxiety lies on her apprehension that if women indulge passions in the same way as men "then morality would fall, and that domino would bring down religion, and order in the state, along with it" (Hole 1996, xxxi). Thus, for More, women's indulgence of the passions is something to be weary of, as it poses a threat to the social order.

Although silenced in many ways by the standards of society women have found ways to express their impermissible desires. They are taught through conduct books what not to

become and do, and the general assumption has been that women show humble submission, respect or that they meet the rules and standards of society passively. However, we argue that these rather lengthy descriptions of "fallen women" exerting inappropriate behaviour, shocking society through their fashion, open sexuality and language are, in fact, ways developed by the female writers in order to break with social conventions by creating alter-egos. Through their writings about "wanton women", they, in actuality, transcend some limitations, which implies that they read actively, and this may be the only way to express their own sexuality and desires openly without being punished or criticised. Additionally, the descriptions of this kind of women are, in some cases, longer than the descriptions of virtuous women. The general belief is that through the use of negative examples women would learn more effectively the right kind of conduct; however, this could be seen as the chance of women writers allowing themselves to create a different kind of woman through oppositions between the angelic and whorish, "between women as the embodiment of moral value and women as the source of moral disorder" (Jones 1990, 57). In this way they could "conceive themselves in two apparently incompatible ways to express themselves in a code capable of being read in two ways: as acquiescence to the norm and as departure from it" (Poovey 1984, 41).

In order to sustain our point of view we selected six different texts of writing, all published after the Glorious Revolution (1688) and before the French Revolution (1789), namely between 1701 and 1761. It is noteworthy that at the beginning of the eighteenth century women were still strictly subjected to male authority. However, towards 1761 a more flexible understanding of women's position was developed, yet it was not as radical as Wollstonecraft's views. They represent the generic variety of this sort of writing, ranging from a poem- Lady Mary Chudleigh's *The Ladies Defence: or, the Bride-*

Woman's Counsellor Answer'd (1701),[3] a semi-autobiographical novel- Delarivier Manley's *The Adventures of Rivella* (1714), a comedy- Susanna Centlivre's *A Bold Stroke for a Wife* (1718), a three-part epistolary conduct book- Elisabeth Singer Rowe's *Letters Moral and Entertaining* (1729-32), a periodical- Eliza Haywood's *The Female Spectator* (4 volumes, 1744-46) and advice writing or a conduct manual- Sarah Pennington's *An Unfortunate Mother's Advice to her Absent Daughters* (1761), written in epistolary form, but its purposes are different from Rowe's *Letters* as we shall argue below.

To start with, Lady Mary Chudleigh's *The Ladies Defence: or, the Bride-Woman's Counsellor Answer'd* was written as a response to a wedding sermon by John Sprint (1699) in which he recommends total submission on behalf of women. The form is that of a dialogue between Sir John Brute, a country squire, the romantic Sir William Loveall, a misogynistic parson generally regarded as a Sprint caricature, and Melissa, a witty and ironic woman.

Defence is dedicated to "all ingenious ladies" as Chudleigh identified the lack of education as a weakness and the writer demands equal treatment: "Why are not Husbands taught as well as We;/Must they from all Restraints, all Laws be free" (Chudleigh 1703, 3). To Sir John women are fools and a nuisance causing inconvenience and annoyance and he cannot perceive the thought of women dominating men. The fault is be to be sought in books which he regards as "the plagues of life" (Chudleigh 1703, 16). Additionally, the Parson brings original sin into discussion arguing that women were guilty first and their punishment is "a strict Subjection" and that the fault does not lie in books but in women themselves. To this, Melissa, Chudleigh's alter-ego, replies that "women are despised by those who are no better than the women they deride, but most

[3] In our analysis we are going to compare *Defence* to Chudleigh's other poem *To the Ladies* in order to reinforce our interpretation and selection of the poem.

women cannot defend themselves because they are uneducated fools" (Williamson, 1990: 97). This is why she wishes women could rule their own minds and "to [their] Reason private Homage pay" (Chudleigh 1703, 18).

Originally the poem was printed anonymously, hence the signature M____y C_____, yet Bernard Lintott later reprinted it without her authorisation, which offended Chudleigh as "*Defence* was written to divert some of her friends and meant only to satirise the views of Sprint" (Williamson 1990, 90). She insisted that "she wrote to persuade women to follow the commands of virtue and rational pleasure, and to contribute to the regular conduct of their lives" (Williamson 1990, 91). Notwithstanding this, but Sprint's sermon provided her with the perfect occasion to write a critical analysis of marriage from a woman's perspective. *Defence* was not meant to "make women radical" (Williamson 1990, 91), however the ideas presented in *To the Ladies* (published in 1703 with her consent) oppose wifely obedience as the writer urges women to shun marriage and "that wretched State" (Chudleigh 1703, 40). In her view, "Wife and Servant are the same,/ But only differ in the Name" as women are not allowed "to look, to laugh, or speak" and "Like Mutes [they] Sign alone must take,/ And never any Freedom take" (Chudleigh 1703, 40). All these ides are emphasised by the repeated use of the words "nothing" and "shun", showing thus the negative consequences of the "fatal knot" on women's condition. In the end she recommends to "Value your selves, and Men despise,/You must be proud, if you'll be wise" (Chudleigh 1703, 40).

Consequently, the ideas conveyed in both poems are similar and represent the core of Chudleigh's thinking which manipulated through words and her alter-egos. She identified women's submissiveness as being socially based and "the greatest danger, Chudleigh perceptively saw, was that women would internalise the misogynistic images of them and accept the slavery of marriage forced upon them by the interests of

their fathers" (Williamson 1990, 95). This is why the change should occur in women's attitudes towards themselves, not in men's outlooks. Education is therefore seen as a tool to silence men, gain respect and, moreover, as Williamson comments, "if women are better educated […] the stereotypic men may not be so much tolerated by society" (Williamson 1990, 98).

Our second text under analysis, Delarivier Manley's fictionalised autobiography *The Adventures of Rivella* is a third person narrative through the eyes of a male character, Sir Charles Lovemore, who recounts the story of "a person of admirable good sense and knowledge" (Manley 1715, 1) to his only audience, Chevalier D'Aumont, a French nobleman. In his view, Rivella, identified as the author of *Atlantis*[4], "has carried the passion farther than could be readily conceiv'd" (Manley 1715, 4) and as a result of bad company and politically controversial writing her reputation is now to be pitied.

The novel, fiction blended with biographical accounts, actual individuals and events, challenges the male concepts of an ideal woman and a whore. It is, as Ballaster argues, "the story of the attempt on the part of male arbiters to stamp the mark of 'more love' on the too manl(e)y writing of a woman" (Ballaster 1992, 147). Lovemore tries to limit and transform Rivella according to what he considers to be the proper or ideal woman. "Who bid her write? What good did she do? Could not she sit quietly as well as her neighbours, and not meddle herself about what did not concern her?" (Manley 1715, 111) are Lovemore's unanswered questions showing his inability to understand her. However, in the end it is her who models him: "the absent author is in reality his author- it is, after all, Lovemore who is the fictional creation. Manley's consummate irony is evident here while the man appears to have 'authored' the perfect female object she is, in reality, elsewhere 'authoring' him" (Ballaster 1992, 150).

Furthermore, Lovemore is incapable of understanding

[4] Manley, Delarivier. *The New Atlantis*, 1709.

the reasons for her conduct and political work complaining that "she loves the truth and has too often given herself the liberty to speak, as well as write it" (Manley 1715, 14). Manley's fiction intertwines with her Tory-oriented political affinity and it focuses on her participation in "the secret history of that tedious law suit" (Manley 1715, 100) involving unethical characters. At the end of the book Lovemore accuses her of having hurt innocent people to which she replies that she has become a "misanthrope, a perfect Timon, or man-hater" (Manley 1715, 109) and that revenge was her catalyst: "she did no more by others, than others had done by her" (Manley 1715, 110).

Therefore, Manley through her alter-ego and the manipulation of words she justifies her political works and challenges the eighteenth-century world dominated by men. Additionally, she strongly argues against the double standard: "If she had been a man, she had been without any fault […] what is not a crime in men is scandalous and unpardonable in woman" (Manley 1715, 7).

Just like Chudleigh's poem, Susanna Centlivre's 5-act comedy *A Bold Stroke for a Wife* challenges the parental authority and advocates for the right of children, especially daughters, to choose their partners. Miss Ann(e) Lovely's father "wish[ed] her dead a thousand times" (Centlivre 1829, 7) in his will by conditioning her to find a husband agreeable to her four guardians with each of whom she has to live three months a year in their house. Toby Periwinkle is "a kind of virtuoso, a silly half-witted fellow, but positive and surly, fond of everything antique and foreign, and wears his clothes of the fashion of the last century, dotes upon travellers, and believes more of Sir John Mandeville than he does of the Bible" (Centlivre 1829, 7). Thomas Tradelove is "a change-broker, a fellow that will out-lie the devil for the advantage of stock, and cheat his father that got him, in a bargain" (Centlivre 1829, 7). Sir Philip Modelove "an old beau … [who] admires all new

fashions, operas, balls, masquerades" (Centlivre 1829, 8) and Obadiah Prim is a very strict Quaker.

Clearly, it is impossible to find a husband that each one of the guardians agrees with; however, Colonel Feignwell conceives a plan in order to deceive them: instead of convincing all four at the same time, he approaches them individually and disguises himself as a fine gentleman dressed in a French style to impress Sir Philip Modelove, as an Egyptian traveller to fool Toby Periwinkle, as a Dutch trader to trick Thomas Tradelove, and finally as Simon Pure, a Quaker preacher, to mislead Obadiah Prim.

What is surprising in this play is the fact that the female character appears on just a few occasions, namely in Scenes II from Acts I and II and in most Act V. However, when she is given some lines she appears to be a strong, stubborn woman who wants to escape the tyranny of her guardians, choose her husband, dress the way she wants and inherit her father's money. Although she pities her situation she does not want to submit and lose her father's money: "What! And have my fortune go to build churches and hospitals?" (Centlivre 1829, 9) Moreover, Lovely often reminds her guardians that despite complying with their "formality" she will accept this "ridiculous doctrine" (Centlivre 1829, 47).

In Act I Scene I the female character also argues against "their quaking dress" which she finds "monstrously ridiculous" (Centlivre 1829, 9). Similarly, in Act II Scene II Mrs. Prim suggests that her "appearance allureth the eye of the by-stander, -encourageth the frailty of human nature,- and corrupteth the soul with evil longings" (Centlivre 1829, 15). Nonetheless, Lovely poignantly raises the question of virtue asking Mrs. Prim whether her virtue consists in her choice of clothes and accuses her of being a hypocrite: "I know you have as much pride and vanity, and self-conceit among you, couched under that formal habit and sanctified countenance, as the proudest of us all; the world begins to see your prudery"

(Centlivre 1829, 15). This view is once again reinforced in the final act when Lovely insists that she will "wear what [she] please[s]- go when and where [she] please[s]- keep what company [she] think[s] fit, and not what [they] shall direct" (Centlivre 1829, 43).

In Act V Lovely appears more and this is when she plays along with Feignwell's witty plan in order to escape from her guardians and still inherit her money. Through her determined alter-ego Cenlivre questions the parental authority and pleas for the right of daughters to choose their husbands: "I'll have no husband of your choosing, nor shall you lord I over me long. I'll try the power of an English senate- orphans have been redressed, and wills set aside- and none did ever deserve their pity more" (Centlivre 1829, 45). Finally, Lovely and Feignwell successfully achieve their goal and when convenient they disclose the truth to everyone's surprise.

A different perspective of our analysis is to be found in the three-part series of Elizabeth Rowe's *Letters Moral and Entertainment* (1729-32) which provide a thorough exploration of the nature of human passions, the danger of indulging them and the possible effects of uncontrolled and excessive passional impulses. Rowe's epistolary narrative is composed by short, often unfinished stories that show the consequences of the failure to follow the dictates of conduct books. Yet, the style of her narrator creates a sentiment of sympathy towards the different characters and, thus, the reader finds it difficult to simply place a moral judgment on the characters. The different characters are depicted as faulty but ones comes to understand their failings and this makes it much more complicated to simply condemn them for their mistakes. The immediacy inherent in the letter-form further emphasises such identification and makes the reader a participant of the attractive and dangerous pleasures that tempt the characters, and the reader is also led astray by the delights of the city or by the libidinal emotions that are portrayed through the letters.

Rowe's *Letters* place passional libidinal impulses at the core of the narrative, and the stories also revolve around other themes, such as adultery, guilt, death and seclusion. Many of the stories are a reflection around the guilt that comes from feeling desires that one is not supposed to feel, forbidden by the rules of society and by nature itself, which is a very intriguing aspect. There is always the doubt as to whether passion can be considered an involuntary affliction and this is the topic of many of the letters.

In Part I of the *Letters*, Sylvia's tale is the story of a guilty passion, as she falls in love with a married man, and she is startled at the discovery of such sentiment: "it is love, a tender, hopeless passion that has had this surprizing effect!" (Rowe 1796, 89)

Sylvia is perfectly aware of the fact that such love is forbidden, and she struggles with her feelings but all her efforts to conquer her passion are fruitless: "I was sincere, Heaven is my witness, in my desire to free myself from the criminal passion, and I thought the most certain way to conquest was by fight" (Rowe 1796, 89). Sylvia's desperation is apparent and her apprehensions have to do with an expectation that is often highlighted in conduct books: the need to dissimulate her true emotions in order not to display them openly. Sylvia, however, is not able to achieve this: "I was an ill dissembler, and have some reason to believe the real disposition of my heart was perceived by the Comte" (Rowe 1796, 91).

Through Sylvia's story, Rowe manages to create an opposition between city life and the country, where Sylvia runs to in order to find the tranquillity that she could not find in the city: "the retirement of the country, and serious reflection, soon freed me from the tumultuous effects of a guilty passion … I am now reconciled to myself, and find an inevitable satisfaction in the silent approbation of my own conduct" (Rowe 1796, 92-3). The city, with all its delightful pleasures and temptations, had robbed Sylvia of her peace of mind, and it is only when she goes

to the country that she recovers her inner peace. This dichotomy between city and country establishes two separate dimensions of desire: a dimension where desire is let loose precisely because it provides opportunities for its indulgence (the city) and a dimension where desire is contained precisely because of its distance to those situations where temptation could lead to a release of the very passions that need to be controlled (the country).

In the first part of the *Letters*, there are other stories that are also a reflection of the consequences of indulging in another criminal passion: adultery. The story of Philario and Amesia is a perfect example of the suffering that this passion brings to the lovers. What is very intriguing about this narrative is the fact that, contrary to the expectation, it is the female who is said to have seduced the male, as Philario claims:

> You taught me softer maxims, and perverted the noble ardour in my soul into loose and infamous designs … I was softened into sin, and unwary took in the deadly poison, while you indulged the guilty inclination, and soothed me into ruin … What infernal delusion perverted your judgment, when you preferred me to the man whom you had given your vows?" (Rowe 1796, 124)

Philario's speech places the blame of their guilty passion onto Amasia, who is presented as a siren-like character that has tempted him and caused him to indulge in their amorous affair. In this story of seduction the female is not presented as the helpless victim, who has been ruined by a man, but she is the active, complicit participant of seduction; she is described as an active agent that seduces the man. This role-reversal is rather intriguing, as it breaks with the stereotypical image of the conduct-book heroine who deflects her desires; Amasia is not simply an object of desire but also an active desiring subject.

In some cases, although the passions are heightened, adultery is avoided. This is the case in Alonzo and Teraminta's story. They feel intense feelings for each other but, as she

claims:

> I was not enough abandoned but to look on adultery as the point of horror not to be outlived; and though I allowed him liberties which I am now convinced were guilty, yet I always kept myself from the last steps of vice … we have never been able to conquer our unhappy passion, though we have suppressed all the effects of it (Rowe 1796, 183-4)

Alonzo and Teraminta are able to constraint their desire before it leads them to a guilty liaison but, despite their partial victory over their passions, they are unable to conquer their desire completely.

In Part II, the leitmotif of adultery occurs again. Hermione tells her fatal breach of chastity:

> One fatal night (let the horror of darkness cover it) I was, in my husband's absence, by the Marquis de___, seduced; it was not the contrivance of a formal amour, but the effect of inadvertency and surprise. Oh! Where was my guardian angel in that loose moment, that interval of reproach and madness? (Rowe 1796, 294)

Hermione's recounting of her seduction by a man who was not her husband is full of despair and guilt. She feels absolutely ashamed of her behaviour. She confesses that her fault was not due to amorous feelings but simply to "inadvertency and surprise"; it was not love that led her to give in to her passion, it was just the opportunity. Curiously, in her desperation, she wonders about the role fate may play in her misfortunate fallen state. She makes reference to her guardian angel, as if implying that all Providence let her down at that crucial moment; she found herself without any divine protection and now suffers the consequences of her error.

In the second part of the *Letters*, we find yet another recounting of the desperation and agony that is experienced by those female characters that have indulged their passions. Amoret's tale of despair is written in a fragmented style, she does not give details about the cause of her extreme anxiety, so

the reader never really knows the cause of her misery. What is very interesting is that her narrative is reminiscent of the scandalous narratives of Haywood and Manley, as Amoret proclaims "Heaven and Earth seem to reproach me, and join with the convictions of my own reason, which fully approves the rules I have violated" (Rowe 1796, 100). Her narrative is very intense, she introduces herself as someone whose errors cannot be forgiven and she just wishes to spend her life in seclusion "where the images of Vanity and Sin may never enter!" (Rowe 1796, 100)

In Part III of the *Letters*, there is yet another seduction tale involving an adulterous affair. The story of Aurelia and Cassander introduces us with a female character who lives in complete isolation in a forced exile which is the result of her adulterous liaison with a married man: "When finding myself with child, to hide my infamy, he brought me to this dismal place, an old-mansion house belonging to his family, where I am cut off from human society" (Rowe 1796, 73). Aurelia's narrative is embedded with the intense feelings of melancholy and anxiety in which she finds herself trapped, as she herself claims, she lives in a "melancholy confinement without hopes of a release" (Rowe 1796, 73).

Apart from the moral lesson that can be extracted from Aurelia's tragic story, another aspect that is to found is about female education. Aurelia wonders how she can educate her daughter, in her fallen state: "How can I give her instructions to avoid those vices which my practices approves? or recommend that virtue whose sacred rules I have so openly violated?" (Rowe 1796, 73) As a fallen woman, Aurelia fears she cannot be an exemplary model for her daughter. If she is to educate her to follow the dictates of virtue, she wonders how she is to undertake such a task when she is an example of those behaviours that are condemned at the eyes of society. She is unsure how to instruct her daughter into the precepts of conduct books when she has violated all the rules those books

warn women about.

All of the stories that appear in Rowe's *Letters* are meant to be read as cautionary tales, as a dreadful warning against the indulgence of passions. These are fallen women, as such, their tales show the terrible results that come from indulging libidinal impulses: desperation, isolation, exile, and even death.

Thematically similar to Rowe's *Letters*, Eliza Haywood's four-volume *The Female Spectator* (1744-46) is "generally regarded as the first periodical directly aimed at a female readership to have been edited by a woman" (Firmager 1993, 8). The multiplicity of narrators and the sense of a female community present in *Letters* are also a part of Haywood's *Spectator*. Although it has been noted that Haywood's periodical was initially taken as fairly conventional, it manages to provide some insights into the female experience through the collection of stories, which revolve around a large diversity of themes, including love, marriage, family relations, political affairs, the importance of education, a demand for social equality between the sexes, and advice on expected social behaviour.

A moral lesson can be extracted from each of the stories. The goal is to learn through these experiences and in recounting these tales Haywood's tone is highly satirical. She makes use of an ironic and cynical tone to give the audience insights about the stories. In her analysis, the presence of passions is introduced as necessary, but with some moderation. Haywood's attitude is not a dismissal of passion, but rather a dismissal of *excessive* passion. Another aspect that is introduced as necessary is possessing knowledge of the world; females who lack such knowledge are much more prone to get involved in dangerous situations.

Passion is a prevalent theme, as the stories are about "passionate women and the sins visited upon them by the men they loved, usually relentless predators with few scruples about

destroying defenceless innocence" (Wright 2006, 13). The insistence on the necessity of moral improvement is very much felt. Haywood offers "social commentary, moral instruction, and advice, all liberally instructed by exemplary or cautionary anecdotes" (Wright 2006, 13). The writer makes use of conventional plots to create a female consciousness that is at odds with the traditional image of "women as irrational creatures in need of male guidance and control because they lack a reason powerful enough to resist the force of their most unruly desires" (Wright 2006, 20).

At the beginning of the first volume of *The Female Spectator*, Haywood presents herself as an experienced woman who, for a period of time, entertained herself "by a hurry of promiscuous diversions" (Haywood 1770, 2). She uses her past follies to her advantage, by introducing her scandalous years as the source of her present wisdom, which allows her to instruct others so that "the public may reap some benefit from it" (Haywood 1770, 2). Her past mistakes have instilled her with a unique perspective through which to analyse the female experience because, precisely because of everything she has experienced, she is capable of judging "the various passions of the human mind, and distinguish those imperceptible degrees by which they become matters of the heart, and attain the dominion of reason" (Haywood 1770, 2). Thus, Haywood becomes the voice of moral authority in the narratives that appear in the periodical, a voice that is able to provide an insightful vision to those stories.

In this first volume, Haywood also attempts to provide some justification as to why certain individuals deviate from the path that is deemed as 'appropriate':

> Everyone is born with qualities suited to society; and when they deviate, it is not the effect of nature, but of the influence of those vicious passions, which by their ill conditions corrupt nature, and render it no longer what it was" (Haywood 1770, 105).

In such reasoning, nature has nothing to do when certain rules are violated. In Haywood's view, the cause is to be found in what she terms 'vicious passions', i.e. those uncontrolled, unrestrained impulses, which might have such a powerful influence that may lead people into the 'wrong' kind of behaviour. In this line of thought, women's failure to control those vicious passions may be the cause of their undoing, as these passions lead them to the violation of societal conventions.

Modesty is presented as desirable quality, as "she who is possessed of it can be guilty of no crime, but she who forfeits it is liable to fall into all" (Haywood 1770, 239). Possessing a modest disposition is the determinant factor when it comes to avoiding those dangerous pleasures that may lead women astray. Yet, despite her insistence on the need to restrain certain passions, Haywood leaves room for some pleasurable components, as she argues that: "some pleasure is doubtless necessary to the human system; taken in moderation, it invigorates both mind and body; but indulged to excess is equally pernicious" (Haywood 1770, 240-1). Thus, in Haywood's view, a certain amount of pleasure is permissible as long as it not *excessively* indulged.

This notion that desire needs to be restrained and controlled is shown as ineffective in one of the narratives from the first volume. Through Martesia's story the reader learns that the efforts to conquest passion are not always successful:

> How weak is virtue when love and opportunity combine! Tho' no woman could have more refined and delicate notions than Martesia, yell all were ineffectual against the solicitations of her adored Citander. One fatal moment destroyed at once all her own exalted ideas of honor and reputation, and the principles early instilled into her mind by her virtuous preceptors. The consequence of this amour was a total neglect of husband, house, and family" (Haywood 1770, 12).

Martesia's tale of adultery highlights the difficulties to control

human passions. She is presented as a tremendously virtuous and delicate woman and yet all her efforts to overcome her passion, to keep it under control are in vain. She surrenders to her ardent emotions, not as a result of a false delicacy or over-indulgence of pleasurable emotions, but as the consequence of "love and opportunity", that fatal mixture which makes it impossible for her to resist her passional instincts.

Erminia's rape-tale is also very intriguing. Haywood "dramatises the sexual threat of the masquerade" (Ballaster 1992, 192), as Erminia's story stresses the ambivalence that surrounded the masquerade. For Erminia, the masquerade assembly proves fatal; believing she is leaving the masquerade with her brother, she actually leaves with a total stranger who is dressed exactly like her brother and who takes advantage of this event to rape her. Erminia was "educated in the strictest rudiments of piety and virtue", and yet tragedy befalls her. All her severe conduct-book-based education cannot protect her from the rape she suffers: "…and for a moment's joy to himself, was the entire ruin of a poor creature, whose ignorance of the world, and the artifices of mankind, alone had betrayed to him" (Haywood 1770, 39-40).

In the second volume of the *Female Spectator*, when people write to her, Haywood tries to be objective and provide them with an explanation or solution. In the first story, she replies to Amintor, who has written to her accusing his loved one of being ungrateful merely because she was not interested in him. Haywood disagrees with him by arguing that feelings are involuntary and suggests he should forget her. In addition to providing her response to the letter, Haywood also provides readers with a general comment about this kind of behaviour:

> lovers complain of it [ingratitude] more than any people in the world, and indeed with the least reason; and a woman, who has the merit or the chance of being addressed by several, must of consequence be guilty of it, since in recompensing one, she must be guilty of what they call ingratitude to all the others (Haywood 1770, 22).

Haywood also punishes jealousy and infidelity: "to be jealous without a cause is such an injury to the suspected person, as requires the utmost affection and good-nature to forgive; because it wounds them in the most tender parts, their reputation and peace of mind" (Haywood 1770, 179). Hence, if jealousy has not got a justified cause, it should not be indulged in any way, as it has a negative effect on the person's inner tranquillity.

Moreover, Haywood also expresses her view on female education:

> if the married ladies of distinction begin the change, and bring learning into fashion, the younger will never cease soliciting their parents and guardians for the means of following it, and every toilet in the kingdom be loaded with materials for beautifying the mind more than the face of its owner (Haywood 1770, 202).

The writer expresses the need to "begin the change", consequently, similarly to Chudleigh's poems, it is the women themselves who need to bring about a change. If the married women, and hence more experienced, start to work towards achieving a change with regards to female education these will benefit the young women, who will learn to cultivate their minds more than their outer appearance.

Finally, Sarah Pennington in *An Unfortunate Mother's Advice to her Absent Daughters* (1761) "breaches the confines of private life in order to publicly advise her children" (Austin, 2009: x) as this is the only way to communicate with them. In her youth Pennington was "manipulated into accepting the proposal of a man whose fortune was far below her own" (Austin 2009, xxi). She discovers the true materialistic nature of her husband when her father, who had intuited this long before she did, leaves the land only in her name. Furthermore, after being unfairly accused of adultery she leaves her husband, but unfortunately given the laws at that time she also loses her right to her children.

Therefore, *Advice* has several purposes: to "repair her reputation as a virtuous woman" (Austin 2009, xxxv) as she is certain that the information given by her husband to her children, but also to their relatives and friends presented her in an "unfavourable light" (Pennington 1761, 2), to establish contact with her children, who, she fears, have been manipulated into believing the worst about her and "to give [them] some advice with regard to [their] conduct life,- and to lay down a few precepts that, if attended to, will in the best manner in [her] power supply the deprivation of a constant tender maternal care" (Pennington 1761, 10). Consequently, this is not a simple letter offering advice on proper conduct inspired by personal experiences. Typically, conduct books targeted one general audience at a time (ladies, gentlemen, daughters), yet Pennington writes for three different audiences: her daughter Jenny, to whom she dedicates the letter upon getting married, but also her other children ("the address is to you in particular, your sisters being yet too young to receive it, but my intention for the equal service of you all") (Pennington 1761, 10), her husband, whom she criticises by offering readers her side of the story as up to that moment she kept silence, and the general public, who, having access to her private life, may follow her advice on how to raise their children.

Pennington writes about various topics ranging from marriage, reputation, diversions, fashion, education, Bible studies and finance, and by doing so she clearly shows that this was the way she had intended to raise her children if granted. In her opinion "a woman can never be seen in a more ridiculous light, that when she appears to govern her husband" (Pennington 1761, 67) and mutual esteem, affection and good nature are the qualities to be sought in a man as opposed to bad temper and materialism. For her marriage is "a world full of deceit and falsehood" (Pennington 1761, 10) and thus recommends other pursuits such as giving love and attention to God, fulfilling the duties of a good Christian, going to church,

praying, doing good deeds and showing piety. Nonetheless, she encourages diversions: "diversions, properly regulated, are not only allowable, they are absolutely necessary to youth, and are never criminal but when taken to excess" (Pennington 1761, 20-1).

Her longest two entries are the ones about education and household management, offering thorough guidance and this thus shows that Pennington was a knowledgeable and wise woman. She argues that "youth is the season for diversions, but 'tis also the season for acquiring knowledge, for fixing useful habits, and laying in a stock of such well-chosen materials" (Pennington 1761, 22). Disagreeing with the "narrow limits of the nursery, the kitchen, and the confectionary" (Pennington 1761, 26) and stating that "it has been objected against all female learning, beyond that of household oeconomy" (Pennington 1761, 26), she recommends acquiring knowledge on a multitude of subjects: from mastering her own language, but also French and Italian, to history, geography, the rules of arithmetic, music, drawing, natural philosophy, educating children, governing servants, fashion, needle work, theatre-going and dancing.

Regarding "the management of all domestic affairs" (Pennington 1761, 27) she urges her daughter to avoid debts, to check the bills and buy products at a reasonable price. Interestingly, these pages contain many words from the financial domain such as debt, bill, price, purchase, parcel, tradesman, credit, payment, supernumeraries, profit, loan, accounts etc. Considered by society a "fallen woman" with a damaged reputation, Pennington positively manages to make use of her personal experience breaking social conventions and standards. Although *Advice* contains biographical elements, the writer does create an alter-ego as she imagines herself as the kind of mother she believes she would have been had she ever been given the chance or the kind of mother women should strive to be.

In conclusion, to use Alexander Pope's influential line from *Epistle to a Lady*: "Ev'ry woman is at heart a rake" (Pope 1822, 95). All these women writers show an acute awareness of the ambivalence that surrounded the construction of the female identity, and thus they have a common hidden agenda, that is to write against the shared idea found in so many texts pertaining to the genre of conduct literature of that time: passive obedience. Their detailed analysis of the female experience goes beyond the generally accepted notion of the domestic, passive, and passionless woman. As we have argued in our article, these writers have successfully developed ways to break with the social conventions by creating a double and, in doing so, they wittily and poignantly criticise the existing social conventions, their characters becoming an embodiment of women's hidden and unruly desires. Finally, our selection of texts goes to show that this hypothesis is cross-generic, meaning that it is not restricted to a particular genre, but can actually be expressed in many different formats, emphasising the relevance and importance given to the topic. It is a global artistic expression of female strategy, which highlights the significance of our selection criteria.

BIBLIOGRAPHY:

Primary sources

Astell, Mary. 2010. *A Serious Proposal to the Ladies for the Advancement of their Interest*. London: General Books LLC. (original text: 1694).

Centlivre, Susanna. 1829. *A Bold Stroke for a Wife*, Edinburgh: Stirling & Kenney. (original text: 1718)

Chapone, Hester. 1790. *Letters on the Improvement of the Mind, Addressed to a Young Lady*. London: J. Walter. (original text: 1786).

Chudleigh, Lady Mary. 1701. *The Ladies Defence: or, the Bride-*

Woman's Counsellor Answer'd. [http://digital.library.upenn.edu/women/chudleigh/defence/defence.html. Last accessed Feb. 2014]

_____. 1703. "To the Ladies". *Poems on Several Occasions*. London: W.B.

Gregory, John. 1834. *A Father's Legacy to his Daughters*. Boston: James B. Dow. (original text: 1761)

Hawkins, Laetitia Matilda. 1793. *Letters on the Female Mind, Its Powers and Pursuits* 2 vols. London: Hookham and Carpenter.

Haywood, Eliza. 1770. *The Female Spectator* 4 vols. London: H. Gardner. (original text: 1744-46).

Locke, John. 1996. *Some Thoughts Concerning Education*. Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing. (original text: 1693).

Manley, Mary Delarivière. 1715. *The Adventures of Rivella; or the History of the Writer of Atalantis.* London: np. (original text: 1714).

Pennington, Sarah. 1761. *An Unfortunate Mother's Advice to Her Absent Daughters* London: S. Chandler.

Pope, Alexander. 1822. *The Poems of Alexander Pope* vol II. Chiswick: C. Whittingham. (original text: 1743).

Rousseau, Jean Jacques. 1979. *Emile: or, on Educatio*n. Bloom, Allan (trans.). New York: Basic Books. (original text: 1762).

Rowe, Elizabeth Singer. 1796. *The Works of Mrs Elizabeth Rowe in Four Volumes*. London: John & Arthur Arch. (original text: 1729-32).

Savile, George, Marquis of Halifax. 1756. *The Lady's New Year's Gift: or, Advice to a Daughter*. London: R. and J. Dodsley.

Sprint, John. 1699. *The bride-womans counseller being a sermon preach'd at a wedding, May the 11th, 1699, at Sherbourn, in Dorsetshire*. London: Printed by H. Hills.

Wakefield, Priscilla. 1798. *Reflections on the Present Condition of the Female Sex, With Suggestions for its Improvement.*

London: J. Johnson.

Wilkes, Wetenhall. 1746. *A Letter of Genteel and Moral Advice to a Young Lady*. London: C. Hitch.

Wollstonecraft, Mary. 1787. *Thoughts on the Education of Daughters: with Reflections on Female Conduct, in the More Important Duties of Life*. London: J. Johnson.

_____. 2009. *Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, New York: W. W. Norton & Company. (original text: 1792).

Secondary Sources

Armstrong, Nancy. 1987. *Desire and Domestic Fiction: A Political History of the Novel*. Oxford: Oxford UP.

Armstrong, Nancy and Tennenhouse, Leonard (eds.). 1987. "The Rise of the Domestic Woman". *The Ideology of Conduct: Essays on Literature and the History of Sexuality*. London and New York: Methuen.

Austin, Mary Lynette. 2009. *A Critical Edition of Lady Sarah Pennington's "An Unfortunate Mother's Advice to her Absent Daughters, in a Letter to Miss Pennington*. Arizona State University.

Ballaster, Ros. 1992. *Seductive Forms: Women's Amatory Fiction from 1684 to 1740*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Boucé, Paul-Gabriel (ed.). 1982. *Sexuality in Eighteenth Century Britain*. Manchester: Manchester University Press.

Firmager, Gabrielle M. 1993. "Introduction". *The Female Spectator*. London: Bristol Classical Press.

Hill, Bridget. 1986. *The First English Feminist: 'Reflections on Marriage' and other writings by Mary Astell*. Aldershot: Gower/Maurice Temple Smith.

Hole, Robert. 1996. *Selected Writings of Hannah More*. London: William Pickering.

Hunt, Peter. 1994. *An Introduction to Children's Literature*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Jones, Vivien (ed.). 1990. *Women in the Eighteenth Century: Constructions of Femininity*. New York: Routledge.

Needham, Gwendolyn. 1948-9. "Mary de la Riviere Manley, Tory Defender". *Huntington Library Quarterly* 12: 255-89.

O'Malley, Ida Beatrice. 1933. *Women in Subjection: A Study of the Lives of Englishwomen Before 1832*. London: Duckworth.

Poovey, Mary. 1984. *The Proper Lady and the Woman Writer: Ideology as Style in the Works of Mary Wollstonecraft, Mary Whelley, and Jane Austen.* Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Spencer, Jane. 1986. *The Rise of the Woman Novelist*. Oxford: Blackwell.

Steel, L. Kathryn. 2012. "Hester Mulso Chapone and the Problem of the Individual Reader". *The Eighteenth Century* 53: 473-91.

Tague, Ingrid H. 2001. "Love, Honor, and Obedience: Fashionable Women and the Discourse of Marriage in the Early Eighteenth Century". *Journal of British Studies*. 40.1: 76-106.

Thompson, M. Lynda. 2000. *The 'Scandalous Memoirists': Constantia Phillips, Laetitia Pilkington and the Shame of 'Publick Fame'*. Manchester: Manchester University Press.

Todd, Janet. 1986. *Sensibility: An Introduction*. London and New York: Methuen.

_____. 1989. *The Sign of Angellica: Women, Writing and Fiction 1660-1800*. London: Virago Press.

Tomaselli, Sylvana. 1985. "The Enlightenment Debate on Women". *History Workshop Journal* 19: 101-24.

Williamson, L. Marilyn. 1990. "Orinda and her Daughters". *Raising their Voices: British Women Writers 1650-1750*. Detroit: Wayne State University Press.

Wright, Lynn Marie. 2006. *Fair Philosopher: Eliza Haywood and the Female Spectator*. Lewinsburg: Bucknell University Press.