CHANGE OF CONDITION: WOMEN’S RHETORICAL STRATEGIES ON MARRIAGE, 1710-1756

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This dissertation examines ways in which women constructed and criticized matrimony both before and after their own marriages. Social historians have argued for the rise of companionacy in the eighteenth century without paying attention to women's accounts of the fears and uncertainties surrounding the prospect of marriage. I argue that having more latitude to choose a husband did not diminish the enormous impact that the choice would have on the rest of a woman's life; if anything, choice might increase that impact. Lady Mary Wortley Montagu, Hester Mulso Chapone, Mary Delany, and Eliza Haywood recorded their anxieties about and their criticisms of marriage in public and private writings from the early years of the century into the 1750s. They often elide their own complex backgrounds in favor of generalized policy statements on what constitutes a good marriage. These women promote an ideal of marriage based on respect and similarity of character, suggesting that friendship is more honest, and durable than romantic love. This definition of ideal marriage enables these women to argue for more egalitarian marital relationships without overtly calling for a change in the wife's traditional role. The advancement of this ideal of companionancy gave women a means of promoting gender equality in marriage at a time when they considered marriage risky but socially and economically necessary.
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In eighteenth-century England, marriage among the upper classes was becoming a matter of emotion as well as duty and socioeconomic necessity. However, to judge the rise of companionate marriage as a single sociological event is to ignore the period's anxiety about marital choice and marital roles. In the late 1970s, Alan MacFarlane, Randolph Trumbach, and Lawrence Stone variously depicted this rise of what we now call “companionate marriage” as an easy transition. Stone, for example, argued that “between 1660 and 1800…there was inevitably a marked shift of emphasis on motives away from family interest and towards well-tried personal affection.”\(^1\) Trumbach observed that from 1720, “arranged marriages so gave way to romantic marriages that by 1780 it could be estimated that three marriages in four were made for love.”\(^2\) These historians have popularized the image of a neat transition to uniform companionacy by basing their conclusions principally on demographics and church records rather than literary or personal accounts. Some historians, such as John Gillis, have refuted this view. Using the same types of sociohistoric evidence, Gillis concludes that “the conjugal [companionate marriage] has always been more an elusive dream than an attainable reality.”\(^3\) But despite such differences of opinion, the idea of an

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inevitable rise of companionacy in the eighteenth century has gained considerable acceptance.

In creating this version of events, few have paid attention to women’s accounts of the fears and uncertainties surrounding the prospect of marriage. For upper-class women who did not earn a living, marriage was virtually compulsory; as Anne Donnellan wrote to Elizabeth Montagu in 1742, marriage was “the settlement in the world we should aim at, and the only way we females have of making ourselves of use to Society and raising ourselves in this world.” As Donnellan’s remark suggests, marriage was the most important decision of a woman’s life, the means of fulfilling an accepted social role and ensuring financial security. However, social constraints on women’s behavior impeded choice and companionacy. When Lawrence Stone cites Mary Astell’s description, written in 1694, of women’s ability to choose a marriage partner, he intends to demonstrate the period’s growing emphasis on choice in marriage. But Astell’s observation foregrounds the social strictures that impeded that choice: “Modesty requiring that a Woman should not love before Marriage, but only make choice of one whom she can love hereafter: She who has none but innocent affections, being easily able to fix them where Duty requires.”

Stone maintains that in arguing for choice, Astell is arguing for “a position already conceded, even to girls, by more advanced parents for at least half a century.” But her comment hints at the persistence of pressures on upper-class women facing marriage, and suggests that marital choice and the rise of companionancy were not unalloyed

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6 Stone, The Family, Sex, and Marriage, 278.
advantages for women. As Susan Staves notes, "the rhetoric of free choice was apt to give [a woman] an added sense of personal responsibility for the consequences [of marriage], and to make her more psychologically dependent on her relationship with her husband."\(^7\) Having more latitude to choose a husband did not diminish the enormous impact that the choice would have on the rest of a woman's life; if anything, choice might increase that impact.

However, because unmarried women were subject to numerous social restrictions, they were left in the position of choosing a husband, so to speak, blindly. Trumbach observes that "throughout the century aristocratic women moved freely in society before their marriage."\(^8\) Young women’s freedom of movement was more than balanced by limitations on their speech and behavior, as Trumbach acknowledges later with regard to Lady Harriet Spencer, whom he describes as "trained to hide anything that might seem like an immodest interest in sexuality."\(^9\) The ideal young woman was modest, unaffected, and timid, neither eager to marry nor opposed to "changing her condition" under the proper circumstances. The necessity of marrying made a tacit endorsement of marriage a necessity for young women as well. Overly strident objections to a particular marriage or to the prospect of marriage in general could label a young woman unmarriageable, casting doubt on her carefully guarded virtue and her suitability as a wife. I will argue that in view of these additional pressures, marital choice was less a blessing than an additional source of anxiety.

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Clearly, society limited women’s power to make the marriages they wanted, to avoid those they did not want, and to criticize the marriage system. This dissertation examines ways in which women were able to marry according to their wishes and ways in which they constructed and criticized matrimony both before and after their own marriages. The women I study here—Lady Mary Wortley Montagu, Hester Mulso Chapone, Mary Delany, and Eliza Haywood—recorded their anxieties about and their criticisms of marriage in public and private writings from the early years of the century well into the 1750s. The persistence of their concerns over five decades further suggests that the rise of companionacy was not as smooth as scholars of marriage have previously thought.

These women’s discussions of marriage make rhetoric a substitute for action. In a period in which a partial criticism of the marriage system could easily be interpreted as a rejection of the whole, these women use their writing to protect their reputations while engaging in limited critiques of the aspects of marriage that they found most objectionable. They often elide or ignore their own complicated backgrounds in favor of generalized policy statements on what constitutes a good and suitable marriage. They promote an ideal of marriage based on respect, and similarity of character, suggesting that friendship is more reasonable, honest, and durable than romantic love. This definition of ideal marriage enables these women to argue, in effect, for more egalitarian marital relationships, without overtly calling for a change in the wife’s traditional role. At the same time, it allows them to present themselves as intelligent and rational potential partners, deserving of a companionate relationship. The advancement of this ideal of companionacy gave women a means of promoting gender equality in marriage at a time
when they considered marriage “serious and hazardous” but socially and economically necessary.  

In Chapter One, “Lady Mary Wortley Montagu and the Power of Self-Fashioning,” I examine Montagu’s correspondence and periodical writing. Montagu escaped an arranged marriage to a wealthy Irish peer when she eloped with Edward Wortley Montagu following a tumultuous secret courtship conducted largely through correspondence. Montagu’s letters to Wortley show that she is able to turn the social restrictions on feminine behavior to her advantage and in doing so to present herself as his ideal woman: intelligent and rational but demure and retiring. In addressing her other correspondents, Montagu performs similar acts of self-fashioning in order to criticize matrimony without making reference to her own marriage. She positions herself as a moral arbiter rather than as an exemplar and from that position expresses increasing skepticism about the possibility for women of finding happiness in marriage. Likewise, in her essays in the *Spectator* (1714) and *The Nonsense of Common-Sense* (1737–38), Montagu uses the shield of anonymity to disparage men’s failings in marriage and to argue for the value of companionacy.

Chapter Two, “Marital Choice and Marital Roles in the Writings of Hester Chapone,” examines Chapone’s *Letters on Filial Obedience* (1750–51) and *A Matrimonial Creed* (1751). In the *Letters*, Chapone flatters their recipient, Samuel Richardson, with protestations of inferiority and humility, using her blandishments as a frame in which to place her arguments for daughters’ right to refuse an unwanted

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marriage. Chapone, a young single woman, writes in this obsequious tone to demonstrate that she is appropriately tractable. Although she suggests she is a “saucy girl” whose ideas need correction from her “adopted papa,” she ultimately moderates only the tone of her assertions, not their content. I will argue that her rhetorical positioning as an eager young student at the knee of a wise mentor is little more than a pose in view of her reasoned and well-supported arguments. A Matrimonial Creed, written after her correspondence with Richardson, demonstrates an apparent need further to soften her position. Rather than retreat from her stance in the Letters, Chapone shifts her focus from marital choice to marital roles, a topic on which she is able to endorse a more traditional position. She suggests in the introduction to the Creed that she has changed her mind about certain ideas thanks to “the gradual effects [of] the arguments I have since heard,” a suggestion that makes her appear compliant and willing to listen; but in fact the Creed avoids the issue of choice by discussing a different aspect of marriage.

Richardson hinted that his correspondence with Chapone influenced the passage of the Hardwicke Marriage Act in 1753. He claimed that their letters had “obtained the notice of those who brought in and carried through a bill, which should…establish the parental authority, so violently attacked by a young lady, who is admired by all that know her.” Richardson’s claim, which Tom Keymer calls “far-fetched” but “not impossible,” and the passage of the Hardwicke Act itself suggest that Chapone was far

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from isolated in her concern about marital choice and parental consent.\textsuperscript{14} The Hardwicke Act became law after nearly a century of attempts to pass such a bill, a fact that demonstrates the extent and the durability of contemporary concerns about marriage and its perceived potential for creating class fluidity.\textsuperscript{15} The Act limited the definition of legal marriage in England. Until it was passed, a simple verbal contract was “the essence of a valid marriage” and had to be recognized in court as such.\textsuperscript{16} The Act required public marriage ceremonies, publication of banns or purchase of a license, consent from a parent or guardian in case of marriage between minors (those under 21), and registration of every marriage by the signatures of the couple, the minister, and two witnesses. As David Lemmings points out, “the first objective of the marriage bill…was to prevent marriages among the children of the social elite which were not sanctioned by their parents and other relations.”\textsuperscript{17} The Hardwicke Act served as a strong “check” on marital choice and as a demonstration of the upper class’s anxieties about the consequences of choice. Companionacy and choice in marriage had become political issues; Chapone personalizes the matter of marital choice in the \textit{Letters on Filial Obedience} by presenting herself as a dutiful young woman wishing to make sure she is both reasonable and virtuous.

The third chapter, “‘Perfect Friendship’: Mary Delany’s Rational Companionacy,” focuses on Delany’s autobiography and correspondence, tracing the evolution of her opinions about marriage from her first forced marriage at age seventeen through her nineteen-year widowhood and eventual second marriage, by choice, to Patrick Delany.

\textsuperscript{14} Keymer, \textit{Richardson’s Clarissa}, 103.
\textsuperscript{15} Trumbach, \textit{The Rise of the Egalitarian Family}, 102.
\textsuperscript{17} Lemmings, “Marriage and the Law,” 347.
Like Montagu, Delany is skeptical about the value of marriage for young women, an assessment colored by her own early experience as a wife. She condemns compulsory marriage, arguing that companionacy can never succeed when marriage is an economic necessity. Still, she promotes companionacy based on similarity of character and on friendship, a relationship she considered more honest than love and certainly more moral than marrying for money.

Delany draws on the Bible and writings by clergymen to support her assertions about companionacy. In the seventeenth century, the clergy had begun to stress the need for companionship in marriage according to the Biblical description of a wife as “help meet,” an emphasis evident in the marriage ceremony outlined in the 1662 Book of Common Prayer. Secular sources similarly praise “perfect friendship” and “respect” between husbands and wives. Romantic love, physical attraction, or financial worth were regarded as unsuitable bases for a lifelong commitment. As Daniel Defoe suggests in *Conjugal Lewdness* (1727), “we have such few happy and successful Matches…how much Marriage, how little Friendship. O Friendship! thou exalted Felicity of Life, thou glorious Incorporation of Souls, thou heavenly Image, thou polisher and finisher of the brightest Part of Mankind.” Delany advances similar opinions in her writing, and argues that friendship, as a more rational and reliable relationship than love, is the best basis for marriage. She suggests that the authorities that she cites share her view, so that the key to happiness in marriage lies in a closer attention to moral standards. Thus, Delany can argue for a change in marital roles without suggesting that women should behave unconventionally.

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In the final chapter, “Eliza Haywood: The Limits of Feminine Power,” I analyze Haywood’s use of authorial personas and amatory elements to incorporate social critiques into her didactic works. In *The Female Spectator* (1744–46), *The Wife* (1756), *The Husband* (1756), and *The Young Lady* (1756), Haywood invites the reader’s interest with interpolated letters and tales, which function both as vicarious experiences and as moral lessons. Within this group of works she uses a series of authorial personas—a reformed coquette, an accomplished young single woman, a virtuous wife, and a trustworthy widow—to lend to the advice the authoritative weight of a “conversational circle.” Both Haywood’s sensual stories and her advice suggest that women should adhere to society’s expectations of their behavior but that such adherence will not ensure their happiness. Women can, however, find happiness in companionate marriages. To advance companionacy, Haywood’s “circle of advisors” suggests, women should be educated, and those who do have social power—parents and husbands—must consider women’s interests equally as important as their own. These changes would lessen the innate risks of marriage for women.

All these women communicate a sense that marriage, though socially and economically necessary, is hazardous. Marriage can be hazardous for the researcher as well: its enduring importance makes the study of it both attractive and dangerous. The temptation to draw sweeping conclusions from limited evidence is enormous. Amanda Vickery points out in the introduction to her *The Gentleman’s Daughter* that “this book does not contain a history of Everywoman.” Neither is that what I intend here. The women I have chosen to study were, in various ways, in the public eye.

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They were, or in Eliza Haywood’s case pretended to be, “genteel.” They wrote prodigiously and, perhaps with the exception of Mary Delany, expected their writings to have some public exposure. They experienced an impressive variety of experiences relating to marriage, experiences which in themselves serve to illustrate the seriousness of women’s concerns about matrimony. What follows is an examination of how these highly literate and rhetorically skilled women made room for their criticisms of marriage and made, or imaginatively created, the marriages they wanted.
CHAPTER 2
LADY MARY WORTLEY MONTAGU AND THE POWER OF SELF-FASHIONING

The writings of Lady Mary Wortley Montagu (1689–1762) demonstrate the kind of rhetorical double-dealing in which a woman could engage on the subject of marriage. We know little of Montagu’s opinions about her own role as an aristocratic woman facing marriage. However, Montagu’s observations on marriage—her own and others’—enable us to see her increasing skepticism toward marriage as an institution with competing demands of emotional fulfillment and financial security. To present her ideas persuasively to the readers of her letters and periodical essays, Montagu fashions a series of self-images in her writing: the intellectual maiden willing to accept a country retirement with her future husband, the witty young gossip flexing her rhetorical power for her friends, the periodical writer whose anonymity sharpens her quill, the wise and protective grandmother. In each of these roles she positions herself as a moral and intellectual arbiter rather than an exemplar, eliding her own unconventional marriage in favor of increasingly strident generalizations about the dangers of the institution. At each stage of her life, she used the contradictions between ideal female roles and her own self-fashioning to further her ends—first, avoiding an unwanted marriage, then criticizing others’ mercenary matches, and finally condemning marriage in general.

Many of Montagu’s opinions on marriage appear in her correspondence with friends and family. Letters, although ostensibly private, were recognized as having some public readership, thereby maintaining “an indeterminate status between public
and private.”¹ Letter writers could leverage this indeterminate status to advance their opinions while maintaining their social roles. Montagu would have expected her letters to be shared with close friends or family members of their recipients; she also hinted that she wished her letters would eventually be more widely read. After reading Madame de Sévigné’s letters in 1726, Montagu wrote to her sister, “Very pretty they are, but I assert without the least vanity that mine will be full as entertaining 40 years hence. I advise you therefore to put none of ’em to the use of Wast paper.”² Her comment suggests she knew she was writing for posterity and even participating in the rise of a new literary genre: Cynthia Lowenthal notes that “these remarks point not only to Lady Mary’s understanding that a tradition of female epistolary excellence was there to be cultivated but, more emphatically, to her intention to play a central role in it.”³ But for a female aristocrat, the sense of a larger audience could be threatening as well as appealing. As Maynard Mack points out, “many eighteenth-century writers composed their letters…with posterity standing behind their chairs.” However, “to offer one’s actual correspondence to the public…was by early eighteenth-century standards unthinkable.”⁴ By writing anonymously in The Nonsense of Common-Sense and in the Spectator, and by placing many of her observations about marriage in her personal letters, Montagu found ways to bring those observations to the public realm while shielding herself from publicity.

³ Lowenthal, Lady Mary Wortley Montagu and the Eighteenth-Century Familiar Letter, 2.
Born in 1689 to Lady Mary Fielding and Sir Evelyn Pierrepont (Marquis of Dorchester, later Duke of Kingston), Lady Mary Pierrepont eloped in 1712 with Edward Wortley Montagu after a turbulent two-year secret courtship. Having no possibility of earning a living, Montagu knew that a woman had to consider her suitor's and her own income—that is, money given or promised by their families—as the financial boundaries within which she would live the rest of her life. At the same time, she feared the prospect of an affectionless marriage to a tyrant. Concern over these competing pressures, not only in her own life but also in the lives of her friends and family, appears in her letters throughout her life.

Montagu broke nearly every social rule and convention when she pursued Wortley. Therefore, her success in promulgating her opinions about marriage stems from a kind of creative hypocrisy: she never endorses her own choice and in fact often urges others to make more conventional marriage choices. Where marriage is concerned, be it her own, her children’s and grandchildren’s, or the institution in general, she presents herself as exceptional in honesty, morality, and reason. Montagu does not urge others to imitate her but to heed her advice and opinions and to believe in her as a moral authority. She finesses the contradictions between her own choices and the choices she counsels for others by ignoring those contradictions. From this position she is able to establish herself as a chaste and virtuous woman: the risks she took to elope with Wortley never went beyond the epistolary. With her own propriety intact, she presents herself as a moral critic and arbiter.

In 1710, when her direct correspondence with Wortley began, Montagu was twenty-one years old and well aware of the restrictions and expectations placed on
women in her position of wealth and social prominence. Before Montagu was born, four generations of male Pierreponts had "made marriages which gobbled up the distinguished surnames borne by their brides, incorporating into their heritage the genes, possessions, and honours of those families" to create a Pierrepont family "rich in privilege." At the age of eight, Montagu famously was presented to the Kit-Kat Club after her father proposed her as a toast, which the members would not accept until they had seen her. As she acknowledged in a letter, she "came early into the hurry of the world" and quickly learned what was expected of her. In 1712 she summed up those expectations in her poem "The Resolve":

Let this great maxim be my virtue's guide:
In part she is to blame, who has been tried,
He comes too near, that comes to be denied.

Montagu uses the word "virtue," but she could accurately have substituted "reputation." The poem suggests what was common knowledge in the period: a woman who would be thought virtuous, and therefore marriageable, had to be above impropriety and even the suspicion that she was capable of impropriety.

In corresponding with Wortley, Montagu risked allowing him to "come too near" and damaging her reputation merely by participating in the exchange of letters, an action that Isobel Grundy identifies as "strictly forbidden (though not uncommon)." Montagu uses the sense of risky intimacy created by those personal letters to present herself as an ideal companion and as a valuable prize for whom Wortley should have

6 Montagu to Wortley, 9 April 1711, 1:186.
8 Grundy, *Lady Mary*, 34.
been willing to sacrifice. She originally had corresponded with Wortley’s sister Anne, but Anne Wortley soon became merely an intermediary who copied her brother’s letters and sent them so that they appeared to come from her. Wortley and Montagu developed a close relationship on this basis: from the beginning of their direct correspondence, they discussed marriage, but a direct correspondence between a man and woman who were not yet formally engaged was a risk. Montagu, however, used that risk to her rhetorical advantage by acknowledging it, then referring to a higher moral standard. After Anne Wortley’s death in 1710, Montagu wrote directly to Wortley for the first time, admitting,

I know it is not Acting in Form but I do not look upon you as I do upon the rest of the world, and by what I do for you, you are not to judge my manner of acting with others. You are Brother to a Woman I tenderly lov’d. My protestations of freindship are not like other people’s. I never speak but what I mean, and when I say I love, it is for ever. I had that real concern for Mrs. Wortley I look with some regard on every one that is related to her. This and my long Acquaintance with you may in some measure excuse what I am now doing.\(^9\)

Lowenthal suggests that Montagu’s self-justification in this letter is a “strategy…doomed to failure” because Montagu calls attention to the sexual significance of their correspondence even as she tries to diffuse that significance.\(^{10}\) While Montagu does call attention to her own violation of conventions, her strategy is not a failure. She admits to behaving unconventionally but justifies the move by a persuasive bit of special

\(^9\) Montagu to Wortley, 28 March 1710, 1:24.
pleading. She shows that she knows the rules and the importance of reputation, but she flatters Wortley by suggesting that he is unique in her eyes and she would not treat anyone else as she treats him. Further, she sets herself apart as morally superior, presenting herself as unlike everyone else, being more sincere in her feelings and more honest in her expression of them. In addition, she hints that she is in love with Wortley by suggesting that her feelings for his sister have transferred to him along with her correspondence.

By the end of the letter, though, she seems to have become afraid. She suggests that she doubts his feelings as well as her own actions: “You distrust me. I can neither be easy nor lov’d where I am distrusted, nor do I believe your passion for me is what you pretend it; at least I’m sure, was I in love I could not talk as you do.”

She concludes by entrusting him to burn her letter and vowing, “Tis the first I ever writ to one of your sex and shall be the last. You must never expect another. I resolve against all correspondance of this kind. My resolutions are seldom made and never broken.”

Giving way to her anxiety—or appearing to do so to prompt reassurances from Wortley—she forswears their clandestine correspondence, falling back on conventional etiquette and girlish modesty as reasons for doing so.

This letter to Wortley establishes a pattern for the letters preceding Montagu and Wortley’s elopement. When she acknowledges her feelings for him, Montagu posits her honesty and forthrightness as virtues, suggesting that she considers honesty more important than the conventions of etiquette. When she becomes concerned that she has said too much, she reverts to those conventions as reasons to withdraw and insists

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11 Montagu to Wortley, 28 March 1710, 1:25.
12 Montagu to Wortley, 28 March 1710, 1:25.
on putting an end to their relationship. We cannot, of course, know whether Montagu was truly in love with Wortley. Grundy mentions that the “rules of good breeding forbade [Montagu] to declare her love without receiving a prior declaration” but emphasizes Montagu’s feeling that “the persona of a girl in love, as figured in contemporary fiction, drama, and poetry, was unacceptable to her as a self-image.” Montagu hoped instead “to be known for sense and reason, balance and good judgment.”

We can never prove her concern for her “self-image,” but her correspondence with Wortley repeatedly demonstrates her interest in showing good breeding and in keeping her sometimes-recalcitrant suitor interested. Montagu uses her concerns about reputation as a means of control to pull Wortley closer or push him away.

In addition, when she writes “I can esteem, I can be a freind, but I don’t know whether I can love,” she presents herself as a believer in companionacy. When she describes for Wortley her ideal “Compannion,” she uses the word “love” but describes a relationship of companionacy rather than romance:

“…[my companion] should be one…that I very much lovd, and that very much lovd me, one that thought that the truest wisdome which most conduced to our happynesse, and that it was not below a man of sense to take satisfaction in the conversation of a reasonable woman.”

Here, she accomplishes three goals at once: she presents herself as an honest helpmate, not a passionate lover; she saves herself from the possible humiliation of

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13 Grundy, Lady Mary, 41.
14 Montagu to Wortley, 25 April 1710, 1:30.
15 Montagu to Wortley, ?c. 26 October 1710, 1:61.
making an unreciprocated romantic declaration; and she pays tribute to the companionate ideal as well as to her own preference for an intellectual life.

Though in many ways constrained by the social expectations placed on a woman in her position, Montagu also turns those expectations to her advantage by using them as a counter-example to point up her own superiority of character. She describes herself as more genuine and admirable than other women because she rejects marital fortune-hunting and hypocritical adherence to social codes. In attacking these social codes, she repeatedly refers to “the World” as the source of a type of conduct she cannot condone or practice because it promotes dishonesty and shallow materialism. She uses this strategy to present herself as uninterested in wealth. “There is something of an unavoidable embarras in makeing what is called a great figure in the world,” she wrote to Wortley in 1710; “I hate the noise and hurry inseparable from great Estates and Titles, and look upon both as blessings that ought only to be given to Fools.”16 Of course, as the daughter of a wealthy and prominent family, Montagu had already made a great figure in the world. While Wortley might wonder if she could give up the luxuries to which she was accustomed, at least she could be said to know what she was giving up.

As Mona Scheuermann notes, Montagu “shows a keen awareness not just of the issues involved but of the sacrifices she as well as Wortley is called on to make.”17 Rhetorically, Montagu uses this awareness to demonstrate further her own selflessness and to deflate the aggrieved and anxious pose that Wortley assumed as the likely financial loser in their eventual marriage. Once it became clear that her father would

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16 Montagu to Wortley, 28 March 1710, 1:24.
not consent to the marriage and draw up formal settlements with Wortley, Montagu had more reason to convince Wortley she did not care to be wealthy. This concern sharpened still further when her father began arranging for her marriage to Clotworthy Skeffington, a wealthy Irish peer. Montagu did not hesitate to detail to Wortley what she was sacrificing by choosing him over Skeffington: a life in London, £300 per year pin money, “a considerable jointure,” and “every pleasure of life, those of love excepted.” “Consider a little whither there are many other Women that would think as I do,” she invites him.  

She had to navigate cautiously between financial reality and social constraint: she could care about money, but not too much. Robert Halsband points out that “in the lovers’ contest as to who gave up more by elopement, she held the trump card: that she threw herself entirely on his generosity without the safeguards of a contracted marriage.” This additional prospect of sacrifice gave her another way to prove her trustworthiness and selflessness to her suspicious suitor. As one who brought nothing to her marriage but “a Nightgown and petticoat,” Montagu had to appear less financially interested than most, a requirement she turns to her advantage by styling her potential poverty as a welcome sacrifice for love and integrity.

Additionally, Montagu suggests that she would be a hypocrite to follow the moral standards of “the World” in determining whether to elope with Wortley, but instead is willing to rely on her own conscience. In August 1712, just weeks before their elopement, she insists to Wortley that they must go away as soon as they are married: “I cannot think of living in the midst of my Relations and Acquaintance after so unjustifiable a step—unjustifiable to the World.—But I think I can justify my selfe to my

18 Montagu to Wortley, 12 August 1712, 1:153, and 6 August 1712, 1:141.
20 Montagu to Wortley, 16 August 1712, 1:161.
selfe."\(^{21}\) With this statement she performs that self-justification. She allows herself to disregard the expectations of her society and to pursue her desires by choosing her own conscience as a higher authority and removing herself from those who would most disapprove of her choice.

However, Montagu makes this choice only when it suits her rhetorical purposes. Just as frequently she endorses conventional morality, usually when she is questioning Wortley’s feelings or trying to retreat from his advances. In August 1710, Wortley writes that he had been trying to reach a marriage settlement with Montagu’s father, but the negotiations had broken down when Wortley refused to entail his estate on his (then hypothetical) first-born son.\(^{22}\) Montagu’s reply begins with an admission of her strong feelings for him, but then retreats:

I think I have said a thing so favourable I ought to be ashamed of it…I think I have said enough, and as much as ought to be expected…I have no hand in the making of Settlements. My present Duty is to obey my Father. I shall so far obey blindly as not to accept where he refuses, tho’ perhaps I might refuse where he would accept. If you think tolerably of me, you think I would not marry where I hated. As for the rest, my Father may do some things disagreeable to my Inclinations, but passive Obedience is a doctrine should always be received among wives and daughters.\(^{23}\)

With these socially safe statements about filial duty and unquestioning obedience, Montagu allows herself some protection from the censure that might follow should her correspondence with Wortley be discovered. She acknowledges that she has been

\(^{21}\) Montagu to Wortley, 16 August 1712, 1:161.
\(^{22}\) Halsband, The Life, 13.
\(^{23}\) Montagu to Wortley, 20 August 1710, 1:53-54.
forward in admitting her feelings and that she should perhaps be “asham’d” of having done so. The quick shift to a reaffirmation of “Duty” serves as a reminder to Wortley, or to anyone else who might read the letter, that whatever her feelings, her actions will remain proper and virtuous.

Indeed, as Grundy notes, Montagu’s warmest affirmations of her affection often seemed to enflame Wortley’s suspicions rather than his passions: “Wortley liked a woman to be sensible but decently subordinate, bright but modest. She must not be over-fond of pleasure, nor must she call attention to herself.” This assessment of Wortley’s preferences suggests he wanted a conventionally virtuous wife. By admitting that she is in love with him, then calling attention to the impropriety of her admission, Montagu allows him to hold two contradictory, but pleasing, ideas about her: she loves him, but she knows better than to admit it.

In her letters to Wortley, Montagu had to “construct a less worldly, more bashful self,” a strategy that would also help her appear financially disinterested, since a woman “over-fond of pleasure” presumably could not be content to live modestly. The changes in her rhetorical self-fashioning over the course of their courtship appear most clearly when she describes her wishes for her future life. In the letter from August 1710, she makes her desire explicit: “If you realy intend to travel, as it is the thing upon Earth I should most wish, I should prefer that manner of living to any other.” In October 1710 she reiterates, “Was I to follow entirely my own Inclinations it would be to travel, my first and cheifest wish.” But in February 1711 she modulates that desire, apparently following a face-to-face meeting in which Wortley asked her in person whether she

24 Grundy, Lady Mary, 40-41.
25 Montagu to Wortley, 20 August 1710, 1:53.
26 Montagu to Wortley, ?c. 26 October 1710, 1:61.
would be willing to settle in the country: “I have nothing to say but that…if you have the disposal of me, and think it convenient either for your Pleasure or Affairs to passe your Life in Yorkshire, I shall not be displeasd with it.”

In the letters that follow, she repeatedly affirms this sentiment, writing to Wortley “I could be content to passe my life in the Country” and, a few weeks later, “If I marry, I propose to my selfe a Retirement.”

On this subject she tailors her responses to match the current intellectual fashion for retired life, what Amanda Vickery calls “a cult of ostentatious solitude.” When she agrees to a country life Montagu is also saying what Wortley wants to hear, showing her loyalty to him at a time when she had other suitors by proving her willingness to leave “the World” behind.

Because Montagu presents herself as a virtuous woman making a rare exception, she repeatedly reminds Wortley of the risk that she is taking by continuing to correspond and meet with him. “I own tis Impudence to think of seeing you,” she writes in February 1711. “After so much Indiscretion I cannot blame you if you think me capable of every thing.” At this stage, more than a year before their elopement, she is still trying to secure her reputation with her future husband. Until they are married, she is gambling with that reputation on two fronts. A woman “capable of every thing” is not a good and tractable wife. She fears that Wortley might question her virtue based on her very willingness to continue their relationship. Equally, if their correspondence were discovered before they married, her reputation would be ruined and her father would

27 Montagu to Wortley, 22 February 1711, 1:82.
28 Montagu to Wortley, 7 March 1711, 1:88 and 24 March 1711, 1:95.
30 Montagu to Wortley, 27 February 1711, 1:86.
disinherit her. In March 1711 she wrote to Wortley, "Tis with the utmost hazard I send this to you. Should my Father find it out, he is of a humour never to forgive it. Your Letter might have falln into his Hands and then I am ruind."\(^\text{31}\) However, her father did not accuse her of "keeping a correspondence" until days before her elopement. Her actions were suspect; she was closely watched, but her reputation remained intact, at least until the day she actually ran away with Wortley.\(^\text{32}\)

Montagu’s correspondence shows what was at stake for a woman contemplating marriage, especially a marriage against her parents’ wishes. Her two-steps-forward, one-step-back rhetoric intensifies over time as she seriously contemplates eloping with Wortley. One source of her heightened anxiety lay in the fact that in the summer of 1712 her father had concluded marriage settlements for her with Skeffington, and she was about to go into the country to be married. Just days before her departure (also days before Wortley purchased their marriage license), she wrote to Wortley and summarized her concerns:

Are you sure you will love me for ever? Shall we never repent? I fear, and I hope. I foresee all that will happen on this Occasion. I shall incense my Familly to the highest degree. The gennerallity of the World will blame my conduct, and the Relations and freinds of ——— will invent a thousand storys of me, yet—tis possible you may recompence every thing to me.

She concludes the letter, "My resolution is taken—Love me and use me well."\(^\text{33}\) Her desire for happiness and companionship in marriage prevents her from acquiescing in the match that her father arranged, while her circumstances as an upper-class young

\(^{31}\) Montagu to Wortley, 2 April 1711, 1:98.
\(^{32}\) Montagu to Wortley, 18 August 1712, 1:165.
\(^{33}\) Montagu to Wortley, 15 August 1712, 1:159.
woman of virtue prevent her from easily making a match without parental approval. Her rhetorical skill enables her to weigh every contingency, keeping marriage to Wortley alive as a possibility while leaving some room to save her reputation should that possibility fail.

Of course, Wortley was not Montagu’s only correspondent in the years before her marriage. Concurrently with her courtship with Wortley, she was corresponding regularly with Philippa Mundy, a close friend, contemporary, and social equal. Not surprisingly, marriage was central to these young women’s concerns, so much so that they invented a shorthand way of describing their marriage prospects: “Paradise meant being married to a man one loved, Hell to a man one detested, and Limbo or Purgatory to a man one merely tolerated.”

In September 1711 Montagu gives her friend, in love with one man but under pressure to accept another, some very conventional marriage advice:

[Tho’] nobody can have more exalted Notions of Paradise than my selfe, yet if Hell is very tempting, I cannot advise you to resist it, since Virtue, in this wicked World, is seldom any thing but its own reward. I guesse Mr. Chester to be the Man; in point of prudence (contrary to point of Pleasure) you ought Not refuse him. I give you better Counsell than I can take my selfe, for I have that Aversion to Hell, I shall resist it all my Life, tho’ without Hope of Paradise, and I am very well convince’d I shall never go to Hell, except ’tis to lead Apes there.

34 Note to Montagu to Philippa Mundy, c. 4 May 1711, 1:107.
35 Montagu to Philippa Mundy, 25 September 1711, 1:109.
She admits that she is giving advice that she could not follow herself when she tells Mundy to marry for “prudence” rather than “Pleasure.” Indeed, she presents herself as willing to avoid “Hell” at any cost, including that of dying unmarried and “leading apes in Hell” as an old maid. In February 1712, as her father negotiated for her marriage to Skeffington, she versified her view of the prospect before her:

I know the fate of those by Interest wed,
Doom’d to the Curse of a vexatious Bed,
Days without Peace, and Nights without Desire,
To mourn, and throw away my Youth for hire.
Of Noble Maids, how wretched is the Fate!
Ruin’d with Jointures, curs’d by an Estate,
Destin’d to Greifs, and born to be undone,
I see the Errors which I cannot shun.
Pity my fate, disclos’d to you alone,
And weep those Sorrows which may be your own.

The moderate and considered tone of the earlier letter has vanished in favor of emotional hand-wringing on her friend’s behalf and her own, albeit wrapped in stylized and conventional poetic language. The formal literary diction allows Montagu to affect a distance from her own impending unwanted marriage and to create a melodramatic commentary on mercenary matches in general; she suggests she is speaking not just for herself but for all “Noble Maids” similarly sacrificed.

36 Montagu refers to the proverbial punishment for old maids, which appears in Shakespeare’s *Much Ado About Nothing* (II.i) and *The Taming of the Shrew* (II.i).
37 Montagu to Philippa Mundy, 6 February 1712, 1:116.
However, the poem’s tone was not all literary posturing or youthful pretension. Between September 1711 and February 1712, Montagu had fallen in love with an unidentified “Paradise” who remained out of her reach, as later letters to “Dear Phil,” just months before Montagu’s elopement, confirm:

I see no probable prospect of my ever entering Charming Paradice, but since I cannot convince him of the Necessity of what I do, I rack my selfe in giving him pain. These alternate Thoughts fight battles in my Breast; mean time I see daily preparations for my journey to Hell.  

With her father negotiating the terms of that “journey”—her marriage to Skeffington—she apparently became increasingly willing to accept “Limbo”—marriage to Wortley—as preferable to “Hell” or to spinsterhood and “a settlement in the Country...after that mighty Sacrifice, I may find myself wither’d and forgotten.” If she chose to remain single her father would send her into the country with a promise of “making my Maiden Life as miserable as lay in [his] power” and with only a £400 annuity—a liveable sum but far less than her marriage to Skeffington would have brought—as her inheritance. Still, she expresses uncertainty to Mundy at the alternative of marriage to Wortley. “I may go into Limbo if I please, but tis accompany’d with such circumstances, my courrage will hardly come up to it, yet perhaps it may,” she writes to Mundy in August 1712. She could not ignore the “circumstances”; that is, the consequences of an elopement for her reputation. Any marriage not sanctioned by family was likely to cause a scandal; this

38 Montagu to Philippa Mundy, April 1712, 1:122-23.
39 Montagu to Philippa Mundy, April 1712, 1:121.
40 Montagu to Philippa Mundy, August 1712, 1:150.
one could create a permanent rupture with her father and other relations and in fact “divided public opinion” when the news of it began to circulate.  

Soon after her elopement, she would advise Mundy to make a different choice than she herself had made and to marry with financial security in mind:

I suppose your inclination is in favour of one unequal in point of Fortune to him proposed by your father. I know there is nothing more Natural than for a Heart in Love to imagine nothing more easy than to reduce all Expenses to a very narrow compass...But, my Dear, can you be very sure of this? The Cares, the Selfe Denial, and the Novelty that you will find in that manner of Living, will it never be uneasy to you? [...] If the Gentleman propos’d to you has realy no other fault but a disagreeable Person...[your dislike] cannot last long. There is no figure that after the Eyes have been accustom’d to, does not become pleasing, or at least not otherwise.  

Montagu suggests that Mundy should do as she says, not as she did, and endorses the traditional view that love easily will grow after marriage, as long as a woman has only “innocent affections” beforehand. Her advice must have come in part from her own exposure to reduced circumstances in the first year of her marriage to Wortley.  

In addition, though as a married woman Montagu need not constrain her words and actions so strictly as she should have done when single, she does not entirely lose her concern for her reputation. For this reason she presents a traditional view, arguing that

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41 Grundy, *Lady Mary*, 58.  
42 Montagu to Philippa Mundy, 10 January 1713, 1:177-78.  
43 In 1761, Montagu wrote to her son that she and Wortley had lived on less than £800 the year he was born (3 March 1761, 3:257).
“the progress from Esteem to Love is shorter and easier than it is generally imagin’d.”

However, in the same way that her letters to Wortley often contain contradictory sentiments, Montagu contradicts herself in writing to Mundy, placing the responsibility of interpretation on the reader. In the letter quoted above, Montagu adds,

However, after all I have said, if the Difference between your choice and your Father’s is only between a great Estate and a Competency, tis better to be privately happy than Splendidly Miserable. The reputation of having acted prudently will be no comfort…[Please] your Selfe, and believe from my Experience there is no State so happy as with a man you like.

Although she cannot, while “acting in Form,” advise her friend to a course of action similar to her own, she must have realized that she would appear hypocritical had she, in effect, recommended that Mundy disregard her own inclinations and marry purely for financial security. She cannot endorse enduring poverty for love, but she can endorse companionacy by citing her own experience: a modest life with a man one likes is preferable to a grand life with a man for whom one feels indifference, or even aversion. By presenting two contradictory views side by side, she can maintain the role of dutiful wife who gives socially correct advice as well as that of the caring friend who wants to see her friend in a happy marriage.

In that role of dutiful wife, Montagu at first appears eager for her husband’s company. Later, she remains fond but becomes increasingly detached and businesslike. In her first letter to Wortley after their marriage she acknowledges herself

44 Montagu to Philippa Mundy, 10 January 1713, 1:178.
45 Montagu to Philippa Mundy, 10 January 1713, 1:178.
“perfectly unacquainted with a proper matrimonial stile” and proposes “to write as if we were not marry’d at all.” She says that the large family with whom she is staying makes her imagine “agreeable pictures of our future Life” in which he will “retain the same fondnesse for me as I shall certainly mine for you,” and even mentions her “Sincere Love.” Although she begins the letter by suggesting that they write as if they were still unmarried, the very fact of being married enables her to write more freely and more warmly than before, allowing her to alter her image to that of a loving wife. The letter also represents one of few instances in which Montagu directly mentions to Wortley her role as his wife. She presents herself as a newlywed whose love for her husband is growing now that they are married, and she suggests that she is eagerly anticipating their next step together: starting a family.

Neither the warm tone nor the overt consciousness of her new role lasts long; although she continues to write freely, her tenderness quickly disappears. Her next letter to Wortley, just a few days later, reproaches him for not writing, and further letters in the first year of their marriage take the same tone. He not only fails to write as frequently as Montagu desires, but also leaves in her hands many decisions about travel arrangements and lodgings. When she is “in great trouble and irresolution” about whether to bring their two-year-old son to London in December 1714, he says only that “if you do wrong about him, you will have no reason to blame me, for I desire it may be as you like best.” Repeatedly she asks for advice and receives either an indecisive reply or none at all, his frustratingly deliberate indecision recalling the recriminations and backpedaling of their courtship letters. Over time, though, she handles the

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46 Montagu to Wortley, 22 October 1712, 168-69.
47 Montagu to Wortley, 11 December 1714, 1:240.
48 Wortley to Montagu, 9 December 1714, 1:240.
business of their life with increasing confidence and even offers Wortley advice on his political career. Her enthusiasm for planning, arranging, and giving advice suggests she has returned to the role that she had promulgated for herself before their marriage: the “rational woman” who would serve as a helpmate to her husband.

Montagu would increasingly emphasize the “rational woman” aspect of her role and cease to be a helpmate, ultimately living on the Continent for the last twenty years of their marriage while Wortley remained in England. Her later letters to him suggest fond concern but no regret for their separation—which, after all, she apparently initiated in order to follow her favorite mistake, Francesco Algarotti, across the Atlantic. Writing to Wortley in December 1752 from Venice, she laments having only recently received a letter he wrote from Leicestershire in August of that year: “It releiv’d me from a great deal of pain occasion’d by your Silence. I am glad you are in a place I have heard often celebrated for one of the Prettiest in England.” The letter, like many she sent him in this phase of her life, describes the weather and concludes with her wish for his continued good health; others thank him for promptly sending her allowance or strategize with him about their son’s dissolute behavior, a source of constant concern for both husband and wife and one area in which the estranged couple continued to collaborate.

In her letters to Wortley, Montagu never expounds on her own role as a wife and mother and rarely gives her opinion on other marriages within their social circle. When she does offer him an opinion about marital roles, that opinion is often conservative. She is particularly critical of marriages between social or economic non-equals, such as

49 Grundy, Lady Mary, 391-93.
50 Montagu to Wortley, 3 December 1752, 3:19.
the Duchess of Manchester’s marriage to an Irishman, Edward Hussey. Hussey and the Duchess married secretly around 1743 but did not acknowledge their marriage until 1747.\textsuperscript{51} On the subject of that marriage, Montagu opines to Wortley, perhaps ironically, “It is generally fatal to women to be at their own Disposal.”\textsuperscript{52} In response to another letter from Wortley, she explains, “I am not surpriz’d to hear the D[uches]s of Manchester has ill success in her adventure. I never knew it happen otherwise in such disporportionate [sic] Matches.”\textsuperscript{53}

In addressing these more conventional comments to Wortley, she is perhaps reminding him that she is a rational companion, a woman of sense who retains socially conservative ideas and can therefore be trusted on her own and across an ocean. None of her surviving letters or essays gives readers many clues about her later feelings toward her own marriage; Halsband suggests that “if her friendship with Algarotti went beyond the bounds of convention, she could rationalize it by the fact that as a wife and mother she had paid her debt to morality.”\textsuperscript{54} Perhaps little more need be said than that she lived on the Continent, apart from Wortley, for the last twenty-two years of his life, returning to England only after his death. However, he agreed to her departure, supported her financially, and continued to exchange letters with her throughout those two decades.

Montagu’s later letters show a much more skeptical attitude toward matrimony in general, criticizing marriages among her acquaintances either as inappropriately mercenary or as lust-driven mismatches. According to Halsband, this skepticism arose

\textsuperscript{51} Note to Montagu to Lady Oxford, 3 June 1746, 2:371.
\textsuperscript{52} Montagu to Wortley, 9 April 1747, 2:384.
\textsuperscript{53} Montagu to Wortley, 1 July 1747, 2:386.
\textsuperscript{54} Halsband, \textit{The Life}, 176.
from her disappointed idealism, which “disgusted her with its frequent failure through misalliance, infidelity, or the refusal of husbands and wives to believe in connubial happiness.”

She may have been a frustrated idealist, but in letters to female friends after her marriage, she is also a social critic. Montagu condemns nearly every marriage that she describes in these letters, usually because she finds them too mercenary but sometimes because she believes that one or both partners lack character. An element of self-congratulation lurks in every gossipy criticism of someone else’s marriage, delivered with Montagu’s typical sharp wit. Although her own marriage did not live up to her ideals, she again omits her experiences from her argument in favor of more general critiques. In addressing close friends and family, she can both exercise her wit and obliquely congratulate them—and herself—for having avoided all the possible pitfalls that claimed her peers. Montagu intends to amuse her friends, reinforcing their bond through the sense of intimacy that gossip promotes.

Equally important, she uses her wit, often in the form of hyperbole, to make a larger point about the social importance of marriage, the consequences of making a bad match, and the imbalance of power between men and women in marriage.

In one such letter, to her sister Frances, Lady Mar, she summarizes a bit of gossip about an adulterous wife, divorced by Act of Parliament, by joking that “the best Expedient for the public and to prevent the Expence of private familys would be a genneral Act of Divorceing all the people of England.” She follows with a hint at the value of companionacy: “You know, those that pleas’d might marry over again, and it would save the Reputations of several Ladys that are now in peril of being expos’d

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every day.” If everyone had the opportunity to divorce, she suggests, companionacy would increase and relationships between spouses would become more equitable: those in companionate relationships could easily remarry each other, while those risking adultery would have the opportunity to choose a partner for whom they felt affection. Beneath the humorous exaggeration lies the suggestion that the current marriage system is untenable; the best recourse would be to divorce everyone and start from scratch, presumably with no financial or emotional strings attached. Writing to her sister at a time when each was well established in her wifely role, she could make such jokes without fear of damaging her reputation.

In a later letter to her friend Lady Pomfret, she recounts offering—in jest—to poison an earl’s daughter to keep her from marrying an actor: “[Since] the lady was capable of such amours, I did not doubt if this was broke off she would bestow her person and fortune on some hackney-coachman or chairman.” Her joke shows the limits of Montagu’s marital activism, as do her remarks to Wortley on the Duchess of Manchester’s marriage. She does not believe in “disproportionate matches” between partners of differing social strata—because, she suggests in this letter, they retard the overall advancement of marital choice: “Such examples are very detrimental to our whole sex; and are apt to influence the other into a belief that we are unfit to manage either liberty or money.” The statement frankly acknowledges that women deserve more rights in marriage decisions but implies that women must prove their deservingness to men and that those who make bad decisions are harming society’s view of women in general.

57 Montagu to Lady Mar, May 1725, 2:52.
In another letter to Lady Mar, Montagu again focuses her criticism on women. Marriage, she argues, has fallen entirely out of fashion; women have become just as sexually immoral as men, and wedlock is “as much ridicul’d by our Young Ladys as it us’d to be by young fellows…You may Imagine we marry’d Women look very silly; we have nothing to excuse our selves but that twas done a great while ago and we were very young when we did it.”

This quip is formulaic but also ironic, Montagu having been married at the comparatively advanced age of twenty-three. Nevertheless, it again shows the limits of her willingness to criticize the institution of marriage. She clearly believes that marriage still has an important place in society. In addition, though she often stands up for women, she does not consider them exempt from criticism. These two letters suggest that she believes women should continue to hold themselves to a higher moral standard, if only to demonstrate that they are worthy of more power and freedom in matrimonial matters.

Although Montagu’s personal letters catalogue poor marriage decisions and bad behavior by both sexes, her published writing relating to marriage focuses her criticism on husbands. In 1714, she anonymously contributed an essay to the *Spectator*, writing in the persona of a president of a widows’ club. Her essay, in *Spectator* number 573, responds to number 561, in which Joseph Addison had depicted a club of greedy widows. He describes the widows from the perspective of a man who hoped to make

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59 Montagu to Lady Mar, 31 October 1723.
60 Wortley also contributed to the public discussion of marriage. His notes condemning settlements as detrimental to marriage provided the bases for *Tatler* numbers 199 (July 18, 1710) and 223 (September 12, 1710).
61 Grundy notes that Addison’s friend Thomas Tickell knew of Montagu’s authorship of the essay and mentioned it in a draft introduction to the last *Spectator* volume, published in 1715 (*Lady Mary*, 72).
his fortune by marrying one of them, only to find the courtship “broke off as soon as they
 came to the word settlement.” Addison uses familiar dramatic stereotypes to describe
 the widows: they are a sexually voracious band who urge other women to remain single
 so that they may “engross the whole male world to themselves.” These widows “do not
 weep so much for the loss of a husband, as for the want of one.” The piece hints at the
 widows’ financial greed but concentrates on their sexual greed, playing on the
 centuries-old theme of women as “the dangerous sex.” He outlines the stories of nine
 fictional widows, suggesting that their libidos are sending their husbands to early
 graves. Among the widows are “Lady Catherine Swallow…a widow at eighteen, and
 has since buried a second husband and two coachmen,” and “The Lady Waddle,” who
 at fifteen married a 72-year-old knight, “by whom she had twins nine months after his
decease. In the fifty-fifth year of her age she was married to James Spindle, Esq., a
 youth of one-and-twenty, who did not outlive the honeymoon.”

In her response as “Mrs. President,” Montagu largely elides the matter of
sexuality and instead enumerates the personal failings of her six deceased husbands:
“my first insulted me, my second was nothing to me, my third disgusted me, the fourth
would have ruined me, the fifth tormented me, and the sixth would have starved me.”
She was “married to [the first husband] at fourteen by my uncle and guardian (as I
afterwards discovered) by way of sale” and chose her second husband, a 60-year-old,
“to comply with my friends.” Her third was a fox-hunting-obsessed boor, her fourth a

4, 515.
64 Addison, The Spectator no. 561, 516.
65 Lady Mary Wortley Montagu, The Spectator no. 573, 561.
debtor and thief. The fifth was a hypochondriac, and the last “loved money to
distraction.” She questions why she should “have spent much time in grieving for an
insolent, insignificant, negligent, extravagant, splenetic, or covetous husband.” Instead of overtly offering a moral, the essay argues by induction, stacking up six
hopelessly flawed types to enable the generalization that a woman can try again and
again, even from the more powerful position of widowhood, and still end up suffering in
marriage. Leaving Addison’s bawdy jokes unacknowledged, Montagu writes a tongue-
in-cheek catalogue of husbands’ personality failings in order to make a case for
companionacy. Wives deserve good treatment, mourning should be a genuine
emotional expression rather than a social nicety, and above all, women are largely
powerless, restricted by law and social convention both before and after marriage.

Complicating matters, the fictional “Mrs. President” describes another suitor in
addition to her six husbands. The courtship of the “Honourable Edward Waitfort” closely
parallels Wortley and Montagu’s courtship (to say nothing of the similarity of names),
and was begun by “a cousin of his that was my intimate friend, and knew to a penny
what I was worth.” Waitfort’s “esteem and love is all taken up, and by such an object as
‘tis impossible to get the better of. I mean himself.” When his courtship of Mrs.
President begins, he is interested only in her fortune, and expects to marry her quickly
and easily. Angered by his presumption, Mrs. President gets her revenge by making
Waitfort fall in love with her, playing the innocent, “best natured silly poor thing on
earth…and when I used him like a dog for my diversion, he thought it was all prudence

67 Montagu, The Spectator no. 573, 560.
68 Montagu, The Spectator no. 573, 561.
69 Montagu, The Spectator no. 573, 557.
and fear.”\(^70\) Her treatment of this courtship is a sharply witty twist on the mutual hesitation that plagued the Wortley Montagus. “Waitfort” perseveres through her six marriages, and she finally acknowledges that “so much constancy should be rewarded” by making him her seventh husband, “though I may not do it after all perhaps.”\(^71\)

Although “Mrs. President” could be blamed for repeatedly passing over the one good apple in the bunch, six unfortunate matches represent solid evidence for at least hesitating before taking a seventh. The courtship of “Waitfort” becomes a bit of fantasy-fulfillment. Montagu uses hyperbole, as she does in her letters to friends, to create a scenario in which a woman has sustainable power and no fear of using it—as far as possible from the reality of marriage in the period, in which the single woman often remained powerless. Whether or not Wortley knew of Montagu’s authorship, the depiction of marriage as a frustrating leap of misplaced faith, not the sideswipe at her own courtship, is the key to this essay.\(^72\)

In her own short-lived periodical *The Nonsense of Common-Sense* (a response to the opposition journal *Common Sense*), published in 1737–38, Montagu deals principally with economic and political issues but touches on marriage and gender roles, mostly in an economic context. Like Eliza Haywood and other periodical writers of the period, Montagu creates a persona to act as the author of *The Nonsense of Common-Sense*. The persona is male, allowing her more rhetorical freedom than she would have enjoyed by writing as a woman. She cites women’s desire for wealthy matches as a drain on the national economy: “But this Nation is now over-run with an odd Sort of

\(^70\) Montagu, *The Spectator* no. 573, 557.
\(^71\) Montagu, *The Spectator* no. 573, 561.
\(^72\) According to Grundy, Montagu’s authorship of the essay remained secret until the twentieth century (*Lady Mary*, 72).
Nuns, of a strange wandering Order, that declare against Marriage, if they cannot marry very great.”

Here, her criticism of fortune-hunting women is only a small part of a larger argument against “luxury” and in favor of lowering the interest rate for the sinking fund, but it also reflects her general and repeatedly expressed distaste for mercenary marriage.

In a later issue Montagu focuses her critique on men in a tone reminiscent of her Spectator essay, attacking those who would gladly read “A Paper smartly wrote…either to ridicule or declaim against the Ladies” because practically every man in a coffee-house

fancies he hath some Reason or other to curse some of the Sex most heartily.—Perhaps his Sister’s Fortunes are to run away with the Money that would be better bestowed at the Groom-Porter’s; or an old Mother, good for nothing, keeps a Jointure from a hopeful Son, that wants to make a settlement on his Mistress; or a handsome young Fellow is plagued with a Wife, that will remain alive, to hinder his running away with a great Fortune, having two or three of them in love with him.

“These are serious Misfortunes, that are sufficient to exasperate the mildest Tempers to a Contempt of the Sex,” she concludes sarcastically, then offers a corrective vision of companionancy based on the Bible: “If I was a Divine, I would remember, that in their first Creation they were designed a Help for the other Sex, and nothing was ever made incapable of the End of its Creation.” Thus she suggests that treating women with contempt is a sin; it is the men who practice such treatment who deserve to be looked

down upon. Writing as an anonymous male, Montagu is able to sharpen her critique of relations between the sexes and of male behavior in particular. Her authorial persona as a “Moralist” and a “Friend…to the Fair Sex” has the power directly to condemn mercenary males and to suggest a better course of action without appearing self-interested or unseemly as a female persona would.

Montagu’s criticisms of marriage grow more serious in tone and more broad in scope in her letters in the 1750s to her daughter Mary Stuart, Countess of Bute. These letters were often written with Montagu’s grandchildren in mind. As an elderly woman writing to her own daughter, Montagu had the rhetorical freedom overtly to cast doubt on marriage as an institution and to suggest that her granddaughters should remain single. As she does in writing to her friends, she repeatedly condemns marriages within her social circle as mercenary or simply inappropriate. Marriages for money are “generally unfortunate;” second marriages are “very ridiculous;” and marriages between unequal fortunes always find “ill success.” For her granddaughters, Montagu suggests that the possible risks simply are not worth the rewards. In 1753, in a letter concerning her granddaughter Mary’s education, she writes to Lady Bute,

The ultimate end of your Education was to make you a good Wife…hers ought to be, to make her Happy in a Virgin state. I will not say it is happier, but it is undoubtedly safer than any marriage…I have allways been so thoroughly persuaded of this Truth that notwithstanding the flattering views I had for you…I thought I ow’d you the Justice to lay before

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Montagu to Lady Bute, 27 May 1749, 19 June 1751, 1 July 1747.
you all the hazards attending Matrimony. You may recollect I did so in the strongest manner.”

Marriage, as her Spectator essay and her own experience suggest, is a gamble. A single woman, provided for by her parents, can at least rely on herself. Similarly, in 1755 she congratulates her daughter on the birth of a son by saying that she never worries about boys achieving “good fortune,” because so many paths are open to them. “We have but one [way] of establishing ours,” she writes, “and that surrounded with precipices, and perhaps, after all, better miss’d than found.” Her advanced age and social position, as well as her audience in these letters, give her the license to criticize marriage without being accused of “biting the hand that feeds her.”

We can draw only limited conclusions from reading the nearly five decades of Montagu’s public and private writing. Montagu rarely gives her opinion of her own situation or details her own actions. However, on the topic of marriage, this absence of agency makes sense, for where marriage is concerned, the theme of female powerlessness resonates throughout her writing. Her emphasis on women’s powerlessness suggests that she views companionate relationships as exceptional, although she argues for companionacy in the form of “friendship” and “esteem” between spouses. That exception, she suggests, has little chance of becoming a rule in the face of all the other pressures on the marriage decision. Largely lacking the power to act, Montagu makes the most of her rhetorical power. She uses contradictory positions, even making opposing statements within a single letter, to present herself to her reader in the most appealing light. In addition, by casting her observations as general rather

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76 Montagu to Mary Stuart, Countess of Bute, 28 January 1753, 3:24.
77 Montagu to Lady Bute, 15 April 1755, 3:83.
than personal, she encourages her reader to view her broadest criticisms of marriage as
aimed at a social system rather than as expressing one individual's anxiety.
Unlike Montagu, whose writing remained largely private or anonymous while she lived, Hester Mulso Chapone (1727–1801) found herself defending her views on marriage in a more public forum when she agreed to correspond with Samuel Richardson—and therefore by proxy with his large circle of friends—about his novel *Clarissa*. In her *Letters on Filial Obedience*, written to Richardson in 1750 and 1751 and published posthumously in 1807, Chapone concentrates on the questions of filial duty and parental consent, speaking strongly about a woman’s right to refuse an unwanted marriage arrangement and describing marriage without affection as “perjury” before God. Richardson’s side of the correspondence has not survived, and Chapone’s *Letters* were not in print between 1818 and 1999, two factors which may serve to explain the lack of critical attention to the *Letters*. However, they demonstrate the ways in which a young upper-class woman could shape and control the presentation of her ideas about marriage.

Twenty-three years old and single at the time she wrote the *Letters*, Chapone probably needed to protect her reputation in order to safeguard her marriage chances. As one of Richardson’s coterie of intellectual women and correspondents, she would have recognized the semi-public nature of their exchanges, which Richardson circulated among his close friends as well as more prominent public figures.¹ Tom Keymer notes

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¹ Rhoda Zuk, introductory note to *Letters on Filial Obedience* in *Bluestocking Feminism: Writings of the Bluestocking Circle, 1738–1785*, vol. 3 (London: Pickering & Chatto, 1999), 204.
that Richardson “held prolonged debates” on the subject of filial obedience in *Clarissa* and “allowed the debates to proliferate by circulating the correspondences among other potential participants.”

Although Richardson apparently encouraged debates, his “instinctive authoritarianism and…fear of insurrection” could have motivated Chapone to stay in his good graces even as she criticized his views. Chapone makes obvious efforts in the *Letters* to sweeten the critical tone of her message, if not the content of that message, and to show herself to be appropriately compliant and reasonable. In a further bid for Richardson’s sympathy, she personalizes the matter of filial loyalty by casting herself as a foster daughter to Richardson, then sixty-one. She repeatedly calls him her “dear papa,” characterizes herself and her ideas as undisciplined and in need of correction by his more mature mind, and thanks him for helping her to improve herself through the exchange of letters.

By placing herself in a parent-child relationship with Richardson, Chapone reinforces the idea of herself as a dutiful and obedient young woman and as the model of a “daughter” who would feel the effects of a parent’s influence on her marriage decision. She sometimes denigrates her own ideas, or her expression of them, as overly stubborn, too extreme, or downright wrong in an attempt to keep herself from appearing inappropriately critical of contemporary marital and gender roles. However, her careful reasoning and appeals to authority show that the pose of the callow...

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3 Keymer, *Richardson’s Clarissa*, 121.
4 Hester Chapone to Samuel Richardson, 3 January 1751, in *Bluestocking Feminism: Writings of the Bluestocking Circle, 1738-1785*, vol. 3, 247. Subsequent references to Chapone’s letters to Richardson are drawn from this book.
intellectual pleading for guidance is no more than that: a pose. Ultimately she moderates only the tone of her ideas, not their content.

Richardson and his circle of correspondents must have recognized that Chapone’s self-effacing pose served only to draw attention away from her argument. A later document, Chapone’s *A Matrimonial Creed*, which she probably wrote in 1751 after her correspondence with Richardson, shows a need to soften her stance on marriage still further. Although we do not know the specific circumstances that led Chapone to write the *Creed*, her Introduction suggests that the *Creed* represents a reconsideration of the ideas about marriage expressed in the *Letters*. Her choice of subject matter in the *Creed* shows the rhetorical maneuvering required in women’s writing on the issue of marriage. She criticizes women’s limited marital choice in the *Letters on Filial Obedience*, but concentrates instead in the *Matrimonial Creed* on marital roles, a subject on which she could present herself as endorsing a more traditional opinion. Chapone spoke out about the difficulty of making a successful marriage, but the presentation and timing of the *Creed* suggest that her outspokenness required her to reaffirm the conventional aspects of her viewpoint.

Although the *Letters on Filial Obedience* quickly evolved into general arguments for women’s right to refuse unwanted marriages, the catalyst for the correspondence was a scene in *Clarissa* in which the heroine is overcome with guilt when her father curses her for refusing an arranged marriage. *Clarissa* demonstrates that success on the marriage market requires the maintenance of a spotless reputation. Richardson creates a “worst-case scenario” in which Clarissa must appear virtuous at all costs. Her own parents cannot dismiss the possibility that she is in love with Mr. Lovelace and will

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5 Zuk, introductory note to *A Matrimonial Creed* in *Bluestocking Feminism*, vol. 3, 249.
not believe that she would refuse to marry Mr. Solmes simply because she finds him “odious.”

“How can you tell me your heart is free?” her mother insists. “Such extraordinary antipathies to a particular person must be owing to extraordinary prepossessions in another’s favor!” After further expostulating with her daughter, she adds, “Ah, girl, never say your heart is free! You deceive yourself if you think it is.” As Clarissa dramatizes, a woman must concern herself with the public impression created by her feelings and actions, even as it may be perceived by her own parents.

Clarissa’s family repeatedly urges her toward her “duty,” the performance of which would enable her to preserve her reputation. “The Duty of a child to her parents may be said to be anterior to her very birth,” Richardson notes in his published commentary to Clarissa. He adds, “It is better for a good Child to be able to say, her Parents were unkind to her, than that she was undutiful to them.” Clarissa’s “undutiful” behavior, Richardson demonstrates in a novel “only meant as a vehicle for the instructive,” leads to her ruined virtue, estrangement from her family, and eventual tragic death. “Chastity, like piety, is an uniform grace,” he explains in his commentary. “If in look, if in speech, a girl give way to undue levity, depend upon it…the devil has already got one of his cloven feet into her heart.”

Keymer notes that Richardson expected and welcomed debate about his novels, and “the problems of paternal authority and filial liberty posed by the opening instalment

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7 Richardson, Clarissa, 98.
8 Richardson, Clarissa, 112.
10 Richardson, A Collection, 171.
11 Richardson, A Collection, ix.
12 Richardson, A Collection, 92. 
of *Clarissa* proved the most intractable and resonant of all these fictive occasions.” Richardson invited Chapone to correspond with him on the subject of *Clarissa* to resolve their dispute over the episode of Clarissa’s father’s curse. Chapone argues that Clarissa had the right to refuse marriage to Solmes without consequence, and that her irrational horror at her father’s curse is a flaw in an otherwise exemplary character. Sarah Fielding characterized *Clarissa* as “not intended as a Dramatic, but as a real Picture of human life,” and Chapone obviously found Clarissa’s situation realistic and serious enough to merit the attempted intervention with Richardson.¹⁴

As Chapone begins the first of the three letters, she positions herself in much the way that Lady Mary Wortley Montagu does in her courtship letters to Edward Wortley Montagu, as a rational woman who values “reasonable pleasures.”¹⁵ On the matter of Clarissa’s refusal to marry, Chapone styles herself Richardson’ student, saying that she hopes to learn from his explanations of the issue and to correct her own reasoning, which, she hints, is faulty:

…it is with this view that I am contented to expose my opinions to you, in order to have them rectified by you. And you have given me leave to oppose my weak arguments to yours, till I can bring my reason to give its free assent to your opinion.¹⁶

Having shown herself appropriately willing to accept instruction from her correspondent, Chapone outlines her argument. The *Letters on Filial Obedience* soon leave *Clarissa* behind to argue for real-life women’s rights in marriage. Chapone is particularly careful

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¹⁵ Chapone to Richardson, 12 October 1750, 205.
¹⁶ Chapone to Richardson, 12 October 1750, 205.
to suggest that she has larger concerns than her own interest, though she adds pathos to her argument by referring, for example, to her love for her own father. She draws the familiar parallel between parents with their children and monarchs with their subjects: both must “maintain order amongst them, and provide for their safety and welfare” in order to ensure “the happiness and good of the person who is to submit.”

However, Chapone suggests that the nature of parental authority changes over the life of the child. Young children must obey their parents because the parents, as adults, know what’s best for the children, but in an adult child who has her own power of reasoning, duty to her parents arises from “love and gratitude.” Grown children must show “the same observance and submission to the will of their parents” that they did in their youth, “in all cases except where a higher duty interferes, or where the sacrifice they are expected to make is greater than any degree of gratitude can require.”

Because Clarissa’s sacrifice is of this latter kind, Chapone argues, it constitutes an abuse of parental authority: marrying Solmes would not have created “happiness and good” for Clarissa, but misery. To have married Solmes would have been “solemn perjury before the altar of God.” Finally, Chapone notes that Clarissa’s terror at her father’s curse creates an inconsistency in Richardson’s characterization. “Why is Clarissa, who is drawn as a woman of so good and [sic] understanding, and who reasons so justly on all other subjects, to be so superstitious and weak in her apprehensions of parental authority?” Chapone asks.

17 Chapone to Richardson, 12 October 1750, 206.
18 Chapone to Richardson, 12 October 1750, 206.
19 Chapone to Richardson, 12 October 1750, 206.
20 Chapone to Richardson, 12 October 1750, 206.
she suggests, her other virtues may be weak as well, and she will not withstand scrutiny as a moral exemplar to readers.

Chapone concludes this first *Letter on Filial Obedience* with another demonstration of her own humility and malleability:

Will you forgive me, dear sir, for making this objection to a character which is otherwise unexceptionable, and which is calculated to promote religion and virtue more than any fiction that ever appeared in the world? I dare say that you will be able to convince me that I have considered this part of the character in a wrong light; at least, if you take the pains to try, you will convince me that you do not think my opinion below your notice, and that you have more regard for me than I can any way deserve.…

This letter sets the pattern for the two that will follow. Chapone surrounds her most serious statements with protestations of her own unworthiness and immaturity and her gratitude for Richardson’s stabilizing influence. As her arguments grow more detailed and her tone becomes more strident, those declarations become almost laughably self-abasing, suggesting that Chapone knew that such statements were merely pro forma in a correspondence between a young intellectual woman and an author old enough to be her father. However, she uses those statements throughout the *Letters*, particularly in the second and third entries, to hedge her most insistent statements. Chapone relies on these obsequious formalities to mask the fact that she is willing to soften only the tone, not the content, of her arguments. She realizes that form matters, especially for a single woman writing about marriage in a correspondence that she could reasonably expect to become public.

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21 Chapone to Richardson, 12 October 1750, 207.
Chapone’s second letter begins with another ritual self-deprecation, thanking Richardson as her “most kind friend” and “excellent instructer.” “To urge fresh arguments against yours,” she laments, “will be to give you fresh trouble, and will, I fear, make you almost despair of doing any good to so obstinate, so tenacious a girl.”

Finally, however, intellectual honesty must win out over politeness. As Montagu had done in her letters to Wortley, Chapone represents forthrightness as a greater virtue than propriety: “I dare not be insincere; and to give up the argument without being convinced, would be to defeat the good intentions of my kind correspondent, who can have no other motive to correspond with me at all, but the desire of my improvement, and my good.”

She touches again on her role as student with Richardson as teacher, a role that enables her to maintain simultaneously the virtuous submission appropriate to a young woman and the marshaling of arguments appropriate to a rational philosopher.

Chapone bases her argument on the assertion that Clarissa had the right to refuse the marriage arranged for her, without guilt or consequence, and extends the argument inductively to suggest that all daughters should have the same right of refusal. While “the father hath...the right of tuition during minority,” from a daughter of marriageable age he is owed only “the right of honor” motivated by a sense of gratitude.

She applies Locke’s ideas about parental power, quoting at length from his *Second Treatise of Government* (1690) to bolster her argument that any child old enough to marry should have the power to refuse a marriage as Clarissa did:

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22 Chapone to Richardson, 10 November 1750, 280.
23 Chapone to Richardson, 10 November 1750, 280.
24 Chapone to Richardson, 10 November 1750, 212.
‘If such a state of reason, such an age of discretion made [a man] free, the same shall make his son free too.’ (And if his son, I presume his daughter too; since the duty of a child is equally imposed on both, and since the natural liberty Mr. Locke speaks of arising from reason, it can never be proved that women have not a right to it, unless it can be proved that they are not capable of knowing the law they are under.)

Here, Chapone refers to an acknowledged Enlightenment authority to support what amounts to a call for female intellectual and social equality. “Whether this doctrine will appear to you in any better light from Mr. Locke’s explanation of it, I know not,” she says. “To me, I must own, it appears highly reasonable, and the objections you have made, do not to me appear strong enough to overthrow it.” Having established Locke as an authority on the issue, Chapone can point directly to the correctness of his doctrine—which prefigures her own—without overtly overstepping the bounds of her role as a young female intellectual.

She further safeguards herself in that role by arguing only for a daughter’s right of refusal. Chapone then applies that standard to herself, acknowledging that “I, as well as Clarissa, only insist on a negative, and…it never entered into my mind to suppose a child at liberty to dispose of herself in marriage, without the consent of her parents.”

Earlier in the letter she also makes an emotional appeal by citing her own feelings toward her father, saying her heart is “ready to sacrifice much of its own happiness to that of my dear papa; and that it will always acknowledge…the great debt of gratitude

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25 Chapone to Richardson, 10 November 1750, 211.
26 Chapone to Richardson, 10 November 1750, 213.
27 Chapone to Richardson, 10 November 1750, 215.
which it must for ever owe him.”

Chapone circumscribes her argument and then personalizes it; she can thereby present herself as a dutiful young woman who feels the proper gratitude toward her parents and is more willing to endorse the contemporary marriage system than to change it or overthrow it.

In addition to citing Locke’s authority, Chapone contextualizes her views by referring to companionacy and to religion as ideals that reinforce her assertions:

You think I expressed myself too strongly with regard to forced marriages; and perhaps I did; for I always considered marriage in a more solemn light than the generality of people do; and as I think highly of the felicity of the state where it is a marriage of souls as well as persons, so I have a dreadful idea of the misery of being ‘joined, and not matched.’

By suggesting that she takes marriage more seriously than most, Chapone presents herself as a moral exemplar who interprets the marriage vow literally: “It is nearly, if not quite, of equal dignity and force with any oath that words can frame.” This approach also shows her to be as appropriately in awe of the prospect of marriage as a young single woman should be. The binding nature of the vows, as well as their religious weight, means that “a woman ought not to trust to a possibility of being able to perform her solemn vow.”

Therefore, she argues, the marriage vow itself becomes another reason for women to be allowed refusal of an unwanted marriage. Although she apparently read the Church of England marriage service at Richardson’s express

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28 Chapone to Richardson, 10 November 1750, 209.
29 Chapone to Richardson, 10 November 1750, 215.
30 Chapone to Richardson, 10 November 1750, 220.
31 Chapone to Richardson, 10 November 1750, 215
request, Chapone finds that it bolsters her argument, not his; it equally allows her to demonstrate her virtue by citing the Church as an authority.\textsuperscript{32}

Chapone similarly turns the suggestion of any possible infidelity on Clarissa’s part to her rhetorical advantage, delicately maintaining that

as to any danger which could follow of her breaking the other part of her vow, that of \textit{keeping only to the man she marries, forsaking all other}, it never entered into my thoughts; nor ever could, whilst the woman in my view was a Clarissa, or even one infinitely short of Clarissa’s excellence.\textsuperscript{33}

Her scrupulous disregard for the prospect of sexual impropriety in any woman fits with her social position, which would require her to turn a blind eye to such ideas. However, in the very next sentence she incorporates the prospect of emotional infidelity into her argument, acknowledging that marriage to a “hated object” would neither keep a woman from falling in love with someone else, nor cancel out feelings already present before the marriage. Although a “\textit{prudent woman}” would try her best to avoid or suppress such feelings, Chapone suggests, “I am not quite sure that those endeavours will \textit{always succeed}.”\textsuperscript{34} She presents this possibility of failure as another reason for marital choice.

By subtly shifting the language of the argument from physical to emotional faithfulness, she is able to maintain her own sense of propriety while using the issue to further her own line of reasoning.

Throughout the \textit{Letters}, Chapone tries to attenuate her tone with formalized flattery aimed at Richardson. She wonders in the second of the three letters whether

\textsuperscript{32} Chapone notes that “after having as you desired perused the matrimonial office, and weighed to the best of my abilities the force of the words,” she does not think she will be able to substantially alter her assertion. (10 November 1750, 219).

\textsuperscript{33} Chapone to Richardson, 10 November 1750, 220.

\textsuperscript{34} Chapone to Richardson, 10 November 1750, 220.
“the exemption of old people from the passions of youth, should be no better a privilege than to leave room for the love of money.” She then immediately denies that she is suggesting Richardson is too old to understand the emotional import of a mercenary marriage and refers again to their teacher-student relationship. After all, his "benevolence and friendship have all the warmth of youth, though guided by maturest judgment" and he may “speak impartially on this subject....” She flatteringly reminds Richardson of his role in their exchange: “And you will shew me where my observations are false, and teach me how to make the best use of those which are true.”

Similar interludes of humility appear at the beginning and end of each letter; she begins the third letter seemingly in transports of adulation, offering nothing but “an affection and reverence next to filial; nothing to entertain you with but the rude essays of an ignorant girl, the unconnected sallies of a wild imagination with but little judgment to direct or control it.”

Amid these declarations of inferiority Chapone rarely concedes a point to Richardson or modifies her argument by more than a word or two. The first letter introduces the broad bases of her position; the second expands that position with references to religious and secular authorities. In the third letter, Chapone initially looks for areas in which she and Richardson agree, again referring to authorities rather than to her own assertions. She and Richardson both approve of Locke and of Bishop Fleetwood, she says, so she admits them “into the confederacy”; she will not admit Bishop Hall or Richard Allestree, the author of *The Whole Duty of Man* (1658), either of whom would place a woman in the condition of “an Indian skreen” to be bought and

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35 Chapone to Richardson, 10 November 1750, 217-18.
36 Chapone to Richardson, 3 January 1751, 227.
sold.\textsuperscript{37} However, the third letter also contains her strongest statements on the social limitations placed on women and girls. Chapone does not present herself as willing to accept correction from a higher mind, but instead asks Richardson whether he will “give me leave, for once, to be a saucy girl, and catechize my adopted papa? Though indeed I do not mean to do it saucily, but really and truly for my information.”\textsuperscript{38} Instead of yielding to his opinion she seeks only to understand it correctly in order to refute it more accurately. She casts their disagreement as one of degree. Both agree that parents and children should respect one another’s “veto power,” but Chapone could support the parental veto wholeheartedly if Richardson would agree to another condition:

\begin{quote}
...if the law you have laid down be allowed the weight it ought to have with all parents, that (at any time of the child’s life from eighteen to thirty and upwards) the parents shall not, unless they can give superior reasons, refuse their consent to a child who, by her wisdom, prudence, discretion, justifies unexceptionally her passion for a particular object.\textsuperscript{39}
\end{quote}

In the paragraphs that follow, Chapone substantiates women’s claim to “wisdom, prudence, discretion” and validates the nature of the “passion” she mentions. She presents a normative vision of companionate marriage, superior to the mercenary matches and romantic elopements she sees as fashionable. She reminds Richardson that “wherever I have mentioned love with any degree of respect…I meant such a love as is founded on friendship.”\textsuperscript{40} If their society would promote marriages based on that

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{37} Chapone to Richardson, 3 January 1751, 228.
\item \textsuperscript{38} Chapone to Richardson, 3 January 1751, 228.
\item \textsuperscript{39} Chapone to Richardson, 3 January 1751, 231-32.
\item \textsuperscript{40} Chapone to Richardson, 3 January 1751, 241.
\end{itemize}
type of love, she suggests, “we should not hear of so many wives that swear the peace against their husbands, nor of so many husbands that sue for divorces and damages.”

Women’s inferiority is not natural, Chapone explains, but culturally imposed. She argues, “I do not see that God and Nature have made daughters more dependent on [parents] than sons. Custom indeed allows not the daughters of people of fashion to leave their father’s family to seek their own subsistence,” but the daughters of the working class go out to earn a living as readily as do the sons. She leaves the conclusion of the analogy unstated, but that conclusion is nonetheless clear. Upper-class women’s inferiority is a cultural construct, not a fact, and it is therefore subject to amendment. To substantiate this claim she returns to one of the starting points of her argument: that women’s ability to reason makes them morally responsible for their decisions. Because marriage “is an action in which her free will is essentially concerned…as a rational creature, [a woman] must have a right to refuse to shackle her conscience with a vow, if she does not choose it.” She vows that she will not dispute “whatever superiority men may claim,” but in arguing for marital choice based on rationality and free will, she is also arguing for gender equality.

After these broad claims, she returns to the original outlines of her dispute with Richardson by reminding him that “the marriage vow ought to be perfectly voluntary.” In the process she begins again to personalize the issue, shifting from a logical appeal to an emotional one. Chapone points out to Richardson that marriage can be a frightening prospect, asking,

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41 Chapone to Richardson, 3 January 1751, 240.
42 Chapone to Richardson, 3 January 1751, 237.
43 Chapone to Richardson, 3 January 1751, 245.
44 Chapone to Richardson, 3 January 1751, 236.
Is it [marriage] not an act whereby a woman places in a man a power over her of so great consequence to her ease and quiet, that nothing but death, or a dreadful appeal to the laws of the land in the face of the world, can release her from his tyranny if he should prove a tyrant, or procure her any redress for the greatest of injuries?45

Previously she had suggested that women should be equal to men in society’s eyes; now she returns to the status quo to reinforce her position as a woman within her proper role, someone who wants only “ease and quiet” and fears the censure of “the world” that a divorce proceeding would bring. Again like Montagu, Chapone often sets up “the world” as women’s adversary, the source of repressive behavioral standards and moral hypocrisy, and presents herself as superior to it in choosing honesty and rationality over materialism.

The Letters end with a final reference to Clarissa and a last gesture towards propriety:

Forgive me, dear sir, if I have expressed myself too peremptorily on this subject, and spare not to take me down, whenever I forget myself so far as to argue with you with unbecoming tenaciousness or decisiveness.

And now may I not flatter myself that we are almost agreed? At least that you begin to think me not quite so rebellious a spirit as you did? I will hope so till you tell me otherwise, because I wish to think with you on all subjects.46

45 Chapone to Richardson, 3 January 1751, 245.
46 Chapone to Richardson, 3 January 1751, 247.
Although she claims to wish to “think with” her “dear papa Richardson,” she no longer urges him to correct her ideas, only the tone in which they are expressed. Her flattering apostrophes grow warmer in the course of the letters, perhaps in hopes of softening the impact of her ideas, which she expresses with increasing confidence and in successively broader terms from one letter to the next, first arguing for Clarissa’s marital choice in particular, then for marital choice in general, then for female equality as an Enlightenment virtue.

In the last of the _Letters_, Chapone reiterates Richardson’s statement that “perpetrated crimes in a man hurt not his reputation in the world’s eye half so effectually as imprudences in a woman.”47 The _Letters on Filial Obedience_ seem to have become one such “imprudence” for Chapone. Chapone then wrote her _Matrimonial Creed_ to circumscribe her bold statements about women’s rights in marriage. Rhoda Zuk notes that in the _Creed_ Chapone “seems anxious to defend herself against stinging accusations from Richardson and others that her views on filial obedience and her tenacity in argument implicitly prove her to be unmanageable and unmarriageable.”48 Although their correspondence was not published until 1807, Richardson circulated it among his friends. He hinted in a letter to Elizabeth Carter that his correspondence with Chapone influenced the passage of the Hardwicke Act in 1753 by bringing the issue to the attention of lawmakers who could “by a national law, establish the parental authority, so violently attacked by a young lady, who is admired by all that know her.”49 Chapone apparently wrote the _Matrimonial Creed_ with a larger audience than Richardson in mind and with the aim of recuperating her public image as a proper young woman.

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47 Chapone to Richardson, 3 January 1751, 237.
48 Zuk, introductory note to _A Matrimonial Creed_ in _Bluestocking Feminism_, vol. 3, 249.
49 Quoted in Tom Keymer, _Richardson’s Clarissa_, 103.
In the *Letters* and the *Matrimonial Creed* we can see Chapone attempting to finesse a position about marriage in an environment where a critique of part of the marriage system could too easily be interpreted as a rejection of the system as a whole. She explains that she wrote the *Creed* at a time when her thoughts were “free, cool and sedate, and my reason unperplexed by…the desire of converting others to our own way of thinking.” Her explanation excuses the more strident tone of the *Letters* by blaming the heat of the moment in which they were written. However, in order to appear logically consistent and intellectually honest, she must also account for any change of heart that readers may observe between the two documents:

If the opinions here set down shall be found to vary from those I set out with, be it imputed, not to designed evasion, but to the gradual effects which the arguments I have since heard, and the reflections I have made, may have imperceptibly produced in a mind, which, however tenacious, is not disingenuous, and would have acknowledged those effects at the time, had it, at the time, been sensible of them.

This introductory explanation echoes her rhetorical positioning in her letters to Richardson, making her appear pliant, aware of her faults, and willing to accept correction, rather than “violent” and tenacious of her opinions.

In the text of the *Creed*, which Ethel Rolt Wheeler described as “a triumph of casuistry,” Chapone chooses her words with care in order to endorse traditional spousal roles and simultaneously argue for rational companionancy. Chapone disregards the

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52 Quoted in Zuk, introductory note to *A Matrimonial Creed*, 251 n. 5.
issues of marital choice and parental consent that inspired the *Letters*; as such, the *Creed* represents a red herring. Chapone focuses instead on the relationship between husbands and wives. Shifting the terms of the argument in this way enables Chapone to remain silent on the controversy that began her correspondence with Richardson, while still appearing to be honest and complaisant. She ends the *Creed* by avowing,

> That I am not insincere and disingenuous, I can boldly and safely determine; and if I felt myself convinced, I am certain I could own it freely….Perhaps I am still tenaciously persisting in the wrong, but I do not find that I can, from any argument I have yet heard, retract from or concede any of the opinions contained in This Paper.\(^{53}\)

“*This Paper,*” however, contains much safer language than its predecessor, and Chapone discusses marital roles rather than marital choice; thus she can “tenaciously persist” in a series of largely conventional and safe statements. Chapone states that “a husband has a divine right to the absolute obedience of his wife, in all cases where the first duties do not interfere…he is undoubtedly her superior.” For this reason, she suggests that women should choose husbands whom they can freely acknowledge as their superiors. Chapone presents these first two points as axioms; those that follow are contingent on the good will of both partners and on the wife in particular. While a wife should be her husband’s “first and dearest friend…with all the privileges, rights, and freedoms of the most perfect friendship,” that friendship is “a free and voluntary gift” which the husband may withdraw if the wife does not deserve it.\(^{54}\) In order to preserve that friendship, the “inequality and subjection” that might compromise it should “be laid


\(^{54}\) Chapone, *A Matrimonial Creed*, 252-253.
aside or suffered to sleep, till such time as the woman shall shew herself unworthy of
the high title of friend, with which her husband had honoured her.”  

Chapone has forcefully implied a syllogism: friends are equals; husbands and wives should be friends; therefore, husbands and wives should be equals. She adds, however, the caveat that this friendship between spouses is the husband’s to give or take away and the wife’s to earn or lose. This restriction enables Chapone to present herself as a more traditional thinker, as does her shift in emphasis from the choice of a spouse in the Letters to the roles of men and women within marriage in the Matrimonial Creed. Although she makes many of the same arguments in both documents, in the Matrimonial Creed she begins by affirming a traditional view—the husband’s superiority over his wife—and follows that affirmation by describing companionacy as a privilege rather than a right.

The latter sections of the Matrimonial Creed read more like a conduct manual than a position statement, a change that allows Chapone further to move away from the controversial issue of women’s rights. She suggests that both partners observe “a certain kind and degree of respect, politeness, or complaisance…even in this most intimate of unions.” They should “testify their mutual preference of each other’s happiness to their own;” a husband must not allow “a total change of those manners which perhaps first attracted [his wife’s] fancy” and a wife “freed from the restraints of maiden punctilio, must naturally be delighted with every proper occasion of shewing her grateful attention and observant tenderness.” Chapone presents these conventional

55 Chapone, A Matrimonial Creed, 253.
56 Chapone, A Matrimonial Creed, 253.
57 Chapone, A Matrimonial Creed, 254.
guidelines as a means to distance herself from the riskier aspects of her letters to Richardson.

Chapone uses the *Matrimonial Creed* to address specific criticisms of her own character, apparently based on reader reaction to the *Letters on Filial Obedience*. “I cannot, on self-examination, convince myself that any of the above sentiments are founded in pride, or in aversion to be governed, or in jealousy of power,” she asserts. Further, she claims to desire guidance and direction rather than autonomy:

> I have never yet been the mistress of myself, nor ever wished to be so; for I am convinced that it is generally a happiness, and often a relief to have some person to determine for us, either to point out our duty, or direct our choice. If I know myself in this respect, I should be a loyal subject, but a rebellious slave.\(^{58}\)

When she disavows any desire for independent decision-making, Chapone comes closest to rejecting the arguments she made in the *Letters*; but she softens the impact of that rejection with the reminder that she still does not wish to accept slavery. With that limitation in place, however, she is willing to acknowledge the “happiness” that comes with subordination, thus showing herself to be appropriately compliant as a daughter and future wife.

> Living with very limited marital choice, a woman had to be careful not to appear hostile to marriage and shut herself out of the market. In the *Matrimonial Creed* Chapone attempts to show she is marriageable, but does so by making an argument that complements, rather than opposes, that of the *Letters on Filial Obedience*. Unlike

\(^{58}\) Chapone, *A Matrimonial Creed*, 254.
Lady Mary Wortley Montagu, Chapone wrote to a well-known public figure in her *Letters*, using quotes from the Bible and from contemporary philosophers to support her belief that young women should have the right at least to refuse an unwanted marriage. Although she criticizes only a single aspect of marriage and compartmentalizes her argument more than Montagu does, her choice of audience and her appeals to religious and philosophical authority suggest she is calling for broad social change. This bold strategy from a young single woman created the need for a much more careful, if equally public, restatement of her views on marriage in *A Matrimonial Creed*. Her humble rhetoric in the *Creed* creates a public image more conventionally suitable to a young woman of the eighteenth century: intelligent and well-read but fundamentally manageable and yielding.
CHAPTER 4

“PERFECT FRIENDSHIP”: MARY DELANY’S RATIONAL COMPANIONACY

In her autobiography and correspondence, Mary Granville (Pendarves) Delany (1700–1788) amalgamates two contradictory positions about marriage: she favors marriage to a good man as the proper role for a good woman, but otherwise deplores it as “the matrimonial trap” in which women give up far more than they gain.¹ She advocates marital choice based on a kind of intellectual morality: marrying a good friend and companion, she suggests, is more sensible than marrying for either physical attraction or financial gain. Delany objects to the restrictions that society places on women’s behavior but never urges women to violate those restrictions. Instead, she argues that an emphasis on reason and Biblically based morality would lead to happiness through companionacy.

Like Lady Mary Wortley Montagu, Delany rarely makes direct reference to her own situation when she outlines her thoughts on marriage; unlike Montagu, whose words consistently diverge from her actions, Delany successfully integrates the contradictions in her ideas. Writing for a private audience of family members and close friends, she never refers to her own life directly, because her intended audience would have had no need of the reminder. For her contemporaries, knowledge of her background lent credence to her assertions. Having experienced both an unfortunate marriage and a happy one, she argues that the wrong marriage can ruin a woman’s life, but the right marriage can perfect it. Her intended readers’ knowledge of her

¹ Mary Granville married Alexander Pendarves in 1717 and used his surname until she married Patrick Delany in 1743. She kept the name Delany until her death in 1788. To minimize confusion I will refer to her hereafter as “Mary Delany.”
experiences gives her statements about matrimony an authoritative weight, showing the emotionally damaging possible consequences of eighteenth-century marriage.

The authority that Delany assumed on the subject of marriage aligned with her reputation as an expert on social matters in general: she knows the rules well enough to criticize them. Throughout her life she was known as an authority on etiquette and an arbiter of taste, closely connected to the Court and, through her letters, able both to describe currently correct behavior, dress, and décor and to advise her friends and family on such matters. She was connected to the “bluestocking circle” of Elizabeth Montagu, Hester Mulso Chapone, Elizabeth Carter, and others whose writings had varying degrees of public exposure; but Delany’s own sense of upper-class propriety kept her from writing for publication. Her personal letters, collected and published in 1861-62, fill six volumes. Like Chapone’s *Letters on Filial Obedience* and *A Matrimonial Creed*, Delany’s correspondence has received little critical attention. She is better known as a skilled craftswoman with impeccable connections than as a critic of the social institutions with which she lived. However, the depth of her experience and the breadth of her correspondence make her writings a valuable resource. In the letters, her many references to marriage—her own and others’—are by turns critical, skeptical, and optimistic. She presents herself consistently and simply as a virtuous woman of common sense, so that her most revolutionary idea—that women should be able to choose their husbands or choose no husband at all—seems logical and even obvious. She approaches the matter of gender roles similarly, happily endorsing the traditional

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2 Delany was a particular authority on the details of mourning dress, and her letters repeatedly provide advice on choice of fabrics, styles, and duration of mourning.
limits placed on women’s behavior but suggesting that both religion and reason demand that husbands and wives be on a more equal footing.

In her early life, Delany, whose sense of duty and filial loyalty led her to agree to an unwanted marriage, was arguably a victim of her own strict conscience as much as of her time and circumstances. However, she never relented from the high standard to which she held herself and which she felt was appropriate for women in general. Her consistency in this respect protected her reputation from scrutiny and allowed her to present herself as a moral authority. She uses her personal morality, based on her Christian beliefs and on her strong sense of propriety, as the foundation for presenting her ideas about marriage. She accepts the Biblical role of the wife and endorses friendship between people of good character as the best basis for marriage, thereby applying her moral framework to promote the ideal of companionacy. Repeatedly, she suggests that any two people of similar backgrounds and complementary temperaments can make a good match and be happy together, especially if they are of fundamentally good character. She objects to the contemporary state of marriage as a socioeconomic system, relentlessly criticizing the necessity for young women to marry and deploring the emphasis placed on fortunes in marriage.

Mary Granville was born in 1700 to Bernard Granville and Mary Westcombe. She described her family circumstances and her life up to her first widowhood in a series of letters addressed to Margaret Cavendish Hartley, Duchess of Portland, and dated 1740. Although Delany’s great-niece and editor, Augusta Waddington Hall, Lady Llanover, labels these letters an “autobiography,” they are personal letters that Delany wrote to the Duchess at her request. The letters describe her life in a deliberately
forthright tone, using humor and pathos to invite the reader’s sympathy with their subject. The only exception to the autobiographical letters’ sense of confessional honesty is their use of typical eighteenth-century poetic aliases for the people involved. However, Delany applied the aliases inconsistently, and also wrote a key to them, suggesting that their use was more a matter of convention than a genuine attempt at confidentiality.

Delany was the product of “a younger, and impecunious, branch of an exceptionally noble ‘old family’” that traced its ancestry back to the Norman Conquest. In the autobiography she explains that as a youngest son, her father’s “chief dependence was on the favour of the Court and his brother’s [Lord Lansdown] friendship.” Delany had been “brought up with the expectation of being Maid of Honour,” but on the death of Queen Anne in 1714, the family could no longer depend on the Court’s favor. Bernard Granville and Lansdown were sent to the Tower for their supposed collaboration with Lord Oxford, who had been a favorite of the Queen’s but was accused of treason after her death. In November 1715, Granville was allowed to retire quietly into the country with his family, but Lord Lansdown remained imprisoned for two years. Shortly after his release, Lord Lansdown invited Delany to stay with his family at Longleat, and she soon became a kind of adopted daughter to him.

When Bernard Granville brought his daughter to Lord Lansdown’s house, the older brother told the younger that he intended to reduce his allowance, explaining to

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3 R. Brimley Johnson, ed., Mrs. Delany at Court and Among the Wits, Being the Record of a Great Lady of Genius in the Art of Living (London: Stanley Paul & Co. Ltd., 1925), xi.
4 Mary Delany to Margaret Cavendish Harley, Duchess of Portland, 1740, in Augusta Waddington Hall, Lady Llanover, ed. The Autobiography and Correspondence of Mary Granville, Mrs. Delany, With Interesting Reminiscences of King George the Third and Queen Charlotte. London: Richard Bentley, 1862. 6 vols. I. 7. Subsequent references to Delany’s correspondence are drawn from this edition unless otherwise noted.
5 Johnson, Mrs. Delany, 3.
Granville “that now he should lessen his income, supposing that by this time he was fallen into a method of living in the country, and did not want so large an income as at first setting out. [Lansdown] reminded him at the same time how kind he was to his children.”⁶ Bernard Granville was unhappy with his brother’s treatment of him and told his daughter so, as Delany describes:

He wanted no hints of the obligations he lay under to his brother, and the day before he left Lord Lansdown’s house, he opened his heart to me, and talked on the subject in so moving a way, that it made a deep impression on my mind, and often after he was gone I used to walk in the gallery where we had our last conversation, and recollect it with grief of heart.⁷

Delany’s loyalty to her immediate family, which this passage suggests, figures repeatedly in her letters and colors her actions, as she describes them, throughout her life, even leading her to seek her mother’s and brother’s permission to remarry at the age of forty-two.⁸ This loyalty is part of her self-presentation, being an element of the morally correct behavior which she always carefully displayed. Much later she would promote and reinforce the same values in writing to the young daughter of a friend: “The only way to be beloved and happy (even in a parent’s house,) is to be humble, modest, attentive, and complying towards those who have taken you under their wing.”⁹ Delany was genuinely close to her family but also presented and promoted that closeness as a moral value.

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⁶ Mary Delany to Margaret Cavendish Harley, Duchess of Portland, 1740, I. 20.  
⁷ Johnson, Mrs. Delany, 19.  
⁸ Johnson, Mrs. Delany, 125.  
⁹ Mary Delany to Miss Sparrow, 13 November 1774, V.57.
Her “grief of heart” at her family’s situation was compounded when a friend of Lord Lansdown’s, Alexander Pendarves, came to visit at Longleat. Delany describes his visit in terms designed to elicit both laughter and sympathy. Her description invites the reader to sympathize with the awkwardness and embarrassment of the situation and, through her, with any girl in similar circumstances, suddenly realizing that the fusty old man at whom she has been giggling is intended to be her husband: “His wig, his coat, his dirty boots, his large unwieldy person, and his crimson countenance were all subjects of great mirth” to Delany, and she “diverted [herself] at his expense several days.” But she soon realized she could not dismiss him with a laugh. Pendarves “talked of going every day,” she recalls in the autobiography, “but still stayed, and I (to my great sorrow) was after some time convinced I was the cause of this delay…and I could easily perceive I was the only person in the family that did not approve of it.”

She found him “ugly and disagreeable”; in addition, at age sixty he was more than forty years her senior. In hopes of heading off a proposal, she behaved toward him with obvious rudeness and disrespect, but to no avail; her uncle and his family welcomed the match. Pendarves was one of Lord Lansdown’s closest friends as well as a powerful political figure in the area. Lord Lansdown thus “readily embraced the offer and engaged for [Delany’s] compliance; he might have said obedience, for [she] was not entreated, but commanded.”

Delany’s intended reader, the Duchess of Portland, would likely have known the factual outlines of this story; in retelling it, Delany creates for the Duchess a sympathetic image of the teenager she had been and the anxiety she must have felt when she

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10 Mary Delany to Margaret Cavendish Harley, Duchess of Portland, 1740, I.23.
11 Mary Delany to Margaret Cavendish Harley, Duchess of Portland, 1740, I.24.
12 Mary Delany to Margaret Cavendish Harley, Duchess of Portland, 1740, I.26.
realized her guardian was immovable from his decision. Delany describes Lansdown’s “pathetic speech” enumerating all the reasons she should accept Pendarves, reasons that form a laundry list of the pressures on young women in Delany’s position. If she refused the match, Lansdown suggested, Delany would alienate her extended family, impoverish herself, endanger her father’s circumstances, and throw her own moral character into doubt by raising the suspicion that she was in love with someone else—Lansdown named a former suitor and threatened to “have him dragged through the horse-pond” if he were the reason for her refusal.13

Delany’s recounting of Lansdown’s speech suggests it was less “pathetic” than guilt-ridden and bullying: he described his own “love and care” for her, her father’s “unhappy circumstances,” her own “want of fortune,” the “little prospect [she] had of being happy” if she “disobliged those friends that were desirous of serving [her],” “how despicable [she] should be if [she] could refuse him because he was not young and handsome,” and last but certainly not least Pendarves’s offer to settle his whole estate on her. Recounting Lansdown’s speech almost a quarter-century after the fact, she obliquely criticizes her uncle and, more broadly, the society that made it acceptable to push a teenager to marry a man of sixty and make that marriage a referendum on her virtue. Again, she seeks her reader’s sympathy, this time by suggesting that the decades-old wounds are still fresh. “I assure you,” Delany writes, “the recollection of this part of my life makes me tremble at this day.”14 Their courtship, such as it was, is one of the few areas she glosses over in the autobiography as “too painful to me to

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14 Mary Delany to Margaret Cavendish Harley, Duchess of Portland, 1740, 1.24.
raise any entertainment to you from the relation.” The elision invites the reader to sympathize but also shields Delany from criticism, as she hints in an earlier part of the autobiography that her behavior toward Pendarves was “not altogether justifiable.” She omits unattractive details and thereby avoids diluting the image of herself as a victim of circumstance.

Anticipating, or likely creating, Delany’s aversion to mercenary marriages, the Granville-Pendarves match was largely an economic one. Delany’s editor suggests that Pendarves purposely came to Longleat to meet Delany because he needed someone on whom to settle his estate. He had intended to make his nephew, Francis Basset, his heir, but Basset refused to agree to the condition of taking the Pendarves name along with the inheritance. Pendarves had threatened to sell his estate if Basset would not accept his condition but apparently decided to marry in order to sidestep his own threat. Delany, for her part, feared repercussions against her parents if she refused Pendarves. In addition, dutiful as always, she “considered...being provided for would be a great satisfaction and relief” to her father as well as a means to improve relations between her father and her uncle. She knew “that if [she] showed the least reluctance, [her] father and mother would never consent to the match, and that would inevitably expose them...to [Lansdown’s] resentment.” With so much at stake for her family, she made up her mind to accept Pendarves.

For the same reasons, she decided to perform her duty to Pendarves by hiding her aversion to him after they were married. She admits that Pendarves genuinely

15 Mary Delany to Margaret Cavendish Harley, Duchess of Portland, 1740, I.29.
16 Mary Delany to Margaret Cavendish Harley, Duchess of Portland, 1740, I.28.
17 Note to Mary Delany to Margaret Cavendish Harley, Duchess of Portland, 1740, I.25.
18 Mary Delany to Margaret Cavendish Harley, Duchess of Portland, 1740, I.29.
loved her, but she nevertheless portrays herself as a victim of her circumstances and her traditional role as a wife and daughter. She saw him as “my tyrant—my jailor; one that I was determined to obey and oblige, but found it impossible to love.”  

She describes him as drinking too much, suffering from attacks of gout, and behaving irrationally out of jealousy over his attractive young wife. In marrying him, she “lost all that makes life desirable—joy and peace of mind.” Her decision to disguise her dislike of her husband, she explains, was an effort to fulfill her sense of duty and place herself above the reproaches of her family or her own conscience.

Of course, it is impossible to say to what extent Delany may have embroidered the facts in her autobiography to create a more moving story for the Duchess of Portland and to make herself appear as a moral paragon. Nevertheless, by calling the reader’s attention to instances of improper behavior on her part, she suggests that she intends that her story be taken at face value and her warts-and-all honesty, or appearance thereof, be regarded as a virtue. Like Lady Mary Wortley Montagu, Delany suggests that her honesty in admitting to her shortcomings outweighs any perceived blight on her character created by the shortcomings themselves. Describing her behavior toward Pendarves before their marriage, she declares, “I shall not disguise my thoughts, or soften any part of my behaviour, which I fear was not altogether justifiable.” In relating the circumstances of Pendarves’s death she sounds this note of veracity again. In 1724, Pendarves unexpectedly died after seven years of subjecting Delany to his jealousy and drunkenness. “I became a widow,” Delany describes in her autobiography, “a state you may believe (after the sincere confessions I have made) not

19 Mary Delany to Margaret Cavendish Harley, Duchess of Portland, 1740, I.31.
20 Mary Delany to Margaret Cavendish Harley, Duchess of Portland, 1740, I.29.
21 Mary Delany to Margaret Cavendish Harley, Duchess of Portland, 1740, I.28.
unwelcome....As to my fortune, it was very mediocre, but it was at my own command." 22 Each reminder of sincerity and truth accompanies an admission of a possible shortcoming on Delany’s part: her behavior during Pendarves’s courtship was less than perfect; she could not honestly mourn the end of her loveless forced marriage; she was not generously provided for at his death. Her willingness to admit to impropriety, she implies, proves her virtue more effectively than hypocritical kindness to Pendarves during their courtship or false mourning after his death would have done. In this way she can rhetorically add to her upright character even when her actions do not fulfill traditional expectations.

Despite his earlier promise regarding his estate, Pendarves died intestate: he had made, but never signed, a will in favor of his wife. 23 As Lady Llanover relates the circumstances, Delany dissuaded him from signing the will the day before he died: “thinking he was low,” she “begged him to defer it till the next day.” 24 The next day, though, Delany found him dead in his bed. As a result, he left his widow only “a few hundreds a year.” 25 Lady Llanover notes that Lord Lansdown apparently agreed to only a “moderate jointure” for Delany when he arranged her marriage to Pendarves, “implicitly depending on the will which was to make her the ‘rich widow’ he alluded to” in a letter. 26 She did not gain the fortune her family expected by her husband’s death; but, as Delany suggests, she found freedom from an unwanted marriage a large enough blessing to offset any financial disappointment.

22 Johnson, Mrs. Delany, 27.
24 “This was mentioned by Mrs. Delany to the editor’s mother,” Lady Llanover explains. Note to Mary Delany to Margaret Cavendish Harley, Duchess of Portland, 1740, I.107.
25 Johnson, introduction to Mrs. Delany, xxxiv.
26 Note to Lord Lansdown to Mary Delany, 5 April 1725, I.115. Lansdown tellingly uses the word “reparation” to characterize what he expects his niece to receive from Pendarves in exchange “for all the friends you have left.” (Lansdown to Mary Delany, 1 May 1718, I. 41)
Delany’s experience with Pendarves led her to remain a widow for nineteen years and to make highly critical remarks on marriage in her letters to her sister, Ann Granville Dewes. As a widow, she finally had true marital choice: she could decide whether to marry as well as when and whom to marry. Delany exercised this choice throughout her widowhood, refusing numerous suitors. More pertinently, in her letters she takes advantage of the social and rhetorical freedom unique to widows and sharply criticizes marriage in general. She equally takes advantage of the rhetorical freedom offered by her audience. Her sister was her chief correspondent from Delany’s marriage to Pendarves in 1717 to Dewes’s death in 1761, and the bulk and content of the letters between the sisters testify to the freedom with which they could express themselves. Delany uses that freedom in order to present herself as unwilling to remarry, critical of the wifely role, and skeptical about others’ motivations for marriage.

Delany’s autobiography suggests that she and her family were concerned about her finances; however, in general she apparently felt little financial or familial pressure to remarry. Her letters reflect her disdain for mercenary marriages and her belief that such an emphasis on finances is immoral. In the autobiography she describes her reaction to her uncle and aunt, Lord and Lady Stanley, urging her to accept a proposal from their nephew Henry Monck about six months after Pendarves’s death. They assured her that they would “make his fortune” if she would marry him. She was surprised at their willingness to subject her to another marriage for money: “I was much astonished at my aunt’s being so zealous for him, and that fortune should ever sway so far with her generous nature as to wish me united to so insignificant a man!” Delany calls her aunt “generous” but suggests that Lady Stanley’s financial concern impugns

27 Mary Delany to Margaret Cavendish Harley, Duchess of Portland, 1740, I.112.
her generosity rather than confirming it. The best expression of that generosity, Delany implies, would have been a concern for her happiness, not for her fortune. The unwanted suitor seems not to have caused lasting familial conflict, however, and Delany continued to present herself as contentedly single and particularly uninterested in marrying for financial security.

A few years later she begins to condemn mercenary marriages in her social circle, describing, for instance, the marriage between Lord Carnavron and a daughter of Lord Bruce:

The ugliest couple this day in England, but then there’s riches, and great alliance, and that is first to be considered. Beauty, sense, and honour are things not required; if thrown into the bargain, why well and good; but the want of them will not spoil a match now-a-days, but if the fortune prove short of what was reported, and the lady has all other accomplishments that can be desired, it is said of her, as once of virtue ‘being its own reward,’ the lady is a very pretty lady, but no match for me; this is the way of the world, and a sad world it is.28

Like Lady Mary Wortley Montagu and (as I shall demonstrate) Eliza Haywood’s “Euphrosine” in _The Young Lady_, Delany claims that “the world”—that is, upper-class society—is corrupt because it values money over common sense, honor, and even physical beauty. She adopts a cynical tone suited to a woman of greater years and experience than she had at the time. Some genuine bitterness surely lies behind the world-weary pose, an understandable reaction to her own unwanted marriage arranged largely for financial and political reasons, but it would not have been necessary for her

28 Mary Delany to Ann Dewes, 5 December 1728, I.182-83.
overtly to draw this conclusion for her sister’s benefit. She could, however, use that
tone to play the “big sister” to the utmost in writing to Dewes and thus to communicate
her negative opinions from her preferred position of virtue and moral correctness.
Delany places herself above “the world,” superior in both virtue and reason, arguing that
while money must be considered, it should not be the principal motive for making a
match. “I have no notion of love and a knapsack,” she concedes in an earlier letter, “but
I cannot think riches the only thing that ought to be considered in matrimony.”
Although her tone becomes more positive through the years, she never ceases to be
skeptical of the preference among her peers for money over companionacy.

As an outgoing young woman, Delany clearly enjoyed the freedom—social and
rhetorical—that her widowhood afforded her. However, her letters consistently place a
premium on socially correct behavior, reminding the reader that Delany values
propriety. Remaining single into her thirties, she suggested that her behavior had
become less lively from “the fear of appearing too gay” and in one letter half-jokingly
takes an acquaintance to task for characterizing her as “a flaunting frisking widow.”
She continues to present an image of modest and conservative widowhood, and never
suggests a wish to change that status. Her letters until her remarriage in 1743 show a
consistent distaste for the prospect of marriage, expressed in the most strident
language seen in the correspondence. While her early opinions about friends’
marriages usually focus on the immorality of marrying for money, her statements about
her own prospective remarriage disparage her potential role as a wife, a role with

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29 Mary Delany to Ann Dewes, 19 January 1728, I.155.
30 Mary Delany to Ann Dewes, 26 September 1731, I.292, and 12 April 1734, I.455.
numerous risks and, as she describes it, no obvious rewards. In 1728 she wrote to Dewes,

Matrimony! I marry! Yes, there’s a blessed scene before my eyes of the comforts of that state.—A sick husband, squalling brats, a cross mother-in-law, and a thousand unavoidable impertinences…I may be dashed on the very rock I endeavour to avoid, and therefore I will say no more…

A year later she remarked on Lord and Lady Fitzwilliam’s divorce, “Fine encouragement this to wedlock. Shall I devote my life, my heart, to a man, that after all my painful services will be glad of an opportunity to quarrel with me?” In 1733 she calls marriage “the matrimonial trap,” and in 1734 describes refusing a suitor with five children, acknowledging that

Matrimony is *so little* to my disposition that I was glad to lay hold of a reasonable excuse for not accepting the proposal, and I was *as glad* to find he had *five children* as some people would have been at hearing he had *five thousand a-year!*

Marriage would have meant giving up the security and social freedom of widowhood in exchange for insecurity in a strange family and no guarantee of reward even if one were to play the wifely role perfectly. It is “serious and hazardous,” a gamble better avoided than undertaken. As a widow Delany speaks from the strongest position available to a woman in her society and depicts the position of wife as a weak one. Well provided

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31 Mary Delany to Ann Dewes, 19 March 1728, I. 164-65.  
32 Mary Delany to Ann Dewes, 1 April 1729, I.204.  
33 Mary Delany to Ann Dewes, 4 January 1733, I. 391.  
34 Mary Delany to Ann Dewes, 12 April 1734, I. 456.  
35 Mary Delany to Catherine Collingswood, Lady Throckmorton, 5 December 1740, II.133.
for financially and under no familial pressure to remarry, she has nothing to gain from marriage and would, in fact, be at a disadvantage compared to her role as a widow.

In that role Delany had latitude to make bold criticisms. Meanwhile, her exaggerated tone—sometimes merry, sometimes biting—would have entertained her sister and created empathy between the two. Dewes, seven years younger than Delany, did not marry until 1740 (three years before her sister’s marriage to Patrick Delany), so in this period they could commiserate and enjoy being young single women together, a situation Delany paints as a kind of cheerful predicament: “We are certainly the poorest of our family, but yet I would not change with any one of them every circumstance of my life,” she remarked to Dewes in 1734.\footnote{Mary Delany to Ann Dewes, 16 February 1734, I. 428.} Although much of her bold tone in her letters to Dewes can be attributed to the freedom to play for laughs and to vent frustrations with a sibling, her sister would of course have recognized that she was speaking from experience. Delany’s knowledge of the risks involved for women would make her reluctant to give up the comparatively rare privileges of comfortable singlehood and genuine matrimonial choice.

To the present-day reader of the correspondence, the marriage between Mary Pendarves and Patrick Delany, D.D. may seem to appear out of the blue. In 1731 she met him for the first time; his first wife was then still living. In her autobiography she claims to have had, from that first meeting, “a higher opinion of him than of any other man I had ever conversed with.”\footnote{Mary Delany to Margaret Cavendish Harley, Duchess of Portland, 1740, I.296.} Still, he is mentioned only in passing in the correspondence until the letter in which he proposed to her in 1743 appears, calling her
“the person in the world [that his first wife] most esteemed and honoured” and offering her “the tenderness of affection, and the faith of friendship.”

“I have long been persuaded that perfect friendship is nowhere to be found but in marriage,” he writes.

The proposal could hardly have been better calculated for its recipient. Mary Delany would use similar language to describe ideal marriages for the rest of her life. Throughout her correspondence, when she writes in favor of marriage or praises a marriage between acquaintances, Delany describes the relationship in terms of friendship, good character, and complementary temperaments. As such, she promotes rational companionacy much as Lady Mary Wortley Montagu does: “I think...if we are not happy it must be our own faults; we have both chosen worthy, and sensible friends, and if we act reasonably by them and ourselves, we may hope for as much happiness as this mortal state will afford.”

A marriage of choice between two good people with common sense is a formula for contentment. Nearly a decade later she states the same theme:

Happy indeed is the woman who has a conscientious and reasonable companion: without truth and virtue there is no real happiness: other desirable accomplishments are additions that are very agreeable but to be possessed of both the good and the agreeable is an extraordinary share of good fortune. So circumstanced the common casualties of life (in marriage) are supportable, but otherwise intolerable.

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38 Johnson, Mrs. Delany, 123-24.  
39 Patrick Delany to Mary Delany, 23 April 1743, II. 210.  
40 Mary Delany to Ann Dewes, 21 February 1744, II.265.  
41 Mary Delany to Ann Dewes, 21 February 1744, III.115.
When she emphasizes the importance of friendship over romantic love, Delany demonstrates that she is not only reasonable but also virtuous. Long before her marriage to Dr. Delany she had described to her sister the value of friendship as a relationship that cannot easily be counterfeited: “People may fancy themselves in love, and work up their imagination to such a pitch as to really believe themselves possessed of that passion, but I never yet heard of anybody’s carrying friendship on by mere imagination.” As a rational woman, she will seek friendship—a relationship that is, she says, based on truth. As a virtuous woman she will not allow herself to be carried away by an ephemeral emotion like love.

Unsurprisingly, Delany’s attitude toward matrimony in general, as expressed in her letters, softens after her marriage to Dr. Delany. Of course, in Dr. Delany she had something she had never had before: a kind and caring husband “whose turn of mind is not foreign from [her] own.” Their marriage was a new yardstick by which she could gauge what a marriage should be. In describing marriages within her social circle, she continues to report on fortunes—financial realities, after all, had not changed—but predicts the success or failure of each match based on the respective characters of the parties involved. A marriage between two ill-bred profligates, such as that between Lady Frances Leveson-Gower and Lord John Sackville, would never succeed: “A wretched couple I fear they will prove; he is ill-natured and a man of no principle, and she has shown the world that she has little prudence.” She had little optimism for a

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42 Mary Delany to Ann Dewes, 25 November 1727, I.148.
43 In late 1729, Delany broke off her relationship with Lord Baltimore, who claimed to have been in love with her for years—and whose feelings she seems to have reciprocated—because he felt that her agreeing to marry him was insufficient proof of her affection, and she was willing to give no other (Johnson, Mrs. Delany, 78).
44 Johnson, Mrs. Delany, 124.
45 Mary Delany to Ann Dewes, 11 February 1744, II.263.
match between opposites like Lord and Lady Rawdon: “I fear no happiness can be expected where the dispositions are so different.” But well-bred, honest, cheerful types were likely to be happy together regardless of circumstances:

[The Lord Chancellor] is going to marry his son (Mr. Jocelyn) to Lord Limerick’s daughter…the young gentleman has a very good character, and is a very pretty man; the lady much commended for her proper behavior—genteel but not handsome, and Mr. Jocelyn has preferred her to beauties and to fortunes: it is an agreeable and reasonable match, and I hope it will prove a happy one.47

It seems inconsistent for someone who had earlier deplored marriage so strongly to later condone it in broad terms of character and upbringing rather than individual preferences. However, Delany prided herself on her rational outlook and on judgments based on common sense. For her, character and friendship, and the empirical evidence for both provided by people’s behavior, would be better predictors for marital success than the invisible and unreliable alchemy of love.

Despite her willingness to approve of marriages between good people, Delany continues to criticize the extent to which marriage was both a necessity and a limiting factor in upper-class women’s lives. Like both Lady Mary Wortley Montagu and Hester Chapone, she laments that women have only one way of making a living—that is, by marrying well: “Young men have a thousand ways of improving a little fortune…but young gentlewomen have no way, the fortune settled on them is all they are to

46 Mary Delany to Ann Dewes, 15 December 1759, III.579.
47 Mary Delany to Ann Dewes, 2 December 1752, III.179.
expect.” Also like Montagu, she is reluctant to see young family members marry. In answer to a question from her sister about Dewes’s thirteen-year-old daughter Mary (who was also Delany’s goddaughter), she explains, “I should be very sorry to have Mary married before she was twenty, and yet if a very desirable match offers sooner, I don’t know how it can be refused, if she must marry at all?” Refusing a good match, Delany hints, could discourage future offers. She questions the restrictions of custom that leave young women “in an uncertain state,” powerless to act beyond accepting or refusing a proposal once one is offered.

Delany reserves her strongest criticism for marriage as an economic requirement rather than as an option. She writes to her sister in 1751, “Why must women be driven to the necessity of marrying? a state that should always be a matter of choice!” Here Delany points out the contradiction that limits the prospects for companionacy most severely: the “state,”—that is, the married state—not merely the partner, should be “a matter of choice.” When a young woman is limited to choosing the partner, not the state, Delany explains,

if [she] has not fortune sufficient to maintain her in the station she has been bred to, what can she do, but marry? And to avoid living either very obscurely or running into debt, she accepts of a match with no other view than that of interest. Has not this made matrimony an irksome prison to many, and prevented its being that happy union of hearts where mutual

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48 Mary Delany to Ann Dewes, 28 July 1750, II.575.
49 Mary Delany to Ann Dewes, 31 March 1759, III.544.
50 Mary Delany to Ann Dewes, 26 December 1755, III.394.
choice and mutual obligation make it the most perfect state of friendship?\textsuperscript{51}

This limited choice, she suggests, can never be truly mutual. A “happy union of hearts” created by “mutual choice” would make the obligations of marriage, which seemed to fall most heavily on the wife, not just bearable, but part of “the most perfect state of friendship,” such as that she achieved with Dr. Delany at a time when she was able to choose whether, as well as whom, to marry.

Although Delany’s views on marriage often appear contradictory, she justifies those contradictions through her lifelong interest in morally and socially correct behavior. Much as Eliza Haywood would do, Delany positions herself as a moral exemplar so that she can appear correct and reasonable in conventional terms, even when she is advocating for a change in the typical relationship between husbands and wives. She disapproves of non-companionate marriages as offenses against reason and against Christian authority: “Our Maker created us ‘helps meet,’ which surely implies we are worthy of being their companions, their friends, their advisers, as well as they ours; without those privileges being our due, how could obedience to their will be a punishment?”\textsuperscript{52} She argues that a companionate relationship is what God wants for a married couple, and that friendship between husbands and wives makes it easier, not harder, to maintain traditional roles, of which she approves. Women, she says, are “designed by Providence to be more domestic.”\textsuperscript{53} Again prefiguring Haywood, Delany suggests that men fail by governing women too harshly and themselves not at all:

\textsuperscript{51} Mary Delany to Ann Granville Dewes, 16 March 1751, III. 25.
\textsuperscript{52} Mary Delany to Ann Granville Dewes, 14 April 1759, III.547. See Genesis 2:18.
\textsuperscript{53} Mary Delany to Ann Granville Dewes, 16 November 1751, III. 57.
The minutest indiscretion in a woman (though occasioned by themselves) never fails of being enlarged into a notorious crime; but men are to sin on without limitation or blame; a hard case!—not the restraint we [women] are under, for that I extremely approve of, but the unreasonable license tolerated in the men.\textsuperscript{54}

Here Delany presents herself as a moralist and as a rational thinker, willing to uphold a high standard of behavior as long as others do the same.

Delany shows that she possesses the Enlightenment values of reason and logic as well as religious training, casting her belief system as a kind of intellectual morality. Rather than embracing the more conventional views of marriage that she considers typical of her peers, she looks critically at the parties involved and judges their prospects of happiness on what she suggests are rational grounds: “Who can judge of our happiness but ourselves, and if one thousand pound a year and a great deal of love will content me, better than ten thousand with indifference, it is the reasonable part to choose that which will give me the most satisfaction.”\textsuperscript{55} Choice in marriage makes more sense than coercion, she suggests, and marrying a companion and friend is more reasonable than marrying for either lust or lucre. Although she sometimes objects to the restrictions and expectations placed on women’s behavior, and strongly decries the necessity of marriage as an alternative to poverty, Delany never advocates that women should behave unconventionally. Instead, she attacks society’s use of the conventions themselves, suggesting that genuine attention to morality and reason will lead couples to happiness.

\textsuperscript{54} Mary Delany to Ann Granville Dewes, 17 January 1732, I. 333.
\textsuperscript{55} Mary Delany to Ann Granville Dewes, 19 January 1728, I. 155.
Although she wrote for a commercial audience, Eliza Haywood (1693–1756) advanced opinions about marriage similar to those that Montagu, Chapone, and Delany presented in their correspondences. In the four works I will examine in this chapter—*The Female Spectator* (1744–46), *The Wife* (1756), *The Husband* (1756), and *The Young Lady* (1756)—Haywood suggests that women must rely for protection on the same moral codes and social mores that limit their agency. In interpolated tales and letters, she delineates the limits of female power: women can preserve their reputations, but not necessarily achieve happiness, by adhering to society’s standards in matters of courtship and marriage. While she endorses conventional expectations of feminine behavior, Haywood criticizes the burden those expectations place on women. Women’s careful preservation of virtue, although necessary, will not ensure their happiness. They can find happiness in companionate marriages based on friendship; but women must be educated, and those who do possess social power—parents and husbands—must consider their daughters’ and wives’ interests as equal to their own.

To advance her critique, Haywood uses letters from correspondents (possibly real as well as fictional) and interpolated tales, adapting the prurient appeal that she established in her amatory fiction and turning that prurience to a moralizing purpose.¹ Kathryn King notes that the sensational episodes in Haywood’s didactic works exist “not

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¹ Kathryn King observes that “critics generally assume that Haywood composed all or most of these materials herself…but the question of their authenticity is one that should, in my view, remain open.” (Preface to *The Female Spectator*, in *Selected Works of Eliza Haywood* II, ed. Alexander Pettit [London: Pickering & Chatto, 2001], vol. 2, viii.)
to warm but to warn.” I will argue that they do both. The letters and tales allow readers to experience transgressions vicariously and therefore without consequence. As Haywood presents the moral message of each episode, readers can then congratulate themselves on recognizing those transgressions as moral exempla. Haywood uses her interpolated material to create shared, albeit hypothetical, points of reference between reader and narrator, much as a private correspondent would refer to a mutual acquaintance in a letter. The fact that Haywood’s references are often fictional, and in any case chosen “to order,” gives her the rhetorical advantage of presenting precisely the evidence that she needs to make her moral arguments persuasive.

Comparatively little is known about Eliza Fowler Haywood’s life. Few of her personal documents have survived, and official records of her life are sketchy. Born in 1693, Haywood left her parents’ home to begin an acting career and, apparently, to marry. Both the identity of her husband and the fate of her marriage remain unknown; it is not clear whether Haywood was estranged from her husband or was widowed, but by 1730 they were no longer living together. In a letter to an unnamed potential patron she describes the circumstances that led her to become a professional writer: “an unfortunate marriage has reduc’d me to the melancholly necessity of depending on my Pen for the support of myself and two children, the eldest of whom is no more than 7 years of age.” Christine Blouch notes that “the preponderance of evidence suggests”

that both of those children were illegitimate.\textsuperscript{5} In any case, having failed to find the success that she had hoped for as an actress, she turned to writing and published the first part of *Love in Excess* in 1719, launching a prolific and lucrative career as a writer of amatory fiction. She would later return to acting but would be known first and foremost as a writer. After her second attempt at an acting career, Haywood once again began to concentrate on writing and was “fully re-engaged in her writing career” by the 1740s.\textsuperscript{6}

In this later phase, Haywood, as is well known, moved from amatory to didactic writing. However, she doubtless knew that sex—or the suggestion of it—always sells: amatory elements animate her advice literature and form an important part of its appeal. Haywood had perhaps altered her emphasis in part to suit the market, which by mid-century had shifted away from the scandalous tales popularized by Aphra Behn, Delariviere Manley, and Haywood herself. As Blouch suggests, “the author had not undergone a conversion in opinion so much as in style.”\textsuperscript{7} At the same time, to succeed as a didactic writer she had to make herself both credible and attractive as a moral authority.

As an actress and professional author with two probably illegitimate children, Haywood obviously did not follow in her life the conventional rules and expectations she endorsed in her writing. Juliette Merritt observes that Haywood’s credibility depended on “a trope of particular importance to [the eighteenth] century—the potential for an individual’s reform, a reform defined by the acceptance of current social norms, gender

\textsuperscript{5} Blouch, introduction to *Selected Works of Eliza Haywood* I, vol. I, xxxix.
Haywood creates such a “reform” by assuming the personas of wealthy, genteel women and, by offering advice, invites her readers to reform as well. She could thus allow her reader to accept her authority, as conveyed by her authorial personas, on subjects of society and morality. In the first book of the eponymous periodical, Haywood presents the “Female Spectator” as a former coquette from a social sphere in which “Dress, Equipage, and Flattery” were her main concerns and all her time was spent in “a Hurry of promiscuous Diversions.” With this description Haywood places the Female Spectator among the upper class, suggesting that she is qualified to address upper-class social issues.

When she depicts this persona as having given up the coquette’s shallow pleasures, Haywood identifies the Female Spectator as a moral authority. To this characterization she adds the intellectual qualifications of “a Genius tolerably extensive, and an Education more liberal than is ordinarily allowed to Persons of my Sex.” Alongside the “Female Spectator” persona Haywood adds three co-authors, adding authority to her advice by presenting it as the product of group consultations rather than as one person’s opinion. Alexander Pettit observes that the characters in Haywood’s The Tea-Table and its sequel (1725-26) exist to “counterbalance discursively the moral contagion proliferating outside.” The Female Spectator’s team performs a similar function. To this end, the fictitious co-authors have moral and social qualifications similar to those of the Female Spectator, so that a team of exemplary women constantly

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8 Juliette Merritt, Beyond Spectacle: Eliza Haywood’s Female Spectators (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2004), 5.
confirms the moral authority of the periodical’s advice. In addition, the four co-authors span all of the traditional stages or roles of a woman’s life, so that as a group they encompass the breadth of female experience. Haywood describes one of the women, “Mira,” as

descended from a Family to which Wit seems hereditary, married to a Gentleman every way worthy of so excellent a Wife, and with whom she lives in so perfect a Harmony…having nothing to ruffle the Composure of her Soul, or disturb those sparkling Ideas she receiv’d from Nature and Education.12

Another collaborator, “Euphrosine,” is a young single woman, “charming as an Angel, but endued with so many Accomplishments, that to those who know her truly, her Beauty is the least distinguish’d part of her.”13 The third, a “Widow of Quality,” is “far from having the least Austerity in her Behaviour” and serves as a trusted confidante to all her acquaintances.14

Betty Schellenberg notes that the fiction of joint authorship, along with the inclusion of correspondence from readers, adds to the periodical’s authoritative weight:

From the fiction of a club as a source of the essays, to the encouragement of reader participation…to the treatment of topics such as gossip, a conversational group is demonstrated to be the most authentic source of subject matter, the most authoritative voice in which to convey it, and the fullest illustration of its complex truth.15

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The Female Spectator is not Haywood’s first use of a “conversational circle.” Pettit correctly argues that Haywood’s use of a conversational circle in the two Tea-Tables (1725-26) “decenters moral authority” by “allowing a series of challenges to [the protagonist’s] moral voice.” In The Female Spectator, however, the co-authors speak, as it were, with one voice: “they are to be consider’d only as several Members of one Body, of which I am the mouth,” explains the Female Spectator in Book 1. In this case the “conversational circle” serves to confirm the authority that the Female Spectator claims.

As “the first periodical written by a woman for woman readers,” The Female Spectator deals extensively with marriage, the chief concern of upper-class women’s lives. The Female Spectator announces this focus in a highly formal tone, calling marriage “a Subject, which never can be too much attended to, and the too great Neglect of which is the Source of almost all the Evils we either feel, or are witness of in private Life.” Ideally, marriage is “the Fountain-Head of all the Comforts we can enjoy” and it “prevents those numberless Irregularities and Confusions, that would else overthrow all Order, and destroy Society.” In ceremonial language, with repetitive rhythms suggesting the Anglican marriage ceremony, Haywood elevates marriage from a women’s issue to a social issue, one whose success or failure can either maintain or topple the social order. When people fail to take marriage seriously, “Dirges, rather

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18 King notes that she is “at some pains to distinguish Haywood from her Female Spectator persona….the persona invented for a particular periodical was a crucial element in that periodical's literary and popular success.” Like King, I attempt to differentiate between Haywood and her authorial personas (Preface to The Female Spectator, in Selected Works of Eliza Haywood II, vol. 2, x).
than *Epithalamiums*, should be sung...and their Friends pity, not congratulate their lot.”

With these grand abstractions and stentorian warnings, Haywood moves from moralizing to fictionalizing, inserting a half-dozen tales of both men and women bitterly disappointed by having made the wrong marriages. Unhappy marriages, the Female Spectator suggests, are multiplying among the upper classes; she notes that “there are now no less than Twenty-three Treaties of Marriage either concluded, or on the Carpet, between Persons of Condition, of which scarce the odd Three afford the least Prospect of Felicity.” The Female Spectator repeatedly emphasizes the need to choose the right husband, arguing, as Mary Delany and Lady Mary Wortley Montagu had done, for companionancy based on similarity of character:

> A *Simpathy of Humours* is therefore no less to be consulted, than a *Sympathy of Inclination*, and indeed I think more so; for I have known several married People, who have come together, without any thing of what we call the Passion of Love, who by happening to think the same Way, have afterwards become extremely dear to each other.

This statement suggests that Haywood endorses the traditional view that love will grow after marriage, but in fact she rejects the prospect of marriage without that “*Sympathy of Inclination,*” even if the match be a parentally approved one between people of suitable age and circumstances. Although Haywood invites the reader’s interest with the amatory elements in *The Female Spectator*, the moral message is evident: turbulent passions should remain where Haywood places them, in the fictional realm of her

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interpolated tales. Like Mary Delany, Haywood suggests that feelings based on reason are the only feelings that can be trusted and therefore the only ones that should form the basis for marriage.

She offers one instance of this lesson in Book VII, on the topic of “Ingratitude.” The Female Spectator responds to a letter from “the Sorrowful Amintor,” who asks her to convict his would-be lover, Arpasia, of ingratitude for failing to return his sentiments and for refusing to marry him, even after her father has approved his suit. Amintor’s letter is full of sensual details that allow the reader vicariously to experience his obsessive courtship—a modern reader might call it “stalking”—of her. He describes Arpasia in passionate, but familiar hyperbole: her “killing Eyes…matchless Mouth” and “fine turn’d Shape would singly charm the ravish’d Gazer,” but the “sparkling Dignity” that accompanies her every motion defies description.24 Rejected by Arpasia and discouraged by her father, Amintor follows her around town: “All Day I skulk in Corners like a Thief, and shun the Light,” he explains, “and at Night stand Centinel opposite her Chamber-Window, blest to see her Shadow through the Curtains while undressing for bed.”25 Having participated by proxy in Amintor’s transgressions through Haywood’s melodramatic depiction of them, readers can then follow the Female Spectator’s lead in recognizing that Amintor is behaving incorrectly. Haywood guides readers toward a morally correct interpretation of the tale, as the Female Spectator’s “little Club” explains that Arpasia cannot be considered ungrateful:

There is no accounting for Antipathies in Nature, nor is the strongest Reason sufficient to surmount them:—In vain his Love and Constancy

have a Claim to her Regard:—In vain her Father’s Assent would authorize that Regard:—In vain a parity of Age, of Circumstances, of Birth, concur to render a Marriage between them suitable; if that secret Impulse that rules the Heart be wanting, all other Considerations are of no force to attach.  

The love that leads to marriage should be founded on friendship and mutual esteem, as the Female Spectator explains later in Book VII: “A Passion inspired by that Sympathy I have mention’d founded on Reason and recompensed by Kindness, can never alter, and a Person who declares himself a Lover, should first ask himself the Question, and be well assured he can be always so.”  

Enduring passion, which in Haywood’s view is the only kind that should lead to marriage, is based on reason, not on a tumult of feelings that might have no lasting basis at all. Haywood uses the dramatic language and transgressive situations of amatory fiction not only to promote companionacy, but also to frame lessons about proper conduct for young women in courtship situations—and for their parents. Arpasia’s role is largely passive, but her success arises from her faultless conduct. She must behave correctly in order to count on society’s protection. Accordingly, she is modest yet cheerful in her behavior, dresses suitably, and appears only occasionally at public amusements, always with an appropriate chaperone. She immediately rejects Amintor’s addresses rather than encouraging them for the sake of having an admirer, then withdraws further from the public eye to avoid any suggestion that she is misleading Amintor. Arpasia acquits herself well and properly on every occasion, as does her father, who, hinting at the Female Spectator’s disapproval of forced marriages,

supports his daughter’s decision. However, readers do not learn Arpasia’s eventual marital fate. By scrupulously protecting her virtue she avoids a bad match with the emotionally volatile Amintor, but we are left to wonder whether she achieves a happy companionate marriage.

With her modest and compliant behavior, Arpasia wins her father’s support. With her rationality, she earns the approbation of the Female Spectator. Arpasia recognizes that she cannot find happiness in a marriage where only one partner feels affection. Amintor, on the other hand, is carried away by an unsuitable passion, the depiction of his irrational behavior serving as an additional warning to young women. He falls into a fever after Arpasia’s father discourages him from pursuing his daughter. Upon his recovery ("if a man may be said to be [recovered], who is continually wasting with inward Pinings"), Amintor begins stalking Arpasia, seeing her for only a few seconds at a time as she climbs into a coach or arrives at church. The brief glimpses of her that he sees become “the sole Pleasure [he] can taste.”28 The Female Spectator rejects his request for her vindication of him and places the blame for his misery on his “Obstinacy of Nature.”29

Haywood chooses to show rather than to tell, using the dramatic story of Arpasia and Amintor simultaneously to pique her readers’ interest and to create object lessons about correct behavior. The tale serves her larger purpose of promoting companionacy but is also crafted to serve the smaller purpose of giving positive and negative examples for readers to follow. Like Lady Mary Wortley Montagu, Haywood draws attention to the

limits of female power. A rational and virtuous young woman should be able to count on society at least to protect her from harm, if not actively to advance her happiness.

With Arpasia’s father’s support of her right to choose a husband, the Female Spectator hints at her strong dislike of forced marriages. In Book VII she condemns parents who deprive their children of choice:

Nor can I call it Ingratitude between married Persons, where one of them, by the arbitrary Power of Parents, shall be compell’d to give a Hand without a Heart, and is afterwards unable to subdue the fix’d Aversion, so far as to return the Affection of the other with any Degree of Tenderness.  

These marriages, she suggests, are doubly immoral, because they pervert both the marital relationship and the parent-child relationship, forcing women to sacrifice happiness in favor of duty. Haywood repeatedly uses interpolated tales and letters to emphasize the pathetic aspect of arranged marriage and its effect on women in particular. Book XX presents one such example, a letter from “Monyma,” whose father refused to give her a portion so that she could marry the man she loved. As Monyma writes, she is just days away from being forced to marry another man or be thrown out of her father’s house:

My Heart shudders while I am writing this, at the dreadful Remembrance of what [my father] has said to me on this Occasion; and at the Impossibility there seems of my any way avoiding doing what will render me not only wretched to a Degree beyond what any Words can represent, but equally wicked by becoming perfidious and ungrateful to the dear and

worthy Object of my first vows...My Wedding Cloaths are making, (wou’d to God it were my winding Sheet) and I must, in a few Days, be forced into a Bridal Bed by far more dreadful to me than the Grave.  

As is the case in the story of Arpasia, Monyma is a moral paragon victimized by others’—in this case, her father’s—greed. She has behaved correctly throughout the episode, seeking her father’s approval to marry the man she loves, agreeing to marry the man her father chose for her, then recognizing the dishonesty of breaking a promise of true love in favor of a false marriage vow. However, her family has not rewarded her correct behavior. Monyma’s impassioned and tragic tone is calculated both to entertain and to move readers, effects enhanced by the letter’s postscript: “Next Thursday is the Day appointed for my Doom, if it be possible for me to survive till then:—Think of me with Compassion, ‘tis all can now be done for me.” With this final note Haywood capitalizes on the dramatic immediacy the epistolary form offers; as Samuel Richardson famously did, she seems to be “writing to the moment,” giving Monyma’s letter a sense of verisimilitude that elicits the reader’s sympathy.  

As in the tale of Arpasia and Amintor, Haywood draws her readers in with an exciting story, then directs them to interpret it correctly: “UNACCOUNTABLE is it, as well as unnatural, that Parents, who in general are fond of their Children while they are very young, can afterwards resolve to make them for ever miserable, only to gratify some sordid Interest of their own.” Noting that Monyma’s father “carry’d his avarice to a much

higher than [sic] one shall ordinarily hear of,” the Female Spectator condemns avarice in general, calling it a “Detestable Propensity” that leads people to ruin by overwhelming their common sense.\textsuperscript{34} Extremes of greed, like extremes of love, destroy reason and lead to unhappiness.

The Female Spectator’s advice to Monyma is contingent, again suggesting a critique of women’s limited power to act. The Female Spectator laments that Monyma’s letter would be published too late to effect her situation. Still, she offers a solution, presenting it as agreed upon by all of the periodical’s fictitious contributors:

\textit{Otherwise} there is no one Member of our Club, not even \textit{Euphrosine} herself, who is the most perfect Pattern of an implicit Obedience I ever knew, but is of Opinion, that \textit{Monyma}, circumstanced as she was, and under a former Engagement, might have refused entering into a second without incurring any just Censure from the World.\textsuperscript{35}

Using the authority of her “conversational circle,” she introduces the advice as proceeding from the group. This distinction gives Haywood a bit of extra rhetorical authority to differ from “some over discreet Persons” who, the Female Spectator imagines, would insist that duty and necessity required Monyma to act as she did.\textsuperscript{36} The “Club” suggests that Monyma would have performed her filial duty by refusing to marry without her father’s approval. By also refusing the unwanted marriage, she would have given “a shining Testimony of Love and Constancy”\textsuperscript{37} to her first suitor. A young woman rendered largely powerless by social strictures must still rely on those same

strictures to justify her actions and create a basis for agency. Even then, readers learn, happiness is not guaranteed. After suggesting that Monyma had justification for refusing her father’s choice, the Female Spectator reminds her readers that “when the indissoluble Union of Marriage is once formed…it is the Business and the Duty of each, thus joined, to render themselves, and Partner for Life, as easy as possible.” If she is forced to marry, Monyma must “endeavour a Forgetfulness” of her sad circumstances and make the best of her lot as a wife.\(^{38}\) As she would do in *The Wife*, Haywood requires women’s behavior to be above reproach.

The section of Book XX devoted to Monyma’s marriage ends on an anticlimactic and indefinite note: “And this is all we have it in our Power to offer on her Account.”\(^{39}\) Even with the aid of her collaborators, the Female Spectator cannot end the episode in a confident tone of moral certainty. She alludes to the inadequacy of the advice just conveyed, or at least the impossibility of happiness in circumstances like Monyma’s. Women can call friends, family, social mores, and morality to their aid, but they remain subordinate. From that position they will not always be able to find contentment.

If the Female Spectator lacks confidence in society’s willingness to allow women to marry happily, she is confident in the usefulness of education to help women choose better husbands and to make them better wives. In this respect, Haywood presents the Female Spectator as a reformer, not as a moralist endorsing conventional views. The Female Spectator persona describes herself as being better educated than most women are; she explains that if women seem flighty, it is only due to “the Vivacity of our Ideas,—the Quickness of our Apprehensions.” —a compliment to her female readers


that invites them to endorse her proposals on this topic. Serious reading in subjects such as philosophy, mathematics, geography, and history would serve to channel and direct the mind and give “a due Weight” to an otherwise giddy, untrained mind.⁴⁰

Haywood justifies these claims in two ways, both of which serve to anticipate her readers’ potential objections. First, she points out that for unmarried girls, education will preserve, not remove, “that modest Timidity, which all our Sex are born with,” by giving girls something to concentrate on other than their own vanity.⁴¹ “A Girl, who accustoms herself betimes to talk of Love and Lovers, will become an easy Prey to the first Offer.— It is therefore the Business of those who have charge of them, to keep their Minds employed on other Things.”⁴² An educated girl gains perspective and good judgment from her reading, qualities that will help her marry wisely. Haywood concludes her argument on this topic with a rhetorical flourish of self-sacrifice for a noble cause:

I foresee the little Relish some of my Readers, not only of the younger Sort, but of those Parents who are misled by a false Tenderness, will have for these Admonitions: A Consciousness, however, of having done what ought to be the Business of every public Writer, will console me under all the severe Things that may happen to be said of me.

Writing as the Female Spectator, a moral authority and an educated woman who has seen the immorality of society’s upper echelons, she hints that parents should follow her example and be willing to sacrifice their children’s immediate pleasure for more lasting benefits.

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Second, she addresses women who have already married, reminding her reader that a wife should be more than a household manager: “She is…the Repository of [her husband’s] dearest Secrets, the Moderator of his fiercer Passions, the Softner of his most anxious Cares, and the constantly cheerful and entertaining Companion of his more unbended Moments.” To be suited for this type of relationship a woman must possess numerous admirable qualities:

- a consummate Prudence, a perfect Eveness of Temper, and unshaken Fortitude, a gentle affable Behaviour, and a sprightly Wit:—The Foundation of these Virtues must be indeed in Nature, but Nature may be perverted by ill Customs, or, if not so, still want many Embellishments from Education.  

Haywood depicts companionate marriage in appealing and even aspirational terms, suggesting that education fosters companionacy. With this suggestion Haywood anticipates the objections of readers who would argue that wives need only enough education to make them good “œconomists.”

*The Wife* (1756) concerns itself entirely with the proper role and behavior for a wife and the correct responses to a variety of marital challenges, from suspected infidelity to a husband’s “little passions and petulancies” to living with one’s in-laws. *The Wife* is identified on its title page as “By Mira, One of the Authors of *The Female Spectator* and Epistles for Ladies.” Haywood, or her printer Thomas Gardner, capitalizes on the name recognition afforded by “recycling” one of her authorial personas, but *The Wife*’s tone and rhetoric differ significantly from those of the other works also attributed to “Mira.”

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The Wife, like The Female Spectator, is exacting in its standards, asking wives to perform their traditional role to the utmost in order to achieve happiness. However, The Wife is more uniformly sympathetic in its tone, showing empathy for wives’ struggles and in the process registering criticism of the limitations that create those struggles. Haywood’s voice throughout The Wife is that of an uncompromising conventional moralist, but one who understands the challenges that women face: an eighteenth-century dispenser of “tough love” whose exemplary tales inspire women to believe in her demanding advice. Mira’s instructions to wives in any difficult situation are roughly the same: the way to succeed—that is, to make one’s husband contented, faithful, and proud—is to perform the wifely role to its utmost by remaining cheerful and obliging even in difficult circumstances, so that dissatisfied or straying husbands will ultimately be won over by their wives’ shining virtue. To encourage readers, she uses interpolated tales as proof of her method’s success, so that readers’ vicarious experiences are of marital happiness and social approbation.

The section devoted to “Advice and Perswasion” begins on an empathetic note and endorses marital equality. Mira explains that a wife has “an undoubted claim” to know about her husband’s affairs and to advise him about them. However, this “privilege…should always be taken with the utmost caution and discretion, and never exerted, or too strenuously enforced, even in cases of the most important and extraordinary nature.”44 The statement contains an obvious contradiction: how can an “undoubted claim” also be a “privilege”? Both the contradiction and the advice have Christian antecedents. In the marriage vow, the husband and wife are made one flesh, but wives are urged to submit to their husbands. Haywood tells wives that women’s

advice to their husbands must “come disguis’d under the softer and more humble appearance of perswasion,” echoing Peter’s direction to women married to non-believers: “If any [men] obey not the word, they also may without the word be won by the conversation of the wives; while they behold your chaste conversation coupled with fear.” Although Mira holds wives to this Biblical standard, she incorporates a criticism of conventional marital roles: men are “vain of their boasted learning, and withal so jealous of that power which law and custom invests them with in marriage.” In fact, some are “so foolishly tenacious and obstinate in this point” that they act against their own common sense rather than take their wives’ advice.

With statements like these Haywood offers her readers a sense of relief from the stringent advice *The Wife* offers. To illustrate the effectiveness of this advice, Haywood uses affirmative examples throughout *The Wife*. Thus the reader receives a foretaste of the happiness to be gained by following Mira’s advice. Like customer testimonials in an infomercial, the examples work to shore up the reader’s confidence. One woman earns the approbation of all her friends when, after mentioning that her husband’s stock-market windfall resulted from her advice instead of his idea, she had the presence of mind to pretend it was a happy coincidence and exclaim, “I have the honour, at least, of being of the same opinion with you.” Another woman, married to a man with “a miserable want of understanding,” manages his business affairs for him in perfect secrecy. She writes letters for him which he then copies; she keeps him from contact with associates so that

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46 1 Peter 3:1-2 (KJV)
she can tell him, privately, how to handle decisions. When her influence is suspected, she denies it, giving her husband the credit for her good sense and understanding, earning his love and gratitude. Suggesting that her readers make sacrifices in order to become ideal wives, Mira motivates them toward those sacrifices with tales of the happiness and success they produce.

The difference in emphasis between the examples and the precepts implies an additional concern that Mira does not overtly acknowledge. The positive examples that Haywood inserts throughout *The Wife* encourage readers by offering the promise of public approval resulting from a wife’s private behavior. Haywood overtly calls attention only to the emotional benefits of wifely excellence, but her interpolations suggest that society is always watching and judging—to wives’ detriment or to their credit. The wife who secretly manages her husband’s affairs cannot “avoid receiving those praises which she would never confess she had any pretence to merit.”

Another wife who carefully saves up her money to buy her husband a gift wins not only his love but also the admiration and envy of his friends when they find out about her good management and generosity. A wife who can obliquely let her husband know that she is aware of his infidelity, and do it with a smile on her face, receives her husband’s sincere contrition and impresses his friends with her “wit and good humor.” However, social censure may arise from a wife’s conduct as well, especially if she moves outside the traditional confines of her role. While a woman may separate from an immoral husband, she must behave with extreme modesty, live a retired life with a suitable

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chaperone, never speak ill of her husband, and continue to “do whatever is in her power
for his relief and consolation.”53 By following these steps she will protect her reputation
from slights that would naturally fall more heavily on her than on her husband, since “the
world is apt to absolve the husband of such a woman for whatever fault he may have
been guilty of, and lay the blame of their separation entirely upon her.”54 Although
Haywood presents readers with visions of private, companionate happiness as the
reward for wifely virtue, she also reminds them of the value of reputation—an argument
that she revisits in *The Husband*.

The final paragraph of *The Wife* alerts readers to a forthcoming book of advice
for husbands and hints that this latter book will counterbalance *The Wife*’s demands on
women: “If any [wives] shall think my admonitions too strongly enforced, they will have
their full revenge when they read the Duties I have enjoin’d a Husband.”55 *The
Husband*, published in 1756, is subtitled “In Answer to the Wife” and does not credit
“Mira” as its author, but its introduction acknowledges the common authorship of the two
works: “I have already in a little treatise set forth, according to the best of my judgment,
the manner in which a wife should regulate her conduct, so as to shew marriage in that
amiable light it ought to appear.”56 Patrick Spedding posits that Haywood wrote *The
Wife* and *The Husband* at the same time and that “they were issued separately for
marketing reasons only,” suggesting a dialogic relationship between the two works.57

*The Husband* addresses many of the same topics as *The Wife*—servants, gambling,
drinking, and dress, among others—but from a far different rhetorical position.

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Haywood addresses wives with firm conviction and encouraging empathy. To husbands she applies a tone of warning and admonition. As in *The Wife*, she presents companionacy based on friendship as the ideal foundation for a happy marriage: “I do not pretend to say the happiness of a married state depends entirely on the conduct of the husband, but on a coalition of mind, a perfect concurrence and purity of sentiment in both parties.”58 While she never calls husbands’ traditional authority into question, she suggests it is theirs to keep or lose depending on their behavior toward their wives:

If a husband will give himself the pains to consider seriously that his honour and reputation are entirely in the keeping of his wife, and must be establish’d or ruin’d by her conduct;—that his fortune, in a great measure, depends upon her prudence and œconomy;—and his own peace and that of his family, on her cheerfulness and affability, he will not think that even greater condescensions than those I have mention’d would be too much to keep her in good-humour.59

This argument, which is the cornerstone of *The Husband*, inverts the usual significance of the “separate spheres,” making the wife the public face of the couple. Haywood maneuvers carefully, using social truisms to support—and, as such, to justify—her unorthodox conclusions. The logic makes sense: a wife spends her husband’s money, plans his meals and social gatherings, and makes him look foolish if she is angry, nagging, or unfaithful. Although the wife is held to a more stringent standard of reputation and behavior, the husband as the recognized head of the household suffers for her shortcomings in a way that she does not suffer for his.

By presenting the argument in these terms, Haywood avoids directly questioning the husband’s role but suggests that he has a responsibility beyond displaying his power at will. She criticizes arbitrarily authoritarian husbands, suggesting that their bullying reflects overcompensation for their shortcomings. *The Husband* contains many positive recommendations and examples for husbands, but most of the interpolated anecdotes, in contrast to *The Wife*, are cautionary tales. This distinction demonstrates the rhetorical differences between *The Wife* and *The Husband*: to other women, Haywood offers encouraging stories that enhance the appeal of her otherwise challenging advice. To men, whom society has placed beyond accepting advice from a woman, she offers negative examples, illustrating what happens to men who take their authority too seriously. One authoritarian husband quarrels with his wife after having “taken it into his head, one morning, to dislike the placing of his bed, and told his wife he would have it remov’d to the other side of the room.” The wife sees that the change would be inconvenient and sends away the upholsterer whom her husband had ordered to dismantle and move the bed. Her husband insists she had no right to contradict his instructions: “I should have been the best judge…when I had seen the alteration made; but if there were a thousand inconveniencies you knew it was my will it should be so;—and sure I ought to be master of my own house.” Disagreements succeed upon disagreements, all “on the subject of that superiority so stiffly asserted by the one, and so resolutely denied by the other,” until the wife leaves her husband for “the embraces of a lover” in Paris.\(^\text{60}\) The tale ends there, leaving husbands to imagine for themselves the lonely humiliation of cuckolddom.

Taken together, *The Wife* and *The Husband* raise interesting, if not easily answerable, questions about readership. *The Husband* fulfills its author’s promise, given at the end of *The Wife*, of “full revenge” for those who thought *The Wife* was too stringent. *The Husband* then begins with a reference to its predecessor, the “little treatise” on wifely conduct. This cultivated cross-referentiality suggests that Haywood expected both wives and husbands to read both books.61 Like other women writing about marriage, Haywood shapes her message to her audience, a complicated task in this case. As Pettit notes, the contrast between the two documents does not suggest an attitudinal change as much as a rhetorical adjustment, specifically with respect to audience….Given her implication that a tendency toward absolutism inheres in men it is no wonder that Haywood declined to transfer her rhetoric of patience from *The Wife* to *The Husband*.62

The more strident tone of *The Husband* would please wives who happened to peer into it by creating a sense that they were not the only ones held to a difficult standard, while *The Wife*’s resolutely traditionalist approach would placate husbands who might open the “little treatise” to see the advice their wives were receiving.

Haywood’s last periodical, *The Young Lady*, lasted only seven issues, the first appearing January 6, 1756, and the last on February 17, 1756, just eight days before

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61 However, Spedding notes that while *The Wife* had “a respectable sale” and was reprinted in London and Dublin within a year of its first appearance, *The Husband* sold badly, with only a single edition in London and Dublin respectively (A Bibliography, 595, 605).

Haywood’s death. Only one issue of *The Young Lady* concerns marriage. With its commonsensical, almost cranky tone, number III suggests both its author’s maturity and her disaffection with the subject that had been the cornerstone of her didactic writing. The persona chosen to represent the writer of *The Young Lady* allows for Haywood’s real-life situation as well: Spedding notes “the unconscious intrusion of an older woman’s perspective” into the “Euphrosine” of *The Young Lady*. The accomplished young charmer of *The Female Spectator* reappears here as a mature woman, driven into an intellectual life first by severe smallpox scarring, then by her parents’ favoritism toward her sister, which left Euphrosine to “mope away [her] time alone.” In turning to books for learning and companionship she has made a virtue of necessity:

In fine, I betook myself to reading, and what I at first look’d upon as the most cruel treatment, I have since experienced to be the greatest blessing of my life, as it has kept me free from the follies and impertinencies of the age,—made me despise the ridiculous pursuits with which so many of my sex are infatuated, and given me a relish for more exalted pleasures,—contemplation and reflection.

By resurrecting the persona of Euphrosine and creating this detailed personal history for her, Haywood takes advantage of the name recognition created by *The Female Spectator*, creates sympathy for an authorial voice that might be a little more difficult to admire, and prepares the reader for what will follow: a sort of feminine

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64 Pettit points out that both of the issues concerning marriage respond to letters from contributors, suggesting that “Haywood had more on her mind than the travails” of young lovers but was drawn into her perennial subject by her readers (introduction to *The Young Lady*, in *Selected Works of Eliza Haywood* I, vol. 3, 271).
curmudgeonliness. At this stage in her career—prolific and successful, but no longer young, and in poor health—this attitude is understandable.

_The Young Lady_ number III opens with a letter from “Amelia,” eighteen years old, forbidden by her uncle to marry the man she loves and unable to marry without his consent because of the passage of the Hardwicke Act, which required parental permission for those under twenty-one to marry. In Euphrosine’s response, her sympathy is perfunctory; she acknowledges herself “extremely affected” by the letter but points out that Amelia is likely only one of “ten thousand of his majesty’s subjects who labour under the same unhappy situation.” Her advice remains conventional, advising Amelia to respect the law and the social codes that bind her, in the process reminding readers that women must be above reproach at all times. Euphrosine’s tone is suitably pragmatic from a persona who values “contemplation and reflection” over “infatuation”:

> Severe as the late marriage-act has been accounted, it binds us not for ever,—the shackles it hangs upon our hearts will of themselves fall off in time,—dear one and twenty will at last arrive, and we shall then be at liberty to pursue our wishes. Nothing can be truly call’d a calamity to which we can see an end.

She further advises Amelia that her lover should go into the country, or overseas, if he cannot avoid the temptation to challenge his rival to a duel. Haywood sweetens the unwelcome prospect of the recommended separation by creating the pleasant image of a daily, heartfelt, and, best of all, private correspondence. The lovers can write to one another, she suggests, and in exchanging letters may “enjoy a more undisturb’d felicity

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than any they can expect to find amidst the snares, plots, and artifices that may be put in practice by those whose interest it is to divide their loves.” In presenting this image to her readers, Haywood creates a scene in which virtue is, for once, its own reward. The advice is crafted to appeal to those who, like “Amintor” in *The Female Spectator*, might allow their passion to overwhelm their reason because they lack the one thing Euphrosine can provide: the perspective and patience gained in maturity. Euphrosine’s pragmatism again suggests the importance of reason as the best basis on which to build a marriage.

Euphrosine counsels Amelia above all not to agree to a clandestine marriage. Despite the persona’s moralizing tone in general—*The Young Lady* contains numerous references to Christian morality and virtue—Haywood chooses a concrete, pragmatic argument, describing the legal rather than the spiritual consequences of such an action: “There is at this time a clergyman of the church of England under sentence of transportation for an offence of this nature, [and] I should be sorry to see another of that sacred robe dragg’d like a common felon to the bar of a court of judicature.” This emphasis, though perhaps unexpected, is a shrewd rhetorical move in itself. To an impulsive eighteen-year-old under stress, or to another of the “ten thousand” who may be in the same circumstances, the legal consequences might be a more meaningful argument than the religious ones; furthermore, the reference to current events enhances the topicality and realism of the exchange.

Like the other writers studied here, Haywood attempts to suit the needs and desires of her audience through her careful rhetorical control of her message. Unlike

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the others, though, she did so in response to the marketplace rather than to social
customs or the wishes of her friends. Amatory fiction fell out of style, but Haywood
made amatory elements a cornerstone of her didactic writing, allowing readers to enjoy
romance and intrigue by proxy while congratulating themselves on reading a self-
improving periodical or conduct book. By creating several authorial personas, she could
claim familiarity with higher social strata, thereby giving credence to her more
conservative views: the husband’s role as head of household, the necessity of parental
approval for courtship and marriage, the wife’s responsibility to remain “the angel in the
house” even under difficult circumstances. At the same time, she critiques the limits of
traditional social roles, showing that while they may save women from harm they do not
help them to happiness. Thus marriage is, for women, both a socioeconomic necessity
and a tremendous risk. The greatest chance for happiness in marriage lies in
companionacy, rooted in friendship and similarity of opinions and enhanced by
education as a means to help women make better marriage choices and create
companionship relationships.
In eighteenth-century England, the dominance of Enlightenment empiricism, with its interest in individual experiences, allowed companionate marriage to achieve credibility. Concern for emotional fulfillment in marriage was rising, while duty and tradition no longer were de facto sufficient motivations for a match. At the same time, property laws restricting women’s economic power still held sway, and families still used marriage as a means of building wealth and influence for future generations. The contradictions between these two trends are obvious. Numerous works of art, literature, journalism, and law, from Hogarth’s *Marriage à la Mode* to Richardson’s *Clarissa* to the passage of the Hardwicke Act, suggest—and attempt to resolve—the period’s anxieties about marriage. As Ingrid Tague notes,

> the moment when many contemporaries perceived an overwhelming trend toward mercenary marriages is the same one in which many modern historians have seen the rise of the loving, egalitarian family. Yet attempts to create a grand narrative of romantic love have been problematic.¹

My research suggests that such attempts have been unsuccessful for good reasons. The attitude of the women studied here toward romantic love is one of skepticism rather than enthusiasm. Lady Mary Wortley Montagu, Hester Chapone, Mary Delany, and Eliza Haywood instead regard friendship and a similarity of character as the keys to happiness in marriage. Therefore, in trying to make a “love story” the overarching

narrative of eighteenth-century marriage, scholars may be framing the argument in the
wrong terms.

The “love versus lucre” dichotomy overlooks anxieties about companionacy even
when companionacy is defined as friendship. These women’s writings do show that
companionacy and marital choice increasingly were accepted in the period: Chapone
strongly advocates choice in her correspondence with Richardson, and Haywood
emphasizes the need for a “perfect concurrence and purity of sentiment” between
spouses. Nevertheless, for upper-class women, or those like Eliza Haywood with an
interest in upper-class mores, companionacy represented an additional source of
pressure, another goal to be achieved from within a restrictive social system, rather than
a panacea for gender inequality. Each of the women studied here gives voice to two
interrelated truths: marriage was, for upper-class women of the eighteenth century,
virtually compulsory; and, as with any action taken by compulsion, marriage was a
source of apprehension. Therefore, although none of the women I consider could
afford, literally or figuratively, to dismiss marriage, all of them approach the subject
skeptically. Marriage is “serious and hazardous;” it is “surrounded with
precipices…[and] perhaps, after all, better miss’d than found;” and the wrong marriage
is “perjury before the altar of God.” Lady Mary Wortley Montagu and Mary Delany,
who each lived long enough to see their granddaughters approach marriageable age,

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2 Haywood, The Husband, book I, section V, in Selected Works of Eliza Haywood I Selected Works of
3 Mary Delany to Catherine Collingswood, Lady Throckmorton, 5 December 1740, in Augusta Waddington
Hall, Lady Llanover, ed. The Autobiography and Correspondence of Mary Granville, Mrs. Delany, With
Interesting Reminiscences of King George the Third and Queen Charlotte. London: Richard Bentley,
1862. 6 vols., II.133.
4 Lady Mary Wortley Montagu to Lady Bute, 15 April 1755, The Complete Letters of Lady Mary Wortley
5 Hester Chapone to Samuel Richardson, 12 October 1750, in Bluestocking Feminism: Writings of the
questioned the necessity of those young women’s entrance into such a dangerous institution. However, marital choice was not purely advantageous for women. Having more freedom of choice did not necessarily reduce, and arguably increased, the impact that choice would have on the rest of a woman’s life. Social restrictions on expression and behavior limited women’s ability to take advantage of marital choice or to register criticisms about the marriage system. Delany is a case in point: as a widow, she had the social freedom to choose her second husband, although her first was chosen for her and her obedient acceptance “commanded” by her uncle.

However, Delany, as well as the others, criticized marriage all the same. In their personal and published writing, they limit and compartmentalize their critiques and practice careful rhetorical control in order to present themselves as rational women of virtue. Haywood creates a series of authorial personas and endows them with experience, virtue, and judgment in order to lend authoritative weight to her advice. Chapone surrounds her logically rigorous and well-supported arguments for marital choice with cheerful self-abasement and frothy flattery directed at her correspondent. Montagu, who had been the toast of the Kit-Cat Club at age eight, reassures her solitary and hardworking future husband that she hates the “noise and hurry” of the fashionable world. Delany carefully shapes the story of her unhappy first marriage, emphasizing some events and eliding others, to evoke sympathy from the reader of her autobiographical letters. With these efforts at image-making, the women invite their readers to accept them as virtuous, in turn making it easier to accept their messages as reasonable.

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6 Montagu to Wortley, 28 March 1710, 1:24.
Positioning themselves as traditional and nonthreatening, yet rational, Montagu, Chapone, Delany, and Haywood focus on general policy statements about marriage rather than on personal anecdotes drawn from individual experience. They suggest that friendship is the only correct emotion on which to base a long-term relationship; as Delany notes, “People may fancy themselves in love… but I never yet heard of anybody’s carrying friendship on by mere imagination.”\(^7\) Because friendship is honest, and is motivated by neither greed nor lust, it is a better basis for marriage than either passionate love or financial gain. By endorsing companionacy in these terms, these women tacitly argue for equality between husbands and wives: a friendship is a relationship of equals. Although they support the Biblical ideal of wifely subordination, they stress the wife’s role as a “help meet,” a suitable helper for her husband, and suggest that the role of help meet makes the wife equal, or nearly equal, to the husband. Haywood points out in *The Wife* that a woman has “an undoubted claim” to know about and to advise on her husband’s affairs, although a wife’s advice must always come in the form of persuasion.\(^8\) Chapone cites secular sources, noting that “since the natural liberty Mr. Locke speaks of arising from reason, it can never be proved that women have not a right to it.”\(^9\)

By making appeals based on reason, morality, and established authorities, these women represent themselves and their arguments as more reasonable than revolutionary. Each of them imagines an ideal of marriage much like that described by Montagu: marriage to a man who “thought that the truest wisdome which most conduced to our happynesse, and that it was not below a man of sense to take

\(^7\) Mary Delany to Ann Dewes, 25 November 1727, I.148.
\(^9\) Chapone to Richardson, 10 November 1750, 211.
satisfaction in the conversation of a reasonable woman." But each of them casts this image as an ideal to be promoted, argued for, and celebrated where it is found, not as a pervasive reality already accepted by society.

This image of marriage as friendship suggests that these women wanted to be appreciated as equals and partners in their husbands' lives. The counter-pressures created by parents, financial circumstances, and social restrictions made that kind of companionate partnership an exception rather than a rule. Although this study necessarily analyzes only a few women's writing on the subject of marriage, it suggests the importance of extending that analysis. We must complete and further clarify an eighteenth-century definition of companionacy, and investigate the factors which either helped or hindered companionacy's rise. In order to do so, we should examine in detail writings by women, who had the most to gain by these changes in the marriage system.

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10 Montagu to Wortley, ?c. 26 October 1710, 1:61.
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