Mary, Quite Contrary: The Novels of Mary Davys, 1700-1727

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Mary, Quite Contrary: The Novels of Mary Davys, 1700-1727

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A Dissertation

Presented to

The Faculty of the Arts and Humanities

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Doctor of Philosophy

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by

Nichol Weizenbeck

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Advisor: Professor Linda Bensel-Meyers
Abstract

As a relatively unknown author, Mary Davys (1674-1732) has garnered scant scholarly attention and little admiration for her work. Those who have written on Davys’s prose fiction most often mention the last three texts she published, *Familiar Letters betwixt a Gentleman and a Lady* (1716), *The Reform’d Coquet* (1724), and *The Accomplish’d Rake* (1727), yet rare mention is made of her first three novels. Moreover, of her later novels, many scholars read them as socially conservative and as representations of Davys’s support of and belief in patriarchy. My project disproves the long-standing and generally agreed upon conceptions regarding Davys’s writings and demonstrates the significance of her life’s work to studies of the novel. By investigating contemporary cultural issues, discussing the popular genres and modes of early eighteenth-century England, and comparing and contrasting Davys’s fiction to other authors’, I explore the myriad ways in which Davys experimented with the formal properties of the novel. Also, by closely examining each novel independently, I foreground Davys’s willingness to engage with charged contemporary topics such as rape, suicide, the laws surrounding inheritance, and male privilege. Not only does she engage with these topics; there is a discernable voice of protest imbedded in the narratives. At times, the techniques Davys employed and the plots she created in her work obscured her social concerns, yet with close reading, subversion also surfaces as one of Davys’s methods. An analysis of Davys’s experimentations with prose fiction and
form illuminates the ways in which those innovations allowed Davys to criticize the culture in which she lived. Furthermore, an investigation of the whole of Davys’s work and the totality of her novels—looking at both form and content—exemplifies the importance of Davys for students of feminist thought and the development of the novel.
### Table of Contents

#### Chapter One
Introduction
- History of the Rise of the Novel........................................... 4
- The History of the Rise of the Woman Novelist....................... 7
- The History of Mary Davys’s Criticism................................. 10
- The Feminists’ Neglect and the Conservative Picture of Davys... 13
- Critical Eyes Focused on Davys............................................. 15
- (Re)Discovering Mary Davys.................................................. 19

#### Chapter Two
*The Cousins (1700)*
Antiromance, Disquieting Deaths, and a Dearth of Heroes
- Innovators of Form and Content........................................... 25
- Davys’s First Fruits............................................................. 27
- Mocking *Agnes de Castro*.................................................. 29
- The Influence of Congreve.................................................. 31
- Manipulating the Tropes of Romance.................................... 34
- Silver Tongues................................................................. 35
- Representations of Suicide.................................................. 37
- A Peculiarly English Problem.............................................. 39
- The Suicidal Male............................................................... 40
- Alvaro................................................................................ 42
- Frederick............................................................................ 42
- Leonora.............................................................................. 43
- Sebastian............................................................................ 46
- Providential Deaths............................................................ 48
- The Destabilization of the Ideals of Romance....................... 50
- The Heroines in the Margins............................................... 54
- Recurrent Patterns............................................................. 55

#### Chapter Three
*The Amours of Alcippus and Lucippe (1704)*
From Romance to the Mundane
- High and Lofty to the Vulgar: Innovations of Speech............. 59
- Bait and Switch: From Romance to Realist Fiction................ 61
- Twisting the Tropes............................................................ 63
- The Passive and Ordinary Rival........................................... 66
- The False Rival................................................................... 68
- Hateful Speech................................................................... 70
- Inverted Roles of Gender and the Heroine as Pursuer........... 72
- In Her Words................................................................. 73
A Very Virtuous Dialogue.................................................. 74
The Incredulous Lucy...................................................... 76
The Development of an Antihero and Unlikely Heroines........ 78
Reaching towards Realism and the Voice of Dissent.............. 80

Chapter Four........................................................................ 82

*The Fugitive* (1705)
A Widow’s Picaresque

The Continental Picaresque.............................................. 83
The English Picaresque...................................................... 86
A Rediscovered Popularity............................................... 91
Mary Davys’s *The Fugitive*............................................ 94
The Elements of the Picaresque........................................ 95
The Bones of *The Fugitive*............................................. 96
Regional Dialects and Racist Attitudes............................. 99
The Prose of the Everyday............................................... 102
The Widow Picara............................................................ 104
The Historical Context of Widowhood.............................. 106
The Outside Observer and the Roguish Gentry.................. 109
The Sordid Details............................................................ 111
Devious Men.................................................................... 113
An Anti-Gothic Tale........................................................ 115
The Widow Trickster......................................................... 116
The Irrational Man, the Braggart Old Maid, and the Avaricious Aunt
.......................................................................................... 117
Laudable Women.............................................................. 119

Chapter Five...................................................................... 122

*Familiar Letters betwixt a Gentleman and a Lady* (1716)
A Political Courtship

Written over a Decade...................................................... 124
The Rise of the Letter....................................................... 125
Davys’s Reach towards Realism........................................ 127
Fact or Fiction and the History of “____ander”................... 129
Letters of Contrast and Letter Manuals: She Wrote, He Wrote 131
The Political Nature of Gossip.......................................... 133
Closing as Friends or Lovers............................................. 136
Indiscreet Epistles and Radical Relationships.................... 138
Whig or Tory, City or Country......................................... 142
The Right to Resist Tyranny.............................................. 146
Shelved but not Forgotten............................................... 148
**Chapter Six**

*The Reform'd Coquet* (1724)

Patriarchy and Male Privilege

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SUBJECT</th>
<th>PAGE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Formal Costumes</td>
<td>151</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Duty of Women to Protect Women</td>
<td>153</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-Fashioning, Disguise, and Character:</td>
<td>158</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Inner and the Outer</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Classical and Contemporary Allusions</td>
<td>160</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inversions of Gender</td>
<td>162</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A Transference of Authority</td>
<td>164</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Guardian as Father and Incest in the</td>
<td>166</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eighteenth Century</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Contractual Cheats</td>
<td>167</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male Conspiracy and the Transference of</td>
<td>170</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Property</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Formidable</td>
<td>174</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Power of Fear and Violence</td>
<td>176</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Grotesque</td>
<td>179</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Depths of Depravity</td>
<td>183</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fiction is better than Reality and the</td>
<td>189</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Impossible Companionate Marriage</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Chapter Seven**

*The Accomplish'd Rake* (1727)

Ravages of a Rape Culture

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SUBJECT</th>
<th>PAGE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Moral Reform Comedy</td>
<td>193</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Infirm Voice of Morality</td>
<td>195</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Additional Connections and Disparities</td>
<td>197</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>between <em>The Reform'd Coquet</em> and</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>The Accomplish'd Rake</em></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lady Galliard, the Tainted Mother Figure</td>
<td>200</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Contrary Voices</td>
<td>202</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Perversions of Pleasure and a Lack of</td>
<td>204</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Escalation of Vice</td>
<td>206</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Masquerade and the First Attempted</td>
<td>207</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rape</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Interruption of Female to Male</td>
<td>208</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cross-Dressing and the Idealized Man</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Belinda and the Second Attempted Rape</td>
<td>212</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cross-Class Rape, Abusive Employers, and</td>
<td>215</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male Collusion</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Actualized Rape</td>
<td>217</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tragedy Ever-After</td>
<td>222</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Postscript**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>PAGE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>226</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Bibliography**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>PAGE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>261</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Chapter One

Introduction

When discussing the development of the English novel, critics often figure as central authors Aphra Behn, Delarivier Manley, Eliza Haywood, Daniel Defoe, Samuel Richardson, and Henry Fielding. The “didactic” early novelists, Jane Barker, Elizabeth Singer Rowe, and Penelope Aubin have of late garnered more attention; indeed, Kathryn King published a monograph on Barker in 2000, and Paula Backscheider one on Rowe in 2013. A name heard and read less frequently is that of Mary Davys. Many scholars of the early English novel and the eighteenth century are often unfamiliar with her work, which comes as some surprise given the breadth of her known publications: six novels, two plays, poetry, and her collected works. In fact, one of Davys’s novels, *The Reform’d Coquet*, enjoyed at least seven editions, and another, *The Accomplish’d Rake*, three. 1 Regardless of this contemporary popularity, at the mention of her name the question typically posed is, “Who is Mary Davys?” Although this appears to be a straightforward query, the answer is not. What we know (with relative assurance) regarding the biographical details of Mary Davys’s life remains scant. Between 1692 and 1694, she married Reverend Peter Davys, who became headmaster of St. Patrick’s School in Dublin. Before their marriage, Peter Davys studied at Trinity College with William
Congreve and Jonathan Swift; the former would prove a great literary influence on Davys and the latter a failed source of patronage.² Davys’s daughter Ann died in 1695, and Peter in 1698, and it is believed that she lost a newborn daughter in 1699. In 1700, facing financial difficulties, Davys set out for London. She published her first known novel, *The Amours of Alcippus and Lucippe*, in 1704 and published five additional novels between 1705 and 1727. Her most successful literary venture came in the form of the only play of hers that was produced on the stage, *The Northern Heiress* (1716), which she also later published, and which ran for three consecutive nights at Lincoln’s-Inn Fields. From the modest proceeds she earned from the third night, Davys was able to purchase a coffeehouse in Cambridge, where she remained until her death in 1732. At the time of her demise, Davys was ill and impoverished although the causes of her penury are unknown.

Included among the matters of speculation concerning her life are whether she was born in Ireland or England,³ what year she was born, how long she lived in London before she moved to York, and when she did, in fact, begin to publish her fiction, as well as the number of pieces she may have published anonymously. Some of these details prove more contentious than others, particularly the genesis of her writing career. Gerd Bayer believes that Davys may have published as early as 1693 in Peter Motteux’s *The Gentleman’s Journal*, and to date there has been no known research regarding any Irish publications that she may have authored. Given Bayer’s claim and the long stretches between Davys’s known novels, eleven years between *The Fugitive* (1705) and *The Northern Heiress* (1716), and eight between *The Northern Heiress* and *The Reform’d Coquet* (1724), it would not be unreasonable to question 1700 as the year in which Davys
began writing. Furthermore, with the evolution witnessed in her work following those
gaps, it would not be illogical to conclude that additional texts exist of which we are, as
yet, unaware. Further bolstering this conclusion of undiscovered anonymous texts is the
knowledge that she did publish anonymously; *The Fugitive, The Accomplish’d Rake*
(1727) and *The False Friend; or The Treacherous Portugueze* (1732) were all unsigned.4
While it was not uncommon for authors, both male and female, to publish anonymously
as public acknowledgement of authorship could ruin one’s reputation, we can only
conjecture the reasons for Davys’s decisions to own certain works and deny her hand in
others. Moreover, there remain matters of educated deduction regarding the murkier
aspects of Davys’s life and writings. Her reasons for moving to York circa 1704 are
believed to be the result of her financial failure in London, and her “publication with two
different, second-order publishers suggest the difficulties Davys experienced in
establishing herself as a writer in London” (Backscheider “Mary Davys”). Yet what, or
who, was waiting for her in York remains unexplained. Norma Clarke speculates that
Davys was a female companion (258), but she may also have had relatives there if we are
to believe *The Fugitive* to be autobiographical. Given the overt and imbedded classical
and contemporary literary references with which Davys peppers her novels, many
scholars since William McBurney believe Davys to have been well-read, if only in her
native tongue. In the prologue of *The Northern Heiress*, she states herself, “She knows no
Languages but one,”5 which also brings into question her level of education and learning.
Also, we know that when Davys did sign her work, she was extremely keen for her
readers to know that it was she, and she alone, who had any hand in the work. In the
prologue to *The Northern Heiress*, Davys denies any influence of other works—classical, mythological, historical, legendary, or any other previous literature—by proclaiming, “Learning she ’as none, so can have no Supplies / From Ancient Books, but on her self relies” (np). And more directly in the preface to *The Reform’d Coquet*, Davys writes:

> But as this Book was writ at Cambridge, I am a little apprehensive some may imagine the Gentlemen had a hand in it. It would be very hard, if their Humanity to me, should bring any imputation upon themselves so greatly below their Merit, which I can by no means consent to; and do therefore assure the World, I am not acquainted with one Member of that worthy and learned Society of Men, whose Pens are not employ’d in things infinitely above any thing I can pretend to be the Author of; So that only I am accountable for every Fault of my Book; and if it has any Beauties, I claim the Merit of them too. (6)

One of the facts of which we are certain, and one that greatly influenced her writing, was that she remained a widow for the remainder of her life. Another circumstance of speculation is the cause of her perpetual widowhood; if we may take her novels as any evidence, Davys wished to remain free of any male control after the death of Peter, and this anxiety of independence based upon biological sex is central to most of Davys’s work, her prose texts and her dramatic ones. As to the reasons Davys remains relatively obscured in discussions of the history of English literature as well as in studies of the English novel, one must also make an educated deduction and begin with the history of the scholarship itself.

**The History of the Rise of the Novel**

In order to appreciate the novels of Mary Davys, a survey of the history of the novel proves key. One of the most enduring of the earlier twentieth-century studies that discusses the origins of the novel is Ian Watt’s *The Rise of the Novel* (1957). Watt cites
industrial capitalism and the spread of Protestantism as “causes of extreme importance,” which led to a cultural emphasis on the individual and economic individualism, which in turn led to the rise of the middle class, all of which, Watt argues, led to the rise of the realist English novel. English realism attempts to portray “all varieties of human experience,” and concentrates on “minute details and has a closeness and texture of the everyday,” while it simultaneously rejects “classical and medieval notions of the universal” (11-22). Famously, Watt declares Daniel Defoe, Samuel Richardson, and Henry Fielding to be the fathers of the novel, neglecting any mention of its mothers. Yet after Watt’s groundbreaking text, eighteenth-century literature and the origins of the novel were all but forgotten until the 1980s. Clearly influenced by Watt’s work, Michael McKeon would publish his own highly influential and enduring work, *The Origins of the English Novel, 1600-1740* (1987). Rather than a dawning due to the rise of the middle class and realism, McKeon claims the novel originated from severe destabilization, both social and literary. McKeon cites the Restoration and secularization as the catalysts that transformed England, and these radical changes along with the country’s newly found penchant for “truth in narrative” led to the genesis of the novel. And although McKeon affords considerably more time to female authors—especially Aphra Behn and Delarivier Manley, the authors who merit their own chapters in the text are Miguel de Cervantes, John Bunyan, Daniel Defoe, Jonathan Swift, Samuel Richardson, and Henry Fielding. In the same year McKeon’s text made its debut, Nancy Armstrong published *Desire and Domestic Fiction: A Political History of the Novel*, in which she hones in on the political nature of sexuality, as the “history of the novel cannot
be understood apart from the history of sexuality” (8), as well as the “rise of female authority in the novel.” Moreover, Armstrong asserts that the novel presented an ideal of the domestic and the domestic woman who reached across the differing classes, and this idealization would, after Richardson, afford women cultural cache as venerated figures of the private realm (13). Although Armstrong foregrounds sexuality in *Desire and Domestic Fiction*, her arguments do not focus on early women authors and therefore the text does not offer a corrective to either Watt or McKeon. Other scholars of the novel, including J. Paul Hunter and Margaret Doody seek to expand the definition of the novel and explore the centuries before the eighteenth century while searching for its origins. Hunter’s *Before Novels* (1990) reacts to what he deems an “elitist record” of intellectual history and sets out to displace the idea of a “first” novel with a genre developed by gradual formation and, therefore, particular dates and “firsts” cannot always be pinpointed. Admitting his disagreements with Watt, Hunter nevertheless acknowledges that his own position owes much to Watt’s pioneering work. Moreover, Hunter concentrates solely on English cultural history and literature as he believes any attempt to fold in other nations’ histories and developments would be an injustice to both subjects. Again abnegating an elitist history of the genre, Hunter also believes that the “novel must be placed in a broader context of cultural history, insisting that popular thought and materials of everyday print . . . need to be seen as contributors to the social and intellectual world in which the novel evolved” (5). Similarly, Margaret Doody in *The True Story of the Novel* (1996) rejects a “chauvinist” definition of the novel; she denies the binaries of novel/romance and of ancient/modern and instead attempts to rewrite the
history of the novel, stretching it across two thousand years. Doody reaches back and begins with a search for the ancient novel in order to “deal with continuities and to make a point of connectedness” and therefore to erase the narrow-mindedness of Western culture’s desire to treat the novel as if it were essentially English. Moreover, Doody links the tropes of the novel—setting, symbols, themes, characters, and plot—across cultures, millennia, and nations to support her theory of “connectedness.” Also similarly to Armstrong, Doody’s purpose is not to reclaim forgotten female authors, but is one of larger generic concerns. Given Watt’s claim that the majority of eighteenth-century novels were written by women (298), one may wonder how they escaped the pages of so many scholars. Unsurprisingly, this lack of focus on female authors and their influence on the literature of early eighteenth century and the novel did not go unnoticed by feminist scholars.

The History of the Rise of the Woman Novelist

Likely in reaction to Watt’s claims for the “fathers” of the novel as well as his neglect of female authors save for Jane Austen, many feminist scholars turned their focus towards the reclamation of the early women novelists. Indeed, before the mid-1980s conventional scholarship often recognized Austen as the first female novelist. In order to disprove this notion, Dale Spender published Mothers of the Novel: 100 Good Women Writers before Jane Austen (1986). Spender asserts, “It is my contention that women were the mothers of the novel and that any other version of its origin is but a myth of male creation” (6). Spender looks to the earlier decades of the seventeenth century to find
the literary moment when the “first seeds of fiction” were sown by such women as Lady Mary Wroath and Anne Weamys. She follows this moment of genesis by systematically discussing and itemizing the authors who came in their wake in order to reclaim women’s traditions and make clear what culture has missed in their absence. Also in 1986, Jane Spencer published *The Rise of the Woman Novelist: From Aphra Behn to Jane Austen*. Spencer focuses on the “changes in the ideology of womanhood from the late seventeenth to the late eighteenth centuries; on the reactions of the male cultural establishment to women writers and their work; and on women’s own conception of themselves as writers within this ideological climate” (ix). Much of Spencer’s text examines the ideas and conceptions of “heroine,” from the writer as heroine to the varying traditions of heroines in eighteenth-century fiction by women, and how female authors used those varying traditions to respond to their own cultural position, which was increasingly alienated from political and economic agency. As Ros Ballaster comments of Spencer’s work:

> Spencer does not seek to produce a linear history of a single female tradition in the novel. She neither views women’s writing as entirely self-determining in isolation from male-authored texts, nor subsumes the category ‘woman writer’ in a general study of the novel. (*Seductive* 21)

For these reasons, Spencer’s book has resonated for many feminist scholars who wish to acknowledge the importance of women writers yet who also do not want to deny a larger, and more complex, context of early fiction. Another leading feminist involved with recovering important female authors, Janet Todd published *The Sign of Angelica: Women, Writing and Fiction, 1660-1800* in 1989. Todd’s stated purpose is to “look briefly at the various signs that women have hung out in their self-presentations (vindications, apologies, autobiographies and prefaces) and more lengthily in their
fictional portraits of women” (9). She accomplishes this by discussing three key movements of the eighteenth century; the focus on sexuality and politics of the early part of the century, the culture of sensibility and its stress on moral feelings of the mid-century, and the emphasis on entrapment in the Gothic of the last two decades.

Furthermore, Todd surveys the century almost exclusively through female-authored texts and the cultural context in which they wrote. In 1992, Ballaster published *Seductive Forms: Women’s Amatory Fiction from 1684 to 1740*, in which she analyzes the political, social, and economic contexts of the early eighteenth century and the ways in which women authors deliberately used the sexualized narrative. Specifically, Ballaster claims that Behn and Manley use the seduction narrative to “seek to privilege the female writer as a political agent, precisely by virtue of her position at the margins of the political order,” and they construct the writer as an erotic enigma for their male and female readers (3). Ballaster concludes *Seductive Forms* by exploring the ways in which amatory writers were ‘written out’ of the eighteenth-century novel tradition, purged as disreputable representations of female sexuality, subversive female power and wit. Since these breakthrough works of the eighties and early nineties, feminist literary scholarship has itself ever since been on the “rise.” Monographs devoted to female authors continue to be published with increasing regularity, with such texts as Janet Todd’s and Marilyn Butler’s work on Aphra Behn, Ruth Perry’s on Mary Astell, Kathryn King’s on both Eliza Haywood and Jane Barker, and more recent publications such as Paula Backscheider’s work on Elizabeth Singer Rowe and Jennifer Golightly’s work on Charlotte Smith. Despite all of this interest in eighteenth-century English female novelists
and the concentration on the developmental authors, Mary Davys has yet to receive the full attention that her fiction has merited.

**The History of Mary Davys’s Criticism**

Although Davys has been largely ignored by literary critics, she has not been entirely forgotten. The first twentieth-century scholar to acknowledge the importance of Davys’s writing was Robert Adams Day, who edited the republication of *Letters betwixt a Gentleman and a Lady* for the Augustan Reprint Society in 1955. A contemporary of Watt, Day was also concerned with tracing the development of realism in the English novel. In the introduction, Day lauds the novel:

> The ‘novel’ reproduced here is principally remarkable not for beaux sentiments, the technical manipulation of correspondence, or tearing a passion to tatters (many of its predecessors had accomplished one or more of these feats much better); but for its atmosphere of British middle-class realism, its characterization, its breezy humor, and its conduct of a plot that is simple, credible, and carefully omits romantic fripperies. Although it retains the high-flown names of worn-out tradition, ‘Artander’ and ‘Berina’ are obviously Thomas and Jane. And this realism of furniture, food, and the difficulties of day-to-day life is as rare as a sense of humor in the early English novel. (ii)

Yet it was not merely Davys’s innovations in realism that Day admired in her work. In his *Told in Letters* (1966), Day praises many aspects of Davys’s *Letters betwixt a Gentleman and a Lady* such as Davys’s “humor” and “eye for physical detail,” which set her apart from her contemporaries, and her creation of her character Berina, a ‘new woman’ (187). Moreover, he categorizes *Familiar Letters* as a domestic novel, the technical advancements of which made it a “humble foreshadowing of the approach to fiction improved by Fanny Burney and perfected by Jane Austen” (190). However, based
on the level of quality of *Letters betwixt a Gentleman and a Lady*, Day erroneously assumes that the novel was “probably written in a leisurely manner by [a woman who was in] comfortable circumstances” or who was not an industrious hack like Behn, Manley, or Haywood (82). While this clearly illustrates the bias towards romance and amatory fiction in the 1950s and 1960s, it also marks the first twentieth-century pages of appreciation for Davys’s work. And Day was not the only mid-century scholar impressed by Davys’s fiction; William McBurney also found much to be celebrated in Davys’s fictional techniques. In 1959, McBurney published “Mrs. Mary Davys, Forerunner of Fielding,” in which we find the first biographical research on Davys as well as the first scholarly article dedicated solely to her fiction. McBurney, too, regards her work as innovative and claims its lack of diffuseness sets it apart from Davys’s contemporaries’ novels, including Defoe, citing in particular *The Reform’d Coquet’s* structural unity. Of the larger effects of her fictional experimentations, he writes:

> She showed how realistic comedy might be adapted to the new genre, to place emphasis on characterization and setting rather than upon simple variety of action, and to bring sturdy commonsense and humor to a literary form which had been dominated by the extravagant, the scandalous, and the sensational. (355)

A disdainful reference likely to the amatory fiction of Behn, Manley, and Haywood. In 1963, McBurney published *Four before Richardson: Selected English Novels, 1720-1727*, a collection of works that includes several texts that precede Richardson such as Arthur Blackmore’s *Luck at Last; or The Happy Unfortunate* (1723), Eliza Haywood’s *Philidore and Placentia* (1727), and Mary Davys’s *The Accomplish’d Rake* (1727). McBurney states that he deliberately selected the novels of the collection as each “anticipates the works of important novelists, Richardson, Fielding, and Smollett” (vii).
The novels are arranged in a “progression of technical skill and general interest” (viii), with Davys’s novel rounding out the collection, and therefore, in McBurney’s estimation, hers is a novel that achieves the highest level of prose fiction of the time period.

Furthermore, McBurney’s self-stated purpose of the collection is an attempt to correct Watt’s omission of ‘immediate precursors and contemporaries’ and to discrediting the notion that the great novelists developed autonomously (xi). Significantly, McBurney claims of Davys’s *The Accomplish’d Rake*:

> The concealment of Sir John in the closet, the drugged rape, and the abduction from the masquerade appear as key episodes in the three novels of Richardson, and she was one of the first writers before Fielding to exploit extensively the English scene. A ‘rambling woman’ she may, of necessity, have been, but with her ‘little taste’ she brought a measure of commonsense and humor to the novel which had been largely dominated by sensationalism and extravagance. (xxxv)9

Although McBurney never directly states that Richardson “borrowed” scenes from Davys or that Fielding took inspiration from her novels, these implications, nevertheless, underlie his arguments. Reading both Day and McBurney, one senses the excitement of unearthing an innovative early eighteenth-century novelist, which may have proved infectious for other scholars such as Josephine Grieder, who published a 1973 critical edition of *The Reform’d Coquet*, and Donald Hal Stefanson, who in 1971 dedicated his dissertation to editing her collected works. Despite Day’s and McBurney’s claims of Davys as an important early English author, she remained in the shadows of literary criticism for another two decades.
The Feminists’ Neglect and the Conservative Picture of Davys

While Jane Spencer does afford Davys two full pages (and five other tangential mentions), she does not explore Davys’s work or potential importance. Although Spencer credits Davys as the first novelist to develop thoroughly the mentor-coquette relationship in *The Reform’d Coquet*, which has now become a common claim, she is also the first scholar of many to misread this novel (and the other novels of Davys) as one that endorses masculine authority and distrusts femininity as the moral weakness of even the best of women. Spencer asserts:

The ideological implications of [*The Reform’d Coquet*] are clearly very different from those of the seduction tale. We only have to compare *The Reform’d Coquet* with Manley’s tale of Charlot in *The New Atalantis*. There are wicked ravishers in Davys’s novel as there are in Manley’s, but this does not mean, as it does in Manley’s, that men are not to be trusted, but that the heroine must find an honest man, submit to his authority, and gain his protection. Whereas Manley portrays the guardian as corrupt, the abuser of his patriarchal authority, Davys makes the guardian the lover and supports his programme of courtship-by-reform. The father substitute, instead of being a quasi-incestuous ravisher, is the legitimate mate for a thoughtless young heroine. His advice is wisdom, and his lifelong control necessary. . . . The story of Charlot is a protest against male domination: the story of Amoranda is an apology for it. (147)

This image of Davys as a conservative, didactic, upholder of patriarchy pervades much of the scholarship on her work, yet it is a conclusion based on surface readings—typically readings of only one of her novels, readings which do not take into consideration the subversion of or extreme anxiety regarding patriarchy that Davys displays throughout her novels. Davys makes a peripheral appearance in *The Sign of Angellica*, and in the main, Todd agrees with Spencer. Todd, too, proclaims Davys to be “didactic” and also similarly to Spencer, Todd believes that Davys articulates in the novel “a woman’s destiny is not self-contemplation and significance but contingency and marriage” (*Sign* 147). Todd also
asserts that Formator is “an attentive male lover [who] helps save a woman from herself” 
(Sign 132), which is a thread subsequent critics take up with similar assumptions of the novel. She earns a mere two sentences in Ballaster’s Seductive Forms, and Ballaster maintains that Davys, too, though to a lesser extent than Aubin, Rowe, or Barker, seeks “to revive moral vigor in feminocentric representations of love” (32). Likewise seeing Davys as a moral reformer, in Women and Literature in Britain 1700-1800 (2000), Vivian Jones asserts Davys’s greatest challenge is “how to get frivolous young ladies to conform to moral strictures in the face of more fascinating attractions” (205). Paradoxically Jones argues, “It is the female scriptor, in the shape of a narrator explicitly identified as female, who manages to negotiate a space for female autonomy even while she tells the story of her heroine’s submission to male authority” (205); again, Davys is afforded a minimal two pages of Jones’s text.

In the collection The History of British Women’s Writing, 1690-1750 (2010), Davys fares little better with only one author, Kate Williams, including Davys in her arguments regarding women and the rise of the novel, and she again gives the seemingly standard two mentions of Davys. Williams asserts that Davys’s fictions, along with Aubin’s and Rowe’s, “were not directed towards a specific wider political point” as opposed to the fiction of Behn and Manley (114), yet she does acknowledge that Davys “had a crucial influence on the mid-century novel but received little credit for [her] contribution” (122). Dale Spender mentions Davys neither in her Mothers of the Novel (1986) nor in her collection of essays Living by the Pen (1992). Notwithstanding the relative inattention Davys receives from the heavy-hitters of feminist scholarship, there
have been a handful of authors since the mid-1990s who have recognized the merit and importance of Davys’s writings.

**Critical Eyes Focused on Davys**

The first author to give Davys a long critical look since McBurney and Day is Catherine Craft-Fairchild in her 1993 publication *Masquerade and Gender: Disguise and Female Identity in Eighteenth-Century Fictions by Women*. Central to the text, Craft-Fairchild analyzes the relationship of the masquerade and the construction of femininity in eighteenth-century, female-authored fiction. In particular to Davys’s *The Reform’d Coquet* and *The Accomplish’d Rake*, she explores the costs of female self-expression, catastrophic sexual unions, patrilineal heritage, and predatory male behavior. Although Craft-Fairchild is arguably the first to reflect upon the darker themes present in Davys’s work, she ultimately claims that *The Accomplish’d Rake* “is not a feminist narrative” as it “rearticulate[s] and reaffirm[s] patriarchal structures” (50), and so carries on the dominant line of thinking in regards to Davys’s novels. Lindy Riley, however, Linda Riley reverses the traditional reading of the novel in “Mary Davys’s Satiric Novel *Familiar Letters*: Refusing Patriarchal Inscription of Women” (1995), arguing it “demonstrates her attempts to expose the sexual politics at work in culturally imposed codes of behavior as, working from within the ‘masculine’ system of representation, she subverts the system” (208). Thus, Riley becomes the first to remark on Davy’s subversion and sexually politicized elements. Paula Backscheider and John Richetti also emphasize the “grittiness” of her earlier work and underscore
her willingness to engage with charged topics that set her apart from most of her contemporaries; for example, she satirizes British prejudices and ideas of the Irish, includes material on the Irish rebellion, and has incidents of suicide and striking portraits of poverty and its results. (251)

Yet it remains Martha Bowden’s work on Davys that arguably has had the most impact on present day scholarship. In 1999, Bowden published a critical collection of three of Davys’s novels: *The Reform’s Coquet, Familiar Letters*, and *The Accomplish’d Rake*. While Bowden relies on much of McBurney’s biographical research, her introduction is the most complete to date and often considered authoritative. As Day does of *Familiar Letters*, she believes *The Reform’d Coquet* to be an “an accomplished work and shows no sign of being turned out mechanically for monetary reward” (xxvii) and that Davys demonstrates in her final dedication to Lady Slingsby “that women should and could support one another.” Although she acknowledges the dark topics underpinning Davys’s novels, Bowden also maintains that to take them too seriously would be to undermine Davys’s comedic intentions (xxvii) and that Davys’s world is foremost a comic one (xli). Josephine Donovan, who also includes a discussion of Davys’s novels in her *Women and the Rise of the Female Novelist 1405-1726* (1999), reverts to traditional thinking regarding Davys’s didacticism and asserts that *The Reform’d Coquet* and *The Accomplish’d Rake* are companion pieces that represent the moral reformation of a young woman and a young man. Once again, Donovan depicts Davys as conservative and concerned with moral improvement rather than with analyzing sexual politics. As did McBurney and Day, Donovan credits Davys as developing the realist tradition in the English novel (79), citing *The Lady’s Tale* as a transitional novel between the romance and realist traditions (90), and like Spencer, asserts that Davys’s *The Reform’d Coquet* is
Arguing for her material interests, Susan Glover, in her chapter “Laying Claim to Title: Mary Davys and Authorial Dispossession,” explores the ways in which Davys’s fiction probes “the role of landed property in class-based and gendered relationships” (76) and her “use of the discourse of property law to question assumptions about women, property and possession in her work” (99). Ultimately, however, Glover concludes that Davys’s “conformity to male patterns of dialogue and realism” limits the imagined possibilities for women, and her subversion remains ineffectual (99). Thereafter, another gap in scholarly attention appears for several years. In 2012, Victoria Joule’s essay, “Mary Davys’s contribution to the Realist Novel,” picks up the earlier threads of criticism that argue Davys is a groundbreaking realist author. However, rather than placing Davys in the didactic tradition or seeing her as an author attempting to subvert the sex/gender system, Joule argues that “Davys’s strategy was to promote an ideal female figure where gender ceased to be a consideration in her personal and literary relationships” and that Davys’s use of comedy weakens any “feminist attempts to explain her writing in terms of female oppression” (31). In spite of repudiating any feminist content in Davys’s novels, Joule underscores the “sinister edge” of the mentor figure and his sadistic and cruel behavior in *The Reform’d Coquet* and maintains that Davys’s key concern throughout her work is an equalization of the sexes and their relationships, and Joule perplexingly refuses to see the presence of these disturbing elements in Davys’s fiction as “bleak.”

Arguably some of the most sophisticated work done on Davys is Karen Gevirtz’s chapter dedicated to Davys, “The Moral Observer,” from her *Women the Novel and*
Natural Philosophy, 1660-1727 (2014). Gevirtz believes throughout her novels Davys investigates the insider/outsider binary, the integration into a group and being independent of a group, the contrast between societal inclusion and exclusion, and the ways in which those collective relationships affect the production, validation, and distribution of knowledge. Gevirtz points out the ways in which Davys uses narrative structure to explore the relationships of detachment and inclusion and knowledge and morality, which provided later novelists with literary techniques that they could, and did, use (128). One technique that Gevirtz highlights is Davys’s efforts to develop a detached, yet morally and factually authoritative, narrator, and in The Reform’d Coquet and The Accomplish’d Rake, Gevirtz argues the narrator has no body but is a consciousness that shapes the readers’ understanding and provides the moral framework for the novels. Furthermore, Gevirtz asserts that Davys uses the detached narrator to illustrate the artifice of narrative, which therefore forces readers to question the conventions of narrative, gender, and the relations between men and women. Perhaps most importantly, Gevirtz writes, “Davys’s refusal to endorse social norms even as she acknowledges their power raises questions about the nature of her conservatism and suggests that such a classification is insufficiently nuanced to describe her views” (160), and therefore stresses the problematic simplicity of former critical readings of Davys’s work. As one chapter of a larger text, Gevirtz’s forges new critical ground and brings new ideas to the studies of Davys, yet it provides a springboard rather than a comprehensive investigation of Davys’s novels.
The lack of an extensive and focused study on Davys’s oeuvre as well as the limited access to her novels has very likely contributed to the sporadic and limited criticism she has thus far been afforded. The critical attention she has received has been, with few exceptions, relatively one note, with the apparent wish to place Davys in one of the two “camps” of early eighteenth-century women’s fiction; as she clearly does not belong in the amatory group, she is almost always read as a didactic novelist of manners, as a socially conservative author buttressing the male dominated world around her through her fiction. However, the intentions with which Davys wrote and the craft she possessed deserve a detailed evaluation of all of her work as a whole.

(Re)Discovering Mary Davys

Historically, the criticism regarding Davys’s work, whether viewing her as conservative or radical, foregrounds Davys’s development of realism in her fiction. Yet it was Davys herself who very early in her career first called attention to both her formal experimentations and her attempts to write a realist novel. As early as 1705, in her dedication to *The Fugitive*, Davys writes that hers is a “plain relation” and that she “had a Mind to make an Experiment, whether or not it was possible to divert the Town with real Events, just as they happen’d, without running into Romance” (np). Following the trajectory of her novels—they matured and grew more sophisticated with every new publication—her own theories of the novel and her stated intentions for her writing also developed and matured. Although contemporary debates may rage on in regards to the definition and origin of the novel, Davys had no doubts as to what she was authoring; she
was a self-proclaimed novelist as she entitled *Alcippus and Lucippe*, *The Cousins*, and *The Reform’d Coquet* all as “novels.” Furthermore, she not only titled her works as such, as did her literary idol William Congreve in *Incognita*, Davys defines for her audience her version of a realist novel. Additionally, and Davys becomes a literary critic in her own right during her discussion of Romance and French Romance, an observation that has not been previously acknowledged. However, since McBurney’s research on Davys, scholars have widely acknowledged that she developed a methodical and thoughtful theory of the novel, which she presented in the preface to her collected works in 1725. I quote a large portion of it to illustrate Davys’s understanding of the literary trends and genres of her day as well as to inform the claims of my subsequent chapters. Davys writes:

‘Tis now for some time, that those Sort of Writings call’d Novels have been a great deal out of Use and Fashion, and that the Ladies (for whose Service they were chiefly design’d) have been taken up with Amusements of more Use and Improvement; I mean History and Travels: with which the Relation of Probable Feign’d Stories can by no means stand in competition. However, these are not without their Advantages, and those considerable too; and it is very likely, the chief Reason, that put them out of vogue, was the World’s being surfeited with such as were either flat and insipid, or offensive to Modesty and Good-Manners; or that they found them only a Circle or Repetition of the same Adventures. The French who have dealt most in this kind, have I think, chiefly contributed to put them out of countenance: who, tho’ upon all Occasions, and where they pretend to write true History, give themselves the utmost Liberty of feigning, are too tedious and dry in their Matter, and so impertinent in their Harangues, that the Readers can hardly keep themselves awake over them. I have read a French Novel of four hundred Pages, without the least Variety of Events, or any Issue in the Conclusion, either to please or amuse the Reader, yet all Fiction and Romance; and the commonest Matters of Fact, truly told, would have been much more entertaining. Now this is to lose the only Advantage of Invention, which gives us room to order Accidents better than Fortune will be at Pains to do; so to work upon the Reader’s Passions, sometimes keep him in Suspense between Fear and Hope, and at last send him satisfy’d away. This I have endeavour’d to do in the following Sheets. I have in every Novel propos’d one entire Scheme or Plot, and
the other Adventures are only incident or collateral to it; which is the great rule prescribed by the Criticks, not only in Tragedy, and other Heroick Poems, but in Comedy too. The Adventures, as far as I could order them, are wonderful and probable; and I have with the utmost Justice rewarded Virtue, and punish’d Vice. (iii-v)

It is unmistakable from Davys’s own pen that she wanted her readers to understand her exact intentions and the highly self-conscious method with which she created her fiction.

Whereas I agree with many of the arguments made regarding Davys’s innovations in realist fiction, there are many other assertions with which I cannot agree. Therefore, my intentions for this project are to disprove what I see as the misconceptions regarding Davys and her fiction, many of them long-standing and generally accepted. I aim to illustrate that Davys’s life work as a whole is significant to studies of the novel, eighteenth-century studies, and women and gender studies and not merely the later novels that she published; almost exclusively, scholars have focused on the last three of Davys’s novels: *Familiar Letters* (1716), *The Reform’d Coquet* (1724), and *The Accomplish’d Rake* (1727). Her first novels, *The Cousins* (1700), *The Amours of Alcippus and Lucippe* (1704), and *The Fugitive* (1705) are occasionally mentioned but usually in footnotes, in passing, or in respect to her latter three. Though each of the later novels merit the interest they garner, an inclusion of her first three novels is key not only for recognizing the overarching patterns and themes of her work as a whole but also for decoding the, at times, subtle and subversive techniques and commentaries of her most popular works. Although her earlier novels are not as sophisticated, they are certainly experimental and worthy of critical attention in their own right. Therefore, the first component of this project is to consider all of Davys’s novels and to consider each novel individually in order to come
to some comprehensive conclusions regarding Davys as a writer. By examining each novel, I will explore the formal properties and the ways in which Davys innovates those formal properties and, in turn, how those innovations confer meaning upon the text, affect a close reading of the novel, and illuminate the characters’ individual traits. Also, I will investigate the ways in which her experimentations of form allow Davys to create a running social commentary, which addresses several significant concerns and issues facing eighteenth-century women. After reading Davys’s novels, it is clear that she was acutely aware of the literary and cultural trends around her, which she intertwines in her fiction, and both of which she exploits almost mercilessly in her writings.

Close readings of her novels also reveal innovations of content and of the function of the characters within the narrative. The grittiness of her fiction Richetti and Backscheider so rightly highlight may be found in her handling of charged and violent topics including premeditated rape and suicide, and Davys readily engages with debates of property and inheritance, which she points to as facilitating a predator/victim cultural binary. As Glover notes of Davys’s novels, “The representation of property is often set in a frame of greed, vanity, and loss, and often in conjunction with the circumstances of marriage” (84). Also unique to her work is Davys’s willingness to create heroines out of culturally marginalized figures; the widow, the servant, the rape survivor, and the fallen woman. With this conception of heroine, Davys challenges the false notion of societal privilege and corresponding knowledge, foregrounding the wisdom (and valor) born of humble means. Moreover, although Davys includes pleasant and entertaining male characters in many of her novels, a notable dearth of heroes pervades her work as a
whole. She may, in fact, be the only author of her time who did not create a single heroic male protagonist in any of her texts. Davys’s world is full of the adverse and detrimental effects of male collusion and, simultaneously, the absolute necessity of women supporting other women. Not only does she write this need into her plots, she also voices this directly in the prologue to *The Northern Heiress*; she proclaims, “From her own Sex something she may expect; / ’Tis Womens Duty Women to Protect” (np).12

In order to understand the various innovations, experimentations, and the progressions of her writing, I have divided the novels into three larger categories. Moving in chronological fashion, there are clear shifts in the formal properties and the ways in which Davys experiments with genre, which I will refer to as her early, middle, and late periods of writing. In the first section, I explore her early period and her antiromantic novels, *The Cousins* (1700) and *The Amours of Alcippus and Lucippe* (1704); in the second, I examine her middle period and her use of the picaresque and familiar letters in *The Fugitive* (1705) and *Familiar Letters betwixt a Gentleman and a Lady* (1716); and in the last, I investigate her late period and her manipulation of the moral reform mode. Her first four novels experiment with four differing genres, while her last two make the boldest and most provocative statements on sexual politics and the perversions of power relations. Taken individually, Davys’s novels create interesting contrasts to other contemporary authors’ work. Taken as a whole, Davys’s novels prove her worthy of further critical study and suggest, as did Day in 1966, that there are “important missing links” to be found in her fiction.
Chapter Two

The Cousins (1700): Antiromance, Disquieting Deaths, and a Dearth of Heroes

Before the mid-eighteenth century, the form now known as the novel was an indistinct one, declared by Terry Eagleton to be a cannibal that fed off the various genres circulating at the time. Romance, the picaresque, the epistolary, travelogues, memoirs, and dialogues comprise a handful of the subgenres authors explored and combined when creating their prose fiction. Arguably the most notorious for its influence on early English fiction, the romance was, during the early part of the century, an at once oft-read yet much maligned form, one that became increasingly trivialized and disdained as the century progressed (McKeon 27). Contemporary critics claimed its enervating effects were particularly dangerous for readers of the “fairer sex,” capable of turning virtuous women away from their faithful husbands and heightening women’s natural proclivity for irrationality and belief in fantasy. Men, in general, seemed to have been impervious to these ill effects, mostly due to the fact that they claimed they were not reading such novels. However, as evidenced by the growing number of publications that began to appear at the end of the seventeenth century, many Englishmen and women indulged in such fiction. With this broadening market came authors willing to innovate and deviate from the conventions of fiction. Perhaps the most famous authors of the eighteenth century to employ various formal properties and modes in the service of their novels are
Samuel Richardson and Henry Fielding, yet there are many more who predated them, such as Aphra Behn, Daniel Defoe, Delarivier Manley, Jane Barker, Eliza Haywood, Penelope Aubin, and Mary Davys.

**Innovators of Form and Content**

One of the first authors to explore the merits of formal experimentation in prose fiction, Aphra Behn, although well-known for her romances, utilized a variety of fictional methods to comment upon contemporary culture. While certainly one of (if not the most) prolific authors of her period, Behn’s range of style, form, and genre are quite impressive as well as nearly overwhelming in number. From travel narratives, to epistolary fiction, to ghoulish domestic fiction, Behn pushes the boundaries of fiction—both in form and in content—and likely had a great influence on Davys, who is commonly believed to have been a prolific reader. Whether Behn, as a professional writer, was manipulating popular forms of her time for commercial success or was consciously experimenting as a prosaic artist is impossible to conclude definitively, yet the end results illustrate that she achieved both. Like Behn, Davys employs a variety of genres to evaluate the social structure and institutions of her culture and the societal weaknesses she perceived as supported by that structure. Incessant experimentation and originality proves a major characteristic of Davys’s *oeuvre*, quite probably in reaction to the texts published at the time, including Behn’s works. However, unlike Behn and Manley, she does not manipulate varying generic forms to expose larger political concerns, such as the Whig/Tory debates in which both Behn and Manley were heavily
invested. In the one novel Davys published that directly addresses Whig and Tory conflicts, Familiar Letters betwixt a Gentleman and a Lady, Davys exploits the characters’ political discourse to focus on the methods men seeking brides willfully employ as well as probing their reactions when a woman says “no.” So while she proves to be extraordinarily savvy regarding the English partisan differences historically and of her day, she concentrates on the ways in which the structure of a patriarchy becomes distilled on a domestic level in spite of, or, perhaps more accurately, due to, the underlying nature of the political parties. Rather than an interest in differentiating between Whig and Tory, her concern lies with the close and personal ways disparate values of sexual difference affect and disrupt society—including rape, inheritance, and legitimacy—and with the manner in which domestic tyranny evolves through an ideology that privileges the male, especially the aristocratic male. Throughout her novels, Davys, like many of her female cohort including Behn and Manley, responds to masculine cultural authority, and she manipulates novelistic structures and genres in order to underscore the malignant consequences of a society imbued with an imbalanced configuration of power. In Seductive Forms, Ballaster notes that “women’s writing is seen as an ongoing response to masculine cultural authority, its primary concern the construction of alternative models and means of winning female power” (22). To highlight the ills and abuses of power and the high probability for misogyny within a patriarchal society, Davys creates two antiromances as her first novelistic attempts, The Cousins and Alcippus and Lucippe.
Davys’s First Fruits

Commonly believed to be her first novel, written approximately in 1700—if not earlier—*The Cousins* was first published in her collected works in 1725. *The Cousins* manipulates the genre of romance to at once mock the form itself but also to examine the power dynamics displayed in such fiction, which, naturally, reflect the dynamics of power in the turn-of-the-century England. According to Victoria Joule:

Davys was an innovator of fiction. She experimented with narrative voice and content, highlighted her dissatisfaction with the romance through her parodies of the form and was involved with early realist fictional developments. . . . Though her anti-romantic position was overtly a novelistic concern, Davys also demonstrated in her writing the limitations of romance for the relationships between men and women. (31)19

While Joule rightly underscores Davys’s “dissatisfaction” with romance, she oversimplifies her discontent as a merely “novelistic concern.” However, Davys emphasized the general cultural limitations of women—not solely the inability of romance to capture human relationships realistically—throughout her six novels. Ostensibly a novel of courtship, *The Cousins* does not record an amatory tale or erotic romance but uses the guise of a lovers’ tale to foreground the effects of male weakness and violence.20 McBurney maintains that Davys consciously played with the genre of romance in the novel, writing, “That she was familiar with translations of Continental fiction is evident, which is exaggerated to the point of burlesque” (McBurney, “Forerunner” 354). Developing from the Heroic Romances of France, the English romance carried over the basic elements: the courtly or aristocratic, courtship and love, chivalric adventures, exotic settings, and the idealization of the characters and their situations. According to Ballaster, Behn, Manley, and Haywood were all strongly
influenced by the French aristocratic forms of amatory fiction, including the romance, and their fiction in turn would become English amatory fiction, yet they were not alone in their preference for the genre. McKeon notes the ubiquity of romance throughout the century and in particular states that “the Restoration and early eighteenth century experienced an enormous outpouring of fiction that, by Watt’s and most other standards, must surely be associated with the anti-individualist and idealizing tradition of romance” (3). Additionally, McKeon claims that while Defoe, Richardson, and Fielding “explicitly subvert the idea and ethos of romance, they nonetheless draw upon many of its stock situations and conventions” (2), and one may say the same of Davys. At first blush, it appears that Davys, too, participated in the romantic tide rising at the turn of the eighteenth century. Superficially, she did just that; however, Davys did not write with a true eye towards creating a “romance” but rather with a jeering look at the popular genre. The bones and tropes of romance would have been immediately identifiable to readers of the time, and Davys calls upon this readerly recognition and expectation to lampoon the form in which she was writing. Rather than penning an obvious and overt mockery of the genre, Davys creates her burlesque by more subtle means, by exploiting the very conventions of romance. And rather than creating a romance made of idealized cultural myths, Davys displaces romance with an antiromance. Riley astutely notes that

[Davys’s] novels emphasize that real human beings are nothing like characters described in courtly romance; indeed, it sees through the ideology that depicts marriage as ‘natural’ to expose it as . . . a social construction that plays a central role in sustaining the patriarchal social order that inscribes women. (208)
However, Riley fails to mention that Davys achieves such a breakdown by using the cover of courtly romance in her earliest novels, which appear to demonstrate the happy effects such an ideology. When examining her novels as a whole, we can see that stealthy subversion permeates her approach to fiction, content, and genre.

**Mocking Agnes de Castro**

Clearly, antiromance reacts to romance itself, and Davys’s *The Cousins* follows suit. Moreover, the provocative possibility that Davys directly reacted to one—possibly two—texts published in the seventeenth century also presents itself. The characters, and their “foreign” names provide strong evidence that Davys ridicules a particular novel in her antiromance, *The Cousins*. In 1688, Behn published her translation of *Agnes de Castro*. The two major antagonists of the novel are brother and sister, Alvaro and Elvira. Admittedly, these names fit the setting and perhaps seem to be likely choices for any text set in Spain or Portugal. However, this assumption does not bear out when other contemporary pieces are included for comparison. The character of Alvaro appears in some texts predating Behn’s translation, including *Don Quixote, Memoirs of the Sieur D’Ablancourt, Epistolae Ho- Elianae, Le Diable Boiteux*, and *Letters Writ by a Turkish Spy* as well as in texts published after 1725, yet all of these works only have one mention—one line or sentence—referring to the character (typically Don) Alvaro. Behn’s and Davys’s remain the only Alvaro characters of any substance, and both paint Alvaro as a villain and sexual predator. “Elvira,” on the other hand, was a somewhat well-used name, found in D’Aulnoy’s and Scudery’s pieces, and later in Aubin’s, yet “Elvira” and
“Alvaro” appear to be paired between the years of 1660-1730 only in Behn’s 1688 novel (and later in Trotter’s 1695 dramatic rewriting of Agnes de Castro) and in Davys’s 1725 novel, The Cousins. Using Davys’s oeuvre as evidence of her attitudes, one speculates that the story of women sacrificing everything for an inconstant married man would provide Davys plentiful fodder for mockery in her own novel. Particularly in Agnes de Castro’s closing, where all the virtuous women end as sacrificial victims and the protagonist Pedro continues to reign without any consequences, one finds a novel and characters ripe referents for a burlesque of romance. To that end, Davys appropriates the distinct name of Behn’s female villain and transforms Elvira from a mercenary and jilted lover into the ideal woman. When contrasted to Agnes de Castro, The Cousins’s female characters possess little in common with their fictional predecessors; the traits for which they are lauded—judgment, wit, humor—contrast starkly to the traits of meekness, loyalty, and silence for which Behn’s female characters, especially Agnes, are valued. In Behn’s text, Elvira is equally malevolent to her male counterpart Alvaro; she employs her wit as a treacherous and malicious weapon, one to torment and destroy her female adversaries. Furthermore, Davys creates in “Elvira” not a singular ideal woman of the novel but one multiplied by creating the original ideal mother Elvira, who died in childbirth, and her ideal heroine daughter, Elvira. In addition to being witty and humorous, both of Davys’s Elviras are beautiful, virtuous, and kind. The mother Elvira is described as “a Woman of incomparable Virtue, and the most remarkable for Wit and Beauty, of any in or about the Place she liv’d in” (205) and as the daughter Elvira:

grew apace, and her Years increased, so did her Beauty too. Her wit was great, and her Humour good, which gain’d her the Love and Admiration of all that saw
and conversed with her, and tho’ very few were admitted to visit her, her Qualifications were so great, that she was (tho’ not twelve Years of age) the discourse of all the Country. (209)

In Behn’s translation, women collude to trick and mislead other women—in particular Elvira, who gives Pedro’s love poems for Agnes to his wife Constantia and also forges a letter by Agnes admitting her love for Pedro, and thereby, she creates malicious havoc in the protagonists’ lives. Conversely, in Davys’s text women care for, aid, and protect one another, a recurrent trait in most of her novels. 27 In fact, there are no female antagonists in The Cousins and only a handful in all of Davys’s novels. 28 However, the one point of commonality between Agnes de Castro and The Cousins lies in the weakness of the male spirit; in particular, both authors present the character of Alvaro as the basest of all of the men, and in both texts he reveals himself to be extraordinarily cowardly. With all of the probable links to Agnes de Castro, an additional text may have also held considerable sway over Davys as she penned her first novel. 29

The Influence of Congreve

Although there were authors supporting themselves through their romance and amatory writings, Davys’s adverse reaction to romance was not an entirely unusual one. The context and plot of Davys’s antiromance thickens William Congreve’s own 1692 antiromance novella Incognita and its characters Lorenzo and Leonora are taken into consideration. 30 McBurney claims that Davys favored Congreve above all other dramatists (xv), and throughout her novels, she references and quotes the author often and obviously holds him in great esteem. Although it remains uncertain how much
personal contact Davys may have had with Congreve, we do know that he and Peter Davys were schoolmates and friends at Trinity College. Therefore, it is unsurprising that Davys would emulate Congreve and even less so when one considers the possibility he penned the novella while at Trinity College.  

Like Davys, Congreve mocks prefaces in his preface and questions the value of romance:

Romances as generally composed of the Constant Loves and invincible Courages of Hero’s, Heroins, Kings and Queens, Mortals of the first Rank, and so forth; where the lofty Language, miraculous Contingencies and impossible performances elevate and surprise the reader into a giddy Delight, which leaves him flat upon the Ground whenever he gives of, and vexes him to think how he has suffer’d himself to be pleased and transported, concern’d and afflicted at the several Passages which he has read, VIZ. these Knights Success to their Damosels Misfortunes, an such like, when he is forced to be very well convinced that ‘tis all a lye. (32)

His antiromance, too, presents itself under the guise of romance, with the comical adventures of two “knight errants” who fall in love with two strange women while in Florence. McKeon notes of Incognita, “Congreve’s personages are figures out of an idealizing romance, satirized most of all for an indefatigable credulousness that economically evokes also the gullibility of the average romance reader” (62). For the more astute reader, Incognita’s delight stems from the burlesque of romance, the mistaken (and masked) identities, and the witty dialogue that ensues between the characters. Moreover, as Congreve himself likely would have pointed to, the novel’s “unity of contrivance” proves one of the novella’s chief components of delight. Congreve, as did Davys, satirizes the artifice of lofty language and the excesses of romance to heighten the comedic effect. For instance, Aurelian “accosts” Incognita:

in these or like words: ‘If I do not usurp a privilege for some one more happy in your acquaintance, may I presume, Madam, to entreat (for a while) the favour of
your Conversation, at least until the arrival of whom you expect, provided you are not tired of me before; for then upon the least intimation of uneasiness, I will not fail of doing myself the violence to withdraw for your release. (41)

And later he exclaims, “I am sure I am not to depart Florence until you have made me the most miserable man in it, and refuse me the fatal Kindness of dying at your Feet” (50). These obvious hyperboles produce ridiculous sentiments, sentiments that Congreve presents as so extreme and embellished that they become “Iyes.” Mocking the genre as he does, the influence Congreve’s novella held over *The Cousins* is, perhaps, difficult to immediately recognize, as Davys cloaks her antiromance under the clever disguise of a “true” romance. As opposed to what McKeon calls Congreve’s “highly self-conscious” antiromance, Davys offers up a novel with multiple layers; one that could be read completely differently depending on the sophistication of the reader. The gullible and credulous reader would likely never have discerned the false face of romance, while a clever and incredulous one would have quickly recognized the lampoon. Some view Davys’s early novels as lacking in complexity and refinement, and, certainly, her novels matured as she did. Yet by producing a text that functions on more than one level, Davys demonstrates sophistication and the ability to create an intricate piece of fiction by aiming for the widest audience possible—those who enjoyed romance as well as those who disdained it. This combination of manipulating a genre, in both its popular appeal and subverting the essence of it, proves a complex and early pattern one can trace throughout her novels.
Manipulating the Tropes of Romance

Employing one of the elements common to the early English tradition of romance, Davys sets *The Cousins* in the far-off kingdom of Spain in an undisclosed era. Yet despite the first line of the novel informing the reader of the distance, and the characters’ names confirming their Spanish heritage, there are no other qualities to maintain this fictional distance, and the story and characters feel distinctly English regardless of the “exotic” veil. Another trope that Davys manipulates as both a tool of mockery as well as an element of destabilization is the hyperbolic and “ideal” characters of the genre; as stated earlier, both Elivras are painted as the ideal of their sex; the mother in the first sentence of the novel, and the daughter who inherits all of her mother’s superlative qualities. The exaggeration of the ideal woman proves ubiquitous in romance and therefore appears in keeping with conventions rather than breaking them. However, Davys juxtaposes these excessive statements with the “real” and thereby undermines the existence of an ideal. In the first sentence of the novel, Davys describes the mother as the best woman “of any in or about the place she liv’d in” (205), yet immediately describes her husband Gonsalvo’s inconsolable melancholy over his wife’s apparent barrenness. After describing Gonsalvo’s immeasurable love for the daughter Elvira, a love so great he cannot allow her to leave their home—even to visit her aunt, he leaves her in the care of a sexual predator. Elvira, like her mother, is very beautiful, indeed, she is “the most beautiful Creature upon Earth” (210). Her extreme beauty alone converts her cousin, Lorenzo, from one who is “indifferent” to women to an obsessed amorous admirer, further
indicating the dangers of idealization. Moreover, Davys exaggerates more than looks and love, demonstrated in the characters’ hyperbolic language.

Silver Tongues

Davys also utilizes typical romantic excess of high lofty language when her characters describe their love.35 When pressing Clara to become his lover, Octavio tells her:

Clara, your Love perhaps is in the bud, and you can hinder its growth when you please, but mine is full grown, and has taken root too fast, that nothing but tearing out Heart and all, can be of force enough to displace it. Tell me not therefore of Advantage, give me but thyself to bless my longing Arms, and then I shall be master of more Wealth than the Eastern Empire has to boast of. (236)

When this strong, excessive speech of emotion crosses the lips of the male characters, it proves to be mere artifice as they continually fail in action when their love is tested. Shortly before his suicide, Frederick tells Leonora that her “unkindness had made his Life a burthen to him . . . and he would remove the hated Object from [her] sight” (228). It is important to remember that he knowingly married her against her will, and her “unkindness” is comprised solely of her attempt to perform her matrimonial duty despite the fact that the marriage was forced upon her. Although he voices his great love for her, his words belie his irrationality and petulance. Furthermore, the hyperboles of heroism are as empty as the declarations of love from the men, as Octavio claims he will “ransack Earth and Sea” to find Clara; in reality, he wanders aimlessly without any ransacking yet with much self-pitying. So empty are his words of heroism that when Clara discovers herself to him, he remains dubious as to the reality of her existence and questions if she
is, in fact, Clara. The extremity of the characters’ language does not reflect the truth of their actions and often directly opposes them.

Conversely, the female characters of the novel use extreme language to voice—and even protest—the abuse and violence they are subject to at the hands of men. When facing her would-be rapist, Elvira exclaims, “Villain, thou canst not make me either happy or miserable, thy Promises and Threats make the same Impression on me, and I fear one, as little as I value the other, therefore, once more, Satyr, leave me, and go and do thy worst” (212). Although Elvira’s tone verges on the ceremonial, it does not undermine the horror of the attempted act; rather it lends a gravitas to Elvira’s character—a girl of fifteen—and also a nobility and bravery witnessed in classical heroines. In contrast, when Clara pens her dying letter to Octavio, written when she believes she will be executed for loving him, she writes:

> Since I die for so good a Cause, Death is doubly welcome. I know your love for me is very great; and if you are resolved to make me happy in the Grave, spill not your Sand before your Glass is run, but wait with Patience. I go to give up that Life which could no longer be of use to me, than it had the liberty of enjoying your Company and when once that was deny’d me, Death was the welcomest Guest to my afflicted soul! Live, dearest Octavio, and live happy, by forgetting the most unfortunate Clara. (240)

Clara’s speech mirrors the florid and figurative language of romance, yet unlike those of the male characters, the sentiments imparted in the letter are absolutely genuine.

However, Davys makes Clara the sacrificial woman of the novel due to her willingness to die so that Octavio will be able to marry advantageously. Moreover, Davys depicts her readiness to die wrongfully and without a struggle so that Octavio may marry a wealthy heiress as equally absurd as the conventional death of the romance heroine, who dies to
protect her chastity or to die honorably after its loss. The two female characters’ lofty speeches juxtapose one another: Clara’s letter confirms the odd romance valuation of female existence while Elvira’s impassioned diatribe challenges construction of victim by declaring the inability of earthly, and even violent, masculine actions to determine a woman’s life.³⁶

Representations of Suicide

Along with hyperboles of language, Davys exploits the excessive trends of her era. Although Davys lampoons the romance genre throughout the novel, one of the darkest examples of her mockery comes in her representations of voluntary murder. One of the tropes commonly found in romance is the voluntary murder of one of the characters, which would be known as “suicide” by mid-century, and Behn’s The History of the Nun provides one early novelistic example. After choosing the “holy life” over her love for Henault, Isabella finds “she cannot bear despairing love and finds it impossible to cure” her misery, and with the overwhelming thoughts of the charming Henault impossible to quit she finds “life could not long support itself, but would either reduce her to madness . . . or force her hand to commit a murder upon herself” (16). Later, while she debates with herself between marriage and breaking her vows, she decides that sometimes “it would be more brave and pious to die than to break her vow; but she soon answered that as false arguing, for self-murder was the worst of sins and in the deadly number” (24). These passages from Behn’s text exemplifies the reasons behind suicide in early eighteenth-century plots, a motivation heavily exploited by later romance authors.
Most frequently, the victims of voluntary murder in romance are female, and often the impetus is unrequited or unfulfilled love. Kelly McGuire maintains that “suicide functions as more than a mere trope of amatory fiction,” and several of Haywood’s works “render self-destruction a quintessentially feminine activity, the teleology of the romance genre and the ultimate expression of desire” (25). Arguably, Haywood utilizes this trope more often than any other early eighteenth-century novelist and establishes the “type” of suicide depicted in early English romance novels (McGuire 28). Moreover, McGuire asserts in Dying to be English that “Laying violent hands on her on life” appears so often in Haywood’s novels that it becomes a virtual refrain of her work (28). And although her fiction succeeds Davys’s antiromance, coming approximately twenty years after The Cousins was written, her work nevertheless provides an interesting comparison to Davys’s. McGuire claims that Haywood’s fiction “draws upon the cultural realities of its contemporary situation in foregrounding the act of suicide as not just a feature of the plot—a convenient exit strategy—but rather as a critical social and national concern” (24). And in this, Davys and Haywood share common ground. Yet whereas many romance novels include one, or more rarely two, suicides or attempted suicides, The Cousins sees half of its characters in the clutches of self murder. With such a ubiquitous presence in the novel, Davys clearly parodies its use in romance fiction by using it excessively in her own.  

38
A Peculiarly English Problem

Davys’s sensitivity to suicide, however, was unlikely simply a reaction to the fictional representations she may have been reading in other texts. Very probably, she also responded to the apparently rising tide of voluntary deaths England experienced toward the end of the seventeenth century. Paralleling the various “rises” and “increases” for which the eighteenth-century would become so famous, self murder also witnessed a wave in England, beginning around 1680. In fact, according to George Minios “it was in England that the end result of this malady was first called suicide” and maintains that the appearance of the neologism, first coined by Thomas Brown in 1636 yet not in popular use until the eighteenth century, reflected a national desire to distinguish between homicide of oneself and the killing of another.39 Indeed, in the early eighteenth century, England was perceived as possessing a “cultural death drive,” as suffering from an epidemic that was specific to the island well above and beyond any other European nation. Debates began to circulate regarding suicide, and the public saw an increasing number of publications—both sympathetic and understanding essays as well as ones damning the act. In addition, notorious and famous cases seemed to illustrate a drastically growing number of citizens choosing to end their own lives.40 By 1733, Dr. George Cheyne would famously coin the phenomenon “The English Malady” in an essay of the same name, yet Minios notes that Cheyne falsely “analyzed that the British committed suicide more often than other nations” (181). Many attributed the cause to climatic determinism, yet Cheyne points to specifically English habits; the use of peat coal to heat their homes, the consumption of half-cooked beef, and the licentious nature of the
English. Between 1680 and 1690, there was an average of 18 suicides per year, but between 1730 and 1740 the number reached fifty. Minios credits the popularity of the idea of “The English Malady” during the years of 1680 to 1720 to the improved statistical techniques developed during the period, the sociocultural evolution of the aristocracy, the climate of intense religious rivalry, and the astonishing growth of the press, “all of which operated in an overall atmosphere of crisis in traditional values” (183). Additionally, the British press began publishing suicide notes alongside of glorified reports of aristocratic suicides. Alongside this practice of publishing the private letters of suicide was the increasing presence of fiction containing suicidal representations. In short, the dramatic escalation in self murder was perceived as an epidemic in early eighteenth-century England, which therefore became a nation associated with a cultural death drive (McGuire 1). In The Cousins, the suicidal trope of romance and the cultural ethos surrounding the wave of voluntary murder conflate, which Davys uses to mock the genre in which she is writing and perhaps even the culture in which she lives. Yet Davys utilizes suicide and romance to raise another significant cultural issue: the tyranny that stems from a society that privileges one sex above another, one in which one sex is afforded absolute power while denying agency to the other. However, Davys’s representations of voluntary murder do not follow the patterns of her contemporaries.

The Suicidal Male

According to the pattern McGuire discerns in eighteenth-century fiction, The Cousins deviates from the norm of fiction published before 1740 and yet simultaneously
predates future representations as “novels in the first part of the century generally dwell upon the suicidal woman, after the 1750s they increasingly devote attention to the suicidal male, the victim not only of the gambling hall but also unrequited love” (McGuire 11). In the prose fiction of the early eighteenth century, suicide was typically a female and feminine act. Not only does Davys create an aberrant contemporary model of the fictional suicidal victim, she also foresees the latter half of the century’s fiction, wherein the gender of self murder will shift; Davys’s novel challenges the paradigm of the suicidal victim of many romance novels, as of the four characters who contemplate or commit voluntary murder, only one is a woman. Moreover, English culture attributed gender and status to the various suicidal techniques, differentiating and privileging the differing methods of suicide, and Davys employs these assumed attributions to reveal the inner qualities of her characters. For example, poison was considered a feminine method, while drowning and hanging were perceived as more active and more violent and therefore more masculine modes. The pistol or the sword was thought to be the most aristocratic technique, and therefore the most admirable and noble, choice. The abundance of fashionable late seventeenth-century suicides adhered to this cultural code whereby the pistol or sword became the favored instrument of death, while hanging was scorned. A closer investigation of Davys’s characters’ methods illustrate her clever, if morbid, manipulation of cultural events.
Alvaro

At the outset of *The Cousins*, Davys introduces Alvaro, and the topic of voluntary murder, by describing his suicide attempt. Alvaro, the eldest son, is disinherited; he immediately rides to a river and attempts to plunge to his death. Unlike the male suicidal characters of Haywood’s fiction whose acts are often mimetic responses to a female suicide (McGuire 32), Alvaro attempts his own life due to his loss of fortune.\(^{46}\) In this instance, Davys uses suicide to impart key information to the reader: it demonstrates that he is overly emotional and irrational as he immediately and without thought chooses to take his life. Dissimilarly to Haywood’s characters, Alvaro attempts his life not due to the higher and loftier notions of love lost, but for the loss of material wealth and status. This in turn, highlights his inherent weakness of morals, which indicates his wickedness as a character. Thereafter, he proves to be a horrid and cowardly man, as well as a repeat sexual offender who attempts to rape the daughter, Elvira, of the man who saved his life, Gonsalvo. Although his choice does not emasculate him by its feminine attribution (he chooses drowning over poison), the very attempt marks him as morally culpable and dishonorable and frames him as a villain well before his attempted sexual assault.

Frederick

The second case of suicide of the novel belongs to Frederick, who marries Leonora despite the fact that he has knowingly “taken [her] against [her] will” by marrying her without her consent and with the knowledge that she loves another. In spite of her reluctance, Fredrick passionately loves her and remains extremely jealous of her
former lover, Carlos, although Carlos has disappeared from Leonora’s life. When he falsely suspects that she has rekindled an epistolary relationship with her previous love, he plans an elaborate and bizarre voluntary death. He takes her to a secluded and “melancholy” spot in the woods, berates her for her “unkindness,” and plunges a dagger into his chest. In one moment, Davys deconstructs the idea of the “loving” husband—his love leads him to be so obsessed that he chooses not to live when he erringly believes his wife to be “unfaithful,” and so hateful and cruel as to force her to witness arguably one of the most traumatizing events possible; the brutal and bloody self-inflicted demise of a spouse.47 McGuire argues that “far from condemning suicide in her fiction, Haywood rather renders it a means of revenge, rebirth, and a corroboration of desire” (32). Clearly in this case, Davys sees suicide as a method of revenge, not just in the loss Leonora must experience in losing her husband but in the “active” participation in her husband’s death, for which he directly blames her. Unlike Haywood, Davys shows suicide to be another instrument of malice, abuse, and tyrannical control.48 Davys almost tempts the readers to sympathize with the desperation of Frederick’s extreme act, yet she undermines any lingering compassion by the extremity of the act itself and in the immediate courtship that follows between Leonora and Carlos, her former lover.

Leonora

As in many of her other works, Davys’s male characters prove consistently incapable of handling any hardship or any emotional trial and when facing a dilemma become overly irrational and verge on madness. When a stranger traveling through the
woods, Lorenzo, discovers the Leonora and Fredrick immediately after Fredrick stabs himself, Leonora appears in “the greatest disorder; she had torn her Face, rent her Clothes, and pull’d her Hair off by handfuls” (221). Lorenzo offers her his assistance, and she asks him to end her trouble with her days and shoot her. While arguably a “feminized,” or passive, method of self murder, a requested death at the hands of another still would have been considered suicide. One of McGuire’s key arguments in *Dying to be English* centers on the fact that “the very conditions that would render women’s suicide possible are denied by the cultural codes that limit female agency, . . . [and] the eighteenth-century novel restores the historical reality of women’s suicide by affording a space for the representation of the phenomenon” (12). In this respect, Davys paradoxically contrasts the myriad ways Leonora, and women in general, lacked agency and choice, being crippled by a patriarchal society that rendered them virtually incapable of taking their own life yet nevertheless attempting to do so. Moreover, McGuire argues “in a patriarchal system which treats women as objects of desire, women are left with no option beyond self-destruction” (24), which Leonora illustrates in her frantic wish for death. While clearly reacting to the violent act of her husband, Leonora may also be reacting to an intense period of objectification from both her husband and her father, both of whom ignored her desires and denied her any agency in her own marriage. In this horrific scene of simultaneous self murder and emotional torture, Davys establishes a pattern of her life’s work, one which reacts to the privilege and power of men in early eighteenth-century England. Sir Robert Filmer’s *Patriarchia* (1680) established for the nation that paternal and political power were one and the same and fully developed a
theory of political right and obedience, and the ramifications of this patriarchy were clear to many women writers and thinkers of the time. Carol Pateman argues, “Since the late seventeenth century, feminists have been pointing out that almost all political theorists have, in fact, explicitly or tacitly, upheld patriarchal right” (19). By “patriarchy,” I refer to men’s political right over women and the ways in which this allows women “to be subordinated by men as men, or to men as a fraternity” (Pateman 3), which in turn leads to sexual subordination and sexual violence, both of which surface dramatically in Davys’s final two novels. Perhaps this radical imbalance prompts Davys to treat the scene in which Leonora begs Lorenzo to take her life with sentiment and empathy and marks the sole instance of the novel to do so. Leonora’s reasons for voluntary death resonate on a much deeper, and more primal, level than those of Alvaro or Frederick. Alvaro, a young and completely healthy man would have had ways of making his way in the world, but he simply surrenders to his brother’s avarice and his own love of (lost) money. Frederick, on the other hand, obsessed with his wife, manufactures reasons for taking his own life, as Leonora is innocent of any infidelity. Additionally, unlike Frederick and Sebastian, who premeditate their self murders, Leonora experiences an intense emotional reaction in response to the extreme violence she is forced to witness and, therefore, in the bleakness of despair, spontaneously contemplates suicide. Moreover, McGuire maintains that

the narrative of suicide—told either from the perspective of the suicidal individual, as in the epistolary/dialogical situation in works like Clarissa and The British Recluse, or from the third-person perspective of [Frances] Burney’s or [John] Shebbeare’s works—typically incorporates the sacrificial element ascribed to voluntary death both by its agents and those that mourn their loss (20).
It is, then, interesting to note that not only is Leonora the only character to embody a sacrificial “victim,” a victim of an arranged marriage and a forced participant in her husband’s suicide, her offer of self-sacrifice directly opposes the other three characters narcissistic motivations for voluntary death. In this case, Davys uses the contemplation of suicide to show a character’s level of loyalty and depth of feeling; her husband’s demise moves Leonora to a heart-wrenching and genuine grief and, momentarily, death appears as a solution to her suffering. Furthermore, Leonora’s desire to die upon the death of her husband is consistent with the standard conventions for establishing a virtuous widow. And perhaps for her loyalty as a wife, and for her obvious humanity and suffering at the hands of her father and husband, Davys allows Leonora a happily ever after. Yet in the male characters’ suicides, Davys provides a spectrum of maleness from the hyperbolic masculinity in Frederick to the extreme effeminacy in Sebastian.

**Sebastian**

The last case of suicide proves arguably the most interesting of all, especially when taken within the context of suicide in other romance works. The last case of voluntary death involves Sebastian, the “treacherous Portuguese,” who tyrannizes the protagonists for the duration of the narrative. To conclude his life, Sebastian drinks the poison he intended for Elvira and/or Lorenzo, and thus comes to his own violent end. According to McGuire, suicidal women of romance who are “unable to retain the objects of their desire, and typically unable to avenge themselves upon the removed object, redirect these violent impulses onto their own bodies” (26). Although his motivations
appear parallel to the women of Haywood’s novels in his redirecting of his unrequited love as violence upon his own body, the sympathy afforded Haywood’s characters is completely nullified in the case of Sebastian. While he similarly redirects his passion back onto himself, it comes after repeated and failed attempts to affect any violence upon Elvira and Lorenzo; here again, his suicide remains outside the realm of Davys’s compassion as evinced by Elvira’s reaction:

Elvira, tho’ she did not delight in Cruelty, yet was she not much concern’d for the Fate of Sebastian, who had so industriously sought her destruction, but was very glad he had put a stop to all her Fears. . . . When the news came, it made a new Face in the whole Family: Elvira’s dreadful Apprehensions were at an end; Lorenzo’s Fury was appeased, and Emilia put on a joyful Countenance: all things were now changed for the better, and our Lovers were resolved to compleat their own Happiness, by giving themselves to one another. (252)

Though Sebastian’s motives look to fall along the lines of unrequited love, and are arguably triggered by his initial passion for Elvira, the true reason behind his self murder results from his inability to “keep his word” to destroy the lovers. So then, it was not his unfulfilled love that spurred him to suicide, but his failure to destroy his rival and the former object of his affection; by the time of his death, his unfulfilled desire has little to do with love and more to do with his impotence as a man. Additionally, his voluntary death functions as a source of universal retribution. Rather than turning a benevolent and sympathetic eye toward Sebastian at novel’s end, Davys makes his death another instance where Providence intervenes. The “poetry” of his demise surfaces through his “weapon” of self-destruction, poison; a choice that further feminizes and unmans him. As with Alvaro and his ignoble drowning, Sebastian’s method of self-poisoning, a culturally recognized feminine and “common” method, not only solidifies his wretched character
and also underscores his utter weakness by denying him a masculine death by pistol or duel. Moreover, this strikes one as particularly noteworthy as many romances indulge in a deciding duel between rivals, and here, Davys denies both Sebastian and Lorenzo the “honor” of facing one another. By refusing the characters this oft-used element of justice, and by creating an end for Sebastian that reads feminine, Davys also simultaneously negates for Lorenzo the heroic feat of overcoming the villain, who was also his fiancé’s intended murderer, and thereby at story’s end, Davys leaves Lorenzo as palpably ineffectual as Sebastian and the novel without a hero.

**Providential Deaths**

In addition to allowing herself to mock the romance—the conventions of which enable Davys to draw attention to the serious topic of her culture’s apparent predilection for suicide—Davys uses the deaths of the novel to move against the grain of traditional romance. As previously noted, all of the male characters’ suicides prove selfish or ignoble and illicit little sympathy, they also completely lack any element of tragedy. At the end of *Love in Excess* (1719), Haywood gives us a broken-hearted woman who dies from the physical manifestations of unrequited love. The characters, and the readers, sympathize with the character who has, by no fault of her own, fallen in love with the irresistible protagonist, Count D’Elmont. So, too, does Madame de Lafayette pull at the heart strings in *Princess du Cleves* (1678), both for the Princess’s husband and her mother, who on their deathbeds plead for her to remain loyal to the Prince after their passing and to never marry De Nemours, to the point of self-sacrifice from the Princess,
and for the star-crossed lovers themselves. Again in Behn’s *The History of the Nun*, the two men’s deaths appear unnecessary, tragic, and wholly unjust. Yet Davys draws on none of these issues or emotions. The characters who die—either by their own hand or another’s—garner no tender emotions, within or without of the text, but end as characters who deserve their early earthly departures. In the case of Alvaro, his flaws reappear in his murderous nephew, and Frederick and Sebastian prove incapable in handling any difficulty, real or imagined, and which prove trifling when contrasted with real suffering, the suffering that they themselves inflict upon others. In a fascinating maneuver, Davys strips male death—and even a seemingly sacrificial one—of all its honor and nobility by deflating the underlying drives, leaving their loss of life completely hollow. What remains is a sense that the men themselves were responsible for their own miserable ends. Additionally, their deaths affect no one outside of themselves; they retain meaning only due to the fact that through their demise, other characters—largely female characters—are relieved of suffering at their hands. Already at this early stage in her writing career, Davys presents her readers with an unflinching glance at the fault-lines of a patriarchy, even when lightly tested. She evaluates with a critical eye those who possess power and the detrimental effects that power causes for those who wield it (improperly) and for those who must writhe underneath it. Moreover, with this stern harsh depiction of their deaths, Davys amputates another factor crucial to many romances; readerly sympathy and empathy for the male characters.
The Destabilization of the Ideals of Romance

The narrative culminates to become a romance that by the very conventions and tropes employed mocks the genre itself and simultaneously tears at its varying “ideals.” Davys frames the family as comprised of perfect figures: Elvira the beautiful and witty heroine, Emilia, her wise and caring aunt, and Lorenzo, the (seemingly) model man just returned home from his Tour, all living in wealth and ease. Yet she uses the guise of the matchless man to reveal that at the core, even seemingly ideal men are flawed to the detriment of the women around them. With her introductions of the characters, Davys provides a stark binary between the men and women of the novel. Initially, Lorenzo appears to fill the role of the ideal romantic hero, who returning from his tour, promptly falls in love with his cousin when Davys describes him as “a most complete Gentleman”; this description of Lorenzo proves underwhelming, especially when contrasted to the superlative depictions of Elvira. No lists follow to describe his manly beauty or his accomplished education; readers are left to image what, exactly, makes him “most complete Gentleman.” Yet despite the lack of distinct qualities, readers would recognize Lorenzo as a protagonist, likely projecting that he will, therefore, become chivalric hero of the tale. Although he occupies the space of the idealized male of romance, a closer look at his character arguably negates any belief in the reality of a hero. He is, from the onset, somewhat tyrannical, unable to handle disappointment, and an utter failure under pressure. Immediately, we learn that “he was not a Man of an amorous fond Temper, but had always been very indifferent to Women in general” (214). Predictably, he falls in love with Elvira, but his magnanimous speech to Elvira sounds tarnished when he
proclaims “In short, Elvira, you have gain’d a Conquest, which, were you less fair, I shou’d be ashamed of” (216). When he declares his love for Elvira, he demands a return to his love and she “must resolve to love none but” him (216). When Elvira in turn plays the coquette, and seems to refuse him, he unravels and becomes “distracted.” Later when they are attempting to reach her father and Sebastian shoots her horse out from under her, “[Lorenzo] had hardly Courage enough to see whether she were dead or alive” (220) and is unable to answer Sebastian’s assault as the party scurries back to the home for safety, a pattern that repeats each time they attempt to leave the estate. Additionally, he cannot find a way to either get Elvira to her father to gain his consent for marriage or even get a letter to Gonsalvo. Yet it is comedic that one man, not an army or a group of cavaliers, but one solitary figure holds an entire household captive. Moreover, it is not only a solitary man but a foreign man who manages to hold hostage a wealthy family with servants and resources at their disposal, not to mention the law. This ineffectiveness even invades his act that appears the most heroic. When investigating the noise during the suicide of Leonora’s husband, Lorenzo admits the he “never set up for a Knight-Errant, yet [his] Curiosity carried [him] in”; not a desire to save a life or a damsel in distress, but simple curiosity. The sum total of his heroic act is to send his man to town “for Conveniences to carry her away by force” as Leonora wishes to die, but is himself seiz’d as the villagers who believe him a murderer, until Leonora herself speaks up, clears his name, and saves him. He even allows the mother-in-law to take Leonora away as the murderer, and that, according to Lorenzo, was all the assistance he could offer. After a month away, he returns to find out the cause of the accident. Therefore, the “idealized”
couple of The Cousins is far from leading a dreamy or romantic life. Due to the actions of one man, the treacherous Portuguese, an entire family and their servants remain trapped inside the walls of their estate, the couple are locked in stasis, unable to marry.\textsuperscript{55} The irony is that others, like Octavio and Clara, are able to enter the estate easily, so that this romantic picture of life is so implausible it becomes ridiculous.

In addition to questioning Lorenzo’s heroic potential, Davys also critically scrutinizes Octavio’s behavior, thereby, centering much of the novel’s satire on these incapable “heroes.” Due to the male characters’ unheroic traits and ineffectiveness as protectors, the women of the novel suffer greatly or face grave danger, and Davys creates in Leonora’s brother Octavio and her adopted sister Clara a principal example. Although Clara is dependent upon his family, and his father forbids a romance between them, Octavio believes it would “be the greatest Self-denial to forbid” himself the discovery of his love, even though it puts Clara in mortal danger. Immediately, her reaction is to express her fear of his affections:

Oh! Octavio, she said, I see nothing in your Love but what inspires me with something too like itself, but I see such dreadful Effects arising from that Cause, that I much fear they will end in our Ruin. . . . Had we not therefore, said she, better prevent this growing Ill, by nipping our Follies in the bud, before they grow headstrong, and past our mastery? (236).

Like most of Davys’s female characters, Clara understands that there are serious consequences to romantic relationships and understands that she, as an orphaned interloper, represents a threat and that she and Octavio could never be together other than in a clandestine relationship. He, however, protests with emotion and hyperbole: “Clara . . . your love perhaps is in the bud, and you can hinder its growth when you please, but
mine is full grown, and has taken root so fast, that nothing but tearing out Heart and all can be force enough to displace it” (236). Thus he pressures Clara into submitting to a secret courtship, which predictably, the father uncovers. After his discovery Clara declares, “how much would you have loved me more, had you loved me less” (237), highlighting that his rash behavior affects her the most deeply—namely that she will lose her home if not her life. Because of Octavio’s inability or unwillingness to control his passion, he puts Clara in mortal peril, which shifts his feelings from an example of love to representing an example of unchecked and privileged male desire, driven to satisfy itself above any consideration for the object of affection, the powerless woman.

Additionally, after his father’s discovery, Clara “always had a suspicion of [his] Father, and said she was afraid some rough Design lurk’d under that smooth Brow” (238), yet Octavio blindly believes that ultimately his father will allow him to marry Clara. His father sends him away, and heedless of Clara’s warnings and misgivings, Octavio leaves her unprotected. When he returns and finds Clara gone, he proclaims he will ransack earth and sea to find her, to which Leonora replies:

Oh! Octavio . . . how much do you boast a power you have not! My Father has not done his work by halves, nor has his Cruelty reach’d at anything less, than the Life of the much abused Clara. These Ears heard the Sentence of Death pronounce’d and these Eyes saw her go to it like a Lam to the Sacrifice. (239) 56

Although Octavio has orchestrated the plot and instigated the whole, Clara is the one punished. Furthermore, Davys compounds Octavio’s lack of heroism in his reaction to Clara’s death; he does not immediately attempt to end his life, but instead throws himself upon the ground and the servants prevent him from following after Clara. Like a good romantic hero, he languishes on the verge of death for some weeks, yet Davys ridicules
this trope as well, as “strength of nature got the better; and tho’ my Mind was still the same, yet my body recover’d its former Health” (241). In other words, after a good rest, he is just fine. Moreover, Octavio also lacks the ability—or true willingness—to avenge his lover’s death as it comes at the hand of the patriarch, his tyrannical father; his “revenge” is to gather his funds and travel aimlessly. When he arrives at Elmira’s estate, he continues act conversely to the typical chivalric hero, and “tho’ he had lost his Quiet, yet retained his manners;” quite composed, he calmly proceeds to tell them the tale of his lost love. Lastly, in perhaps the most scathing moment regarding Octavio’s character, once they find Clara in the woods, he doesn’t recognize her. When she speaks, Octavio “thought himself very well acquainted with that Voice, but cou’d not persuade himself that he had ever seen the Face in his life” (244). She sees his face, cries his name, and collapses; yet still, Octavio, “who knew her not, was much at a loss to know how she came by his name” (244). In her poverty and her rags, he is unable to recognize her and remains suspect of her true identity until she cleans herself and changes clothes. Octavio represents the worst version of a lover; one who leaves his lady, almost causes her execution, and then denies her presence. Yet he adheres to the model of unheroic behavior, as in total, the male characters read as incompetent and emotionally explosive, and make the large part of Davys’s satire of romance.

The Heroines in the Margins

The only valiant figures of the novel are the tangential female characters, who are able to survive, adapt, struggle, and persist under extraordinary misfortune. To begin
with, Emilia, the widow aunt, takes Elvira from a place of isolation—the place of her attempted rape—and moves her to her own estate. Indeed, after Alvaro’s attack, the presence of her father does not ease Elvira’s fears, yet news that Emilia has arrived gives Elvira “new life” and she meets her with the “greatest Transports of Joy.” Moreover, Emilia proves an active, rather than a passive, woman as she comes to their home after repeated written requests of Gonsalvo to remove Elvira; specifically she will “take no denial” concerning Elvira’s living with her, as she recognizes the potential harm of Gonsalvo’s parental choices. While Emilia remains a marginal character in the novel, hers is the first unselfish act that is made in Elvira’s best interest. Despite Leonora’s pleas for a voluntary death after her husband’s suicide, she too proves resilient, in control, and to be a survivor, as in her widowhood she chooses her own fate and the terms of her second marriage to Carlos. Lastly, Clara, who has been put to the ultimate test of will and determination, survives starvation, kidnapping, attempted murder, and considers her female savior and benefactor’s well-being over her own future. In the secondary characters, Davys highlights women’s acts of bravery and fortitude, and in this way, one might argue that she smuggles in these acts of female courage in an era that did often represent women as the stronger or more capable sex.

**Recurrent Patterns**

Davys will again satirize romance in her next novel, *Alcippus and Lucippe*, yet she will do so more overtly and it will be her last novel to glance at the genre. Thereafter, Davys experiments with several different genres and modes: the picaresque, familiar
letters, and moral reform comedy. Although each novel witnesses a progression of Davys’s ability as a writer, and each evinces the refinement of her authorial voice, *The Cousins*, nevertheless, establishes many patterns traceable in Davys’s work. Despite moving from genre to genre, Davys manipulates the conventions of form and structure in order to call attention to social issues such as power, privilege, and misogyny. As she does with *The Cousins*, Davys continues to mock the ridiculous slices of life, at times in the genre itself and at others in the characters she creates. Moreover, her novels, all in their own unique way, illustrate Davys’s keen awareness of the culture around her, its patterns, trends, markets, and flaws. Yet with this awareness attends a growing cynicism, and as her fiction evolves with the passing years, so too does Davys’s darkening perception of the world around her.
Chapter Three

*The Amours of Alcippus and Lucippe* (1704): From Romance to the Ordinary

Similarly to *The Cousins*, *The Amours of Alcippus and Lucippe* (republished as *The Lady's Tale* in 1725\(^5\)) was also written and published earlier than the presumed original publication date. However, unlike with *The Cousins*, Davys herself provides the details of the earlier composition and publication dates. Davys claims in her preface to her 1725 collected works:

*The Lady's Tale* was writ in the Year 1700, and was the Effect of my first Flight to the Muses, it was sent about the World as naked as it came into it, having not so much as one Page of a Preface to keep it in Countenance. What Success it met with I never knew; for as some unnatural Parents sell their Offspring to Beggars, in order to see them no more, I took three Guineas for the Brat of my Brain, and then went a hundred and fifty Miles Northward, to which Place it was not very likely its Fame should follow: But I found it in a sad ragged Condition, and had so much Pity for it, as to take it home, and get it into better Clothes, that when it made a second Sally, it might with more Assurance appear before its Betters. (v)

Whether it was published in England or Ireland is unknown, yet given the information Davys herself provides, it is very probable that it was published in London circa 1700. Davys was living there at the time, moving to York thereafter, which is 174 miles (151 nautical miles) north of London. Even given Davys’s own testimony of the novel’s previous publication, Bowden doubts the truthfulness of her claim.\(^6\) However, it seems unlikely that Davys would fantasize to such a great length, or try to convince her readers
of the novel’s history with nothing to gain from the mistruth. Indeed, the concrete details of payment and the distance between the cities along with the matching dates for all of these factors supports the veracity of Davys’s assertion. More likely than a fabrication on Davys’s part, the 1700 version either never made it to print, or was published with so little success that the first effort has been lost, as *Alcippus and Lucippe* was believed to be before Frans De Bruyn’s discovery of a copy. If one believes Davys, this means that the novel had three separate publications, and two extensive revisions.

Discussing the 1704 and the 1725 republication, *The Lady’s Tale*, is problematic due to the fact that although some scholars, Bowden for instance, believe the two works to be almost identical, there are in fact, notable distinctions. While *The Lady’s Tale* retains most of the plot points, Davys significantly amends the finer details of the narrative as well as the structure itself, and the differences between the two novels are quite considerable. Davys takes the core of *Alcippus and Lucippe* and transforms it into a much more complex and interesting novel. In *The Lady’s Tale*, she adds a fictional audience in the form of Lucy, and thereby also adds significantly to the humor, which the earlier version lacks. She also augments details and events, which decreases some of the rather unflattering characteristics of her earlier female protagonist, Lucippe. Yet because the bones of the story remain the same, as do the themes and cultural issues, and we have no evidence to suggest a revision date for *The Lady’s Tale*, I shall discuss them jointly.\textsuperscript{61} Continuing in a similar vein to *The Cousins*, patriarchy, the institution of marriage, courtship, and the irrationality of male passion make up the focal issues in *Alcippus and Lucippe* and *The Lady’s Tale*. While *The Amours of Alcippus and Lucippe* presents a
more obvious antiromance than *The Cousins*, it still adheres to the arc of her work, as each novel she wrote progressively attempted to capture realistic details of everyday life. In *Alcippus and Lucippe*, Davys eschews all but the very superficial trappings of romance in the novel.\(^6^2\) Similarly to *The Cousins*, the novel also has the veneer of romance, particularly at first glance; as in all of her novels, Davys uses the title in a significant way.\(^6^3\) The title teases readers to expect a romance as it follows the genre’s tradition of christening the text after the titular lovers and their very exotic names. Such titles as *Almanzor and Almanzaida* (1678), *The Amours of Milistrate and Prazamine* (1709), *Belisarius and Zariana* (1710), *The Amours of Clitophon and Leucippe* (1720), and *Philadore and Placentia* (1727) demonstrate the market trend that Davys exploits. Additionally to the title, Davys employs other characteristics of the genre: the orphaned daughter,\(^6^4\) the aristocratic family, and the tale of courtship. However, despite these traits, much of the novel directly mocks romance in contrast to *The Cousins*, which attempts a more subtle and more clandestine burlesque.

**High and Lofty to the Vulgar: Innovations of Speech**

The first element of romance that Davys explores in *Alcippus and Lucippe* is language, with which she continues to experiment throughout her writing career. From *Alcippus and Lucippe* to *The Accomplish’d Rake*, Davys plays with the dialogue and the word choice of her characters, experimenting with regional dialects, class-oriented dialects, and the vernacular, which was highly unusual for prose fiction in the early part of the century.\(^6^5\) In contrast to the loftier speech of *The Cousins*, Davys begins to insert
vernacular words and phrases into her characters’ dialogue, mostly Lucippe’s/Abaliza’s. Although Lucippe’s family is “noble,” the language that they use strikes one as less so; Lucippe/Abaliza refers to “chaps,” “ape’s bags,” and “dumps,” and even refers to Alcippus as a “spark.” Perhaps Davys’s point is to in some way normalize the family, or to move them closer to their merchant-class brethren, or to engage differently with the language of fiction—possibly to emulate that of the stage. Her burlesque of the genre suggests that language is merely another tool to tear down the façade of romance. And it proves effective; when cruder phrasing appears, it jolts one out of the never-never world the characters supposedly inhabit. Moreover, it indicates early on in the narrative that this “romance” may not be what it seems and rouses suspicions of a satire. Before the novel begins, in the dedication, Davys writes, “But if what I have written can pass for good English, and give you and the rest of the ladies an hour’s diversion, I shall gain my end.” At first glance, this sentence provokes little doubt of Davys’s sincerity in her motives. Yet when she begins to pepper the narrative with vulgarities, it implies that on the whole, the novel may be a less than earnest romance. Moreover, Davys carefully crafts which character speaks with less artifice, as she juxtaposes the two protagonists’ style of speech; Lucippe uses common expressions while Alcippus uses more contrived and artificial ones. Declaring his feelings for Abaliza to her father he waxes hyperbolic, “I love your Daughter more than Life, and when I cease to do so, I must cease to breathe: She is the very center of my Wishes, and to possess her, would finish all my earthly Desires” (Lady’s Tale 162). On a visit with his father, Alcippus announces his love:
no Man had ever more Inducements to Love, so never Man did it with more  
Sincerity than I do: And, Madam, I beg of you not to keep me in suspence, but to  
give me leave either to Live or Dye; I have but a short time to Accomplish the  
greatest Concern of my Life, and I can’t live upon indifference; . . . nothing but  
your Breath can make me happy or miserable. (Alcippus 59)

As Alcippus pleads his own case for their courtship, Lucippe asks him to speak of  
another, more pleasing, subject, he proclaims as “one of the best breed Men in the World,  
he would much rather bite his Tongue out, and spit it to the Dogs, than once offend [her]  
by the least Word” (42). Indeed, Alcippus’s lofty—and excessive—language foregrounds  
his “good breeding,” but it also proves him to be an affected construction rather than a  
relatable “real” character. Moreover, he consistently uses his fine speeches to coerce  
Lucippe/Abaliza to act in ways contrary to her morals, such as when he claims they  
should marry immediately after his father’s death, claiming ceremony is impertinent,  
while she rejoins that it is mere decency to follow social customs when faced with such a  
loss. Although Alcippus purports to be well-bred, he immediately wishes to abandon  
social conventions when they prevent him from fulfilling his desires. His rash and at  
times crude behavior belies his lofty language, which reads as noble, yet his actions do  
not.

**Bait and Switch: From Romance to Realist Fiction**

Alongside Alcippus’s hyperboles of sentiment, Davys initially appears to offer  
her readers a romance by including some familiar tropes, only to undermine the typical  
conventions with her original replacements. Davys teasingly substitutes the elements of  
romance with her very mundane alternatives, and thereby she creates generic space
between her novel and romance, beginning with the setting. As she does in *The Cousins*, Davys also sets the bulk of the plot in the quintessentially domestic scene, inside Lucippé’s home. In the 1725 publication, she intensifies this backdrop as the real action of the novel: Abaliza physically tells her tale to her friend, in her home, perhaps even in her closet; in *Alcippus and Lucippé* the action of the tale she recounts also occurs largely in her own home. In other words, exotic Spain or another colorful location do not comprise the site for this tale of courtship; rather, Davys chooses the very ordinary family estate as a backdrop. Moreover, when she shifts the setting to another country, they travel not to a mysterious foreign land, but to the decidedly unromantic and mercantile country of Holland. Furthermore, Davys uses the characters’ travels to intensify her satire; during the typically sensational portion of the novelistic plot—a journey by ship—she highlights the uneventful and denies any sense of adventure. There are no treacherous or life-threatening storms but, rather, calm seas and monotony as Abaliza relates:

> It wou’d be superfluous, to give you an account of our voyage, since nothing worth repeating happen’d to us, for we were neither taken by Pirates, nor swallow’d by Waves; we escaped both Storms and the Grand Signor’s Seraglio, and with full sails of a fair Wind we reached our wish’d for Harbour. (*Lady’s Tale* 180)

By scorning the trope of the perilous journey and the grand adventure of travel, Davys sharpens her critical eye trained on romance while simultaneously furthering her experiments with realism. Indeed, McBurney also cites this passage as evidence that Davys consciously burlesques Continental fiction (“Forerunner” 354).

Likewise, in *The Lady’s Tale*, the characters themselves are not exotic or royalty; whereas Davys emphasizes Lucippé’s family’s nobility in the 1704 novel, by 1725 they
become country gentry, and in both versions the foreign characters hale are a Dutch merchant, Vanzouch, and his son, Alcippus. And although the Dutch family’s wealth far exceeds that of Lucippe’s/Abaliza’s family’s, they are actively “working” in trade—far removed from any princely status or royal culture. Alcippus and Lucippe is Davys’s first novel to openly laud the merchant class, one that also marks the beginning of another recurrent pattern of her work. Raising the merchants above the gentry, Davys underscores the excessive wealth of Vanzouch, and despite the fact that Lucippe/Abaliza outranks Alcippus as nobility/gentlewoman, both of the patriarchs, her father and his, believe her to be in every way inferior to Alcippus, which historically would have been the obverse. Increasingly during the eighteenth century as the merchant/middling class grew, it was not uncommon for wealthy merchant families to marry into title-rich, cash-poor aristocratic ones. However, it would have been unusual for an aristocratic woman to marry a middle-class man as no status could be conferred by the union—indeed, hers would be forever lost. If such an arrangement came about, it was often a wealthy merchant-class father offering a sizable dowry so that his daughter could assume a title and the noble son and his family, wealth. Therefore, Davys’s ahistorical construction reverses romance’s idealization of the aristocracy to replace it with her own of the newly-moneyed middle class.

Twisting the Tropes

In addition to substituting the higher-ups for the more middling, Davys also bends other traditions of romance as well. Analogously to a characteristic romance,
Abaliza/Lucippe loses her mother, yet atypically, no sudden death invades the beginning of the tale. In *Alcippus and Lucippe*, Lucippe pronounces her mother’s frail state of health at the beginning of the narrative, yet she survives for almost half of the novel. In *A Lady’s Tale*, the mother herself announces her impending death, which comes half way into the novel, and she expires not in childbirth, or even in Abaliza’s youth, but when Abaliza is a young adult. So while she, too, becomes motherless, it impacts the plot—and the characters—in the slightest of fashions. However, Davys does use the mother’s death to expose the various realities and effects of death, which again further separates the novel from romance. While Lucippe discusses her mother’s ill health with her, she airs her apprehensions of her mother’s possible demise; “should you die, my Father would certainly marry again, and I shall be neglected for another Breed. I therefore beg of you to use your Interest with him, to put my Fortune into my own Hands” (4), which her mother flatly denies as a possibility and insists on her marriage. Davys amends this in *A Lady’s Tale* when the mother expresses her trepidation of leaving the world before Abaliza marries, as a step-mother’s “confines” could cause Abaliza “some inconveniency.” To this Abaliza informs her mother “it wou’d have been more agreeable to my Temper, had you injoin’d me to Celibacy for Life, but to shew my Duty to the last, give me but leave to like the Man, and you shall command me in that too” (126). Although both exchanges end with the same conclusion, Lucippe/Abaliza must marry and both are prompted by the women’s fears of a strange woman/wife in control of the daughter’s fate. The difference in Lucippe’s and Abaliza’s requests indicates the changing developments of the eighteenth century. Lucippe asks to take control of her life
through a legally-determined financial independence, while Abaliza wishes for a nunnery—meaning almost total isolation, yet still offering an independent life for a woman—or for a companionate marriage. Showing the progression from 1704 to 1725, Davys reflects the changing cultural trend regarding matrimony as companionate marriage continued to become a more prevalent concept throughout eighteenth-century fiction.\textsuperscript{71} In addition to the realities of a “wicked” step-mother, who would have proven very dangerous to Lucippe/Abaliza if she could produce a male heir, Davys also gives a faithful picture of death and of mourning. After her mother’s death, Lucippe and her father give themselves “wholly up (for several Days) to an uninterrupted scene of Sorrow; but Time, that wears off all things, at last put a Stop in some Measure to our Grief, and by degrees we began to comfort one another” (\textit{Alcippus} 53). Similarly, Abaliza’s grieving father refuses to speak or see anyone for several days, “but conquering time, tho’ he could never wholly remove, began to mitigate his Grief” (\textit{Lady’s Tale} 153). Davys represents the effects of a spouse’s passing accurately and with economy; she does not have the husband fall into a fever where he too nearly loses his life or create any hysterical speeches eulogizing his wife.\textsuperscript{72} Rather, she creates a character who becomes distant and distracted after his wife’s passing and demonstrates that while time cannot erase the pain of death, it does in fact ease it. In much the same way Davys undermines the romance of travel by remarking only on the banal nature of the trip, she also undercuts the romantic notions of loss by eschewing any emotional outbursts or further dramatic events; in both novels, after the funeral, husband and daughter simply recover.
Similarly, Davys negates the dramatic tension of dueling suitors by creating a wholly mundane defeat and a rival who is not a rival.

**The Passive and Ordinary Rival**

As with the other topes Davys introduces, the rival suitor appears and then simply slips away. Abaliza’s first suitor, Alcippus’s cousin, Adrastus, comprises a man neither dangerous nor alluring but rather ordinary: a man who saw Abaliza at the baths and fell in love, a man who has since recovered from smallpox but still has a good face, fine eyes, good teeth, is genteel and clean, yet wholly unremarkable. Adrastus is also a suitor who willingly—and passively—resigns his suit when he learns his cousin, Alcippus, also loves her. Not only does he limp off into the shadows but actually writes a letter of courtship on behalf of Alcippus when he injures his arm:

> I forget I am writing for him in the Misfortune of a fall, having made him incapable of doing the grateful Work himself. He bids me (oh! Cruel Command) he dies with impatience to see you, and since I must fall where he rises, I will submit and die in silence, to let you see, there never was a more generous Lover, or a more generous Rival, than the abandon’d, wretched, Adrastus. (160)

Arguably, he does make the most generous and least chivalric rival in fictional history, who not only relinquishes all hope with a mere word from Alcippus but also attempts to arrange an amorous meeting for the new lovers. Davys creates a “soft” challenger, who proves the antithesis of a contender by actively participating in another’s suit. However, in addition to dismissing the trope of the battle for a maiden’s hand, Davys also reverses the heroic nature of the winning suitor. Davys uses the rivalry between the cousins to provide the initial unsavory indicators of Alcippus’s character.
When Alcippus and Adrastus arrive at Lucippe’s/Abaliza’s home, Alcippus’s self-proclaimed task is to persuade Lucippe to consider Adrastus’s courtship, “which by all the Laws and Honour of Friendship” he thinks himself obliged to perform, yet he does not. He immediately sues for her attention on his own behalf, all the while knowing his father would never permit the match. Starkly contrasting the chivalric code and Alcippus’s behavior, he also does not openly declare his love for Lucippe or challenge Adrastus directly; rather, he sneaks off with her into a corner of the garden, where he can clandestinely question the nature of her feelings. Moreover, when Adrastus dies at the hands of bandits, and Lucippe begins to shed tears for his loss as a “small Tribute” to one Alcippus loved, Alcippus commands her to stop as Adrastus is unworthy of her tears. So not only does Davys depict Adrastus as a generous friend and suitor—even if a very ordinary one—Davys juxtaposes his giving acts and behavior to Alcippus’s, whose meager consideration of his cousin—in life and in death—illustrate his deficiency of character. By contrasting the two men, Davys insinuates the fault of an ideology that includes the romantic hero; Adrastus is described as perfectly nice man, with neither great flaws nor idealized traits, as a man who would make, by Abaliza’s own admission, a perfectly nice husband. Moreover, Davys affords him the noble death, as he dies while fending off bandits to protect his uncle, proving him not only kind and generous, but loyal and brave. Therefore, Davys suggests that faith in romance and in an idealized man actually lead to poor choices, perhaps even destructive ones.
The False Rival

In the second half of the novel, Davys satirizes the battle for Lucippe’s/Abaliza’s hand again by introducing a “rival,” who is none other than a beloved, and extraordinarily practical, uncle. The uncle’s entrance into the narrative creates the tipping point for the plot and confirms Alcippus’s ever-increasing character flaws. Davys prefaces this turning point with two spontaneous violent acts, by which the narrative traces not only the progression of a courtship but also the widening gap between the idealized picture of Alcippus and the reality of his inner qualities. During one of Alcippus’s visits, Abaliza’s beloved childhood dog, who has gone mad, “fastens” to her skirts “at which Alcippus drew his Sword, and catching the Dog’s Neck behind, ran it down his Throat. This over, he again assumed his former Discourse, and entertain’d [Abaliza] with the irresistible Charm of fine Sense” (Lady’s Tale 163). Davys fills this short scene with information.

Although Davys repeatedly alludes to Alcippus as the representation of “the knight in shining armor,” and the superlative man, she undercuts the notion of the chivalric by showing his actions. It is not another “knight” or dangerous villain from whom he rescues her but an adored family pet that Alcippus slays in the most brutal and heartless of manners, perhaps even needlessly. Additionally, after the gruesome deed, Alcippus shows no remorse, but sits down and resumes his conversation.74 In the second instance of violence, Lucippe’s/Abaliza’s father is struck by his servant, at the sight of which Alcippus becomes “so transported with Rage, at the insolence of the Fellow, that he drew his Sword and ran him into the body” (Lady’s Tale 170). Abaliza immediately calls for the surgeons and prays for the servant’s recovery—both for his well-being and so that
Alcippus does not have to stand trial for murder—and begs Alcippus to go into hiding. Alcippus answers, “I wou’d not take a Man’s Life . . . yet such an impudent Insult as his was, will in great measure, justify what I in the height of Resentment did” (171). Davys illustrates Alcippus’s raging temperament in his elitist overreaction to the incident as Abaliza’s father is “only stunned” while the servant faces a mortal wound. Certainly, Davys does not condone the servant’s own violent act, but uses it to underscore Alcippus’s irrational and tempestuous streak as his first reaction remains to draw his sword in an attempt to kill the man. Furthermore, the irony of Alcippus’s denial of his willingness to slay another is that he would take a man’s life, as this is the first of three attempts on other’s lives. All of this leads up to the most explosive moment of the novel, when Lucippe’s/Abaliza’s uncle comes to visit. Waiting for news of the servant’s recovery or death, Alcippus remains in hiding, yet he so desperately desires to see Lucippe that he goes to her home. There he discovers her upon the knee of her uncle and rushes away, with Lucippe/Abaliza chasing after him. After Lucippe/Abaliza and her uncle follow him to Holland, Alcippus attempts to end the uncle’s life, once by accosting him unannounced in the street at night, and later by challenging him to a duel before finally listening to her and her uncle’s explanation. In fact, there are few scenes when Alcippus acts in a rational, reasonable fashion; he is, instead, ruled by his violent passions and emotions, which make him an extremely volatile, and decidedly less than ideal, character.
While his actions reveal his unstable character, Alcippus’s language also makes evident his misogynist side. Although their tale ends in a matrimonial “happy ending,” one wonders how happy Lucippe/Abaliza actually shall be. His behavior and the language he uses throughout the novel depict him to be neither the traditional hero of romance nor a hero of the everyday, but rather as a sexist, classist, inhumane, rash, petulant, violent, unreasonable, and explosively emotional man. Although Alcippus makes grand speeches of love for Lucippe/Abaliza, Davys often accompanies those expressions with the taint of chauvinism and disingenuousness. By the denouement of the tale, when Alcippus thinks she is a random woman come to answer his challenge, he rages, “What have I here . . . a hated Woman! Has my Coward Rival sent a petticoat to make his Peace? Go tell him for the sake of her he adores, I hate the whole Sex. Begone, fly, provoke me not to treat you rudely, but send the Dastard with his own Sword to face mine!” (187) Punctuating and reiterating his chauvinistic sentiments that have threaded the novel, he recounts his fretful journey to Holland and asserts, “your whole Sex are Tyrants, and you are resolved to keep up the Character Well” (192). On their second meeting, Alcippus pushes her to marry clandestinely before he and his father leave for Holland; she resists, yet promises to be true to him until he returns. To Abaliza’s promise he returns,

a Woman is naturally weak, and to keep a Promise requires a steady, strong Resolution; when a fine Man, surrounded with Fortune, and other agreeable Qualities, comes to lay himself at your feet, and address with powerful Rhetorick, you’ll soon forget you ever promised me and so I am lost in the midst of my own Security. (Lady’s Tale 157)
To this incredible piece of wooing, Abaliza retorts:

I think, Sir . . . you are pretty safe for that, because you do not seem to have any Security at all; your Sex is so very civil to ours, that the only things you allow us perfect in, is Levity, Vanity, Dress, and now and then a little Beauty, but to let you see how industrious I am to secure you from broken Vows, I will never make you any, and then you will be sure that I at least shall never deceive you; be assur’d there are none more cautious of making Promises than I am, but when I have made them, I have a Soul very capable of keeping them. (157)79

Davys wishes to show more than Abaliza’s own wit and sharp tongue; these traits ascribed to the female sex—levity, vanity, and an excessive attention to dress—were often found in the publications of the time period (The Tatler and The Spectator for example). Davys uses Abaliza’s voice to protest the degrading stereotypes that were abounding regarding women in the eighteenth century. Furthermore, when Alcippus comments that she seems “ruffled” at his comment, he goes on to “beg” her to pardon him for his wild expressions the “violence of his Passion forces” from his tongue, to which she further retorts that men of his age and gallantry profess love like a “standing dish,” one they use on every woman with whom they meet. This model holds for the duration of the novel; Alcippus speaks and acts in hyperboles, and Abaliza with a colder rationality; Davys escalates his excessive language and actions to the point of ridiculousness and self-detriment, yet Lucippe/Abaliza maintains a cooler head, mainly exhibited in her actions and her speeches directed at Alcippus. Riley claims that this permeates Davys’s works as “Davys is one of the authors who tackles the antifeminist argument that associates women with ungoverned passion and men with reason” (209). Until novel’s end, Davys counters the construction of hyperbolic male language with clever—oftentimes cutting—and logical language from the female characters. Whereas
one may expect his intense passion to lead to chivalric deeds, Davys undermines such an expectation; rather than leading to a heroic performance, Alcippus’s fervor leads to generalized and hateful statements towards women, which he then recants, blaming his fears of losing her. In a clever twist, Davys uses the very idea of an idealized suitor to reveal the ugly truth lurking beneath the assumption, and thus manipulates the conventions of romance to prove its fallacy. Conversely, Davys creates a heroine who cuts against the grain of the genre in a reversal of the traditionally feminine.

**Inverted Roles of Gender and the Heroine as Pursuer**

In her boldness of speech and actions, Lucippe/Abaliza contradicts the typical romance heroine. Rather than fleeing a nunnery into a lover’s arms, Abaliza sees marriage as the absence of pleasure, one that requires “sedateness and gravity.” If not for her duty to her parents, Abaliza would willingly choose “celibacy for life,” and she consistently denies her interest in the institution of marriage. Alcippus, on the other hand, has no such reservations and possesses decidedly weak defenses against the fairer sex. In another nod to *Incognita*, Alcippus like Aurelian, and in predictable romance fashion, falls in love at first sight. However, Davys humorously contorts this idea; although he cannot see Lucippe’s/Abaliza’s face, as it is covered “with a Mask,” he nonetheless professes his love for her unmatched beauty. After following her through the woods and some banter between them, she declares, “You men of Gallantry shou’d never engage with us Country Girls, we know not how to hold discourse with you, but I hope you wou’d not try to persuade me you are in love,” to which he answers, “Madam, you wrong
your own Charms if you doubt it; who can see, and hold from loving?” (132) The irony, of course, stems from the fact that he “sees” very little as she is veiled, echoing Congreve’s comedic notion that “[Incognita] had the best face that his imagination could provide” (43). Abaliza openly disavows and mocks the concept of “love at first sight,” and Davys makes an even more discernable pun on the idea in *Alcippus and Lucippe*. In the 1704 publication Lucippe herself falls in love—and becomes desperately lovesick—without ever meeting, corresponding, or seeing Alcippus. Lastly, Davys innovates the role of the female protagonist in both *Alcippus and Lucippe* and *A Lady’s Tale*. She upsets the typical romance convention of the heroine chasing hero; as opposed to the strapping yet forlorn man searching remote corners of the globe for his lost-love, Abaliza/Lucippe follows Alcippus to correct the wrong he has done to her character—not to win back or assure herself of his love. Moreover, in addition to allowing Lucippe’s/Abaliza’s the bold act of pursuing her wrong-doer, Davys gives her the greatest share of power possible, as the novel is a record of her story in her voice.

**In Her Words**

In both novels, the plot unfolds strictly through female voices. *The Amours of Alcippus and Lucippe* chronicles a female character’s first-person narrative of her courtship and marriage, solely interested in the woman’s point of view. Many novels come to mind that are recounted from the female character, but the majority capture a less moral tale than Lucippe’s/Abaliza’s—many chronicle the more salacious adventures such as *The London Jilt* or *Moll Flanders* or the less upstanding romances such as *Five Love-
Letters from a Nun to a Cavalier. Furthermore, Davys addresses the flaws of a novel told in first person and alludes to the artifice of fiction in Alcippus and Lucippe:

It must of Necessity be a very unagreeable Task to most People to write their own Characters, since it is altogether inconsistent both with our Natures and Interests, to speak with Indifference of our selves. However, I shall with all the care I can, endeavor to satisfie 'em, and do myself Impartial Justice, too. (1)

Davys’s brings into question how much truth there may be found in fiction, a common debate in a period brimming with “romances” and “histories,” and to a lesser extent, “novels,” yet simultaneously allows her readers to suspend their disbelief. Similarly to Cockburn-Trotter, Davys uses the first-person to provide her readers with a feminocentric point of view; both authors completely erase the direct male voice from their tales. Yet as intriguing as these early innovations prove, her republished version, The Lady’s Tale, embellishes and advances Davys’s earlier text and she intensifies the satire and the comedy by manipulating another popular form.

A Very Virtuous Dialogue

Completely new to the 1725 version, Davys adds a friend, listener, and responder in the character of Lucy. Instead of giving readers one voice, as she did in Alcippus and Lucippe, Davys creates an interesting hybrid in her third republication of the novel; the formal properties of the text resemble that of a dialogue with two women holding a conversation. While the dialogue was a popular form in the eighteenth century, it is somewhat unusual to find examples occurring between two female characters. When found, such dialogues often comprise an older woman instructing a younger woman, typically in the ways of sexual exchange, known as a whore dialogue, such as The School
of Venus (1680) or Venus in the Cloister (1725). More specifically, as Davys is wont to do, she plays on the whore dialogue format of the late seventeenth century but with her typical slant. Instead of an older whore educating a younger whore by sharing her experiences, we have a married lady of four years describing how she came to “enjoy” the matrimonial state. Yet while it purports to be a dialogue and follows the form initially, the discourse remains decidedly one-sided, with only a few interruptions from Abaliza’s friend, Lucy. Although infrequent, Lucy’s interruptions provide most of the wit and comedy of the novel yet arguably have a much more important role. In addition to adding humor to the novel, Lucy’s comments also add a sense of the true nature of casual conversation to the text. The loose form of a dialogue and the interruptive discourse allow Davys to infuse an organic element into the novel such as the first time Lucy interjects, when Abaliza in turn also breaks Lucy’s sentence off at the pass, “If you interrupt me . . . I shall forget where I left off, and make a Botch of my story” (125). Although Davys rather quickly abandons the traditional use of the dialogue—the steady Socratic back and forth of two people, usually a mentor and a “learner”—she nevertheless uses the genre to very specific ends. Interruptions are a natural part of any “real” human discourse (unlike the classical modal, which remains rather stiff and formal), and by peppering the novel with them, she effectively insinuates the text to be recorded conversation without a preface claiming it to be so. Moreover, instead of using authorial intrusion to question the believability of the events, as Congreve did in Incognita, Davys employs Lucy for the task.
The Incredulous Lucy

Through the character of Lucy, Davys disturbs the narrative to interrogate the plausibility of Abaliza’s tale and its details, as well as challenging the reliability of the narrator, thereby at once striving for realistic specifics yet also highlighting the fictional and artificial nature of fiction in general. After Abaliza claims she lay on the verge of madness or death after Alcippus’s disappearance, Lucy quips, “Thou wer’t a loving Tit, that’s true, but of all things, I admire your Memory: were I to go through this Story after you, what Stumbles and Blunders shou’d I make by the way?” (178) Once again, her commentary inserts comedy into the novel yet simultaneously foregrounds the very self-conscious creation of a fictitious narrative. Furthermore, Abaliza’s and Lucy’s final comments also create an incredibly self-reflexive novel by story’s end. After telling her tale, Abaliza asks Lucy for critical feedback, saying:

I beg you will tell me, wherein I have transgress’d thro’ the whole Oeconomy of this Amour... consider my Dear what service it may be to me for since you are resolved my Tale shall be made publick, I desire my faults may be so too, if for no reason, but to prevent the criticizing world from making their Remarks. (200)

With the publishing of any novel, an author put her reputation at risk, and possibly to mitigate or silence any ugly reviews, Davys cheekily critiques her own text in the response from Lucy. If she can effectively announce the defects of her own work, along moral lines but also in regards to the authenticity of the plot, who could charge her of anything untoward or of creating “lyes”? She does exactly that; she attacks herself through the character who has listened to the whole tale. Initially, Lucy proclaims the implausibility of the tale in the extremities of the romantic “perfection” of the couple’s
courtship but refuses to comment on the moral, rather than technical, faults of the story. Yet, after a nudge, Lucy complies:

First, I think the beginning of your Love was a little whimsical, for you seem’d to be very uneasy, for you knew not who, next, your Arguments with your Father about Adrastus, were not only too pert for a Daughter, but some of them very weak. Then I must blame your Conduct for going after your lover, because you had a trusty Relation going where he was, and a Letter to him wou’d have been as convincing as your Person was; in fine, your whole Behavior was a little too forward, which you know as well as I, is a fault in our sex. (201)

While her friend condemns Abaliza’s actions and thereby calls into question the veracity of her story and more importantly the virtue her character, Abaliza responds, “How proud am I to find myself grown to such a height, of what the Men call Philosophy, to hear all of this without being moved?” (201) In an interesting turn, Davys foresees the objections some readers may have to her novel, and posits them herself, and then goes on to say that those objections matter little—to either the heroine of the story or to Davys herself. Gevirtz claims, “Abaliza is heading off the criticism that might ensue from readers encountering the narrative without a moral frame, readers who will perceive the work as morally rudderless and critique it accordingly” (Women 149). Additionally, Davys finishes the novel with her rejoinder to these concerns. She begins to go through the list, beginning with the “whimsical” nature of her desire to be with Alcippus, calling it not whimsy, but pride, and then begins to address the second point concerning Adrastus, and then to bring the tale full circle she interrupts herself as she sees Alcippus and her son. It seems the only objection to which Davys is willing to engage fully and offer a retort is the motive behind Abaliza’s initial attraction to Alcippus. She is quick to highlight that her attraction was due to her belief in her ability to win over Alcippus against the
assertions of her father that Alcippus enjoyed such status “of wealth and of person” that she would never be able to attract him. In a somewhat aggressive and confrontational way, she admits that she married solely to prove her father wrong—that she was every bit as “good” as Alcippus. Secondly, she disdains from answering any of the other charges Lucy makes as to refuse to do so illustrates that she is, indeed, not like the rest of her sex and therein lies no fault. In short, Lucy’s arguments that Abaliza is too masculine and therefore inappropriate are swept away as inconsequential.

The Development of an Antihero and Unlikely Heroines

While there are many aspects of Davys’s fiction that prove peculiar, unique, and remarkable, perhaps the most striking remains the dearth of heroes in her fiction. One may be able to point to isolated incidents where a novel or a piece of prose fiction contains only villains, yet it is a distinguishing characteristic of Davys’s novels. Although Davys allows her male characters some positive, even at times redeeming, qualities, and creates a handful “good” male characters—such as the uncle in *Alcippus and Lucippe*, in all of her works—novels and plays—there is not one true central “hero” to be found.\(^8\)

One might come to the conclusion that Davys was attempting to create a realist hero to accompany her realist fiction—that she was attempting to move away from the classical demi-god or superhuman heroic figure toward a male heroic figure who was literally more down to earth. However, the male protagonists of her novels garner little admiration for their virtue or their actions. Moreover, what makes this lack of heroes all the more noteworthy is the way in which Davys constructs a seemingly typical male protagonist,
one who holds the place where a reader would typically find a hero, or more accurately, would expect to find a hero, and dismantles, undermines and deconstructs the idealized figure to reveal what inevitably turns out to be an incredibly flawed, and most often, dangerous man. Due to her subversive use of the traditionally heroic position, at first glance, it may be difficult to discern this as an over-arching pattern in Davys’s texts. Yet, not only does she utilize the established placement of the hero—almost always in a lover, or as in her last novel, in the main character—to set up and then tear apart readerly expectations of the male protagonist, she also manipulates differing genres to exploit their lack of honor and questionable behavior. Thus in her antiromance novels, picaresque novel, epistolary novel, and moral reform novels, she takes the conventions of each of the genres themselves to lure us into believing she creates heroes but then uses those very same conventions to undo the construction. By *The Reform’d Coquette*, Davys almost completely submerges the formidable nature of Formator under the guise of a mentor, and in *The Accomplish’d Rake* she creates an absolutely depraved male protagonist yet uses a comedic structure for the narrative, so that McBurney claims the novel to be “light and humorous.” By her constant creation of male protagonists who are disturbingly flawed and eventually beyond redemption, Davys develops her own type of antihero with Alcippus as the first embodiment of the type. Whereas the traditional antihero lacks the classical heroic qualities, and is most certainly flawed, perhaps one who lives outside of the law, they still prove loveable, sympathetic protagonists, who remain attractive and are characters readers want to see triumphant at story’s end, perhaps even more so because of their flaws. Davys, however, breaks away from the antihero
tradition and gives us a new type, a true anti to a hero, who are not loveable or attractive but are imperfect. However, juxtaposed to this element of Davys’s fiction is the unique representations of heroines in her fiction. In a reversal of roles, Davys creates level-headed female characters and violent and chaotic male characters, which is strongly evident in *Alcippus and Lucippe*. As Gevirtz comments, “Lucippe, like Berina, Elvira, and Amoranda is rational and self-possessed. Alcippus is impulsive and out of control” (*Women* 145). Furthermore, Davys elevates the marginalized and even traditionally pathetic or unseemly female characters to become the laudable figures of the novels.89 Perhaps the influence of Mary Astell and Madame D’Aulnoy surfaces in Davys’s work, as Donovan maintains, Astell was the most important theorist to influence the prosaic writers of the 1690s, and “women writers of the nineties generation adopted an anti-romantic, rationalist thematic and created women characters of sense” (80). This may be most clearly observed in the next novel she would publish in 1705, *The Fugitive*, in which Davys places a widow as the central protagonist and moves into the second period of her fiction.

**Reaching towards Realism and the Voice of Dissent**

Together, *The Cousins* and *Alcippus and Lucippe* make up the first period of her development as a writer. She pushes her readers to examine the underlying assumptions of the popular forms by mimicking them and then by mocking them. Moving from *The Cousins* to *Alcippus and Lucippe* (and even more drastically, moving from *The Cousins* to *The Lady’s Tale*), one can see the evolution of thought and technique in Davys’s early
novels. As well as an advancement in her narrative style and complexity, it also marks the fruition in her use of satire. Moreover, these two novels begin Davys’s experimentation with various genres, a tactic she continues to employ throughout her writing career. While subtly exploiting the tropes of romance and its themes of chivalric love and the idealization of human character in *The Cousins*, by the publishing of *Alcippus and Lucippe*, she is willing to challenge the genre’s conventions directly to reveal the overarching social concerns that will resurface in her later works: the crippling power of patriarchy, the institution of marriage, the poor behavior of privileged men, and the transference of wealth and property. Echoing Locke’s formulation “every Man has a Property in his own person,” Davys meditates on the nature of property not as “only material goods but also as the property that ‘individuals are held to own in their own persons’” (Pateman 5). In her next novel, *The Fugitive*, Davys investigates the functions of wealth and independence, especially for women, and employs the picaresque to do so. Her increasing interest in the material carries over into an emphasis on the domestic, the quotidian, and the mundane as a formal property of her fiction becomes a key component of her novels as she increasingly adds these details to the fabric of the narrative.90
In her second period of development, from 1705 to 1718, Davys increasingly infuses the level of the everyday into her texts. Published one year after *Alcippus and Lucippe*, Davys’s *The Fugitive* (1705) is arguably the most generically innovative novel in her *oeuvre*, partially due to the heightened development of the mundane but also due to the highly original elements she incorporates. Not only does she break new formal ground, Davys also takes a longstanding stock character, an unnamed widow, and reinvents her into a heroine, central character, and narrator. As noted in the previous chapter, from *The Cousins* to *Alcippus and Lucippe*, Davys adds more quotidian details and vernacular language to her 1704 text, and in her 1705 novel, she amplifies these formal components. Indeed, this striving for the “real” in fiction will characterize her middle period of writing, which includes *The Fugitive* (1705) and *Familiar Letters betwixt a Gentleman and a Lady* (1716), but opposed to penning an antiromance or a satire of romance to achieve a heightened realism as she did in her first period, Davys instead turns to a genre known for its use of the ordinary, the picaresque. In order to discern the ways in which Davys was consciously investigating the tropes and the formal
elements, and how she innovates the form into a regional genre, it is useful to look both at the continental picaresque as well as the domestic.

**The Continental Picaresque**

The picaresque as a genre, or a mode,\(^92\) is oft-remarked as an influence on the modern novel and on the development of the novel, particularly the elements of “artistic realism” with which the picaresque is credited as adding to the genre. Although there is not an abundance of work on the picaresque, authors such as Frank Waldeigh Chandler, Lars Hartveit, Ulrich Wicks, Stuart Miller, and Robert Alter have authored monographs on the genre and the ways in which it reacts to and reflects the culture in which it was produced.\(^93\) Frequently, scholars cite the seeds of the picaresque blossoming in the late sixteenth-century and early seventeenth-century Spain, where they then travelled to Germany and France. The formula of the (continental) picaresque novel proves rather basic. The common traits of the picaresque include representations of low life, criminal behavior attached to the degenerate culture of a region, and the witty antihero, who must travel from master to master to survive. The special term associated with the antihero of the rogue narrative, *picaro*, likely comes from *Picardo* or “of Picardy,” which according to Michael Alpert, “came to mean ‘ragged’ because of the miserable state of Spanish soldiers who fought in that area. From there its meaning was extended to drifters and petty delinquents” (ix). Additionally, the picaro or picara relates his or her story as a first-person narrative which often results in a narrative consisting of biographical details, or ostensibly autobiographical details, of the antihero, employing humor as both a key
narrative tool as well as the driving tone of the text. This does not mean, however, that
the authors of such works avoid the rougher edges, merely that often such subjects as
starvation, abuse, and revenge are depicted with a wink and a smile from the
protagonists, who relish their clever maneuvers in response to the hardships they must
face.

As with the overarching patterns of structure, the picaro/as also generally adheres
to a model protagonist. Along with the familiar obstacles that the antihero of the
picaresque must face are the personal qualities required to overcome such hurdles. Alter
lists the essential qualities of the picaroon as: 1) he is a man who does not belong, 2) he is
a man on the move, and 3) he is a man who takes matters into his own hands (107).
Typically, the picaro must untangle economic and social predicaments from the
beginning of the narrative—often of the most immediate and pressing nature—and sets
out as a social outcast who must confront an endless number of antagonists along his
journey (Hartveit 10-12). In fact, Ralph Freedman writes that the “picaresque as a
paradigm presents a space described entirely by interactions between heroes and the
antagonists, between selves and others” (Hartveit 9). In this, one may find another link
to the realist novel, the focus on the individual and the record of that individual’s
experiences. Lars Hartveit foregrounds the way in which the “insider-outsider opposition
permeates the social model the picaresque novel contains” (16). As the outsider, the
picaro becomes the consummate observer, documenting not only his own but society’s
experiences as a whole, and through his observations the picaresque (anti)hero learns
how to outsmart others at their own game (Alter 109). Where the hero may lack physical
or financial strength, his extreme nimbleness and wit allows him to overcome his enemies. Robert Alter writes, “The picaroon will not let the social system pin him down; mobility is part of his essential nature; but he willingly accepts a position of subservience within the social system” (15). While he may apparently concede to meet society on its own terms, the picaroon remains apart from, and in some ways above, it, so that the picaro/a becomes a self-ordained and self-constructed other. This dovetailing of a marginalized societal position and the ability to observe freely, often from the inside, creates a perfect vantage point for satire, another consistent element of the Spanish picaresque. Indeed, Alter asserts the very position of the picaroon—living in the midst of a social system without being altogether part of it—provides the opportunity for him to turn satirist (17). According to Alpert, these antiheroes “live without honor in a Spain where the literature was obsessed with the concept” (xiv) and insists that picaresque fiction abandons the Renaissance concept of the balanced and harmonious man, shifting its focus to a wretchedly imperfect world (xiii). The genesis and popularity of these unlikely protagonists may be explained by examining the culture that created them.

During the period the Spanish picaresque developed and flourished, European society was undergoing significant changes in social organization (Wicks 30). Although Spain was still a wealthy and powerful country controlling a vast colonial empire, this elevated position was deteriorating. Historically, the turn of the seventeenth century in Spain saw a period of great decadence that was slowly inching toward decline.95 In the early years of seventeenth-century, Spain experienced time of lavish excess, and picaresque fiction provided a counter to such indulgence and the idealism propagated by romantic fiction
(Chandler 9). Picaresque fiction, argues Chandler, provided Spanish authors an outlet with which to react to and comment upon the dissipation of their nation. With societal structure in sway, the focus of fiction also shifted.

The English Picaresque

This history of the picaresque in England contrasts in many ways to that of its Spanish development. Yet much like Spain, England, too, has a long standing love for the rogue, exemplified by the lasting popularity of Robin Hood, whose fame began sometime in the twelfth century. However, compared to his Spanish cousins, Robin Hood lacks the “sordid guile of the picaro” (Chandler 12), perhaps establishing a uniquely native model of antihero, one who would reemerge in eighteenth-century England. Also distinctive to English rogue literature produced before the eighteenth century, Chandler argues that the English picaresque lacked the burlesque that was so heavily drawn upon by the Spanish authors and asserts “as a rule English roguery refused to run in the channels of satire” (77). Rather, it flourished in conny-catchers, fabliaux, jest-books, prison tracts, character-books, and criminal biographies, which figure as the nonfictional and fictional avenues for rogue narratives that predated the English picaresque novel. Searching for the English urtext of the picaresque novel, some believe Thomas Nashe’s *The Unfortunate Traveller* (1594) provides the first native example of the genre. McKeon cites the direct influence of the Spanish picaresque after the 1570s translation of *Lazarillo de Tormes* (1574), particularly on Nashe (97), and Chandler, in turn, cites *The Unfortunate Traveller* as a heavily influential source for the picaresque that also came in the late sixteenth
century. At the time of its publication in 1594, only one Spanish text had been published, the Spanish urtext, *Lazarillo de Tormes* (1554), which supports McKeon recognition of *Lazarillo’s* almost immediate influence, and Chandler’s identifying Nashe’s regional originality. However, while one may trace tenuous similarities between the two, the discrepancies between the two works overwhelms them.\(^{97}\) Chandler bizarrely claims that in contrast to *Lazarillo de Tormes* the English fictional work “is distinguished by its freshness of language and sparkle of diction, by its narrative power, by its swift and vivid character sketching, by its humor, by its realism, and its Puritanism” (198), yet this praise folds under scrutiny. Rather than tracing the maneuvering of a clever orphan, Nashe’s work investigates the roguish behavior of the page, Jack Wilton, who never claims to be an orphan but rather self-titles as an “appendix,” as he meanders through the continent. Whereas Lazarillo is transferred from one master to the next, Wilton has one, with whom he parts in Rome. Yet as in *Lazarillo*, Nashe frames the tale at the onset with humor. In the dedication, Nashe declares, “all that in this fantastical treatise I can promise, is some reasonable conveyance of history, and variety of mirth” (251). Indeed, the piece begins in the vein of jollity and a traditional rogue narrative with Wilton describing his trickery, which he commits upon various victims. He cheats at dice, dresses as a wench, convinces a solider to desert the army, and terrifies the stingy alehouse owner—all in the first dozen pages. His “sparkling diction,” however, is soon interrupted by a gruesome accounting of “a sweating sickness,” followed by an almost gleeful description of the literal gores of war, which then leads into a rant regarding unorthodox Christianity and religious hypocrisy. Nashe then abruptly jumps back to his continental ramblings and,
thereafter, to a very loosely structured prosaic narration. While Nashe interweaves, or sprinkles in, episodic events, these often feel forced while the moralizing that recurs throughout the text surfaces as the primary objective of the text. Undoubtedly, the most striking, and least picaresque, feature of *The Unfortunate Traveller* comes in the last third of the work. To conclude his “variety of mirth,” Nashe vividly details an extraordinarily brutal rape scene, as well as three extraordinarily exhaustive chronicles of torture.

Gladfelder rightly comments upon the last portion of the text,

> The executions of the last two chapters are set pieces of a cruelty so excessive as to be almost unreadable; they are the culmination of a shift in narrative from the loosely-strung episodes of trickery and offhand humiliation of the first two-thirds of the work to the completely interlaced dramas of entrapment, betrayal, and sexual violence of the final third. (35)

Although a portion of the text does consist of a narrative of a travelling rogue retelling episodic events, the similarities with the Spanish picaresque practically end there. The travel is strictly outside of England, and this, indeed, seems to be the point of the story. Extreme brutality, Roman Catholics, and lasciviousness thrive in Spain and Italy, and so beware the innocent (English) traveler. Other than the first few humorous deceits, the antihero loses his slippery wit and later his freedom as he is taken prisoner, once for scientific anatomical experimentation and then as a sex slave,\textsuperscript{98} saved only by the women around him, not from any clever machinations of his own.\textsuperscript{99} *The Unfortunate Traveller* reads as a dogmatic and xenophobic warning rather than a critical eye turned towards English society. In a tangential sense, this element may lead some to place it within the bounds of the picaresque, as the picaresque is largely considered to be a corrective form—a genre concerned with manners and morals, yet typically, that lens is turned
inward towards one’s own culture rather than outward toward a foreign one. Regardless of its arguably loose ties to the conventions of the continental picaresque, features of the text do, admittedly, tie it to the distinctive features of the eighteenth-century English picaresque novel. One of the hallmarks of the Spanish picaresque is its usage of vernacular language. Nashe, too, exploits the vernacular; however, he pushes the limits of language as he also invents his own words *fizgigging* and *firkings* as well as “recreating” scholarly German, “Vanhotten, slotten, irk, bloshen glotten.”\(^{100}\) Moreover, as opposed to a static and stratified relationship amongst the characters seen in the Spanish picaresque, Wilton and his master Earl trade roles as Wilton poses as the master and the Earl as the servant, a tope Davys herself will use in her later novels.\(^{101}\)

Furthermore, while many view the text as a watershed of the picaresque, Chandler argues that *The Unfortunate Traveller* was not an aberration amongst English roguery fiction, as “with Breton, Chettle, and Nash celebrating rogues of fiction, and with Awdeley, Harman, Greene, Deker, and Rowlands picturing low-life tricks and environment, no picaresque literature out of Spain was so rich by 1610 as the English” (205).\(^{102}\) Following the first decade of the seventeenth century, when it appeared to be flourishing, suddenly, English rogue fiction virtually disappeared. Despite the dearth at home, plentiful translations supplemented English readers for the next fifty years. One cause for the diminishment of English rogue fiction stems from the rising popularity of the romance (Chandler 207), and any development or experimentation of the picaresque languished until the Restoration. In 1665, with the publication of Richard Head’s *The English Rogue*, native picaresque tales would again be written and read by the English.
Indeed, Gladfelder cites the publication as “the genre’s full assimilation into English” (34). While Chandler credits Head with venturing into the picaresque, he scathingly declares,

_The English Rogue_ is lacking in art and feeling, never finished, yet of bewildering extent, it is less a novel than a chaotic collection of all picaresque tricks on record at the moment of its publication. It knows no unity, it attempts no study of manners, and neglects everything that made the picaresque a link to the modern novel. (211)

Admittedly, Head’s prose is neither complicated nor complex, perhaps not even “sparkling.” Yet the first part is clear and readable and possesses a strong easily-followed narrative in each chapter, however fragmented the text as a whole remains. Furthermore, the first volume proves pointedly regional, discussing, for example, the Irish rebellion of 1641 and follows closely the general skeleton of the continental picaresque. The flaws and faults Chandler notes likely come from Head’s “coauthor.”

Professed as Head’s collaborator, Francis Kirkman purchased the rights to the piece in 1666 and attempted to ply more volumes from Head. Head refused, citing the popular opinion of the reading public, who deemed the narrative as autobiographical, which in turn caused Head’s reputation to suffer. Kirkman, unable to find another author, penned the remaining volumes himself (_The English Rogue_ vii). Undoubtedly, Kirkman stood ready and willing to “import” rehashed fables of the picaresque to turn a profit and seemingly cared little for quality. Reading Kirkman’s preface to the second volume, his motives become obvious as the text was designed “the first and foremost to gain ready money, the second I had an itch to gain some reputation by being in print, . . . and the third was to advantage the reader and make him a gainer by acquainting him with my
experiences” (269). These motivations would echo in the late seventeenth and early eighteenth century; Kirkman, like most of the female authors who developed the modern English novel, wrote and published for the most sordid of reasons, to earn money.

A Rediscovered Popularity

Around the publication of The English Rogue, picaresque fiction regained a share of the market. Between 1660 and 1705, at least eight picaresque translations were published (or republished) including Celestina’s Daughter (1660), La Picara (1665), The Marten of Seville (1665), The Visions of Dom Francisco de Quevedo Villagas (1668), The Spanish Decameron, which included five novels by Cervantes and five by Alonso de Castillo Solorzano (1687), Satyricon (1694), The History of the Renown’d Don Quixote (1701), and The Comical History of Francion (1703). However, this renewed English interest in the picaresque appears contrary to that which led to the rise of the Spanish picaresque. It did not follow a period of great decadence, but rather a period of great Cromwellian rigidity. As it gained popularity during the eighteenth century, particularly in the form of the English novel, it flourished within a country and culture that, too, flourished. Luxury, commerce, trade, the middle class, and the novel were all on the “rise,” and so too, were the texts criticizing the excesses that accompanied those growths. Two of the leading publications criticizing the dissipation of society, Joseph Addison’s and Richard Steele’s The Tatler and The Spectator headed the charge in 1709. In one of the most volatile and explosive periods in English history—in terms of economy and social mobility—the English picaresque novel came to be.
Many scholars place native germination with either Daniel Defoe’s *Moll Flanders* or *Colonel Jack* and therefore believe the English examples of the genre to have first been published in 1722, flowering later with Henry Fielding’s work in the 1740s beginning with *Joseph Andrews* (1742). Yet no writer creates a work in a vacuum, and Defoe and Fielding are no exceptions to this rule. Undoubtedly, they were influenced by both the translations and foreign specimens of the picaresque that appeared in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, as well as by the English rogue literature circulating at the time. By the turn of the eighteenth century, English taste for criminal biographies was well cemented, and building upon the long history of rogue fiction in England, particularly upon criminal biographies, Chandler believes Defoe revives the “romance of roguery” with his naturalism and character-drawing. In Chandler’s mind, Defoe spurs the birth of the English picaresque novel.  

*Moll Flanders* does, after all, exhibit the hallmarks of the genre—the interest in the criminal narrative, the focus on the antiheroes and the episodic structure—and appears a full twenty years before Fielding’s famous picaresque novels. Exceptionally, Defoe’s novels draw upon native sources and inspirations rather than drawing upon established foreign tales. The largest distinction Chandler makes between Defoe and his Spanish precursors is in Defoe’s treatment of love, as “the Spanish and French antiheroes never seem to have known unarmed innocence or natural affection” (292). Yet on the whole, Defoe’s roguish novels lack many of the traits that set the English picaresque novel apart from its continental brethren. Those searching for the characteristic “Englishness” of the English picaresque novel typically cite Fielding’s *Jonathan Wild, Tom Jones,* or *Joseph Andrews* as
quintessential and early examples of the form. What *Moll Flanders* lacks when held side by side with Fielding’s novels, and what Chandler considers to be unique to Fielding’s work, are the burlesque and satirical elements that Fielding so deftly applied to his fiction. Few would argue that either *Joseph Andrews* or *Tom Jones* do not represent classic examples of the English picaresque; while they both are influenced by earlier Spanish, German, and French forms, there remains something decidedly unique to the way in which Fielding employs the picaresque as a social critique. Additionally, Fielding does not focus solely on the lower orders and criminal behavior as the target of his satire. From top to bottom, Fielding examines and condemns every class along the ladder, showcasing a society rotting throughout the spectrum. He strays from the Spanish model yet still applies its base to the structure of his novels. After Fielding, what would come to be distinctive to the regional genre may be found in the target of its burlesque, whereby the low orders examined are not necessarily the criminal servants shifting from master to master, but may be, paradoxically, the upper orders of society. No longer strictly concerned with the standard ribbing of the various “lowly” professions and the corruption attached to them, Fielding’s work expands to become more of a generally critical eye trained on society as a whole. While Fielding himself credits Cervantes as an influence upon his novels, there was a source much closer to home that suggests the existence of an important precursor to Fielding’s native style of the picaresque. The distinctiveness of Fielding’s use of these elements should be questioned and previous assumptions made regarding the English picaresque novel challenged. Delving deeper into early eighteenth-
century fiction, one again finds a female author at the forefront of a genre and an undeveloped form.

**Mary Davys’s *The Fugitive***

When tracing the history of the English picaresque novel, Davys’s third novel, *The Fugitive* (1705), becomes a potentially important text to examine. At first glance, the novel appears to be a domestic travel narrative, in which a widowed woman visits friends and relatives in the English countryside, relating the comic events that transpire along the journey. However, with closer attention, it becomes apparent that Davys plays upon the bones of the continental picaresque, turning it sideways to serve as a sounding board for her own “moral reflections” and as a medium to impart those lessons unto her readers. Yet in order to appraise the value of Davys’s contribution to a regional picaresque, one must break the novel apart and sift out the similarities and the differences. After doing so, a clear picture emerges of the structure Davys’s builds upon and where she may be said to be truly innovative. Like her fellow morally concerned citizens, Davys employed her pen to voice the ills she saw as the results of the cultural ethos which surrounded her. One of the themes Davys touches on throughout her career and would almost solely focus upon in her last novel is the faults of the privileged, and to that end, *The Fugitive* lampoons heavily the blunders and weaknesses of the country elite. Prior to the publishing of *The Fugitive*, most examples of the picaresque feature a crafty rogue attempting to survive and navigate a corrupt world in the chaotic echelons of the lower orders. Conversely, *The Fugitive* presents a respectable protagonist negotiating her way
through the roguish gentry in an equally corrupt upper-crust world. Distinctive to this novel, Davys satirizes the country gentry, their manners and modes of living, yet adhering to earlier formal models, Davys is interested in more than extracting a mere laugh from her reader. Particularly, when examining the English precursors to native picaresque novels, particularly the sixteenth-century conny-catchers, one will see that a moral aim makes a pattern rather than an aberration, and ostensibly these authors devoted themselves to the anatomy of roguery so that “forewarned may be forearmed.” However, when contrasted to the earlier picaresque narratives, unique to *The Comical History* and *The Fugitive* is the social status of those who come under fire. Interested in the sloths of society, Davys focuses not on city degenerates, as did the Spanish picaresque, but points her cross-hairs on the wealthy and dissipated country gentry. Yet this broadening of social mockery is only one of the ways Davys added original properties; to more firmly distinguish Davys’s novel from a domestic travel narrative necessitates a consideration of the tropes and tricks Davys utilizes from the picaresque as well as her departures from it.

**The Elements of the Picaresque**

Most scholars agree on the basic elements of the picaresque. As Stuart Miller notes, the picaresque’s plot is comprised of discrete fragments; it is a broken narrative that expresses openness and an intuition that the world is without order (10). Assaulted by life’s chaos, the picaro/a moves from episode to episode, yet nothing of substance seems to happen. The picaresque plot merely records fragmented happening after fragmented happening (Miller 12). Related to its episodic plot, the picaresque utilizes the
device of rapid fire pacing so that events pile upon each other in “strikingly short
compass” (Miller 21). This breakneck episodic structure of the picaresque allows little
possibility for closure and affords no natural point of conclusion, and thus, typically the
novels abruptly close in a deliberately open-ended state (Alter 33). Additionally, the
incessant jumping from one event to the next causes a constant flux of characters; with
each introduction of a new character there is a simultaneous abandoning of the old
(Miller 14). All of these elements create a pace and rhythm remarkable to the picaresque
and arguably add to the genre’s sense of realism. Moreover, in contrast to the elevated
subject matter of the traditional romance, the picaresque concerns itself with the
quotidian and trivial, and many picaresque tales adopt an autobiographical, or pseudo-
autobiographical, mode (Hartveit 9). Moreover Alter notes:

The picaresque novels send their heroes traipsing down all sorts of twisting
garbage-strewn by-ways that have in general been considered off-limits for the
more respectable heroes of traditional narratives. The attention they give to the
coarser aspects of existence is not only a comic convention but also a genuine
extension of the frontiers of realism for fiction. Alter 62

Using these elements as a paradigm illuminates both the influence of the continental
picaresque as well as the exceptional qualities to Davys’s novel.

The Bones of The Fugitive

By examining the structure and characteristics of The Fugitive, a clear foundational
pattern of the picaresque emerges. As a record of a widow’s journey through the English
countryside, the entire plot is made up of “discrete fragments,” solely comprised of
episodic events. In some passages, Davys intensifies the episodic construction, wherein
an episodic event contains another episodic event, so that the structure becomes that of a spiral, or of a nesting doll, adding not only to the complexity of the composition but to the “rapid fire” pace as well. Davys both manipulates and tests the fragmentary structure of the genre and although she takes it to such extremes, the narrative still holds together, bound by the glue of the narrator herself. Yet because of its extraordinarily lax structure—an almost complete lack of plot—*The Fugitive* has, as Alter suggests, no possibility for “real” conclusion but breaks off abruptly after one of the longer episodes. Indeed, so abruptly does the novel end that the sense pervades that it continues on elsewhere or that a second volume shall follow. Whatever her intent may have been, whether to continue the widow’s adventures in another novel or conclude them in *The Fugitive*, Davys creates a fractal-like structure where the protagonist’s adventures stretch outside of the narrative and push beyond the boundaries of more traditional narratives. Due to the fragmentation and pace, characters are constantly fading while new ones emerge, some telling their own narratives, some relating the tales of others, and some only present as a character in the widow’s tales. True to other established elements of the picaresque, this fading in and out of the characters affords little bone structure in which to ground the plot and again adds to the pace of the narrative.¹⁰⁹ The widow’s chronicles of the characters is mired steeply in the mundane, sinking to the depths of soiled table linen and tobacco stained mouths. Furthermore, scholars, including Bowden and McBurney, who write (briefly) of *The Fugitive* by and large believe the novel to be autobiographical, based presumably on Davys’s inclusion of the death of her husband and the details concerning their respective ages at the time of his death.¹¹⁰ These realistic and mundane
details of the novel have convinced many that these are true facts recorded by Davys, yet they parallel the picaresque convention of presumed autobiography—readers of The English Rogue also assumed that the tale was autobiographical—and so one must be careful to assume too much in Davys’s case.\textsuperscript{111} Since we have so little concrete evidence—no manuscripts, letters, or diaries—it remains impossible to say whether these details are facts from Davys’s life or are merely a device exploited by the author. True or not, they demonstrate Davys’s conscious decision to ground her text in the humdrum aspects of the everyday. Indeed, Davys herself declares in the opening lines that The Fugitive is a novel of travel and observation, which may be said to be one of the most basic elements of the picaresque. She writes, “As Ignorance is the Mother of Devotion, and Necessity of Invention, so may Travelling be properly enough call’d the Mother of Observation” (161). She goes on to differentiate between the traditional travel narrative and the picaresque by painting one as an international journey and the other as a domestic one:

\textit{And tho’ the petty journeys I have taken will hardly entitle me to the Name of a Traveller, because I have never been in France for new Fashions, not at Rome for Religion, or a Song, yet I hope England is not so barren of Diversion but one may pick up some things worthy of note. (Merry Wanderer 161)\textit{}}

Unlike Alcippus and Lucipe, Davys does not self-title her work as a “novel” but as “surprizing Adventures,” yet Davys plays upon the truthfulness of her piece. By contrasting her preface to Madame D’Aulnoy’s preface from The Lady’s Travels into Spain (1699), one may see how Davys cleverly opens the door for the fictionality of the novel. D’Aulnoy writes:

\textit{It is not sufficient to write things true, but they must likewise seem probable, to}
gain belief. . . . In a word, I write nothing but what I have seen, or heard from persons of unquestionable credit; And therefore shall conclude with assuring you, that you have here in no novel, story, devised at pleasure, but an exact and most true account of what I met with in my travels. xii

By contrast Davys’s preface gives no such assurances:

I will not say that every Circumstance of the Book is true to a tittle, but the Ground and Foundation of almost every Story is matter of Fact, and I have not taken upon Credit from any Body, but have been a witness to the greatest part of my self. If the Reader finds any thing in it that can divert him, I shall undoubtedly be the better satisfy’d with my pains; if not, I have already told him, I am resolv’d to be easy.

Already in the preface, Davys gives her readers a contradictory and tongue-in-cheek introduction to her narrative: it is not true a tittle, almost every story is matter of fact, and she has not taken anyone else’s version of the events but she was witness to the greatest part of it herself. So if she was not the witness, and credits no one else, from whom does the additional information come? Also, her explicit purpose is to divert the reader, unlike D’Aulnoy, who denies she writes for her audience’s pleasure. Davys self-consciously presents a travel narrative that is not a travel narrative—it is wholly domestic—one that may or may not be based on true events, and therefore, she satirizes the “true accounts” of “travel narratives” with her brand of picaresque.112

**Regional Dialects and Racist Attitudes**

Another point of commonality with and, paradoxically, also a departure from, the continental picaresque may be found in the language that Davys chooses to use in the novel.113 As she does in *Alcippus and Lucippe*, Davys inserts vernacular phrases and words yet experiments more intensely with language.114 According to Alpert, the
picaresque novel “is bitter and skeptical and written tautly with economy of words in a style which uses the prose of everyday life, rather than an artificial and prescribed literary manner” (xvi). Chandler also argues that the spirit of the rogue narrative is rich in linguistic curiosity (129). From the outset, Davys engages with language, writing into her narrative what is believed to be the first use of an accent or dialect in British fiction.115

Having just landed on English soil, the narrator and her group dine at a “very good” inn when they are confronted by an ignorant and racist Englishman. He too, dines at this “very good Inn,” making clear that he is not a poor man or a beggar off the streets, but a local man able to afford a pricey meal. Davys’s satirical bent begins piercingly with his caricature. He offers a shilling to the staff to see the “wild Irish”; 116 relishing the chance to mock the ignorant man, the narrator meets with him, but the Englishman, surprised to meet a civilized Irish woman, relates his disbelief and the “true” nature of the Irish:

Unclothed, cover with hair, and sporting tails. He admonishes her: “Noa, noa, said he, yo looken laik one of us; but those Foke, that I mean are Foke wi’ long tails, that have no Clothes on, but are cover’d laik my brown Caw a whom with their own Hair” (162). To which the narrator responds:

Come . . . sit you down, and I’ll tell you all, when I was three years old I was just such a thing as you speak of, and going one day a little farther than I should have done, I was catch’d in a Net with some other Vermin, which the English had spread on purpose for us: and when they had me, they cut off my tail and scalded me like a Pig, till all my Hair came off; and ever since I have been such another as you. Well, Forsooth, said he, yo tellen me Wonders, but pray yo, cou’d yo speak? Speak, said I, no I could only make a gaping inarticulate Noise, as the rest of my Fellow-Beasts did, and went upon my Hands as well as Feet, in imitation of them, but for any other Knowledge, I had it not till I got into English hands. (163)
In addition to being the first known writer to use dialect in a fictional work, she also conveys the backward and extremely racist attitudes of the English through parody and a tremendous display of ignorance. His coarse and common speech drastically contrasts to her proper and grammatical language, highlighting who is the more savage and ill breed of the two. When he questions her ability to speak, the obvious jest surfaces in his barely articulate queries. After listening to her tale, in a show of absolute baseness, he asks to see the scar where her tail had been, and she answers, “No friend, that may not be so decent; I find you are a man of curiosity, but must beg you would take my Word for once without ocular Demonstration” (163). Finally, to drive the point home regarding this false division between Irish and English, he in turn responds to her phrase “ocular Demonstration,” “Mercy on me, what’s that?” and the widow ends with “Why that is without staying any longer; to make haste home, and tell your Wife and Neighbors what you have heard and seen” (163).

While a point of humor in the novel, this racism toward the Irish would have been something with which Davys herself likely had to contend. Tension between Ireland and England, was, of course, not a new-born one and by the turn of the eighteenth century had reached a feverish pitch, one that had been brewing since the 1641 massacre in Ireland. Indeed, Head foregrounds the attitude toward the Irish in The New Canting Dictionary. While tracing a history of the Gypsies progress from Bohemia through Spain to Ireland, he declares:

where, joining to their own Villainous Inclinations, the Natural Barbarity and Cruelty of the Wild Irish, such as was the influence of the Climate upon them, that, from private Cheats and Thieves, as they had been in other Countries, they threw off all Disguises, and stuck not at the most execrable Villains, firing of
houses, massacring of whole Families, and robbing and plundering in Troops, ‘til the Name of Aegyptians was wholly lost in that of Raparees or Tories. (Gladfelder 24)

Gladfelder notes how this view of racial difference between the Irish and the English was perpetuated by contemporary literature maintaining,

The topos of the Irish as criminal by nature, owing to both their ‘Natural’ racial characteristics of cruelty and barbarity and their proness to miscegenation with the Oriental race of the AEgyptians, persists in much of the criminal discourse of the eighteenth century. (24)

Therefore, not only does Davys’s first experimentation with regional dialect challenge English attitudes towards the Irish, it also delivers a scathing commentary upon the historical construction of their entrenched bigotry.

The Prose of the Everyday

While Davys writes no other dialects into the novel, she continuously explores the “prose of everyday life” as well as possibly creating completely original expressions throughout the text. Words such as physmygig have no entry in the OED, while others, such as bouzy and cuz simply reflect the vernacular of everyday speech. However, proving the most interesting are the words and phrases that the OED cites the first use of hundreds of years after Davys published the work. The narrator uses the phrase “stuck in my gizzard” to express her extreme dislike of a country gentleman and his chauvinist comments, yet the OED cites the phrase as originating in 1938. While the use of “Bedlamite” dates back to 1691, Davys’s complete phrase “raved like a Bedlamite” to describe a misogynist’s reaction to the narrator’s trickery, the idiom is not cited by the OED as in use until 1751, quoting Smollet’s use of the phrase in Peregrine Pickle.
Additionally, Davys coins the word “pad” to indicate house/home, and according to the OED, this term was not in circulation until 1914, and not in Britain but in the United States as a criminal terminology. As well as moving away from the high and lofty language of the romance to develop the realism of her fiction, Davys’s employs these terms specifically to enhance the characters and provide insights into their natures. The language Davys creates and recreates also adds complexity, depth, and texture to the narrative and the players within it, as McBurney notes Davys’s use of stock characters such as the miserly housewife, the scold, the prodigal, the prude, and the hypochondriac, but her embellishment of these figures with interesting details, like the cat caught in the milk jug, elevate these well-worn types from the “stock” category (“Forerunner” 354). Excepting the phraseology Davys employs against the fop, her choice of terminology becomes a tool of her satire, a way of exhibiting the lowliness, ignorance, silliness, and authenticity of the characters she describes. In some scenes, Davys employs a razor-sharp tongue to completely berate an unworthy character. The narrator raves against the misogynist fop, “I heard last Week of a Man who was, about forty Years ago, hang’d for lying with his Sow, and I durst almost venture to be hang’d too, if you are not the Product of his Pains” (213). Davys gives the widow figurative and clever language, highlighting both her wit and imagination and also her extreme boldness. This experimentation with language resurfaces in William Pittis’s *The Jamaica Lady* (1720) and Arthur Blackmore’s *Lucky at Last* (1723), and so perhaps by 1740, this became its own convention of English rogue literature. For by 1742, Davys experimentation with the vernacular posits itself directly opposite to Fielding’s own innovation of language,
granting the basest characters the most silver of tongues. In this way, Fielding augments and once again transforms the English picaresque linguistically, which arguably adds a new level of sophistication to his satire and to the genre. Although he may be credited deservedly with creating the peak of the English picaresque, there is still much to be said of Davys’s early innovations, originalities that will reemerge in Fielding’s own work.

Alluding to Davys’s reverberations in his work, McBurney delights in Davys’s fictional explorations, asserting, “Certainly, never before Fielding was the English Country scene with its squires, bumpkins, compliant chamber maids, fops, gossips, retired soldiers, old maids, coachmen, crowded inns, and practical jokes so exploited in the novel” (“Forerunner” 355).

The Widow Picara

As well as following the structural organization of the picaresque, Davys also creates a picara that in many ways adheres to the pattern of picaroons who both preceded and succeeded her. Indeed, although Davys uses a known template for her picara, her deviations in the construction of her heroine and in the characters with whom the picara must contend reveal one of Davys’s greatest innovations of the genre. However, Davys utilizes the base model for her picara; like many of the picaroons, she is the woman who does not belong, a woman on the move, and a woman who takes matters into her own hands. Although she is constantly “on the move,” she travels from country town to country town, yet the whole of the novel takes place in England and uses a decidedly regional setting. Davys’s picara stays for only short periods of time in each place and
deals with each problem on her own, using her intellect and sharp tongue in each case to either overcome the obstacle she faces or to expose the other characters’ unsavory natures. While Davys’s widow does not self-define as a picara, she nevertheless does define herself and does so before a page is turned. Provocative in itself and certainly bold, the title allures before a page is ever turned, with the widow self-proclaiming to be a fugitive.121 “Fugitive” is defined by the *OED* as “One who flees or tries to escape from danger, an enemy, justice or an owner,” or as “one who quits or is banished from his country; an exile, refugee,” and also “one who shifts about or moves from place to place; a vagabond, wanderer.” Any one of these definition fits within the content and context of Davys’s novel; if one of the first two definitions were the intent, one then considers from whom the narrator flees or from whence she has been banished.122 Immediately in the first pages of the novel, she announces she has literally just stepped off the boat from Ireland but refuses to impart the circumstances of her travels, if she has quit her country voluntarily or been exiled. As the narrative begins *in medias res*, and the narrator provides no hints to her previous existence in Ireland, and there is no evidence to suggest strongly that she is an exile or attempts to escape any danger. Therefore, she may have been “banished” from society as a widow or is a refugee from a social system that left her in desperate circumstances.123 Similarly to her continental brethren, the widow must “untangle” economic predicaments, and because of her financial quandary, she faces social dilemmas as well. Often times, these circumstances land the narrator in other single women’s tales of romantic woe.124 So while all three usages of the word may inform the novel, most likely, it is the third meaning of “wanderer” that most likely
coincides with Davys’s intent. Given that it is a novel that constantly shifts—as does its narrator and its setting—this seems likely. Furthermore, the vagabond element certainly adheres to the spirit of the picaresque as a whole, and lastly, the fact that Davys renames the novel *The Merry Wanderer* for her 1725 republication implies this was Davys’s main intention. While it may appear unimportant to split hairs over why, exactly, Davys chose this title for her novel, it further suggests that Davys consciously wrote with the foreign picaresque texts in her mind. However, in another original stroke, one that comments alluringly on the state of unmarried or widowed women, the narrator, unlike many of her brotherly counterparts, is not an orphan but a recent widow. Therefore one must take into consideration how the status of the widow compares to that of the orphan historically. This discussion foregrounds one of Davys’s boldest overarching patterns to her work; the foregrounding of the status of women in eighteenth-century England and the most unlikely of heroes/heroines, the female outcast.

**The Historical Context of Widowhood**

The widow is, like the other figures of the novel, a stock character, one which would have excited certain expectations from contemporary readers. Yet also similarly to the way Davys bends and manipulates the other marginal stock types, she also changes the characteristics so drastically as to create a wholly new version of the widow. Particularly in the eighteenth century, widows were complicated figures, either presenting a danger to society in their independence or a pathetic drain on it by their dependence. Marjo Buitelaar comments on this conceptual polarization of the category of widow as
“she may be lavishly rich or utterly poor and she appeals to compassion or mockery, in some cases to both” (7). Regardless of which end of the spectrum the widow represents, she is always presented as an “other” and almost always a secondary figure or catalyst—historically or fictionally, but rarely acts as the principal agent. In fact the origin of the word “widow” is the Latin *vidua*, whose meaning is related to the root meaning “to place apart” (Buitelaar 1). While the wealthy widow had neither male support nor protection, she also had no one to control her financial and personal decisions. Barbara Hanawalt writes of the widow’s life:

> Once the widow secured her dower, with or without a legal battle, she entered that unique phase of a woman’s life when she was not under the legal guardianship of either her father or her husband. Widows had more legal freedom of action than any other women. Age wealth, and personal preference determined their decisions about what to do with their newfound freedom and their dower. (35)

This historical dichotomy also surfaces in the literature of early modern Europe: “the image of the proverbially ‘merry’ widow competed with an image of the widow as sadly alienated from her society. Widows in many works of the period, were betrayed as bereft not only of husbands, but of beauty, wealth and friends” (Mirrer 13). More often than not, despite the real presence of “dangerous” independent widows, widows were depicted as *personae miserabiles*, the objects of charity and need. The connection between orphans and widows requires no great leaps, and most obviously, the link stems from their shared socioeconomic position. On the one hand, both lived in an unprotected and vulnerable state, forced to negotiate the world on their own for the first time, and also for the first time live completely without “paternal” or “patriarchal” guidance, and many found themselves in real pecuniary need. Therefore, Buitelaar rightly underscores the
stirring and compelling dichotomous representations of both widows and orphans as both
can be “more vulnerable and more empowered than ‘ordinary’ children . . . Likewise,
widows are represented as both more vulnerable and more empowered than ‘ordinary’
women” (7). Certainly, the continental picaresque recognized the powerful symbol of the
orphan in their choice of the typical antihero, and very likely Davys recognized the power
of such representations as well as the link between orphans and widows. While her
choice of a heroine may have been autobiographically driven, it is also a pen-stroke of
genius for an author converting the continental to a regional picaresque and who was
interested in the plight of women. In light of all of these factors, and taking into account
the picaroons who appeared before her, one could argue that she is a fugitive—an
outcast—from society as a whole, moving from place to place to escape the conditions to
which she is exposed and with which she is forced to contend.

As Hartveit rightly highlights, the insider/outsider opposition remains a persistent
element in the picaresque novel (16). Indeed, the narrator of the novel situates herself on
the side of need rather than from an independent place of wealth. Starting with the title,
the narrator proclaims herself to live in the margins; and whether by choice or coercion,
there she stays. Although not explicitly stated, based on her collection calls131 and the
insistence of her friends that she remarry, Davys depicts her protagonist as one
experiencing pecuniary difficulties, and thus, our widow becomes an even more
marginalized figure when juxtaposed to the members of the closed society in which she
travels. This, too, parallels many rogue narratives, as does the unspoken misfortune the
widow has already experienced. She details neither the death of the husband nor the
circumstances that drove her from home but begins at the start of the picara’s journey—her arrival in England. This likening of the widow to the orphan protagonist not only links the novel to the tradition of the picaresque but also creates a political commentary upon the lot of women, married, unmarried, and widowed, as well as manufacturing a sympathetic parallel to which the readers could then apply to the narrator. Unlike the traditional picaresque, we do not hear of the widow’s own ordeals; she listens, and retells through her narrative, the misfortunes of others. Moreover, not only as a widow in financial need but also as an Irish woman, the narrator makes clear that she does not belong to the society (perhaps even the country) around her—as is abundantly clear in her first conversation of the novel with the racist Englishman. So much like the abandoned poor orphan of the Spanish picaresque, Davys creates a figure who would likely be regarded as desperate and weak, a figure with little power to satirize those around her, particularly the privileged, yet they are precisely Davys’s target and the widow is able to mock them.132 In short, she creates a new type of antihero, a new picara, who Davys confirms as an unlikely protagonist, one who possesses the ability to outwit all of the motley rich she encounters.

**The Outside Observer and the Roguish Gentry**

By placing herself as the social outcast, the narrator creates a binary space, the insider/outsider opposition, where her position as outsider allows her to scrutinize freely and sardonically those around her. Similarly to Lazaro, who as the “scourge of authority, is also the authoritatively satirical scourge of all moral hypocrisy he encounters”
(McKeon 97), Davys’s widow provides the authorial satire and moral lens from whom we receive the tales. Through the widow’s observations, Davys’s places her narrator firmly above and apart from those whom she visits; only an occasional female friend rivals her in tale-telling ability as well as apparent wit and goodness. Her obvious moral superiority and cleverness far outweigh the majority of characters, and with these traits, she is able to negotiate the muddy social and cultural waters as well as lampoon the country elite’s obvious flaws. For the majority of the novel, the narrator dryly and scathingly comments upon the follies of the households she visits, and their follies fuel a satire comprised almost solely of country gentlemen and women. Herein is another slant to Davys’s version of the picaresque; rather than a rogue negotiating a corrupt and chaotic world and the realistic descriptions of scenes from the lower orders, Davys’s picara is the wholesome other to the roguish country gentry upon whom she calls. In other words, Davys flips the paradigm in order to reveal not the baseness of those reduced to immorality from real pecuniary need, but rather the sordidness and ugliness of the pillars of society produced by their financial excess. Indeed, far from behaving with any immorality due to want, the widow exhibits strength and superiority from her position. According to Hartveit, “Since the author is hostile to the established society he or she portrays, in the course of the novel, an alternative society may emerge” (18). In The Fugitive that alternate society is one connected from woman to woman. Additionally, Miller argues that the picaro “is a disordered literary character, and in his external and internal instability one may find a reflection” of the chaos in society (44). Contrarily, the widow shows no external or internal instability; in fact, she seems to have a clear path,
and she proves unflappable regardless of the situation in which she finds herself. Rather than mirroring society’s ills in her character, Davys constructs a protagonist who remains a calm pond that reflects the disorder surrounding her. Moreover, as opposed to the picaresque that acts as a protest against the way in which the world causes humans to be, Davys’s picaresque acts as a remonstration to the way the world allows the elite to be. In order to capture this relationship, she exploits the details of their everyday life—down to snoring bedfellows and cats in milk jugs—and posits the reflections of a self-proclaimed moral observer.

The Sordid Details

After the racist incident at the inn, the countryside travel unfolds, and the next object of Davys’s lampoon becomes the miserly wealthy. In her first visit, the widow encounters her friend’s wife, a “gentlewoman” of considerable circumstances, yet she proves a somewhat shocking disappointment, and in this episode, Davys begins to reveal her talent for understated wit and cutting characterizations. Of her face, “the Corners of her Mouth look’d as if the last thing she had eaten was a spoonful of Treacle . . . [or] had been applying Pilgrim’s Salve for a Remedy,” but the widow discovers it to be no more than “the Effects of Tobacco Smoke” (164). And of her dress, “Her looks and Dress had something so odd in them, that I began of all things to admire my Friend’s fancy.” Moreover, she serves the meals on a cloth “which might have served for a Supper itself, had all been fairly out, that was fairly in,” (165) and the narrator carefully describes the repast consisting of days-old reboiled meat and bones and a rabbit head. Furthermore,
Davys makes a clear argument regarding “natural” refinement as she juxtaposes the wife’s crudeness with her manservant’s elegance as “the Side-board, however, was set out with Plate and Glasses to a nicety, which piece of Civility I placed to the Man’s account, who seem’d to wait with a deal of Diligence” (165). After dinner, the narrator looks forward to a night’s respite alone in a clean bed but instead “was laid in Linen of at least a Month’s standing, with the Lady herself on one side of me, and a Niece she had t’other, to keep me, I suppose from falling out of bed” (167). Yet perhaps the most scathing criticism of the miserly housewife may be found in her management of her dairy and her overproduction of her product. The narrator’s amazement at her tight-fisted production and at her reducing her milk products to so little that they have no value is contrasted at her astonishment of the housewife’s nonsensical and extravagant blazing fires on warm days; Davys distills ignorant hypocrisy in the form of the miserly housewife who squeezes too tightly with one hand and opens the other needlessly.

From the household of parsimonious behavior, the narrator jumps to its opposite, the overly indulgent wealthy family, yet the focus of her burlesque remains the same—those who are unable or unwilling to use moderation in life. In her relative’s home, there is an overabundance of dishes, an open cellar, and far too many guests. Although she jests about the abundance, just as she did about the meagerness of her former situation, a serious note invades the text and it was “not without some moral Reflections” that she “beheld the Superfluity of Provision” (169). To this family, the narrator lays the blame of turning servants into thieves with an undeniable temptation, an unlocked liquor cabinet, and of wasting their inheritance on lazy guests. While the housewife proves offensive, the
widow’s family is guilty of a much greater crime—turning servants into criminals through their lack of moderation and common sense. Here again, the widow complains, “it vex’d me to my very Soul to see People of Sense live without Consideration” (179). Yet, it is at this point in the novel where another important picaresque convention becomes part of the novel’s structure. Another, and almost essential, ingredient of the picaresque consists of the framed-narrative, of which from this point on the novel almost totally comprises itself. Some last only a few lines, some dozens of pages. Within these tales, Davys continues her assault on the elite, illuminating them as greedy, selfish, unmanly, unwomanly, immoral, stupid, superstitious, predatory, parasitical, foolish, misogynist, mercenary, vain, dishonest, and gullible. At times the characters themselves relate their own narratives, and at others, the story is told secondhand from a friend or bystander, providing a frame within a frame but also affording the novel incredible pace.

**Devious Men**

With breakneck speed, the widow continues to satirize the characters of the novel. Focusing on the parasitical nature of the immoral elite, Davys includes a tale of a wealthy heir who marries for love and then abandons his wife of little fortune after his father’s remonstrations. This is no ingenious or highly original tale; however, the specifics with which Davys embellishes the story are significant and noteworthy. To begin with, the gentleman inherits his fortune from his grandmother—the framed narrative includes a matriarchal line—with his father assigned as guardian. As seen in *Alcippus and Lucippe*,
Davys fills her novels with questions of legal inheritance, which becomes almost an obsession by her last two novels. This unlikely paradigm shift—female wealth to male heir—is the first instance of gender bending Davys performs in this scene. Previous to their marriage, the father locks his son away, starves him, takes away his allowance, and refuses to let him see any company as to prevent his marrying the less wealthy neighbor maiden. While this, too, is not an unusual story line—a child locked away to prevent a companionate marriage—the sex of the character forced into such compliance is. Davys reverses the traditional expectation of fair maiden whisked into hiding and instead places the viral lad in the tower. Yet following in more traditional footsteps, he escapes and at first opportunity marries the girl of his dreams. After three weeks, the effects of boyish love vaporize, and he returns to his father’s estate and swears in open court that he never married. The young man flees the kingdom, leaving his bride with the communal stamp of whore until nine witnesses prove her marriage—also in court. Davys employs another gender reversal as the (now grown fat and red-faced) lady pursues the husband; she tricks him into marrying her again when she passes as a wealthy heiress, and he of course does not recognize her. The father, discovering the “second marriage” began to “comfort himself for the Loss of his Son with the Hopes of his Estate; for he thought the first Purchase that would be made for him would be a Halter” (177). Each tale grows in depravity, and here Davys presents a father who would rather see his son hanged for bigamy than give him control of his own estate. Of course, there is no crime—the rake is merely tricked into re-marrying his bride, so that by story’s end, all appears to end well. Although Davys dresses it as a tale of love, introducing the two as a “cooing
“Couple” on “Honey-Moon” and ending the story with the comment that by his continued fondness, he is now called “the most uxorious Husband in this part of the country.” But typically of Davys, the dark heart of matter—a rake who will allow his lawfully-wedded wife to be considered a whore and a father who would see his son die for money—punctuates the scene and she ends with “so much Love before Folks is a certain Sign of none, when they are alone” (178).

**An Anti-Gothic Tale**

While the next two framed-narratives continue her black reflections, Davys attempts in the last half of the novel to return to the witty banter and lampooning with which she began, and turns to an anti-gothic story as the superstitious and weak-headed wealthy also fall under the widow’s scorn. Visiting a “very good woman” and her family, the widow discovers the whole household to be afflicted by fear. The husband, terrorized by his belief that the house is plagued with “ghosts,” grows mad and “lives mew’d up in his Chamber.” Tellingly, the wife explains to the widow that the “House is haunted, and has been so ever since my Husband began to be ill.” To which the widow responds, “Pish . . . this is all Fancy, and I am afraid your spleenetick Husband has infected the whole Family” (192). During her visit, the family engages themselves with an after dinner prayer, and they hear such a sad rumbling noise, after which “some ran into one hole, and some another, and no body had the Courage to face this formidable Rattler but myself” (193). Convinced of their folly and foolish imagination, the narrator discovers it to be nothing but a drunken cat. By proving that there is no celestial monster, the widow saves
the family when she gets the patriarch to quit his self-imposed jail, his bedroom. Once again, Davys reverses conventional expectations as the man runs mad and secures himself in the bedroom.

**The Widow Trickster**

When the widow herself is courted by a suitor who seeks to gain her future fortune she stands to inherit from her brother working in the East Indies, she showcases, once again, the soft-headedness of the elite. From the fortune hunter, the widow receives an almost illiterate letter or courtship, written with the help of “Nan”:

Last Thursday I was very sick with eating Goose-Giblets, and our Nan says I am in love. Now if I am in love, I am sure it is with you, for I always loved strange Faces dearly; and our Nan, who is a very good woman, bid me tell you so and now I tell you so, and to-morrow I will tell you so again, when I come to see you; and I have Three Hundred Pounds a-year, and will keep you a good Pad, and you shall never go to Church on foot, and you shall have Furmety as often as you please, and our Nan shall make it for you, and so no more at present, but that I am your loving Sweetheart. (219)

After reading this “worthy epistle” to the lady of the house, the lady thinks he could not have written it, claiming “tho’ he is far from a bright Man, he makes a tolerable Figure, and I do assure you talks much better than he writes; and to say the truth, I believe it is the first Letter he ever writ in his Life” (219). Not only does Davys depict the country elite as nearly debilitatingly ignorant, they are practically illiterate as well. Yet despite these clear character flaws, his courtship is encouraged by the widow’s friends, due to her uncertain future. Most notably, although she is a widow with financial needs, the narrator refuses to engage in mercenary marriage in spite of her friends’ attempts to convince her otherwise. She declares of her suitor,
he persisted in his fruitless Attempts much longer than I either expected or
desired, nor was it his foolish Importunities only, which I had to struggle with, but
the Persuasions of all of my Friends, who looked no further than his Estate, and
thought that alone sufficient to make a Woman happy, tho’ it came attended with
all the Circumstances of a Coxcomb. (220)

To convince her friends of his mercenary nature, the widow disguises herself as an
already flush and available woman to force him to denounce her publically as a possible
mate. Like the previous wealthy heir, this gallant misrecognizes the widow from the
simple use of a veil and a lisp; sure that this “other” heiress has a fortune, he openly
declares his love for the wealthy woman, denouncing the widow “as heartily as ever he
did the Devil” (228). At once, Davys uses the story to illustrate the very real and
desperate situations into which many women were forced in eighteenth-century England,
as well as the true motivations behind men’s desires to wed.

The Irrational Man, the Braggart Old Maid, and the Avaricious Aunt

Not only does Davys target the parasitical pool of suitors, she again picks up a
thread from her previous novels and ridicules hyperbolic male chivalry and “manly”
courage. After the widow receives a jesting letter from a neighborhood gentleman, her
rash cousin demands satisfaction for the affront, and the gentleman being “no great
Swords-man” lets loose his Mastiff to respond for him. In the scenario, both men fall
prey to their passion and lose their reason, willing to lose or take a life over a simple
misunderstanding. Yet not ignoring the fairer sex, Davys aims her arrows at single and
desperate women as well. When an old maid insists that her cousin come to the wedding
even though she is extremely ill, her fiancé falls in love with the ill maiden and abandons
the old braggart. The narrator tells us, “she bemoans the preservation of virginity, not the loss of it” (246). Greed also comes under Davys’s fire; the narrator and her unmarried friend go to see the young woman’s aunt. The friend was meant to inherit a considerable sum from her uncle, but the aunt “betwixt Wheedle and Norse” convinces the uncle “to make a will after her own heart, in which everybody was excluded except herself” (254).

In a rambling humor, the friend and the widow go to visit the avaricious wife and her children by another marriage. Meeting an amiable gentleman along the way, the three contrive to humiliate the opportunistic aunt and her children by setting up mock engagements and then leaving them at the altar. Returning to the sharp-tongued observations of the early part of the novel, the widow describes the aunt:142

The Mother of those two Rarities was not so inconsiderable, but deserves a little notice, and was one of the godliest, busiest, praying, imperious, holy, back-biting old Women I had ever seen, she constantly pray’d three times a-day with a laudable voice, and all the rest of her time was spent bragging of her Family, the top of which was a rooking Brother who had gamed long enough to keep a Coach. (262)

She goes on to describe the son:

In his Behavior he was a perfect Sir Mannerly Shallow, and in his Dress a Sir Fopling, as far as he durst or was capable. His Complexion was true buff, but he mightily affected looking red; in order to which, he always tied his Neck-cloth as straight, to force the Blood into his face, as if he were trying by degrees to bring himself halter-proof; then again, to shew the extremity of his Perfections, he would often force a Song upon us, tho’ he had Grimalkin’s voice, and made a more untunable noise than a Pig in a pail; yet when he pretended to be witty, he was really diverting, for he was then always the greatest Fool. (261)

In the same fragment, Davys once again openly ridicules the romance with the figure of Mr. Good, the gentleman they bring into their jest, who wishes “to go where-ever [the friend is] going, and there stay till [she] determine[s] [his] fate.” In order to enjoy the
lady’s attention, she challenges him with tasks to prove his merit. He must, according to the rules of the house: pray three times a day, sing psalms till he is black in the face, and get the assembly’s catechism by heart, read and expound a chapter out of Revelations every night to the family after supper, say a Grace fifteen minutes long, after which he may pray for neither Church nor State, as soon as the clock strikes nine, he must “start fair” with the rest of the family to bed, be up by seven or else he loses his breakfast, and she ends with the comment, “now come if you dare.” To this list of “impossible” tasks, he responds,

    Faith Madam, the conditions are very hard, and not at all agreeable, but he’s a Coward-Knight, who dares not run thro’ a few Difficulties to purchase the company of a fair lady he likes . . . I dare promise to run all hazards, and think it possible to bear as much as you can do. (259)

The mock trials the mock knight, Mr. Good, must complete are clearly in no way dangerous but are the real mundane ordeals with which real suitors must contend. As she does in _Alcippus and Lucippe_, Davys simultaneously burlesques the chivalric ideal and thereby infuses realism into her text. While all of the political commentary through her satirizing of the aristocracy and county gentry proves quite potent, her most provocative observations concern the other marginalized female figures of the novel.

**Laudable Women**

Where one may expect to find the greatest caricatures, Davys disappoints expectations. While there are scathing tales regarding women in the novel, Davys saves her ire for those who are already married, or who behave badly while desperately searching for a husband. Happily single women, and morally upstanding single women, however, escape her wit, and prove, in fact, to be the only equals with whom the narrator
interacts. The first woman she befriends is a fallen woman, who, though in love with the county’s most eligible bachelor and anxiously pursued by him, refuses to marry him due to her “soiled,” yet secret, state. The widow encourages her to be honest—which she ultimately is—and owing to her brave refusal to cheat the honest suitor, the couple marry to become two of the rare virtuous characters in a novel riddled with the “low” elite.143 As the tale highlights the elevating effect of integrity, it also points to the vileness of wealthy rakes who take advantage of, and even rape, young innocent women, a theme that will intensify in Davys’s later novels. In another framed-narrative, an engaged woman stumbles accidentally into the room of a strange man, thinking it was the room she and her cousin were sharing at an Inn. At first, the stranger assumes her to be a whore and attempts to exact a sexual exchange. He agrees to let her go if she will invite him to her upcoming wedding. Later, when he appears the day before the wedding and relates her coming into his bed to the assembled company, he unequivocally proves her fiancé to be a scoundrel willing to take an unknown gentleman’s word over hers, a woman he has known all his life. The story again focuses on the strength and sincerity of the woman in question and concurrently emphasizes the ignoble actions of those already in a privileged position, most often men, afforded by their power and wealth. In all of these tales, the narrator underscores the pressure on women to marry for money and to disregard their own felicity and any higher aims of human union while also abandoning any virtue or morality for the sake of financial security.

Although Davys uses the formal properties of the picaresque to voice her social concerns by privileging the weakest of society, the unmarried, the fallen, and the
widowed women with the strongest traits and those in the strongest societal positions
with the weakest—even abhorrent—qualities, *The Fugitive* represents a new version of
the genre. Some of the most canonical picaresque texts deviate from the “set” pattern that
preceded them, often creating an advancement in the mode that carried forward to future
texts. Davys’s innovations caused McBurney to name her as “A Forerunner of Fielding,”
and if one reads closely, one may find traces of *The Fugitive* in *Joseph Andrews* and *Tom
Jones*. While this novel may showcase most clearly Davys’s willingness to experiment
with genre and mode, her next text, *Familiar Letters betwixt a Gentleman and a Lady*,
written in 1716, continues her by now established pattern of formal invention and
originality, her creation of the superior female protagonist, and her manipulation of
various genres as a form of cultural critique.
Chapter Five

_Familiar Letter betwixt a Gentleman and a Lady_ (1716): A Political Courtship

As with romance and the picaresque, Davys employs another popular contemporary form, epistolary fiction, in her fourth novel, _Familiar Letters betwixt A Gentleman and A Lady_. Although epistolary fiction appears throughout the eighteenth century, many scholars point to Samuel Richardson’s publication of _Pamela_ (1740) as a particularly prominent moment in the genre’s history. Indeed, _Pamela_ created a contemporary craze, with many authors mimicking the style and content thereafter. Yet as with all genres, subgenres, and modes, the evolution of epistolary fiction did not occur overnight but over a long stretch of other publications. Of _Pamela’s_ predecessors, Robert Adams Day proclaims that _Familiar Letters betwixt a Gentleman and a Lady_ represents one of the most highly developed novels of letter fiction of the period, exhibiting “epistolary technique, depth, and subtlety with realistic settings and believable plots” (177). However, not all scholars concur with Day’s estimation; Alice Wakely erroneously declares the text a “make-weight” for Davys’s _Works_, and finds little intrinsic value in the piece (266). _Familiar Letters_ does weigh in as Davys’s shortest known novel; however, it very much strives to mimic authentic correspondence in its focus on the quotidian and mundane and possesses little plot or physical action, which creates the uniqueness of the novel and it evinces a major progression in Davys’s career as an author.
Similarly, Day only appreciates a portion of *Familiar Letter*'s distinctiveness, both for contemporary readers as well as scholars of today, yet Davys’s epistolarity\textsuperscript{144} alone makes the novel worthy of critical study and her insightful political and social commentary adds complexity to the text. As with *The Cousins, Alcippus and Lucippe*, and *The Fugitive*, Davys’s generic choice for the novel steers the work in a particular direction and allows her to address some of the central issues facing eighteenth-century British society. As with her previous novels, her choice of the epistolary also points towards a nuanced understanding of the literary market and popular culture; the content highlights Davys as *au courant*, and her use of the form marks a greater turn towards working within successful commercial genres.\textsuperscript{145} As opposed to satirizing generic conventions as she did in *The Cousins* and *Alcippus and Lucippe* or reinventing traditional tropes as she did in *The Fugitive*, Davys takes the formal qualities and conventions of the epistolary and manipulates them in order to utilize the mass appeal of the genre while also subverting a typical narrative of courtship.\textsuperscript{146} As Altman underscores, “for the letter novelist the choice of the epistle as narrative instrument can foster certain patterns of thematic emphasis, narrative action, character types, and narrative self-consciousness” (9). Although Davys plays upon the strengths of the popular genre, a close reading of the text suggests that she penned a purposefully ambiguous novel, which allows readers to find in the letters a conventional narrative of courtship in order to maintain the text’s appeal, yet paradoxically she also builds the novel upon her own vision of British culture, which runs counter to the customary love story. Initially, it
appears that Davys creates a tale of ardor and romance, yet upon closer scrutiny, the letters reveal a much darker concept of courtship and matrimony.

Written over a Decade

In order to understand fully the context of *Familiar Letters*, it is important first to establish the year of the novel’s composition. *Familiar Letters* was published only once during Davys’s lifetime in her *Works* of 1725, but textual evidence indicates that she wrote the piece well before its publication. Dating this novel proves an inexact process, but many scholars believe the events referenced to in the novel place the date of composition between 1716 and 1718. With the mention of the birth of a royal child, who Donald Stefanson believes to be George William born in 1717, some place the composition date in 1718. However, Bowden points to Artander’s comment regarding the twenty-eight years of Whiggish rule to date the novel as early as 1716. Moreover, given its heavy (and heated) political content, an earlier composition date bears out with the political trends of the century. Geoffrey Holmes writes, “It has been shown how most of the toxic party issues which had kept both the electorate and the parliament in a state of fever lost their potency between 1715 and 1725, and how the whole temperature of politics fell sharply in consequence” (2). As Bowden also rightly notes, it is very likely that the novel went through several revisions (xxxii), which adds to the ambiguous timeline and sometimes contradictory clues within the text. Dating the composition closer to 1716, the year of Davys’s successful play, *The Northern Heiress*, which secured her adequate funds to purchase her coffeehouse in 1718, supports Robert Adams Day’s
assertion that she wrote *Familiar Letters* slowly and with care. 147 Certainly, the novel itself bespeaks a subtlety and complexity of technique that implies a slow composition and considerable revision.

**The Rise of the Letter**

Davys’s formal move to the epistolary comes as little surprise given the growing popularity of letters in the seventeenth and eighteenth century and her own pursuit to infuse realism into her fiction.148 Thomas O. Beebee maintains that Johann Neukirch’s frontispiece featuring *Oratorie, Posie*, and “Epistolarie” underscores the “extraordinary cultural importance which the art of letter-writing had assumed by the early eighteenth century” (1). This significance held true not only for real-life correspondents but for writers of fiction as well. After Roger L’Estranges *Letters Portuguese* (1678),149 Day believes the English epistolary form to have truly arrived.150 And although he counts upwards of 200 pieces produced between 1660 and 1740 that include epistles, he also claims that only:

some few of them—ten to twenty—can be called epistolary novels without straining the definition. Because of their pioneering steps in fictional technique, they merit comparison with the work of the greater novelists after 1740. . . . They gave their work a depth largely new to fiction by concentrating on details of character, motivation, and action, by using multiple points of view, and by maintaining a uniform tone and texture in the novels, in contrast to the uneven narrative of the partly epistolary tales. . . . They began to forsake impossible aristocratic characters and melodramatic plots of amorous intrigue for accounts of ordinary people who behaved in a believable fashion. Lastly, the style and the settings of the stories began to change. The authors wrote in plain, idiomatic English, and their stories took place in a milieu of British domestic life not in operatic lands of passion and violence. (146-7)
Whereas the purely epistolary novel may have been published less frequently than other genres such as romances, histories, and travel narratives, the epistle as a narrative tool proved ubiquitous to early English fiction. However, the use of the specific term “familiar letters” in contemporary publications was unique in the early years of the eighteenth century. A search within *Early English Books Online* and *Eighteenth Century Collections Online* for works bearing the title “familiar letters,” in whole or in part, between the years 1660 and 1718 produces only eighteen published works, most of them nonfictional, nine between 1600 and 1699, and nine between 1700 and 1718. A startling contrast may be noted when the same search is performed for the years after Davys’s publication of *Familiar Letters* in her collected works of 1725; between the years of 1726 and 1799 the total reaches nearly ninety publications. Moreover, between 1726 and 1799 many of the texts were republished, some several times, giving a total of over 200 works of “familiar letters” in the years following Davys’s novel.

Titling her novel as such, Davys plays with the ambiguity of the text from the first by announcing that the epistles therein are “familiar” rather than “love” letters. Although *Five Love-Letters from a Nun to Cavalier* may have started a cultural fixation for amorous epistles, Behn’s famous Tory seduction narratives composed in letters, *Love Letters between a Nobleman and his Sister* (1684), arguably proved even more scandalous and continued to provoke reactions from both parties and their authors. Behn allows for no uncertainty as to the content that will fill the sheets; *Love Letters between a Nobleman and His Sister* leaves little doubt that the letters will be amorous as well as
scandalous. Given Behn’s and Davys’s opposing political views as well as Davys’s scorn for romance, it seems likely that Davys consciously differentiates her work from Behn’s from the outset with the title of the novel. Creating distance between the two novels, “betwixt a Gentleman and a Lady” adds to the distinction, illustrating that the letters shall not be salacious such as one written by a nobleman to his sister.

Additionally, Davys dilutes Behn’s elitist element by reducing the protagonist from a “nobleman” to a “gentleman.” While certainly not “common,” the figure of a gentleman was likely to appeal to a readership whose interest was turning away from the lofty towards the more approachable. Running parallel to a growing appreciation for characters less than noble, Eve Tavor Bannet notes the English trend away from a “heightened” style in letter writing towards an appreciation of epistles conveying information in a clear, simple, perspicuous style (Letter Manuals Vol I 90). Davys’s choice of the term “familiar” illustrates her understanding of the trends of English tastes while also likely enticing readers with the murky levels of truthfulness and fictionality attached to the genre.

**Davys’s Reach towards Realism**

Often works of published letters implied a “true” correspondence between actual persons and were largely deemed to be nonfictional pieces of work. Yet the lines between the real and the fictional were also “deliberately blurred by purveyors of the time,” as Ruth Perry writes when citing Alexander Pope’s letters, asking who could attest to the reality of the letters as they were “written and sent . . . with an eye toward future
publication” (79). Moreover, Thomas Brown famously “edited” the letters he published, enlarging his dubious reputation as well as tarnishing the veracity of published letters as a whole. Nevertheless, this veil of the “true” and “real” drew in many readers desiring to catch a glimpse into the private lives of the great as well as those of the more humble. Frequently, familiar letters chronicle the correspondence of important male figures or correspondents of a male coterie, seen in James Howell’s *Familiar Letters* (1645-1650), or as father and son as in Chesterfield’s letters (published in 1774), or a central male friend, as in *Letters between the Honourable Andrew Erskine, and James Boswell, Esq.* Yet epistolary publication was also exploited by important women early on as evinced by Margaret Cavendish’s *Sociable Letters* (1664) and *Philosophical Letters* (1664).

Although *Familiar Letters* dons the veil of an easy correspondence, there is more structure to the novel than at first meets the eye. *Familiar Letters* moves through three distinct phases (or acts); the first comprises the political debate between Berina and Artander, the second, the exchange of gossip and anecdotes, the third, Artander’s passionate pursuit of Berina and her rejections of his suit. Yet despite this discernable structure, of all her novels, *Familiar Letters* marks Davys’s greatest attempt at realism by creating a probable correspondence between two friends and the progression of their relationship. As in *The Fugitive*, Davys continues to present anecdotal slices of country and city life in unstilted an informal language, which may be considered as one of the key components of the familiar letter. Ehrenpreis and Anderson maintain,

> From Cicero on, the whole genre [of familiar letters] may be viewed as an escape from formality, a release from the sort of rules associated with ‘higher’ kinds of
literature. . . . Cicero himself reserved for his letters not only an informal subject matter but informal diction as well. (271)

While the content of *The Fugitive* still has the faintest hint of artifice and the shadowy figure of the author behind the scenes, *Familiar Letters* read as if they could have been penned by historical rather than fictional correspondents. Day proclaims, “The very stress on conventional passion in the letters, combined with their playful tone and the brief references to everything under the sun which establishes them on solid ground, makes them perhaps the most realistic letters in early English fiction” (190). They discuss marriages, broken hearts, accidents, visits to neighbors, illnesses, courtships, disputes—all of the matters of everyday life, until Artander begins to press Berina out of a friendship and into a courtship. Additionally, Day highlights the fact that Davys is careful to date her epistles in an authentic manner. Whereas other epistolary fictions may have several letters exchanged in a single day through such contrivances as servants as letter carriers, Davys spaces most of Berina and Artander’s letters at three and five days apart.

**Fact or Fiction and the History of “____ander”**

Davys adds complexity and irony when naming her characters. Inspired by Ovid’s “Leander,” epistolary texts often availed themselves of classical *nom de plumes*. By employing the same tactic, Davys at once situates herself in the discourse of the epistolary yet also differentiates herself thereby. As Beebee foregrounds:

> Different kinds of fiction can be categorized according to the degree of overlap between possible and real worlds. While myth and epic tend to maximize the differences between actual and possible worlds, epistolary fiction tends to minimize such distinctions. . . . Sometimes, as in Abbé d’Aurignac’s *Roman des Lettres* (1667), ‘real’ letters are transformed into fictional ones merely by the
substitution of a Greek name for the author’s real name, and the insertion of the letter collection into a fictional framework of reading. (8)

Behn famously played with this tradition in *Love-Letters*, as the letters themselves were fictional yet the persons behind the names were, indeed, real.¹⁵⁷ In this, Davys conversely takes a fictional collection and undermines its fictionality by giving the manufactured correspondents ostensibly Greek names,¹⁵⁸ exploiting notions of authenticity of both the letters and the characters;¹⁵⁹ eighteenth-century readers may have speculated upon which contemporaries were concealed behind the high-flown apppellations.¹⁶⁰ As with her characters’ use of letter manuals, language, and formality, the characters’ names also polarize the characters. “Berina” is a name still found amongst eastern European countries and means “the highest, the best, supreme” in Arabic, while “Artander” has much different implications, and the names stand in stark relief to one another.¹⁶¹ “Artander,” like “Philander,” plays with the evocative prefix. Whereas “Philander” evokes immediate and obvious images of the philandering rake, “Artander” also provides clues to the male protagonist’s character. “Art” according to the *OED*, as a verb, means “to constrain, compel, oblige, or urge (a person) to do something; to bind (a person) to an action, obligation, etc.” Or, as a noun, “Crafty or cunning conduct; cunning; artfulness; trickery, pretense; conduct or action which seeks to attain its ends by artificial, indirect, or covert means.”¹⁶² Furthermore, if *Familiar Letters* is not a narrative of courtship and romance, but rather a display of the patriarchal system and its effects through the most quotidian of details, then the employment of high-flown apppellations becomes a great source of irony as well as a clever misdirection. Undoubtedly, there are authorial designs imbedded in *Familiar Letters*. In order to discern these patterns, one must not only look
to the text itself, but also to the letter manuals of the time period. Bannet sagely notes that the manuals give us the models that allow us to recognize when authors depart from the commonplace (Letter Manuals Vol I xi). Just as both her employment and manipulations of picaresque conventions add meaning to The Fugitive, Davys’s adherence to and her departures from the letter manuals allow readers to peel back the layers of Berina and Artander’s characters and to discern the tension lurking under the surface of the text as well as to recognize Davys’s larger thematic concerns.

**Letters of Contrast and Letter Manuals: She Wrote, He Wrote**

Manipulating the formal properties of the letter, Davys’s epistolarity creates a stark contrast between Berina and Artander, which confirms the more obvious, polarizations of the characters (their political allegiances, for example). Moreover, just as Davys plays with language to reveal the characters’ traits and to juxtapose the female and male protagonists in Alcippus and Lucippe and The Fugitive, she continues to develop this exploitation of expression in Familiar Letters but with a newfound and more subtle technique. Artander uses such canned phrases as: “I therefore earnestly sue for a Speedy Answer to every letter I write” (93), “Three Posts are gone, and a fourth come, without one satisfactory Line from Berina. I grow impatient to know the Cause of your Silence” (107), “I [expect] a Letter by the next Post: of which, if I fail, I shall conclude you do not have the least value for the repose of Artander” (108), and “You are so tir’d with Pleasure, that if I were sure my Letters were any to you, I would forbear writing for a while” (109). Artander’s phrases are very similar to those that may be found amongst
the pages of various letter manuals; although his formulations are not exact replications from the manuals, they heavily mimic both their tone and style. For instance, in Jean-Puget de la Serre’s *The Secretary in Fashion*, one finds such examples as: “These three months of your silence I have kept my mind in the continual fetters of grief,” (28), and “Do not wonder if I importune you so often with my Letters, I have no greater pleasure in the world than to assure you of the esteem I make of your friendship, and the eternity of mine” (57), and from *The Academy of Complements* “Thus longing for your gracious and sudden answer” (119). Moreover, Artander frequently begins his letters with formal, stilted language: “It is now six whole Days since I left the pleasures of the Town, and the more agreeable Amusement of Berina’s Company, for a lonely Retreat into the dull Country where Solitude indulges Melancholy, and Time that used to fly, goes only at a Foot-pace” (93), “That there have been ill Men in all Ages, no Man in his Senses will deny; and the Cruelty you speak of, as far as we may trust to tradition, is equally certain” (99), and “When I am Berina’s patron, I intended to be her Champion too, and with Pen in Hand, defend whate’er she writes” (105). Instead of explicitly telling the reader that Artander is a pompous, stuffy, and (seemingly) polite companion, Davys’s uses his own pen to reveal these character traits. Berina, by contrast, eschews the stock phrases of the letter manual, and begins her letters with a breezy (perhaps even overly casual) style: “Last Night I accidentally fell into the Company of one of those modern Creatures call’d a Prude, who seem’d extremely fond of the instructive Part of Conversation” (94) and

What a prodigious long time has poor England been in Anarchy! For it seems we have never had a King or Queen since King James the Second, of dreadful Memory; nor are ever to have one, till the conscientious Tories can find a hold for the Pretender to creep in at. (100)
These openings demonstrate her cleverness and good humor even when faced with a stiff political rival. Yet it is not only in their rhetorical choices, but also in their selection of content that speaks volumes.

**The Political Nature of Gossip**

However parallel their use of anecdotes may be, the message behind their bits of gossip proves dramatically different. Davys continues to rely heavily on the framed-tale as she does in her earlier fiction, and here, like *The Fugitive*, she presents them as matters of gossip, circulating news, and parts of ordinary life, which adds to the sense that these are two “real” correspondents sharing the juicy tidbits from the country and city. At one point, Artander even writes that he has heard the same tale Berina retells in her previous letter from “another good Hand,” foregrounding the reality of the circulation, and popularity, of such “news” the two exchange and one purpose of the familiar latter. After Artander begins *Familiar Letters* by reminding Berina of her “promise of an eternal Friendship,” he directly launches into an attack on a local woman and relishes in her embarrassment. For his choice items of gossip, Artander continually fixates on the faults of the women in his community, whereas Berina concentrates on the status of women as marginalized members of society. In his first letter, Artander begins his tale with the gleeful admission, “You will say, I am very spightful, when I have told you, the only Pleasure I have had since I left you, was in seeing one of your Sex mortify’d” (94). After he spins the story of a young woman’s pride causing her to scorn an eligible suitor and then the suitor’s resulting revenge in arranging a false wedding and abandoning her at the
altar “booted and spurred.” At the end of the tale, the “bridegroom” punctuates his vengeance by saying to the now disgraced young woman, “In the mean, be a good Girl, and mind your Lesson; I am going from home for some time, and shall be glad, at my return, to find you improv’d” (94). In response, Berina answers:

I pity the poor disappointed Lady you writ about, tho’ I think she deserved her Fate; and the Gentleman’s Revenge was very sharp, tho’ very innocent. I could send you a Story something like it, but Jilting in our Sex, and Deceit in yours, is so very common, that I think it will want Novelty to make it diverting. (95)

Berina thereby signals to Artander that his tale was not diverting but rather unexceptional and trite. While Artander champions the suitor’s action and, on the surface, Berina appears to remain noncommittal regarding the act, yet from Berina’s reaction, one may infer that while Davys certainly does not condone the young lady’s pride, which comes from ignorance and youth, her fault is eclipsed by the older suitor’s cruel and willful humiliation of not only the young lady but her family as well. This, too, is a ubiquitous trait of Davy’s male characters; their drive to punish others for trivial transgressions and the enjoyment they derive from it. Additionally, in Berina’s response to Artander’s recounting of the story, Davys exposes the spectrum of dangers involved for single women as they age, from ridicule to destruction. She ends her first letter by absolutely affirming that for women, love equals death (figuratively and literally) with a tale of a “Maiden Lady of sixty five, who poison’d herself for Love.” Riley views this “ironic juxtaposition of the two stories” as Davys emphasis upon “how much more women stand to lose in the context of love” (211), which, indeed, is another theme that permeates her work. In his next letter, Artander mocks a young lady for her penchant for the fashionable hoop skirt, which causes an accident in which he is injured, and then in his next,
ridicules an older lonely woman for her sad environs, meager dress, and scant provisions.

Once again he luxuriates in his malicious tale:

I went to see an old Lady, who had often bespoke a visit, and began to think me rude for my neglect. The whole scene was so comical, that I can’t forbear sending Berina the Particulars. . . . she was dress’d in a black Cloth Gown, over which she had a dirty Night-rail, and a coarse Diaper Napkin . . . After I had paid my Compliment, and receiv’d hers, and gaz’d a while at the Charms of her Dress and Person, I made bold to fancy she was a little craz’d; and turn’d to take a Survey of the Room and Furniture, which was in no way inferior to herself. (99)

Juxtaposed to Artander’s harsh relations of the women he encounters, Berina’s letter highlights the debauchery and wasted extravagance of male aristocrats, sharing a tale of a Lord’s early demise and ruin due to gambling. She retells a surgeon’s accounting of the tale: “As soon as Dawn appear’d, I left my wretched Bed and posted home . . . and soon after heard my Lord was dead, which all that lov’d him rejoiced at; He having gamed away his whole Estate, his very Clothes and Furniture of his House” (105). These exchanges establish their character; Artander gaily relates events—at times malevolent and at others morbid—that inevitably end in the ridicule or victimization of women, and Berina is keen to give examples of the blemishes of a patriarchal society and the consequences resulting from male privilege. One seemingly uncharacteristic exception to this pattern is the story of the abandoned daughter in the rock, whom Artander saves by placing her in his mother’s employment. However, as Karen Gevirtz rightly notes, “When [Artander] insists that [Berina] stop writing about politics, he substitutes it with the story of a male penetrating a dark ‘Hollow’ to discover a vulnerable woman, a metaphorical rape fantasy” (Women 135). 165
Closing as Friends or Lovers

As with the other formal components of the letters, each correspondent’s closures prove quite illuminating. Throughout, Berina subscribes herself: “yours,” “your friend,” “your real friend,” and “your true friend.” Indeed, according to The New Academy of Letters, “If it be a Woman that writes, she shall say, Your Servant” (5), and “In the Conclusion, we use to testify our Affections, and set down our hearty Wishes or Prayers for his Prosperity to whom we write” (6). In her conclusions as in the body of her letters, Berina proves no better at following the letter manual’s advice as she “is just going to the play,” or “the Tea-Kettle boils,” or, is “interrupted by two or three Ladies who are just come in” and her “Correspondence must give place to the Tea-Table.” Not only does the disparity between Artander and Berina’s closings indicate the distance between their emotions, but also evinces Berina’s willingness to admit her nonchalance towards Artander. Moreover, not only does this confirm the casual attitude Berina holds for Artander, it also augments the ordinary moments of her life, grounding her correspondence in the details of the everyday. However, only Berina ends with these organic and domestic scenarios. Artander favors the style, found also in Aphra Behn’s Love-Letters Between a Nobleman and his Sister (1684-87), of ending with a last token of affection or protestation of friendship. Artander’s closings read dramatically: “I am always safe in Berina’s Company, it and a continuation of her Friendship, is all that is desir’d” (100), “Marriage shall never spoil my Friendship for Berina; when it does may I cease to be” (102), and “now, Berina, either comply or own you never had the least Friendship for, Artander”(107). In addition to his closings, Artander’s letters increasingly
become “high-flown,” devoid of the anecdotal and domestic, which made his earlier letters feel authentic. When he finally reveals his defeat at the hands of Cupid, he uses highly artificial language, full of metaphor and war imagery:

I have made the most vigorous Defences against my Fate, and set up Bulwarks to oppose the little Thief, tho’ I took my Measures by a wrong Handle; and while I with the force of Arms thought to repel him, he by Wheedle and Insinuation, found and Entrance, when I thought myself the most secure; Though the Wound he has given me has such an agreeable Smart, I feel it with Pleasure, and wish for nothing more than an Increase of his Power, that may make Berina own it too. (115)

Berina’s response is filled with shock and disgust at his admission of love, and she later avows the letter to be a prank, in the main because of the stilted and contrived language he uses. In her last letter to him she writes,

The next time you put on the Lover, do it with an easier Air; ’tis quite out of fashion to talk of Dying, and Sighing, and Killing Eyes, and such Stuff; you shou’d say, Damn it, Madam, you are a tolerable sort of Woman, and if you are willing, I don’t much care if I do you the Honour to marry you. (120)

Davys contrasts the ordinary to the elevated in order to polarize the characters and as the novel progresses, unravels what she herself appeared to construct at the beginning of the novel; she negates the romance that the readers were likely expecting. Davys builds upon the differences between the friends using the subtleties of their language and styles and the formal properties of the epistle, until they reveal themselves as binary figures, in their obvious political beliefs, their personalities, and their place in society. Davys pictures Berina as a breaker of conventions and as she shuns the language of letter manuals, she also shuns the coyness they prescribe for single female correspondents.
Indiscreet Epistles and Radical Relationships

Additionally, letters between a woman and an unrelated man would likely have been perceived as an impropriety by many members of society. Davys acknowledges the perceived dangers of such intimacy between men and women in Berina’s first letter to Artander, and also Berina’s unwillingness to heed to such warnings. Of the “Prude” she introduces in her first letter she relates:

Among several Heads upon that Subject, she told us, writing to any Man, except a Husband, a Father, a Brother, or some very near Relation, was an unpardonable Crime, and cou’d not be answered to Modesty. Upon which I was going to write Artander one exclusive Letter, and desire him to expect no more. But I began to consider, A Friend is not worth calling so, who dares not run the risque of so trifling a Censure, to maintain so noble a Character: and, therefore, bravely scorning all dull Reflection, I have taken my Pen in hand with a design to fight my way thro’ all Difficulties, and make good my Friendship in spight of all Opposition. (94-5)

Here, Berina mocks the convention of “relative only” correspondence and simultaneously suggests that the common view, which holds that men and women are capable solely of showing interest in one another in an amorous or romantic fashion, is fallacious. Affirming this cultural conception regarding the hazards of correspondence between single men and women, Perry argues,

It was a rule which arose in a culture with little unconstrained interaction between the sexes, where the decorum of unspokenness between men and women proffered to one another when they wrote about themselves, making letter-writing dangerous to chastity and an ‘unpardonable crime’. (132)

Overtly, both Berina and Artander rebuke the notion of a courtship in the beginning of the novel by claiming a strictly platonic relationship, as Artander writes, “How happy are you and I, who have made the strongest Resolves against the Follies of Love! Be sure,
Berina, keep your friendship inviolate, and you shall find I will keep my Promises, in
never desiring more” (94). Yet as the novel goes on Artander’s protestations of a platonic
relationship become diluted by both his words and, later, his actions. As Davys develops
a split between the characters’ language and the content of their letters, she
simultaneously develops deepening disparities between the motives each character has
for corresponding. As the letters progress, they present dueling narratives; one side
(Berina) decrying the notion of marriage and courtship, while the other (Artander) fully
embraces it by the latter third of the novel. From her first letter, Berina establishes her
reluctance to follow empty conventions and rules, especially those that would prohibit
two people from sharing a human connection and expressing their thoughts, and as the
novel advances, increasingly Berina balks at those that demand a woman must comply
with a courtship when the man so desires it. Throughout, Berina eagerly shares her
opinions, which highlights the familiar latter as a tool for female expression. According
to Thomas O. Beebee, “the familiar letter gradually became a genre at which women
were conceded to excel, as long as they restricted themselves to certain literary and
cultural stereotypes, such as that of the abandoned lover” (105). Unlike other epistolary
heroines, Berina does not engage with the emotional edge women were purported to have
in the writing of missives. Quite to the contrary, she employs reason and logic in her
arguments and intelligence in her prose.

Moreover, Berina wishes to be no kind of lover, abandoned or otherwise. This
again becomes apparent when Berina’s language is examined. Letter manuals advised
women, even interested ones, not to admit of their passions, often deflecting them by
professing their powerlessness to answer and to appear doubtful and even deny the sincerity of the male suitor. Berina does deny Artander’s love, yet in contrast to the manual’s examples, her language proves so strong, it would be difficult to read her words as modest attempts to further a courtship. From the letter manual one reads as an example:

Sir, I have nothing but thanks to offer up to you for the Honour you were pleased to do me in your last Letters. And though they be ordinary effects of your Civility, rather than proof of your Love, yet I cannot chuse but be extremely obliged to you, which I beseech you believe, and likewise that I am, Sir, Your humble servant. (De la Serre 74)

And another with a bit sterner language:

Sir, you know that I am not accustomed to credit the complaints of Lovers; their afflictions do pass with me for Fables, and their diseases seem to be very easie of cure. Thus I give you a firmer assurance of my conceptions of love, than you can give me of the constancy of any that you profess you entertain; yet be your affections what they will, I will render my self, as far as a chast liberty will permit, Your humble Servant. (The Academy of Complements 121)

And while Berina’s letters share the manuals’ expressions of disbelief, they have all the appearance of earnestness in their very harsh honesty:

When I receiv’d your last Letter, I took it with my wonted Satisfaction, and open’d it with the same Air of Delight I used to do, but found it full like Pandora’s Box, full of Poison and Infection. I read it with so much Astonishment, that before I got to the end, I forgot the beginning, and was forc’d to read the displeasing Paper twice, before I could believe my own Opinion of it. (115)

In her next epistle, she challenges his manliness in order to dissuade him from continuing with his “prank”:

You mimick [the Lover] as naturally as if you had serv’d an Apprenticeship to its God: Methinks the very Paper whines, ’tis writ in such a beseeching Stile. . . . but I consider’d it was morally impossible for a man of Artander’s Resolution and Courage to be conquer’d by a Boy. (120)
Lastly, though her chastisements have been read as adamantine coyness, Berina’s reference to Mary Astell’s writing certainly suggests otherwise. After she relates the tale of the spinster’s suicide, Berina concludes, “The Use we are to make of it, is to hug ourselves in the midst of Liberty, and thank those Stars that inclin’d us to Freedom. I hate the Yoke that galls for Life” (96). In the preface to the third edition of her _Reflections upon Marriage_ (1706), Astell proclaims:

To be yok’d for Life to a disagreeable Person and Temper; to have Folly and Ignorance tyrannize over Wit and Sense; to be contradicted in everything one does or says, and bore down not by Reason but Authority; to be denied ones innocent desires, for no other cause but the Will and Pleasure of an absolute Lord and Master, whose Follies a Woman with all her Prudence cannot hide, and whose Commands she cannot but despise at the same time she obeys them; is a misery none can have a just Idea of but those who have felt it. (90)

Davys shrewdly illustrates by the end of the novel that only women are capable of the high-mindedness required of a truly platonic relationship. Berina continues to evoke Astell’s sentiments of marriage, while Artander’s first epistle devalues marriage and courtship to the seeming point of disgust, yet he evolves (or devolves in Berina’s eyes) into a willing suitor. Despite Artander’s attempts to turn his familiar letters into love letters, Berina denies his assaults at every turn, consistently reverting to their mutual claims of platonic friendship. Davys adds to the overwhelming polarity of the characters through Berina’s steadfast commitment to a nonromantic relationship and Artander’s degradation by becoming an openly zealous lover. Thereby, Davys affirms the impossibility of a single woman enjoying a relationship with an unmarried man; not due to the impropriety of such a relationship, but because it cannot help but turn amorous or
predatory due to the very nature of the culture in which they live. In Davys’s work, women were—literally and legally—seen as property. 175

**Whig or Tory, City or Country**

Almost every scholar who comments on *Familiar Letters*, notes the remarkable political element that frames the novel. However subtle the juxtaposition Davys creates between Artander and Berina may be, the binary of their political beliefs proves anything but. 176 Although not the first to exploit the tension between the Whigs and the Tories—Behn published *Love-Letters* over three decades earlier during one of the great crises of British political history—Davys exposes her political savvy and her knowledge of contemporary and historical political issues through the characters’ debates. Similarly to Behn, it is quite likely that Davys was also reacting to remarkable political events: the 1714 transition from Queen Anne to George I, who experienced a “major political crisis in the early part” of his reign 177 and the Jacobite Rebellion of 1715. 178 Given Artander’s Tory affiliations and the Jacobite Rebellion, Davys adds a healthy dose of irony to Artander’s comment regarding the unlawfulness and immorality of rebellions; “Now do but shew me one Text in either Old or New Testament, that tolerates Rebellion, and I’ll recede from all my past Opinions, and become as strenuous a Whig as Berina” (99). While inserting the sense of irony, Davys also exhibits her political knowledge and ongoing political arguments of her day. JR Jones notes, “Tories believed that as the Whigs were a dangerous faction they must be tried and punished if rebellion were to be avoided. This was precisely the attitude which the Whigs themselves adopted towards the
papists involved in the original plot” (*First Whigs* 18). Importantly, it is Berina who engages the political debate by celebrating the birth of a young Prince, noting a “Vein of Satisfaction seems to run thro’ the whole Court and City” (95) and copies a poem commemorating the birth. Yet she does not stop by boasting of a Whig friendly heir to the throne, she fires at Artander and his “poison’d Principles”:

> With how much pleasure shou’d I received your next Letter, wou’d it prove a Recantation, and heartily renounce all your former Errors? Why shou’d a Man of Artander’s Reason and Goodness, be bypass’d by a parcel of Monsters? who have nothing in view, but the Subversion of the Religion and Laws, and the utter Ruin of their native Land. Common Prudence teaches us, if we meet with a Creature whose Out-side only we are acquainted with, to keep our Fingers at a distance, till we have inform’d ourselves of the nature of it; lest a gaudy Feather, or a shining Scale, shou’d draw us into the worst of Ills. No less pernicious can it be to Men of honest designs, to be drawn in by a parcel of Villains, who pretended to gloss over all their Actions with Conscience, tho’ it was, long since, sear’d with a hot Iron. Oh! Artander, fly from their infectious Breath, for the Poison of Asps is under their Tongues! (95-6)

Berina specifically references Whiggish fears concerning an absolute monarchy and James III’s Catholicism as well as his close relationship with Louis XIV and the French court. Perhaps more telling than her clear understanding of the main issues underlying the divisions between the Whig and Tory parties is her ability not only to articulate both as opposing parties, but also to demonstrate her understanding of the regional aspects to the two. Berina writes of “court” and “city,” which were, largely, the favored locations of the Whigs, while many Tories hailed from the country. Berina and Artander follow suit as he lives and writes from the country and Berina from London. This illustrates Davys’s nuanced understanding of both the historical and the contemporary happenings within the parties, as William Speck notes, “Court and Country were much older divisions than Whig and Tory, dating back to the 1620s, when they had been used to describe the
supporters and opponents of James I and Charles I” (63). Additionally, Whigs were formerly known as the “Country Party,” yet soon after 1714 the Court-Country division—whereby Whig denoted “Court” and Tory “Country”—it became “the dominant one in both political action and debate” (Holmes 71). Many have argued that *Familiar Letters* presents a rather balanced, if heated, argument between two members of opposing parties, yet it is worth looking at the letters more closely to determine if Davys tips the scales in favor of one of the parties.181

While many scholars have seen Davys as affording equal time to the differing parties, they also have largely claimed Davys to be a staunch Whig. Wakely writes:

Davys moves away from the Tory tradition towards an actively Whiggish interpretation of the epistolary novel by ultimately coming down in favor of Berina’s position. It must be conceded, however, that this is not immediately apparent. Both sides are accorded equal airtime, and then the decision appears to end in a stalemate. . . . Moreover, there are few supporting clues within the evidence available external to the novel that might indicate which way Mary Davys herself would tend politically. (261)

Also providing no additional external evidence, Wakely notes that Davys’s subscribers to her collected works were equally Whigs and Tories (261). Yet of the weakness of Artander’s political position, Karen Gevirtz rightly notes,

Davys signals Artander’s ridiculousness with the sheer number of physical accidents that befall him during their exchange on politics. He trips over a woman’s dress and they fall down the stairs, and he slips on an old piece of bacon and winds up in an old lady’s lap. Berina, on the other hand, is not only in command of herself physically but also in command of the rhetoric of the time. (137)182

Buffoonery such as this adheres to patterns of Restoration drama and foreshadows later eighteenth-century novels (such as Frances Burney’s *Evelina*), whereby it indicates a
character’s weakness and lack of heroism. Artander answers Berina’s lengthy attack with a mere three sentences;

I always told Berina, her greatest, nay, her only Weakness lay in being a Whig. Methinks the very name, so hated and despis’d, should give your Inclinations a turn: then do but look back to our English Annals, and see the Practice of those Men, from whom the Name first took its Rise. (96)

He then precedes to divulge the country happenings. Rather than engaging in an intellectual debate regarding the issues facing England, Artander prefers to indulge in frivolous local gossip. To his short reply Berina in turn responds with aggressive and pointed language, filling her letter with violent imagery:

You sent to me the *English* Annals for a Cure of *Whiggism*, and (as if Heaven had design’d me for what I am) I insensibly found myself in Queen *Mary’s* Reign, where I had so many Objects of Cruelty presented to my view, that I was ready to creep into myself at the dreadful Reflection. How many brave Men, courageous Women and innocent Children did I see butcher’d, to do God good Service? Our Bishops burning with both Fire and Zeal, to confirm the Reformation so happily begun; while its Enemies, set on by Hell’s chief Engineer, depress’d its Growth, and trod it under foot. From thence, I went to the *Irish* Rebellion, where I saw more than three hundred Souls murder’d in cold Blood, the Clergy’s Mouths cut from Ear to Ear, their Tongues pull’d out and thrown to the Dogs, then bid to go preach up Heresy; Mens Guts pull’d out and ty’d to each other’s Waists, then whipp’d different ways; some stabb’d, burnt, drowned, impal’d and flea’d alive; Children ripp’d out of their Mother’s Womb, and thrown to the Dogs, or dash’d against the Stones; crying *Nits will become Lice, destroy the Root and Branch*: with a thousand other Barbarities, too tedious as well as too dreadful to repeat, beside what has been transacted abroad. And now, Artander, if those things be true, as we have the same Authority for, that you have for your Martyr’d King, tell me, to use your own Words, *Whether it be not every true Churchman’s Business, to dread and crush the like Proceedings?* (97)

Whereas Artander remains vague in his arguments, Berina is painfully specific. And not only does she recount the atrocities of the Papists, she later points to the Tory’s vitriol and suspicion towards their “Dissenting Brethren,” another major historical distinction between the parties. In his next epistle, Artander invests slightly more time in his defense
and again responds by writing that both sides have committed atrocities, yet only Tories truly follow the word of God and the Bible. True to form, he moves sharply away from politics to relate misogynist gossip from the neighborhood. Again, Berina also remains true to her political zeal (and knowledge) and fills her entire response with informed points to break down the Tory position. Yet the next epistles foreground the realities of the cultural expectations of women and marks the point when their political debate degrades into an unwanted seduction.

The Right to Resist Tyranny

To break with the political and move toward courtship, Artander uses his social position. Artander begins with assurance, “I have no reason to doubt; you will comply, when I beg of you to put a stop to this sort of Correspondence; and your Letters for the future, be filled with the innocent Diversions of the Town; ’tis a pity Berina’s Temper should be ruffled with Politicks” (101). To this demand Berina returns:

If Artander’s Heart were not so hard as the Rock he has been scrutinizing into, he wou’d never have laid such strict Injunctions on my Pen, and robb’d me of my darling Pleasure; but to let you see how ready I am to relinquish every thing that gives you uneasiness, I have, in compliance with my Friendship, laid by the Subject you dislike, and will, for the future entertain you with something else. (103)

While she complies, this exchange strikes at the heart of the differences of their character as well as the power—and lack of power—afforded their respective sexes. Artander acts out the tyranny associated with an absolute monarchy, and Berina balks at his male-derived sense of entitlement yet nevertheless complies. According to Wakely,
The Tory model of monarch/subject relationship embraced by Artander posits absolute power on the one hand, and passive obedience on the other, implicitly favoring a Stuart succession; whereas Berina, as a Whig, argues for a more Lockean paradigm of mutual agreement and obligation in support of the House of Hannover. (260)

In Berina’s arguments one may also read a more radical subtext than simply towing the party line. Holmes maintains, “When it came to conferring active or positive political rights upon subjects, the Whigs adopted a restrictive policy. The one political right which they were prepared to grant all men was the right to resist arbitrary tyranny” (34). Arguably, Davys believes women deserve this right as well, particularly when her work is examined as a whole. As Karen O’Brien underscores, “Whiggism, in its political and established religious forms, was not, as Carole Pateman argued, inherently apathetic to arguments promoting the status and rights of women, and that it was in fact, in the longer run, the medium in which such arguments most flourished” (36). With this in mind, Berina’s passionate party devotion takes on a larger dimension for the remainder of the novel. Davys illustrates the philosophical distinctions of the two parties by using the correspondents’ letters, wherein Artander expects Berina’s compliance with his wishes and then his courtship, eventually forcing his way to her physically, while Berina attempts to maintain a platonic and mutual friendship.¹⁸⁷ Unlike her other fictional works, Davys does not end her novel in a “happily” ever-after marriage, but rather concludes with Berina denying any such possibility while Artander reaffirms his decision to pursue her regardless of her denials.¹⁸⁸ Commenting on male dominated courtship, Perry claims, “Early fiction tended to reinforce these patriarchal arrangements, celebrating as it did, the sort of romantic love which swept away all vestiges of selfhood, ideally ending in
marriages which institutionalized such feeling” (Women 47). Although Berina continues to make light of Artander’s protestations of love, and attempts to use humor to deflect his unwanted courtship, the sincerity of her refusal remains clear.

Shelved but not Forgotten

As with the other uncertain aspects of Davys’s life and work, we have no indication for her reasons for waiting almost a decade to publish Familiar Letters. Given the complexity of the text and the advancements it evinces in Davys’s progression as a novelist, one may only speculate upon the rationale for her decision not to publish the piece earlier. Perhaps Davys attempted to sell the piece but was unsuccessful due to its politically inflammatory content. Perhaps Davys was concerned with how the piece would affect her reputation as a dramatist, as she wrote it around the time of the performance of The Northern Heiress, or even as a coffeehouse proprietor, as she opened it shortly following the play’s production. Nevertheless, Davys obviously felt the novel worthy of a readership as she herself published it in her 1725 Works. As well as demonstrating the height of Davys’s experimentation with realism and her intense investment in domestic political and social issues, it also marks a very long pause in her career as an author. Although there were many years between Familiar Letters and The Reform’d Coquet (1724), Davys’s interests in realism and social concerns and her skill as a novelist only increased in the interim. Her savvy understanding of English culture, its flaws and its trends, reaches a zenith in the most popular and most successful novel Davys would ever publish, The Reform’d Coquet.
Chapter Six

_The Reform’d Coquet (1725): Patriarchy and the Perverse Privilege of Men_

Davys republished _The Reform’d Coquet_ in her collected works of 1725, and thereafter the novel went through at least seven known editions. The last was published in 1760, making it her most enduring novel. It is certain that the 1735 Dublin publication as well as the fourth London edition in 1736 of the text occurred after her death in 1732, but the dates for the second and third editions remain elusive and so it is unknown whether or not Davys enjoyed the royalties. Yet the success of the novel was arguably due to the time Davys spent working on her craft. After her modestly successful three night run with _The Northern Heiress_ in 1716, which she also then published, Davys appears to have gone silent as an author. Other than her poem, “Answer from the King of Sweden to the British Lady’s Epistle,”¹⁸⁹ a gap exists from 1716 to 1724, and during those years, there is no current evidence that she was actively publishing her work. Yet while she may not have been publishing, she was writing; as stated in the previous chapter, she likely wrote _Familiar Letters_ beginning in 1716, and Bowden also believes she penned her other, unproduced, play, _The Self-Rival_ between 1716 and 1718. Her lack of publications may have been owing to her new business, her Cambridge coffeehouse, which she opened in 1718, and the demands on her time must have been considerable. However, we must also
remain open to the possibility that she was publishing anonymously, as half of her known works were so published. Nevertheless, it is certain that Davys published *The Northern Heiress* in 1716, and *The Reform’d Coquet; or the Memoirs of Amoranda* by subscription in 1724, both naming her as author. As with *Familiar Letters*, Davys appears to embrace and combine other popular contemporary genres; the more subdued genre of didactic love fiction, which stressed “the virtues of chastity and sentimental love” (Harvey 29) and the more socially conservative mode of moral reform comedy.

Considered by many to be her best and most sophisticated novel, *The Reform’d Coquet* returns in some ways to her first two novels, *Alcippus and Lucippe* and *The Cousins* by once again offering a courtship narrative ending in marriage. Davys also returns to the elite setting of noble families and their estates. However, unlike *The Cousins* Davys does not covertly mock the genres, and unlike *Alcippus and Lucippe* Davys does not overtly ridicule the genres or the characters. Similarly to *The Fugitive* and *Familiar Letters*, Davys takes two fashionable trends in literature and uses their conventions to foreground the issues facing eighteenth-century women. However, some scholars, such as Eleanor Wikborg and Catherine Craft-Fairchild, have ignored any such subversion on Davys’s part and written that the novel represents a “love story.” Martha Bowden contends that Davys uses fairy-tale framing, which allows readers to suspend their judgment regarding the flaws of the male protagonist (xxxiii). Yet she goes on to comment that for modern readers, Formator as a figure of perfection proves problematic and questions whether Davys really envisioned him as such, or if “she was reflecting the demands of the literary marketplace and her own desire to establish herself as a writer of texts that restore the
‘purity and empire of love’?” (xxxiii) Perhaps contemporary as well as modern readers noted the “sinister edge” to the protagonist, Formator. Moreover, all of these readings neglect the fact that while Davys may have been following market trends of moral reform comedy and didactic love fiction, she may also have created a text that works “to subvert what it seems to celebrate” (Tanner 4). Clearly Davys does not include anything erotic, and therefore the novel does not fit into the category of the amatory, but one must also question the extent to which *The Reform’d Coquet* represents earnestly either the virtues of chastity or the believability of sentimental marriage, the base of didactic love fiction or depicts true “moral reform.” As well as drawing upon the conventions and formal qualities of both genres, Davys also mirrors the heart of the debate surrounding realist fiction itself—the tension between artifice and “truth,” as *The Reform’d Coquet* is a novel that revolves around the complexity of appearances, their veracity and fallaciousness.

**Formal Costumes**

Again, Davys plays with genre, using the formal properties as a disguise, which conceals the social issues at the heart of the novel. As Davys’s work continually proves multilayered, with a light-hearted veneer and a more serious subtext, one questions the reasons for her recurrent strategy of burying her commentaries. Yet Davys was very careful to position herself as a clergyman’s widow and as adhering to the strictest moral code in life and in her fiction. A woman challenging the dominant ideologies such as patriarchy and property rights would likely have raised suspicions as to her integrity, especially a woman writer whose reputation was already threatened due to the very fact
that she was a woman writer. Therefore, one may argue that in order to free herself from controversy, Davys chose to subvert her more radical critiques and ideas. In *The Reform’d Coquet*, Davys structurally creates a comedy, heavily influenced by dramatic comedy, complete with the hallmarks of the up-side down world, and the betrothal ending. More specifically, Davys uses the model of the moral reform comedy, which was “staple fare on the eighteenth-century stage” (Gollapudi 1), directly indicating as much with the claim of “reform’d” in her title.192 According to Aparna Gollapudi, “reform plots were predominately concerned with two broad areas of interest—matrimony and money” (16), the reform of the rake into a better husband or the reform of the extravagant wife into a frugal one. Although *The Reform’d Coquet* is solely concerned with property and marriage, Davys deviates from the norm by reversing the roles as it is the young woman who must be transformed into a sober bride and who has a healthy estate. Yet the plot encompassed by these dual structures produces a dual narrative; “a woman’s tragic narrative against a man’s comic one” (Staves “Comedy” 106).193 Most palpably this duality surfaces in the disparity between the male sense of comedic coherence, whereby the world and society are again unified as he obtains his bride—and therefore her estate—and of the individual (and, in this case, female) sense of tragic loss, whereby she loses her voice, freedom, estate—and indeed, her identity. Bowden also notes at the end of the novel, when the masks and disguises are gone, so, too, is Amoranda’s “sparkle”; “Having left her story in the male hands of her lover and guardian, she leaves the stage” (xxxii). When she returns and Alanthus makes his formal proposal, “her answer is not recorded,” and, thus, the once vibrant female protagonist is silenced. By manipulating
formal properties, Davys focuses her text upon the ability of appearance to reflect and/or deflect the nature and motives of the characters, all of which leads to the silencing of Amoranda. Just as Alanthus dons a disguise to further his secret plans of reformation and marriage, Davys employs a structure, which acts also as a camouflage, and which enables her to write a surface narrative of courtship, while a subversive narrative of cultural anxiety lies submerged underneath the guise of comedy. Davys intertwines the emphasis on appearance with power, the shifting nature of power, and the abuse of power. Specifically, Davys concentrates on the power—the power of cultural compliance, money, violence/rape, and sex/gender—men hold over women in their roles as husbands and guardians, all of which enable a conversion of an “untamed” individual into an obedient member of society. By examining the power relations of the sexes through the external and internal and the discrepancies of the two, one may discern the conflicting, and subversive, messages imbedded within *The Reform’d Coquet.*

**The Duty of Women to Protect Women**

The privilege and power of eighteenth-century elite men create a traceable thread in Davys’s *oeuvre.* Women saving and aiding women, and men colluding with men for dissolute, dishonest, and, at times, illegal purposes are strong lines of thought in her work beginning with *The Cousins* and become more central to the narrative as her work matures. Although they are not always the dominant subjects or concerns of her texts, the working-class hero surfaces in many of her novels, particularly in her last two. For example, as is made clear from Amoranda’s initial opinion of Lord Lofty and her
misreading of Biranthus, she cannot accurately read people and situations. Her maid, Jenny, on the other hand, is very quick to judge character and events accurately, as is the Cook. When Davys introduces Lofty, he admires *The Rape of Helen*, comparing his designs on Amoranda with those of the painting. During these contemplations, he discovers a letter, and being a “man of none of the strictest Honour,” he reads it. Afterwards, he considers fleeing as “his Courage would not hold out to face Amoranda” (16). Not only is Lofty an exploiter of women, a daydreamer rapist, and a dishonest human in general who uses his privilege for the most dissipated of means, he is also a coward. Yet Amoranda sees none of this; she believes in the inherent integrity of gentlemen and the code by which she imagines they live. Immediately, Davys opens his character to the reader, who sees the level of his disrepute. Jenny, too, sees through his nobility and exposes his character to Amoranda, yet she still refuses to believe her maid. Jenny admonishes Amoranda for behaving so “freely” with him after reading Altemira’s letter, which divulges his treacherous past actions of seducing and ruining an innocent gentlewoman. Amoranda dismisses the letter as coming from a spiteful “Tenant’s Daughter” who he likely “for a Nights Lodging, promised Marriage” (17). As a better reader, Jenny persists and ask her to read the letter once more, which Amoranda finds missing. Jenny immediately and correctly concludes that Lofty found the letter, read it, and kept it, yet Amoranda insists that he has too much honor to open a letter directed to another. By revealing the corrupt nature of Lord Lofty, and Amoranda’s stubborn refusal to believe a nobleman could behave ignobly, Davys illustrates Amoranda’s misguided faith in an aristocratic ideology. Yet through Amoranda’s belief in such an ideology and
the almost disastrous results of such a belief, Davys challenges the conviction of the undisputed honor of those with rank as another instance where exterior circumstances do not necessarily reflect interior virtue. Michael McKeon writes of aristocratic ideology:

Honor is an essential and inward property of its possessor, that which the conditional or extrinsic signifiers of honor exist to signify. In this respect, honor is equivalent to an internal element of ‘virtue’. The notion of honor as a unity of outward circumstance and inward essence is the most fundamental justification for the hierarchical stratification of society by status, and it is so fundamental as to be largely tacit. What it asserts is that the social order is not circumstantial and arbitrary, but corresponds to and express an analogous, intrinsic moral order. (131)

By juxtaposing the disrepute of the gentlemen’s intentions and their absolute lack of virtue or honor, Davys interrogates this ideology while simultaneously warning women against putting their faith in men above a willingness to trust women. McKeon also claims twelfth-century romance was a method of investigating the substance of status categories at a time of pressing status inconsistency (142). Likewise, the changing position of the aristocracy following their defeat in the seventeenth-century Civil War and the Glorious Revolution of 1688, and the eighteenth century witnessed a destabilization of the social order. Davys, too, challenges any firm position or assumed honor of the aristocracy in *The Reform’d Coquet*, which she contests vehemently in *The Accomplish’d Rake*.

Moreover, along with questioning the interior value of those with the highest social rank, Davys demonstrates the ability of the working class to discern a character’s inner nature correctly by Jenny’s astuteness, which proves a common characteristic amongst “good” servants. Jenny also correctly surmises that the suitors surrounding Amoranda are wasps “who come to sting and steal from those who have a better Title to
the Sweets of your Favour” (23). Jenny proves so shrewd, in fact, that in a letter of
courtship she recognizes Alanthus’s handwriting as the same as that from the anonymous
“rude” letter from the beginning of the novel, and only then does Amoranda, too, see the
resemblance. To Jenny’s charge of “rude,” Amoranda attempts to correct her, arguing
that after Formator’s “education” she sees the letter in the glove with different eyes and
now believes that it came from a “friend.” This at once signals Amoranda’s “reform,” yet
it is questionable if Davys wants her reader to hold the same opinion concerning the merit
of the letter. Since we know that Jenny is the better judge of character—always
accurately assessing their motives—one must take her response into account: “Nay,
Madam . . . you know best how you can bear an Affront; had any Fellow sent me such a
one, I would have spit in his face the first time I saw him: Tell me I was no Angel!
Impudent Blockhead” (67). Davys demarcates with humor the differences between the
classes, pointing to the crass reaction Jenny would have had, but as she has been an
oracle of wisdom throughout the novel, it cannot be dismissed merely as a comedic
moment or as a point of departure between classes. Interestingly, Davys ends the
exchange between the women on a subtle note of protest. Amoranda questions Jenny
about her vocalized desire for a wet nurse for her future children. Amoranda declares that
nursing is a “Work Nature requires” of women, to which Jenny responds that working
class women are prohibited from following a natural course of childbearing and
childrearing due to their work of servitude. Bowden notes that Jenny’s response “refers to
the unnatural aspect of a life of enforced chastity spent waiting on a young woman when
the maid is in her child-bearing years” (236). While Davys was clearly very sensitive to
concerns of the middle-class and noble woman, she also demonstrates her understanding of issues that faced working-class women.

Another example of both the working-class heroine and women as the protectors of women is Altemira’s old Cook. When Altemira fears her brother will rape her, she runs to the Cook’s house for protection, and it is there she meets Lord Lofty. Cook first suspects and tries to warn Altemira about Kitty, her maid, and Lofty conspiring and advises her to terminate the maid. Altemira, like Amoranda, reads people poorly and continues to trust both Kitty and Lofty, to her near complete ruin. Later, Cook attempts to prevent Altemira from going to Lofty’s house even though he is a benefactor to her husband and so has a great deal at stake in denying him his wishes. Despite this dependent relationship, when Altemira does not return to Cook’s that night, Cook courageously goes in search of her at Lofty’s and desperately bangs on the doors to save Altemira from her fate. Not only does Davys create in Cook a more savvy counterpart to Altemira—like Amoranda and Jenny—she creates a female character who is brave to the point of experiencing economic harm and even physical violence as she travels alone at night. Alongside of these heroes, Davys also inserts the corrupt and treacherous servant such as Kitty and the men who betray Amoranda on the river excursion, and one would be hard-pressed to find any character without flaw in her work with the one exception of The Cousins. So then, this balance of good and evil in The Reform’d Coquet is not surprising, but Davys increasingly layers her novels with the unsung heroes of those who serve others. Indeed, in Amoranda’s greatest moment of need, it is an unnamed servant, and not Alanthus, who kills Biranthus at the crucial climax of the attempted rape scene.
Additionally, Alanthus claims afterwards that he is unable to lead them out of the woods, so a servant takes the reins and leads the group to the barge. Alanthus’s claims that he cannot find the way back to the barge and the servant offering his knowledge may appear very slight, yet after the revelatory unmasking, in hindsight the scene strikes one as another instance of Alanthus’s dissembling. Alanthus maintains at the time of the attempted rape that he does not know his way out of the woods, yet when Amoranda questions him, he claims to have ridden “directly” to the area in the woods were the rape would occur as well admitting he had arrived an hour before hand and had “rang’d about every part of it” (80). Davys gives no indication as to Alanthus’s intentions with this deception other than to cast additional doubt on his honor but makes a particular point to have those who rank below a gentleman commit the most valiant acts, killing Biranthus and leading Amoranda to safety. Furthermore, the servants, good or bad, appear as they are; juxtaposed to their noble employers, they do not use masks or disguises to hide their true designs, which makes the dishonest servants blamable but far less dangerous than those who corrupt them.

**Self-Fashioning, Disguise, and Character: The Inner and the Outer**

For the wealthy men of *The Reform’d Coquet*, the discrepancy between their outer appearance and inner integrity is considerable, and the contrast between the façade and the truth has severe consequences for the female characters of the novel. Jessica Munns and Penny Richards foreground the fact that “Bodies and clothes endlessly redefine each other to forge, adapt—and deny—varieties of selfhood” (9), and Davys manipulates this
concept of redefinition as well as the act of denial through costume throughout the narrative. Her male characters exemplify this property most clearly as almost all of the female characters’ inner and outer qualities correspond and, all except for one, do not employ dress as a means of deception. In order to play on the conflicting roles of dress and character, as well as to further the narrative, Davys uses a complex web of masquerade, cross-dressing, disguise, and the grotesque. Although Davys was not the only female author to use these devices, she did so in a much different way than her contemporaries. We may especially note Manley’s own employment of cross-dressing and gender inversion that fill the pages of her fiction. Rather than focusing on male cross-dressing, Manley “unequivocally condemns” her female characters who cross-dress (Ballaster Seductive 137), whereas Davys denounces the male characters in her novels who do so. Most obviously, Davys exploits Formator/Alanthus as the main figure for exploring the function and revelatory properties of disguise. Common to Davys’s fiction, she begins with a classical allusion and then transforms it. Formator, like Minerva from Telemachus or Athena from the Odyssey, suddenly descends upon Amoranda, a young man disguised as an old and wise man, who is ostensibly sent to watch over and guide her. In her introduction to the novel, Bowden comments upon the possibility of Davys alluding to the Odyssey in The Reform’d Coquet, but claims “an ‘authoritative’ reading is both impossible and undesirable” (xxxiii). However, while one could not say definitively that Davys nods (and winks) at both the classical epic The Odyssey and the contemporary text Telemachus, a look particularly at the popularity of Telemachus in the early eighteenth century and the historical context of its translations and publications allow for
the probability that a woman such as Davys would have been aware of the texts and its
tropes and was openly playing upon them.194

Classical and Contemporary Allusions

Originally published in 1699, Francois de Salignac de la Mothe-Fénélon ‘s Les
aventures de Telemaque, or The Adventure of Telemachus, the Son of Ulysses created an
instant sensation and was published sixteen times after its original publication in 1699
alone, and sixteen more in the years between 1700 and 1712 (Chilton xx). Between the
years of 1700 and 1724, the work enjoyed English translations in 1701, 1703, 1705,
1707, 1712, 1713, two in 1715, 1719, and 1721, for a total of ten different translations.
Moreover, the Odyssey also enjoyed multiple translations in the latter half of the
seventeenth century.195 On the outside chance that she herself did not read either the
Odyssey or Telemachus, which, given her taste for classical and contemporary literature,
is unlikely, it is also probable that the texts, their precepts, and their plots were oft-
discussed topics in Davys’s coffee-house. Given the ubiquity of translations, particularly
that of Telemachus, and the moral and didactic tone of Fénélon’s work, one may suggest
that Davys created a crafty inversion and tongue-in-cheek representation of the Mentor
figure. As she does in the rest of the novel, Davys plays on the sex/gender reversal by
placing a male character into Athena/Minerva’s role, and a female character into
Telemachus’s. Not only does Davys invert the sex of the participants, ironically, she also
places a suitor—the very figure Athena and Minerva despise—as Mentor rather than a
goddess sent with the most honorable of goals. What is more, Davys seems to draw both
on *Telemachus* and the *Odyssey* when plot and moral themes are taken into account. In the *Odyssey*, Athena arrives in Ithaca to aid Telemachus in ridding his house plagued of suitors, as does Formator for Amoranda. Odysseus, cursed, sails the world after conquering Troy, while Amoranda’s uncle and custodian, E. Traffick, blessed, sails the seas after conquering the East Indies. As Leslie Chilton concludes of *Telemachus*, Mentor/Minerva teaches Telemachus that he must use “reason and prudence to govern his passions” (xx) and similarly Formator teaches Amoranda the reason and discipline she must apply to “pleasure.” Telemachus, too, condemns pleasure informing Mentor, “May the gods condemn me to perish, rather than suffer effeminate pleasure to take possession of my heart. No, no; the son of Ulysses shall never be vanquished by the charms of a base effeminate life” (6). Formator echoes this sentiment, however, rather than condemning the effeminate, he targets the young; “What I inveigh against, is an immoderate Love of Pleasure, which generally follows the Young, and too often leads them to Destruction” (25). Following his denunciation of pleasure, Davys lays the first clue that as opposed to idealizing Formator/Alanthus, she satirizes him. When Amoranda asks Formator what he calls pleasure, he answers, “I call everything Pleasure that pleases us.” In his extremism, Davys ridicules the figure for an audience who are reading her own novel for “pleasure.” This adds to the comedy of the novel and the image of the cantankerous old man, yet it also belies the unrelenting character of Amoranda’s chosen suitor; everything should be shunned except for Formator’s “lessons” and daily readings from conduct books. Davys, on one level, offers up humor to her readers, yet the event that sends the novel into the
topsy-turvy world of comedy challenges gender norms as well as Alanthus’s behavior and integrity.

Inversions of Gender

Before Formator is on “stage,” Davys cleverly drives the action and upsets the normalcy of the scene not with Formator’s entrance, but with a stranger’s preceding “challenge” to Amoranda. The familiar scene which unfolds before Alanthus’s letter makes for a domestic setting in which a young and wealthy heiress is courted by various lecherous and greedy country “gentlemen.” In the midst of a visit from her suitors, another gentleman throws a glove at Amoranda’s feet. Hidden within the glove is a letter, which reads:

This letter, Madam, does not come to tell you I love you . . . but if I tell you I am in pain for your Conduct, and spend some Hours in pitying your present Condition, it will, I dare say, be entirely new to you . . . you are neither an Angel or Goddess, but a Woman, a fine Woman, and there are in this Nation ten thousand such. (22)

Here Davys amusingly plays on the conventional use of the epistolary in fiction, more specifically a love letter, and the notion of the “battle of love” yet simultaneously allows doubts to percolate as to the gentleman’s intentions. Amoranda reads his initial action as a challenge to one of the gentlemen callers but remains confused as “he rid away in a Cloud of Dust” (23), without staying for the answer. Davys highlights this moment through Jenny and Amoranda’s conversation, during which Amoranda describes the author of the letter as a “familiar Brute” and the sage Jenny comments that although he likely means well, “if this be a Conquest, ’tis made upon a very insulting saucy Lover”
(23). Davys foregrounds the odd event as one that bends gender conventions while simultaneously foreshadowing the hidden nature of Alanthus’s personality. In the eighteenth century, dueling became increasingly seen as an extravagant and immoral act carried out (primarily) by the aristocracy. In her earlier novels, Davys also ridicules this “code of honour,” as does Richard Steele, who campaigned avidly against the “absurdity of this self-destructive ritual” in the Tatler (Mackie 13) as well as in his play The Conscious Lovers (1722). In Tatler No. 25 (1709), Steele claims the “resentment” that fuels a duel “is an Imposture, made up of Cowardice, Falsehood, and a Want of Understanding” (470). In The Reform’d Coquet, Alanthus’s throwing down of the gauntlet has multiple purposes. Not only does it mark the first moment of comedic mayhem but also exposes the first unsavory aspect of Alanthus’s character. Like the grotesque, which Davys later employs, it exposes his “unnatural” willingness to defy another convention of honor—that of men not challenging women. His act also parallels the later actions of the cowardly would-be kidnappers, Callid and Froth, who pull their swords on those whom they believe to be unarmed women. Davys further stresses this connective tissue of immoral dueling between Alanthus and Callid and Froth, the suitors/would-be rapist kidnappers, with the suitors’ mutual demise resulting from the duel between them after they are foiled at the Summer House. With morbid humor, Davys notes of the duel and the subsequent deaths, “tho’ they lived like Scoundrals, they went off like Gentlemen, and the first pass they made, took each other’s Life” (33). Moreover, and quite importantly, Amoranda does not understand that she herself has been “challenged,” as she can only conceptualize duels as occurring between men,
underscoring both her innocence and the aberration of the act. Moreover, when Formator enters the “field of honor,” Amoranda’s home, where he will defeat her willfulness, he arrives disguised as a defenseless older man, which further adds to the imbalance of the “duel” and incredibly to his odds of ending as the victor as Amoranda’s defenses would be completely quelled. Therefore, not only is Amoranda clueless to the fact that she herself should be defending her honor, she is given no weapons with which to do so.

A Transference of Authority

When he does first appear as Formator, he wears an extraordinarily simple costume to hide his identity—a beard and a lisp. While his affectations and costume are painted as absurd and to comic effect in the denouement—and alluded to in the passage concerning pleasure—beforehand, Davys treats his disguise as believable and serious. In part Davys herself masks the simplicity of the disguise as she only reveals the actual details of Formator’s physicality and voice at the end of the novel. Additionally, to further his credibility, Amoranda’s uncle and guardian, E. Traffick, supplies her with a letter guaranteeing the reality of Formator’s existence and informing her of the transference of guardianship, and commands Amoranda to “let him in my stead interest himself in all your Affairs.” As to Amoranda’s initial confidence in Formator’s masquerade, Davys leaves this ambiguous, writing, “When Amoranda had read her Letter, she look’d a little earnestly at Formator, possibly not very well pleas’d with a Guardian of such an Age” (25), and she goes on to reason that as her uncle directs her to accept this stranger into her household, she must do so. During her contemplation of
Formator, she ruminates on the fact that Traffick is both her father and her mother, which gives her uncle every influence over her, literally leaving her without any other advisor or choice. Any hint of doubt she may have experienced, as she looked him over earnestly, is by necessity erased due the force of her uncle’s sovereignty, and she immediately acknowledges Formator’s power over her as well as her willingness to comply. To underscore the men’s transfer of rule, Davys calls the period between Traffick’s departure and Formator’s arrival an “Interregnum.” This transmission of authority, the act of Alanthus occupying Amoranda’s uncle’s “place” becomes a focal point of Davys’s critique of, and the potentially corruptive nature of, male, patriarchal power that is also patrileneal. Repeatedly in the novel, Davys is careful to emphasize the exact nature of Formator/Alanthus and Amoranda’s relationship. From the introductory letter to Formator’s unveiling, he is clearly marked as Amoranda’s guardian—not as a suitor or lover. After he mistakenly reveals his identity—when Amoranda declares she has done with him first as guardian, or Formator, and secondly as a lover, or Alanthus—he asks her, “Did I not give you a letter from your Uncle’s own hand, to receive me as a Friend?”, to which she responds, “Yes, to receive you as a Guardian, not as a Lover; to receive you as Formator, not as Alanthus” (78). While this tension between mentor/guardian and lover may be lost on modern audiences, and one that would be increasingly romanticized in the nineteenth century, in the eighteenth-century the relationship would have been seen as incestuous.
The Guardian as Father and Incest in the Eighteenth Century

Victoria Joule cites *The Reform’d Coquet* as one of the earliest uses of the mentor figure turned lover/husband and sees Davys’s Formator as an innovation of character (35). Eleanor Wikborg asserts that the novel is “one of the earliest to preach the joys of a father figure’s validation of the heroine’s conformity to his teachings” (74) and further that novels such as *The Reform’d Coquet* emphasize “the deep satisfaction the heroine gains from her dependence on him, and the pleasure she takes in her future husband’s validation of her worth” (73). However, while Wikborg acknowledges the incestuous nature of guardian/lover relationships, she maintains that Davys created a positive fatherlike mentor/lover figure and thereby dismisses the incestuous overtones of their relationship (160). Given Amoranda’s repeated insistence on Formator’s guardianship—she highlights this role throughout the novel—it suggests that Davys wished to complicate both Alanthus as a character and the nature of his relationship with Amoranda and employs the art of disguise to challenge ethically his actions.

Incest and testamentary guardianship was not only an issue of great import to Davys but to many other female authors as well; it peppers the works of many of Davys’s contemporaries such as Manley, Haywood, Barker, and later authors such as Sarah Scott. To explain the pervasive interest in guardianship and incest, Ellen Pollack points to the shift that occurred during the Restoration due to “Charles II’s legal empowerment of private-property owning fathers through the institution of testamentary guardianship” (20). The change in guardianship law, particularly that of testamentary guardianship, reshaped the relationships between fathers and guardians and between guardians and
wards (87). In essence, after the implementation of testamentary guardianship during Charles II’s reign, a guardian became equated to a father, as opposed to the earlier model of a guardian as an acceptable potential future husband. Therefore, Pollak sees the figure of the incestuously abused female ward as a “highly charged cultural signifier” (20), one that is a recurrent when texts of the time period are examined, particularly those authored by women. The abused ward is so highly charged a signifier, in fact, that many times scenes of incest are also scenes of rape such as in Manley’s *New Atalantis* (1709) and Barker’s *Exilius* (1715).\(^{197}\) Pollak asserts that the novelists concerned with incest used these narratives “to expose women’s purely intermediary role in the dramas of masculine desire and privilege, highlighting the passive and merely secondary function of the female reproductive body in male economies of exchange” yet they simultaneously suggest the possibility of alternative models of desire and agency (20). Almost equally foregrounded in *The Reform’d Coquet* as the incestuous nature of Formator and Amoranda’s relationship is the role of contracts and agreements in regards to matrimony.

**Contractual Cheats**

Bound tightly to the narrative’s cultural insistence on courtship and marriage is male manipulation of contracts through their knowledge of the laws regarding the institution. In the first instance, Lord Lofty uses a written agreement to trick Altemira into parting with her virginity before they marry, which he never actually intends to do. He gives her a bond promising her ten thousand pounds if he should ever recede from his promise of marrying her and has it witnessed by two trustworthy servants. She questions
his need, or hers, for such a contract when he is free to marry whom he chooses, to which he promises she is in *Foro Conscientiae* his wife and deserves to know his secrets; a scorned and jealous lover is about to marry, and Lofty tells Altemira that they must wait a few days “to let the storm pass.” Moreover, while she is visiting his home, he produces a marriage license, which reaffirms his honest designs for her and reassures her that she is safe to stay the night, as the next morning they will wed. Predictably, the scheme is an orchestrated maneuver to take Altemira’s chastity as a trophy. Yet Lofty does not act alone; Altemira’s corrupt maid Kitty unlocks her bedroom door and allows Lofty to enter. When he requests his “Bridegroom’s privilege” to lie down with her, she considers all the firm engagements he proffered and believes in his eternal love. Afterwards, both Lofty and Kitty disappear, as does the contract that Altemira locked in her escritoire. Once again, Davys juxtaposes truth and fiction, the façade of the legal document and seeming iron-clad nature of contractual arrangements with the reality of they, too, being malleable by the men who create them and therefore dangerous—especially for the women of the novel. In addition to his debauchery and dishonesty, Amoranda flushes Lofty out as an elitist hypocrite. During a discussion of marriage, Amoranda quips, “I wonder your Lordship does not get the House of Lords to endeavor to repeal the Law of Marriage; Why should you Lawgivers impose upon other people, what you think improper to follow yourselves?” to which he answers, “there are politick reasons for what we do” (46), essentially declaring noblemen above the institution but a social device necessary for the masses. Deceiving the deceiver, Amoranda convinces Lofty to propose to her and then switches Altemira for herself at the wedding. This marks the only example in the novel
were a concealed identity works for moral purposes rather than manipulation or
corruption. While Lofty has no intention of righting his wrong, Amoranda tricks him into
correcting it, which thereby reclaims his character. While Bowden sees the marriage as a
punishment from Lofty’s point of view (xxviii), Amoranda’s contrivance actually seems
to “save” him given his admission after the reveal. After he discovers the truth he
declares, “I am pleased with what you have done; there is certainly a secret pleasure in
doing Justice, tho’ we often evade it, and a secret horror in doing ill, tho’ we often
comply with the temptation” (49). Davys also clearly shows Amoranda’s understanding
of the necessary steps toward a lawful and binding marriage. Amoranda comments upon
the canonical hours (which Lofty attempts to dismiss as true), the need of a license, and
the importance of Altemira using her own name in the ceremony. Perhaps these facts
were common knowledge, however, as Davys is very careful to detail Amoranda’s own
understanding of them, and the men’s consistent attempts to subvert the laws, it suggests
there was a real concern of women being deceived due to their ignorance of these simple
steps. Also, Amoranda and the other female characters very reluctantly side-step the
formal and conventional traditions that legitimized marriage after pressure from their
male lovers. Both Lofty and Alanthus are content to work outside of these respected
conventions; Lofty with his false contracts and Alanthus compels Amoranda to “forget
the Ceremony and Formality of a tedious Courtship” (71). Once again, Davys connects
the dots between Lofty’s more villainous deed to Alanthus’s, which raises the question of
degree rather than outright contrast.
Male Conspiracy and the Transference of Property

The collusion between E. Traffick and Alanthus places Amoranda in the intermediary role between male desires and goals, as Pollack suggests, yet Davys unfolds this position through a complex series of events. To begin the novel, Davys lauds the virtue of the merchant class, represented by Traffick, and decries the baseness of the “old” aristocracy, represented by Amoranda’s grandfather, who loses his wealth and property due to his “vicious inclinations.” Traffick, having made a fortune in trade, and who finds nothing “so despicable as Honour and Poverty join’d,” repurchases the whole of his family’s estate and thereby redeems the family’s “ancient” name and his older brother’s elite place in society. In an inversion of norms, Traffick bequeaths his estate to Amoranda creating an entirely independent woman of her upon her father’s death “not making the least reserve upon himself” (12). While this seems wildly forwarding-thinking, his liberal act becomes clouded by his machinations with Alanthus, which effectively retract Amoranda’s short-lived independence. Pollack comments that eighteenth-century stories about incest at times works to re-inscribe patriarchal norms, yet they also sometimes serve to critique those patriarchal structures and point towards possibilities for cultural change (19). Traffick’s abnormal bequeathal seems to lean towards these progressive possibilities until the whole scheme is unpacked and the story comes full circle to male-to-male inheritance. Rather than revealing Davys’s endorsement of patriarchy, this circularity—this transference of power and wealth from one male to another—demonstrates Davys deep and growing skepticism of cultural norms concerning male power and privilege. Davys further complicates this seemingly radical act with the
insertion of the conflated guardian/lover figure; after the near assault in the woods, Alanthus writes to Amoranda that he will negotiate her estate with Formator, or in other words Alanthus, as guardian and lover, will negotiate only with himself, sanctioned by her uncle in his first letter. Again, she is directed by Traffick to “let [Formator] in my stead interest himself in all of your Affairs” (24). Eleanor Wikborg identifies what she sees as a second, more skeptical tradition of the lover/mentor figure that follows Davys earlier tradition, one that is most fully represented by Haywood’s *The History of Miss Betsy Thoughtless* (1751), a tradition where the lover/mentor’s judgments are treated with greater doubt. The “didactic endorsements of his attempts to form—or reform—the heroine’s ‘thoughtlessness’ are juxtaposed with a critical scrutiny that draws attention to the selfish exercise of power that may lurk beneath the apparently responsible discharge of a mentor’s duties” (74). Wikborg reads *The Reform’d Coquet* to endorse strongly a domineering mentor/suitor; however, time and time again, Davys throws Alanthus’s words and actions into a less than favorable light, and certainly questions the ways in which he exercises—and chooses not to exercise—his power. In his offer to negotiate with himself for Amoranda’s fortune, he undermines her with a double cheat, and she is afforded only duplicitous counsel in her affairs, which would prove an extraordinary advantage as Amoranda’s wealth and property are considerable.

Moreover, the temptation to read Traffick as a benevolent and munificent uncle must be belied by the very events he allows to transpire and enables. Davys obfuscates Traffick’s integrity by his willingness to allow a virile young man to live unsupervised with a known young coquette, which reads especially questionable given the fact that all
of this can only be affected given the unadulterated deception of both men. Traffick, like many of Davys’s deficient fathers, creates an explosive situation as he, through neglect, allows her to become the coquette who must be “reformed.” After the death of her parents, Traffick leaves her in the country alone “open to all the Temptations that Youth, Beauty, Fortune, and flashy Wit could expose her to” (14). Although he has saved the family estate and made Amoranda a wealthy heiress, he neglects his most important duty, the education and protection of his ward. Lastly, Davys questions the uncle’s reliability in her very choice of names. As Bowden comments, Amoranda’s father and uncle do not share the same surname as the father carries the name Sir S—d, and the uncle, E. Traffick. While Bowden does not conjecture upon the meaning of this discrepancy, she remarks it as noteworthy, and as carefully crafted as the novel is, one must assume it serves a novelistic purpose. Davys predilection for double entendre throughout her career leads one to consider more closely the names of her characters. Bowden also remarks that the choice of “Traffick” is “a good allegorical name for a merchant” (232), and it must also be seen as keeping with the dramatic, and to a lesser extent, fictional, conventions of the time. Yet along with the obvious connection to trade and commerce, the verb “traffic” also possesses less than savory connotations. The OED cites additionally the late seventeenth-century (and into the mid-1800s) usage of the verb “traffic” to imply the sense of improper dealings as well as dealings of illicit and conspiratorial natures. So while his act of transferring property to his niece appears as a conferral of independence, it ultimately becomes a transient act that ends with his bosom friend righting this gender reversal by converging both property and woman into an act of dubious exchange. And as
the whole Formator/Alanthus ruse is unveiled, Davys carefully points to the problematic nature of combining such a deceptive exchange with a “union of love.”

When forced to explain his disguise, Alanthus offers Amoranda two reasons: the sage advice she “stood in need of would sound more natural, and be better received from an old mouth, than a young one” and he thought she would be “more open and free in declaring [her] sentiments of everything to [him]” (79). Initially, these motives have an altruistic ring to them—he wanted to curb her wild ways for her own benefit—however, his urge to mold her into the woman he desires rather than the woman she already is fuels the Formator scheme and is underpinned by the cowardliness of assuring himself of her sentiments before he courts her. On the use of disguise in eighteenth-century theater, Gollapudi asserts:

Characters in Restoration drama frequently use disguises and masquerade to fulfill their personal desires and agendas, displaying an instinctive consciousness of the power of manufactured facades. However, though strategic self-fashioning might facilitate the achievement of individual desires, it also engenders and endemic uneasiness about apparently sincere assertions. (23)

Davys casts doubt on Alanthus’s “charitable” motivations through his dubious actions, but she also likely uses contemporary dramatic conventions, and the readers’ knowledge of such conventions, to add an element of suspicion to his willingness to cheat Amoranda. Moreover the “coquettish” nature of Amoranda is quite innocent and has little to “reform”; she is a young lady who has a penchant for flirtation yet is nothing but a chaste heiress—in fact, she is too trusting and naïve.\(^{199}\) Any altruism becomes further erased by his methods of achieving his goal of reformation. Davys highlights his relentless methods as he shapes Amoranda’s mind to his own liking with “daily
application.” Amoranda later admits that she was “giddy and thoughtless” before Formator’s arrival, yet it must be remembered that she is only fifteen years old when he arrives. Her age alone virtually assures his ability to mold her personality and her inclinations, particularly when harsh and deceitful tactics are employed. Her youth and his influence as her guardian enables Alanthus to create in Amoranda the ideal mate, even at the expense of her mental well-being: as Formator and as Alanthus he bullies, torments, and harangues her.

**Formidable**

Just as Davys hints at the layered meanings of Traffick’s name, she too chooses a name for her guardian figure that allows for more than one reading. Again, the meaning of “form” in Formator is clear: “to mould by discipline or education” (*OED*), yet Davys adds a rather ominous insinuation to her construction of the whole—“Formator” does not strike one as a harmless or benign term. Indeed, it lies very close visually and aurally to the Latin *formidare*, or “formidable.” By her own admission, Davys did not speak any foreign languages, yet she obviously had at least a limited knowledge of Latin and French as she slips a phrase or two into almost every novel, and one cannot discount the possibility of a more scholarly (and classic) allusion in her naming of the mentor figure. Both Formator and Alanthus share this formidable quality as one of their core traits, one that escalates in intensity until the grotesque attempted rape scene. To initially reveal this attribute, Davys begins with Formator lecturing Amoranda on her “misfortune” of having the freedom to choose her company. At the end of the lengthy tirade concerning the
“vermin” with whom she has surrounded herself, “Tears stood in her eyes, and she was just going to beg he wou’d have done, when the Bell rung for Dinner, and put a stop to what remain’d; she was never so lectured in her Life before, however, she told herself in her own Breast, that every Word he said was true” (30). He insults her character and her integrity yet his guardian-sanctioned intimidation moves her to see the errors of her coquettish ways and sparks her transformation. This lecture proves the first step toward her reform and toward Alanthus’s eventual domination over her. After she admits to loving Alanthus, Formator again uses “her cruelly” by telling her Traffick has already chosen her husband, implying it to be another man. He allows this charade to continue until he again brings her to tears. Yet he does not save this malicious streak for Amoranda alone; Davys juxtaposes Formator’s cruelty to Amoranda’s humanity thereby magnifying the fault. After Callid and Froth kill one another in the duel,

[Amoranda’s] tender Heart felt a great deal of pity for the tragical Catastrophe. But Formator told her, he thought she ought rather to rejoice, if she had a sense of a Fellow-Creature’s Sufferings; for said he, when a Man has out-lived his Fortune, Friends, his next Relief is the Grave. (33)

This mirrors the events following the attempted rape by Biranthus, when they discuss the fates of the corrupt servants. Formator stringently demands that they “swing for example,” and while Amoranda sees the “justice” of a death sentence, she is “not willing to take their Lives” as “a little Clemency may reclaim them” (65). Predictably, under the pressure of her guardian, Amoranda capitulates and allows the men to hang. When Amoranda meets an appropriate and respectable suitor while visiting another house, Formator demands that they leave the house immediately, to which Amoranda consents because she knows it is in “vain to deny.” As the narrative unfolds, Davys makes clear
that Amoranda’s transformation owes much to Formator’s manipulation of her fears and the perpetual state of terror in which Amoranda exists; “Poor Amoranda had been so lately in jeopardy, that she was now afraid of everybody, and durst do nothing without Formator” (34). Employing a combination of shame and fear, Formator transforms Amoranda into a dependent potential wife.

The Power of Fear and Violence

When he drops the guise of Formator and appears as Alanthus the most glaring fissures of his character appear. After Amoranda is betrothed to Alanthus, and there is no further need for his masquerade, Alanthus nevertheless continues to torment her first with his disappearance and then by writing to her that, quite ill, he is confined to his bed. This episode in no way furthers the plot or narrative; it does, however, allow Amoranda to question his character, his brutal behavior, and his selfish brand of love. During her examination of Alanthus during the discovery of the disguise, she reproves him:

I have another piece of cruelty to lay to your charge, my Lord; Since you had by your disguise found out my weakness, and knew I had a value for you, why did you send me word you were in a dangerous state of Health, when at the same time you had no indisposition, but what preceded from your Mind, in giving me pain when you had none yourself? (81)

As telling as this rebuke from Amoranda proves, Alanthus’s response proves even more so, when he admits it was essentially an act of sadism, as “it was not possible for me to deny my self the exquisite pleasure I knew your kind Concern would give me” (81). Yet Davys constructs the most profound example of Alanthus’s inhumanity in an undeniably complex manner with the threat of extreme violence from an outsider.
In the climax of the novel, the rape scene involving Biranthus, Alanthus allows the events to escalate to such a degree that one woman dies and Amoranda is left severely traumatized. Although Davys’s previous novels include violence against women, this scene foreshadows the morbid tone for her last, and darkest novel, *The Accomplish’d Rake* (1727), with its extreme levels of brutality. And while there is the sense of real cultural anxiety regarding the ways in which men use violence against women as a tool and a weapon, Davys also uses the scene as a lens through which to read Alanthus’s integrity. Alanthus later reveals that he watched the whole but still permits the action to reach such a horrific level. When Alanthus, a “stranger” appears, he interrupts the scene only to then abandon Amoranda. She chases him and his servants and “with Prayers and Tears implored their Pity,” yet they ride off in spite of her desperate pleadings, leaving her with a savage rapist. At the height of despair, she wails and rips out her hair until Biranthus drags her back to his cousin’s corpse, where he plans to gang rape Amoranda with her male servant. Moreover, before he deserts her, Alanthus blames Amoranda for the situation in which she finds herself, calling her a self-willed, head-strong lady, who left the “Care of a tender Father.” Alanthus establishes for Amoranda the absolute impracticality and danger of independence for women; by ignoring Formator’s advice to stay at home, she almost loses her chastity and her life for indulging in an afternoon picnic. Sheer and abject terror provides a tool for Alanthus to effectively break a good-natured young woman from any thoughts of self-determination and prove to her that she must have the (masculine) protection of either a husband or guardian safely to navigate the world. Indeed, the manipulation of the fear of rape proves a well-worn trope in
literature; Susan Staves foregrounds the ways in which this fear has been historically used and represented to limit the behavior of women, real and fictional (“Comedy” 88), a pattern that escalates in Davys’s novels. The force of the threat of rape is most palpably felt in the brutality of the actual event, but Davys also punctuates it with Alanthus’s later admissions. When Amoranda questions Alanthus as to the reasons he left her, he tells her
he did so to

cure [her] at once of rambling with Strangers. . . . I knew it would give you a double terror, to see a prospect of relief, then find yourself abandon’d; and I likewise knew, the greater your fear was then, the greater your care would be for the future, to avoid such enterprizes. (80)

Not only does he ensure that Amoranda will become his wife through his double dealings with her uncle and his tactics of fear but will also become a wife who knows the consequences of any indiscretion—even if it be accidental—or of acting without his approval. Increasingly throughout the novel, he secures his power through the threat of violence and terror, all the while these methods are total unnecessary as he already has the blessing of her uncle and his own authority of a guardian. Paradoxically, although he tortures her with the dread of rape and death, Amoranda loves him as her deliverer. Not only does she contemplate his very existence as an ideal man, she also calls him “too God-like to be an inhabitant of this world.” With such a progression, Davys plays into the time-honored tradition of the saved damsel formerly in distress falling for her “hero,” often following a scene of near violence. Staves argues the “near” violence proves important, and she highlights the difference between attempted rape and the actual act, claiming that a rape, rather than an attempted one, occurring within a text would challenge patriarchal ideology “according to which men were protectors of women,
especially good women” (105). On the surface, it seems that The Reform’d Coquet adheres to this formula were it not for the extremely gruesome details of the attempted rape as well as the doubt Davys must have planted in the readers’ minds when Alanthus sallies away from the ravisher. So while Alanthus does, in the end, protect the good woman, he does so in a very unsettling way, one that paradoxically encapsulates an ideology where a man’s stated duty is to protect the weaker sex yet affords him the choice of whether to do so or not.

The Grotesque

As with rape, Davys’s use of the grotesque proves another complex trope in the novel. As with her manipulation of the reality and deception of disguise, the grotesque initially seems to function as a vessel for female power—or to express the possibility of such power—yet then sharply veers to become a revelatory device for exposing the underlying natures of the male characters. For this opening scene of the grotesque, it appears at first glance that Davys crafts a moment that imbues the female sex with power by proxy, as “women” physically overcome some very depraved and dangerous men. Again, the scene in which Formator and Amoranda’s servant disguise themselves as women is glossed as comedic, with two ladies beating and dominating two young men, which would likely give many readers a good chuckle. Terry Castle argues that a masquerade episode precipitates a comic plot, even though on the surface the event seems to being leading to disastrous consequences as a temporary “plunge into enigma and difficulty” yet ultimately ends with the realization of the characters’ comedic destiny

179
Here, too, the masquerade episode adds to the comedy—not only does Davys picture a woman beating a man, but for the moment, she leads her readers to believe it is an old man dressed as a woman besting two virile young men. However, instead of the masquerade precipitating the comic plot, it affirms that the narrative has already entered the confused realm of comedy. For a moment, Formator’s cross-dressing appears to invert the power dynamics, whereby his masculine supremacy transmits to the other, to the female. Instead of “absorbing and naturalizing the power” of the other (Munns and Richards 27), Formator’s cross-dressing seems to generate a transference of power. Amoranda’s preceding offer of protecting Formator in the battle sparks this idea, and Formator’s willingness to pose as Amoranda supports this sense of transferal. The instance involves Callid and Froth, suitors to Amoranda, who intend to be rapists and abductors when their courtships fail. It also marks an early pivotal scene in the novel as it establishes one of the recurring, and unique, patterns Davys creates. Callid and Froth recognize that Amoranda has no intentions of marrying either of them and so they discuss how her fortune, and not her person, are the prize they seek as both men have allowed their estates to “sink.” They conspire to abduct her from her summerhouse and force her to marry one of the two so they may split her estate or, at the very least, receive a handsome ransom to release her. Learning of the plan, Amoranda plans a counterattack with two of her footmen dressed as herself and Jenny to sabotage their plan. Formator asks to “personate” Amoranda; she questions his ability to “show his Prowess,” and offers to invert custom to save him if he be worsted. With this conversation, Davys sets the comedic stage and the fitting gender bending that follows. Indeed, Formator’s
exemplifies his grotesque prowess as “the two Ladies laid on so unmercifully, that [Callid and Froth] began to cry Quarter and beg for Mercy” (32). However, although Davys clearly intends to affect the comedic sequence with surprise and mistaken identity, the context and outcome of the episode ultimately denies any comedy or mirth.

Immediately, Callid and Froth’s abusive natures and cowardice surface, as without “regard for Sex or Quality” they draw their swords on the ladies (who, while they have cudgels, are without steel—in essence unarmed), which they would not have attempted but that they thought their “Antagonist a Woman” (32). Furthermore, when the suitors are bested, Callid admits that he would have had “a glorious revenge” in brutally ravishing Amoranda. In one stroke, Davys unveils the dark and beastly intentions of which noblemen are capable and additionally that the actions of the nobility are, in Davys’s world, base to the point of wickedness. In fact, in her novels, the elite prove far more dangerous—especially for women—than the merchant class and more particularly the working class, who are only corrupt due to the actions of, and usually after bribes from, the “noble.” And although Davys seems to mock Callid and Froth’s tragic ending, wherein they kill one another in a duel, and certainly one feels they have, in some measure, received their just desserts, it is apparent throughout her writing she believes duels to be immoral, and so their demise is not only unnecessary it also exposes a fatal flaw of the English society’s construction of a “gentleman.” Here, Davys uses the comedic to reveal the seriousness and very real consequences of their act. Importantly, in “The Comedy of Attempted Rape,” Staves asserts that because Fielding’s fictions are comic, his would-be rapists receive minimal punishments, at most a box on the ears
(104). By contrast, all of Davys’s would-be rapists are punished in the most severe fashion—with death. Moreover, the depravity of Callid and Froth mirrors that of Formator’s, and his willingness to exploit the grotesque exposes his own depravity that will also later come to light.

However, while Davys ridicules Callid and Froth, Formator shares in none of the humiliation the suitors face and is never the object of ridicule—Davys focuses all of her ire on Callid and Froth. Their disgrace comes four-fold; firstly in believing they are being bested by two women, secondly in their drawing weapons on unarmed women, thirdly in discovering they have really been bested by an “old man,” and lastly through their ignoble deaths. Throughout these levels of dishonor, Davys mocks and scorns the would-be assailants, shaming them throughout the encounter. Conversely, Formator receives no share of shame for his “frolick to sit in Masquerade” (32) but is lauded as a hero. Castle asserts masquerade costumes function at deeper levels than simply that of fantasy or allusion. They also create an act of homage to “otherness itself” and allow for the embracing of the unfamiliar (61-2), which initially, Formator’s grotesque seems to do. However, through Formator’s willingness to transgress gender and age boundaries, Davys creates an elaborate smokescreen. As opposed to Formator embracing the unfamiliar, his real intention is to control the other, the “unfamiliar” female, in every aspect. It must be remembered that Formator states his goal is to “rid the House of Caterpillars,” two of whom are Froth and Callid; to the point of gleefully contemplating their demises, Formator intends to stop any competing suitors at any cost. Elizabeth Hunt maintains the “hysterical discourse” surrounding the grotesque female body “reflects
cultural anxieties about the dangerous invasion of interest and desires coded as ‘feminine’” (92), yet Davys inverts the use of the grotesque so that it reflects the anxiety surrounding and the danger of masculine interests and desires. So while Davys paints a humorous veneer over the event, the intentions of all the men involved are deadly serious. By using the grotesque at such a moment, a moment where two men attempt to rape a young fifteen year-old virgin, Davys taints the comedy by establishing the basic plot of the passage as one of fear and violence. As a perversion and distortion of nature, Formator’s readiness to violate gender codes signals flaws that Davys will later reveal in another attempted rape of Amoranda.

The Depths of Depravity

In a complete inversion of plot from the first instance of the grotesque, wherein the savior wears a dress, in the next climactic scene, the would-be rapist dons the frock. Equaled in Davys’s work only by the depravity of the rape of Nancy Friendly in The Accomplish’d Rake, the passage containing Biranthus’s intended rape of Amoranda exemplifies Davys’s bleak contemplations on the darkness of human nature, which will intensify in her next novel. Unlike the previous example involving Callid and Froth, where Davys injects elements of humor as a surface for the grotesque episode, here she offers nothing but ugliness and the morally distorted. Because Biranthus is unsuccessful in his attempt, some may read this as Davys’s effort to maintain the comedic gloss. Staves claims attempted rape to be a “natural topos of comedy” due to the nature of the unsuccessful assailants, who “huff and puff with all their might and main but only give
themselves coughing fits and never actually blow the house down and are silly villains who do no real harm” (87). And while Biranthus’s attempt affects no bodily harm, there is absolutely no sense that Davys treats his character or his attempt as silly or harmless. Instead, she infuses the whole with a keen sense of terror and dread—even though the reader strongly suspects Amoranda will be saved, the ominous tone and the soul-wrenching pleas from Amoranda effectively erase the comic. Importantly, not only is this the most morbid section of the novel, it is also the longest, underscoring the importance of the passage, which creates not only a climax of plot and allows the “real” Alanthus to enter the story, but this idea of a meticulously planned rape will also become Davys’s focal point in her next novel. Here, the grotesque does not imply the influence of comedy, nor is it an example of the bizarre, extravagant, or ridiculous of the Restoration grotesque (Clayborough 5), nor does it possess even the façade of humor. Rather it functions as a signifier of the absolutely horrific and degenerate levels to which debased men allow themselves to descend, the men themselves a signifier of the perversion of truth and nature.

Galt Harpham foregrounds the grotesque’s ability to arrest our attention and challenge our understanding, both of which Davys accomplishes with this extraordinarily elaborate passage. Additionally, the grotesque signifies the “travesty of polite culture” (Hunt 100), and in The Reform’d Coquet each episode involving disguise indicates an escalation in the level of danger Amoranda faces due to the plummeting level of morality of each progressive suitor. Whereas Lord Lofty is represented as a manipulator and rake, and Froth and Callid are depicted as “Fops and Fools,” albeit treacherous ones, Formator
recognizes, even before he realizes the masquerade, that Amoranda is faced with the greatest ruin when the two “ladies,” Arentia and “Berintha,” who is actually Biranthus, come to visit. Along with Formator’s foreboding premonitions, and before the dissolute act of attempted rape, Davys once again foreshadows and builds up to the event, imbuing the text with significant hints of what is to come. Before he and Arentia arrive, and before his use of the grotesque, Biranthus attempts to abduct Amoranda by simple concealment—that of a mask—and in his masculine and “natural” form, and he is completely impotent and unsuccessful in his design; yet by transgressing gender boundaries, he moves very close to attaining Amoranda in the most violent of ways. He owes his initial ill success to Formator’s ability to fight off the masked villains and Amoranda escapes safely, and the scene serves to raise readers’ suspicions when “Berintha” appears two pages later. Also, similarly to Nancy Friendly’s rape, the later attempt on Amoranda is comprised of a bizarre plot that leads to the culminating act. One of the relatively few female villains in Davys’s fiction, Arentia, a favorite childhood friend of Amoranda, enables all of the events to transpire. She arrives at Amoranda’s home for a visit and brings a female companion with her, and Amoranda is exceedingly pleased to have female company. What begins as a visit, however, turns into a homophobic tongue lashing, which then intensifies to a grotesque scene of rape. At first, Formator believes Berintha to be a woman, and her unnatural affection towards Amoranda causes him to believe Amoranda to be in the most moral and mortal danger thus far, even when weighed against the two previous attempted rapes and abductions. And while Amoranda refuses to believe Formator’s succeeding claims that Berintha is a
man, disgusted at Berintha’s perverted affection, she declares, “Kisses from our own Sex, and other Women’s Husbands, are the most insipid things in nature” (54). Davys portrays same sex affection as another form of a grotesque, thereby, she cloaks the truly grotesque within the appearance of another grotesque; one grotesque concealing another in the same dress.

Also within this passage, Amoranda commits her greatest fault in Formator’s eyes. As he has already warned her of Berintha’s true sex, he tells her that she should not go on a river excursion with the two. Amoranda rejoins that she will have the protection of her servants, and secondly, that even if Berintha is Biranthus, he is “neither devil nor monster” and would do nothing so wicked as Formator imagines. Just as Amoranda failed to read Lord Lofty’s intentions correctly, she does so again with Biranthus, and more importantly, she fails to read the warning signal of a grotesque person. Significantly, although Formator believes her to face grave danger, he refuses to accompany the trio. Obviously, this allows the plot to move in substantial ways; Alanthus makes his first undisguised entrance into the narrative, as well as the crucial attempted rape, which leads not only to Amoranda’s admiration of Alanthus, but it also presents the first tangible moment where the reader begins to question both Formator’s logic as well as his motives. Throughout the novel, Davys plays with this act of concealment and revelation as she suggests numerous times Formator’s true identity and the improper nature of his relationship with Amoranda as a suitor in guardian’s clothing, and this scene marks the breaking down of the subterfuge to begin the revelatory phase of the novel. What is more,
in this central scene of Alanthus’s introduction into the novel, Davys conflates Berintha/Biranthus with Formator/Alanthus.

When Arentia unveils Berintha’s true identity as Biranthus, Amoranda remonstrates:

If your friend Berintha be a Man of Fortune and Honour as you say he is, why has he used clandestine means to get into my Company? . . . Had you come like a Gentleman, as such I would have received you; but a disguised Lover is always conscious of some demerit, and dares not trust his right Form, till by false appearance he tries the Lady: if he finds her weak and yielding, the day’s his own, and he goes off in triumph; but if she has the Courage to baffle the Fool, he sneaks away with his disappointment, and thinks no one will know anything of the matter. (57)

After this speech, Biranthus endeavors to “disguise his Mind as well as his Body,” and attempts to bring Amoranda to comply with marriage. When she refuses, he threatens her with force and employs her own servants to complete his plan. Davys is careful to detail the fastidious planning that comprises Biranthus’s strategy, who foresees that if she failed to capitulate he would violate her, and, therefore, Davys conflates a planned rape and a planned seduction, where the outcome would be analogous—Biranthus would dominate her person. In addition to charting a river trip in a secluded area, bribing her servants, landing where he knew there would be an ideal spot for rape, traveling in “intricate ways” through the woods to avoid being discovered, and arranging to have horses waiting to take them to the intended location of the rape, he designs an extremely morbid and gruesome punishment for her if and when she declines his generous offers of marriage. As she does in The Cousins with Leonora’s reaction to her husband’s suicide, Davys constructs a scene of wrenching anguish, in which Davys admits the level of rage, despair, and grief Amoranda must feel defies adequate expression. When she realizes the
seriousness of the situation, Amoranda laments, “Why has Nature denied us Strength to
revenge our own Wrongs? And why does Heaven abandon and forsake the Innocent?”
(59) These questions mark one of the central points of the passage, questions that evade
an answer or explanation. When he again offers to marry instead of raping her, she
declares she would rather be tortured than ever consent to be his wife. Similarly to Callid
and Froth naming rape a “glorious revenge,” here both Amoranda and Biranthus
acknowledge that rape is a form of torture and punishment for women. Not only does
Biranthus outline his plans to violate her, he describes how he will make a base act even
more abominable—her servant will hold her down while Biranthus rapes her and,
afterwards, her servant will have the “assistance” of Biranthus’s arm while her man
repeats the offence. Not only must Amoranda be debased by a gentleman, she will face
the added taint of being violated by an inferior. Again underscoring male sadism, after
Alanthus refuses to aid her escape, Biranthus plans to rape Amoranda next to his cousin’s
corpse. While rape proves a ubiquitous theme in eighteenth-century literature, the level of
detail and sheer blackness of Davys’s design stands apart from other examples in fiction
and in drama.204 On the surface, the motive behind Biranthus’s grotesque differs wildly
from Formator’s in that rape makes up the bitter end of his plan, and Formator intends to
protect his future bride by cross-dressing. However, Biranthus’s ideal goal is also to
marry Amoranda, and Formator’s goal is to transform a happily unwed young lady into
his legal possession—also his wife. So the real difference, then, lies in degree rather than
stark contrast as well as an increase in plot tension. Along with Amoranda’s comment
concerning disguised lovers, Davys gives many parallels between the men, their actions,
and their motives, particularly in the grotesque, that lead the reader to question the previous events and to look beneath the disguise of Formator and his supposed honorable intentions. When Alanthus finally sheds his costume and appears as himself, he is at his cruelest and exploits Amoranda’s horrifying situation, making it a silent and corrective threat. Given the escalating intensity and menacing behavior of the suitors as the plot matures, and Alanthus being the last suitor introduced, Davys suggests that that which is hidden from view to be the most treacherous and throws the “happy ending” of Amoranda’s marriage into serious question. Furthermore, Davys implies that men especially have the ability to manipulate, hide, and transform “truth” into a more palatable fiction, which is merely artifice, and which causes the severe detriment of women.

Fiction is better than Reality and the Impossible Companionate Marriage

At the end of the novel, when all is unveiled, Davys provides her readers with the requisite marriage of love fiction and comedy. However, the novel implies the question for whom this ending is “happy”; perhaps not so happy for the young, and no longer independent lady involved. Moreover, there is a strong sense that it was Formator, and not Alanthus, who proved to be a desirable character. Amoranda asks Alanthus to don the costume one last time as “methinks I grieve myself, I have lost the good old Man” (79). The old maid Maria, the cleverest character of the novel, and also a woman who has eschewed marriage completely, summarizes the situation the most succinctly and astutely when she notes of Formator, “’Tis a pity such a good character should be a fictitious one”
Davys works on two levels throughout the novel; the surface of love fiction and reform comedy that allows Alanthus to be the heroic lover of the tale, and the other where Amoranda’s loss of self is a tragic ending of dependence and silence, one that questions the possibility of companionate marriage in a society comprised without equals and one willing to victimize half of its members. As Ballaster notes of Eliza Haywood’s fiction, she infuses her texts with a “profound melancholia and pessimism” and presents a “very melancholy view of heterosexual romance” (175). Davys instills in *The Reform’d Coquet*, like Haywood, a deep skepticism of marriage and courtship, but uses a great deal of skill in keeping that cynicism submerged in the depths of the narrative. It is ironic that in creating a new tradition of the mentor/lover figure in prose fiction, a figure who Davys used to highlight the potential abuses of patriarchy, she created a character who would become central to romantic fiction in the nineteenth century. Perhaps, this stems from the Davys’s twofold narrative, which allowed readers to ignore any hints of protest or critique. However, while she does effectively mask her own pessimism of patriarchy, male power, and matrimony in *The Reform’d Coquet*, she completely demonstrates all of her dark fears concerning male privilege and marriage in *The Accomplish’d Rake*. 
Chapter Seven

*The Accomplish’d Rake* (1727): The Ravages of a Rape Culture

As her last known published novel, the *The Accomplish’d Rake* (1727) is a fitting conclusion to Davys’s *oeuvre*. In the novel, Davys intensifies all of the issues and themes that have been percolating in her work from *The Cousins* onward and punctuates her career with an extremely chilling final commentary regarding aristocratic male privilege. Scholars largely consider *The Accomplish’d Rake* to be the sequel, or companion novel, to *The Reform’d Coquet*, one concentrating upon a lady’s foibles and the other on a gentleman’s vices. Both novels share similar structures and trace the experiences of an aristocratic young woman and young man in early eighteenth-century England. However, Davys vastly contrasts the lives of Sir John and Amoranda and thereby juxtaposes male and female existence rather than creating complementary pieces. Whereas *The Reform’d Coquet* evinces Davys’s growing cynicism of the culture in which she lived and its pervasive inequality, *The Accomplish’d Rake* illustrates the nadir of Davys’s bleak perspective on English society. Davys’s last fictional world includes multiple drugged rapes, venereal disease as a weapon of revenge, and men who treat women, quite literally, as the prey of society.
While Davys outlines the prescribed path of courtship and marriage for a young woman in *The Reform'd Coquet*, she defines the early years of a gentleman’s manhood as ones of debauchery and licentious revelry in *The Accomplish’d Rake*; years spent avoiding the wedlock insisted upon for their female counterparts. Although *The Accomplish’d Rake* mimics the structure of *The Reform’d Coquet*, Davys highlights the lack of necessity for gentlemen to reform; whereas *The Reform’d Coquet* depicts the absolute need for women to conform to male desire in order to be both accepted by society as well as to find a husband, her last novel illustrates the freedom men have to act with impunity. Immediately, Davys establishes this disparity in her titles: the coquette is reformed, the rake is accomplished. *The Accomplish’d Rake* shares the contemporary concerns revolving around aristocratic decadence, illustrated in such publications as *The Spectator* and the *Tatler*, but delves beyond the discussion of poor manners into the degraded and depraved world of the overly-indulged elite and underscores the destruction of which they are capable and the cultural immunity they enjoy as noblemen. Although Sir John is the focal point and protagonist of the novel, by tracing the wake of his rakish and his abusive behavior enabled by his privilege, Davys directs the concern and sympathy of the novel towards the female victims of the novel. Moreover, by emphasizing the extraordinary predatory nature of aristocratic men and the public and private consequences such behavior ensures for the women around them, *The Accomplish’d Rake* is Davys’s boldest critique. In her last novel, Davys sheds almost all of the humor with which she penned her novels to present a very desperate reality for England’s women.
Moral Reform Comedy

As she does in The Reform’d Coquet, Davys also appropriates the skeletal structure of moral reform comedy in The Accomplish’d Rake in order to assess critically the world in which she lived and manipulates its formal traditions in order to challenge contemporary cultural conventions. Catering to the enormous popular interest in reform in the eighteenth century, Davys, as she did with The Fugitive, Familiar Letters, and The Reform’d Coquet, attempts to capitalize on market trends. However, unlike her other novels, Davys sustains many of the traditions of the reform genre for much of the novel. Largely thought to begin with Colley Cibber’s Love’s Last Shift (1696), the genre of moral reform concentrates on aristocratic leisure and vice and attempts to replace it with the more temperate middling-class values (Gollapudi 3). Adhering to this model, one of Davys’s primary goals in The Accomplish’d Rake is to anathematize aristocratic values, and following Cibber’s lead, Davys too treats vice as a predominantly aristocratic activity, a poison particular to the wealthy. As in The Reform’d Coquet, Davys conveys her deep mistrust of the social and governmental institutions that controlled women’s lives but shifts her focus from the many contractual and property related issues to the more brutal and physical aspects of control and power. Whereas The Reform’d Coquet concentrates on the reformation of manners, The Accomplish’d Rake calls attention to more serious moral concerns and the aftereffects of Sir John’s behavior. Deepening the contrast between the two texts, Davys frames each of the protagonists in a much different light. In the case of Amoranda, Davys creates a true reform comedy protagonist, one who is depicted “not as sinful, innately foolish, or incorrigibly wicked, but as misguided”
(Gollapudi 6). As for Sir John, on the other hand, Davys fashions in him a character completely horrific, a protagonist who lives beyond the scope of reformation, who intensifies Alexander Pope’s notion of the “treach’rous Friend the daring Spark,” and who truly embodies Pope’s warning “Beware of all, but most beware of Man!” Davys introduces the notion of moral reform only to destabilize it at the close of the novel by questioning the genuineness of Sir John’s repentance. By undermining the authenticity of his reform, Davys thereby challenges the ability of the genre to effect actual moral reclamation as well. In this, Davys was not alone in her interrogations of the irredeemable protagonist and moral reform comedy’s ability to effectively transmit lessons in virtue. Aparna Gollapudi cites John Vanbrugh’s early incredulity regarding the possibility of moral restoration made most evident in his sequel to Cibber’s *Love’s Last Shift, The Relapse* (1696), wherein he “scoffs at Loveless’s pious reform” (21) and depicts him as an lifelong and irredeemable rake. Gollapudi also names George Farquhar and Susanna Centlivre as dramatic authors who exploited the “popularity of the reform genre only to simultaneously subvert it by challenging the efficacy of performance and theatricality as a tool of reform” (43). However, Davys’s subversive use of the reform plot does not translate into a general disavowal of the social concerns and cultural values at the heart of the genre. More accurately, she disputes the ability of a man born into a system of advantage—a system that allows wealthy men to act in horrific ways with impunity—as one who is capable of reform. To counter Sir John’s dissolution, Davys provides the voice of the morality in the character of Mr. Friendly.
Unusual to moral reform comedy, Davys does not use the cultural trend of the “cult of womanhood” as the catalyst for change as did Cibber, Farquhar, and Centlivre. In *Love’s Last Shift*, Amanda’s speech awakens Loveless’s “horror and remorse” over his past actions and is a typical scene of conversion, yet Davys chooses a much different impetus for the moment of reformation. Rather than drawing upon the growing belief in a woman’s influence as a civilizing and humanizing force, Davys employs a male character to spark Sir John’s reclamation in the pitiable father figure of Mr. Friendly. By giving Mr. Friendly this capacity, Davys appears to erase what little cultural power women were afforded in the early eighteenth century. However, one must consider that fictional representations of women as a corrective two-dimensional presence, capable of being merely saints or saviors, victims or prey, translates not into real power or influence but into a diminished and simplified version of the sex, of which Davys seems keenly aware. Moreover, to exploit the role of women as the measuring rods for morality would lessen greatly the complexity of her depictions (and cultural perceptions) of women and would turn Nancy Friendly into a pathetic and beseeching—rather than angry and disdainful—victim of rape, which would also minimize the brutality of her victimization and rape in general. However, Davys complicates the male character as the agent for transformation as well.

**The Infirm Voice of Morality**

For the role of the honorable aristocrat—once again taking inspiration from the stage—Davys appropriates one of Cibber’s characters from *The Lady’s Last Stake*
(1707), wherein Cibber also employs a virtuous friend for the task of reformer. However, while Cibber’s Sir Moral Friendly uses the “soft and gentle interposition of a profess’d friend” and proves successful with such an approach—especially as it is carried out with good humor (Gollapudi 10), Davys’s mouthpiece of moral reform is equipped with a much different constitution. Indeed, Davys’s Mr. Friendly is also a well-bred gentleman and begins the novel with good humor and “soft” intercessions regarding Sir John’s profligate ways. However, at the climactic moment of Sir John’s conversion, Mr. Friendly is a broken man, teetering on the edge of death. Mr. Friendly’s pathetic state elicits the sentimental response from Sir John, which leads to his questionable proclamation of repentance. After returning home after four years of debauchery and at his mother’s behest, Sir John visits the Friendlys’ estate. Sir John sees Mr. Friendly for the first time and his looks are so altered, that Sir John:

Conscious of the Cause, beheld him as well with a Pitying, as a Guilty Eye; he saw a Man, once Happy in his Family and Fortune, Reduced to the utmost Disquietudes, and laid under the Heavy Pressures of continu’d Uneasiness; he observ’d his Eyes grown languid, his Cheeks pale and thin, the whole Man wasted, lean and old with Trouble; when at the same Time he was forced to Reproach himself, and secretly say—Ah! Galliard! Thou art the Cause of it all. (221)

Willfully disregarding Sir John’s hand in his tragedy, Mr. Friendly welcomes Sir John and gives him a speech regarding all he has lost and his wishes for Sir John’s future blessings. Then:

These words were succeeded by a pretty long Silence, and some Tears on both Sides, when Sir John raising his Eyes from the Ground, found a sudden Alteration on his Breast, Honour, Pity, Gratitude, and every Noble Passion of the Mind, had seiz’d the whole Man, as if they had combin’d by Force of arms to rescue his Soul from all their own Opposites. (222)
This passage exhibits the undeniable hallmarks of the sentimental, which was essential to proving the earnestness and sincerity of a character’s reform on the stage. In *The Accomplish’d Rake*, the moral sincerity of the moment is “signaled by tears, tenderness and impassioned language” as with its dramatic counterparts (Gollapudi 40). Yet while this denouement seems to impart Sir John’s heartfelt desire to transform himself, the novel’s close throws immense doubt on his ability to keep to the straight and narrow. In this, Davys shares Vanbrugh’s skepticism for true regeneration yet leaves the certainty of Sir John’s future degeneration in flux; while Vanbrugh shows Loveless unequivocally reverting to his previous licentious habits in *The Relapse*, Davys strongly suggests, yet does not confirm, that Sir John will relapse. Given the deliberately uncertain ending, one questions whether Davys was, like Cibber in his epilogue to *Love’s Last Shift*, trying to please a large variety of cultural palates, or, like Farquhar and Centlivre, was attempting to express her doubts for the efficacy of prose fiction to be able to provide a vehicle for moral reform. Of the two crucial elements structuring moral comedy, the ‘well-wrought scene’ and its ‘prevailing force’ on the audience, Davys undermines both with the narrator’s dubious closing remarks concerning Sir John’s debatable sincerity; Davys’s largest departure from the formal conventions of the genre.

**Additional Connections and Disparities between The Reform’d Coquet and The Accomplish’d Rake**

As with her use of the reform plot and the titles of her last two original novels, Davys creates additional parallelisms for the two novels in her dedications. She dedicates
The Reform’d Coquet to “The Ladies of Great Britain” and The Accomplish’d Rake to “The Beaus of Great Britain.” Immediately, one notes that while she establishes a connection between the two, she does not dedicate The Accomplish’d Rake to the ladies counterpart, the gentlemen of Great Britain, but, rather, to the “The Beaus,” in which Davys points to the larger concerns of the novel: the dearth of good (gentle)men, whether beau or rake. Davys also creates disparate dedications; in The Reform’d Coquet, her tone is light yet earnest, and in The Accomplish’d Rake she ridicules many types of men, ending with very insincere wishes for their future happiness. Furthermore, her disingenuous dedication forces one to consider for whom Davys was writing. It is doubtful that she believed her novel would affect sweeping change amongst the aristocracy; more probably she wrote to stress the social ills affecting women, possibly as a warning to a female audience. Perhaps she simply wanted to voice her serious concerns facing English society. Whatever her reasons may have been, The Accomplish’d Rake was Davys’s only text to make its focal point a male character or to be dedicated to a man or men.

Also analogous to both novels, Davys begins each with loss; Amoranda’s parents both pass away as does Sir John’s venerated father. Due to these losses, both adolescents fall into unbecoming patterns of behavior, and this arc of the weak or absent father may be traced throughout Davys’s oeuvre, from The Cousins to The Accomplish’d Rake. Although Davys initially describes Sir John’s father as “wise and prudent,” she goes on to highlight his overindulgent tolerance of his wife, whom he looks upon as a “sick child,” one whom he humors while “winking” at her follies, so that one questions
Davys’s opening assessment of him as a wise and prudent man. Indeed, he so desperately desires Lady Galliard’s ever-lasting affection and so anxiously fears her death-bed rejection that he chooses not to protect his children from her “folly” when facing imminent death; instead he “determined to do nothing with his latest Breath that should give [his wife] the least Indifference for his Loss” (128). Here, Davys’s macabre humor and sarcasm surfaces; while on his deathbed, Sir John’s father directs him to “marry a Woman of Virtue,” and after drawing his last breath, Davys remarks “in him died a worthy Patriot, a tender Husband, and a careful Father” (128). In the previous paragraphs, Davys carefully demonstrates that he was anything but a careful father and that Lady Galliard as anything but a virtuous woman, which Davys succinctly summarizes in one sentence: “To leave [the children] to her care and Management (her Temper consider’d) was throwing them into the Mouth of Ruin; and to substitute another . . . was shewing those Faults too plainly to the World” (128). Ultimately, this “careful” father gambles away his children’s future for the potential longevity of his reputation and his wife’s love; both of which evaporate shortly after his passing. For Sir John and his sister, the sins of their father may be said to be willful neglect. Yet he is not the only weak father of the novel who causes irreparable harm to his child; Mr. Friendly also puts his daughter in grave danger through his indulgence of Sir John. Although Friendly knows that Sir John has been involved in unsavory and debauched behavior, he allows Sir John to live with his family, including Nancy, in London. Moreover, his fondness and value for Sir John directly leads to his daughter’s attempted rape. Although the rape attempt is foiled, Friendly still caters to and allows Sir John into his family and his trust, all the while
knowing what type of “gentleman” Sir John really is. This ultimately causes the Friendly family’s undoing, ending in his near fatal fragility and his daughter’s victimized state and public humiliation, and therefore her almost total isolation from society. Not only does Friendly enable Sir John’s successful corrupt machinations upon his own daughter, after Sir John rapes Nancy and suspicions of his involvement circulate in their neighborhood, Friendly still defends him to the neighbors, calling his licentious actions, “the Follies of Youth.”

**Lady Galliard, the Tainted Mother Figure**

While the flawed father figure proves a recurrent theme of Davys’s novels, new to *The Accomplish’d Rake*, and completely absent from any of her other works, is the corrupt and corrupting mother figure, Lady Galliard. Davys highlights Lady Galliard’s pedigree as a “Woman of Distinction” she “claim’d a Share in some of the Best Blood in the Nation” (127). Although Lady Galliard is an entirely new female character of Davys’s, as an aristocratic one, she fits the pattern of the debauched elite and proves equally delinquent as the male characters in her willingness to abuse her class privilege to extort sexual favors from her servant, Tom. In the character of Lady Galliard, a character who would be echoed in Fielding’s Lady Booby, albeit with much more humor, Davys exploits the similarities between men and women—in their desires and their actions—and in her comparisons between mother and son she therefore underscores the blindness of a society that views women as sexual objects as opposed to sexual beings. Lady Galliard demonstrates that women, like men, are vulnerable to “criminal
inclinations,” especially, it seems, those men and women with money and power. Inverting the typical roles of gender and sex, Lady Galliard represents the predator and Tom, her servant, as prey. Yet Davys also pointedly notes that it is Tom’s wife who suffers the greatest for the relationship; although Tom is later an unwilling participant in the affair, the narrator suggests that Tom’s wife’s death is a direct result of the liaison. Moreover, in another reversal of traditional roles, Lady Galliard acts as patron and Tom as prostitute when he demands to be financially rewarded for his services. While she certainly does not condone Lady Galliard’s behavior, Davys does suggest strongly that philosophically and empirically treating the sexes as polarized creatures rather than as beings with shared appetites reduces a woman’s complexity as a human by believing her incapable either of sexual pleasure or sexual vice. Davys’s consternation at this simplistic view of women is evinced in the various dialogues between the characters. Busy, Lady Galliard’s maid, advises her “if Heaven has given us Appetites, can it be angry that we indulge them; and if we have a Choice of being either happy or wretched, who would not choose the former?” (153) However, Lady Galliard recognizes, as her son will not, the fatal consequences of indulging her appetites; “I with too voracious an Appetite most greedily swallowed till the Poison infected my whole Mass of Blood, and has turned me from thy Mistress to thy Slave” (153). Not only does she self-reflect on her past behavior, she needs no outside catalyst as her own remorse creates a moment of reform and thereafter she becomes a positive (if seldom mentioned) figure in the novel. Unlike Sir John, Lady Galliard needs only one reflection upon the darkness of her past actions and is determined thereafter to live a life of contrition.
Contrary Voices

Nancy Friendly, too, probes this issue of sexual disparity and asks Sir John why men may “show their fondness” to one hundred women while a woman “may only smile upon one”; why women may not love variety as well as men, to which she herself concludes: “your imperious saucy Customs has made me perfectly ashamed of my own Behavior” (157). Even young fifteen year-old Nancy Friendly recognizes this duality of sexuality and its adverse effects upon society’s innocents along with the depraved in a culture polarized by “modest” women and men who “live at large.” This misunderstanding of human nature is voiced by the male characters as well: Teachwell, one of the only unblemished characters of the novel, asserts to Sir John,

Women no doubt, are made of the very same Stuff that we are, and have the very same Passions and Inclinations, which when let loose without a Curb, grow wild and untamable, defy all Laws and Rules, and can be subdued by nothing but what they are seldom Mistress of. (137)

In perhaps Davys’s clearest and most direct statement, Sir John, after hearing of his child and Friendly’s impending death, proclaims of Miss Friendly and her calamity, “Why, what of her . . . is she not a Woman and was she not made for the Pleasure and Delight of Man?” (176) Furthermore, in the words of Sir John, Davys underscores the societal hypocrisy regarding the sexes. After Lady Galliard pays off Sir John’s debts of “Honour and Extravagance,” she chastises him, acknowledging her own failings as a mother and a role model, and describes Sir John’s ever increasing moral decline as eclipsing her own. He reminds her to consider that vast Disparity betwixt both our Ages and Sexes, there are a thousand Things perhaps not very innocent which I may act and no Notice taken of them, which in you would draw the Eyes of every body towards them, Women

202
are naturally modest, Men Naturally impudent, and in short there is no comparing the Actions of one with the other. (178)

And thus Davys challenges the logic behind this imbalance and questions throughout the novel how any such distorted society could hope to produce anything but victimized women and brutish men. Indeed, Sir John argues with Belinda—when she knows he will rape her if she does not comply with his wishes—that women were made to be enjoyed and a “Lady’s Person,” and not her estate, is all that concerns him, which he will use as he pleases. Moreover, according to Sir John, men should do as bulls and horses and command “a Thousand Mates.” To this odd mixture of coercion and attempted seduction, Belinda scornfully rejoins:

I am sorry . . . to find you take your Example for a Plurality of Mistresses from the Brutes, I always thought Man a Creature above them; One that had Reason to regulate and govern his inordinate Passions, though I confess, the Comparison is very just in those Humane Monsters, who neither can, or will endeavor to subdue them; but if every Man were to choose as many Women as he likes, and take them as his proper Vassals, as you are pleased with much Civility to call us, I cannot but fancy it would destroy the whole system of life, and the best Oeconomy must be turned upside down. (189)

With Belinda as the voice of disgust and protest, Davys makes her most direct argument regarding the dangers and consequences of dehumanizing both men and women through a belief in differing sexual appetites and the objectification of women. Davys also highlights the arrogant force of male privilege fed by such ideologies that are also, in part, founded upon the aristocratic notions of “pleasure.”
Perversions of Pleasure and a Lack of Education

As she does in *The Reform’s Coquet*, Davys investigates the concept of pleasure; in *The Accomplish’d Rake*, she examines the “joy” found in vice through the actions of Lady Galliard, Sir John, and his “gentlemen” friends. Whereas Davys jests at Formator’s extreme anxiety regarding pleasure (pleasure defined by him as everything that pleases), in her last novel, she contrasts the amusements of the elite to those of the morally sound. Teachwell, Sir John’s tutor, defines pleasure directly for him:

Pleasure . . . is in strictness no longer so, than while like an easy Meal it goes lightly on the Stomach, without loading or loathing, and what we vulgarly call Pleasure too often includes a great many criminal Actions, could I by strength of Argument be so happy to instill an innocent Notion of Pleasure in your Breast, I should gain a very considerable Point, but you are now going to a Place where Religion, Vertue, Sobriety, and in short every Action worthy Praise is by the gay and young exploded. (143)

Teachwell provides the temperate view of pleasure and disparages the evils of licentious gratification, of which Sir John heartily partakes. Sir John (and Lady Galliard to a lesser degree) believe in the immoderate, and aristocratic, view of pleasure with whoring, gambling, and drinking forming the trifecta of pleasure for which London sits as the fountain head. Sir John’s extreme and perverse notions of pleasure—and his belief in his entitlement of gratification—carry him so far as to knowingly and deliberately brutalize women. Another key component of Sir John’s upbringing that leads to his deviant lifestyle is his lack of instruction. In addition to juxtaposing aristocratic conceptions of pleasure, the character of Teachwell also serves to foreground the importance of education in a person’s development. As Davys’s points to a father’s weakness or absence as a fault-line for morality, this combined with a lack of schooling virtually
ensures rampant debauchery. In *The Reform’d Coquet*, Formator instructs Amoranda with inundations of conduct books and fear and thereby successfully reforms her manners, yet Davys treats his methods and motives with skepticism; rather than elevating her to a higher intellectual state, Formator subdues Amoranda with his “teaching.” However, Davys embraces the importance of an academic education and true learning as key to human, perhaps even cultural, progression in *The Accomplish’d Rake*. Given the debate circulating in the late seventeenth century and throughout the eighteenth regarding the “education” of women, it is no wonder that Davys does not endorse Formator’s faith in conduct books, or that she values and believes in the edifying effects of a scholarly education. Voiced through the character of Mr. Friendly, she writes,

> We have the advice of a very wise Man . . . to train up Youth as we would have them act when riper Years take place. Learning we all know is the first Step towards the Improvement of our Sense, as good Conversation is towards that of our Manners, and it is so hard a Matter to bring a Man to an exact Behavior in Life that he ought not to lose one Minute in the pursuit of it. (131)

Furthermore, Mr. Friendly claims that when Heaven gave “the Noble Gift of Reason” to mankind “it left that very Reason to improve itself, and there it is we joyn with Beasts when we neglect to listen to it” (132). Predictably, Sir John disagrees with Mr. Friendly’s logic, claiming, “If I have lost a Year of two of Improvement, I may possibly make it up in my future Life, but if I never do, I shall not miss it, a Man of Fortune and a Fool may be highly content with what he has” (133). When Sir John and Teachwell part ways on their journey to Cambridge, Sir John abandoning his mother’s (and father’s) plans for his education and diverting to London to seek “Pleasure,” Teachwell warns him of the dangers of the city and the folly of visiting London as he has no home, money or friends
there. Suddenly, Mr. Friendly appears and invites Sir John, “a man of so much good Sense,” to live with him as long as Sir John will honor him with his company, although knowing that Sir John is willfully disobeying his mother. Teachwell and education are thwarted by Mr. Friendly and the aristocratic network; a benevolent and decent man, Mr. Friendly’s faith in his class and his actions of an enabler directly lead to his daughter’s tragic attack.

**The Escalation of Vice**

To this point in the novel, when Sir John veers off course to go to London, he has been a rather harmless rake. And while Davys takes notice of his rakish behavior, her focus is the cultural lens through which he views women and the disastrous consequences for the women with whom he comes in contact. After living with the Friendlys in London, Sir John becomes a predator, leaving many women’s violated bodies in his wake. She touches in passing on his gambling and drinking through his admission into the extremely depraved “Hellfire Club,” but the majority of the novel is comprised of his brutal sexual attacks and exploits. Violence against women figures as a major concern in *The Reform’d Coquet* as well, however, it is the threat of brutality represented by the attempt of rape and not the completed act. In *The Accomplish’d Rake*, attempted rape also figures directly in the plot and character development but, more powerfully, male savagery takes on full force, by the ubiquitous presence of sexual assault and the actualization of rape. According to Susan Staves, “Fielding’s comic plots not only use attempted rape as a sign of female desirability, they also use vulnerability to rape as a
way of distinguishing good women from men and distinguishing good women from bad women” (90). For Davys, the distinction lies merely between men and women—she does not distinguish the women as “good” or “bad,” and women from all walks of life become Sir John’s prey. Moreover, the scenes of brutality are realized by male collusion, wherein the men not only work together to ruin innocent women and they also attempt to surpass one another in the viciousness of their acts, illustrating that Sir John is not an aberration of an English gentleman. He does, however, have a seemingly insatiable desire to abuse women; in *The Accomplish’d Rake*, and with Sir John as the attacker, three rapes and two attempted rapes occur within its pages, making violence against women the driving force of the plot.

**The Masquerade and the First Attempted Rape**

Nancy Friendly’s eventual rape is preceded by Sir John’s attempt on her chastity, following her attendance at a masquerade. Davys employs the masquerade in *The Accomplish’d Rake* to propel the plot forward as well as to engage with some of the thematic concerns of the novel. In *The Reform’d Coquet*, Davys relies heavily on disguise and masquerade throughout the novel, yet in *The Accomplish’d Rake* this type of misdirection happens intermittently. Arguably, masquerade figures so lightly in her last novel because the brazen—and open—way in which aristocrats are allowed to conduct their lives is precisely Davys’s point. They have no need to disguise themselves as there are little to no consequences for their dissolute actions, and this lack of need to hide their true character underscores their power and cultural acceptance. Moreover, while the
masquerade often precipitates the comedic plunge into the topsy-turvy, here it precipitates the tragedy of Nancy Friendly and where Sir John first hunts her. Rather than affirming a “comic plot of heterosexual romance,” here the masquerade initiates a plot of sexual predation. Before the ball, Nancy and her friend, Miss Wary, swap costumes to “cheat” Sir John humorously, implying a comedic scenario. However, at the end of the night, Sir John directs Miss Wary’s chair, believing it to be Miss Friendly, to a bagnio, where he intends to ravish her. Due to the interruption of “little Gentleman,” Miss Wary is conducted back home, where she and Miss Friendly puzzle over the misdirection; Miss Wary decries Sir John’s ill intentions and attempts to warn her friend, but Nancy, like Amoranda before her and Belinda after, refuses to believe a gentleman capable of brutishness. This picks up another theme from *The Reform’d Coquet*; women who do not listen to other women put themselves in severe bodily danger. It is a recurring pattern of both novels; women often disbelieve their well-intentioned yet skeptical female friend, instead believing in the infallible good-nature—and words—of the gentlemen seducers/rapists who surround them. Yet in an interesting convolution of the sexes and a unique and complex moment in Davys’s fiction, it is a woman who appears as “a little Gentleman” who saves “Nancy” from Sir John’s attempted rape.

**The Interruption of Female to Male Cross-Dressing and the Idealized Man**

When Sir John misdirects Miss Friendly’s chair to a bagnio, which, as Miss Wary comments, is nothing more than a “tolerated Baudy House,” the event that prevents the success of his black design is the arrival of “the little Gentleman,” who the party
encountered earlier at the masquerade. At the ball, he approaches Sir John requesting he part with one of his Ladies, which hints of the “comedic precipitation” common to scenes of masquerade, and at the bagnio, Davys reveals the “little Gentleman” to be an aristocratic woman seeking a sexual liaison due to her husband’s infertility. While this passage, and the role of this Lady throughout the rest of the novel, provides one of the more interesting figures in Davys’s work, it also remains one of the more complex scenarios of the novel. To begin with, her act of asking Sir John to part with one of his ladies makes little sense given her ultimate goal of impregnating herself, and, moreover, Sir John publicly demeans the “little Gentleman” as a “Tom Thumb” and “Pigmy,” at which the “Bauble” goes off muttering. When s/he arrives at the bagnio, s/he demands “satisfaction” for the slight and challenges Sir John to draw his sword. Obviously, Davys plays upon the sexual innuendos of the language of dueling.216 On the one hand, Davys’s use of female to male cross-dressing allows for comedic language and wit—and even Restoration style bawdy humor—and on the other, it affords Davys’s a subversive method of revealing the characters’ integrity as the grotesque does in The Reform’d Coquet. The “little Gentleman’s” request for female company immediately signals him to be a sexualized character. After his reveal as the “Lady,” this may suggest to a modern reader to that her sexuality is in question, yet this is doubtfully Davys’s intention given the disgust with which Amoranda discussed lesbian behavior in The Reform’d Coquet and the favorable light the Lady appears in later scenes. However, one may rightfully consider the argument that this is, indeed, a representation of homosexuality and its perverseness. Although the Lady is revealed as having a face “fair and young,” from the
neck down, she still presents as male, one who was bold enough to challenge Sir John to
a duel. Although this may be a nod towards the Restoration “breeches” part, it also
creates an inverted grotesque, where it is not the wearer (or the object), but the viewer (or
the subject) who becomes its representative. Therefore, while Sir John knows her to be a
woman, “the Lady” is still depicted as mostly male, and Sir John’s arousal at the
biological discrepancy indicates a deep level of sexual perversion, which Davys
intensifies as the novel continues. As men were considered to be the ideal—and women
the inferior—version of a human and the human body, cross-dressing in this case is more
likely an emulation of the dominant sex rather than a grotesque. Yet more powerfully
than the mere parroting of this cultural idealization, Davys clearly outlines what women
are capable of when disguised as men. Davys’s encapsulates the freedom of male
privilege through the success of the Lady’s disguise: not only is the Lady free to move
alone in society, attending masquerades unattended, and traveling unmolested—and at
will—to suspect locations, she is also free to proposition a man without consequences.
Unlike the sexualized men of the novel, and of The Reform’d Coquet, the Lady suffers no
providential retribution. And as she does with Lady Galliard, Davys again reverses the
traditional object/subject role of the sexes as it is the “little Gentleman” who acts as
voyeur and actively hunts his/her desired partner, surveilling Sir John and approaching
him as sexual prey. Moreover, with this desperate act, Davys highlights the cultural
obsession with male heirs and continues to foreground this issue with heirs conceived
through consensual means as well as through acts of rape.
Davys continues to exhibit Sir John’s unnatural attraction to the “little Gentleman,” as he arrives at the Galliard’s “now again in Man’s Apparel, [and] Sir John received her with some Transport and Warmth, which she return’d with bare good Manners and a modest Indifference” (178). He inquires if their last meeting was successful, to which she responds, “she could not say it had, though there was a Child, but it proved a Daughter.” Sir John “kindly offered his Service to get a Son,” (178), yet the Lady wishes to reclaim her honor and therefore to marry. Realizing how foolish her past actions were, she admits that she is resolved to be the lawful wife of Sir John or to never know another man. Like Lady Galliard, the Lady grasps her former mistakes without any outside influence and reforms, as it were, off stage and of her own volition. Furthermore, after Sir John refuses her hand in marriage, he offers to buy his child a “whistle and bells.” To his offer the Lady gives an impassioned speech against debauched fathers:

Your Child Sir John . . . wants no Whistle, but is far from hence and so am I when I am at home, and since your Principles hang so loose about you, I shall think it very fit to keep her at a Distance least their Infection should reach the tender Bud and blast each Virtue as it grows up in her. (179)

Here, Davys explicitly underscores the connection between the overly-indulged and depraved parents and future generations of degenerates. The massive distinction, however, between Sir John and the women who have sinned—his mother and the Lady—remains that they are truly repentant and reformed whereas he dubiously claims both titles at the close of the novel. After his attempt to rape Belinda, he claims to regret his wicked ways only to fall immediately back into wantonness.
Belinda and the Second Attempted Rape

In the later attempted rape of the novel, Davys draws upon the figure Belinda of Alexander Pope’s poem, “The Rape of the Lock” (1714). However, whereas Pope’s Belinda experiences her mock-tragedy in the loss of a lock of hair, Davys’s Belinda remains intact yet is the near-victim of a much more savage act. The seriousness of the situation Belinda faces in The Accomplish’d Rake contrasts greatly to the insignificance of the “violation” committed to Belinda’s hair, and rather than representing an isolated “violent” act, the attempt on Davys’s Belinda establishes a consistent pattern of Sir John’s behavior. Belinda’s (and Nancy’s) fatal mistake, like Amoranda before her, is her staunch belief in the unwavering honor of gentlemen. Also again echoing scenes from The Reform’d Coquet, Belinda almost ruinously disregards the advice and warnings of another woman, Miss Wary, who has experienced firsthand his deceptive and degenerate ways. In spite of Miss Wary’s account of his previous behavior at the masquerade, Belinda directly refutes the possibility of Sir John’s dangerous nature, as she “cannot believe him a Man of so much Dishonour to commit a Rape” (187). As in the rape of Miss Friendly, which occurs before the attempt on Belinda, the second attempted ravishing is not a spontaneous act but also a carefully-planned, premeditated event, proving a complete lack of remorse in Sir John and suggests his inability or unwillingness to reform. Moreover, Davys prefaces Belinda’s entrance by painting Sir John as a now completely predatory man, who “resolving to hunt out Nobler Game” and seeing Belinda in Miss Wary’s coach, “lick’d his Lips, and told himself, he could be very happy in her Embraces for a few Hours” (183). Davys also foreshadows the attempted rape by
foregrounding the despicable way in which Sir John and his crony, Sir Combish, speak of the women they meet and “enjoy.” The “gentlemen” refer to the women as “pritty Fools,” who surfeit a stomach in a month, are another man’s “Leavings” and “Bones picked for a Repast” (184). All of this explicit imagery and language leaves the reader with little doubt that Sir John will sink to new lows in his encounter with Belinda. Similarly to Biranthus’s plan in *The Reform’d Coquet*, Sir John plans to take Belinda to an abandoned area and there brutally violate her. When Belinda becomes aware of Sir John’s intentions—through her maid’s intervention—Belinda charges Sir John with being the “Abominable Product of [his mother’s] Vice, the Spawn of some of her Footmen,” which Sir John silently acknowledges are “just Remarks,” and which forces him to question his parentage given his mother’s previous affair. After her insult, Sir John informs her that she is out of danger for “all the Love [he had for her] is vanish’d” (194) and throws himself at her feet declaring he is a reformed man. Yet it is neither Belinda’s too-accurate slight nor Sir John’s deep insight or repentance that saves her but rather the protection of Jenny, Belinda’s maid, that allows Belinda to arrive safely at her sister’s home. 217 Once again, as she does in *The Reform’d Coquet*, Davys again elevates the common figures in *The Accomplish’d Rake* to the level of hero.

Despite the ways in which his aristocratic male privilege nearly allow Sir John to rape again, Belinda narrowly escapes Miss Friendly’s fate thanks to her loyal maidservant, Jenny, and a few “honest men.” 218 In the longest and most dramatic scene of the novel, Davys juxtaposes the bravery and valor of the servants and the working-class by contrasting it to the baseness of the aristocracy. After overhearing Sir John’s plan, Jenny
hires the men who will prove the only barrier between Belinda’s chastity and shame. Moreover, Jenny refuses to let the innkeeper notify the authorities of Sir John’s plot as even the suggestion of a violation would destroy Belinda’s reputation, the loss of which would have equally fatal consequences for Belinda on the marriage market as rape itself. Also parallel to The Reform’d Coquet, it is the unnamed male servants Jenny hires who shield Belinda from Sir John’s brutality; they even refuse to take his bribes and remain with Belinda until she reaches safety. However, the most unusual hero of all of Davys’s novels, belongs to the criminal rather than working class. When Dolly, Sir John’s sister, is kidnapped by Tom to avenge his wife’s death and plans to rape her as an act of revenge, the whoremaster of the house, Mother Needham, rescues Dolly. Alerting her old customer, Sir John, to the “curious fine girl” from the country in her house, brought “by a Fellow that would feign have Ravished her, but she was resolved there should be no such Disorderly Doings in her House” (172). While her methods of saving Dolly are imperfect at best—she attempts to transfer Dolly from a rapist footman to a mistress-seeking gentleman—it is nonetheless evident that she desires nothing but to save Dolly from a vicious sexual assault. Davys’s choice of a brothel-owning heroine is fascinating in and of itself, yet the fact that Davys uses a contemporary figure, Elizabeth Needham, who died in on the pillory in 1731 (three years after The Accomplish’d Rake was published), and who was said to be the corrupting bawd figure of William Hogarth’s The Harlot’s Progress, is perhaps even more so. Davys’s sympathy toward and refusal to demonize women reaches its apex in her heroizing of a known courtesan, and her drive to confront the issues facing servant women carry over from The Reform’d Coquet. To that
end, the last incidence of rape in *The Accomplish’d Rake*, involves a cross-section of the social strata, and the maidservant victim seeks her own retribution from her attacker.

**Cross-Class Rape, Abusive Employers, and Male Collusion**

Although Davys exploits the use of disguise less frequently in *The Accomplish’d Rake* than in *The Reform’d Coquet*, she does use it as a symbol of deviant male power and sexual control. Following his attempted violation of Belinda, she and Sir John sit down to an odd reconciliatory meal with his friends, Sir Combish and Cook-a-hoop. Suddenly, a “Virago” flies in and tears the flesh of Sir Combish’s face, crying “Betty Dimple revenge thyself and tear the Villain’s Soul out” (197). Belinda demands to know the cause of her rage, and Betty implores her to have pity as a fellow woman and begins her narrative recounting the “forty fluting Lovers, with their fine Speeches and filthy Designs.” Betty is reunited with her childhood love, and they become engaged, however, her betrothed, William, has the misfortune to work for Sir Combish Clutter, another corrupt and depraved nobleman. Another instance of male conspiracy, Sir Combish promises to make Will a Free-holder in exchange for Will’s assistance in cheating a woman of her virtue, to which Will readily agrees and gives Combish his livery so the he might carry out his “Frolick.” Unbeknownst to Will, Combish’s intended “frolick” is to trick Betty into believing him to be Will and convince her to have premarital sex, which she predictably does. Sir Combish’s class cross-dressing demonstrates his degeneracy, and which functions much as Biranthus’s grotesque in that it foregrounds his willingness to be “low.” When William bursts in on the pair and
discovers Sir Combish’s counterfeit and treachery, he stays in Combish’s employment but shuns Betty as a whore, exemplifying the ways in which men scheme and the extraordinary costs to women of their machinations as well as the extreme hypocrisy of a patriarchal society. In this scene of rape, Davys eschews the fear and violence she formerly associated with the gentlewomen victims, yet in a bold turn allows Betty to protest verbally the abuses of the working class at the hands of their wealthy employers. William claims his eyes are opened after he listens to Betty’s tale, admitting they both were maltreated, and they should now pity one another. She replies:

No, I will neither pity you, nor myself till I have taken the Law of that Base Transgressor of it: Why must a Poor Man be hanged for Stealing a Sheep, and a Rich one escape, that takes away by Force or Trick what is more valuable from us: I am resolved to make both himself and the World know what a Rogue he is; and I’ll see him hang’d before he shall wear the Best Jewel I ever had, and not pay a Good Price for it. (206-7)\textsuperscript{221}

In her demand for remuneration, Davys represents Betty’s lost virtue in a different light than Belinda’s or Nancy’s (or Amoranda’s), and seems to objectify the working class body as a material commodity. However, it must also be stated that this view of rape as theft was in keeping with the contemporary conceptions of working-class sexuality and the actual laws of the time, when rape was deemed a property crime and the plaintiffs were most often husbands or fathers, not the female victim herself. Affirming this belief in the exchange value of maidenhood, Sir Combish does in fact posthumously purchase it by giving William and Betty a farm and ten pounds a year if they will marry one another and disregard his actions. Although Davys’s view of the working-class woman’s body as different from her aristocratic counterparts appears as classist, it is obvious that Davys considers the exploitation of women servants just as morally reprehensible. Davys still
depicts Sir Combish’s act as brutal and ruinous, and Betty equally affected as the
gentlewomen victims. Whereas both Amoranda and Belinda are willing to die to protect
their honor and chastity, Betty is willing to fight the perpetrator with her bare hands.
Moreover, at Betty’s entrance, Davys carefully displays her despair and anguish, and the
damages she suffered are not only pecuniary. Davys also clearly demonstrates the lack of
concern over Sir Combish’s crime on the part of the aristocratic company as immediately
after his arrangements with the couple he renews his addresses to Belinda only to her
horror. Although Davys paints the rape of Betty and the attempted rape of Belinda as
wicked, it is Nancy Friendly’s rape that haunts the entire novel and leaves Sir John’s
reformation in so much doubt.

**Actualized Rape**

The rape of Nancy Friendly is not the climax of the novel but rather the
abominable event that afterwards informs the narrative. In this, Davys stays true to the
conventions of reform comedy, as the scene of repentance—not the preceding sins—
typically provides the climax of the plot as it does in *The Accomplish’d Rake*. Yet
however conventional this climactic moment may be, Davys’s construction of rape in *The
Accomplish’d Rake* represents one of the darker (perhaps even darkest) in eighteenth-
century fiction,222 and this violence is not a traditional trope of the genre. Importantly,
rape in Davys’s work is never spontaneous but always premediated; she does not depict a
man suddenly overwhelmed by his baser passions, but rather demonstrates how men
wield violence to maintain their control over women, even if the goal is to dominate them
momentarily. In her last novel, Davys carefully unfolds the depravity of Sir John’s character by charting his meticulous plans to rape his fifteen year-old neighbor, Nancy Friendly, and confirms his absolute wickedness in the moment he rapes her. Again, Davys foregrounds the violation as calculated and sadistic, an act that requires sustained savagery to complete yet also highlights Nancy’s father’s culpability in her tragedy. Although unintentionally, Mr. Friendly facilitates his daughter’s rape by inviting Sir John, a man he knows to be licentious, into his London home to live with himself and his young daughter. Sir John’s states before going to London that he intends to “glut himself at the Fountain-head” (142); although Mr. Friendly does not hear this declaration, he repeatedly acknowledges Sir John’s dissipated behavior and his need to reform. Moreover, Mr. Friendly does know that Sir John was intended to go to Cambridge and therefore does know that he is not a man of serious application and that he travels to London against his mother’s wishes. Not only does Mr. Friendly invite him to live with them, he gives Sir John an open invitation. Almost immediately, Sir John makes “himself large and pleasing Promises of [Nancy’s] Ruin,” and though shocked himself by his “barbarous Design,” he justifies his thoughts as “Men of Pleasure find little Room for Reflection, at least until they have gratified their own unreasonable Desires” (156). Although the privilege of his social position and friendship with Mr. Friendly allows Sir John to realize his plans, he can only imagine such savagery due to the way in which he and English culture conceptualize the female sex. As stated earlier, Sir John continually maintains that women were simply created for a man’s pleasure, an ideology necessary both for an individual to be capable of such atrocities and also for a society to ignore
them. After his initial inspiration to rape Miss Friendly, he uses his friendship with her father to carry out his design, making all of the men in Nancy’s life complicit in her fall. And because he lives with the family, Nancy and her aunt cannot perceive of him as a threat: Sir John is so comfortable in the family, gained from the high esteem of Mr. Friendly, that Nancy’s aunt allows her to attend the masquerade with him. Following Nancy’s rape, Davys stresses the ills of a society that holds aristocratic males in such high esteem they are able to move through life impervious to any punishment despite the brutality of their actions. The morning after her violation, and immediately after she realizes what has happened, Mr. Friendly finds his daughter at the inn, and at his entrance, “she recalled own Pretty Temper to entertain him with Cheerfulness” (169). He inquires after Sir John and announces he would give “Hundreds a Year” to see him morally reclaimed. After a mild admonishment from Miss Friendly, he retorts, “Forbid it Heaven . . . that he should ever want my Bounty; but if he does while I have Life and a Six-pence he shall share the latter.” To this declaration the narrator answers, “Too Kind, too Generous a Declaration, in Favour of one whose Black Ingratitude made him the least deserving of such strict, such Noble Friendship” (170). Davys highlights the poignancy of this passage by the fact that although he promises to sacrifice the inheritance of his children for his “Good Neighbor,” he has already sacrificed much more than wealth due to his excessive kindness and fondness for the male heir of his former friend. Moreover, Davys illustrates in the example of Mr. Friendly that even “good men” contribute to a cultural ethos that allows rampant violence towards women. More disturbing than such
passive examples of involvement are the outright conspiracies of men to ruin women in the novel.

After the botched attempt at the bagnio, Davys amplifies the morbid and terrifying nature of Sir John, and the revolting ways men are willing to collude with their fellow man. Determined to have Miss Friendly “unknown to herself,” though he admits he is certain she would be a willing partner, he hires his apothecary to create a rape drug that would cause a “Lethargy for some Hours,” explicitly mapping out his plan. The apothecary, like many of the corrupt characters of the novel, is willing to sell his morality, “because Sir John was an excellent Customer and his Bribe pretty large” (165). With this information of Sir John as a “good Customer,” Davys points to Sir John’s lengthy career as a rake, a rake who has been treated multiple times for venereal disease. The depraved nature of his plan deepens as he creates a “trial” rape and violates the maid in the house where he lodges. Finding “it answered his Expectations,” he sets out to find Miss Friendly. He travels to the inn where he knows she must lodge days earlier in order to convince a servant into assisting him. The chamber maid, Sarah, too readily complies, as Kitty does in *The Reform’d Coquet*, and not only agrees to let him into Nancy’s room, but promises her further assistance should he need it. Although outright female villains are rare in Davys’s fiction, her last two novels include a female servant character who willingly aids a rapist for money. When Miss Friendly and her servant arrive, Sarah gives them the poisoned macaroons (Nancy’s favorite sweet, ensuring she will partake of the treat), which affords Sir John the opportunity to violate Nancy without her being able either deny consent or defend herself. Yet directly preceding her violation, ironically,
Nancy proclaims that she would prefer Sir John, with all of his faults over such a man as Mr. Wary, who possess fine qualities; and for such extreme folly, Miss Friendly is severely punished. Curiously, directly after this statement of preference and before her attack, she reflects upon the bagnio incident, commenting that she owes her safety to her change of dress alone, which further complicates her attraction to Sir John. To her contemplations of his attempted rape, her maid, Jenny, responds, “O Ingratitude . . . if that be true, all Mankind are Monsters” (168), which hits the heart of Davys’s concerns. Hidden in the closet, exactly as Mr. B will be eight years later, Sir John listens to the all too accurate defamation of his character, yet he refuses to stifle his hideous desire. When he knows both women are fully affected by his drug, “the Time came, the Lady asleep in one Bed, her Maid in another, and Sir John had all the Opportunity he expected” (168).225 As is typical of such scenes in the eighteenth-century, Davys does not directly use the term “rape”; however, she barely veils the scene with indirect euphemisms. Furthermore, when she awakens, Nancy knows she “is Ruined past Redemption” and knows that she was violated by someone familiar. After his debased act, Davys satirically puns on Sir John as a “knight,” using the term simultaneously in an ironic sense, invoking the chivalric tradition, and to foreground his noble status. As his deeds continue in such a black vein, Davys increases the level of irony with hyperbole, eventually naming Sir John as a “Splendid Knight” during his dissolute adventures. Whereas Alexander Pope satirizes the trivial nature of Belinda’s “rape” with elevated language, Davys, in turn, uses lofty terminology to ironically point to the absolute baseness of Sir John’s acts. After her rape, Miss Friendly is largely absent from the remainder of the novel, and
makes only a ghostly presence in the letters of Lady Galliard. However, after the pivotal reformation scene, she again takes center stage.

**Tragedy Ever-After**

Finally, the novel’s closure provides Davys’s strongest criticisms and evidence of her concerns regarding the society in which she lived. Similarly to *The Reform’d Coquet*, the novel closes with the promise of marriage typical of comedy, particularly moral reform comedy’s variation, “in which the rake learns to accept the matrimonial yoke (Gollapudi 14). However, in *The Accomplish’d Rake*, Davys does not attempt to disguise the horror and tragedy of Nancy Friendly’s situation. Whereas Amoranda’s sad “happy ending” remains unstated, and is in fact evinced by her silence, Nancy’s future looms bleakly beyond the wedding suggested by her own words. In order to fully appreciate the force of *The Accomplish’d Rake’s* ending, one must closely examine the last pages. After Sir John experiences his moment of repentance at the pathetic sight and words of Mr. Friendly, he arranges to meet with Miss Friendly against her will again by colluding with her father. Initially, Sir John offers to adopt her son, as the child “is so much [his] Likeness” and Sir John would “never be ashamed to father her Productions,” ending his charitable offer with, “will you give him to me?” (224) She retorts,

Give him? . . . do you think I want a charitable Hand to take my Child off mine? No! . . . When he first made his Appearance in Life, I had an Abhorrence of the very sight of him, but Nature pleaded strongly in his Behalf, and I must own he is now so dear to me that the Wealth of the Universe should not buy him from me. (224)
Thereafter, she declares that she does not want a husband for herself but rather a father for her child. Sir John, heightened by her sentimental speech, declares while “(snatching her to his Arms) I know your Innocence, I am the Brute that wrong’d you of what you held dear, that plundered your Honour and caused your Shame, the Father of your Child, and the Ravisher of his Mother, but” (225), at which point Nancy interrupts, saying she cannot believe Sir John would be guilty of “so poor, so low, so base an Action.”

Suddenly, Sir John’s tone dramatically changes, and he returns:

Look’ye Nancy . . . this is too nice a Point to be entered into with much Examination, and I have certainly done Things since I was born which perhaps I should blush at now, but if I am willing to own my Fault and make you Restitution I would not have you give yourself Airs, but take me at my Word when (Liberty forgive me) I say I will marry you, and if your lost Honour be what you lament, I will restore it with the Addition of a Ladyship and a good Estate. (225)

In this haughty retort Davys belies his repentance from the previous pages and demonstrates Sir John’s own recognition of his power over Nancy. Moreover, Sir John echoes Mr. Friendly’s own words, “I can call a great many inadvertent Actions to Mind, which I am now ashamed of” (145), illustrating the ritual of such behavior in England’s aristocratic men. In Miss Friendly’s response to Sir John’s offer of marriage, Davys underscores the wretched choices such a tradition affords English women.

In her last words of the novel:

The poor Lady trembled with Resentment, but recalling her Temper said as follows: Your barbarous Usage sir John, might very well countenance a firm Resolution of seeing your Face no more, which I should certainly make were only I to suffer for it, but I have a Child which is very dear to me, and in pity to him I will close with your Proposals, provided you will promise to order Matters do, that he may be the undoubted Heir to your Estate, I know it must be the Work of Parliament,226 and you must expose yourself on such an Occasion, but as you are
the only Aggressor you must be the Sufferer too: These are the Conditions, Sir John, if ever you and I meet again. (225)

Her last thoughts remain noteworthy for a variety of reasons. Nancy makes crystal clear her reasons for agreeing to marry Sir John—not to salvage her own blasted reputation by marrying a distinguished member of the community, as she finds him now repellent, but to ensure that her child will not suffer due to the depraved nature of his father. Moreover, Nancy demands restitution; rather than the Ladyship and estate Sir John promises, she wants him to publicly own, to confess to being the monster that he is in order to receive the redemption of her character. The marriage for Nancy is not happy but necessary for her child’s future. Although many scholars have read Nancy’s capitulation as a conservative validation of matrimony, as Gevirtz rightly comments, “if the ending of The Accomplish’d Rake is conservative, it is conservative because it recognizes where power lies, not because it endorses that situation” (Women 160). Yet despite this acknowledgement and Sir John’s offer of marriage, the oft-used symbol of reform, Davys strongly suggests that little has changed.

Importantly, Davys ends the novel with her voice in the words of the author/narrator:

As for Sir John Galliard I would have him acknowledge the Favour I have done him, in making him a Man of Honour at last, but withal I here tell him I have set two Spies to watch his Motions and Behavior and if I hear of any false Steps or Relapses, I shall certainly set them in a very clear Light, and send them by Way of Advertisement to the Publick. (226)

Indeed, her tone may be read as one of earnestness, unless one considers that Sir John would certainly not “acknowledge the Favour” done him and additionally contemplates the group of moral “activists” of the eighteenth century and their methods Davys likely
references. Given that she writes a moral reform comedy that contains no true reform, her last statement suggests that she mocks the main force behind moral reform in the eighteenth century, The Society for the Reformation of Manners, or SRM. Indeed, her recognition of the use of public shaming and spies calls to mind the very techniques the SRM employed in order to “reform” those who they saw as wayward citizens.227 Shame was their strongest weapon, and ironically, it is a force to which Sir John seems immune. Although her three previous publications, *The Northern Heiress* (1718), *The Reform’d Coquet* (1724) and her *Collected Works* (1725) all bore her name as author, *The Accomplish’d Rake* was published anonymously. Perhaps due to her dubious belief in moral reform and its agents or to her forceful critique of her own society, Davys did not express her pride in her last novel as she did her previous texts by declaring them all of her own conception and pen—at least not publically. Perhaps she was worried *The Accomplish’d Rake* was overwhelmingly morbid. Or perhaps, Davys’s last known work, which was so desperately hopeless, reflected her own situation as the end of her life appears to have been equally full of despair.
Postscript

In July, 1732, at approximately 58 years of age, Mary Davys died in Cambridge of an unknown illness. Davys writes of her condition the year before her death, “my Hand trembles and my Eyes are almost blind” (*Grub Street Journal* 229). Although Davys published four novels, one play, and her collected works, and despite her Cambridge coffeehouse, she passed in penury, bequeathing only clothing and a mourning ring—all worth less than five pounds—to her sister, Rhoda Staunton. The cause of her poverty remains a mystery, yet she was in such urgent need that she borrowed money from a known Cambridge usurer (Bowden, “Introduction” xxiv). Yet in spite of the pitiable circumstances of her last months, there is some poetry to the end of her life. One of Davys’s last recorded acts is her donation of an Oxford Bible in April of 1732 to St. Patrick’s of Dublin, also valued at five pounds. Notwithstanding the obvious financial hardships she suffered in last year of her life, Davys still felt compelled to give a rather extravagant gift to the cathedral, and we may only speculate upon her motivations for bestowing such a large portion of her assets to the church. There are, however, some alluring possibilities to entertain as to why she gave such a large portion of her assets to the church. Jonathan Swift served as dean at St. Patrick’s in 1732, and if he was the intended tangential target of the donation, several potential scenarios present themselves. She may have been, once again, attempting to curry some kind of favor with Swift as she
had during her early years as a writer, yet this seems unlikely, as Swift wrote Davys he
could neither offer her any more assistance nor would he see her again. Alternatively, she
may have been attempting to prove to Swift that she had been successful regardless of his
refusal to either patronize her work or introduce her to his coterie. Swift sent Davys five
pounds after her first letters to him, and one might find the symmetry in the cost of the
bible and the amount of Swift’s gift as too coincidental. This arguably suggests that she
attempted to end her life unindebted to a man who had been nothing but disdainful and
contemptuous of her. Perhaps, Davys’s gift was more charitable than self-validating and
Swift was not the focus of her donation. Possibly, it was a loving gesture, and Davys was
paying tribute to her late husband Peter and her daughter Ann, both of whom were buried
at St. Patrick’s. One might presume that her reasons for donating the bible were, like her
work, complex and multidimensional.

Also shortly before her death, *The False Friend; or, The Treacherous Portugueze*, a version of her first novel, *The Cousins*, was published anonymously.

McBurney deems the novel a piracy, but Bowden believes it to be an authorized
publication, which is more likely the case. Finding herself in financial difficulties and
battling an illness, it would be logical for Davys to return to one of her earlier
manuscripts, rewrite it as she had done with *Alcippus and Lucippe*, and publish it with a
new name to generate income. Moreover, as it is dedicated to her long-time supporter,
Lady Slingsby, and includes a truncated preface from her *Works*, and has a title that pays
direct homage to Vanbrugh’s *The False Friend* there seems little reason to doubt that
Davys herself was behind the publication. Whether she intentionally created a closed
circle of her work, ending her career with the first novel she wrote, is, of course, uncertain, but it is a fitting choice for an introspective and ailing author. However, her thoughtfulness and her continued desire to control her image and her work is most clearly evinced a year before her passing.

Almost exactly a year before her death, in July, 1731, Davys received her only known public attack. In *The Grub Street Journal* no. 80, “Philogrubaea,” supposedly Davys herself, addresses her letter, dated July 15, to “Mr. Bavius,” in which the author scathingly discusses Davys’s apparent—and earned—title of “Wit,” along with her unsavory relationship with her students. A footnote after the subscription reads, “Mrs. D wrote several bawdy Novels, and *The Northern Heiress*” (228). In her reply, dated July 22, and published in *The Grub Street Journal* no. 81, Davys indicates she knows who penned the letter with the help of a “Glib Tongued Wife,” and writes that her “Novels may e’en fight their own Battles all I shall say for them is, that they are too unfashionable to have one word of Baudy in them” (229). Alluding to a “Grand affair,” which she makes clear was a trifling incident, she goes on to declare the author a “Lier” with many others “ready to confute him.” Interestingly, during one point of the attack (perhaps even a reference to the “Grand Affair” itself), Philogrubaea claims some of her customers have run unpaid tabs, and the method of settling those debts is to admit herself a “Grubean,” and she “chuse[s] to be a Grubean with money, than have only the name of Wit without” (228). Davys, in her response, also addresses a past issue with “Licquor” and admits to her desire for compensation as “a Dun is a Devil and I was a Devil upon Dun.” All of this has the appearance of a public squabble; the first letter slandering Davys’s reputation and
her response is a clever refutation apparently written a week later. However, when one looks closely at the two pieces, one realizes both were published on the same day, July 29th. Therefore, it is obvious Davys was either warned of the “attack” and was allowed to read it and respond before going to press, or the whole maneuver was a clever hoax, invented to benefit Davys, which seems highly probable. “Philogrubaea” alludes to an arrangement made, wherein Davys must admit she is a “Grub.” More than an admission, the piece was perhaps a ruse attack, which allowed Davys a shrewd way of naming herself a “Grubean” and therefore collecting upon her debts yet still being able to deny such an admission. Possibly, coffee enthusiasts were spreading rumors of Davys as a too zealous keeper and collector of tabs. Or, perhaps with thoughts of publishing in the future, Davys wished to have her name circulate once again in literary and public circles. While all may have been true, it illustrates dexterous plotting on Davys’s part and her recurrent desire and ability to define herself—and her work—in her own terms.

Davys’s capacity for self-fashioning was a trait she exhibited throughout her life. She meticulously created an identity as a novelist, playwright, coffeehouse proprietor, widow—and more specifically as a clergyman’s widow—and carefully delineated herself as a respectable and moral author, who never penned a “baudy word.” Another remarkable quality Davys possessed was her ability to survive alone and against the odds in a society that afforded women virtually no means of supporting themselves. Although Clarke regards Davys as “aggressive” and McBurney views her as “masculine,” Davys was able to navigate her world and accomplish feats rare for any person in the eighteenth century—man or woman. Not only did she publish, she published her own works by
subscription, ensuring that her words and thoughts would be read, and while also earning a larger share of the profits. With her bold purchase of a coffeehouse, Davys placed herself in the center of the intellectual world and granted herself access to the debates, discussions, and information normally barred to women. In short, she was a self-made woman, a figure Perry touts as an “abnormality” of the time (Astell 13). It is the totality of Davys—her intellect, her œuvre, her innovations, her craftsmanship, her complexity, and her political and cultural awareness—that makes her fiction worthy of continued critical scholarship.

One of the intentions of this project was to complicate readings of Davys’s novels, and I hope that in so doing, other authors will be similarly complicated. Often scholars offer up a neat division between the early women English novelists: amatory writers on the one side, didactic authors on the other. Especially—but not exclusively—more obscure and lesser known authors are swiftly swept into one category or another, often, it seems, without much close or careful reading. Mary Davys provides one example of an author who was hiding in broad daylight, using the cover of various fictional genres not to instruct the populace but to object to the social ills affecting it. Perhaps, Davys defies the heretofore established camps of women writers, and perhaps there are many more to do so. Another intention of this project was to broaden the perspective regarding the writing career of Davys and to examine the panorama of nearly thirty years of work rather than merely the last three. To date, the majority of the scholarship on Davys has reduced her to a one-note author and her fiction to The Reform’d Coquet and The Accomplish’d Rake with little to no discussion of her first three novels or her plays.
Perhaps in part due to her own fervor to set herself apart from the amatory writers, Davys is often viewed as a didactic novelist, and frequently as an extremely conservative one. After reading and rereading Davys’s novels, this representation of her feels myopic, cursory, and simplistic. Only the work of Riley and Gevirtz strongly suggests otherwise, and they have greatly enriched the critical landscape for readers and students of Davys’s writings. However, as of yet, no concentrated study of Davys’s novels or prosaic work has been published. With this project, I have attempted to fill this void and complicate the traditional readings of Davys and her novels by investigating the ways in which Davys has been misread and misunderstood. Moreover, I have endeavored to highlight the voice of serious social concern and protest imbedded within her novels and to expand the definition of her as an innovator to include her content as well as her formal experimentations. To see Davys as the upholder of social traditions is to negate the many ways in which she deviated from conventions, both socially and formally.

According to Gevirtz, Davys wrote prefatory material that refused to preface the narrative (*Women* 147). I would add that she wrote dedications that denied flattery, romances that rejected the romantic, familiar letters that renounced love letters, comedies that declined to be comedic, and moral reform novels that repudiated a belief in reform. In almost everything that she penned, she refused to conform, making Mary Davys quite contrary.
Endnotes

1 All of the subsequent publications, however, occurred after Davys’s death in 1732.

2 While Davys’s letters have not yet been recovered, we have many from Swift, some of which include disdainful and scornful remarks concerning Davys, which openly avow his rejection of Davys’s requests for patronage. We also know from his letters that he sent Davys a paltry sum of money at least once; knowing Davys’s independent spirit, this “gift” of a few pounds must have stung her pride when what she truly sought was an introduction to Swift’s famous coterie.

3 Due to the Battle of Dublin in 1922, and the resulting fires, all of Ireland’s public records were destroyed.

4 Inexplicably, Martha Bowden claims that all but Davys’s collected works and *The Northern Heiress* (1716) were published anonymously. Yet in addition to *The Collected Works of Mrs. Davys* and *The Northern Heiress*, she signed the dedication for *The Amours of Alcippus and Lucippe* and her name appears on the title page of *The Reform’d Coquet* (1724). The piece Bayer believes to have been published in 1693, “A Gift and no Gift,” is also attributed to Mrs. Mary D.

5 Lacking any other evidence, we must assume that Davys is being truthful regarding her linguistic capabilities. While many prefaces burst with false modesty, this is certainly not Davys’s tradition and very likely not her intention with the prologue. Rather, her claim attempts to prove that she was not influenced by any foreign plays (specifically French or Spanish) as were many of her contemporary playwrights and that her lack of learning supports her originality, as she could not have been influenced by what she could not have read. In virtually every preface, Davys clearly delineates that she was the only author, for better or for worse. Obviously, Davys felt it important for her readers to know that she received no assistance in her writings, particularly from men—students or authors.

6 Ian Watt claims that Daniel Defoe and Samuel Richardson are the first “great” writers who did not take their plots from such sources (13).

7 For a further discussion of the virtual disappearance of eighteenth-century studies in these decades, see J. Paul Hunter’s *Before Novels: The Cultural Contexts of Eighteenth-Century English Fiction*. 232
8 Nor does she focus on male authors. In fact, Armstrong affords only four authors, Samuel Richardson, Jane Austen, Charlotte Brontë, and Emily Brontë any significant attention.

9 Here, McBurney references Jonathan Swift’s scathing letter, which condemns Davys as “a rambling woman with very little taste in wit or humor.”

10 Although Bowden attempts to cohesively collect the many speculative details of Davys’s life, there are facts that she overlooks, which would negate some of her assumptions, such as her claim that other than Davys’s collected works, “the only other work to appear with her name on it in her lifetime was The Northern Heiress” (Self-Representation in Mary Davys).

11 Glover does not define what, exactly, she views as “masculine realism” and such a conception seems short-sighted, particularly given the previous scholarship on Davys and realism.

12 Davys credits her greatest literary success, the three night run of The Northern Heiress, to “the Ladies in particular” (A3).

13 This belief made be said to culminate (fictionally, at least) in Charlotte Lennox’s The Female Quixote of 1752. In Davys’s works, she often fights against the assumption of the irrational and emotionally motivated woman and instead shows the darker side and the often violent effects of an irrational and emotional man.

14 McBurney quips that while Fielding may not have read romantic novels, Mrs. Heartfree certainly did (xxvi).

15 I name Behn specifically not to ignore the fictional prosaic texts of male English authors of the period, or to suggest that the women’s writing of the era proves superior, but simply because Behn’s male contemporaries, while arguably experimenting with form and style in their fictional pieces, did not do so on the scale of Behn, nor did they publish such a large body of fictional work with which to compare and contrast Behn’s and Davys’s work. However, when looking at nonfictional as well as fictional texts of singular authors, one would also find a range of ability and experimentation. One might also argue that given the newness of the form, any author writing novels at the time would be original and progressive.

16 Ballaster astutely notes, “The perception of women’s different, and frequently disruptive use of fictional forms is instrumental in the novel’s formation” (14).

17 Davys’s tactics for presenting each side remain intriguing. While the correspondents appear friendly, some scholars such as Robert Adams Day and Martha Bowden even
regard them as lovers by the text’s close, the language they use to describe their opposing views certainly is not amicable.

18 This enlarges upon Ballaster’s claim that “readers of women’s amatory fiction are required to be read by a process of constant movement between sexual and party political meaning” (19) to include other women authors in that movement.

19 Joule also asserts, “Her first two novels The False Friend and in particular The Amours of Alcippus and Lucippe were romance parodies with laughable heroes, comic melodrama and plot twists” (34).

20 In this way, another contrast may be found between the romance and Davys’s antiromances; Ballaster claims that “in the romantic plot, femininity serves to reflect masculine desire” (84). In The Cousins, masculinity serves to reflect feminine strength and rationality.

21 See Seductive Forms: Women’s Amatory Fiction from 1684-1740.

22 Josephine Donovan claims that:
   By the latter half of the seventeenth century even authors of romances were beginning to call for more probable or more realistic characters. In various theoretical statements made in the mid-seventeenth century, Madeleine de Scudéry, the leading French romancier, proposed that writers should attend to probability, thereby invoking an Aristotelian criterion, which soon became codified as vraisemblance. In French neoclassical criticism, however, vraisemblance emerged as a doctrine of propriety—authors should depict characters who are realistic according to social norms of appropriate conduct. 2

23 See Michael McKeon’s discussion of Northrop Frye’s Secular Scripture, pages 8-11.

24 Citing Paul Salzman’s work on the anti-romance, Donovan maintains that “While Salzman claims the English anti-romances tended to remain burlesques rather than works of comic realism, that is not true of women writers in the English tradition, such as Manley, Trotter, and Davys” (117). I would counterclaim that in the case of Davys, at least, her works may be said to exhibit traits of the burlesque and realism.

25 See The History of Gil Blas of Santillane and A Collection of Voyages and Travels.

26 Donovan remarks, “The Cousins picks up from Behn’s ‘The Lucky Mistake’ (1688) and ‘The Wandering Beauty’ (1687) (and of course, numerous antecedents in the continental novella) on the theme of the young girl pledged to an older (in this case lecherous) parental friend” (93-4). If her meaning is that Davys plays upon this theme by not having Elvira pledged to him, revealing him (and thereby the other lecherous
antecedents of romance) as predators rather than suitors, then I agree with her. If, however, she is suggesting that Elvira is pledged to Alvaro, this is a vast misreading of the novel as Elvira’s father never consents. Donovan goes on to comment that “there is nothing to distinguish The Cousins from other examples of the genre (Behn’s for example), but it may be that these were all intended as burlesques” (94). Certainly two of Behn’s texts, “Memoirs of the Court of the King Bantam” and “Lucky at Last” are indeed meant to be comical and are likely parodies in themselves.

27 One remarkable line from Agnes de Castro reads, “the unfaithful Portuguese served Elvira exactly to her desires” (188). If, in fact, Davys reacts to Behn’s translation and uses it as a source of fuel for her antiromance, Bowden’s suggestion that the original title was The Treacherous Portugeze; or The False Friend, under which title it was republished in 1732, has added intrigue.

28 There are three; an avaricious step-mother in The Fugitive, and one corrupt female servant in The Reform’d Coquet and one in The Accomplish’d Rake.

29 Given the likely influence of Agnes de Castro and Incognita on The Cousins and the close dates of their original publications, I believe the composition date to be earlier than 1700, as early as 1692, the year she married Peter Davys. Gerd Bayer also believes that Davys may have published a piece in Peter Motteux’s Gentleman’s Journal in 1693.

30 Donovan claims, “An anti-romance undercurrent continued to circulate in the English women’s literary tradition throughout the century,” and that “there is no disputing the importance of the anti-romance to the constitution of the novel, and so is highly relevant to establish women’s contribution to the anti-romantic tradition” (113-4).

31 A. Norman Jeffares claims that although the piece was published in 1692, it was written during Congreve’s stay at Trinity College (10).

32 McKeon remarks of the preface, Congreve’s famous ‘Preface’ reiterates the familiar complaint that the ‘miraculous’ and the ‘impossible’ pleasures of the romance always must fade as the reader realizes ’tis all a lye’. The alternative term for the ‘lies’ of the romance Congreve calls not “true history” but ‘the novel’. (62)

33 One might speculate that Davys does not develop the exotic setting fully because she was unfamiliar with it. However, the pattern of interest in travel narratives and the fact she was well-read (and therefore likely familiar with works describing Spain, such as D’Aulnoy’s Account of the Voyage to Spain) suggests her intentional use of a foreign setting, which quickly becomes very domestic and familiar.

34 In Davys’s world, this indicates strongly that Lorenzo cannot truly embody the role of
“hero.” He falls in love with her based on her superficial qualities, not her internal merit.

35 Donovan highlights Manley’s own indulgence in mock heroics as “Violenta finally acknowledges, amidst much blushing and many tears, that she loves Roderigo. These have their effect and Roderigo finally determines he will marry her . . . an obvious parody of the French Romance” (104).

36 Some scholars believe that Davys imbedded her novels with firm religious beliefs and faith in providence. This declaration by Elvira seems to imply a deep faith in a greater power than that which exists in the terrestrial sphere.

37 Suicide also appears in Jane Barker’s *A Patch-Work Screen for the Ladies*; a possible suitor of Galesia disdains her for his former and corrupt lover, who cheats him of his fortune and estate. Upon the discovery of the cheat, the gentleman “in the midst of his Fury, went forthwith and shot himself” (138).

38 Like Davys, William Pittis also used suicide as a comical element in *The Jamaica Lady* (1720).

39 Congreve cleverly uses the term “amicide” in *Incognita*, a term not listed in the OED. Perhaps he also plays on, and or mocks, the nation’s desire to distinguish between types of murder.

40 According to Minios, “after 1660, the nobility and the refined society of London began to show more indulgence toward suicide” (187).

41 For a more complete examination of this phenomena, see Eric Parisot’s “Suicide Notes and Popular Sensibility in the 18th-c British Press.”

42 McGuire claims the term *suicide* enters the novel in the mid eighteenth-century, and *Clarissa* commonly viewed as the first novel to employ it (2).

43 Minios cites the London bills of mortality, which do, indeed, show an increase in the average suicide rates between 1680 and 1740, beginning with an average of 20 per year in the decade of 1680-90 and reaching 50 in the decade of 1730-40, which he attributes to the rise of industry and capitalism and the unstable economic events such as the South Sea Bubble (183-5), yet a change in reporting may have also led to the increasing figures.

44 Minios convincingly argues that the rate was not excessively greater than that of the continent, however much public (and perhaps even private) spin there was to the contrary.

45 For a culture so classically informed as England was at the time, these hierarchies of
suicide may harken back to classical notions of voluntary death. Hanging was considered a typically feminine form of suicide—recalling Jocasta and Antigone—or indeed as a punishment for women—such as the slaughter of Penelope’s handmaids at the end of The Odyssey. Therefore, it may have been in keeping with the English’s cultural admiration for Greek culture that sustained scorn for certain methods and admiration for others.

Greed and malice are typical characteristics of the aristocracy in Davys’s fiction. Although Alvaro is the eldest male child, his brother convinces the father that Alvaro will attempt his father’s life to gain his inheritance. After Alvaro discovers he has been disinherited and banished from the family estate, he immediately tries to drown himself. Although McGuire claims that drowning and hanging belonged to “a higher tier of lethal behavior” than that of poison (36), in the late seventeenth and early eighteenth century, the most oft-chosen method of self murder amongst the nobles was the pistol. The abundance of famous suicides occurring during the late seventeenth century, and the news thereof “accredited the idea of ‘fashionable’ suicide obeying a code of honor similar to the one that governed duels. In both cases the instrument of choice was the pistol or the sword; suicide by hanging was profoundly scorned” (Minios 187). So while Davys does not signify Alvaro as feminine by his choice of suicide by drowning, she does, arguably, render him from the start as ignoble. Moreover, in this tale, Davys wraps a philosophical argument concerning providential justice. Justice “overtakes” the younger brother, who while hunting falls from his horse and dashes his brains out against a rock. In The Cousins “natural” or “divine” justice rights almost every wrong committed in the novel. It is the first of many examples in Davys’s novels of her belief in Providence.

Although an obviously vengeful and malicious act, he paradoxically leaves a suicide note stating that he took his own life, and that no blame should be laid upon Leonora, which, in fact, is exactly what his mother tries to do. Davys either shows her ability to anticipate future trends or simply exhibits her belief in the power of letters and writing when she includes a suicide note in her novel. According to Parisot, later in the century “newspapers and magazines of the period also made a ‘luxury of grief’ by indulging their readers with an occasional sentimental or sensationalized report of suicide . . . by publishing suicide notes” (277). Furthermore, in 1711, William Withers published an essay regarding voluntary death. His basic rules were: “choose a clean efficient method, and leave a suicide note that your widow can read later” (Minios 188). While Frederick does not follow this “code,” his letter is a powerful tool of exoneration for Leonora as a murderer as she is charged immediately following the discovery of the gruesome scene.

However, one must also note that Frederick’s death allows for the rebirth of Leonora and Carlos’s romance.

In the nineteenth century, Emile Durkheim claimed that women lacked the intellectual development requisite to end their lives, and according to this construction, suicide was a male behavior and a mark of superiority of the sex (McGuire 11).
For a full discussion of “patriarchy” see Carol Pateman’s *The Sexual Contract*.

Elvira discovers the poison when the bottle slips from her hand and the family dog drinks the solution. As a tangential yet fascinating trait of Davys fiction, dogs are often involved (as victims or perpetrators) in important violent events of her novels. Once again, these representations of pets as central to the characters’ lives underscores Davys feel for the pulse of the period as domesticated dogs would also be one of the signs of the growing luxury of the eighteenth century, and may be said to have witnessed their own “wave” in popularity and breeding in the eighteenth century. Also of note is the realistic depiction Davys gives us of the dog’s death. She writes,

> a little Italian Greyhound, that had been Lorenzo’s Fellow-Traveller, and used to taste of everything, ran to this Liquid stuff, and lick’d up some of it, but being very strong, he shak’d his Ears and left it. And in two Minutes, swell’d to a prodigious bigness, and died immediately. (243)

The Princess does, indeed, promise to never marry her true love De Nemours after her husband’s death and instead enters a nunnery. Although coerced, she, too, becomes a virtuous, if tragic, widow.

Moreover, it is worthy of notice that Davys affords Sebastian an equal amount of praise as Lorenzo, describing him as “a Man of a considerable Figure, and [who] served the King in an honourable Post” (213).

It seems Davys is being ironic when Leonora thanks Lorenzo for all he had done for her as he actually did nothing but allow her husband to die in front of him and send her off as his murderer.

Even the family’s letters are intercepted so that all of their pleas for help go unanswered.

Once again, Leonora is forced to participate unwillingly in a violent act. Although she does not witness the final act of Clara’s death, she must listen to the pronouncement of the death sentence.

Another jab at his heroism, Octavio saves the family by shouting “Villain, what dost thou do?” and then grapples over a lit match. There are no “manly” duels or battles with swords or a gun battle, etc., but two men wrestling over a tiny stick. After Octavio’s “victory,” Sebastian simply runs away after the struggle over the match.

Davys again indulges in mocking the “hero” and the romance; while at dinner, “Octavio eat not much meat, but fed plentifully on sighs” (243).

When republishing earlier works Davys often retitled her novels. As noted, Davys
likely used the original title to draw in readers who would have been interested in romances, a popular genre at the time. However, it is interesting to speculate why she would have removed the names in 1725. By renaming it *The Lady’s Tale* she erases Alcippus as a titular character and therefore arguably diminishes him, reemphasizing Abaliza’s—or Lucippe’s—importance and voice.

Bowden first claims, “For many years, *Alcippus and Lucippe* was thought to be lost,” yet paradoxically argues that this could not be the case for the earlier version Davys claims to have sold. Bowden asserts, “While Davys may in fact have written the book in 1700, and might even have packed it into her luggage for the trip from Ireland to London, it was not published until 1704, under the name *Alcippus and Lucippe*” (“Introduction” xiii).

I have attempted to clarify, when possible, where the scene appears; in *Alcippus and Lucippe* or *The Lady’s Tale* or both by referencing either the title or female protagonist directly; Lucippe from *Alcippus and Lucippe* or Abaliza from *The Lady’s Tale*.

Karen Gevirtz cleverly notes that all the elements of the novel prove contrary, “with a dedication that is not a dedication, a preface that is not a preface, and a romance that is not a romance, Davys balances inclusion (social, literary, moral) and detachment or exclusion” (147).

Margaret Doody comments upon the importance of titles for literature in general, “Changes in literary fashion (and perhaps readership) can sometimes be traced in the differing titles given to any one of the older novels from the sixteenth to the eighteenth century” (252). Likewise, one may trace the changes within Davys’s work (and also perhaps her readership) from her titles—changed and original—as well.

Although an oft-used figure in fiction, Davys incudes this trope so often in her texts (five of her six novels and both of her plays) that one wonders if she, too, were orphaned and this is, indeed, a bit of autobiography seeping into her work.

Not only does she use vernacular phrases early on in her work, she attempts in her following novels to phonetically write the dialects of certain regions and classes.

It is interesting to note that the term “romance” is itself a progression to the more common. Deriving from the French *romanz*, which means “the speech of the people” or “the vulgar tongue,” the term essentially means written in the vernacular (*Encyclopedia Britannica*).

The disparity between the names of father and son must also be a lampoon on Davys’s part; Alcippus fits nicely to the tradition of romance heroes, while Vanzouch certainly does not. Moreover, Davys paints Vanzouch as a realistically flawed—in fact, physically imperfect.
deformed—yet laudable character, while conversely the fathers see Alcippus as the ideal man.

68 This may, in fact, be another nod to Trotter’s novel, The Adventures of a Young Lady. The protagonist, Olinda, also has a Dutch suitor, yet in Trotter’s narrative, the older Dutchman, not the son, pursues Olinda.

69 Jane Austen’s Pride and Prejudice may come to mind when contemplating mixed-class marriages, although in an entirely different way. Mr. Darcy’s heroism stems from his willingness to enter into a companionate marriage—or a marriage purely for love—when he has nothing to gain as he has a thriving estate as well as superior status to Elizabeth Bennet.

70 It is interesting to note that in most of Davys’s novels where there is a young lady to be courted, she is fifteen years of age, as is Lucippe. However, Davys changes the age to eighteen in A Lady’s Tale, which would have been more consistent with the reality of marriages in the eighteenth century; a man came of legal age in his twenty-first year, and his bride to be would have been nearer to his age, not typically as young as fifteen. Again, this ubiquitous age of fifteen may be a biographical detail that seeps into the bulk of Davys’s work, or Davys may use it to reveal an inappropriate attraction on the part of the male protagonists.

71 Marilyn Williamson claims:

Another group of writers—Mary Davys, Catherine Trotter, and the authors of The Perfidious P and of Lindamira—use the basic structures of amatory fiction without allowing immorality to thrive. Their books are stories of the education of a heroine in choosing wisely where to place her love in order to marry happily. The educational theme is important, for it represents a fundamental social meaning of the fiction for its large and growing female audience. Increasingly isolated in homes of small nuclear families, a status often represented in fiction by spatial confinement, marriageable women knew of little of the world, of males, of their own sexuality. They and their world were increasingly convinced, however, of the new world conclusions about marriage; children and parents should not make their marriages, and marriages for love were the only happy ones. (210) Although Williamson is correct concerning the increasing isolation of women to smaller domestic spheres, she fails to see how Davys herself comments upon this type of isolation, and the limitations it created for women. This idea of the closing marriages as “happy” and companionate seems to be a common misconception of Davys’s work. Particularly true of her last two novels, The Reform’d Coquet and The Accomplish’d Rake, Davys questions the plausibility of companionate marriage.

72 He does, however, swoon in The Lady’s Tale.
On the other hand, Alcippus remains unscathed and is proven ineffective as a protector as his cousin and father perish under his watch.

Davys carefully notes Abaliza and her father’s humanity in this scene as well. When they discover Setter has gone mad, they consider he had “been so very good in his kind, we thought it a pity to hang him, till we had endeavor’d for his Cure” (163).

Lucippe will later cry, “Oh! Alcippus, what has thy Resentment done? Has it not ruin’d thee and me?” (172)

At Lucippe’s and Alcippus’s first meeting in the forest, he chases her and frightens her so terribly that she almost faints with weakness. In a moment of great irony, Marianna, Lucippe’s maid, bids her to fear not, “since [their] Pursuer was, she was sure, a Gentleman, and one that would offer [them] no violence” (15).

Although Alcippus and Lucippe and The Lady’s Tale burst with uncontrolled male passion, Davys again contrasts the two suitors’ emotions. Adrastus sends Abaliza a letter after she rejects and embarrasses him, which reads, “your Charms are stronger than my Resolves . . . give me leave, my long adored Abaliza, to see you once more, that I may die at your feet, since that is the only Fate reserv’d for the Wretched” (Lady’s Tale 145). While his passion is self-effacing, Alcippus is frequently violent. Moreover in Adrastus’s letter is a discernable reference to Congreve’s Incognita as Aurelian, too, beseeches, “but sure I am, not to depart Florence until you have made me the miserable Man in it, and refuse me the fatal Kindness of Dying at your Feet” (50).

In another instance of a marginalized character coming to the aid of one of the protagonists, an unknown woman helps nurse Alcippus to health. For her efforts, Alcippus claims she “persecuted” him “with her profound Civility, which never could have been bestowed on a more thankless Person” (193).

His response to this chastisement illustrates Davys’s wit and her great ability to capture human moments in dialogue. He says:

You seem a little ruffled, Madam . . . that I have suspected you cou’d be guilty of a Weakness you can resist; but I entreat you to consider, it was the dreadful Apprehensions of my own eternal Uneasiness which has been the Cause. Oh! Abaliza, I cannot live without you, and therefore beg you will pardon every wild Expression which the violence of my passion forces to my tongue. (157)

Another common trope of amatory fiction and romance witnessed in such texts as Behn’s Isabella of The History of the Nun; or the Fair Vow-Breaker (1689).

The passage describing Aurelian’s descent into love reads:
he was strangely and insensibly fallen in love with her Shape, Wit and Air; which, together with a white Hand, he had seen (perhaps not accidentally) were enough to have subdued a more stubborn Heart than he were ever master of; and of her Face, which he had not seen, he bestowed upon her the best his imagination could furnish him with. (43)

82 Playing with this inversion of gender, after the uncle receives the challenge from Alcippus, he laughs and says, “Abaliza, this is your quarrel, so you may e’en go and fight it out yourself; for I assure you, I will neither kill nor be kill’d for nothing.” To this Abaliza responds, “I’ll swear, Sir . . . you are a topping Hero to send a Woman to answer your Challenges; but I hope, tho’ you won’t be Principal, you will be my Second” (186). Moreover, depicting the duel as ridiculous male behavior will also become a consistent peripheral theme of Davys’s novels.

83 One notable precursor, Catherine Cockburn-Trotter’s *The Adventures of a Young Lady*, employs the epistolary form to tell a woman’s tale of courtship and heartbreak and was published in 1693. One may also point to Behn’s *Oroonoko* as another principled woman retelling her tale. However, the narrator from *Oroonoko* serves as an observer of the action rather than the focal point of it whereas Davys’s and Trotter’s characters prove central to the plot.

84 All of the letters in *The Adventures of a Young Lady* are written by Olinda. The only occasion of a male address to the reader is, quite literally, in the address to the reader. Moreover, one wonders how much influence Cockburn-Trotter’s 1693 novel may have had on Davys. Anne Kelley writes of the novel, *The Adventures of a Young Lady* is a satiric account of male courtship in a domestic setting, and in this the novella breaks with the tradition of seventeenth-century epistolary romance, conventionally written in florid rhetorical style, and concerned with passionate and often tragic love affairs. (viii)

85 Davys is not, however, the only author to deviate from this pattern. In 1709, Bernard Mandeville’s *The Virgin Unmask’d* appeared. It, too, records a conversation between two women, yet he plays on the genre even more than Davys as *The Virgin Unmask’d* includes the thought of an older maiden aunt and her younger maiden niece. But like Davys, he uses the title to direct his readers’ expectations towards a titillating read, playing with the virgin dialogue with a discussion of Antonia’s bare breasts. Additionally, in 1740 *A Dialogue Between a Married Lady and a Maid*, an abridged translation of Nicolas Chorier’s *Satyra sotadica* (1660) also plays with the genre by setting the discourse between “upstanding” ladies, who prove just as lewd as any of the bawds from the whore dialogues.

86 McKeon notes that Congreve’s very insistence on his role as the neutral and transparent recorder of
what has happened—the very antithesis of those visionary, creative romancers who are his heroes—leads him to protest the truth and plausibility of his narrative so energetically as to raise of suspicions rather than quell them. (62)

87 However, in The Reform’d Coquet and The Accomplish’d Rake, Davys does include unnamed heroic men, all of whom are paid for their duty, yet still, they save Amoranda and Belinda from sexual assault.

88 Frans de Bruyn also writes of the evolution in Davys’s work; “Beginning with a simple novella, Davys soon progressed to narratives of increasing complexity and sophistication, encompassing forms as diverse as the epistolary novel, disguised autobiography, and realistic comic fiction” (2).

89 Ballaster claims that “amatory prose offered an opportunity for an exploration of the power of female representation, political and sexual” (122). Arguably, Davys also sought forms that would allow her to also explore female power her culture’s attempts to deny it in the domestically political.

90 One may note her interest in the domestic as a meditation on the division between the public and the private. Pateman argues,

The story of the social contract is treated as an account of the creation of the public sphere of civil freedom. The other, private sphere is not seen as politically relevant. Marriage and the marriage contract are, therefore, also deemed politically irrelevant. To ignore the marriage contract is to ignore half the original contract. (3)

91 Clearly, Don Quixote was already on Davys’s mind in 1704, as in the preface to Alcippus and Lucipe Davys attributes “Little said soon Amended” to “Sancho Pancho.” One may deduce that she did, in fact, mean Sancho Panza, however, the attribution belongs to Baltasar Gracián, and the full quotation, and “Little said is soon amended. There is always time to add a word, never to withdraw one.”

92 Frank Waldeigh Chandler argues, “The literature of roguery is defined by subject matter rather than on form” (i).

93 McKeon also provides a lengthy discussion of the picaresque in Origins of the Novel.

94 He goes on to claim that this in turn causes the picaresque story to function as a paradigm for the novel as a whole (Hartveit 9).

95 Chandler claims that social conditions were analogous in Germany, which led to the rise of the German picaresque novel, the first being Der Abenteurliche Simplicissimus in 1669 (29).
Other early famous native rogues include Robin Goodfellow, Robert the Devil, and Friar Rush, found in medieval fabliaux. The most famous women rogues of the seventeenth century (and beyond) remain Mary Firth, or Moll Cutpurse, and Longa Margarita.

J. Paul Hunter asserts that while there may be international cross influences on the English novel, “national strands need to be worked out before folding into the mix the intertwinnings” (xxii).

While this scenario has potential to be presented as “funny,” a decidedly dark tone permeates this episode as Julia, the Pope’s mistress, has plans to “use” him literally to death.

Oddly relishing female cruelty, after the description of a Jewish landlord’s torture at the hands of women, who previously whipped and abused Wilton’s courtesan, Wilton remarks, “Triumph women; this was the end of the whipping Jew, contrived by a woman, in revenge of two women, herself and her maid” (359).

The OED has no citation for “fizzigging” and credits Nashe with the first use of “firking.”

Additionally, Hal Gladfelder notes,

If by its finale The Unfortunate Traveller seems to have reversed the usual terms of the picaresque—turning from satire to tragedy, episodic to plotted, public and exuberant to domestic and grim—I would argue that this hybridity of shifting between extremes is characteristic of the English incorporation of the genre. (35)

As Chandler suggests, delving deeper, one might consider folklore, medieval fabliaux, and jest books as possible precursors.

In addition to The English Rogue, Head also wrote and published The Life and Death of Mother Shipton in 1677. Like Head’s first novel, the prose is relatively simple and straightforward, but again, the novel also has a well-defined and methodical narrative. While Mother Shipton is not picaresque, it is a rogue biography of the stranger sort—the story describes Mother Shipton’s birth from a desperate and willing mother and her father, the devil, and how she became an oracle—while also being an allegory for the wrongs of Queen Mary and Oliver Cromwell.

In 1680, John Bunyan’s The Life and Death of Mr. Badman also appeared, which some consider to fit in the rogue literature category.

Chandler also credits Le Sage with heavily influencing the dawn of the English picaresque (229).
Monsieur de Parc’s *La Vraye Historie Comique de Francion* was originally published in 1623. Uniquely, the antihero is not a picaro in service of an aristocrat but a person of a wealthy family and a gallant adventurer, yet he still exhibits the roguish behavior associated with the lowly picaro. The translation, *The Comical History of Francion*, was published in 1703. Of course, it is impossible to say whether or not Davys read the work, but the similarities are, in some aspects, striking. *The Comical History* is a text that directed its satire toward the high as well as the low and toward individual characters rather than towards characters as representatives of a profession. In this respect, both *The Comical History* and *The Fugitive* may be said to align with their Spanish and German cousins, as the picaresque has traditionally been connected to the novel of manners (Chandler 29).

Chandler wrongly claims that Fielding was the first to introduce satire to English roguery (78).

Chandler staunchly holds that when held side-by-side to Continental anatomies of roguery, the English “transcended in number, interest, and importance” (87).

In fact, there is only one character who is named in *The Fugitive*, Joan Ellis, and oddly it is one of the most fleeting characters—a woman who weeded the narrator’s uncle’s garden. Even the widow remains unnamed in the novel.

If one follows this line, then the imbedded narrative of the poor scholar with no fire to heat his apartment provides a tantalizing picture of Peter Davys’s life at University.

While it did contain real events of his childhood, Richard Head claimed that the majority of the novel was fictitious.

Of course, Davys did not use the term picaresque specifically; in fact, no one did until Walter Scott coined the term in 1827 (*OED*).

*The London Jilt* (1693) also employs the use of vulgarity and the vernacular, with terms such as “bitch” and “cooled.”

This purposeful use of language is present from her very first novel *The Cousins*, where McBurney notes Sebastian “soliloquizes in thinly disguised blank verse,” which Davys includes to burlesque Continental fiction (“Forerunner” p354).

Davys’s phonetic creation is similar to yet different from Nashe’s ridicule of the German language. In *The Unfortunate Traveller*, we are to laugh at the nonsensical sound of the German language. In *The Fugitive*, Davys attempts to capture the sound of the regional dialect. Moreover, the reader is meant to laugh at the man but also to understand the depth of the Englishman’s ignorance, the use of accent revealing the extreme
xenophobia of the man and his beliefs. In 1720, William Pittis published *The Jamaica Lady; or The Life of Bavia*, in which he also included a heavy Irish accent and a Creole dialect.

116 The offer of money has a distinctly negative connotation upon the man’s character. While the man negotiates a distasteful exchange with the servants of the Inn, the widow sees the need of the inn’s staff and agrees to play along so that another may benefit.

117 David O’Shaughnessy claims:

The British had considered the Irish barbaric long before 1641, in a tradition dating back at least to Gerald Cambrensis in the twelfth century, but events of 1641 solidified these attitudes. Some parliamentary troops, for instance, were so affected by assumptions of Irish bestiality, that after the Cromwellian destruction of a garrison in Cashel in 1647, they claimed that some of the corpses had ‘tails near a quarter of a yard long’.

118 Alternately, and perhaps to highlight her conscious choice to use the vernacular, Davys also inserts the Latin phrase *nemine contradicente* and appropriates the “common” language of Shakespeare with her use of “Grimalkin” and “Sooterkin.” However, all of these more intellectual references come from the mouth of the very clever narrator, which contrasts her, and her language, to the vulgar, and their vulgarities, of the novel.

119 Directly before this speech, Davys heavily suggests that the fop hates women and is therefore fond of men. While Davys takes a progressive line on many topics, homosexuality is not one of them. In many of her novels she bursts with disgust at the thought of same-sex relationships.

120 According to Chandler this is a blessing and a curse typical of the picaresque as, “It is the glory of the works that they are thoroughly national; it is their limitation that they lack the art which alone could have made them universal” (29).

121 To speculate why Davys changed the name from *The Fugitive* in her 1705 publication to *The Merry Wanderer* in her 1725 edition of her collected works is likely a complicated and lengthy discussion. However, one wonders if the original title appeared too aggressive for an early eighteenth-century London based readership, and Davys attempted to soften the titular character and the novel.

122 A fascinating connective thread to Fielding’s novel comes in the form of criticism. Richardson famously regarded the heroine of *Tom Jones* as “the weak, the insipid, the Runaway, the Inn-frequenting Sophia,” who in turn considered by Richardson’s female correspondents as “a Fugitive from her father’s house” (Gladfelder 7).

123 This reading would be consistent with those who believe *The Fugitive* to be a thinly
veiled autobiography.

124 Here, again, proves a nice parallel and simultaneously a contrast to the Spanish works that came before *The Fugitive*; Hartveit points to the contrast of the fragile and outcast low-born picaro to the handsome and wandering knight (16). In Davys’s picaresque novel, we have the confident and independent widow contrasted to the troubled single women she meets; if she has had romantic disappointments, we do not hear of them.

125 One could speculate that as an intelligent woman, Davys was, in fact, conflating the meanings, allowing for a myriad of ways to perceive the main character and the theme of the novel.

126 It is also interesting to note if we take *The Unfortunate Traveller* as a forerunner to the English picaresque novel that the English convention would be to lean toward the universal and vague with regard to their titles contrasted to their foreign counterparts. If so, this is an English convention that Fielding totally abandons.

127 According to the men in Brandes’s study, a woman’s ultimate goal in marriage was widowhood and claimed that “widows immediately gained weight and acquired a lustrous glow after their husbands die and they are likely to become promiscuous” (Buitelaar 9).

128 Judith is one notable widow who acts contrary to expectations by invading an enemy camp and then beheading General Holofernes. Another distinctive widow comes from the Catalan *Curial e Güelfa*, written in the mid-sixteenth century, wherein her husband grants her autonomy in his will. Historically, for medieval London widows this would have been an impossibility, as even in cases where husbands attempted to make their wives real property owners upon their deaths, the court always objected, stating that the “widow could only have a life interest” in the property (Hanawalt 26). Other notable literary widows include Shakespeare’s Gertrude, who helps send Hamlet into madness with her second marriage and Jocasta who marries her son, Oedipus. While neither are outright villains, they are also not depicted as the center of the narrative and as characters whose actions cause massive disruptions in the “natural” order.

129 Buitelaar argues that the widow’s act of surviving her husband was an act of defying his male authority (11).

130 This was a real historical seventeenth- and eighteenth-century Dutch category that included widows, orphans, the chronically ill, and other ‘unfortunate persons’ (Buitelaar 6).

131 Alter claims, “The tension or ‘conflict’ that keeps the narrative taught is the individual’s incessant and ingenious struggle to take a livelihood from a grudging world”
The narrator, too, must attempt to keep her dignity while also dealing in the “sordid” world of money and debt collection.

The only exception to this rule is in the instance where the narrator links herself to a rich brother working in the East Indies, which upon his return will ostensibly confer funds and status to his sister. While provocative, his return never happens and does not feel imminent during the widow’s own proclamation.

Miller asserts that as a general rule, the picaresque “is a protest against men as they are and as the world causes them to be” (72).

These traits of Davys’s writing will appear with greater sophistication a century later in the works of Jane Austen.

The widow tells the housewife the story of the poor scholar who could afford no fire and therefore had to be extremely frugal—telling the housewife what she does by choice others must do out of necessity.

Davys underscores the problem arising between the lax aristocracy and needy servants, which was in fact a common contemporary theme as tensions regarding material goods and theft were on the rise, and which culminated in the 1723 Black Act and after which Britain would witness a huge increase of crimes punished capitally, most concentrating on crimes of property.

The picaresque is not the only genre to avail itself of the framed-narrative as fictional tool. The romance is also often made up of a series of framed-tales, however, in the picaresque the tales often introduce a character who then disappears. In romance, the tales often involve main or secondary characters and further either the plot of the development of character.

Throughout her career, Davys appears to be obsessed with the laws governing the institution of marriage—the ways in which men circumvent it and the ways in which women legitimize it.

Here is a repetition of the circumstances of Alcippus and Lucippe.

Misrecognition is long-standing trope of drama, but would also become one of fiction; Haywood also uses the trick in Fantomina (1725).

This character shares much in common with Sophia’s father, Mr. Western. The young man in love escapes his dungeon due his father’s love of hunting, punctuated with the darkly comical wish for a “halter.”
It is also notable that this horrendous family are Dissenters, and this affiliation adds to their ugliness and ridiculousness.

The question of whether the woman was tricked or raped by her previous lover remains unanswered, and Davys’s does not spend any time attempting to distinguish the cause of her fall.

Defined by Janet Altman as “the use of the letter’s formal properties to create meaning” (4).

However, like Catherine Trotter’s *Adventures of a Young Lady*, Davys did not follow the formula of the epistolary romance. According to Anne Kelley, *The Adventures of a Young Lady* “is a satiric account of male courtship in a domestic setting, and in this the novella breaks with the tradition of seventeenth-century epistolary romance, conventionally written in a florid and rhetorical style, and concerned with passionate and often tragic love affairs” (viii).

Joule argues against this claiming, “*Familiar Letters* is not only a parody of romance, but also more specifically of the Tory seduction narrative. . . . The letters parody the veiled, allegorical political style in works by Behn and Manley” (41). Joule cites Wakely in her assertion, who also claims, “*Familiar Letters* signals its departure from the Tory seduction narrative tradition by a deliberate parody of the latter’s conventions” (258).

Of the “three of the best” epistolary novels, *Lindamira, Olinda’s Adventures*, and *Familiar Letters*, Day asserts that they were “probably written in a leisurely manner by women who were in comfortable circumstances or who at least were not industrious hacks like Mrs. Behn, Mrs. Manley, and Mrs. Haywood” (82). While one may take umbrage with his highly subjective—and likely a severely simplified—opinion as Mary Davys certainly did not live in comfortable circumstances, her reworking of entire novels as with *Alcippus and Lucippe* further supports the idea that she very likely took great time with, and came back to, her texts.

According to Gary Schneider the birth of the familiar letter dates back to Cicero: Classical writers such as Cicero first defined and practiced the epistolary form known as the familiar letter. Petrarch’s discovery of Cicero’s *Ad Atticum* in 1345, and Coluccio Salutati’s unearthing of his *Ad Familiares* in 1392, however, mark the reemergence of the Latin familiar letter as a form used to communicate with friends, scholars, and political administrators alike, “[and this] changed the focus of the letter away from narrow legal and bureaucratic concerns’ as Thomas O. Beebee puts it. (42) Moreover, according to Schneider, it appears that England warmed to the public publishings of private letters much later than its continental counterparts. Already in the fourteenth century, collections of letters were scribally published, finding their way into
print in the following century. The production was “enormous,” and Michel de Montaigne writes that he possessed over 100 volumes of Italian letters alone. However, up until the 1640s, letter collections were far less common in England, “constituting primarily the letters of classical, patristic, and continental humanist writers (49). For a more in-depth discussion of the history of letters and their publications, see Gary Schneider’s The Culture of Epistololarity, Robert Adams Day’s Told in Letters, Janet Altman’s Epistolarity, and Thomas O. Beebee’s Epistolary Fiction in Europe 1500-1850.

149 According to Charles Mish, “No piece of fiction had wider circulation in the late seventeenth century and hence the influence of these letters as a model for the presentation from within of an intensely realized love-story was great” (37).

150 Although the Restoration would see the true growth of letter fiction, Day cites Nicholas Breton’s Poste with a Packet of Madde Letters (1602) as a very early and innovative example. Day finds Brenton’s work to be “lively and realistic” with pithy characters who wrote in colloquial English and who responded “credibly”; furthermore, Day credits the publication as introducing English literature to the “truly ‘familiar’ letter” (20).

151 By foregrounding an incestuous (as well as noble) relationship in her title, Behn consciously plays on the wicked nature of the letters. Before a leaf is turned, the reader was virtually promised a titillating read. Love-Letters, according to Janet Todd, “plays on the [the] mixture of politics and sex by focusing on the seduction of the Tory Henrietta Berkeley by the Whig Lord Grey” (ix). Furthermore, Karen Gevirtz claims the novel “reveals most clearly and extensively how Behn’s interest evolved during the 1680s and how Behn developed narrative strictures to respond to that interest” (Women 39).

152 Wakely also maintains,

The sarcasm of the exaggerated terms with which [Davys] describes the conventions she is flouting rises into relief when compared with both Behn’s and L’Estrange’s texts, which take such assumptions as read in order to give an illicit thrill to their characters’ amorous correspondence. (259)

153 The OED defines “gentleman” as “A man of gentle birth or having the same heraldic state as those of gentle birth; properly, one who is entitled to bear arms, though not ranking among the nobility but also applied to a person of distinction without precise definition of rank.”

154 And Pope is certainly not singular in this act. Cynthia Lowenthal claims of Lady Mary Wortley Montagu’s Letters from Turkey:

The letters extant today, fifty-two in all, are not the letters Lady Mary actually sent but a compilation carefully preserved in her own autograph and copied in two small albums. Robert Halsband reports that among the Wortley manuscripts is a
document, written in Lady Mary’s hand and endorsed by Wortley initials as ‘Head of L.M.’s Letters from Turkey, which contains her correspondents’ and accompanied by brief summaries of the letters. While she drew on her letters to create the embassy collection, other evidence indicates that she edited out the personal references and rearranged information. As such, the embassy correspondence is Lady Mary’s most polished and self-conscious epistolary performance document deliberately shaped, edited, and fine-tuned for nuance and subtlety. (83)

Furthermore, in some cases epistolary novels masked other genres; Katherine Hornbeak claims that Richardson’s *Familiar Letters* are tactically presented to appear as familiar letters but are, in actuality, a conduct book reiterating much of the “popular” wisdom of Richardson’s day.

155 I am grateful to Jessica Munns for providing this information.

156 Schneider notes that the “birth” of the vernacular and native English familiar letter was an illustrious one indeed: he cites both James Howell’s *Epistolae Ho-Elianae* and King Charles I’s *The Kings Cabinet Opened* as starting the trend of letter publication that thereafter saw the growth of personal letter publication (49).

157 The real people behind the characters were, in fact, Ford Lord Grey and his sister-in-law Lady Henrietta Berkeley. In her preface, Behn claims that the tale is foreign and she the mere translator. However, Todd asserts that Behn’s claim of finding a “little Book of Letters, call’d *L’Intregue de Philander & Silvia*” and the resulting *Love-Letters* to be a mere translation to be entirely false as no such title exists. Furthermore, Todd maintains that Behn’s claim points to the French influences of the genre while simultaneously introducing the notion of decoding, ciphers, and the revelation of secrets, however, “the historical characters intended are frequently clear though no comprehensive key to the work was ever published” (*Love-Letters* 3).

158 Trotter’s Cleander and Olinda also are prominent examples of this name game, Cleander likely referential to Leander, showcasing the author’s knowledge of the classics.

159 Philips’s letters to “Poliarchus” are a “true-to-life” example of the bleeding between fiction and nonfiction in her use of highly artificial *nom de plumes*.

160 Day also claims that these type of names were the vestiges of the influence of French romances on English fiction, and “the student of English fiction between the Restoration and Fielding can almost count on his fingers the number of characters who do not have romance derived names” (24).

161 McBurney comments upon the obvious influence Steele and Addison had on *Familiar Letters* as they also traced the courtship of Berina (Whig) and Artander (Tory) in *The
Spectator (“Forerunner” 354 n.24).

162 Ehrenpreis and Anderson claim that the epistolary form itself attempted to “subordinate ‘art’ into ‘nature’, the composed to the unplanned,” (272) yet Artander attempts the opposite, composing the planned to appear as the spontaneous.

163 This use of a binary, here “sharp” yet “innocent,” is one of the hallmarks of Davys’s style, wherein she belies the acknowledgement she has made; something cannot be “innocent” and “sharp,” and readers may discern her true meaning in the lines that follow. In this case, it is the suicide of a love-sick elderly maiden.

164 He, reminiscent of The Tatler, recalls an event with a hoop skirt so large it causes an accident at a party. See The Tatler No. 116, Thursday January 5, 1710, “Addison on the Hoop-skirt on Trial.”

165 While the events themselves are rather implausible, Davys uses the situation to launch into a depiction of true poverty and the helpless position in which society subjects women, both oft-found elements in Davys’s fiction.

166 Cavendish, as radical as she was, also religiously observes the “humble” or “faithful servant” closing; even in her close to her husband she writes, “Your Lordships Honest Wife and Humble Servant” (39). Of all of the subscriptions in the 211 epistles of Sociable Letters only in two to her sisters, Pye and Ann, does she subscribe herself “Your most Affectionate Sister,” and “Your very loving Sister” (272-3), and two addressed to “Worthy Sir,” ostensibly a physician treating a “Mrs. T,” she subscribes herself “Your very loving Friend” (283-4). One other fictional correspondent, Olinda of Trotter’s novel, also refuses the appellation of “humble servant,” instead subscribing herself in various forms of “Your Friend.”

167 This is most palpably evinced when Artander complains that “three Posts are gone, and a fourth come without one satisfactory Line from Berina” (106). Berina replies that she was at Sir John -----, “and during the whole time there” was never “Mistress of so much time as wou’d write a Letter” (108).

168 Bannet asserts that “fulsome compliments came to be regarded as ‘servile’ flattery. By the middle of the eighteenth century, this style had degenerated into the language of libertines and villains in courtship novels” (Letter Manuals Vol I 90).

169 Although less common, letters between unrelated men and women are certainly not unheard of. Before Samuel Richardson’s Letters written to and for particular friends on the most important occasions (1746), The Works of Monsieur Voiture containing his familiar letters to gentlemen and ladies, published by Sam Briscoe in 1701, Susanna Centlivre’s Familiar and Courtly Letters published as Astrea (1700), Edward Ward’s A
Pacquet from Wills (1701), The Works of Thomas Brown (1707), Thomas Otway’s love letters to Elizabeth Barry (1712), and the aforementioned works by Cavendish are some examples of texts that challenged these notions of propriety.

Notable exceptions include Trotter’s epistolary novel, The Adventures of a Young Lady 1693 (later published as Olinda’s Adventure: or the Amours of a Young Lady), Lady Mary Wortley Montagu’s Turkish Embassy Letters (1763), and Katherine Philips Letters from Orinda to Poliarchus (1705). Of the three, only Trotter’s was published during her lifetime and as a piece of fiction. According to Perry, Philips “fled the country and took to her bed stricken, when an unauthorized edition of her poems was pirated and printed in 1662) (Astell 474). Given the apparent scorn English society had for a correspondence between unrelated men and women, it is little wonder that Montagu’s and Phillips’s were both published posthumously.

Ruth Perry also comments upon this parallel aspect of Love-Letters and maintains, “In his verbal agonies, the hero Philander often writes about what is natural and what is artificially imposed upon man by misguided social codes” (Women, Letters 24). However, Philander’s complaints against “misguided social codes” are complaints against incest and adultery, not against an “innocent” friendship.

Despite their political differences, Astell a Tory and Davys a Whig, Davys also shares other beliefs with Astell. Perry claims, “[Astell’s] views about women were inextricably bound up with questions about the nature of intelligence and the soul, and the definition of natural government” (13).

It is interesting to note that Trotter’s, Behn’s, and Davys’s novels all begin with the voice of the male character. Although Cleander merely introduces the novel to the reader and then disappears as an author, his is still the first voice the reader “hears.” Both Philander’s and Artander’s letters are the first we read in Behn’s and Davys’s texts, and both characters ultimately emerge as the disreputable men (some may argue that there is no emerging, that from the first letter, they are presented as disreputable).

Kelley maintains that “[Trotter’s] novel is interesting not only for its unconventional narrative style but also for according the female protagonist a pivotal role in determining her own fate” (viii), as does Familiar Letters.

This is most clearly illustrated by cases of rape in the eighteenth century, for which defendants were not charged with a crime of violence against a person but rather for a crime of property.

Behn also capitalized on political polarization between correspondents. However, Behn ostensibly denies a political agenda in “The Argument,” which prefaces the letters (1684), by ending, “tis not my business here to mix the rough relation of a War with the
soft Affairs of Love” (10). Paradoxically, this statement is belied by the fact that Behn opens “The Argument” with an introduction of War, “In the time of the Rebellion of the true Protestant Huguenots” (9), and thereby adding ambiguity to Behn’s true intent.

177 Nigel Yates locates the cause for the Crisis in the continued familiarity between Anglican high churchmen and non-jurors coupled with Jacobite support by some high church clergy (18).

178 Given a likely pen dated of 1716, the heated nature of Berina and Artander’s debates parallel those that must have been circulating nationally following the Rebellion.

179 Geoffrey Holmes lists the fundamental tenets of the Tory theory of order as: absolute monarchy, divine right, indefeasible hereditary succession, non-resistance, and passive obedience, to which Whiggism was greatly opposed (30).

180 Interestingly, there has been some debate amongst historians to the existence of Whigs and Tories representing two parties and a two party system during Anne’s reign. See William Speck’s “Whigs and Tories dim their glories: English political parties under the first two Georges.”

181 One might argue that by novel’s end Davys indicts the Tory party through their ridiculous representative, Artander. Given Davys’s career-long vilifying of male characters, and Artander is no exception, it would not be illogical to read Familiar Letters as itself a clandestine partisan commentary.

182 Joule also notes this tendency of Artander’s, arguing, “Davys’s representation of Artander as a patriarchal figure is not straightforward. He is a comic character, sometimes effeminate and ridiculous” (42).

183 And she goes on: her letter continues for another three-quarters of a page.

184 A pervasive indictment of Artander’s character lies in his interest in love over the interests of his nation; his relationship with Berina appears to take precedence over political matters. Artander responds to Berina’s heated question as to whether he will not “own him for your King, tho’ both God and the Nation have made him so?” with, “I Doubt, Berina, you and I shall do as the whole Nation has done, argue ourselves into some Misunderstanding, which may not easily be rectify’d; which Consideration, made me, in my last, try to divert the Subject” (101). Arguably, Behn similarly positions Philander, who privileges a romantic/sexual relationship before the more serious concern of national politics. After receiving a beseeching letter from Cesario, Philander encloses the letter to Silvia so that

Silvia may see how little I regard the world, or the mighty revolution in hand;
when set in competition with the least hope of beholding her adorable face, or

254
hearing her Charming Tongue; when it whispers the soft dictates of her tender heart into my ravish’d soul; one moments joy like that surmounts an age of dull Empire. (62)

Also common to both *Familiar Letters* and *Love-Letters*, after Silvia’s most impassioned and scathing—and lengthy—reprimand, Philander dismisses the subject as too masculine;

How comes my charming Silvia so skill’d in the Mysteries of State? Where learnt her tender heart the Notions of Rigid business? Where her soft Tongue, form’d only for the dear Language of Love, to talk the concerns of Nations and Kingdoms? . . . my generous Heart cou’d not Love at less a rate, than to lavish all, and be undone for Silvia. (44)

Whereas there may be great divergence between Behn and Davys’s letters—and political leanings—the common ground of both texts lies in the shared villianization of the male characters and their use of male privilege.

It is in this moment where the reader suspects that Berina and Artander shall never share more than a friendship. Although arguably subtle, Berina’s letter punctuates a definite closure on any possible future romance.

In this, Davys is in keeping with the trends of epistolary fiction. Beebee asserts, “One symptom of this cultural change [the ‘feminization’ of Western culture], as Ruth Perry points out, is that women rather than men are now the fortresses of virtue assaulted by the outside world—a favorite theme of epistolary fiction” (108). Perry herself writes:

In the literature of chivalry, a man’s honor resided in his physical prowess and spiritual enlightenment which were his weapons against the forces of evil often tempting him in the form of a sexually inviting woman. By the time of Richardson, these roles had been very much reversed, and without any sense of strain the public read its way tearfully through 2,000 pages of an unscrupulous rake trying to seduce a poor, defenseless woman. (20)

Here Davys follows the pattern of the seduction plot as Janet Altman maintains, “In novels that develop the seduction plot, whereas the seducer regards the letter as his arm for overcoming the barrier between him and his lady, the lady paradoxically regards the letter as an extension of this barrier, as her weapon of protection” (16).

Of which no copy is known to exist (Bowden, “Introduction” xlvii).

The title page reads *The Reform’d Coquet; A Novel*, but the first pages and subsequent headers all refer to the work as *The Reform’d Coquet; or The Memoirs of Amoranda*

Ros Ballaster notes the closer formal resemblance of amatory fiction to didactic love fiction than the pornography of the time (*Seductive* 32).
192 Collie Cibber is most frequently attributed with presenting the first moral reform comedy, *Love’s Last Shift*, in 1696.

193 Susan Staves is specifically referring to rape trial testimony and the “comic story of the ambivalent woman who first consents and then falsely cries rape” frequently prevailing to convince jurors of a man’s innocence (91).

194 Davys was not the only author to be inspired by *Telemachus*; Jane Barker also published *Exilius; or, The Banish’d Roman. A New Romance. In Two Parts: Written After the Manner of Telemachus, For the Instruction of Some Young Ladies of Quality* in 1715. Barker, like Davys, also includes a tale of incest, whereby a father rapes his daughter.

195 Alexander Pope’s translation would not be published until 1725, or a year after *The Reform’d Coquet*.

196 One may speculate as to whether or not Davys was inspired by the stories of La Maupin (1673-1707), the cross-dressing, swashbuckling, opera singer from Italy, who, according to lore, dueled several men at once and reigned victorious (Holland 62-3) when reversing the conventions of the duel in her novel.

197 Haywood’s D’Elmont in *Love in Excess* would be no exception to this, as he too attempts to ravish Melliora but is thwarted by Melantha. However, while Haywood does complicate their initial relationship, far from painting D’Elmont as a villain, he proves quite the charming, seductive, and irresistible hero.

198 Patricia Meyer Spacks comments of Richardson’s *Clarissa*, “As Anna Howe knows, only so long as a woman declines what is offered can she retain control” (59). This holds true for Amoranda as well, who will only remain independent as long as she refuses offers of marriage, and Davys makes this point throughout the novel from the mouths of the various suitors.

199 Jane Austen’s Emma is a character very reminiscent of Davys’s Amoranda.

200 The fact that Davys pictures these would be rapists as fops may, for modern readers, seem paradoxical, however, as Shawn Maurer notes, the connection between foppery and homosexuality did not exist in the eighteenth century, and particularly regarding periodical literature, the fop represents a “significant sexual threat to ‘Men of Sense’” (221).

201 As a great lover of drama, Davys may have been inspired by Colley Cibber’s Sir Novelty, who draws on his mistress, Mrs. Flareit.

202 Seventeenth- and eighteenth-century drama was often cruel and savage in its
revelations, and so one may point to the theater’s influence on Davys’s fiction.

203 This sentiment regarding “lesbian impulses” and unnatural masculinity will be echoed in Richardson’s *Pamela* in the character of Mrs. Jewkes but without the cross-dressing.

204 *The Unfortunate Traveller* includes a similar scene of rape, wherein a wife is held down on her husband’s dead body as she is ravished. Davys very likely may have read the text as it was republished many times.

205 Although *The Accomplish’d Rake* is believed to be her last published original novel, an anonymous version of *The Cousins*, entitled *The False Friend; or The Treacherous Portuguese*, was published in the year of her death, 1732. However, whether Davys published the novel or if it was pirated is unknown.

206 See Pope’s “The Rape of the Lock.”

207 Gollapudi specifically discusses Farquhar’s *The Inconstant* (1702) and Centlivre’s *The Gamester* (1705) (39).

208 Gollapudi also goes on to maintain that Centlivre’s and Farquhar’s subversive use of the genre does not mean that they rejected the value of a more stridently moral position but that they remained skeptical regarding the theater’s ability to act as a reforming agent (77).

209 See Aparna Gollapudi’s *Moral Reform in Comedy and Culture, 1696-1747* for a thorough discussion of the key elements of reform comedy.

210 See Janet Todd’s *Sensibility* and G.J. Barker-Benfield’s *The Culture of Sensibility: Sex and Society in Eighteenth-Century Britain* for a more complete examination of the sentimental and sensibility.

211 Ballaster maintains Eliza Haywood, in contrast to Manley and Behn, proves somewhat of an aberration in that she consistently addresses her texts to an exclusively female audience (*Seductive Forms* 40). Davys, too, up until *The Accomplish’d Rake*, always dedicated her works either to individual women, or as in *The Reform’d Coquet* and her collected works, to all “the ladies.”

212 Davys mocks the widow character’s mourning and grief: Lady Galliard had too much Resolution and Courage to struggle with Grief, but like an expert Fencer gave it one home Thrust and silenced it for ever, hardly allowing so much as the common Decorum of a Month’s Confinement to a dark Room, though her wild Behavior told the world she was but too well qualified for such an Apartment for ever. (129)

Thomas Booby, who departing this life, left his disconsolate lady confined to her house, as closely as if she herself had been attacked by some violent disease. During the first six days the poor lady admitted none but Mrs Slipslop, and three female friends who made a party at cards: but on the seventh she ordered Joey, whom, for a good reason, we shall hereafter call Joseph, to bring up her tea kettle. The lady being on bed, called Joseph to her, bade him sit down, and, having accidentally laid her hand on his, she asked him if he had ever been in love. (67)

213 Behn’s *The Rover* is another rare example of a text that also depicts explicit male prostitution.

214 In an ironic twist, Davys also wryly notes that Sir John’s brutish way of living almost “unmanned him.”

215 When the ladies discover Sir John’s identity at the masquerade, Sir John asks, “Do you know me?” to which Miss Wary answers, “Yes, better than you know me” (161). This strangely echoes a passage in *The Reform’d Coquet* where Amoranda relates her encounter with Alanthus to Formator: “He told me . . . he knew me better than I thought he did, and I could have told him, I knew him better than he thought I did” (72), which suggests that Amoranda knows Formator’s true identity. Davys is obviously interested in levels of knowing, and in particular a woman’s level of knowing.

216 Behn’s *The Rover* (1677) also plays upon this imagery with the Toledo winning the contest for the longest “sword.”

217 During the few pages of strangely comedic plot turns, Davys includes a passing comment regarding incest through from the character of Belinda’s sister. As she is discovered to be “the little gentleman” and therefore the former lover of Sir John and the mother of his bastard daughter, she asks Sir John to “never address” Belinda “because abominable Incest shocks my Soul and gives my Blood an Ague” (210). So while incest virtually disappears in *The Accomplish’d Rake* it is nevertheless a serious moral issue upon which Davys continues to comment.

218 Following Belinda’s attempted rape, Davys careens sharply into a much different tone as she inserts an ill-fitting comedic passage following the unsuccessful rape. To this point in the novel, Davys’s underscores the raw and the sinister of humanity when suddenly Belinda fully forgives Sir John and the narrative takes on the lighter hues of comedy and clever banter.
Davys repeatedly peppers her novels with men who do not recognize the women they love and the women must prove their identity. The first is the aforementioned Octavio and Claire from *The Cousins*, and in *The Accomplish’d Rake*, Sir John does not recognize his sister “her Face was so disguised with her Tears, he stood some time to consider her and asked her many Questions before he could believe it was really his Sister, all which she answered so pertinently that he no longer doubted the Truth” (172).

As with the topic of incest, Davys also fleetingly revisits the theme of suicide. Although not one of the major focuses of the novel as it was in *The Cousins*, she presents suicide in hyperbolic fashion once again. All of Betty’s rejected lovers threaten suicide as a method of obtaining her consent to marry. However, contrasting the true and successful attempts in *The Cousins*, here Davys highlights the cunning, manipulative, and desperate strategies male suitors are willing to employ.

Contemporary law would have been blind to Betty’s assault as “having intercourse with a woman rendered insensible by alcohol, having intercourse with a woman who was feeble-minded, and having intercourse with a woman by fraudulently pretending to be her husband was not rape” (Staves 100). Although Davys would have been aware of this, she clearly views the act as a violation, bodily and morally.

One other notable rape scene is that of Haywood’s *The Fatal Secret* (1725): in the climax of the novel, Anadea is drugged with opium and raped by her father in-law. When her husband discovers them, she stabs herself, the father shoots himself, and the son gives away all his earthly possessions and becomes a monk.

Mrs. Jewkes is perhaps the most infamous of the evil female servants of the eighteenth century; she, like Davys’s maid servants, is only too willing to help in the rape of an innocent young girl. However, Richardson’s wicked woman goes so far as to hold Pamela down so that she may be penetrated, which may not be far off from drugging the victim, but links her far more directly to the crime.

Davys’s rather macabre sense of the world seeps through when Miss Friendly calls her child “her little Mackroon.”

This also suggests that Jenny, too, may have been raped.

Bowden notes here “There was no means of retroactively legitimizing a child whose parents had not undergone any form of marriage before his birth, and only legitimate offspring could inherit titles. Thus the child could probably inherit Sir John’s property if the latter adjusted his will, but could not ascend to the baronetcy” and claims that “Davys seems to be rewriting the law in order to assure her happy ending” (250). I would argue that Davys eschews any happiness in the ending but rather points to the extreme importance of legitimacy.
227 Mother Needham was the object of the SRM’s attention, which was the organization that put her in the pillory, which led to her death.

228 I am grateful to Peggy Keeran for contacting ECCO to confirm the publication dates of each letter.

229 Although Davys is oft-cited as the first woman to publish by subscription, she was, in fact, the second, as Elizabeth Elstob did so before her. However, she is believed to be the first female novelist to do so.
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