Garden doors: Tempting the virtuous heroine in Clarissa and Betsy thoughtless

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Garden Doors: Tempting The Virtuous Heroine In Clarissa And Betsy Thoughtless

by

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Garden Doors: Tempting the Virtuous Heroine in *Clarissa* and *Betsy Thoughtless*

Jamie Kinsley

ABSTRACT

Gardens in Eliza Haywood’s *The History of Miss Betsy Thoughtless*, and Samuel Richardson’s *Clarissa, or a History of a Young Lady* provide a place for the characters to gain knowledge; but without preparation to receive this knowledge – if restrained behind the veil of decorum – they come to harm, rather than constructive awareness. A fine line exists between innocence and experience in these works. The ways in which the characters negotiate this line illustrates the complexities involved in the eighteenth-century understanding of virtue and how society attempted to mediate this issue. This negotiation can be seen largely in specific garden scenes in these two novels. In *Clarissa*, Clarissa’s flight with Lovelace early in the novel demonstrates this negotiation; while in *Betsy Thoughtless*, this demonstration lies in the garden scene at the end with Betsy and Trueworth. Richardson and Haywood present alternate endings for a virtuous heroine tempted by sex and trapped by domestic politics. The different fates of Clarissa Harlowe and Betsy Thoughtless result from not only the difference between tragedy and comedy, but from the differing views of temptation. I wish to investigate the possible didactic messages behind these alternate endings. In investigating the two treatments of the temptation of the virtuous heroine, I hope to provide new material by asserting the importance of flight from the garden as representative of the fallen woman in
Richardson’s novel, and the triumphantly virtuous in Haywood’s. Clarissa’s fall out of the garden proves a previous sin punished, while Betsy’s flight from the garden proves her virtue. Since both Clarissa and Betsy Thoughtless, and their authors, are seen as groundbreaking, an abundance of scholarship is available. However, little has been done in connecting the two garden scenes to definitions of temptation. Furthermore, though connections between Milton’s Satan and Richardson’s Lovelace have been drawn and re-drawn, little critical attention has been devoted to the way in which the Paradise Lost expulsion from the garden may mirror the important flights from the gardens that both Clarissa and Betsy experience.
Chapter One

Introduction

Questions of virtue dominate the pages of eighteenth-century novels. For authors such as Samuel Richardson, temptation acts in direct conflict with virtue. For Eliza Haywood, and other women writers of this time, temptation lends itself to a different definition. Temptation, whether it is temptation to disobey, or to participate in sexual experience outside of marriage, becomes enticing. However, it must be controlled. This control over temptation is only a slight amendment to the attitude Richardson takes toward the issue, however. While Clarissa and Betsy stand as paragons of virtue, they both suffer in their dealings with temptation. However, the temptation Richardson’s Clarissa faces is constructed from outside pressure, while Haywood’s Betsy welcomes temptation against the warnings of her brothers. Yet, Clarissa’s punishment for temptation is rape and death, while Betsy escapes with forgiveness and self-awareness. What didactic message does Richardson bring to the public sphere in punishing the virtuous Clarissa, and what is Haywood saying about virtue by allowing Betsy to remain innocent despite her coquetry?

Gardens in Eliza Haywood’s *The History of Miss Betsy Thoughtless*, and Samuel Richardson’s *Clarissa, or a History of a Young Lady* provide a place for the characters to gain knowledge; but without preparation to receive this knowledge – if restrained behind the veil of decorum – they come to harm, rather than constructive awareness. A fine line exists between innocence and experience in these works. The ways in which the
characters negotiate this line illustrates the complexities involved in the eighteenth-century understanding of virtue and how society attempted to mediate this issue. This negotiation can be seen largely in specific garden scenes in these two novels. In Clarissa, Clarissa’s flight with Lovelace early in the novel demonstrates this negotiation; while in Betsy Thoughtless, this demonstration lies in the garden scene at the end with Betsy and Trueworth. Richardson and Haywood present alternate endings for a virtuous heroine tempted by sex and trapped by domestic politics. The different fates of Clarissa Harlowe and Betsy Thoughtless result not only from the difference between tragedy and comedy, but also from the differing views of temptation. I wish to investigate the possible didactic messages behind these endings.

For centuries the image of the garden has stood as a symbol of innocence. In Christian religious traditions the Garden of Eden is known as Paradise – a place of peace and perfection from which humankind found themselves banished. A vast number of works have been written attempting to capture the symbolic meaning of the garden. Milton’s Paradise Lost is not least among the works that translate a meaning behind the space of the garden and humankind’s symbolic place therein. Harold Bloom investigates Milton’s influence upon eighteenth-century writers in The Anxiety of Influence. He states that,

Poetic Influence – when it involves two strong, authentic poets, -- always
proceeds by a misreading of the prior poet, an act of creative correction that is to say the main tradition of Western poetry since the Renaissance, is a history of anxiety and self-saving caricature, of distortion, of perverse, willful revisionism without which modern poetry as such could not exist (Bloom 30).
Milton’s *Paradise Lost*, highly influential in the literary world, follows the trajectory outlines by Bloom and naturally succumbs to revisionism. The influence of Milton upon Richardson and Haywood can be seen in the pivotal garden scenes in their two popular novels, *Clarissa* and *Betsy Thoughtless*. These two writers utilize the garden as a place to explore the effects of disobedience and punishment. Milton’s garden as a place from which humans inevitably find themselves banished becomes the template for the garden in these works. However, since Milton merely influences these writers, their explorations into the symbolic space of the garden vary in relation to their didactic messages about punishment and reformation.

While the garden may still stand as a symbol of paradise and innocence, *Paradise Lost* emphasizes the garden as a place from which humans were forcefully banished because of their disobedience. Bloom says that “to Milton, all fallen experience had its inevitable foundation in loss, and paradise could be regained only by One Greater Man, and not by any poet whatsoever” (Bloom 34). The view of the garden as a place symbolic of punishment for disobedience arises from Miltonic influence. Richardson translates this view as permanent loss. Clarissa’s banishment from the garden is final; she only regains paradise through willful submission to the patriarchy and death. Haywood, however, tweaks the Miltonic influence. In her novel, the garden becomes a place where forgiveness can be found through proper self-governance.

Milton’s view of the garden resonates in *Clarissa* and *Betsy Thoughtless* as the gardens in these works operate as a place where virtuous heroines are tried and innocence is tested. For the purpose of this paper, I wish to explore the attitudes of Richardson and Haywood toward the symbol of the garden, through their treatment of the tempted
heroine. By investigating the two treatments of the temptation of the virtuous heroine, I hope to provide new material by asserting the importance of flight from the garden as representative of the fallen woman in Richardson’s novel, and of the triumphantly virtuous in Haywood’s. Clarissa’s fall out of the garden marks a previous sin punished, while Betsy’s flight from the garden proves her virtue.
Chapter Two

Samuel Richardson’s *Clarissa, or the History of a Young Lady*

Laura Hinton argues that Clarissa bases her idea of autonomy on the patriarchal ideals of her Christian orthodoxy. She furthermore says that Richardson’s novel forbids a compromise between “autonomous thinking” and “social imitation” (Hinton 295). In *Clarissa*, independent thinking results in punishment, while conforming to societal demands results in eternal reward. In slight contrast to Hinton’s view, Mary Martin says that “Richardson exposed the fallacy of the happy ending,” by showing the sexual politics that sustain it, and unveiling the violence that produces such “happy endings” (610). I would say, however, that, as the poignant scene in the garden demonstrates, Richardson’s novel seeks a “happy ending” by stripping the heroine of her autonomy, and forcing her into the confusing and precarious situation of the punished sexual object. Nearest to my analysis would be Lois Chaber’s argument that the “sin” for which Clarissa suffers punishment is “her tragic pride… in presuming to act rather than to suffer under God’s providence, in the first half of the novel” (518). However, even Chaber neglects the importance of Clarissa’s literal fall out of the garden door and its relation to a perception of temptation. Lois Chaber views Clarissa’s deathbed declaration as “both an epitome of Christian heroism – redemption achieved through suffering—and of classic female masochism—an internalization through guilt of society’s misogyny” (Chaber 537). The scene detailing Clarissa’s banishment from the garden demonstrate the confusion and frustration Clarissa feels at being faced simultaneously with this “Christian heroism” and
“female masochism.” Though the language of the garden scene illustrates the first buds of Clarissa’s knowledge about her punishment, she still retains the opinion that she both deserves and possesses the power to return to the garden. As Gwilliam argues, her position as an exemplar figure in the text not only “disrupts Lovelace’s placement of her in the categories of sexual victim and sexual property but also, to some extent, problematizes the naturalness of those categories for women” (Gwilliam 64). In Gwilliam’s view, the novel addresses the problem of categorizing women as sexual victim and sexual property. Clarissa immediately finds herself occupying the category of sexual property in relation to the way the other characters treat her. The novel soon adds Clarissa to the category of sexual victim and her suffering finds no alleviation until she stops fighting against the injustice of her plight and accepts these categories and her subsequent punishment for inhabiting them.

I will begin my analysis by describing Clarissa’s fall from the garden. Clarissa, having resolved against going away with Lovelace, enters the garden to “personally acquaint him with the reason for [her] change of mind” (Richardson 374). She travels to a part of the garden “most distant from the ivy summer-house,” steps to the garden door, unbolts the “ready-unlocked door,” and faces Lovelace on the other side (Richardson 374). The “ready-unlocked door” of the garden resonates with Clarissa’s ready-sealed fate. No battle will ensue in this garden between the virtuous Clarissa and the Satanic Lovelace; only banishment awaits the end of this scene. Clarissa, in the shock of seeing Lovelace on the other side of the garden door, nearly faints, and she writes to Anna that “I should hardly have kept my feet had he not supported me” (Richardson 374). In this tumultuous moment, barely within her senses, Clarissa finds herself in Lovelace’s arms.
and on the other side of the garden door. Once out of the garden, Clarissa regains her senses a bit and begins to battle Lovelace for the freedom to return to the garden. Confused as to how she allowed herself to fall into this position in the first place, and determined to go back, Clarissa remains oblivious to the soon apparent fact that she cannot go back. Because she did not choose to leave the garden, but, rather, fell out of it, the emphasis on Clarissa’s mistake lies not in leaving the garden, but in the prior thought that she might. Terrified with the thought that it is too late to change her mind, desperate with the knowledge that this situation equals death for her reputation – and thus death for herself – Clarissa begins an emotional, mental, and physical struggle with Lovelace to enter back into the garden.

In order to understand our virtuous heroine’s fall, we must investigate how she got to that point. For the first quarter of the novel, Clarissa’s family demands she marry the vile Solmes against her increasingly desperate insistence that she will not. Clarissa wants only to live alone. She feels satisfied with her solitude. Her contentment centers on her opinion that looking forward to her afterlife in Heaven brings peace in her current life on earth. She also finds fulfillment in her friendship with Anna Howe, and feels that no other relationship, or love for another human being, is necessary beyond that of Anna. Her grandfather, having left her an estate and inheritance, provides Clarissa with what she sees as the ideal opportunity to live comfortably alone. However, young John Harlowe sees an opportunity to expand the Harlowe name through a connection with the abominable Solmes. Upon seeing Clarissa, Solmes decides he must possess her. Solmes owns a connecting property to Clarissa’s inherited one. If these families join, if Clarissa and Solmes have a son, the Harlowe name will be raised to a greater status through land.
While Clarissa has no desire to ever marry, she certainly sees no reason to marry a man who desires her only for her beauty. Solmes’ vile obsession with her purity further solidifies her disgust of him. Regardless of Clarissa’s unwavering decision about Solmes, the Harlowes, lead by John Jr., decide to use force to persuade Clarissa to wed Solmes. Unfortunately, the Harlowe’s demand to use Clarissa as property exchange functions in conflict with her desire to remain outside the domestic politics of marriage. Clarissa, refusing beyond all shadow of a doubt to marry Solmes, finds herself subject to imprisonment in her own home.

Meanwhile, Lovelace begins his pursuit of Clarissa. Also enticed by her beauty and innocence, Lovelace decides to make her a conquest. However, he has already tarnished a possible relationship with the Harlowe family by dueling with John Jr. at the outset of the novel. Though by the rules of civility the Harlowe family cannot keep Lovelace away, Mrs. Harlowe fears another duel if Lovelace encounters John Jr. Lovelace proposes to visit the Harlowes, which, Mrs. Harlowe feels, would incite John Jr. to challenge Lovelace. Since Lovelace hurt John Jr. in the past, Mrs. Harlowe fears for her son’s life. Therefore, she encourages Clarissa to correspond with Lovelace in order to keep him content. Here Clarissa finds herself forced into the role of peacekeeper because of Lovelace’s sexual desire for her. Though Mrs. Harlowe may find this act necessary and rather harmless, Clarissa feels a foreboding sense of dread in agreeing to exchange secret correspondence with a man. However, she continues her correspondence with him and she laments her discomfiture in doing so to Anna. After leaving a packet of letters for Lovelace Clarissa hurries away to avoid seeing him, but then goes back out of curiosity to see if her letters were gone, “Yet what caprice was this! – for when I found it gone, I
began (as yesterday morning) to wish it had not: for no other reason, I believe, than because it was out of my power” (Richardson 352). She sees the error of corresponding with Lovelace, yet continues it.

Underlying Clarissa’s early letters to Anna is a disputable feeling of affection for Lovelace. Though she details with Anna the possibly admirable qualities of Lovelace, the dominant atmosphere of this secret correspondence is a confused feeling of responsibility toward her family. In an effort to keep her family safe, and obey her mother, Clarissa finds herself playing the role of sexual object to placate Lovelace. Furthermore, as her letters to Anna at this stage of the plot show, Clarissa’s letters to Lovelace exhibit features of sexual subjectivity – she describes his charms, she dwells on his manners, and she delivers her secret words to him in clandestine billets. It appears Clarissa may actually enjoy the idea of Lovelace as a suitor, and may return his affection and physical desires. Regardless of how she may fall into the role of sexual subject, though, Clarissa remains firm on her ultimate desire to remain outside the realm of marriage or sexual desire. She says to Mrs. Norton that

it is not a small thing that is insisted upon; nor for a short duration: it is for my life – Consider too, that all this is owing to an overbearing brother, who governs everybody. Consider how desirous I am to oblige them, if a single life, and breaking all correspondence with the man they hate because my brother hates him, would do it. (Richardson 179)

This conflict between writing to Lovelace and wanting to remain single displays Clarissa as an unwilling sexual subject, forced into this role by feelings of familial responsibility.
For a moment, Clarissa allows all the blame for her current situation to fall upon Lovelace:

If I have not an opportunity to meet without hazard or detection, he must once more bear the disappointment. All his trouble, and mine too, is owing to his faulty character. This, although I hate tyranny and arrogance in all shapes, makes me think less and still less, as my sufferings (derived from the same source) are greater than his. (Richardson 263)

Tyranny and arrogance are the prime culprits making Clarissa miserable. “Tyranny and arrogance in all shapes” rings true of Lovelace’s actions in addition to the actions of her family. Here, briefly, Clarissa’s lamentations about her position as the peacekeeper in her family are clothed in criticism of Lovelace. The tyranny and arrogance of her family for the past several weeks cause her to lose her hold on her ability to think. Here, the weakening of Clarissa appears as she laments that her sufferings may cause a misstep in her thoughts because of her constant battle with tyranny and arrogance on all fronts. Possibly, Clarissa’s analysis of Lovelace’s tyranny and arrogance is a reflection upon her family’s dealings with her. While it may be dishonorable to directly attack her family with such words, this passage allows insight into Clarissa’s feelings about her situation. Worn down by a tyrannical family that assumes arrogant control over her life, and confused by the pressures from a controlling Lovelace, Clarissa sees her power over thought slipping away more and still more.

Clarissa’s heightened sense of entrapment becomes clear in her letters to Anna two weeks prior to her fleeing the garden with Lovelace. As her brother and uncles threaten to carry her away “to the moated house—to the chapel—to Solmes,” she
exclaims, “They will make me desperate!” (Richardson 260). Here, Clarissa appears to acknowledge her impending ruin. To run away with Lovelace will ruin her reputation, but it is the only choice that she can see as viable to escape a forced marriage to Solmes. She already is conscious of those feelings of desperation that will drive her to choose a clandestine meeting with Lovelace. Rather than patiently awaiting her fate, Clarissa decides that any avenue is better than being carried away to a forced marriage with Solmes. With the threat of being moved to a place where she will be paralyzed from any free movement at all, Clarissa resolves to allow Lovelace to rescue her from marriage to Solmes; however, this resolve is tenuous. Though she places herself in Lovelace’s hands with the appointed escape, she presents him precise qualifications and details about how exactly he will assist her in this escape. She writes to him that he may assist her in her escape, but includes the condition that she holds the freedom to change her mind at any time.

Clarissa feels the power of her words and virtue. She sees her stipulations on the escape as protective of her virtue. By creating a situation of escape with her own rules she feels that she might find safety from being carried away to an undesirable marriage and from being raped by a notorious rake. Clarissa sees her virtue as impenetrable by either marriage or seduction. Though her desire to remain single overwhelms all other decisions, Clarissa entertains the idea that she can reform the rake. She briefly mentions the possibility of her goodness and virtue overtaking the code of the rake and changing him into a man of virtue. More than once in the novel she and Anna outline the requirements for a virtuous gentleman. In allowing herself the temptation of leaving with Lovelace, Clarissa also allows herself to entertain the dangerous idea of reforming a man
bent only on her own undoing. However, by trusting Lovelace, she unknowingly erases any power she may assume over the situation. She no longer stands alone with her principles and morals to govern her decisions and movements. In this story the virtuous heroine must remain isolated from outside influences in order to stay virtuous. By including Lovelace in her confidence, Clarissa’s virtue faces peril.

When Clarissa returns from depositing the billet that contains a request for Lovelace to meet her in the garden, she writes to Anna: “I come back dissatisfied with myself” (263). However dissatisfied, Clarissa finds consolation in the idea that included in the billet to Lovelace are the directions that no meeting should take place if she changes her mind. Though she feels apprehensive about the potential of arranging a secret meeting with Lovelace, she brings her decision back to the greater fear that Lovelace will react violently toward her family should she decide not to pacify him: “But I think, my dear, there can be no harm in meeting him: if I do not, he may take some violent measures: what he knows of the treatment I meet with in malice to him, and with a view to frustrate all his hopes, may make him desperate” (Richardson 263). Still struggling with her decision to arrange this garden rendezvous, she says that “What [Lovelace] requires is not unreasonable, and cannot affect my future choice and determination: it is only to assure him from my own lips that I will never be the wife of a man I hate” (Richardson 263). Clarissa finds solace and security in her fortitude against Solmes. The conflict arising in this passage illustrates Clarissa’s inner conflict with being forced to act against her principles. Marriage to Solmes would act in direct conflict with her view of him as a man she cannot respect. A secret meeting with Lovelace in the garden conflicts with her open and honest nature; yet, she finds herself groping to gain
footing in a situation where these two paths appear to her as the only possibilities. Her determination to remain free from a marriage to the vile Solmes soothes her mind in its struggle to make sense of her decision to meet with Lovelace.

Soon after arranging to meet with Lovelace, however, Clarissa realizes the error in this decision. This revelation occurs on the day of their secret appointment. All too late she sees the impending mistake of leaving her father’s house. The impropriety of leaving her father’s garden with a man conflicts with her religious view. To disobey her parents (her father) would be to go against the commandments of her religion, which would, in Clarissa’s mind, result in death. Clarissa sees the fatal error of leaving with Lovelace before she commits the crime. Regardless of her recognition of her misstep in thought, Clarissa already disobeyed in her mind; therefore, she must suffer punishment for her sin in Richardson’s novel. Her punishment begins with banishment from the garden.

As Laura Hinton argues, “Clarissa underscores the ironies of a moral sense based on a radical autonomy that adheres so faithfully to Christian orthodoxy” (295). In this novel, the idea of autonomy cannot exist if it strays from Christian orthodoxy. Clarissa cannot disobey her parents, which means that to leave her father’s house without his blessing is a sin. However, because Clarissa’s religious views are heavily intertwined with her sense of autonomy, she cannot see a clear path of action. The autonomous decisions that Clarissa wishes to make center greatly on the desire to remain unwed at all costs. This sense of independence governs Clarissa’s decisions for the majority of the novel. Clarissa thinks that her codes for how to live her life allow her to govern herself as an autonomous body, but as the garden scene suggests, the moral obligation of being governed by the patriarch complicates her determination to live freely by her moral
codes. Though her idea of autonomy is consistent with the patriarchal ideals of Christian orthodoxy, Richardson’s novel disallows a compromise between “autonomous thinking” (making decisions based on her own ideas of conduct) and “social imitation” (following the codes of conduct set out for her by her family and society) (Hinton 295). Clarissa cannot both govern herself as an autonomous body and follow the social guidelines for how to conduct her life. More importantly, though, Clarissa thinks she is making choices, yet she has no choices to make. She attempts to exert moral autonomy in her decision to remain single, but in a Christian patriarchy she must follow her family’s desires. Whereas, perhaps, she should be allowed to make choices that might protect her, the novel punishes her for disobeying the patriarchy.

The detection of her fall presents itself strongly in the scene at the threshold of the garden gate. Clarissa exclaims that “an obliging temper is a dangerous temper! – by endeavoring to gratify others, it is evermore disobliging itself” (Richardson 374). Here, she speaks not only of her compliance to Lovelace but also of her attempts to appease her family and keep them from harm. Outside the garden, Clarissa, too late, recognizes the danger of her complying nature. By attempting to oblige her mother, and then Lovelace, Clarissa disobliges herself. As Dianne Osland argues, in Clarissa’s “desire, but not often ability to please… complaisance proves a peculiarly difficult virtue for her, as a woman, to support” (493). At this point of meeting with Lovelace, however, Clarissa is already banished from the garden. The fear that she is too late in her recognition of the hazard risked by gratifying others permeates this scene. As the novel shows, Clarissa’s obliging temper brings her into temptation and thus banishment from the garden forever.
On the day of her banishment, in an effort to keep Lovelace away from the house and a subsequent duel with her brother, Clarissa attempts to deposit a letter telling Lovelace she will *not* meet him. She hopes this letter “will save me much circumlocution and reasoning: and a steadfast adherence to that my written mind is all that will be necessary” (Richardson 370). Her distrust of her own fortitude demonstrates the power Lovelace holds over her. She foresees that a face-to-face meeting with him may cause her to forget her adherence even against her “written mind,” that agent which protects her independence. Already, Clarissa falls into the sin of temptation. She is tempted to run away with Lovelace in an effort to remain single; yet, as her decision to cancel the meeting demonstrates, she sees this as disobedience to her codes of conduct. However, Clarissa has already transgressed by entertaining the prospect of disobediently escaping her father’s house. Her punishment for *thinking* about disobeying the patriarch arises in the image of her crossing through the garden gate on this fateful day:

I stepped to the garden door; and seeing a clear coast, unbolted the ready-unlocked door – and there was he, all impatience, waiting for me! A panic, next to fainting seized me when I saw him. My heart seemed convulsed; and I trembled so, that I should hardly have kept my feet had he not supported me… Recovering my spirits a little, as he kept drawing me after him, Oh Mr. Lovelace, said I, I cannot go with you! – Indeed I cannot! – I wrote you word so! – Let go my hand and you shall see my letter. (Richardson 374)

When Clarissa unbolts the door, she falls into Lovelace’s arms from the panic of seeing him on the other side. Therefore, Clarissa does not leave the garden; rather, she falls out of it and Lovelace closes the door behind her. This fall from the garden resonates with the
banishment from the Garden of Eden. The crossing illustrates Clarissa’s complicated situation of the Miltonic fall from innocence.

Lovelace’s sudden appearance at the garden door, directly precipitates the shock Clarissa receives. In both Clarissa’s and Lovelace’s version of this scene, her awareness of her imminent danger and his impatience to secure her grow at almost an equal rate. In her version of this scene, she, startled by his impatience, says, “—but I will not go with you!—Draw me not thus!—How dare you, sir?—I would have been guilty of some rashness!—and, once more, I will not go!” (Richardson 374). She condemns the impatience that marks his character, and predicts that -- should she allow him to draw her thus -- she will become “guilty.” In his own version of the tale, when he translates it in a letter to Belford, Lovelace spends paragraphs detailing the way Clarissa looks. His ability to dwell on her beauty, while maintaining the impatience to possess this beauty, demonstrates his inability to see her as anything other than a sexual object. His view of her during her struggle with him is located in the opinion that she coyly pretends to not know what she wants, “She trembled: nor knew how to support the agitations of a heart she had never found so ungovernable” (Richardson 400). Lovelace wants to see her as a coy contradiction, rather than as Clarissa sees herself – an innocent woman.

Clarissa repeatedly begs Lovelace to release her as he draws her away from the garden. This request for release, intermingled with admonishments and regrets, illustrates Clarissa’s deep confusion as to why he will not release her. Unable to fully comprehend that she is already fallen, Clarissa sees herself as justified in feeling that she still possesses a right to return to the garden and correct her error. Her confusion mounts with her terror as she, realizing Lovelace draws her further and further away from the safety of
the garden, says: “Whither, sir, do you draw me?—Leave me this moment—Do you seek to keep me till my return shall grow dangerous or impracticable?—I am not satisfied with you at all! indeed I am not!—This moment let me go, if you would have me think tolerably of you” (Richardson 376). The dashes in her letter to Anna continue, deepening the feeling of Clarissa’s terror at finding herself outside the garden. Lovelace argues that his happiness and the safety of her family depend on this moment of flight. However, Clarissa now realizes that her fate, should she flee with him, appears quite grim. Leaving with Lovelace will result in a loss of reputation, rape, and a loss of family -- all of which equal death in Clarissa’s mind. Here, Clarissa sees the fatal mistake of her correspondence with this man. She attempts to reason with Lovelace, telling him that her good opinion of him rests in his allowing her return to through the garden door. Lovelace cannot allow Clarissa to return, though. Her fate is sealed. He is a vehicle for the punishment Clarissa must suffer.

Before the scene detailing Clarissa’s banishment from the garden closes, the text appears to allow her one last hope to refuse temptation. She argues with Lovelace, pleading with him to listen to her decision to return to the garden, “Let go my hand: for I tell you (struggling vehemently) that I will sooner die than go with you! –” (Richardson 374). The disoriented punctuation of this sentence – its colon and parenthesis marking distinct physical struggles – mirrors the disorientation Clarissa experiences in this moment. The specific choice of words that Clarissa finds breath to aspirate emphasizes the foreshadowed knowledge that to leave the garden equals death. The tone of this scene, swiftly moving in rhythm with Clarissa’s pounding heart, illustrates the fast-paced moment of the heroine’s banishment from the garden. The possibility that Clarissa has a
right to return to the garden is an illusion. Since it is an illusion, the innocence with which Clarissa is pushed into temptation is emphasized. She steadfastly believes that she should be able to pick up the key, open the garden door, and return to her father’s house. This belief demonstrates that Clarissa’s sin is unconscious. Her disobedience in being tempted to leave results in banishment from the garden, and from her father’s house, and this disobedience will only find be forgiven when she admits this sin. Only when Clarissa fully blames herself for being tempted to disobey the patriarchy will she regain paradise (returns to her father’s house) through death.

Outside the garden door, Lovelace repeatedly attempts to pressure Clarissa away with the impending threat of marriage to Solmes. Though the threat of Solmes forced her into her temptation and fall in the first place, in this scene, all too late, Clarissa finds strength to combat this threat. She says, “To Providence, Mr. Lovelace, and to Law will I leave the safety of my friends—You shall not threaten me into a rashness that my heart condemns!—Shall I, to promote your happiness, as you call it, destroy all my future peace of mind?” (Richardson 376). Clarissa’s dashes continue through this statement, symbolizing the terrifying knowledge that her determination to build a peaceful future is already destroyed. Though she finds strength in using “Providence” and “Law” to refuse Lovelace, her adherence to these constructs only comes after her fall. Her confusion about how to properly negotiate “Providence” and “Law” in a patriarchal system frustrates her attempts to regain Paradise, until she gives in and allows the abstracts of providence and law to move her into an acceptance of her state as a fallen and justly suffering woman.
In her attempt to return to the garden, Clarissa emphasizes the word *ought*: “Am I to be thus compelled? Interrupted I, with equal indignation and vehemence—Let go my hands—I am resolved not to go with you—and I will convince you that I *ought* not” (Richardson 374). Strong in her words, weak in her might, the use of the word “ought” and its emphasis through italics set Clarissa’s determination in a questionable light. “Ought,” as opposed to the ever prominent phrase “*will not* marry Solmes,” draws attention to Clarissa’s temptation to follow Lovelace away from Harlowe Place. She ought not allow Lovelace to carry her away, she ought not allow herself to be tempted away from the cruelty of the Harlowes, but she will. This allowance, despite her statement of: “I will sooner die than go with you” (Richardson 374), demonstrates Clarissa’s knowledge of the temptation. Furthermore, the struggle between these terms “ought” and “will not” demonstrates Clarissa’s conflict in seeing herself as a fallen woman.

Clarissa’s remark that she “*ought* not” go with Lovelace also demonstrates that her obliging nature, by disobliging herself, comes from the teachings of others – namely, those who wish to place her in the role of sexual object. Clarissa begins to see that her fall, constructed by others in their attempt to control her as a sexual commodity, has resulted in removal from the garden. She calls out, “urge me no farther—surely I am not to be compelled by everybody!” (Richardson 374). In her realization that this fall stems from her attempt to gratify others against her better judgment, she tells Lovelace:

Let me judge for myself, sir. Do not you, who blame my friends for endeavoring to compel me, *yourself* seek to compel me. I won’t bear it—Your earnestness gives me greater apprehensions and greater reluctance!—Let me go back, then!”—
let me before it is too late go back, that it may not be worse for both. What mean you by this forcible treatment?—Is thus that I am to judge of the entire submission to my will which you have so often vowed?” (Richardson 376-377)

Clarissa, having seen her obliging nature as harmful to herself, blames Lovelace for her situation. She recognizes the danger of Lovelace, yet she finds her fate is sealed. Clarissa struggles, until her imprisonment in jail, with the notion that she somehow deserves the punishment of a lost paradise. This brief, emotional plea from Clarissa outside the garden door allows us to see that she cannot bear to be compelled, yet her virtue is judged by the submission of her will.

Clarissa believes she holds some control over the situation outside the garden door, because she still sees herself as a virtuous woman. After much struggle with Lovelace, she feels as though she has successfully argued her case, and writes that: “When near the garden door I stopped: and was the more satisfied, as I saw the key there, by which I could let myself in again at pleasure” (Richardson 379). The key appears to confuse Clarissa into thinking that she possesses the opportunity to go back through the garden gate; thus, it creates a false sense of power for her. Her dashes cease, her panic abates for a bit, and as she stoops to pick up the key, she calmly says, “And depend upon it, Mr. Lovelace… I will die rather than have that man. You know what I have promised if I find myself in danger” (Richardson 379). Lovelace then confuses Clarissa into thinking that people are on the other side of the gate, and tells her he will not leave her— as is honorable, he exclaims. Again the dashes rapidly enter her writing as she tells Anna of how he whisks her away from that place. Whether they flee of her volition, or of his force she seems uncertain: “he hurried me on still faster: my voice, however,
contradicting my action: crying, No, no, no, all the while, straining my neck to look back as long as the walls of the garden and park were within sight” (Richardson 380). Even as she leaves the garden forever, Clarissa demonstrates her inability to fully accept her situation.

The undertones of the conflict within Clarissa and between her and Lovelace carry throughout the novel. Only after the rape and her imprisonment, Clarissa begins to tell her story to many people, thereby signifying her new view of herself as a fallen woman. In acknowledging her value as fallen, but rising as virtuous through this admission, Clarissa is redeemed by providence and regains Paradise through death. Lovelace, however, never able to see Clarissa as holding value in any way other than as a sexual object, refuses to find redemption.

In the end, the narrative seeks the submission of her will. Submission of Clarissa’s will presents itself as the only avenue to grace. However, this submission is also the avenue to her fall. Forced as a sexual object, confused into the role of a temporary sexual subject, Clarissa succumbs to temptation in an adulterated fashion. This fall, genuine or not, finds punishment in Richardson’s novel. Clarissa asks Lovelace to let her go back “before it is too late go back, that it might not be worse for both” (Richardson 376), but as the garden scene demonstrates, it is already too late for Clarissa to return to the garden. She never goes back through the garden gate, and, indeed, as she predicts, life becomes “worse for both.” Clarissa’s error occurred in the conception of such an idea, and her attempt to remove herself from this mistake finds no forgiveness in Richardson’s novel. The action of leaving the garden becomes a result of the crime, which lies in the misstep of Clarissa’s thought.
Clarissa’s confusion over her banishment from the garden reflects her suffering. This suffering follows her throughout her time with Lovelace, and even after the rape, until she finds herself in jail, when she completely gives into the idea of providence. Only then does her mind clear the confusion represented by the dashes in her description of Lovelace drawing her away from the garden. Lois Chaber sees the “sin” for which Clarissa suffers punishment as “her tragic pride… in presuming to act rather than to suffer under God’s providence, in the first half of the novel” (518). Clarissa, constantly plagued with the requirements forced upon her by others, finds herself attempting to negotiate not only her own desires to remain peaceful and alone, but also the desires of others to see her as both a sexual subject and a sexual object. Clarissa has no clear choice of how to act. She continues to think that she has a choice in how to act, that her autonomy is not governed by social standards; however, once she submits, the narrative relieves her of her punishment.

Chaber views this submission of will as a facet of suffering Clarissa must endure in order to fit into the constructs of “passive Christian heroism” (511). In this view, Richardson uses suffering to mean a “passivity which always seems to entail pain, and an activity which seems only to have the end of inflicting pain” (Chaber 511). This polarization becomes the justification for self-righteous heroines in Richardson’s works (Chaber 511). Yet, before Clarissa can become the justified, righteous heroine, she must submit to suffering. Only through this submission of her will does she gain the peace she desperately desires in the beginning of the novel. However, since her removal from the garden resulted directly from her entertainment of temptation, the only way for her to find grace and regain Paradise is to submit willfully to death.
Though the epistolary style of the novel allows us, as Nancy Roberts says, “privileged and intimate access” to Clarissa’s thoughts and voice, it also objectifies her (Roberts 112). This objectification of Clarissa begins before Lovelace takes over the narrative with his dramatic lies. From the beginning, Clarissa’s family views her as the object of commodity for land trade with Solmes. In becoming a sexual object, Clarissa’s fall takes place. Despite her desire not to become an object in this exchange, Clarissa faces punishment for this objectification. Banishment from the garden must occur, and Clarissa must suffer before she might regain Paradise. Lovelace’s movement with Clarissa away from the garden gate demonstrates the objectification of Clarissa. A sexual commodity in the play of domestic politics, Clarissa’s agency is limited within the framework of sexual object. This placement prohibits her from fulfilling her desire to remain neither a sexual object, nor a sexual subject.

While “Lovelace’s need to discover the secret of female desire was expressed in the form of a trial” (Gwilliam 82), the novel also participates in “almost endless probing and uncovering of the female body and mind” (Gwilliam 82). In this way, perhaps the novel’s didactic message is read in Richardson’s banishment of Clarissa from the garden for falling prey to the sin of attempting to decide not to function as a sexual object. Though the novel appears as a didactic message about suffering and virtue, Clarissa’s confusion and disorientation outside the garden door demonstrates that her fall was not a clear one to her. Her punishment and removal from the garden exists because she can neither comprehend, nor negotiate the codes of the patriarchy.
Chapter Three

Eliza Haywood’s *The History of Miss Betsy Thoughtless*

While Clarissa is banished from the garden based on the thought of disobedience, Eliza Haywood’s *Betsy Thoughtless* is forgiven her transgressions. Betsy’s virtue remains with her regardless of her difficulty in learning how to govern herself autonomously within a patriarchal society. Betsy is allowed to make mistakes and learn from her errors. In the end, *Betsy Thoughtless* seeks a compromise between autonomous thinking and society’s idea of propriety. The garden as a symbol of banishment for disobedience is altered into a more forgiving model. At the end of *Betsy Thoughtless* the garden symbolizes a place where choices are made and autonomous thinking can be safely employed. In *Betsy Thoughtless*’ garden scenes decisions are not permanent until actions are executed. While Clarissa realizes the error in her decisions, she cannot change the course of her punishment. Betsy, however, is allowed the opportunity to correct her course of action despite her thinking. When faced with temptation in the garden, Betsy possesses thoughts of sexual desire, yet freely chooses the proper action to remain virtuous.

A highly defining characteristic of Miss Betsy Thoughtless is her independent nature. She sees herself not as a coquet, but as a woman too young for marriage. She does not wish for her youth to keep her barricaded behind closed doors of propriety, or locked behind what she sees as stuffy decorum. Though Betsy respects what society deems as fit and proper behavior for a young woman, she finds no reason for her enjoyment to be diminished. Her delight in being admired by many suitors runs hand in hand with her ignorance of sexuality and the possible dangers that come from misconduct. Like other
writers of this period, Haywood demonstrates how “the space of time between the completion of a young woman’s education and her marriage represents a potentially precarious period in her life” (Palo 218). However, Haywood creates a heroine who maintains her virtue through a series of fortunate rescues, thereby keeping her safe, yet she calls attention to the danger of Betsy’s coquettish behavior. Deborah Ross’ assessment of Lennox’s *The Female Quixote* rings true of *Betsy Thoughtless* as well: “We see here a dominant trait of the women’s novel of the mid-eighteenth century: a pragmatic didacticism, almost an amoral morality, in which what *is* clearly but inevitably differs from what *should be*, and in which the author gives advice that would not be necessary in a fairer world” (Ross 465). Though Haywood may give a pragmatic didacticism, “the novel makes us sympathize with the heroine by showing that suppression, while virtuous, requires considerable struggle” (Ross 462). The near-rapes that occur several times in the novel allow a subversive Haywood to direct a message to her audience regarding the need to enlighten young women about their sexuality. This awareness might then result in better protection of a virtuous reputation. Though Betsy’s virtue remains throughout the novel, and though she becomes a reformed heroine in the end, Haywood’s pen carries Betsy though many adventures before she reaches her reward.

Young women of Betsy’s economic and social position were expected to remain fully chaste because eighteenth-century British society dictated so. However, these women were also to remain “dangerously naïve” (Backscheider 26). This image of femininity included an image of delicate naivety. Young women were to have an ignorance of sexuality and no apparent desire for sex. Betsy’s honor, therefore, lies not
only in the protection of her virtue, but also in the presentation of herself as ignorant of sexual conduct. Furthermore, whether she is virtuous in actuality or not matters rather less than her reputation as a virtuous woman. Her brothers and guardians continually warn her that what people believe about the state of her virtue matters a great deal. They caution her that who she befriends, how she utilizes her time, and the way in which she presents herself, all contribute to the prodding, intrusive view society has of her.

Jane Spencer likens Betsy to Fielding’s Tom Jones in that her “faults are those of carelessness, not design, and she is vulnerable to misrepresentation because of her good nature and her thoughtlessness” (149). As though it were an entity in and of itself, society must be satisfied that there are no rumors that question a woman’s honor. Betsy must conduct herself in a way that reflects the ideals of society. Betsy’s priorities should revolve around the protection of her reputation, regardless of her desire to be independent or generous to those less fortunate than herself. She must surround herself with people of strong reputations, who fall into the same class as she. Betsy cannot act freely or knowledgably if she is to remain within the constraints of social propriety. Her every moment must be accounted for in appropriate ways. For instance, when Betsy takes responsibility for the orphaned child of her dress-maker, her reputation suffers. Rumors begin to circulate concerning this child’s patronage and its relation to Betsy. In Betsy’s mind, however, taking care of the orphan and placing it in a situation where it will survive well within its own class is the honorable thing to do. Society’s attempt to control Betsy’s every move can be seen in the way the rumors about the orphan harm Betsy’s possible relationship with Trueworth at one point in the novel. This tarnish on Betsy’s reputation might demonstrate the power of society in influencing Betsy’s future
happiness. Perhaps if she constantly remained within the constraints of society – whether or not she believed it to be honorable – then her happy marriage might arrive sooner. However, because Betsy ultimately receives her happy ending, regardless of the rumors about the orphan, this detail in the novel serves to show Betsy’s ability to live a life of propriety, yet still utilize her autonomy to make decisions she sees as ethically proper.

Betsy is not alone under the scrutiny of eighteenth-century society – she stands as a representative of women of her time and status. As Shea Stuart demonstrates, “Haywood’s novel is a microcosm of eighteenth-century social conflicts—emergent versus residual ideologies of patriarchy and of marriage, conduct-book didacticism versus common reality” (8). Though Betsy’s preservation of virtue may be a result of an effort to create a novel acceptable for an audience who fed heavily on Samuel Richardson’s *Pamela*, Haywood’s Betsy is also “presented as a sacrifice to the current sex-gender system” (Stuart 1). In order to survive as a virtuous heroine, Betsy must abide by the rules of propriety. However, she struggles to break free of the stodgy oppression placed upon her sex. She acts as a coquette because it pleases her to do so. She sees herself as a strong, independent young lady, and she desires to take advantage of her position in life because she is aware that she will not always be young and independent. Works from women writers of the eighteenth-century “are above the variances and the slow but inevitable changes that characterize social custom” (Palo 217). Betsy’s adventures as a coquette and the trouble she receives for her behavior demonstrate the conflict between the autonomous eighteenth-century woman and the ruling patriarchal society.

Haywood artfully creates a world that shows the difficult and precarious positions in which women constantly find themselves because of the constraints society places
upon them. “A woman who desires freedom and an equal share of life’s entertainments puts herself in serious danger, but a woman who denies herself these things and maintains the character of a ‘proper’ woman risks giving up all authority over her own life,” thereby creating what Austin refers to as a “double bind” (Austin 271). The evidence of Betsy’s desire to break away from the constraints of propriety appears in her many run-ins with men who wish to overpower her, and her struggles to escape from their clutches. Whether she is under attack physically or simply unable to remain focused on one suitor at a time, Betsy determinedly holds on to her independence: “Miss Betsy thought she had the highest reason to be satisfied with her situation, and how, indeed, could it be otherwise” (Haywood 36). She sees no reason to marry when she is so comfortable in her life, enjoying company and admiration from many men.

Haywood’s purpose in creating a work with a heroine such as Miss Betsy Thoughtless, “indicates her [Haywood’s] complete understanding of the dimensions and consequences of these constraints and the ways in which a woman may, if she has such an understanding, use self-conscious performance to surmount them” (Anderson 9). Betsy cannot overcome the constraints of society throughout the majority of the novel because she has not the self-awareness necessary to overcome the walls of propriety. Though she realizes that her virtue must be guarded against all attacks, no matter the cost – even if it means jumping to her death from a moving carriage (strangely reminiscent of Richardson’s zealous Pamela) – Miss Betsy is unaware of her value as a sexual object. She does not realize that her beauty, which she so highly values, means more to the men who adore her than a surface, distanced, admiration. The trouble she often finds herself in thus arises from her ignorance of her sexuality – both as a desired sexual object and a
desiring sexual subject. Juliette Merritt, in *Beyond Spectacle*, discusses Haywood’s exploration of vanity’s role in female subjectivity. Women construct their identity and sexuality largely around the desire to be seen, according to Merritt (8). However, this construction of identity depends upon an “internalized patriarchal gaze,” which creates women’s lack of social power (Merritt 8). This lack of social power seeks remedy in *Betsy Thoughtless* through the construction of knowledge about sexual desire and how to control it according to societal prescriptions. This knowledge occurs most fully in the novel’s garden scenes.

Betsy cannot see herself as a sexual object because she remains an innocent character, devoid of knowledge about sexual conduct outside of marriage. Though Betsy is aware of sexuality and its presence in the lives of other characters such as Flora, she is not aware of her place in this sexual theater. Her flirtations are merely a desire to be admired. She craves the power to be gifted attention from people. For her, male affection happens more readily, but she does not realize that this affection springs from a view of her as a sexual object. Therefore, she is not fully knowledgeable about how to control her power as an object. On the other hand, her inability to govern herself as a sexual object or subject demonstrates the flawed power of the “internalized patriarchal gaze” of which Merritt speaks. As Betsy moves through her adventures, she gains knowledge about her position as a sexual object, it is only in the final garden scene, however, that Betsy realizes her position as a sexual subject. However, in order to remain safe within the patriarchal society, Betsy must become aware of her sexual desires on her own, while also governing herself according to social expectations.
It is upon Betsy’s entrance into London that the public scrutiny of her reputation begins. Though she may have been conscious of the possibility of her virtue falling into jeopardy, a self awareness does not accompany Betsy to the city. If the city represents society, and the country does not, then the gardens become an oasis away from the prodding eyes of society. The gardens may allow an escape from the city, and thus from the intrusive, critical gaze of society, but they do not provide protection from the dangers of isolation and knowledge. The barriers of greenery work not only as a shield from society, but also as a visual representation of the sexuality of which the young women know nothing. They can see the “monuments of antiquity… overspread with jessamines and honeysuckles” (Haywood 605), and they can feel the romantic emotions, “delightful… heavenly… solitude… truly preferable” (Haywood 606), but the meaning of these feelings remains outside their consciousness. To know that their emotions are linked to sexuality and desire would enable them to protect themselves from falling into ruin. Deborah Nestor says that, “Haywood represents a society which provides women with very little protection from predatory males, and then casts them away as irretrievably ruined after they have been seduced or raped” (582). They do not know that the shelter of the gardens provide more than solitude for romantic reflection; gardens allow seclusion from their protectors, and thus an opportunity for attackers.

The dangerous situations in which many of the characters find themselves only worsen with their naïve and lively responses (Spencer 148). The young man in Oxford, by whose hand Betsy is nearly undone, paints this picture of the garden into which he coerces the girls: “full of the most beautiful alcoves and arbours so shaded over, that the sun, even in his meridian force, could, at the most, but glimmer through the delightful
gloom‖ (Haywood 70). The girls follow him to the garden without hesitation, laughing carelessly the whole way, in a manner that causes him “to form some conjectures no way to the advantage of these ladies’ reputation” (Haywood 70). Flora, prepared to know what conjectures must certainly follow isolation in the garden is not in jeopardy, but Betsy, ignorant to any suppositions against her virtue finds herself in a dangerous and undesirable position. When Betsy finds herself alone with a young man in the Oxford garden it hardly registers with her that this could be a dangerous position. However, by allowing herself alone with him, the young man assumes that Betsy is allowing him the opportunity to make advances upon her. Betsy’s acknowledgement of the danger of the situation does not erase her naivety over the situation. Though she recognizes sexual threat, she cannot yet recognize her position as a sexual object.

The character of Miss Flora juxtaposes Betsy because while Betsy innocently carries on flirtations, Flora carries on “sexual obsession and actual carnal involvement” (Richetti 249). For Miss Flora, a garden in Oxford provides her with a desired space of seclusion. The text gently allows us to see Miss Flora as a character who is aware of her sexuality before stepping behind the walls of a garden. Betsy previously observed her acting improperly with Gayland alone in her chamber. When Flora reappears after leaving Betsy in an unhappy situation in Oxford, Betsy obverses that Flora has “no sense of virtue or modesty” and was already aware and prepared for what could have happened in the Oxford garden (Haywood 75). Though Betsy is able to observe Flora’s behavior as improper, she still lacks the self-awareness to see how her own actions might be inappropriate for a virtuous young woman. In order to remain socially proper, she must
know enough to appear as though she knows nothing about sexual desires. This paradox causes both internal and external conflicts in Betsy’s life.

At first Miss Forward’s story paints her as a victim of this paradox as well. The undoing of Miss Forward occurs in a garden outside the safe walls of her school. She has not been taught about sexuality until she comes here, and then it is forced upon her. Though she says, “with the bitterest regret and shame I now confess it, my own fond heart too much consented” (Haywood 110), her tone strongly insinuates that she did not expect Wildly to act in the way he did. This artificial exchange suggests that Miss Forward’s words are a contrivance (Austin 277). Though Miss Forward sees, in retrospect, how her undoing occurred, she entered the garden that night unaware. She did not know that to enter a garden alone with a man was a sign of her willing assent. She was not prepared for the knowledge awaiting her in that green seclusion. In this inter-story, as in others, Haywood subversively demonstrates the need for young women to know what awaits them before they enter the gardens. While the patriarchal society demands that young unmarried women remain blind to knowledge about their positions as sexual objects, and refrain from seeing themselves as sexual subjects, these garden encounters demonstrate the need for women to know.

Betsy remains unaware of herself as a sexual object or subject. She is shocked at Flora’s behavior and outraged whenever a man attempts to take advantage of her. She also refuses to be enlightened toward Miss Forward’s improper position as a “common prostitute.” Betsy’s refusal to accept this knowledge from Trueworth illustrates how unready she is to become self-aware. Additionally, Betsy is not worldly enough to perceive the full meaning of what Trueworth says about Miss Forward’s position (Nestor
Trueworth attempts to keep Betsy sheltered from the truth about Miss Forward, yet wants to dissuade her from maintaining the relationship and discontinues his courtship with her when she refuses to take his advice. He punishes Betsy for not following his advice on something which she cannot understand due to the ignorance necessary to remain a virtuous woman. The shock she receives when she finally discovers, in a most unpleasant way, that her childhood friend holds an unfavorable reputation still does not fill Betsy with the proper amount of knowledge to become aware of how her actions affect the way society sees her. Though she knows enough to realize that she must discontinue her company with Miss Forward, she is not yet aware of herself as a sexual object in society, and thus continues her flirtations and irresponsible behavior.

Married life for Betsy becomes emotionally abusive, yet she attempts to make the best of it. Betsy’s family pushes her into marrying Munden, and even on the day of the wedding, she observes, “what can make the generality of women so fond of marrying?” (Haywood 494). Betsy resolves to remain a virtuous and respectful wife despite her mundane and cruel husband, yet she maintains respect for herself as well. Haywood thus ensures, “the reader's good opinion of Betsy,” while also subversively criticizing “common male behavior and educat[ing] wives about their options” (Stuart 8). Lady Trusty’s explications on how to be a subversively good wife demonstrate how women attempted to work within the framework and against it simultaneously. Lady Trusty, however, can be viewed also as a representative of a woman attempting to work within the patriarchal structure, yet has only submitted to it. Lady Trusty wants Betsy to be comfortable, and her advice suggests that Betsy should behave kindly to her husband in any way possible so as to create the best possible situation for herself. Only her
husband’s infidelity can drive Betsy from Munden’s home. This also appears as the only action on Munden’s part which causes others to side with Betsy. Until this point, all of Betsy’s family and friends agreed that she must stay in Munden’s home despite how miserable she may be. Her marriage was seen as a misfortune – nothing from which she could save herself. Even after Betsy discovers Munden’s infidelity, she cannot divorce him. However, her friends and family do assist her in removing herself from his home, an avenue she sees as most desirable.

Though Betsy believes she wants nothing more than a peaceful life alone, she discovers that her true desires lie in Trueworth. This realization takes place in a garden. Betsy enters a garden alone to reflect. It is described as a “very beautiful garden, decorated with plots of flowers, statues, and trees cut in the most elegant manner” As she sits in a shady arbor, “upon a mossy seat, where scenting fragrancy of the sweets around her, made more delicious by the freshness of the morning’s gale” (Haywood 606), she pulls out an image of Trueworth and gazes upon it pensively. Haywood paints a comfortable and inviting paradise. Here resides no fear of banishment. Furthermore, Betsy is isolated from the penetrating gaze of society. Thus, Haywood successfully creates a place where Betsy is free to govern herself autonomously. She must make her own choices in the garden, rather than rely on society to dictate her actions. Betsy herself says “‘how heavenly… is this solitude, how truly preferable to all the noisy giddy pleasures of the tumultuous town, yet how have I despised and ridiculed the soft serenity of a country life’” (Haywood 606). Betsy’s growth as an individual is reflected in her ability to enjoy the solitude of the garden.
Betsy reflects that her individual growth makes her a more worthy companion for Trueworth. With this thought, Betsy realizes her error in choosing the life of a coquette over Trueworth. However, it is not too late for Betsy to find forgiveness for her errors. As she weeps over Trueworth’s image, feeling the remorse for her choices in life, Trueworth appears out of his hiding place in the garden. Her surprise at seeing him there causes her to nearly faint away “but for the immediate assistance of the person, who had caused these extraordinary emotions” (Haywood 607). When Betsy regains her senses Trueworth admits his equal feelings for her, and expresses his desire for her. Betsy, however, collects herself and returns to a state of propriety. Haywood commends this trait:

that admirable presence of mind, which Mrs. Munden had shewn on many occasions, did not in this entirely leave her; -- the time he was speaking those few words sufficed to enable her to recollect her scattered spirits, and [withdraw] herself from the hold he had taken of her, and [remove] a little farther on the bench… (Haywood 608).

Betsy, because she is allowed to govern herself, does not fall into a state of confusion. She promptly pushes Trueworth back to an acceptable distance and prepares herself to control the situation through her rhetoric.

Because Trueworth has already heard Betsy’s confessions of love, he feels as though he may take bold steps with her in openly discussing their desire for each other. Betsy, however, does not let the conversation take over her knowledge about the proper way to handle herself. She attempts to dissuade him that her confessions were that of love. The narrative admits that Betsy mustered a great deal of courage in her attempts to
push Trueworth away. Though they are isolated from the gaze of society, Betsy governs herself with decision that will protect her reputation. When Trueworth, overcome with passion for Betsy, embraces her, she says, ‘‘Forbear, sir,’ she said; ‘you know I am not at liberty to be entertained with discourses, nor with actions of this nature; -- loose me this moment, or be assured all the kind thoughts I had of you… will be converted into the extremest hatred and detestation’’ (Haywood 609). Betsy resolutely forbids Trueworth to treat her in any way that is not becoming of her station in life. She demands respect. This demand arises from the knowledge of how to protect her reputation but thrives because she is granted the power to govern her own decisions regarding her heart. Haywood soon rewards her heroine – the reformed coquette – with the fortunate death of her husband.

Though she retreats from her husband after discovering his affair, she does not become fully self-aware until she realizes, in the garden, that her heart lies with Trueworth. Betsy’s gazing upon Trueworth’s image in the seclusion of the garden produces in her the knowledge that he alone is worthy of her affection and sexual desire. This knowledge comes to her because her adventures have led her to a self-awareness that will guide her autonomy into proper decisions for herself; however, this awareness does not occur for Betsy until she enters the shelter of the garden. Once Betsy becomes self-aware, she is prepared for Trueworth’s passion. Betsy’s awareness of her sexuality and her desire for Trueworth grants her the power to push him away and remove herself from the garden, virtue still in tact. She no longer needs rescuing by fate, or men; her self-representation allows her to use knowledge to protect herself, and to control “her own desiring body” (Nestor 587). She frees herself and takes with her the knowledge that her love is not unrequited, a knowledge gained only upon entrance into the garden.
Haywood does not disguise the double standard of yielding to sexual desire. Trueworth may chastise himself for his affair with Flora, or for having passionate thoughts about Betsy, but he is not punished in the same way he punishes Betsy for her friendship with a prostitute. Likewise, Haywood’s earlier novel, *Love in Excess*, contains a hero whose conflicts with virtue are not as fiercely punished as his heroines (who all find endings representational of death). D’elmont finds redemption as the end of Haywood’s novel, and receives his happy ending through a forgiveness of his transgressions. Despite the differences in gender the redemption of both Betsy Thoughtless and D’elmont occurs in gardens. In these instances, Betsy and D’elmont prove their constancy and their ability to become aware of their desires and the world around them. For these Haywood characters, gardens become the places where knowledge is gained through a transformation into a self-aware individual that can govern himself/herself properly according to autonomous decisions. Perhaps the similarities between D’elmont and Betsy demonstrate Haywood’s desire for men and women to be allowed to govern themselves with equal autonomy in order to make the proper decisions.

This new self-awareness leads to a re-birth into a character who receives redemption from previous errors -- especially errors resulting from ignorance, such as the inability to express themselves as sexual subjects, or see themselves as sexual object. While Clarissa realized the error of her thoughts, yet still found herself banished from the garden, Haywood’s characters are allowed enough room and good fortune to learn from their mistakes and demonstrate their ability to act properly. Haywood allows for autonomous thinking that works within the patriarchal structure of society. Through
Betsy’s adventures, she gains an awareness of how to govern herself according to her desires, yet still obey the constructs of society. She does not run off with Trueworth while still married to her husband, nor does she give into her desires for him there in the garden. She has gained enough self-awareness to see herself as a sexual subject without giving into desires that would actively function against societal codes of conduct.

In the end, Betsy’s reward lies not only in her marriage to Trueworth, but in her new-found ability to express herself. This knowledge is only gained after she realizes that societal constraints and propriety must dictate her life; but the knowledge of this affords her opportunities of subversion within the patriarchal barriers. “Haywood’s novel celebrates individual, if delayed, moral agency” (Richetti 253), thus ending Betsy’s lengthy adventures in her discovery of proper self-representation. Though Betsy Thoughtless ends with the heroine’s knowledge of her sexuality and desires, she never truly steps out of the walls of decorum. Some critics see this “revised concern for public opinion” as a “breaking of Betsy” (Stuart 8), rather than a reformation. Betsy must learn how to perform properly within the realms of society. Though she realizes her love for Trueworth, she tells him, “henceforth avoid my presence with the same care I will do yours” (Haywood), and she waits the obligatory year after her husband’s death before pursuing marriage to Trueworth. On the other hand, Betsy subverts the rules of propriety during this year of mourning by sending Trueworth “the first love-letter she had ever wrote” (Haywood 627). Here, Betsy’s independent character shines behind the veil of decorum; in the garden, she gained a self-representation that allows her to live safely, yet freely, within her world.
Though Betsy is punished for her coquette actions by Mundun’s mental, financial, and emotional abuse of her, she escapes this punishment and is rewarded with a marriage to Trueworth. In the garden, she gains knowledge about her sexual desires. Enlightened as to her true feelings for Trueworth, her self-awareness also grants her the power to run away from him so as to escape a possible affair that would damage to her reputation. Betsy remains a virtuous heroine because she is allowed the freedom to make her own choices. By the end of the novel Betsy learns the powers of reflection, and can plan around the possible consequences of her speech and action (Anderson 7). Because her “self-conscious performance becomes a form of self-expressive and therefore honest theater” (Anderson 5), she remains true to herself, and is not broken by public opinion. Betsy’s reprimands to Trueworth, as well as her love letter to him, demonstrates what Merritt discusses as the power of female forms of discourse, “especially those which aim as self-representation” (23). This discourse works against the double standard, and the misrepresentation of female sexuality that Haywood’s novels seek to destabilize. While Betsy cannot pursue an affair with Trueworth, and while she remains within the constraints of the patriarchal society by waiting the obligatory year before another marriage, her love letter to him demonstrates her autonomy. Though she has learned how to govern herself according to societal expectations, and therefore live safely within her social world, she still retains a freedom to act as she pleases by choosing to write to Trueworth before the end of her year of mourning. Thus, Haywood didactically illustrates the need to live according to the rules of a patriarchal society yet retain autonomous thinking.
Chapter Four

Conclusion

Samuel Richardson’s *Clarissa* and Eliza Haywood’s *Miss Betsy Thoughtless* explore the symbolic space of the garden. While Richardson uses the garden as a place where banishment for disobedience takes place, Haywood allows her heroine to gain redemption in the garden. The garden stands traditionally as a place of innocence; yet, with the rise in popularity of Milton’s *Paradise Lost* the symbol of the garden increasingly became seen as a place from which humans are banished because of their inevitably flawed nature. Eighteenth-century writers revered Milton’s work. This influence resulted in a widespread exploration of Milton’s core issues in eighteenth-century works. However, as is the nature of re-writing, revisionism naturally took place. Since Milton’s work itself is a revision of a religious story, religious values underwent double revision by the hand of eighteenth-century writers. Those works which gained immense popularity, such as *Clarissa* and *Betsy Thoughtless*, were available to influence readers to trust their respective messages as though they held important religious didacticism. Thus, Richardson’s *Clarissa* and Haywood’s *Betsy Thoughtless* expressed eighteenth-century understandings of virtue, the fallen woman, and redemption.

Richardson’s novel seeks a “happy ending” by stripping the heroine of her autonomy, and forcing her into the confusing and precarious situation of the punished sexual object. Clarissa’s banishment from the garden can be seen as a punishment for attempting to govern herself with an autonomy removed from any social or religious ties.
However, the garden stands as the place from which Clarissa is banished for disobedience. Humans, even paragons of virtue such as Clarissa, fall short of paradise according to Milton’s story of the garden. Richardson merely translates this symbolic place into *Clarissa*. Her banishment from the garden results from her entertaining the idea of disobeying the patriarchal authority by running away with Lovelace. The garden scene demonstrates Richardson’s adherence to the need to punish the disobedient human spirit as it was represented earlier in *Paradise Lost*. In keeping with *Paradise Lost*, Clarissa literally falls out of the garden when she attempts to govern her own life. After banishment from the garden, and willful submission to the patriarchy, Clarissa regains paradise in her return to her father’s house after her death. Clarissa can exist as a paragon of virtue only when she experiences banishment from the garden as punishment for her sin of disobedient thoughts.

The garden scenes in *Miss Betsy Thoughtless*, on the other hand, demonstrate the importance of preparing young women to receive knowledge. Only those characters properly prepared to receive knowledge about their sexuality and desire exit the seclusion of the gardens unscathed. Indeed, Betsy leaves the final garden scene of her own power and fully embraces a new self-awareness of her desires. “Young Betsy begins the novel properly unaware of sexual feeling” (Nestor 586), but her embrace with Trueworth in the garden and subsequent banishment of him proves her full awareness of her sexuality and the need to remain within the constraints of proper behavior (Nestor 587). Perhaps, as Alexander Pettit posits, *Betsy Thoughtless* seeks not to “foster a corporate move toward moral consensus… but rather to present a multiplicity of moral perspectives, none of them dominant” (263). The women in *The History of Miss Betsy Thoughtless* attempt to
remain within the constraints of propriety, but the text shows them straining to break free and find self-expression. Haywood creates a text with a virtuous heroine, yet subversively manages to demonstrate a need to educate young women about their sexuality and reconstruct the feminine image. *Betsy Thoughtless*’s ambiguity allows a powerful Haywood to dislocate passivity and agency in order to violate expected gender possibilities right before the readers’ eyes (Backscheider 28). Haywood shifts the symbolic space of the garden from one where punishment takes place, to one where forgiveness is found through proper autonomous decisions.

The didactic messages that Richardson and Haywood bring forth in their treatment of the garden exemplify the differences in thought about autonomy, propriety, and virtue in eighteenth-century Britain. The Miltonic influence upon these works can be located in the use of the garden as a place where judgment is passed on the heroine. For Clarissa, her fate is sealed in her entertainment of the idea of disobedience. Richardson disallows any forgiveness until Clarissa accepts her fallen state and submits willfully to the patriarchy. Clarissa’s inability to see herself as a fallen woman for much of the novel demonstrates the complicated nature of her sin. However, Richardson’s banishment of the virtuous heroine from the garden illustrates a view of all humans as inevitably flawed. Only when Clarissa accepts that she has no right to return to the garden does she receive a return to paradise in the form of death. Haywood, however, creates a tale about a reformed coquet by continually rescuing her heroine from rape throughout the novel. In addition to these fateful rescues, Haywood allows Betsy to govern herself with autonomous thinking. Though Betsy’s autonomy often gets her in trouble for the first portions of the novel, it is only when others interfere in her future that she marries an
abusive man. Haywood utilizes the safe space of the garden in the end of the novel to
give Betsy the freedom to choose properly how to act. Betsy receives redemption from
her unhappy marriage because she governed herself accordingly in the garden with
Trueworth. The differences in the treatment of the heroines’ right to autonomy are
exemplified in the pivotal garden scenes in these two novels. Richardson’s novel
illustrates the irrevocable error in even the thought of disobeying the patriarchy, while
Haywood’s novel celebrates the autonomous woman.
Works Cited


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