Representations of Deficient Motherhood in English Novels of the Eighteenth Century: Daniel Defoe, Samuel Richardson, Frances Burney, and Ann Radcliffe

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ABSTRACT

The eighteenth century witnessed the development of an ideology of motherhood that promoted the notions that women are born to be mothers and naturally inclined toward childcare and domesticity. Throughout the century, in all manner of cultural forms, the mother’s role was constructed into a series of rules of maternal behaviour, sentiments, and responsibilities were promoted as the attributes of maternal excellence.

Against the cultural imperative to define and idealize maternity, there emerged a body of fiction in which mothers and mother figures are deficient when measured against the exacting standards of maternal excellence. Either the mother fails because she does not exhibit the appropriate maternal sentiments that would propel her to perform the duties of the ideal mother, or she is absent and forced to leave the mothering of her child to others. These others – substitute mothers – are also deficient in some way. Whatever form deficient motherhood takes in these novels, the mother figure exerts some form of agency that affects the destiny of her child, and the outcome of the narrative.

Through close textual analysis of the novels, Moll Flanders (1722), Roxana (1724), Clarissa (1747-9), Evelina (1778), and The Italian (1797), this thesis examines how literary representations of deficient motherhood are realized in English novels of the eighteenth century, and demonstrates why major writers, like Daniel Defoe, Samuel Richardson, Frances Burney, and Ann Radcliffe deployed this fascinating theme. It argues that there was a crucial change in the method of representation and that these two different methods were reflected by, and reflective of, the changing cultural and social requirements, needs, and desires to define and control motherhood. It further argues that the deficient mother was an effective narrative device for writers to explore the emerging ideas on gender and social class. The representative novels engage with issues pertinent to their historic time and place and highlight the extent to which mothers - and women in general – in eighteenth-century England were defined by the precepts of ideal motherhood, social class, and gender.

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STATEMENT OF ORIGINALITY

This work has not previously been submitted for a degree or diploma in any university. To the best of my knowledge and belief, the thesis contains no material previously published or written by another person except where due reference is made in the thesis itself.

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Susan Patricia Tym McGarr, BA, MA (Dist.)
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and

DEDICATION

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INTRODUCTION

Through the turn of the seventeenth century and throughout the eighteenth century, motherhood became a focus of cultural attention and scrutiny. An ideology of motherhood emerged and developed to become the basis of a model of ‘maternal excellence’.1 Toni Bowers describes this model as one in which mother-love is natural and instinctual, encompassing sentiments of all-engrossing tenderness and selfless devotion toward the child (exemplified by specific behaviours such as protracted maternal breast-feeding), the personal direction and education of young children, the absence of sexual desire, a constraint on movement outside the home, and withdrawal from productive labour.2 By the end of the century, it also came to include the constant supervision and responsibility for the moral teaching of older children, particularly daughters, until adulthood and marriage. The idealizing of motherhood and what historian Amanda Vickery has called, “the sheer glamour of the images of tender motherhood”3 that appeared in conduct manuals, art, and other forms of popular writing contributed to the appropriation of these ideals as the fundamental set of standards against which all mothers were measured.4 Within a matter of decades, the multiple experiences and circumstances of motherhood were manipulated into a knowable and more easily controllable set of rules that constituted what was to become known as the social institution of motherhood, which became the blueprint for maternal behaviours and sentiments that still holds true to varying extents in Western societies today.5

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1 R. Miliband 1977, Marxism and Politics, Oxford Paperbacks, Oxford, p. 32. I use the term ideology in its classic Marxist sense to refer to modes of thought and discourse, which represent the interests of a particular group as the interests of the majority, the community, or the nation. Throughout this study, ‘ideology’ is used in a way to denote its power as a tool for controlling human behaviour in its capacity to universalize modes of thought and to make them appear real, natural, and desirable.
2 Toni Bowers 1996, The Politics of Motherhood: British Writing and Culture, 1680-1760, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, p. 28. I borrow Bowers’ term ‘maternal excellence’ in acknowledgment that it is the best description of the maternal ideology forged in the eighteenth century. Like Bowers, I use the term ‘behaviours’ (in the plural, but in the Australian spelling) to denote the multiple ways in which one conducts oneself and performs particular activities, the treatment of others, and moral conduct.
Against the cultural sway to idealize motherhood, a body of fiction emerged in which the mother figure is shown to deviate from the ideological model of excellent – and supposedly natural - motherhood.\(^6\) The narrative theme of what I refer to as ‘deficient motherhood’ appeared in what was the new literary form of the novel. Although this theme rarely, if ever, conveys maternal deficiency as a main theme, it exists - sometimes quite subtly – in a surprising number of English novels throughout the eighteenth century.\(^7\) In novels such as *Moll Flanders*, *Roxana*, *Tom Jones*, *Clarissa*, *Tristram Shandy*, *The Adventures of Peregrine Pickle*, and *The Castle of Otranto*, for example, fictional mothers or mother figures exhibit maternal behaviours that range from monstrous at worst, to ambivalent at best. Moreover, in novels, such as *Evelina*, *Cecilia*, *A Sicilian Romance*, *The Mysteries of Udolpho*, and *The Italian*, the mother figure is conspicuous by her absence, and her child (always a daughter) is left to the often-dubious care of maternal substitutes.\(^8\)

I propose in this thesis that the persistent appearance of the theme of deficient motherhood in English novels of the eighteenth century forms a pattern, comprising two main tropes, the one passing into the other towards the end of the century. In novels in the first half of the century, we find key instances of the first trope, in which the mother manifests her deficiency by failing to demonstrate the sentiments or behaviours associated with the ideology of maternal excellence. In novels in the later part of the century, we find instances in which the mother’s deficiency consists rather in being absent and unable to mother her child. This latter trope initiates a secondary trope (or sub-trope) of deficient motherhood through the activities of inadequate maternal substitutes. None of these novels is centrally about motherhood as such, but they all evince some interest in maternal values, in the sense that mothers are frequently conspicuous by their maternal failings or absence, and to that extent, they delineate what might be seen as a fictional paradigm of deficient motherhood.

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\(^6\) I use the term ‘natural’ in relation to human behaviour, to refer to a person’s innate or essential qualities, inherent impulses determining character, and a specified element of human character. In relation to the human state, ‘natural’ refers to an uncultivated condition, and a living thing’s vital function or needs. ‘Unnatural’ is used to refer to behaviour contrary to these meanings of natural, contrary to nature or the usual course of nature, lacking natural feelings, and extremely cruel or wicked.

\(^7\) I use the term ‘theme’ to denote an idea or a value of some kind (e.g. ‘good’ or ‘deficient’ motherhood) and the term ‘trope’ to denote the particular narrative enactments of that theme (e.g. a standard plot formula such as maternal failure or maternal absence).

\(^8\) See ‘Bibliography – Secondary Sources’ for bibliographic details of the novels.
I propose to argue that the deficient mother is a compelling character in these novels, partly because her failure or absence often provides the fundamental impetus to the protagonist’s story, and the framework for the narrative itself. On the basis of this argument, I pose the further question that has been fundamental to my research: What purposes did the figure of the deficient mother serve in eighteenth-century English novels?

To answer this question, I have structured my research in two main parts. First, having examined representations of deficient motherhood in a large number of eighteenth-century English novels, I have chosen for detailed examination five novels that span the century, each separated from its predecessor by about a generation. First, I propose to demonstrate, through close textual analysis of these novels, the variety of purposes the fictional deficient mother served. Second, I shall try to determine the extent to which the novels of deficient motherhood played a part (if any) in the creation, development, and dissemination of the ideas that made up the ideology of maternal excellence.

I will demonstrate in this thesis that the fictional deficient mother serves several different functions in the novel:

1. She is the catalyst for writers to validate and promote the ideology of maternal excellence. Through their creation of deficient mothers and through their fictional representation of the most drastic consequences of a mother’s deficient mothering, writers evoke maternal excellence.
2. She is the means by which writers could teach mothers how to mother. Through the portrayal of mothers engaging in all manner of maternal transgressions, the writer invites the reader to consider alternatives, to consider ultimately the ‘right’ way to behave or feel.
3. She is representative of an individual that must grapple with the many social, political, economic, spiritual, and cultural changes taking place in eighteenth-century England. Her deficient motherhood exposes the contradictions of ideological concerns and lived reality.
4. She is a means by which writers could validate and promote the particular ideals and concerns of a new middle class at the same time as they could endorse the principles of the newly structured social hierarchy. Through the evocation of excellent motherhood, by construction of its opposite in deficient mothers, writers promoted it
as beneficial and desirable to the new way of life being created by the emerging and developing middle class.

5. She stands in the novel as the means by which writers could examine the sex-gender system. Writers demonstrate the extent to which mothers, already defined according to their capacity for maternal excellence, and by their position within the social class system, are also defined by their adherence to the strictures of sex gendering and femininity.

6. She is a writer’s device to entertain the reader, and she is variously the source of shock or amusement, horror or concern. In whatever way she appeared, the deficient mother becomes the subject of her own small narrative within the larger purposes of the novel.

I will further demonstrate that the novels of deficient motherhood were vehicles for social critique and were instrumental in the creation, development, and dissemination of ideas that were integral to the ideology of maternal excellence. Moreover, I will show that, through the figure of the deficient mother, these novels variously reveal that the changes in class structure and the emergence of the middle class were inseparable from the conceptualization of gender differences and the reconfiguration of gender relations at this time in history.

It is the aim of this study to show that the novels of deficient motherhood give representation to the concerns and ideologies of a society that framed a mother’s identity, relationships, and existence, and an important consideration here is the implications for mothers of the class and gender politics that were the backdrop for eighteenth-century English society and culture. Whether or not eighteenth-century readers acknowledged the implications of the maternal sub-narratives of these novels is something we cannot fully know. However, it seems likely that representations of deficient motherhood provoked a response from their intended readership, a readership that consisted in large part of a social group, a newly emergent and culturally militant middle class, in whose interest it was to reproduce and consolidate certain ideals of motherhood. In that sense, these novels can be

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9 The term ‘culture’ is used to mean a whole way of life, material, intellectual, and spiritual (Raymond Williams 1959, *Culture & Society 1780-1950*, Doubleday, New York, p. xiv). Two other of Williams’ definitions for the word culture are also pertinent in the context of this study: it can refer to the general state of intellectual development in a society as a whole, and it can refer to the general body of the arts.
read today as social documents that illuminate the concerns of a past society experiencing enormous change, and they have much to tell us about the foundations of ideas about motherhood, some of which we continue to consider ‘natural.’

My study contributes to the body of research on eighteenth-century conceptions of motherhood and on the connections between fictional representation and ideological acculturation. The novels of deficient motherhood do not directly reflect women’s history, or the history of motherhood, nor do they necessarily reflect a pattern of shared maternal behaviours and failures. Each literary imagining is different, emerging at different historical and cultural moments, and written by very different writers. What these narratives do appear to share however, is a conception of motherhood as a site of agency (or at least potential agency). Through their representation of deficient motherhood, these novels anticipate many of the behaviours, attitudes, and beliefs that Western societies have considered, and continue to consider, fundamental aspects of natural and ‘civilized’ motherhood.10

This study attempts to establish a conceptual framework for exploring and comparing fictional images of deviant maternity, while at the same time outlining a literary and socio-historical context for the narratives of deficient motherhood. The (fictional) deficient mothers considered here, that is to say, not only reflect maternal attitudes and behaviours that were prevalent at particular historic moments; they are also part of a wider cultural discourse that changed attitudes and behaviours, affected modes of social and familial interaction, modified power relations, and elicited new ways of thinking.

10 The term ‘civilized’ is used in the same way as Norbert Elias uses it to refer to Western society’s understanding of itself as civilized in its behaviours and customs. For a people (in the sense of group) to be ‘civilized’ is for it to have reached an advanced stage or system of development. A civilized society consists of a people that behave in ways that indicate enlightenment, refinement, and education. Elias states: “the simple fact that even in civilized society no human being comes into the world civilized, and that the individual civilizing process that they compulsorily undergo is a function of the social civilizing process … Since in our society every human being is exposed from the first moment of life to the influence and the moulding intervention of civilized grown-ups, they must indeed pass through a civilizing process in order to reach the standard attained by their society in the course of its history, but not through the individual phase of the social civilizing process” (2000, The Civilizing Process: Sociogenetic and Psychogenetic Investigations, Blackwell, Oxford, p. xi).
The Choice of Novels

The novels I shall be examining are, in chronological order: *Moll Flanders* (1722) and *Roxana* (1724) by Daniel Defoe, *Clarissa* (1747-49) by Samuel Richardson, *Evelina* (1778) by Frances Burney, and *The Italian* (1797) by Ann Radcliffe. Why these particular novels? First and foremost, because each of them engages with a range of issues pertinent to its social milieu; motherhood is only one of the many themes and issues they examine; each of them thus situates motherhood in a larger context of ideas and values.

An important premise of my discussion is that the novel is a form that creates, develops, and disseminates particular ideas that make up ideologies. With Nancy Armstrong, I regard the eighteenth-century novel both as a document and as an agent of cultural history, and my choice of novels was partly determined by this dual function. On the one hand, because of their relatively high degree of literary complexity (as compared with the more straightforwardly didactic texts of the time), these novels can document, in rich, nuanced, and non-reductive ways, the moral and emotional contexts in which the individual and familial dilemmas of motherhood were played out; similarly, because of the density of their social texture, they alert us to the breadth and variety of the social contexts in which the failures of motherhood were registered and judged. On the other hand, because these novels (despite their 'literariness') were all demonstrably very popular with readers in their day, they can all reasonably be regarded as 'agents,' at least in the sense that they did address a large and responsive readership, and presumably exercised some degree of influence - whether through the characters held up as exemplars for praise or blame, or by the direct moral force of authorial discourse - on the ways in which a significant proportion of the literate population thought about the issues.

The choice of novels was also influenced by a further factor, and that is their considerable diversity as examples of the novel form. This can be conveniently underlined by reference to the system of fictional sub-genres

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11 Nancy Armstrong 1987, *Desire and Domestic Fiction: A Political History of the Novel*, Oxford University Press, New York, p. 23. Armstrong argues that women’s experience is so often at the centre of early novels. She contends that eighteenth-century literature devoted to producing the domestic woman appeared to ignore the political world run by men, restricting to the female any suggestion that birth, title, and status indicate the real worth of the individual less accurately than the more subtle nuances of behaviour. Armstrong does not specifically examine the role of the mother, but her arguments are relevant to my examination of maternal authority (or lack of it) in the novels of deficient motherhood.
Patricia Meyer Spacks sets up in her exploration of the literary, rather than social causes of change in the eighteenth-century novel, *Novel Beginnings, Experiments in Eighteenth-Century English Fiction* (2006). Here *Moll Flanders* and *Roxana* figure as novels of adventure; *Clarissa* as a novel of consciousness; *Evelina* as a novel of manners; and *The Italian* as a Gothic Romance novel. Spacks points out that these are heuristic devices rather than definitive categories but her taxonomy is nonetheless useful in enabling me to highlight the persistence of the theme of deficient motherhood right across the fictional sub-types of the period.  

All four writers of the chosen novels were popular (or became popular) at the times in which these novels were published. Defoe was a well-known and prolific writer of non-fictional journals, political pamphlets, and newspapers. His first novel, *Robinson Crusoe* (1719) was a great success and widely read and admired, making him, along with writers such as Eliza Haywood and Delarivier Manley, for example, one of the most popular writers of his day. Manley and Haywood have deficient mothers in their fiction; long-lost mothers in Manley’s *New Atalantis* (1709), and abdicating mothers in Haywood’s *The Force of Nature* (1725), for example, but against these representations, Defoe’s mothers are spectacularly deficient, and it is for this reason that I consider Defoe’s maternal representations ideal for my research purposes. *Moll Flanders* (1722) and *Roxana* (1724) are early contributions to what Toni Bowers has described as the Augustan fascination with ‘unnatural’ mothers. Whether or not Defoe intended it, his maternal heroines expose the practical and ideological conditions that mothers faced. Poverty, prostitution, crime, and child abandonment are all part of Defoe’s exploration into the complications inherent in a female’s pursuit for autonomy, and his novels demonstrate both the inherent contradiction that existed between female individualism and maternal viability, and also the connection between female poverty and social conditions.

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16 The term ‘individualism’ is used here, in the same way that historian Norbert Elias describes it, to mean the result of a process by which individuals become increasingly self-centered and aware, differentiating themselves, socially and psychologically, from the groups with which they previously identified (Elias 2000, p. 479).
Samuel Richardson’s first novel, *Pamela* (1740) was a huge success when it was published, inaugurating Richardson’s novelistic career, and spawning “numerous imitators.”* Clarissa* (1748) is in the same epistolary form and adopts the same didactic approach that had proved so successful in *Pamela*. In *Clarissa*, mothers and mother figures abound and all are related to the heroine in some maternal way, yet all are in some way deficient, and all are involved, to varying degrees, in Clarissa’s tragedy. It is argued, however, that Mrs. Harlowe - Clarissa’s biological mother –initiates the paradigm of deficient motherhood that pervades the novel. In her failure to intervene in the persecution of a beloved daughter by her money-obsessed family, Mrs. Harlowe gives representation to the conflict between maternal authority and wifely obedience and emerges as a key component of Richardson’s political and pedagogical maternal agenda.

At around the same time, the middle of the eighteenth century, deficient mothers were appearing in a variety of forms in other popular literary novels. In *Tom Jones* (1749), *The Adventures of Peregrine Pickle* (1751), *Tristram Shandy* (1759-67), and *The Castle of Otranto* (1764), for example, deficient mothers are in some way disruptive, yet crucial, to the coming-of-age narrative of the hero. In *Tom Jones*, Henry Fielding devises several complicated plots in which maternal conduct is the source of the larger concerns (and comedic highlights) of the novel such as illegitimacy, incest, sexual indiscretion, and family inheritance. In *The Adventures of Peregrine Pickle*, Tobias Smollett creates a cruel mother whose rejection of her son, the hero, is the symbolic catalyst for Smollett’s satiric exploration of human cruelty, stupidity, and greed. In *Tristram Shandy*, Laurence Sterne creates an ostensibly passive and phlegmatic wife and mother whose ambivalence to the males in her family is the catalyst for Sterne to examine (and ridicule) masculinity, male sexuality, and social identity. In *The Castle of Otranto*, Horace Walpole creates a virtuous and tender wife and mother, whose misguided loyalty to her husband leads to familial disorder and sexual deviance.

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17 Spacks 2006, p. 95.
Frances Burney, largely unknown before the publication of *Evelina* (1778), became a literary celebrity virtually overnight when it was discovered – several months after her anonymous publication of the novel - that she was the author. Arguably Burney’s most popular novel, *Evelina* is the first of three novels (Cecilia, published in 1782 and The Wanderer, published in 1814, being the other two) that has at its core the trope of the absent mother. In *Evelina*, the mother is dead, and her absence from her child’s life initiates the tropes of the motherless heroine and the deficient maternal substitutes. Through the characters of the mother figures (among others), Burney presents a wide perspective on the social class system in her time. She shows the strict delineations of classes through her insightful and amusing demonstration of different behaviours, manners, speech, and activities.

Mothers and mother figures confront the contemporaneous social and cultural concerns to define gender and Burney’s substitute mothers are representatives of the way mothers and women are bound to the culturally prescribed precepts of femininity that limit their authority and subjectivity. The absent mother’s potential for excellent motherhood is evoked not only through the context of the deficient maternal behaviours of the substitute mothers but also through her daughter’s physical resemblance to her and that likeness being the source of authority for the heroine’s legitimacy. As representative of suffering female virtue, the dead mother exists in this novel as emblematic of the ways in which women are bound to patriarchal laws that stifle their potential. Yet, as emblematic, also, of an existential, natural, and excellent form of motherhood - by way of her biological maternity and the heroine’s resemblance to her – the dead mother evokes a strong maternal power through the mother-daughter bond.

By the time *The Italian* appeared in 1797, Ann Radcliffe was regarded as one of the most successful women writers of her generation. The *Italian* is the last of Radcliffe’s novels with the trope of an absent mother; *A Sicilian Romance* (1790), *The Romance of the Forest* (1791), and *The Mysteries of Udolpho* (1794) all feature the trope to a greater or lesser extent. In *The Italian*, Radcliffe addresses motherhood through representations of patriarchal abuse, maternal loss, and maternal deficiency against the

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historically specific emerging quest for female voice. The absent mother, Olivia, is representative of suffering female virtue, her potential for excellent motherhood realized through demonstration of an innate bond between her and her unknown daughter by way of her expression of ‘instinctual’ maternal responses to love and protect her child. Radcliffe represents motherhood as a multitude of different behaviours and sentiments, and the notion of maternal excellence as a particular set of behaviours and a knowable entity is consistently challenged and refuted. Olivia, representative of the ‘good’ mother, for example, fails in several key maternal behaviours that are, theoretically, the cornerstones of maternal excellence but, by her absence, she imparts the sense that none of the dangers with which the heroine is faced would exist if she were present. Radcliffe allows for human frailty and affirms a form of maternal power by creating mothers that may fail, but that ultimately redeem themselves through expression of an innate mother-daughter bond.

The trope of the absent mother appears in many other novels of the period. Charlotte Turner Smith’s *Emmeline; or The Orphan of the Castle* (1788), *Ethelinde, or the Recluse of the Lake* (1789), *Celestina* (1791), *The Old Manor House* (1793), and *Marchmont* (1796); Mary Hays’ *The Memoirs of Emma Courtney* (1796); and Maria Edgeworth’s *Belinda* (1801) all evoke the absent mother as the benevolent, loving and excellent mother.

*Toni Bowers and ‘The Politics of Motherhood’*

In her study, *The Politics of Motherhood: British Writing and Culture, 1680-1760* (1996), Toni Bowers examines literary representations of motherhood in early eighteenth-century English novels and makes two central claims, which together form the starting point for this study. The first claim is that motherhood as a social institution emerged in early eighteenth-century England, and that representations of monstrous mothers were used as a means to limit women’s power in every area of life. With regard to this claim, she focuses on the ways in which motherhood – as an institution – became a political and cultural tool to regulate sexuality and promote a specific political agenda. 

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21 Charlotte Lennox used the trope of the dead mother in *The Female Quixote, or the Adventures of Arabella* earlier, in 1752. It is notable for its early consideration that a dead mother enables the heroine to experience the world without the constraints for feminine propriety that a present mother would impose.

The second claim is that these representations were instrumental in the creation of a model of maternal excellence, a model in which the various activities and experiences of motherhood were reduced to a “limited set of supposedly natural, timeless sentiments and practices.” This model, she contends, is the foundation of a maternal ideology that persists in Western societies, to varying extents, to the present day.\(^{23}\) Since the present project is in many ways an extension of Bowers’ work, it may be useful to enumerate the ways in which I believe it may augment and qualify it:

1) I establish the existence of a narrative theme of deficient motherhood in English novels of the eighteenth century, and use five novels written by four major writers that exemplify the theme. By analyzing novels of writers separated one from the other by approximately 25 years, I establish the existence of a pattern of fictional representations of deficient motherhood throughout the century.

2) I define deficient motherhood as maternal failure and maternal absence, and propose that there was a transition from one to the other towards the end of the century. I argue that this transition reflects both a change in authorial intention and strategy, and a change in the social and cultural expectations of motherhood.

3) I argue that, despite the theme of deficient motherhood being a sub-narrative in these novels of potentially larger purpose, these writers had something to say about motherhood and about womanhood more broadly, and that their fictional deficient mothers are the catalyst for their enquiry, examination, and exploration into issues that affected women in their everyday lives.

4) I show how these novels explore the implications for society of an ideology of motherhood that ignores social and economic circumstances, with particular attention to the effects of social class on mothers, and to the concerns, values, and requirements of and for the middle class mother.

5) I demonstrate the implications for mothers of the sex-gender system that assigned them characteristics and behaviours of ‘femininity,’ and disparaged and condemned other characteristics and behaviours.

\(^{23}\) Bowers 1996, p. 28.
6) I expand upon Bowers’ argument that novels that represent deficient motherhood reflect a cultural imperative to define mothers in order to harness maternity into a knowable and manageable entity that makes up the social ‘institution’ of motherhood.

Although my concern is to establish the purposes of the fictional deficient mother, I take account of Bowers’ work on non-fictional forms of maternal discourse and ideology. According to Bowers, conduct manuals made up a large proportion of the non-fictional discourse on motherhood and were an insistent means of communicating the ‘rules’ of good maternal behaviour. These manuals, especially those published between approximately 1680 and 1760, were virtually all based on two works: *The Ladies Calling* (1673) by Richard Allestree and *Advice to a Daughter* (1688) by the Marquess of Halifax. Reproductions, abridgements, or confections of these two “supremely influential” works propounded and disseminated, as rote, a consistent set of rules for ‘good’ maternal behaviours and sentiments that became “the maxims that achieved ubiquitous authority during the Augustan period.”

Deficient mothers act in ways that deliberately contradict the notions of maternal excellence articulated in manuals such as these. Bowers argues that the deficient mothers serve a dual purpose. They simultaneously question the notion of motherhood as a prescribed set of maternal behaviours that takes no account of economic or social circumstance, and at the same time validate the performance of maternal excellence by representing the devastating consequences of dereliction, as in, for example, the death of a child. It is my contention that whatever surprise, horror, discomfort, or distress the maternal figures may evoke, what they elicit, above all, is a *response*, be it from characters within the text, from the writers themselves (in the form of narrative comments), or from readers then and now. The fact of response is integral to my argument that these narratives were instrumental in the dissemination of ideas that constitute ideology, an ideology that was increasingly consolidated and appropriated by all levels of society.

Throughout this thesis, I refer to conduct manuals and philosophical tracts in relation to how the maternal behaviours and sentiments they recommend are

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mimicked, transgressed, and promoted in novels of deficient motherhood. Samuel Richardson, for example, makes clear that all his novels – *Pamela* (1740), *Pamela Volume 2* (1741), *Clarissa* (1747-8), and *Sir Charles Grandison* (1753) - are didactic. Indeed, parts of all of them read remarkably like conduct manuals, whether it is to reinforce a particular point, as in Pamela’s insistence in *Pamela Volume 2* on the benefits of maternal breastfeeding, for example, or to promote a paradigm of proper behaviour, as in his characterization of all his somewhat saintly protagonists, Pamela, Clarissa, and Sir Charles Grandison. I will demonstrate that elements of non-fictional representations of excellent motherhood are present in all the novels of deficient motherhood, and that these novels contribute to the overall dissemination and appropriation of ideals of maternal excellence.

**Feminisms, Patriarchy, and Literary History**

My research is broadly feminist-historicist in orientation. My concern has been to situate the novels within the historical conditions, social settings, and ideological forces that shaped fictional representations of deficient motherhood in this period. There is a substantial body of feminist readings of the eighteenth-century novel, from the early studies of critics such as Dale Spender and Ellen Moers to more recent studies of scholars such as Toni Bowers, Nancy Armstrong, Helene Moglen, Donnalee Frega, Felicity Nussbaum, Mary Poovey, Ruth Perry, Janine Barchas, Susan Greenfield, and Margaret Doody. My own approach is a virtual patchwork of feminist thought; I favour a perspective that has, generally, a more sociological than philosophical slant. I acknowledge the diversity of the aims and methods of feminist literary criticism and adopt as the cornerstone of my own enquiry what Annette Kolodny describes as:

> an acute and impassioned attentiveness to the ways in which primarily male structures of power are inscribed (or encoded) within our literary inheritance: the consequence of that encoding for women – as characters, as readers, and as writers; and, with that, a shared analytic concern for the implications of that encoding not only for a better understanding of the past but also for an improved reordering of the present and future.25

I am less concerned with the politics of feminism, which I take to mean what Toril Moi describes as “a specific kind of political discourse, a critical and

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theoretical practice committed to the struggle against patriarchy and sexism.” The novels are not examined with the purpose of identifying, defining, and naming a ‘struggle’ between the mother and patriarchy, but rather of elucidating how novels create relationships that bring to light facets of a patriarchal order that impact particularly upon the mother.

Patriarchy is a complicated (and often misused) term, which requires clarification for the purposes of this study. In its simplest definition, patriarchy is “a form of social organization or government in which a man or men rule and descent is reckoned through the male line.” Allan Johnson describes it as “a kind of society” that is male-dominated, male-identified, and male-centered. He describes male-dominance as the power difference between men and women whereby men shape culture in a way that reflects and serves their interests and promotes the idea that man is superior to woman. ‘Male-identified’ describes the fundamental cultural belief that men and men’s lives are the norm against which women and women’s lives are measured, and ‘male-centered’ describes the way in which male experience is representative of human experience. Johnson says that patriarchy is not a condition by which men ‘know’ they are dominant, or one by which women eternally suffer male oppression. He contends that patriarchy ‘happens’ because men and women have socially prescribed gender definitions of masculinity and femininity which normalize and naturalize domination and oppression in the creation of images of men and women as “harmonious, complementary, and equal.”

I use the term patriarchy to denote a social condition to which both men and women are party: a condition of social organization in which men and women participate on the joint and equal understanding, appropriation, and naturalization of an essentially male-centric ideology as real and universal. The cultural coding as natural feminine attributes and the promotion of motherhood as a woman’s purpose enabled the patriarchal order invested in the feminine to maintain a code of behaviour and moral excellence commensurate with the new way of life that the middle-class was constructing. The mother was pivotal to a way of life that focused on wealth,

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29 Johnson 1997, pp. 72-73.
comfort, and order. An interest in keeping wives domesticated and dependent was not reflective solely of the concern for male domination with the sole purpose of female oppression. However, I consider that, with a wife who adhered to the ideological precepts of femininity and maternity, a man could be assured on a personal level of his wife’s virtue and his domestic well-being and on a social level, of patrilineal surety and an unhindered pursuit of masculine autonomy and authority. In the novels, some individuals exert excessive – even brutal – means to control women as part of their patriarchal privilege. As excessive as these fictional situations may be, I argue that they illuminate the extent to which eighteenth-century society was shaped by patriarchal concerns.

My examination of these novels focuses on the effects of ideology on society in general and the mother in particular. In this exercise, I necessarily privilege the female perspective, in an attempt to expose the extent to which the ‘primarily male structures’ of eighteenth-century discourse affected women and mothers in their everyday lives. Through fictional representations of deficient and absent mothers can be seen the eighteenth-century concern with defining and policing gender, and with constructing rigorous codes of femininity and maternity to which the mother was compelled by social and cultural forces to adhere, and against which her maternal viability was measured. What emerges from this examination is both a sense of how these novels contribute to a discourse of maternity that helped construct what we recognize today as modern maternity, and a sense of how they contribute to literary tradition with politically complex and psychologically enduring effects.

In the earlier novels by Defoe and Richardson, I concentrate on the main maternal character, although references are also made to others. I have chosen Defoe’s two woman-centric novels not only because they are outstanding representations of the theme of deficient motherhood, but because they represent Defoe’s concerns with the political, social, and economic issues prevalent at his time. Defoe’s novels, particularly, project a sense of the changes taking place in society and in the ways people behaved. As such, they also provide a foundation for my examination of the later novels, which represent different changes applicable to their particular historical moments. In all the novels, the ways in which mothers are deficient are examined, as are the functions they perform in the novel’s
larger purpose of social critique. All the novels demonstrate, for example, the writer’s awareness of, even preoccupation with, the issues of gender and social class: the deficient mother figure in each is representative of the ways in which the sex-gender system worked and of the implications of strict social class delineations.

The deficient mothers are historically specific in that they are shown to engage in situations or to be encumbered by circumstances that reflect their historical timeframe and social mores. The mother figure in each of the novels grapples variously with social, familial – and reader - expectations for her to behave and feel in ‘appropriately’ maternal ways and, if she does not conform to those expectations, she is deemed deficient and ‘unnatural.’ Moreover, the tasks that became defined as natural to the mother evolved into a discourse that constructed the maternal role as a natural behaviour of femininity – the parameters of which were defined within the sex-gender system - by which women (and men) were assigned particular characteristics that became accepted as the natural constituents of their sex. If a woman or mother is not feminine enough – that is, if she displays characteristics other than those commensurate with those being defined through the sex-gender system as peculiarly female – she is deemed ‘masculine’ and therefore also unnatural. As the ideals of maternity and femininity were appropriated as norms, defining the maternal role became critical to society’s definition of itself. From this definitional process, Nancy Armstrong argues, rose a new woman: a creature of feelings naturally inclined to household management and caring for the sick, needy, and young. At the same time, women also acquired, as if by osmosis, the supposedly natural feminine behaviours of docility, virtue, and moral goodness, ideals that consolidate throughout the century to promote motherhood as “woman’s highest mission – as her distinct career,” establishing motherhood as an institution that

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30 Judith Butler 1990, Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity, Routledge, New York and London. I use Judith Butler’s meaning for ‘gender,’ as “the repeated stylization of the body, a set of repeated acts within a highly regulatory frame that congeal over time to produce the appearance of substance, of a natural sort of being” (p. 33).

31 The process by which writers characterize women who display behaviours that challenge the precepts of ‘femininity’ is described in this study as ‘masculinization.’ Mother figures are ‘masculinized’ for a variety of reasons, but most often as the means to challenge the sex-gender system that limits women to certain behaviours and as the means to explore the implications of gendering on the mother.


became, according to Toni Bowers, “a central pillar upholding patriarchal privilege.”

Many scholars have been interested to investigate the extent to which eighteenth-century writers, particularly the writers represented in my study, were ‘feminist,’ and the extent to which their ‘feminism’ is (or is not) manifested in their writing. I use the terms ‘feminism’ and ‘feminist’ (in single quotation marks) to distinguish them from modern-day concepts to mean an eighteenth-century writer’s awareness, not necessarily acted upon, of an imbalance between men and women in relation to the power structures of their society. In her study, *The Domestic Revolution*, Eve Tavor Bannet examines eighteenth- and nineteenth-century novels, conduct books and philosophical tracts by women writers, and distinguishes two threads of ‘feminist’ thought, which she terms ‘Matriarchal’ and ‘Egalitarian.’ ‘Matriarchs’ believe that women are superior in sense and virtue, and desire to take control of the family; and ‘Egalitarians’ seek to level hierarchies both in the state and in the family, believing that a family should be based on consensual relations between spouses and between parents and children. Although the labels ‘matriarch’ and ‘egalitarian’ are not used in this study, they have proved useful as heuristic devices - rather than as indicators of fixed ideological platforms - for examining, for example, the kind of ‘feminism’ that has been seen in the writings of Defoe and Richardson and the often-covert ‘feminist’ impulses in the novels of Frances Burney and Ann Radcliffe.

Despite the focus on the concept of ideology in the discussions that follow, my analysis of the novels adopts a fairly traditional realist approach, giving close attention to the emotional complexities and ironies of the situations and relationships the novels depict. To some extent, this represents a conscious departure from some of the strictly linguistic and psychoanalytic approaches adopted by several recent critics, and a return to an older, more ‘humanistic’ model of literary criticism. My approach, I believe, enables a more direct and coherent engagement with the specifically experiential dimensions which novels – as distinct from the conduct manuals and philosophical tracts to which I occasionally refer – trade on in their representations of motherhood across the century. My analysis of the novels has a three-fold purpose: to

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examine how writers represent deficient motherhood; to propose what function those representations served and serve; and to place them in a literary social historic context. I base my research on the premise that the writers represented in this study had something to say about motherhood. I argue that, whether or not they set out to do so, they demonstrate how motherhood actually worked in relation to contemporaneous social, cultural, and political mores and in so doing, reveal some general truths about motherhood.

The Novel, Culture, and Ideology
The relationship between the novel, history, and culture and the notion of the novel as a means for communicating ideologies and social critique are the foundational arguments of my thesis. As a starting point for examination of this relationship, and of the proposition that novels of deficient motherhood were in some way instrumental in the reproduction and consolidation of ideas that perpetuated the ideology of maternity, consolidated notions of gender definitions, and validated class distinction, I draw on the work of several key literary historians and critics.

I argue that the novel is connected to the production of the new female ideal and to the rise of the new middle class in eighteenth-century England. Novels are not only an ideal form for representing human experience, they are an ideal form for representing the observed ‘facts’ of social existence and the ideas and attitudes that were circulating at the time. The novel is one of many components of a culture. It entertains and enlightens, but in its capacity to intersect with the real world and to correspond to life – at a particular time and place in history - it also contributes to the formation of the culture. I analyze these five novels as historical works produced within a political framework that includes the present, which those literary texts have in some way helped to shape. On this understanding, I examine the cultural factors that affected the writing of the novels and note the impact they have had on their own and our cultures.

As a component of culture, the novel is a public artifact, my sense of which derives largely from the work of Terry Eagleton and Lennard Davis. Eagleton argues in *The Rape of Clarissa* (1982), for example, that *Clarissa* is a
valuable social document, less for what it ‘mirrors’ than for what it does.\textsuperscript{36} The notion of novels ‘doing’ something is pivotal to the claim advanced in this thesis that novels of deficient motherhood did something to effect, as well as affect, ideas about motherhood in the eighteenth century. Eagleton’s ideas about the novel being a part of the eighteenth-century public sphere are integral to the conception of the novel as “public property subject to strategic uses, lynchpins of an entire ideological formation.”\textsuperscript{37} In his analysis of Richardson’s novels, for example, Eagleton contends that Richardson not only shared in the bourgeois public sphere, he helped to construct it.\textsuperscript{38} He argues that Richardson’s novels are not only or even primarily literary texts: “they entwine with commerce, religion, theatre, ethical debate, the visual arts, public entertainment. They are both cogs in a culture industry and sacred scripture to be reverently conned. In short, they are organizing forces of … the bourgeois ‘public sphere.’”\textsuperscript{39} I would argue that this is also true of the novels and the writers of the other novels of this study: they all helped to construct the bourgeois public sphere, but this is not to say that they did so in similar ways.

Richardson is surely the most didactic of the major eighteenth-century novelists, but other novelists also write, to varying extents, with didactic purpose, as they address, challenge, and consolidate specific ideas and ideologies. Eagleton remarks:

\begin{quote}
The realist novel was one of the great revolutionary cultural forms of human history. In the domain of culture, it has something like the importance of steam-power or electricity in the material realm, or of democracy in the political sphere. For art to depict the world in its everyday, unregenerate state is now so familiar that it is impossible to recapture its shattering originality when it first emerged. In doing so, art finally returned the world to the common people who had created it through their labour, and who could now contemplate their own faces in it for the first time.\textsuperscript{40}
\end{quote}

This statement articulates perfectly the foundation of this study, and for the idea of the impact of the novel on the literate population in eighteenth-century England, providing the basis of understanding the potential of novels to reproduce, consolidate, and disseminate ideas.

\textsuperscript{37} Eagleton 1982, p. 5.
\textsuperscript{38} Eagleton 1982, p. 7.
\textsuperscript{39} Eagleton 1982, p. 6.
Lennard Davis also argues for the novel ‘doing’ something by stressing that the novel is itself a form of ideology. Concerned with the ideological implications and effects of the novel, Davis argues in *Factual Fictions* (1983), for example, that ‘fictionality’, as he calls it, is a ploy to mask the underlying ideological, reportorial, and ‘commentative’ functions of the novel, the notion of which is particularly apparent in, for example, Defoe’s novels. Davis argues that the novel came into being as a form of defence against censorship, power, and authority, yet it is equally possible (as he observes) for novels to support and reinforce those power relations. In this way, the novel has an activist function, or at least has the potential to be actively instrumental in the defence or support of ideological values, a function which is particularly apparent, for example, in *Clarissa* and in all of Richardson’s writing. Davis contends that novels do not depict life itself, but life as it is represented by ideology; and this is perhaps partly true of the novels being examined here, though I would certainly reject the doctrinaire anti-realism of Davis’s formulation. They are, to a degree, pre-organized systems of experience in which characters, actions, and objects have to mean something in relation to the culture and to the readers who inhabit that culture. Novels make sense because of ideology – they embody ideologies, they disseminate them, and they may also subvert them by exposing their contradictions.

In *Uneven Developments: The Ideological Work of Gender in Mid-Victorian England* (1988), Mary Poovey argues that, “every text works … as an ensemble of specific discursive practices and as the outgrowth of a determinate mode of production, and … every text participates in a complex social activity.” She says that part of the work that novels perform is the reproduction of ideology, and this is done by way of writers presenting the values and structures that constitute ideology through fictional characters as personal needs and desires that, ultimately, induce social accord. In this sense, interpretation of the text is historically and culturally specific; it is part of a public institution. Poovey’s argument strengthens my specific claim that

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42 Davis 1983, p. 222.

43 For the standard British version of the doctrine in its Althusserian purity, see Terry Eagleton, 1976, *Criticism and Ideology: A Study in Marxist Literary Theory*, Verso, London, pp. 102-161. Eagleton later abandoned this position for a more eclectic brand of Marxist discourse theory.


novels of deficient motherhood are part of an eighteenth-century discourse that promotes maternal values and structures of values, and that it is the accumulation of these representations - what Poovey calls the 'ensemble of discourse' – across novels and within them - that enables these novels to be instrumental in the reproduction of ideology.

My understanding of the novel as the form that, more than any other mediated the relationship between the public and private spheres derives from the work of a number of historians and critics, Michael McKeon, Patricia Meyer Spacks, and Carol Pateman among them. I use the term and concept of 'separate spheres' as a framework for the conceptual delineation of the sexes at a time of rapid economic, political, and social change, but with the knowledge that the mere notion of separate spheres - a public/private dichotomy – is one that is continually under review. Pateman considers that the public sphere is primarily a masculine preserve because of a powerful cultural construct that confined women to an inferior 'private' sphere to which they are not necessarily 'naturally' adapted and that men “properly inhabit, and rule within, both spheres.” I have tried to show how fictional representations of deficient mothers provide clues as to how separate spheres actually worked within the 'reality' the novel depicts. What seems to have become clear is that the concept of separate spheres is barely

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47 The private/public dichotomy is a major issue of feminist theory, described by Pateman, for example, as “ultimately, what the feminist movement is about” (1989, “Feminist critique of the public/private dichotomy,” in The Disorder of Women: Democracy, Feminism and Political Theory, Polity Press, Cambridge, pp. 118-40, p. 118. Pateman 1989, p. 118.
visible in the period when Defoe was writing, but becomes omnipresent in the novels later in the century.

I give consideration to the relationship between the concept (and possible reality) of separate spheres and social class and propose that the greatest impact of the separation of spheres according to sex was felt first at the middle-class level. As the public domain of capitalism and individualism provided the work and enterprise that defined a man’s occupation and his role, the private domain, by default, became the one in which a woman would be defined. As Leonore Davidoff and Catherine Hall have persuasively argued, the spheres of public life outside the home and the newly private life inside the home created two distinctly separate domains and two related theoretical categories of production and reproduction. 49 They argue that the process of social reproduction depends on the family and women’s labour, a form of labour that is concealed by its categorization as private and to which no theoretical or analytic importance has been justly accredited. The creation of the private sphere has been central to the elaboration of consumer demand, so essential to the expansion and accumulation process of capitalism, which characterizes modern Western societies.

Through close analysis of these novels with a focus on the ideological concerns they promote, I demonstrate the connection between the historical reality of different spheres and the historical specificity of the rise of the novel during a time when society was ripe for instruction, manipulation, coercion, and definition. One way the novel is successful in doing this is that it invites readers to interact with the complex paradigms of the discourse created by the maternal sentiments and behaviours they illustrate. Interaction with the novel forces the reader to make judgments and to take interpretative and corrective stances. The elements of discourse are interpreted according to the ideology the novel promotes and so become components of that ideology. 50

Literary critics continue to debate the extent to which eighteenth-century novels are works of realism and the impact of realism on readers.\(^{51}\) It was undoubtedly the intention of some writers to present as realistic a picture of life as possible, even to the extent of pretending their novels are true accounts or histories of real people (as with Defoe’s novels, for example). Not all eighteenth-century novels conform to realism however. In her study, *The Trauma of Gender: A Feminist Theory of the English Novel* (2001), Helene Moglen suggests that the eighteenth-century novel is actually structured by two narrative modes, the mode of realism, and the mode of what she calls, "the fantastic."\(^{52}\) Moglen explains how these two narrative modes reflect the outward- and inward-looking (what I refer to as the social and the personal) aspects of the consciousness of individualism. The realist mode is a social form that eighteenth-century writers used to reflect and promote the aspirations, assumptions, and beliefs of his or her largely middle-class readers. It establishes a middle ground between self-interest and the need for social integration first, by showing how excessive self-interest jeopardizes the hegemonic social order, and second, by presenting strategies for the containment or management of that self-interest. The novel conceals both the ideological concern to balance individual aspiration and the social need to present that balance as desirable and achievable.\(^{53}\)

The fantastic mode has what Moglen describes as an ‘intrapsychic’ focus, one that exposes the anxieties inherent in a new social order that is attempting to reconcile the tensions between an individual’s personal desires and social demands. The individual, thwarted in his or her personal desires by the constraints of a society that demands conformity, confronts a moral dilemma. The tension between individual desire and social order becomes the source of guilt and shame in the individual who – consciously or unconsciously - seeks to satisfy those personal desires in the knowledge that they transgress social codes.\(^{54}\) Moglen’s definitions of the two narrative modes provide an ideal starting point for my proposition that the realist mode enables the reader access to the novel, through connection, recognition, and empathy, and the

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\(^{53}\) Moglen 2001, p. 5.

\(^{54}\) Moglen 2001, p. 7.
fantastic mode enables the reader *exploration* of ideas, feelings, and fears evoked in the novel. The dual function of the novel encourages the reader to make choices, decisions, and judgments that ultimately constitute the concepts, ideas, and beliefs that inform ideologies.

The novel that most epitomizes this duality is *Roxana*, yet I see that the two modes are present, to varying extents, in all the novels analyzed. Often the modes overlap (as they do in *Roxana*, for example), but sometimes they also produce gaps in the narrative; gaps that the reader must negotiate and resolve (as are evident in all the novels examined). The idea of narrative gaps is one that Wolfgang Iser developed in his seminal work, *The Implied Reader: Patterns of Communication in Prose Fiction from Bunyan to Beckett* (1978). Iser argued that the novel, like no other art form, confronts its reader with circumstances arising from their own environment of social and historical norms and stimulates them to assess and criticize their environment. The reader is given the chance to recognize what is missing (the gaps) in his/her own existence, and is offered ways of filling them. The content and form of this self-discovery is the calculated response of the ‘implied reader’ who discovers the expectations and presuppositions that underlie his or her perceptions of their world and, in so doing, the reader learns to ‘read’ him or herself as he or she reads the text.55

Paula Backscheider addresses Iser’s theory in her study, *Revising Women: Eighteenth-Century “Women’s Fiction” and Social Engagement* (2000) by examining how texts express and participate in social processes. She identifies three gaps – or ‘spaces’ - in the novel where cultural and social issues are negotiated: the space of the ‘Other,’ or more specifically Woman as Other, the reader’s space, and the liminal space. The space of the Other exists as a response to male concerns about social formation, commercial expansion, material consumption, and national identity, and woman exists in the space of the Other as a perceived threat to those concerns. The reader’s space encourages the reader’s participation in the novel’s concerns and ideological conflicts: the more gaps and contradictions the novel contains, and the more dialogical the novel becomes, the greater the demand for interaction from the reader. The liminal space is the space in the novel that does not conform to the practices, rules, or assumptions in either of the other

spaces. This is the space - “the boundary between two states of consciousness” that exists between, for example, childhood and adulthood, dependency and responsibility, and autonomy and relationship - in which discovery and change takes place.\(^\text{56}\) I use Iser’s and Backscheider’s theories for examination of the novels of deficient motherhood and demonstrate the liminal spaces that result, for example, from the tension between maternal ideology and maternal experience, the most obvious being the paradox of the mother being ‘natural’ in virtue of her biological maternity yet ‘unnatural’ in virtue of her maternal behaviour. The reader is forced to create some kind of resolution according to his or her understanding and moral codes and, consciously or unconsciously, formulates an understanding of the ideology that it evokes and promotes.

**Historic Background to Motherhood**

What is known (or conjectured) about motherhood of the period is largely based on historical assumptions about conditions of childhood and family life. On an understanding that studies in the treatment of childhood and family reveal more clearly than any other type of study the true character of a social philosophy,\(^\text{57}\) various approaches to the histories of childhood and the family are considered in order to provide a social and historical framework for this study. Research on the history of the family comprises three areas of study, described by Michael Anderson as the ‘demographic’ approach, the ‘sentiments’ approach, and the ‘household economics’ approach.\(^\text{58}\) The demographic approach, as practiced by Peter Laslett and E.A. Wrigley, for example, concentrates on population changes using a family reconstitution technique based on information from parish registers (to trace surnames) and to extrapolate what is, in effect, an unvarying family structure.\(^\text{59}\) The sentiments approach, adopted by Philippe Ariès, Edward Shorter, Lawrence Stone, and Randolph Trumbach, for example, concentrates on reconstructing the emotional reality of family relationships, with particular emphasis on the

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history of childhood. The household economics approach, as practiced by David Levine, Jack Goody, and Wally Seccombe, has an anthropological slant and concentrates on investigating how the family functioned as an economic unit, how labour was deployed, resources distributed, and reproduction arranged, positing a two-way relationship between family form and the way the family supports itself.

This thesis uses a combination of all three historical approaches. For the most part, however, the sentiments approach is favoured since this study is principally concerned with literary representations of maternal sentiments and behaviours rather than with sociological facts about maternity. Moreover, this thesis examines novels in terms of the ideological formations they promote and challenge, which are themselves as intangible in their way as sentiments. Care is taken to avoid anachronism in projecting modern-day family values onto a culture that may not have privileged them in the same way. The demographic and household economics approaches are relevant to the historical framework presented here, however, in that the social and political concerns founded in historical circumstance that the novels evoke are taken into account, as is the fact that modes of production facilitate and foster the reproduction of certain family forms and preclude or hamper the development of others. Family forms are active elements in the constitution and development of modes of production because they are central in the production of people and their capacities for work, compliance, and resistance.

Historians such as Valerie Fildes, Linda Pollock, and Adrian Wilson all argue for greater attention to motherhood in the seventeenth-century and even earlier on the basis that society has always had an interest in attempting to

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regulate female lives and that women’s maternal potential has always influenced women’s social existence. While a female culture based on maternal function most certainly existed in some form in the past, cultural ideologies, forms, and practices of the eighteenth century provide evidence to suggest that the figure of the mother was more politicized than in previous centuries. In other words, it was in the eighteenth century that political, social, cultural, economic, and spiritual forces coincided to transform what was essentially a biologically inscribed female culture into a socially inscribed institution of motherhood.

The associated notion that childhood was “invented” from the seventeenth through the nineteenth centuries, as propounded by historian Philippe Ariès, for example, is one that is continually under review. Nonetheless, inspired by Aries, historians generally endorse the idea that a significant change in childrearing occurred in the eighteenth century and that parents took a more ‘humane’ approach to childrearing, one aspect of which was the move to maternal breastfeeding. While the new ideology of maternal excellence worked in one way as the means to uphold patriarchal privilege, an historical implication (based on the sentiments approach) might be that many women were seduced by representations of an all-tender mother ensconced at home with her children around her. Edward Shorter suggests, for example, that the construction of women primarily as mothers was an advance for women. He sees the effects of capitalism as integral to the perceived increase in maternal sentiment. Improvement in family incomes enabled middle class women to “exchange the grim pressures of production for the work of infant care,” which enabled them to devote themselves to the maternal role and encouraged the development of “maternal tenderness [that] became part of the world we know so well.”

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65 Shorter 1976, p. 204.
Lawrence Stone defines 1640 to 1800 as the period that witnessed the emergence and consolidation of the closed domesticated nuclear family. He argues that empowering the middle-class mother with responsibility for creating and protecting a closed, domesticated nuclear family was instrumental in stimulating the mother’s desires and abilities to confine herself to the home and to the care of her children. As Mary Sherriff points out, the ‘good mother’ as a type was double-edged, for “while keeping women subservient to patriarchal authority, it permitted them a closer and more emotionally fulfilling relationship with their children,” becoming, for many women, as Valerie Fildes argues, “the most fundamental and rewarding experience of their lives.” Such arguments suggest that many women, particularly middle-class women, were as much a party as men to the consolidation of the belief that maternal and domestic duties were a natural female function. The new status afforded the female and mother an elevated position within the family by which she became valued not for the income-producing work that had previously characterized her life, but for just being herself, with her ‘natural’ attributes of femininity, maternity, and domesticity. The new mother, as an invaluable component of the new family structure that depended on wifely and maternal presence and devotion, was idealized because her role was made closely complicit with the ideology of individualism in her support of man’s social positioning as capitalist individual and family breadwinner. Of course, it should also be remembered that many of the advantages to which historians such as the foregoing refer only applied to women from the classes that could afford to keep the wife and mother from paid work, which suggests that a mother’s economic condition was directly related to her capability to accept the role of excellent mother.

Taking these and other factors into consideration, the historical background for this study takes the following form: With the rise of industrialization, manufacturing gradually shifted out of the household and into capitalist industry leaving the household as the area of responsibility for reproduction.

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66 Stone 1990, pp. 149-299. I use the term ‘nuclear family’ in reference to Lawrence Stone’s theories on the formation and development in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries of the ‘family’ as a basic social unit consisting of a mother and father and their children as separate from the larger groups of kin that had characterized families in earlier times. Stone’s theories continue to be contested by historians such as Linda Pollock, Adrian Wilson, and Valerie Fildes, among others.
the relationships and day-to-day activities involved in maintaining the family on a daily basis. This ideological split between publicly organized production and privately organized consumption and reproduction was given distinct form in a doctrine of separate spheres, with men ruling the public sphere of industry, economics, and politics, and women and children living in the private sphere of the household. Partially because of this shift, there emerged a new concept of childhood, as a special and valued period of life, and a new concern for children as deserving and needing prolonged protection and care. A complementary concept of motherhood was required to fulfill the serious responsibilities of childcare - one that required total and exclusive devotion - and it was this concept of motherhood that was the one to which women were deemed to be naturally predisposed.

Propositions
I find two gaps in the current critical literature on eighteenth-century English novels of deficient motherhood, both of which I have addressed in my research. The first is the absence of an account of novelistic representations of deficient motherhood that, unlike Toni Bowers’ study, spans the whole century. The second, corollary gap is the absence of an account of a literary-historical pattern to those representations across the century, in which different narrative forms and tropes reflect the changing social and cultural conditions and political contexts for motherhood at a turbulent time in English cultural history.

I address the first gap by arguing that the narrative theme of deficient motherhood exists in English novels of the eighteenth century, and that it takes two forms – maternal failure and maternal absence. The trope of maternal failure appears in early novels and the trope of maternal absence appears around the last quarter of the century. I hope to demonstrate that the shift in tropes represents a shift in the promotion of ideas about motherhood from ethical to existential.

In the trope of maternal failure, the deficient mother lacks the prescribed, supposedly biologically driven, nurturing maternal sentiments and/or fails to demonstrate the supposedly natural behaviours of maternal excellence. I argue that one of the purposes of this trope was to promote particular ideas about mothering that were propounded through ideology as the ‘right’ way to
mother, ideas that were, coincidentally, socially and politically motivated to meet the needs and desires of an emerging middle class.

In the trope of maternal absence, the absent mother promotes the theme of deficient motherhood through the activities of substitute mothers. The deficiencies of the substitute mother evoke, as natural and ideal, the sentiments and behaviours of the (unknown and unknowable) excellent biological mother, and promote ideas of a bond between mother and child based on their biological connection that neither death nor absence can diminish. This trope promotes the idea that motherhood is innate and existential, based on love, compassion, and desire to mother, rather than based on a series of tasks and responses. It also evokes a form of female power (though not always) through the character of the motherless daughter. Compelled by her motherless state, the daughter experiences the world and its dangers and makes her own mistakes and decisions without the restrictions of obedience, propriety, and femininity that a present mother would impose. The absent mother, who is invariably a victim of some form of patriarchal abuse, achieves vindication through the actions of her daughter.

A note on this proposition is in order. The trope of maternal failure – relating to ethical motherhood – was one that was used, in the main, by male writers, and the trope of maternal absence – relating to existential motherhood – was used largely by female writers. It is considered here that, because male-authored novels share similar characteristics and female-authored novels share other characteristics, the sex of author might be a consideration in understanding the transition between the dominant tropes of deficient motherhood that is being proposed here. In this respect, the differentiation between male- and female-authored novels does not initiate a study itself, but is instead a useful heuristic device to examine and explore the possible causes, meaning, and implications of the transition.

I address the second gap by arguing that the novel of deficient motherhood is an effective medium for exploring the emerging ideas on motherhood, gender, and social class, and that the deficient mother is a narrative device that represents the point at which all three ideas intersect. Novels of deficient motherhood were an effective medium for examining and promoting particular ideas on motherhood. I argue that all these novels engage with issues pertinent to their historic times and places and highlight the extent to
which mothers - and women in general - were defined by the ideological
precepts of maternal excellence, the social imperative to establish and
maintain a strict class structure, and the cultural concern to define gender,
but they engage with the issues *novelistically* in very different ways.

In Chapter One, I propose that Daniel Defoe uses a bi-partite model of failed
and monstrous motherhood to structure the maternal behaviours of his two
maternal heroines, Moll Flanders and Roxana. In Chapter Two, I propose
that Samuel Richardson deploys his own authorial voice rather than his
narrator’s voice in the construction of Clarissa’s Will, which is what enables
him (and not his heroine) to place blame for Clarissa’s tragedy on her
mother, Mrs. Harlowe. In Chapter Three, I discuss the period of transition
between the tropes of maternal failure to maternal absence, and propose a
connection between the transition and the ideas espoused in the emergent
‘sentimental’ novel and, later, the rise of the woman novelist. In Chapter
Four, I propose that Frances Burney structures her narrative in a way that
mimics the three-tier social structure of eighteenth-century England, and that
the mother figures – along with other characters – are representative of the
types of behaviours and attitudes associated with each class. In Chapter
Five, I propose that Ann Radcliffe’s five mother figures are each
representative of concerns that women at the turn of the century faced:
motherhood, female sexuality, the legal implications of the sex-gender
system, social class, and the quest for a female ‘voice’.

It is always possible to show just how different a past culture was from our
own and those differences certainly need to be taken into account. It is my
objective to enter into a productive dialogue with the past through the
analysis of these novels. From *Moll Flanders* through to *The Italian*, I hope to
demonstrate that deficient mothers and substitute mothers are women who
confront the ideologies and realities of a social framework that allowed them
few options outside of motherhood, femininity, and domesticity. Removed as
we are by several centuries, we see emerging in these novels ideas that
made up the blueprint for what we in Western society consider today natural
and civilized maternal behaviour. Moreover, the concerns raised in these
novels resonate strongly with issues that mothers in Western societies
continue to face today.

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CHAPTER ONE
Daniel Defoe’s *Moll Flanders* (1722) and *Roxana* (1724)

Daniel Defoe’s *Moll Flanders* and *Roxana* are early contributions to the novels of deficient motherhood. Little is known about who actually read *Moll Flanders* and *Roxana* and what readers thought of them, but it can be inferred from Defoe’s own background and from the tones of his novels that he addresses himself to the ranks of the middle class, a petty-bourgeois audience consisting of people like himself who prized respectability yet craved adventure. References by Defoe’s enemies and rivals that he was popular among ‘low’ readers suggest that Defoe’s audience was essentially from a class that had only recently achieved literacy. The salacious, comic adventure narrative of *Moll Flanders*, for example, was arguably popular with readers of all classes and levels of reading ability, and the confessional style was undoubtedly a ploy to engage the reader in the trials and tribulations of the novel’s exuberant heroine.

That Defoe intended an audience ‘of the better Sort’ for *Moll Flanders* is also inferred in the novel. Moll consistently pleads for understanding and sympathy, for example, to an audience she (and Defoe) constructs as securely and complacently respectable. Moll engages the reader both by confessing her ‘sins’ with blatant (and comic) ‘honesty,’ and by constantly suggesting that she would be a better person (like her reader) if she were able. Covertly, Moll (and Defoe) suggests that the differences between the behaviours of her readers and herself are mainly due to the differences in their circumstances. She implies that anyone could be driven to crime and deficient maternal behaviour by poverty and other pressures that she faces, and argues that, as ‘bad’ as she acknowledges herself to be, her values are essentially the same as those of her audience.

Defoe also intended *Roxana* also to be read by an audience of the better Sort, but the heroine, Roxana, takes a different approach than Moll. Unlike Moll, who applies to the reader’s understanding or sympathy based on an acknowledged respectability and capacity for compassion, Roxana does not apply to the reader for anything. She assumes that the reader is of her own middle class status and that her degradation is consequently beyond their

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understanding or compassion – inferring that her degradation is actually beyond her own understanding and compassion.

Despite their different approaches, both novels were obviously popular - the volume of reprints, piracies, and ‘continuations’ of Moll’s story by other writers, for example, indicative of the success of *Moll Flanders* as a novel and Moll as a character. On this basis, *Roxana* was similarly popular, in that ‘Roxana’s’ story went through a variety of sequels and revisions by other writers for many years after its publication.²

**Defoe’s Ideas on Individualism, Women, and Money**

Defoe was one of a number of authors interested to promote the notion of individualism hand-in-hand with capitalism as the source of human happiness, the chief influence for his own concept of individualism being the works of British philosophers Thomas Hobbes (1588-1679) and John Locke (1632-1704).³ Like Hobbes, Defoe believed that self-preservation was fundamental to individualism. In his poem, *De Jure Divino* of 1706, Defoe wrote:

> The Laws of God, as I can understand,  
> Do never Laws of Nature countermand;  
> Nature Commands, and 'tis Prescribed to Sense  
> For all Men to adhere to Self-Defence:  
> Self-Preservation is the only Law,  
> That does Involuntary Duty Draw;  
> It serves for Reason and Authority,  
> And they'll defend themselves, that know not why.⁴

Defoe says that the laws of nature are the laws of God, and that self-preservation, as ‘the only Law,’ is instinctual and, as it ‘serves for Reason and

³ István Meszaros describes the ideology of individualism as one that was appropriated as a crucial principle of the Capitalist ideology concurrent with the growth of mercantilism. Meszaros says that the increasing preoccupation with individual freedom which preceded the growth of economic individualism was due to “the dynamic development of the capitalist relations of production which required the universal extension of ‘liberty’ to every single individual so that he could enter into ‘free contractual relations’ with other individuals, for the purpose of selling and alienating everything that belongs to him, including his own ‘labour power’” (2000, *Marx’s Theory of Alienation*, Harper Collins, London p. 225). I consider this definition pertinent to the ideas that Defoe developed about the connection between individualism and capitalism/ mercantilism. I interchange the term individualism with the term ‘autonomy’ to give more emphasis on the right of personal self-government and independence.
Authority,’ is therefore rational. Defoe considers the notion that any rational response to an individual’s situation is in accordance with God’s will, and that reason and instinct are therefore the guiding principles of an individual’s behaviour, if not always consciously acknowledged. Fundamental to self-preservation is interest in the self as worthy of preservation, and this constitutes what Defoe terms as ‘self-love,’ which he defines also in De Jure Divino, thus:

Men may sometimes by Subtilty and Slight Oppose themselves, and Sacrifice their Right;
But all’s a Blast, the empty Fraud’s in vain,
Int’rest Instructs, and all’s restor’d again;
Self-love’s the Ground of all the things we do,
Which they that talk on’t least do must pursue.⁵

Defoe regards self-love as the “true key to human nature,”⁶ and promotes the notion that it is a God-given right for the individual to act reasonably in development of one’s self-interest. Defoe believes that for an individual to go against his or her own interests, through habitual vice, stupidity (‘slight’) or delusion (‘subtilty’), is to ‘Oppose themselves,’ in the sense that an individual cannot conceive of a coherent and unified sense of identity and ‘self’ if he or she continually opposes what is instinctually right or moral. Habitual vice, Defoe says, is not instinctual, even though it may sometimes appear rational, and repentance therefore, is always obligatory.

Locke’s theories on ‘possessive individualism’ influenced Defoe’s beliefs in an individual’s natural state. Locke theorizes on the natural condition of an individual and in particular on how an individual would function if there was no civil society.⁷ He contends that the state of nature constitutes, “liberty but not licence … governed by laws of reason, according to which people have a right to the preservation of life, liberty, health, and possessions.”⁸ Locke states that it is the right of the individual to be “proprietor of his own person or capacities, owing nothing to society for them,”⁹ and that the right of appropriation over any moral claims to society is fundamental to freedom. While Locke asserts individual freedom however, he also understands the

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⁹ Macpherson 1964, p. 221.
individual to be a too self-indulgent being to function without civil society and attendant moral laws, and contends that the individual is “primarily moved by appetite and aversion” - appetite for freedom, and aversion to restraint - and that in a state of nature all morality would be overturned. He therefore advocates the necessity for moral laws “as a curb and restraint to these exorbitant desires.”

Defoe examines how the notion of an individual’s freedom and self-actualization is one that can artificially detach individuals from the social framework in which they become, and exist as, human beings, and one that situates the individual and society as separate and opposing forces. Defoe demonstrates the possibility of such opposition in *Moll Flanders* and *Roxana* through his representation of motherhood that transgresses social, moral, and maternal codes.

Throughout his career, Defoe held views about women that were remarkably progressive for the times. He spent his life writing political treatises, essays, and journals and was a robust advocate for familial reforms. *Moll Flanders* and *Roxana* are testament to Defoe’s life-long commitment to providing incisive social, political, and economic commentary, his sympathy for women, and his keen interest in the problems women faced concerning marriage, education, and economics. In his periodical, The *Review* (1704-1713), and in his other writings, including *An Essay Upon Projects* (1697), *The Family Instructor* (1715), and *Conjugal Lewdness; or, Matrimonial Whoredom – A Treatise Concerning the Use and Abuse of the Marriage Bed* (1727), he took a critical interest in relationships, particularly in marriage. He was a strong advocate for women’s equality rather than subordination in marriage, and wrote in *Conjugal Lewdness* that, “Love knows no superior or inferior, no imperious Command on one hand, no reluctant Subjection on the other.” He cautioned women about the married state, “with all its Addenda of Family Cares, the trouble of looking after a Household, the hazard of being subject to the Humours and Passions of a churlish Man.” He concluded with the

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12 William L. Payne 1951, *The Best of Defoe’s Review*: *An Anthology*, Columbia University Press, New York, p. ix. More than three hundred periodicals were published during the first sixteen years of the eighteenth century. *The Review* was published from February 19, 1704 to June 11, 1713 and was, according to Payne, ‘remarkable for its longevity.’
question, “What Woman in her Senses would tie herself up in the Fetters of Matrimony, if it were not that she desires to be a Mother of Children, to multiply her Kind, and, in short, have a Family?”14

Defoe believed that women should not be denied the benefits of education, and argued that women were “equal, if not superior in all manner of science and even more capable of all possible Improvement than the men.”15 He advocated appropriate early learning for girls to enable them to be a part of the public and productive world. In An Essay on Projects, he said, “God had given to all Mankind equal Gifts and Capacities, in that he has given them all Souls equally capable; and that the whole difference in Mankind proceeds either from Accidental Difference in the Make of their Bodies, or from the foolish Difference in Education.”16

He also wrote about money - arguably more than other writers of his time - as the means by which all individuals could establish productive lives. In 1707 he wrote in his Review an essay entitled ‘Money, Money, Money’ in which he advocated that the legal acquisition of money was the source of stability, happiness, and dignity and the “foundation of ... law, liberty, and property.”17 He also expressed strong opinions about women and the economic and social functions in which they should or should not participate. In his Review, Defoe promoted the notion that wives of tradesmen and merchants should learn their husbands’ businesses for the benefit of themselves, their children, and the national economy.18 Despite this however, Defoe’s views about women as autonomous economic agents appear to be mixed, particularly in Roxana.

Money – the lack, the acquisition, and the preservation of it, and the power it represented - attracted special attention during this period, and is an important consideration in Moll Flanders and Roxana. Defoe examines and demonstrates the connection he certainly sees between economics and

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maternal viability and, in so doing, unearths ideas about money that can be seen to have been early concerns for social class and gender. The first idea about money that the emergent middle class were beginning to appreciate was its potential as a vehicle for social upwards mobility – a concept that Defoe demonstrates through Moll’s pursuit and eventual attainment of ‘gentility,’ for example. The second idea about money was the social reality that women’s lack of it was the source of their vulnerability, the concept of which Defoe demonstrates, for example, in Roxana’s impassioned arguments to remain single in order to retain control of her own money. Through the subject of money, Defoe gives early critique on what would become a major concern later in the century of gender definitions and, in particular, on how such definitions constrict the woman and mother to specific behaviours that preclude her from participating in the capitalist economy.

Defoe’s conflation of money and maternity highlights both the complexities of maternal (and female) experience - the vulnerability of the poor, uneducated female, and the power and arbitrary benevolence and economic support of men over women - and the social reality of monstrous maternal activities such as widespread child-abandonment, questionable wet-nursing practices, and infanticide. Defoe’s deficient mothers are the means for him to discuss social and economic issues in relation to a mother’s ability to thrive in the new individualist, capitalist economy. Within his fiction there is a strong critique on a variety of social issues that women and mothers faced: economic dependence, subservience in marriage, lack of education opportunities, and specifically maternal issues such as wet-nursing and child abandonment. Defoe also demonstrates that the female, specifically the mother, is more at risk of transgressing social and moral laws when she actively pursues autonomy. Through his heroines, Defoe shows that a mother’s pursuit of autonomy that excludes familial relationships and responsibilities comes at the expense of personal integrity and social detachment, thereby highlighting the innate contradictions not only between female autonomy and maternal viability, but also between an ideology of maternal excellence and the reality of social conditions.20

19 Jennifer Thorn 2003 (ed.), Writing British Infanticide: Child-Murder, Gender, and Print 1722-1859, University of Delaware Press, Newark, pp. 172-195, p. 13. Thorn argues that child-abandonment and infanticide were publicly acknowledged problems in the eighteenth century and that child murder particularly, was a pervasive topic in all forms of writing throughout the century.

Reading the Maternal in ‘Moll Flanders’ and ‘Roxana’

Past criticism of Moll Flanders and Roxana was largely focused on Defoe’s many mixed messages: on his ironic intent;\(^{21}\) on economics;\(^{22}\) on the depiction of morality;\(^{23}\) and on elements of Defoe’s potential autobiographical connection with his protagonists.\(^{24}\) What was only briefly commented upon, and often even overlooked in these critiques, was the fact that Moll and Roxana are mothers.\(^{25}\) This has since changed, and many scholars concentrate on the maternal aspects of the novels, Toni Bowers, Christopher Flint, Mona Scheuermann, Miriam Lerenbaum, and Marilyn Francus, to name only a few.\(^{26}\) Maternity, as central to the narratives, is certainly the result of a nuanced reading. Mothers in both novels do not ‘mother’ to any extent, and Moll and Roxana’s maternities are certainly secondary to their adventures. Yet, Defoe makes maternity an issue of importance, most obviously by making both heroines incredibly fertile. Moll and Roxana produce over twenty children between them, and although several die in infancy, both women demonstrate robust maternal health and experience little trouble in giving birth to living babies. In the early eighteenth century, a period of unstable maternal medical conditions and of high rates of infant mortality, stillbirths, sickness, and deaths of mothers in childbirth, these were no mean feats.\(^{27}\)

Defoe shows Moll and Roxana abandoning, ignoring and, potentially and ostensibly, killing, their children, and for most readers their maternal conduct is reprehensible. Moll bears fifteen children, most of whom she leaves, some who die with little comment, and only one with whom, after twenty years’ separation, she has a relationship. Roxana bears eleven children, of whom

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\(^{26}\) Bibliographic details of the works of these scholars are listed in the Bibliography, Secondary Sources – Works Cited.
seven survive.\textsuperscript{28} She chooses to be anonymous to all her children, although she ‘makes provision’ for some of them later in their lives, and she only comes to know one – a daughter, Susan – who she ultimately destroys (metaphorically by refusing to become a mother to her, and literally by allowing her death). Yet, despite representations of deficient, even murderous, motherhood, Defoe imparts a sense that his heroines – the mothers of these children and the perpetrators of these crimes – are often victims themselves;\textsuperscript{29} a tactic that often convincingly renders them, particularly Moll, worthy, to varying extents, of the reader’s compassion.

Defoe places further focus on the maternal by making most of the women characters, in both novels, mothers or mother figures, suggestive that maternity is unavoidable for any woman. Moreover, he shows mothers participating in a variety of forms of economic exchange propelled by their maternity. Moll’s ‘Mother Midnight,’ for example, trades in babies and offers all manner of maternal services, including birthing, wet-nursing, adoption, or abortion (\textit{Moll Flanders}, pp. 164-165). Defoe presents maternity as the female embodiment of economic productivity yet, in another ambiguous turn, Defoe also portrays most of the mothers and mother figures as dubious characters and outcasts of civilized society. In \textit{Moll Flanders}, Moll is a thief and whore; Moll’s mother is a criminal, and ‘Mother Midnight’ trades in babies in one form or another, and in \textit{Roxana}, Roxana is a whore and Amy is (ostensibly) a murderer.

\textit{Narrative Structures of ‘Moll Flanders’ and ‘Roxana’}

\textit{Moll Flanders} and \textit{Roxana} take the form of historic truth and reality – Moll tells the “History of a wicked Life repented of” (\textit{Moll Flanders}, p. 2), and Roxana tells “not a Story, but a History” (\textit{Roxana}, p. 35). Realist novels are emblematic of the eighteenth-century novel’s focus on the things that mattered to the emerging individual; birth, possible orphanhood, the discovery of roots, and the creation of a new world, a career, and society.\textsuperscript{30} Despite their focus on the value, power, and desirability of individual self-construction however, writers of realist novels also expose how excessive

\textsuperscript{28} Bowers 1996, p. 99. Bowers notes that despite Defoe’s description of Roxana bearing eleven children: five by the brewer, two by the jeweler, three by the prince, and one by the Dutch merchant, Roxana says at one point that she had \textit{six} children by her “true husband” the brewer (\textit{Roxana}, p. 109), which would bring the total number of children Roxana bears to twelve.

\textsuperscript{29} Bowers 1996, p. 123.

self-interest threatens society’s need for social integration and conformity, and they create fictional situations to address and negotiate this concern. Defoe applies this strategic approach in both *Moll Flanders* and *Roxana*, but the outcomes are considerably different. Moll’s diversions into prostitution and crime threaten the society that the middle-class was creating but, in her apparent sincere quest to be a gentlewoman, she is exonerated of her misdemeanours based on her expressions of sincere repentance and, most importantly, on the basis that her aspirations coincide with those of a middle-class readership. Roxana, however, threatens society by constantly transgressing the norms of civilized behaviour; by abandoning her children, by lacking a modicum of maternal affection, by choosing to remain a prostitute for most of her life, by transgressing gender norms through her unfeminine behaviour and sentiments, and most emphatically, by allowing the murder of her own child. Consequently, Defoe could find no way to exonerate Roxana and to reintegrate her into the middle class society from where she came for she transgresses the boundaries of maternal, female, and human behaviour.

Defoe writes in a way that appears to mirror reality by his narration of all events in a circumstantial, matter-of-fact way, and with humour and irony, that subtly masks his political agenda and his didactic purpose. However, Defoe’s concern for verisimilitude and his simultaneous interest to convey a moral message become conflicted. In *Moll Flanders*, Defoe avoids this conflict by preserving the moral of the story at the expense of verisimilitude. He creates for his heroine a comfortable, and rather implausible, conclusion to her narrative, by rewarding her for her (equally rather implausible) repentance with economic autonomy, middle-class gentility, a loving marriage, and filial affection. In *Roxana*, the conflict between verisimilitude and morality is exaggerated. Roxana’s excessive self-love (manifest through vanity and greed), is at the root of her deficient maternity and, because she consistently and willfully privileges her needs and desires over those of her children, Defoe structures the novel in such a way that the implications of Roxana’s maternal behaviour are not resolved through repentance and a satisfactory conclusion. His use of the dual narrative modes of realism and the fantastic (the mode that concentrates on psychological rather than experiential aspects of character development) enables him to move beyond his reporting-style of events in the mode of realism to the rendering of the
more complex causes of - and responses to -events.\textsuperscript{31} Defoe uses the two narrative modes in \textit{Roxana} as the means to explore the social and personal aspects of the consciousness of individualism. That is, he demonstrates through the realist mode the opportunities for female autonomy, and through the fantastic mode, the consequences of that autonomy.

Not only are the narrative structures of Defoe’s two novels different, the ways in which the mothers are deficient are different. It is my contention that Defoe depicts ‘failed’ motherhood through the character of Moll Flanders and ‘monstrous’ motherhood through the character of Roxana. Moll is a failed mother because she cannot meet the demands of her child in that she is unable to take care of it, and Roxana is a monstrous mother because she will not meet the demands of her child, in that she cannot privilege its needs over her own. The bipartite model of failed and monstrous motherhood emphasizes the extent to which the mother is bound by a maternal framework that, because it ignores individual traits or external circumstances, is irrational and unrealistic. Defoe does not use the terms ‘failed’ or ‘monstrous’ to describe his heroines’ maternal behaviours. I am naming what I argue is the delineation Defoe created between the maternal behaviours of his two heroines. In his model of failed maternity, for example, maternal failure is due to economic and social circumstances that deny a woman the opportunity to be an ideal mother, and in his model of monstrous maternity, maternal failure is due to a woman’s excessive self-interest that precludes relationships based on familial, emotional, and affectionate connection.

Christopher Flint argues that, while Moll and Roxana “scatter progeny in many places, [Moll] feels much less compunction” in abandoning her children than Roxana who “only gives up her children in the face of convincing necessity.”\textsuperscript{32} In Flint’s view, Moll is a worse mother than Roxana because her continuous ‘abandonment’ of her children suggests, to him, that she is indifferent to them or too lazy to care for them. Toni Bowers suggests, conversely, that it is Roxana who “spends no time worrying about maternal imperatives not consistent with her own survival,” implying that Moll’s


maternal imperatives are more genuine than Roxana’s. Marilyn Francus argues that because both mothers recognize that the displacement of their children – if not outright child abandonment – empowers them and enables them to sustain their socioeconomic independence, and because the desertion of their children is validated by their ever-increasing acquisition of wealth, Moll and Roxana are able to engage in, and conceal, their monstrous maternity.

The differences in interpretation suggest the complexities involved in locating sites of willful maternal transgressions. Such a project is difficult because Defoe constructs situations that make the heroines’ transgressions inevitable and, to varying extents, justifiable. Interpretation is also difficult when it is considered, as I do, that Defoe deliberately constructs Moll as a failed mother with the appearance of a monstrous one, and Roxana as a monstrous mother with the appearance of a failed one. Moll and Roxana are both aware that they exceed the bounds of virtue. Roxana, who constantly questions her maternal behaviour, appears solicitous of her actions, but she does not actively seek to change her behaviour, nor does she show any desire to be a better mother, only the desire to conceal herself from her children – to distance herself, so to speak, from the evidence of her maternity. Moll, however, displays the potential, ability, and desire to be a ‘better’ type of mother if her circumstances allow. It should be remembered that Moll actually has years at a time (indicated by the silences in the novel) when she is rearing her own children.

Marilyn Francus considers that Moll and Roxana are Defoe’s representations of mothers “grappling with maternity and identity, as [they] try ... to take over the authorship of their lives and wrest female identity and the narrative away from the patriarchal tradition.” This is true to a large extent with Roxana, but perhaps less so with Moll. It should be noted, for example, that Moll continually strives for what could be considered a balance in her life. She truly believes – as does Defoe – that she can be married, have a family, be a gentlewoman, and live a productive, happy life. The point is that Moll is not necessarily wresting female identity from the patriarchal tradition, she is

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35 Francus 2003, p. 259.
instead forced – by the circumstances of patriarchal tradition – into a way of life (and ways of behaving) with which she is not entirely comfortable. In this sense, Moll is a much more ‘modern’ – and recognizable -heroine than Roxana, in that she attempts to understand the complexities of her situation and works with what she has to try to make the necessary changes that will have a positive impact on her life.

*Moll’s Quest for Gentility*

In *Moll Flanders*, Defoe highlights the conditions of a society in which poverty, wet-nursing, child abandonment, abortion, prostitution, domestic brutality, and the potential for incest are a part of everyday existence for a large portion of the female population. More than any other writer examined in this study, Defoe suggests that a mother’s ability to mother is intricately tied to her economic circumstance. That is not to say that Defoe did not believe in an innate maternal nature or that he did not believe that women were naturally predisposed to be mothers. Simply, it is to say that Defoe recognized as irrefutable the link between economics and maternal viability.

In *Moll Flanders*, Defoe demonstrates a fundamental paradox of motherhood. He *exposes* the social conditions that hinder a lower class mother’s ability to be an ‘excellent,’ or even ‘competent,’ mother at the same time as he *endorses* the type of model of maternity being developed most conspicuously by the emergent middle class. Moll consistently exhibits ostensibly ‘bad’ maternal sentiments or engages in bad maternal practices, yet, at the same time, she extols (indeed pontificates on) what she believes to be ‘good’ and natural motherhood. This paradox provides the foundation for the outrageous and amusing hypocrisy that structures the novel, and the foundation for Moll’s experiences as a woman, as a mother, as a thief, and finally, as a gentlewoman.

Moll’s language is shaped by her participation in the world of capitalism and economics in which she must survive, her regular accounts of her state of affairs often reading like a balance sheet. Her children are a part of the balance sheet type matrix that structures Moll’s existence, and they are

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36 Daniel Defoe 1998, *Moll Flanders* (1722), edited by G.A. Starr, Oxford University Press, Oxford. All references are from this edition and appear in this section with page numbers in parentheses, as follows (---).

always ‘dealt’ with in as convenient a way as possible. Moll’s expressed desires and understanding, however, indicate her belief in a natural model of motherhood - which she cannot achieve - and in middle-class respectability - for which she constantly strives. Moll’s silences are also significant, for they often exist in the novel to indicate the spaces in time when Moll is “living in the ordinary way” (189), married and “mind[ing] her family” (189) or living “as a Wife” (124) bearing children with one man. Moll’s silences are emblematic of the times that she returns happily to what she believes to be the natural feminine and maternal condition - marriage, maternity, and domesticity. These silences can be seen to be Defoe’s narrative device to implicate Moll in middle class respectability that act, in a sense, as the justification for his approval of his heroine and of his concern to create for her the opportunity to repent and to be rewarded for what he considered her bourgeois sensibility.38

Reading the maternal in Moll Flanders is reading against the grain of the text to a certain extent, yet the novel invites a maternal perspective in several ways. The scope and success of Moll’s fertility, the number and importance of mother figures in the novel, and the maternal inheritance Moll receives to enable her to live the rest of her life as a gentlewoman and fond mother, all indicate Defoe’s intentions to make maternity an issue of some significance. Moreover, Moll’s potential for maternal monstrosity is avoided by Defoe’s careful construction of situations in which Moll’s dealings with her children reveal that she occasionally demonstrates a maternal sensibility beyond the expectations of her social position. Miriam Lerenbaum convincingly argues that, despite rarely mentioning her children and appearing to forget about them once she has left them, Moll relates, in all but one case, that she has ensured some sort of care for them.39 Indeed, as Lerenbaum further argues, although Moll may not wish to be personally responsible for her children, it does not mean that she does not care what happens to them.40 Whereas Moll’s somewhat cavalier attitude to the leaving of her children suggests she lacks maternal tenderness, she often operates in opposition to the reality of

38 The term ‘sensibility’ is used here to denote a person’s moral, emotional, or aesthetic ideas or standards. The term can also refer to a person’s capacity to feel and openness to emotional impressions, susceptibility, and sensitivity. The latter meaning is pertinent, for example, to Samuel Richardson’s heroine, Clarissa, in the novel Clarissa, discussed in Chapter Two.
40 Lerenbaum 1977, p. 102.
an age in which the life of children disadvantaged by illegitimate birth and/or poverty was of little value.

Against what is surmised about social history of the early eighteenth century and taking into account Defoe’s capability of “defending contradictory positions, relishing the rhetorical elaboration of different, perhaps equally convincing opinions,” Moll’s maternal behaviour and sentiments can be understood as somewhat more justifiable – compassionate even - than previous critical readings suggest. This interpretation should not however take away from what are the darkly comic aspects of Moll’s character and maternity. Moll’s laissez-faire attitude to her children constantly threatens the notions of Moll either as a deficient but well-meaning mother, or as a good but downtrodden-by-circumstances mother. Moll’s deficient maternal behaviour and professed good maternal sentiment all contribute to Defoe’s characterization of his heroine as both sincere and ironic. The reading of the maternal in *Moll Flanders* is on the understanding of this paradox, inherent in the novel and in the character of the heroine, and on the understanding that those darkly comic aspects of Defoe’s writing contributed to the popularity of the novel.

*Moll’s Maternal Choices*

In the first of what has been seen as Moll’s many maternal transgressions, Moll is widowed after five years of marriage and leaves her two children with her parents-in-law, the same people with whom she has lived since the age of twelve, and by whom she has been treated with generosity and compassion (17). Moll does not explain why she leaves her children, but states, rather contemptuously to be sure, that “My two children were indeed taken happily off of my Hands, by my Husband’s Father and Mother, and that was all they got by Mrs. Betty” (59). While the tone of this single sentence on the leaving of her children appears caustic on first reading, and suggests Moll’s easy abandonment of them, an alternative reading is possible. Leaving her children in comfortable middle-class surroundings to be cared for by their compassionate paternal grandparents is not, as has often been construed, an act of child abandonment. While Moll’s matter-of-fact tone lends itself to an interpretation of easy relinquishment of maternal responsibility and lack of maternal love, her actions indicate that the leaving of her children with their grandparents is to the satisfaction of everyone involved.

Moll’s second maternal transgression is the leaving of her children in Virginia after discovering that her husband is in fact her brother. Moll is horrified at discovering her incestuous marriage and parenthood with her brother; a horror she refers to even at the end of her narrative as “not a Story ... that would bear telling” (324). Moll is so terrified “to be with Child again by him” (90) that she determines to cut her incestuous ties and return to England and, without any further mention of her two children, she leaves them in Virginia with their father and grandmother. This act can be perceived as another example of Moll’s maternal ambivalence, yet it could also be argued that this perception ignores Moll’s inherent pragmatism and, arguably, her consideration for the welfare of her children. Leaving her children with their father, “a Man of infinite good Nature” (84) and their Grandmother, “too kind a Mother to be parted with” (85), suggests that Moll may well be ensuring a more comfortable life for her children than the unknown “new Scene of Misfortunes” (105) to which she herself is to be exposed.

Moll’s next child, described by her as “a fine Boy indeed, and a charming child” (118), is the first son by her Gentleman from Bath, and the first child to be born outside of a married state. Although Moll considers herself to be “in the height of what I might call my Prosperity” (118), she still wants “nothing but to be a Wife” (118). Throughout Moll’s narrative, she indicates that marriage is the preferred state and that, “had I happen’d to meet with a sober good Husband, I should have been as faithful and true a Wife to him as Virtue it self could have form’d” (128). Moll understands that the position of a mistress is a precarious one: “that Men that keep Mistresses often change them, grow weary of them, or Jealous of them, or something or other happens to make them withdraw their Bounty” (118). She believes that while marriage can bring gentility, comfort, and economic security, whoredom, or “Mistresship” (126) does not. By endowing Moll with the desire for marriage and the belief in it as the respectable foundation of middle-class gentility, Defoe is giving emphatic approval to his heroine and to the institutions and ideologies for which she, and he, stand.

Moll remains the mistress of the Gentleman from Bath for six years, and bears three children by him, the first son only surviving. When the Gentleman is sick and possibly dying, Moll’s first thought is for what she fears is “the end of my Prosperity” (121); her second, for her son, “a fine lovely Boy, above five years old, and no Provision made for it” (122). Moll is
typically pragmatic in that her first thought is for her economic situation and her second, of the "Danger of being ... without Maintenance to support" the child (125). She is prevented from having to make what would ultimately be the decision between keeping the boy or 'abandoning' him when the father, now fully recovered, offers to "take due care of the Child" (124). Defoe gives Moll reprieve from potentially making the 'wrong' maternal decision, allowing her to remark, tongue-in-cheek, that, "it was Death [to her] to part with the Child" (125) before she sets off on further adventures, unencumbered by responsibility (or further thought) for any of her children.

It is with the birth of “another Brave Boy” (171), the son of her Lancashire husband, Jemy, that Moll must confront her maternal agency, and it is at this point in the novel that maternity and economics are conflated into a maternal economy, in which Moll’s maternal affection and care for a child is commensurate with money. At this point, Moll is faced with having to take personal financial responsibility for the welfare of a child. She is accountable, as never before, to herself alone for taking care of her son, a situation that is reflected, arguably, in the way Moll describes this child with more attention than any of her previous children. Richard West sees the change in Moll’s maternal attitudes as evidence of her “belatedly com[ing] to believe in the duties of motherhood.” It should be remembered however, that Moll has left her children with their fathers or their grandparents, those who can, arguably, afford better than she their upkeep – actions that indicate that Moll has enabled her children to have a better life with their families than if they had been exposed to their mother’s precarious way of life. If, as Defoe suggests, the maternal can be understood largely in terms of economic support, Moll offers her children a form of nurturance to the best of her abilities. Neither Moll’s words nor actions in dealing with her children prove her morally culpable, nor are they inconsistent with her rhetoric on the ‘unnatural’ mothers who try to induce abortion or turn their children over to the unpredictable care of custodians without ensuring their welfare, a practice that Moll refers to as “killing their Children with safety” (173).

With this son, Moll faces a maternal situation from which it would be to her material benefit to run. Having received a marriage proposal from a respectable banker, Moll has the opportunity to return to the life of gentility

she craves. She is keenly aware that she cannot, after a year’s absence and
with the newly born child of another man, return to the banker who has just
divorced his adulterous wife (135), and expect him to accept her. Moll’s
“great and main Difficulty” (173) to achieving the much-desired status as a
wife within respectable gentility is the existence of this son.

It is at this point that Defoe shows how Moll’s options to keeping her child
with her are few and not very palatable. She can abandon him to the
dubious care of the parish, leave him to certain death in a field or roadside,
or send him to the care of a wet nurse. All these practices were widespread
at the time of Defoe’s writings, and all very often the only options available
to a poor, unmarried woman who would otherwise be ostracized from a
society that considered her sexual conduct a sin, her child a ‘bastard’, and
the upkeep by the parish of that child an unnecessary economic burden.
These conditions led to the deaths of many children – a “daily sight,”
according to Thomas Coram, the founding father of the Foundling Hospital, in
1736, “of infant corpses thrown on the dust heaps of London,” that
constituted what Toni Bowers has described as “a social presence that could
not be ignored.”

Moll says that “it touch’d my Heart so forcibly to think of Parting entirely with
the Child” (173), in full knowledge that she may well be exposing him, and
disposing of him, to the “neglect and ill-usage” (173) she associates with
wet-nursing practices and which she considers to be “only a contriv’d Method
for Murther” (173). West points out that Moll’s eloquent criticism of mothers
who put their children out to nurse, together with her taking the moral high
ground to set herself apart from unnatural mothers, is an ironic prelude to
her decision to put out her own child to nurse. This interpretation,
however, ignores both the complexities of Moll’s dilemma and Defoe’s
intentions - the contradictions between the maternal norms by which Moll
defines herself and the kinds of mothering she can only hope to achieve.
Moll’s obvious distress at sending her child to a wet-nurse suggests that it is
not an easy decision, but one she makes as a desperate mother who would
prefer to have options available to her to enable her to do better for her
child. Moll believes that “Affection was plac’d by Nature in the Hearts of
Mothers to their Children; without which they would never be able to give

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43 Quoted in William Langer 1974, ‘Infanticide: A Historical Survey’ in History of
Childhood Quarterly 1, no. 3 (Winter), p. 358.
themselves up, as ’tis necessary they should, to the Care and waking Pains needful to the Support of their Children” (173-4). Moll is unable to meet these rigorous emotional demands of motherhood if she has not the economic means to do so. Even though Moll may want to take care of her own child, she is forced to accept the social conditions that prevent her from doing so. Moll’s ‘Governess’ points out the reality of this situation when she tells Moll to “do as other conscientious mothers have done before you and be contented with things as they must be, tho’ they are not as you wish them to be” (176).

The most complicated episode in Moll’s maternal history is her silence about the fate of her children by the banker. She relates that she “Had two Children by him and no more,” that she “minded [her] Family,” and that “Life became a pleasure” (189). She spends five years in what she describes as this “safe Harbor, after the Stormy Voyage of Life” (188) before the banker dies, and Moll is left in poverty, “perfectly Friendless and Helpless” (190). Moll is verbose about her own “dismal condition” (190) in the two years following the banker’s death, but does not refer to the fate of their children. Such an omission in Moll’s narrative is problematic in that it defies any positive explanation for Moll’s maternal behaviour. In this case, it may be useful to consider how critics have often argued for Defoe’s “carelessness,”46 “imperfect craftsmanship [and] errors and inconsistencies” in narrative detail,47 and his lack of “control over his narrative.”48

Moll’s omission to relate the fates of these children along with her reflections upon the difficulties and responsibilities of maternity, her earlier cavalier attitudes towards her children and her later ecstatic reunion with her son in Virginia, can be seen to epitomize hypocrisy, immorality, inhumanity, and unfeminine conduct.49 Yet Moll consistently demonstrates the ‘appropriate’ moral principles – or certainly the moral principles of which Defoe approved – by being revolted by incest, which she decries as “unnatural in the highest degree” (91), appalled by child-murder and abandonment, and “abhorr’d” by abortion (168). Taking into account Defoe’s undoubted approval of Moll’s professed moral principles, it is likely that the omission of the fate of the

47 Shinagel 1973, p. 413.
banker's children may well be one of those "inconsistencies in matters of detail which are very common in all [Defoe's] works." Moll's apparent neglect and abandonment of these children constitute willful maternal monstrosity, behaviour that is not, as I hope to have shown, commensurate either with Moll's previous maternal conduct, or with Defoe's concerns for Moll's maternity.

**Moll's Maternal 'Rewards'**

After her childbearing years are over (and the possibilities for 'mistresship' and marriage are limited), Moll resorts to crime to earn a living. After many successful years as a thief, she is eventually caught, imprisoned, and sentenced to death. Moll repents of her crimes and subsequently gains pardon from the death penalty and is instead transported to Virginia. When in Virginia, Moll investigates the circumstances of the family she left behind twenty years before in order to discover if her mother left anything to her on her death. In these final stages of the novel, Moll reunites with one of her children from her incestuous marriage. When she sees this son – Humphry - she is over come with intense maternal affection for him, describing her first thoughts on seeing him thus: "I can neither express nor describe the Joy, that touch's my very Soul" (333). Humphry, “who had never before known what a Mother of his own was,” reciprocates his mother's affection (333).

As usual, Moll's narrative quickly shifts to economics and "talk of the main Business" (335), which is to discover what, if anything, Moll has been left by her mother. Humphry tells her that not only has she inherited a plantation from her mother, but that he has managed it for Moll during her long absence and has saved the income from it for her. Moll refers to this day with her son, including the information imparted, as "the pleasantest Day that ever past over my Head in my Life, and which gave me the truest Satisfaction" (337).

The conclusion to Moll's narrative is, like much of her story, full of contradictions and irony. Richard West considers Moll’s ‘sudden’ maternal affection "bogus emotion" and that this, together with her dubious repentance and her unlikely acquisition of wealth, constitute a somewhat preposterous conclusion to Moll’s narrative. Mona Scheuermann, however,

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50 Lerenbaum 1977, p. 111.  
considers it to be the "tender financial communion between mother and son [in which] Joy, warmth, piety, and money are completely intertwined."\textsuperscript{52}

This, of course, is where the tension between Defoe's pursuit of verisimilitude at the same time as trying to convey a moral message is most apparent, and Defoe must forego verisimilitude in order to allow his heroine to repent for her crimes and to be rewarded for having made the 'right' moral choices when she was able. While Moll has participated in what she herself considers unnatural maternal practices - often to elevate her circumstances - she has, for the most part, done so in order simply to survive. Except for the banker's children, whose fates Moll omits from her narrative, Moll leaves her children in assured care, most often with those who are better able than she to care for them. In this respect, Defoe promotes not maternal excellence, but maternal competence, and Moll has shown at times that she has tried to be competent.

Defoe highlights the problems a woman, particularly a mother, faces against the dictates of a society that restricts women in all public spheres of life, particularly in the fields of education and mercantilism. Moll fails because she is restricted by a society that denies her both the ability to be productive and to earn an income, and the opportunity to be a mother who is able to provide for, and take care of, her children. Defoe absolves Moll of her deficient motherhood, therefore making explicit his argument that motherhood is more often than not a socially determined occupation. Moll knows what is right, and she is the type of woman who would be a better mother if circumstances allowed. Because Moll is not deliberately deviant, and because she is the victim of social and economic circumstances of her time, Defoe rewards her with everything for which she has consistently striven.

Steven C. Michael has argued that Moll is "a hybrid of everything Defoe hated and admired, a paradox with no reducible centre of ultimate meaning."\textsuperscript{53} It can be seen however, that the conclusion to Moll's narrative suggests that Defoe admires Moll a great deal more than he hates her, and he excuses her for her crimes because she has ultimately implicated herself in the right ideology. Defoe is emphatic in his approval of Moll's abilities to have


survived the ravages of a society that provides no tools to help her live a productive life, and he rewards her for trying to do the best she can within the limitations that society has imposed upon her, and for making the right choices when she was able. Moll is rewarded for being “brought to be a Penitent” (3), and she achieves economic autonomy, maternal affirmation (through her mother’s legacy), filial affection, and gentility, within an affectionate and equal partnership in marriage to the man she loves “most tenderly” (155), and a life with him of “the greatest kindness and comfort imaginable” (342).

Moll’s struggle for middle-class gentility and economic security, which she only really achieves in her old age, is exaggerated in Defoe’s last novel, *Roxana*, into early “ill-gotten excess” and later self-indulgence and greed. Moll’s haphazard but essentially well-meaning motherhood is exaggerated in *Roxana*, as Roxana, driven by her personal desires for wealth and privilege, willfully and consistently privileges those desires over the needs of her children. Roxana’s persistent abdication of maternal responsibility, her continued displays of maternal indifference, and her relentless greed, are symbolic of unnatural and uncontrollable womanhood that establishes the need for, and the seeming justice of, male control. Abandoning and ignoring all her children, and finally allowing the murder of one of them, Roxana is Defoe’s representation of monstrous motherhood.

**Roxana’s Quest for Autonomy**

The concept of excessive ‘self-love’ resounds in *Roxana*, as Roxana operates outside the social norms, increasingly driven by her desire for wealth and luxury, and by her aversion to moral laws and codes of humanity. In his creation of a heroine who is narcissistic and solipsistic, Defoe reveals the dangers of an individualist mindset that excludes affection, sympathy, and empathy for others and demonstrates how a mother who strives for individual autonomy above all else is an anomaly of nature - a travesty of womanhood, motherhood, and humanity.

In order to give verisimilitude to Roxana’s story as a “history,” Defoe initially uses the realist narrative mode to describe Roxana’s attainment of economic

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55 Daniel Defoe 1982, *Roxana* (1724), edited by David Blewett, Penguin, Harmondsworth. All references are from this edition and appear in this section with page numbers in parentheses, as follows (--).
stability through her participation in a variety of economies. She participates in a sexual economy through which she attains her wealth, in the public capitalist economy through which she attains economic autonomy, and in a maternal economy in which she trades maternal responsibility for personal gain. In order to explore his heroine's self-destructive behaviour, Defoe uses the fantastic mode to show the psychological implications of Roxana’s participation in these economies. Defoe’s use of the dual narrative modes of realism and the fantastic enables him to explore the psychological aspects of Roxana’s experiences, not in the way that Samuel Richardson came to use in his novels a ‘psychological realism’ that concentrates solely on the interior life, but in a way that allows him to oscillate between external reality and interior thought. The fantastic mode enables Defoe to show how Roxana’s concerns are not so much about the realities of day-to-day existence that drive Moll, as they are about the reasons she behaves as she does. It enables him to show that Roxana, unlike Moll who rarely concerns herself with insight into her own actions, is tortured, “in the most passionate Manner” (36), by insight into hers; insight that eventually debilitates and dehumanizes her.

Roxana as a Mother
Roxana sets herself apart from Defoe’s understanding of natural motherhood early in the novel when, in abject destitution, she says that, “all was Misery and Distress, the Face of Ruin was every where to be seen; we had eaten up almost every thing, and little remain’d, unless like one of the pitiful Women of Jerusalem, I should eat up my very Children themselves” (50-51). Roxana is not seriously contemplating eating her own children, of course, but is making a kind of grim joke that has two functions. First, and most obviously, the joke illuminates the extent of Roxana’s desperation, the eating of her children being an unthinkable act. Second, Roxana’s joke also serves to illuminate the idea that will take firmer hold throughout the narrative, that Roxana’s motherhood is one by which she equates child abandonment with maternal survival.

Roxana’s abdication of maternal responsibility lies at the heart of her maternal monstrosity and is characterized by, among other things, her passivity that enables her to allow others, principally Amy, to assume her maternal responsibilities. Roxana’s relinquishment of maternal responsibility is realized early in the novel when she leaves “the Management of the whole
Matter” of abandoning her children, to Amy (52). Felicity Nussbaum regards Amy’s relationship to Roxana as one based on what is essentially a trade-off between one kind of female labour and another; maternal and sexual. Amy provides a form of maternal labour by ‘dealing’ with Roxana’s children at various stages in the novel, and by taking care of the day-to-day necessities of Roxana’s life. In return, Roxana provides the sexual labour that pays for her and Amy to eat and stay alive. Roxana’s passivity, evident in her insistent denial of maternal volition, is no more apparent than in the final act of the supposed murder of her daughter. Although Roxana does not directly commit the act of murder, she does allow Amy to “take Care she [Susan] shou’d trouble her Mistress [Roxana] no more” (372). Amy is not, however, the only person Roxana allows to take on her maternal responsibilities. Husbands and lovers, and finally her daughter Susan, all contribute to driving the events and decisions that define Roxana’s life.

Perhaps Roxana’s most disturbing maternal trait – as much from Defoe’s perspective it seems as it is from a modern reading - is her lack of concern for the actual lives of her children. For Roxana, the death of a child is of little or no consequence, and is often even a preference. Roxana knows that she lacks what she herself calls “the natural Affections of a Mother” (308), and she continually demonstrates an eerie detachment from all her children. During one pregnancy she comments that she “wou’d willing have given ten Thousand Pounds ... to have been rid of the Burthen in [her] Belly” (203). Even when a child dies, she admits: “Nor, after the first Touches of Affection (which are usual, I believe, to all Mothers) were over, was I sorry the Child did not live” (142), for his survival would have constituted “the necessary Difficulties” (142) attendant with motherhood. Of the merchant’s son, she says, “I scarce saw it four times in the first four Years of its Life, and often wish’d it wou’d go quietly out of the World” (309).

For Roxana, motherhood is a purely financial activity, one over which she can exert control and from which she can remain emotionally independent. She distinguishes her relationships according to this reductive economic criterion to all her children, particularly apparent in her dealings with two of her sons. Of her son by the merchant, she says:

I did not love the Child, nor love to see it; and tho’ I had provided for it, yet I did it by Amy’s Hand, and had not seen it above twice in four Years; being privately resolv’d that when it grew up, it shou’d not be able to call me Mother (272).

Roxana later relates her lack of love and “general Neglect of the Child” (308), yet reconciles herself to both by considering that, “to pay for its Nursing” (308) is sufficient maternal behaviour. Even to her son by the jeweller, a child for whom she admits some fondness, Roxana considers that “provid[ing] very well for him” (309) is the only maternal responsibility necessary, or certainly the only maternal responsibility she is prepared to assume, and that such provision for him justifies her remaining anonymous to him (309). Bowers explains how ‘making provision’ for one’s children was a precise and legally operative term in Augustan England.\(^{57}\) It denoted an expectant mother’s preparation of bed linen and baby clothes for her child before delivery; an action assumed to indicate maternal affection (or to support claims of stillbirth), and one often successfully cited in defence of mothers accused of infanticide.\(^{58}\) Roxana’s assertion that she ‘provides’ for her children assuages her guilt and enables her to continue to absolve herself of her maternal responsibilities. When Roxana tells Sir Robert that she has no children “but what are provided for” (209), Roxana is arguing for her innocence in the fates of her children even though she has knowingly handed them over to nurses she describes as “She-Butchers … who are certain to starve and murder them” (116).

In Roxana’s world, money retains its value regardless of its history or of its means of acquisition, whereas maternal, familial, and sexual relationships are always encumbered by responsibilities and obligations. Felicity Nussbaum suggests that Roxana’s economic viability determines her maternal feeling,\(^{59}\) but it seems that the only feeling Roxana’s motherhood generates is guilt, and that her economic viability enables (or should enable, as Roxana sees it) alleviation (or exoneration, as Roxana wishes it) of her maternal guilt. Even when Roxana attains economic viability and, it must be remembered, stability, early on in her career, she does not seek out her abandoned children for fifteen years (230). Furthermore, even when she learns of the hard lives of her surviving children (231), she indulges only in help that she admits herself has only “the Face of doing good” (230).

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\(^{57}\) Bowers 1996, p. 115.

\(^{58}\) Thorn 2003, p. 24.

\(^{59}\) Nussbaum 1995, p. 33.
Only when she “wallow’[s] in Wealth” (230) does she become “greatly desirous to hear how things stood with [her children]; and whether they were all alive or not; and in what Manner they had been maintain’d” (230). With audacious irony, Roxana relates how the Aunt (Roxana’s sister-in-law) of the first five abandoned children had “us’d them barbarously, and made them little better than Servants in the House, to wait upon her and her Children, and scarce allow’d them Cloaths fit to wear” (231). In blaming her sister-in-law for her children’s miserable lives, Roxana echoes an earlier diatribe on the father of these abandoned children when she chances to see him (but not confront him) several years after his abandonment of her and the children. She considers giving him money in the hope that he would send some of it “to relieve the Necessities of his poor miserable Wife at London, and to prevent his Children to be kept by the Parish” (130), but decides against such benevolence, claiming that, “he was not qualified to receive it, or make the best Use of it” (130). Roxana, who claims at this point, early in the novel, that she is “Rich … very Rich” (137), has not attempted to find out where her children are, or even if they are still alive.

In one of many opportunities Roxana has to compensate for her abandonment and negligence of her infant children by helping them as adults, she exhibits a harsh, niggardly, and petulant manner to one son. Roxana says she “took a different Care of, and shew’d a differing Concern” of this son by sending him to school, and by financing him to “go over with a Person of Honesty and good Business, to the Indies” (309). When the son has grown rich, Roxana sends “him over a Wife; a beautiful young Lady, well-bred, an exceeding good-natur’d pleasant Creature.” When the son refuses to marry her, Roxana refuses to send him a prearranged “thousand Pound Cargo” and, even when the son does eventually marry the young woman, Roxana proclaims that she “never sent him the … Cargo, so that he lost that Money for misusing me” (309).

Roxana’s maternal benevolence is dependent upon the acquiescence of her adult children to her maternal control, control that she insists upon having on the condition that she remain anonymous to them. The guilt she feels for her consistent denial of maternal and moral responsibility is no more apparent than in her desire to keep from “ever letting the Children know what a kind of Creature they ow’d their Being to” (248). Roxana indicates that she is not so much ashamed of being a prostitute as she is of having her children know
she remained a prostitute for far longer than was economically necessary. She says, "I could not find in my Heart to let my Son know what a Mother he had, and what a Life she liv’d ... he must be oblig’d, if he was a Man of Virtue, to hate his Mother, and abhor the Way of Living" (246). Implicit in Roxana’s insight is her understanding that, while her son, “if he was a Man of Virtue,” might hate her for her “way of living,” he would hate her more if he were to find out that the “mother he had” had abandoned, neglected, and ignored him and his four siblings. Roxana’s audacious irony, her petulance, and her shame are Defoe’s attempts to demonstrate Roxana’s transition to psychic self-delusion that characterizes her behaviour for the remainder of the novel.

**Roxana as a Woman**

Defoe constructs Roxana as a woman with dubious moral values and with a troubled relationship to her past, to her gender, and to her economic success. Lacking the moral principles of religious faith, and having lost sense of middle-class respectability, Roxana’s actions have no moral centre. She is motivated only by concerns for herself that ultimately trap her in an obsessive, recurring cycle of self-loathing and self-destruction.\(^60\) Malinda Snow remarks how Roxana’s psychological complexities render interpretation of her actions and the text itself, “a significant hermeneutical question.”\(^61\) Indeed, as Maximillian Novak points out, one of the main problems in interpreting *Roxana* is accounting for Roxana’s actions, for she constantly announces her sins are willful and, as such, “‘prevents us from feeling for her the kind of pity that we feel for Moll.”\(^62\) Marilyn Westfall calls *Roxana* “a frank narrative about a brutish life,” and Roxana herself a complex combination of the brutish and the refined.\(^63\) Indeed, Roxana appears to be a character that oscillates between being “passively evil”\(^64\) and “a tormented and tragic victim;”\(^65\) views due not only to Roxana’s contradictory behaviour, but also to what Anne Robinson Taylor suggests is Defoe’s own apparent “seesawing between identification with her and loathing for her.”\(^66\)

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\(^{60}\) Moglen 2002, p. 47.  
\(^{61}\) Malinda Snow 1994, ‘Arguments to the Self in Defoe’s *Roxana*,’ in *Studies in English Literature, 1500-1900*, Rice University, Houston, Summer, 934:3, p. 6.  
\(^{64}\) Novak 1983, p. 110.  
Roxana is a member of the middle class and is bound to the patriarchal ideology and practices that both shape and propel it. By placing her in an arranged marriage to a ‘fool’ husband (the worst of all husbands according to Defoe), who squanders their money and abandons her and their five children to poverty, Defoe is making several key points, all of which he had expounded in his non-fictional journals and pamphlets. He gives fictional representation to his opposition to arranged marriages, to his belief that women sacrifice too much in marriage, and to his argument against a society that extols the superiority of one sex over the other.

At the heart of Roxana, as in Moll Flanders, is the subject of economics, one central to the middle-class ethic of trade, acquisition, and social mobility. Defoe’s first narrative construct is a sexual economy as one into which Roxana, at age fifteen, is initiated through her father’s choice of husband for her to a potentially economically viable man based on her sexual allure. Roxana is therefore made a sexual commodity well before she makes one of herself and becomes the jeweller’s mistress. Roxana is a part of a system in which she is valued on the basis only of her tradability in the marriage market, that is, a system that values a woman based on her economic viability (itself based on her sexuality), but that equips her with no means other than marriage by which to survive. Within the established backdrop of a society in which a market of sex for money is expected and accepted, Roxana lacks the moral capacity to make decisions that will empower her. Defoe is well aware that this is the state of affairs for women and that they are always compromised by their sexuality as long as society obstructs their access to education. For Defoe however, it is not Roxana’s participation in the sexual economy and her decision to “prostitute her Virtue and Honour” (63) that constitute her moral transgression, for he carefully creates circumstances that, in part, explain her actions. Rather, it is her abandonment of her five small children, one to certain abuse of the parish, and four to uncertain fate with a hostile sister-in-law, that constitute her moral transgression that sets in motion the paradigm of monstrous motherhood that defines Roxana’s life.

Defoe’s conflation of capitalist economics with maternal and sexual economics in the character of Roxana enables him to explore the nature of woman as it is constructed by society’s requirements and needs, and in particular, to examine the discrepancies between inherent and constructed gender roles. Throughout the novel, Roxana’s attitudes, behaviours, and sentiments are ambiguous. Against ideological promotion that maternity is the natural function of the woman, for example, Roxana is shown to consider maternity nothing more than an inconvenience, an unpleasant by-product of her occupation that impairs her beauty and that could potentially ruin her value as a commodity - “the Great Article that supported my Interest” (143). Moreover, Roxana often exhibits attitudes and behaviours that were more conventionally associated with men rather than women. She has, for example, an astute business sense, rendering her “masculine in her politick Capacity; [with] the full Command of what she had, and the full Direction of what she did” (188), with the drive and ability to build her “Fortune to prodigious Height” (207). Roxana considers herself “a Man in her separated capacity ... accountable to none, and ... in Subjection to none ...as fit to govern her own Estate ... as a man was” (188), and, later, describes herself as a “Man-Woman” (212). She fiercely condemns marriage, asserting that a woman is forced to give up “Liberty, Estate, Authority, and every-thing” (187). She speaks in a "kind of Amazonian language” (212) that is suggestive of female aggression and control, 68 and she has an ambiguously sexual relationship to Amy, who she describes as one who is as faithful to her “as the Skin to my Back” (59).69 Through her overt distortion of gender norms, Roxana is made “shocking to Nature” (196) - a monstrous mother, in one sense, because she is not ‘feminine’ enough.

Mona Scheuermann argues that Roxana’s business sense is “admirable, not unfeminine,”70 but I think there is a danger of anachronism here. Roxana’s aptitude for business is indeed admirable, both for the time and for today, but it should be remembered that women were not generally educated to the

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69 Terry Castle suggests that Roxana and Amy are literary doubles, remarking that Amy’s name refers to “a ‘me’ – an oddly displaced and altered version of the speaker herself” (1995, *The Female Thermometer: Eighteenth-Century Culture and the Invention of the Uncanny*, Oxford University Press, New York, p. 46).

70 Scheuermann 1993, p. 58.
same level as men and the expectations for a female’s participation in business affairs was, as Defoe shows, limited. Against the social and economic circumstances in which men had the upper hand in business affairs, Roxana’s admirable business sense is therefore comparable only to the business activities associated with the male rather than the female. Against a sex-gender system that increasingly defined – and reduced - certain activities as specifically ‘masculine’ or ‘feminine,’ Roxana’s behaviour is ultimately deemed ‘masculine’ and therefore, ‘unfeminine.’ The point is that Defoe deliberately constructs Roxana in this way to illuminate the social and cultural difficulties women face when they attempt to take control of their own lives.

Defoe counter-balances the representation of Roxana as a ‘Man-Woman’ by creating fathers who are, through their material circumstances, distinctly ‘masculine’ (the jeweller by his business prowess, the Prince by his rank and wealth, and the merchant by his economic success) and are, at the same time, compassionate (a quality more often attributed to femininity and mothers) to their children. The jeweller is said to have been “mightily pleased” at Roxana’s first pregnancy by him, and that “nothing could be kinder than he was in the Preparations he made” for Roxana’s lying-in (84). His second child is also born “to his great Satisfaction” (84). The Prince is “overjoy’d at the Discovery” of Roxana’s first pregnancy by him (112) and assures Roxana that he will not “refuse owning him for [his] Son ... a Natural Son; and shall never slight or neglect him” (112). The merchant, “one of the honestest compleatest Gentlemen upon Earth” (198), demonstrates “a wonderful Degree of Honesty and Affection to [their] little Son” (308). When Roxana refuses to marry the merchant after the birth of their son, the merchant is “astonished [that Roxana] can be so cruel to an innocent Infant, not yet born” (198). He appeals to Roxana’s “natural Affections of a mother” (308) to marry him for the sake of the child’s reputation, the reputation of ‘bastard’ being an “Infamy” even Roxana recognizes, as “worse than Death” (308).

Marilyn Francus argues that Defoe suggests that maternal monstrosity marginalizes fathers insofar as it empowers women.71 Roxana is indeed empowered – economically certainly – by her choice to dissociate herself from her children. Yet, paradoxically, fathers marginalize themselves.

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71 Francus 2003, p. 280.
according to Roxana, particularly in cases of illegitimacy, in their construction of parenthood as only a maternal and/or financial responsibility:

Great Men are, indeed, deliver’d from the Burthen of their Natural Children, or Bastards, as to their Maintenance: This is the main Affliction in other Cases, where there is not Substance sufficient, without breaking into the Fortunes of the Family; in those Cases, either a Man’s legitimate Children suffer, which is very unnatural; or the unfortunate Mother of that illegitimate Birth, has a dreadful Affliction, either of being turn’d off with her Child and be left to starve, &c. or of seeing the poor Infant pack’d off with a Piece of Money, to some of those She-Butchers, [wet-nurses] who take Children off of their Hands, as ’tis call’d; that is to say, starve ’em, and in a Word, murther ’em” (116).

Roxana makes clear that a sexual double standard is no more apparent than in parental responsibility, and that mother and child are more often than not at the behest of a father’s arbitrary benevolence for economic support. Yet Defoe shows that even men who are not the biological fathers demonstrate more compassion and long-term care for a child than Roxana does for any of her children. Roxana’s sister-in-law’s husband, who is no blood relation to Roxana’s children, for example, shows more “charitable Tenderness” (58) to Roxana’s abandoned children than either Roxana or his “not so tender and compassionate” wife (58). Likewise, the “kind Man” who becomes benefactor to one of Roxana’s abandoned sons acts as “a Father to the Child,” having “maintain’d him, fed and cloath’d him; put him to School, and … put him out to a Trade” (233).

Defoe’s portrayal of some of his male characters being more compassionate towards Roxana’s children than Roxana herself is evidence of two of Defoe’s specific purposes. First, he emphasizes Roxana’s consistent denial of what he considers the natural feminine and maternal norms through her distortion of gender norms, and he examines the relationship between femininity, maternity, and gender. Second, in his creation of benevolent men who care for children, Defoe is making an overt political statement. Although Roxana’s husband abandoned Roxana and their five children in poverty, he is not representative of men in general. The blame for the abuse of women and children (by way of abandonment) is not on individual men or even on men in general, but on society as a whole. Through this theme, Defoe restates his consideration that women should benefit from education that would enable them to take care of themselves and their children without being reliant on men. In Roxana’s case, for example, an appropriate education would have
enabled her to participate in the family business and oversee her husband’s misuse of funds and bad business management that would have saved the family from ruin.

D. Christopher Gabbard suggests that these representations serve to illuminate Defoe’s notion of the intransigence of gender ideology. Defoe’s awareness of, and consideration for, the lack of education for women and his concern for the rights of women within marriage, all point to the possibility that he wants to say something specifically about gender in his novel, yet, not all critics agree that gender plays a part in Defoe’s construction of Roxana. Bram Dijkstra reads Roxana’s gender as neutral or irrelevant against the novel’s primary economic focus, and Mona Scheuermann assesses Roxana’s strident views not as destabilizing gender norms but as balancing them, and asserts that “Defoe draws his female characters as if they were men – that is, simply as human beings, rather than as specifically female human beings.” To read Roxana in this light however is to ignore Defoe’s intimation that Roxana’s narrative is contingent on her transference of reproduction (as exemplified by her maternity) to production (as exemplified by her career as a prostitute) and the further intimation that this transference exemplifies woman’s limited, dichotomized choices within a society motivated by patriarchal and capitalist interests.

The Conclusion to ‘Roxana’
The novel’s conclusion is often considered the most complex aspect of Roxana, in that it is seen as not being a conclusion at all, but representative of how the novel is “no longer controlled by Defoe … and he cannot bring himself to finish the novel satisfactorily.” Malinda Snow’s suggestion that the novel “offers not closure but silence” is, I contend, the one most pertinent to reading the maternal in the novel.

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73 Bram Dijkstra 1987, Defoe and Economics: The Fortunes of Roxana in the History of Interpretation, St. Martin’s, New York.
76 Snow 1994, p. 6.
It is in the novel’s conclusion that Roxana faces the psychic consequences of her maternal monstrosity. Throughout her narrative, Roxana has constantly related her present actions to a past in which she has traded her body and abdicated her maternal responsibilities. By the end of the narrative, Roxana, filled with self-reproach and self-loathing, is rendered mute, immobile, and isolated, embroiled in “a silent sullen kind of Grief, which cou’d not break out either in Words or Tears” (167). Defoe deflects the potential of sympathy for his heroine by making Roxana admit that she has lived a life “of six and twenty Years of Wickedness, without the least Signals of Remorse; without any Signs of Repentance; or without so much as a Wish to put an End to it” (229). Even when she ceases her life of “prosperous Wickedness” (287) and now has a “Life fill’d with all humane Felicity” (309), Roxana continues to think about her past “with Detestation, and with the utmost Affliction” (309), which “lessen[s] the Sweets of my other Enjoyments” (310). She discovers that “not all the affluence of a plentiful Fortune [nor] all the things we call Pleasure, cou’d give me any relish, or sweeten the Taste of things” (310), and she is left “sad, heavy, pensive, and melancholy ... not fit for conversing with my Family or any-one else” (310). Roxana is tortured with guilt for the life she has led, yet she continues to make the wrong decisions, the most drastic being her compliance in ridding herself of her daughter, Susan. Roxana makes no pretence of her desire to be free of this daughter whose only ‘fault’ is that she wants to know her mother:

It is true, I wanted as much to be deliver’d from her, as ever a Sick-Man did from a Third-Day Ague; and had she dropp’d into the Grave by any fair Way, as I may call it; I mean had she died by any ordinary Distemper, I shou’d have shed but very few Tears for her: But I was not arriv’d to such a Pitch of obstinate Wickedness, as to commit Murther, especially such, as to murther my own Child, or so much as to harbour a Thought so barbarous, in my Mind: But, as I said, Amy effected all afterwards, without my Knowledge, for which I gave her my hearty Curse, tho’ I could do little more; for to have fall’n upon Amy, had been to have murther’d myself (350).

Roxana’s musings here and later in the novel reveal that she is intensely confused by her desire for that which should be undesirable. Yet, despite her outrage at Amy’s suggestion to murder Susan and her consequent deliberations on it, Roxana does nothing to stop Amy, and it is therefore difficult not to see the murder of Susan as something Roxana desires. That Roxana is actually thinking about “a Thought so barbarous” as killing her own child is evidence of Roxana’s self-confessed “wickedness,” a state of mind that has been seen by Terry Castle, for instance, as emblematic of an
“abbreviated psychic development.” Yet, I would say that Roxana’s nightmarish images following her daughter’s supposed murder are less accountable to an abbreviated psychic development than they are to guilt. These images, all too ordered and clear, spring from the deep-rooted guilt of a mother who has destroyed her child and of a human being who has violated the laws of nature and humanity:

She was ever before my Eyes; I saw her by-Night, and by-Day; she haunted my Imagination, if she did not haunt the House; my Fancy show’d her me in a hundred Shapes and Postures; sleeping or waking, she was with me: Sometimes I thought I saw her with her Throat cut; sometimes with her Head cut, and her Brains knock’d out; other-times hang’d up upon a Beam; another time drown’d in the Great Pond at Camberwell (374).

Whether or not Susan is murdered becomes no longer the issue, for Roxana’s crimes against her children and the general development of her attitude towards them began long before this point. Susan’s fate is representation of Roxana’s maternal monstrosity in all its manifestations.

Defoe does not provide any evidence of Roxana having a psychological disorder, but instead portrays, through an ordinary woman, the evils of excessive self-love and self-indulgence. Roxana’s ramblings at the end of her narrative are due to her understanding that maternal responsibility is hers alone, and that no matter how she may construe “the Injury done the poor Girl, by us both” as one of shared blame between Amy and herself, she knows, by way of her final words, that it is “my Crime” (379). With all the outward trappings of material wealth and position that should ostensibly bring happiness, Roxana is guilty and ashamed of her monstrous maternal behaviour, and no amount of money or latent maternal affection can change what she has done to her children.

The conclusion to *Roxana* has been a source of critical interest. Scheuermann considers it a satisfactory conclusion. Looking at it from a purely economic standpoint, she contends that Roxana is rewarded for her canny business sense with “all the Splendor and Equipage” (379) commensurate with her fortuitous marriage and considerable wealth. Laura Brown considers Roxana’s conclusion to be representative of individual, cultural, and social upheaval and emblematic of the many ideological

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78 Scheuermann 1993, p. 57.
contradictions of the novel, and it is this interpretation that coincides with my own. As ideology and reality collide, *Roxana* is evidence not only of the fantastic contradictions inherent in the ideology of maternal excellence and in the notion of female autonomy; it is also evidence of a new ambiguity in the understanding of the nature of things in a changing society. Taken on this level, Roxana’s psychological demise can be attributed not only to her guilt for her maternal crimes, but also to her distortion of what was seen as the nature of motherhood, womanhood, and humanity. For the introspective Roxana, punishment comes in the form of her understanding that she is unable to reconcile what she has done with who she is and will never be free of guilt and shame. By allowing the murder of her child, Roxana has destroyed a part of her self, and Defoe punishes her by leaving her in a frightening, psychological hell, in “misery” of her crime (379), that she describes thus:

> I grew sad, heavy, pensive, and melancholy; slept little, and eat little; dream’d continually of the most frightful and terrible things imagined... I was *Hagridden* with Frights, and terrible things, form’d merely in the Imagination; and was either tir’d, and wanted Sleep, or over-run with Vapours, and not fit for conversing with my Family or any-one else (310).

The conclusion to *Roxana* is deliberately vague; a conclusion that Helene Moglen refers to as one situated beyond language and beyond the text. In my view, the conclusion to Roxana’s narrative is not only indicative of Defoe’s awareness of the social, familial, and personal implications of maternal monstrosity, it is a sensitive and apt conclusion to Roxana’s tale and one for which few of Defoe’s critics have allowed him literary kudos.

The unconventional closure of *Roxana* led to a variety of publications of ‘Roxana’ with different endings. Fourteen years after Defoe’s death, one of his editors added a second volume to *Roxana* and published it as a new version. In this 1745 version, the volume included a protracted account of Roxana’s repentance and a nascent parental concern. Later, in 1775, another revised edition was published in which the plot of Susan’s pursuit of her disinterested mother is deleted entirely and, in extensive additions to Defoe’s original text, ‘Roxana’ discovers the joys of being a good wife and

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mother. Nancy Armstrong suggests that one of the reasons for the sequence of revisions might be representative of later readers being unable to accept Roxana’s maternal delinquency,\(^82\) suggestive perhaps of the changing social consciousness about maternal responsibility and care. It could be that later readers appreciated that, for lower class women, material circumstances rather than feelings, by necessity, would determine a mother’s ability to care for her children. Such considerations became increasingly untenable throughout the century however, as an ideology of maternal excellence took hold throughout all classes. The notion of a maternal instinct that superseded all other emotions and which ignored material conditions set in place a maternal framework of endless possibilities for maternal failure and loomed large in the female unconscious, the ultimate source of maternal guilt.\(^83\)


\(^83\) I use the term ‘unconscious’ to refer to that part of the mind which is inaccessible to the conscious mind but which affects behaviour and emotions. It is used in two forms throughout to denote the personal and collective unconscious.
CHAPTER TWO
Samuel Richardson’s Clarissa (1747-9)

Clarissa, or The History of a Young Lady: Comprehending the Most Important Concerns of Private Life, and Particularly Showing the Distresses that May Attend the Misconduct Both of Parents and Children, in Relation to Marriage (1747-9) was considered, by almost unanimous consent of Samuel Richardson’s contemporaries, to be the greatest example of the epistolary genre ever written. Samuel Johnson said that if you read Clarissa for the plot you would hang yourself, yet still considered the novel “the first book in the world for the knowledge it displays of the human heart,” and Richardson “the greatest genius that had shed its lustre on this path of literature.” Jean Jacques Rousseau wrote in the Lettre à d’Alembert (1758) that “no one, in any language, has ever written a novel that equals or even approaches Clarissa.”

Clarissa is the story of Clarissa Harlowe, a beautiful and virtuous young woman whose family intends to enlarge their recently-acquired wealth and estates by marrying her to a rich landowner whom Clarissa hates. Driven to despair by her family’s insistence on the marriage and their increasing abuse for her refusal, Clarissa unwisely escapes with Robert Lovelace, an enigmatic and scheming rake who considers it sport to defile young women. Lovelace imprisons Clarissa in a brothel and eventually rapes her. Disowned by her family, and forbidden to return home when she finally escapes Lovelace, Clarissa becomes ill and dies, in full consciousness of her Christian and moral virtue.

Richardson’s Didacticism
Richardson intended Clarissa to be a didactic tome, specifically, he said, to “inculcate upon the human mind, under the guise of an amusement, the great lessons of Christianity” (Clarissa, p. 1495), and he applied the same

1 Samuel Richardson 1985, Clarissa, or The History of a Young Lady (1747-49), edited by Angus Ross, Penguin, Harmondsworth. All references are from this edition and appear in this section with page numbers in parentheses, as follows (---). To distinguish page numbers from dates, page numbers of four digits are preceded by p., as follows (p. ----).
principles of didacticism that he had used in his two earlier novels, Pamela (1740) and Pamela Volume Two (1741). Richardson was explicit in his intentions for his novels to be authoritative in their didactic nature. He insisted, for example, that Pamela was written, “in order to cultivate the principles of virtue and religion in the minds of the youth of both sexes.”

Published at a time when the market for the conduct book was burgeoning, Pamela would arguably have provided entertainment and relief from the sermonizing of the conduct book (although Pamela does much of that herself) and, at the same time, provided what were considered sound moral lessons on virtue and modesty. Richardson apparently held Pamela Volume Two “in much higher estimation” than Pamela, perhaps because he considered it a more effective didactic text. Indeed, Pamela Volume Two at times reads more like a conduct manual than a novel, especially in its attention to the matter of maternal breastfeeding.

Richardson uses the same epistolary form for Clarissa that had proved so successful in Pamela in his belief that it was the ideal form to encourage readers into debate, and that this increased the effectiveness of the moral instruction the novel was designed to convey. In Clarissa, the epistolary form provides a sense of intimacy and urgency that invites the reader to participate in the very thoughts of the writers of the letters, to the extent that we as readers come to ‘know’ more about Clarissa (and Lovelace) than they know about themselves, and we ‘experience’ the various points of view that enable us to ‘suffer’ with the heroine the consequences of the narrow-mindedness of the other characters.

Richardson demonstrates his belief that one effective way of teaching appropriate behaviour is to incite fear. He describes the spectacularly horrid Mrs. Sinclair and her young whores and elaborates Lovelace’s insinuations and threats that lead to his rape of Clarissa, for example, all in enough vivid detail to frighten his reader into virtue; tactics designed to “keep other young

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5 Pamela, or Virtue Rewarded, p. 27.


8 Richardson’s concern to promote maternal breastfeeding in Pamela Volume Two and Sir Charles Grandison (1753-4) is discussed briefly at the end of this chapter.
misses from a fate worse than death.”\textsuperscript{9} Indeed, fear permeates the novel: the heroine lives in fear for her virtue, the mother in fear of her husband, son, and male relatives, and we, the readers, in fear (and anticipation) of the inevitable tragic outcome for the heroine.

Richardson’s other didactic strategy is to suggest the possibility for reform, as demonstrated, for example, through the character of Lovelace’s friend, Belford. Dorothea E. von Mücke suggests that Belford’s conversion from a rake into Clarissa’s friend and the editor of her story provides the key to understanding \textit{Clarissa} as a pedagogical project.\textsuperscript{10} I shall suggest that the possibility for reform is made never more apparent than in the character of the main deficient mother of the novel, Mrs. Harlowe, through Richardson’s persistent evocation of the notion that Mrs. Harlowe would be a more sufficient mother (as opposed to a deficient one) if she chose to exert her rightful and proper maternal authority.

In \textit{The Rape of Clarissa} (1982), Terry Eagleton argues for the social and cultural factors that enable a text such as \textit{Clarissa} to exist, factors that render a young woman a bargaining tool within the socioeconomic reality of property marriage, as her family plot to marry her off to a man she despises in order to improve their economic and social positions. \textit{Clarissa} is indeed emblematic of the system in which the female is “the fundamental unit of exchange … the circulating property which cements the system of male dominance.”\textsuperscript{11} Feminist critics particularly, have been keen to assess the extent to which Richardson was commenting on the patriarchal order that condoned and naturalized the bartering of women. Early critics were keen to see Richardson as a ‘feminist’ champion. Katharine Rogers, for example, argues that Richardson was “a radical feminist [who] represented women as autonomous beings rather than appendages to fathers, brothers, lovers, or husbands” and a defender of women against exploitation in “his penetrating exposure of male chauvinism.”\textsuperscript{12} I would argue to the contrary, with Robert A. Erickson, that, while Richardson enjoyed the company of women and often

put himself in the role of women, he was by no means a modern feminist - or even an eighteenth-century ‘feminist.’\textsuperscript{13} Nancy Armstrong regards him less as a feminist champion than as an observer of gender representations, defining his novels as works that engage in the representation of gender as the standpoint from which all aspects of society are viewed. Armstrong argues that it is the gendered viewpoint that exerts a form of ‘political authority,’ an authority that was generated through domestic novels that introduced, and engaged in, a new form of discourse that “invested common forms of social behaviour with the emotional values of women.”\textsuperscript{14} Certainly, Clarissa’s voice exerts some form of authority through her narratorial vantage point, which enables us to see the negative implications for women and mothers of social structures and laws. Yet, I believe that it was not Richardson’s intention to promote female authority, nor even to comment on patriarchal abuse of power, but rather, to expose the social and familial necessity to balance power and authority. Indeed, in Clarissa, Richardson offers no options to patriarchal power, but structures the novel so as to mediate between exposure and acceptance of that power.

There are many mothers and mother figures in the novel, all of whom relate to Clarissa in some maternal way and all of whom are in some way deficient. Clarissa’s Aunt Hervey and Clarissa’s friend’s mother, Mrs. Howe, fail to intervene in Clarissa’s persecution, the brothel-keeper Mrs. Sinclair deceives Clarissa and assists Lovelace in his rape of her, and even Mrs. Norton, Clarissa’s beloved nurse and trusted friend, ultimately fails her by not attending her deathbed. These mother figures, however, reiterate a model of deficient motherhood already established by Clarissa’s biological mother, Mrs. Harlowe, and it is on her representation as a deficient mother that I focus in this chapter. I make brief reference to other mothers as their behaviours apply to my argument that Mrs. Harlowe stands as Richardson’s representative of deficient motherhood and as the one mother figure amongst the others who could and should have prevented her daughter’s tragedy. In the final part of this chapter, I refer briefly to Richardson’s representation of excellent motherhood through the character of Mrs. Norton, and conclude with a brief discussion on Richardson’s interest in promoting maternal breastfeeding as fundamental to excellent motherhood.

Jerry C. Beasley argues that *Clarissa* is concerned with “the proper role of the patriarchal figure and of the manner in which he is both to act out the authority vested in him and to sustain the power structure that validates his authority.”¹⁵ I augment Beasley’s argument by suggesting that, through his maternal figures, and particularly through Mrs. Harlowe, Richardson explores issues that women and mothers faced in relation to a society dominated by patriarchal authority. Richardson sheds light on contemporaneous ideas on appropriate female behaviour, the foundation of which was, for wife, mother, or daughter, obedience to the patriarch, whether husband, father, son or male relative. In the novel, there is continual conflict between patriarchal authority and female duty, and Richardson shows that motherhood – as subject, as ideology, and as ‘lived reality’ in the life of the novel – is always problematic. Mrs. Harlowe, at the heart of the conflict, is Richardson’s catalyst for examination of the tension between demands and loyalties and between ideology and reality.

It is my contention that mothers are the main target for Richardson’s didacticism, and that Mrs. Harlowe features as his primary object lesson, her deficient motherhood figured by deliberate authorial, rather than merely narratorial, representation. In other words, I argue that it is Richardson the author, and not Clarissa the narrator, who “places peculiar responsibility for its heroine’s tragedy on her mother.”¹⁶ This distinction becomes particularly evident in Clarissa’s Will, a document that can be read – against the grain to a certain extent – as Richardson’s carefully constructed treatise concerning the mother’s centrality in her daughter’s tragedy. The argument for Richardson’s condemnation of Mrs. Harlowe is complicated by his construction of his heroine, Clarissa, as an overtly loving and dutiful daughter who, throughout the novel, considers her mother an excellent and loving parent who has been forced against her better judgment to be the mouthpiece for the men in her family. In many respects, Richardson shows this to be true: Mrs. Harlowe’s behaviour shows she is in constant conflict between knowing what is right and doing what is wrong. Indeed, Mrs. Harlowe’s maternal behaviour can be more sympathetically interpreted on the basis that she, like Clarissa, is a female who is bullied by a family that uses and abuses women to suit their own purposes. Yet, I favour a reading that allows for a sterner,

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less forgiving interpretation – what I call the ‘didactic interpretation’ – because of my specific focus on the didactic function of the novel. Clarissa’s judgment of her mother is far more sympathetic than Richardson’s judgment of the ‘Mother,’ and this separation is an important consideration that forms the basis of my argument.

In order to assert his didactic intent, Richardson shows that, because she is the mother of the heroine, Mrs. Harlowe is more responsible than others for her daughter’s tragedy. He does this in several quite subtle ways, each of which is discussed in the separate sections that follow. First, he undermines Mrs. Harlowe by declining to use the term ‘mother’ to describe her in the Principal List of Characters (Mrs. Harlowe as ‘Mother’). Second, he presents Mrs. Harlowe as a mother who, despite appearances, has transgressed the fundamental rules of maternal excellence (‘Clarissa’ and the Conduct Manual). Third, he constructs her as a mother who refuses to deploy a specifically maternal authority to save her child from abuse (Maternal Authority). Fourth, he presents her as a mother who makes her maternal love conditional on her daughter’s obedience (Conditional Maternal Love). Finally, he constructs situations in which Mrs. Harlowe seems driven to assert the family’s unreasonable demand despite her recognition – and jealousy – of her daughter’s superior sense of self (Mrs. Harlowe, Clarissa, and Female ‘Value’).

Mrs. Harlowe as ‘Mother’

One of the first indications that Mrs. Harlowe’s motherhood is both a focal point for reform and a target of Richardson’s disapproval is, ironically, his omission of the term ‘Mother’ as a descriptive of her in the Principal List of Characters. All the members of Clarissa’s immediate family are described according to their relationship to Clarissa: James Harlowe Esq. is “the father of Miss Clarissa, Miss Arabella, and Mr. James Harlowe.” “James Harlowe, jun.” is described as “jealous of the favour his sister Clarissa stood in with the principals of the family.” Miss Arabella Harlowe is described as the “elder sister of Miss Clarissa” (37).

Mrs. Harlowe, on the other hand, is described as “Lady Charlotte Harlowe, [James Harlowe Esq’s] wife, mistress of fine qualities, but greatly under the influence not only of her arbitrary husband but of her son” (37). It may be a small point, but it is unquestionably anomalous that Mrs. Harlowe is not
referred to as Clarissa’s mother but is described by her relationship to her husband alone. It is significant, in light of the argument that Richardson deliberately omitted the term ‘mother’ to describe Mrs. Harlowe, that even when he revised aspects of her description for the 1751 edition, he still did not add any reference to Mrs. Harlowe as Clarissa’s mother. Yet, he did make a change of some significance in that he capitalized all the familial terms in the novel. Mrs. Harlowe was not merely ‘mother’ in the body of the narrative, but ‘Mother,’ and all family members were similarly treated: ‘Father,’ ‘Brother,’ ‘Sister,’ ‘Uncle’ and ‘Grandfather,’ for example, imparting what Florian Stuber argues, an allegorical connotation to each familial role. In this model, Mrs. Harlowe is ‘everyone’s Mother’ and, as such, her motherhood (and by the same token, Mr. Harlowe’s fatherhood) is made a highly politicized entity as it reflects the cultural concern to define motherhood within the framework of middle-class values and is laid bare to scrutiny and judgment.

‘Clarissa’ and the Conduct Manual

Richardson’s characterizations of deficient motherhood – in all its manifestations – evoke and validate the notions of ideal motherhood that had by now been circulating for decades, disseminated mostly through conduct books, the most popular of which was Richard Allestree’s “immensely influential” The Ladies Calling. This conduct manual – and the various forms of it – had become the authority on motherhood, many of its maxims validated in Richardson’s fiction.

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17 Janine Barchas 1998, The Annotations in Lady Bradshaigh’s Copy of ‘Clarissa’, The English Literary Studies Monograph Series, No. 76, University of Victoria, Canada, p. 40n. Barchas says that Lady Bradshaigh told Richardson that his reference in the first edition to Mrs. Harlowe as “Lady Charlotte Harlowe” was an incorrect titular distinction for the married daughter of a Viscount, and that, when married to a non-aristocrat, the aristocratic woman could no longer use the title, ‘Lady.’ Richardson corrected this mistake for the 1751 edition’s revised and shortened list of principal characters, and described her as, simply, ‘Mrs. Harlowe,’ but retaining something of the former distinction by adding the words ‘His Lady’ (instead of the earlier definition ‘his wife’) as the character’s sole description.


19 Florian Stuber 1985, ‘On Fathers and Authority in Clarissa,’ in Studies in English Literature 1500-1900, No. 25, pp. 557-574. Stuber concentrates on Mr. Harlowe’s representation as universal ‘Father.’

20 Bowers 1996, pp. 157-158, citing Richard Allestree 1677, The Ladies Calling, 5th edition, Oxford, pp. 201-213. Ruth Bernard Yeazell notes that The Ladies Calling was reprinted eleven times between 1673 and 1720, and was still being reprinted as late as 1787. It was also reprinted under different titles and was widely used in fragmentary form in other works (1991, Novels of Modesty: Women and Courtship in the English Novel, University of Chicago Press, Chicago, p. 240.)
As part of “the office and duty of a Mother,” Allestree insisted that the mother possessed natural feelings of “tenderness” toward her children, and was naturally predisposed to personally breastfeed her own infants, supervise her children’s early education and moral upbringing, and provide constant care and attendance “through the several Stages of Infancy, Childhood, and Youth.” In this model, Allestree charged that mothers failed for only two reasons: they either love their children too little or too much. Mothers who love their children too little were identified as those who did not personally breastfeed their own children. Maternal breastfeeding, as defined by Allestree, was not only the fundamental precept of maternal excellence, it was the cornerstone of maternal love, and a mother who did not breastfeed her own child was considered unnatural and a deficient mother. In Clarissa, Mrs. Harlowe is presented as a mother who loves her child too little because she did not personally breastfeed Clarissa, but hired the wet nurse, Mrs. Norton, to perform this function.

The measure of a mother who loved her children too much is more complex. Allestree warned mothers who loved their children too much that “the doting affection of the Mother … is frequently punished with the untimely death of her Children; or if not with that … they live … to grieve her eies, and to consume her heart.” Richardson invokes this kind of mother through the character – dead before the novel even begins - of Lovelace’s mother. Through Lovelace, Richardson condemns Lovelace’s aristocratic mother for her “indulgent folly” in loving her son too much and blames her for his violent and unruly behaviour. Lovelace writes, “Why, why, did my mother bring me up to bear no control? Why was I so educated as that to my very tutors it was a request that I should not know what contradiction or disappointment was? – Ought she not to have known what cruelty there was in her kindness?” Richardson wrote in a letter his concern to show that Lady Lovelace is responsible for Clarissa’s tragedy because of her excessive maternal love for her son:

22 Allestree 1677, pp. 205-6.
Mr. Lovelace’s Mother is often hinted at in the Progress of the Story, as having by her faulty indulgence to him in his early Youth, been the Occasion of that uncontrollableleness of Will, which proved so fatal to many Innocents and in the End to himself.\(^{23}\)

Indeed, Lovelace’s mother haunts the novel as a failed mother, responsible for her son’s perversity and violence, and the first of the novel’s many other deficient mothers.

Mrs. Harlowe’s motherhood is complicated by Richardson presenting her as a deficient mother not only for loving Clarissa too little through her failure to personally breastfeed her, but also, paradoxically, for loving her too much, through her favouring of Clarissa over her other two children, James and Arabella. According to Mrs. Harlowe, Clarissa is the perfect child, “our glory abroad, our delight when at home [providing] charming amusements and useful employments which … the whole family was better for” (584). Mrs. Harlowe pronounces that “no parents ever were happier in a child” (583) and that Clarissa’s siblings “were so sensible of their sister’s superiority, and of the honour she reflected upon the whole family, that they confessed themselves eclipsed without envying the eclipser. Indeed there was not anybody so equal with her, in their own opinions, as to envy what all aspired but to emulate” (584). Clarissa is, according to Mrs. Harlowe, the child that gives “eminence to us all” (584).\(^{24}\) By making Clarissa the perfect child, Mrs. Harlowe has set her apart from her other children and from everyone else in the family, and confined her to a role in the family that makes her disobedience the more catastrophic.

In her fascinating study, *Speaking in Hunger: Gender, Discourse, and Consumption in ‘Clarissa’* (1998), Donnalee Frega argues that it is the Harlowes’ over-indulgence, or favouritism, of Clarissa, along with their need to keep her as their perfect child, that is fundamental to Clarissa’s tragedy.\(^{25}\) Mrs. Harlowe plays a great part in singling out Clarissa as the favourite child of the family, and Clarissa, aware of her elevated position, is subsequently concerned to appear, in the family’s eyes (and in the mother’s eyes


\(^{24}\) Donnalee Frega discusses how the Harlowe parents are excessively preoccupied with appearances and Clarissa is another source, along with their newly-acquired wealth, that contributes to the condition of one-upmanship the Harlowes seem to promote (1998, *Speaking in Hunger: Gender, Discourse, and Consumption in ‘Clarissa’*, University of South Carolina Press, Columbia, p. 13).

\(^{25}\) Frega 1998, p. 12. Frega argues that maternal favouritism is fundamental to the tragedies of Clarissa and Lovelace.
primarily), flawed in any way. When Clarissa is raped, for example, it is not the loss of her virginity but the mutilation of her perfection and the consequences of it in her family’s regard for her that renders her meaningless in her own eyes.

In his characterization of Clarissa, Richardson adheres to the precepts of daughterly obligation as set out in conduct manuals. In *The Ladies Calling*, Richard Allestree asserted that for daughters to fall in love without their parents’ consent was “one of the highest injuries they can do their parents, who have such a native right in them, that ‘tis no less an injustice than disobedience to dispose of themselves without them.” As Mr. Harlowe’s legitimate daughter, Clarissa is not only his dependent, but, in a sense, his ‘property.’ She is, as James Harlowe remarks, “no more than a chicken brought up for the tables of other men” (77), viewed by the Harlowe men as a commodity to trade within the socioeconomic reality of property marriage, a “fundamental unit of exchange,” according to Eagleton, “which cements the system of male dominance.” In *Clarissa*, a female’s virtue is a tradeable commodity in the marriage market that is crucial to propelling the family’s social ambitions.

Clarissa’s disobedience is a crucial factor to the understanding of the Harlowe men’s increasing brutality towards her. According to them, Clarissa is obliged to submit to their demands but, in her disobedience, she is actively subverting the social order for which they stand. Clarissa’s disobedience, therefore, is the site of patriarchal attention and contention and the catalyst not only for her fall from grace within the family; it is also the catalyst for Mrs. Harlowe’s downfall as a mother, for the subversion of the patriarchal order, and for the entire family’s social disgrace. In a disturbing refiguring of daughterly obligation, Richardson enables Clarissa to show her parents her remorse for her disobedience (the ‘highest injury’) by ostensibly doing the ‘right’ thing and dying for it.

Within the framework of middle class values that Richardson presents, the Harlowe parents’ motives for arranging and insisting upon a favourite

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28 Eagleton 1982, p. 56.
daughter’s marriage to someone she dislikes are questionable. Richardson’s
disapproval of the Harlowe parents’ insistence on Clarissa’s marriage echoes
contemporaneous ideas on arranged marriages. As historian Randolph
Trumbach notes, after 1720, enforced marriages had become generally
unacceptable, and mercenary marriages were especially condemned. Later
in the century, William Buchan warned parents of the consequences of
forcing unwanted marriage on their offspring:

> The first thing which parents ought to consult in disposing their
children in marriage, is certainly their inclinations. Were due regard
always paid to these, there would be fewer unhappy couples, and
parents would not have so often cause to repent the severity of their
conduct, after a ruined constitution, a lost character, or a distracted
mind, has shewn them their mistake.\(^{30}\)

Mixed messages on parental authority continued throughout the century
however, and as late as 1792, *The Ladies Magazine* warned that girls should
“Obey your parents’ wishes, and you will offend neither delicacy nor
propriety.”\(^{31}\) To a certain degree, Mr. Harlowe’s motives, unpleasant as they
may be, for insisting on this marriage in order to increase the wealth and
social standing of the family correspond to eighteenth-century middle class
expectations regarding the behaviour of the patriarch. That is to say, Mr.
Harlowe does not demonstrate particularly unusual behaviour for a father - it
is, after all, as Clarissa recognizes, the “prerogative of manhood” (82) - only
an extreme (and inappropriate) demonstration of patriarchal authority.

Unlike Mr. Harlowe’s motives, however, Mrs. Harlowe’s motives are
ambiguous, even in an eighteenth-century context. The ‘fine qualities’ by
which Mrs. Harlowe is described in the principal list of characters are rarely, if
ever, made apparent in the life of the novel. Instead, Mrs. Harlowe
demonstrates in all her brief and intense interactions with her daughter that,
whatever fine qualities she may have possessed in her role as an ostensible
loving and caring mother, she no longer deploys them. Her relentless
insistence on her daughter obeying a deeply unpleasant command and her
withdrawal of maternal compassion when her daughter needs it most is

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puzzling. Mrs. Harlowe is therefore a character who complicates perceptions of motherhood more than Mr. Harlowe complicates expectations for fatherhood.

Mrs. Harlowe’s submission to her husband’s will would not have surprised Richardson’s original readers, but her dogged determination to force her daughter into an unwanted marriage would certainly have exceeded expectations (as Lady Bradshaigh’s and Sarah Fielding’s comments demonstrate).32 Even though, as is generally acknowledged, family discipline may have been more severe in the eighteenth century, the consensus of family historians is that, although parents had a right to command obedience from their children, it was not acceptable to force a dutiful daughter into marriage with an unwelcome suitor. In other words, a daughter had the right, theoretically, to refuse a man chosen for her, but she did not have the right to choose one for herself, except with her parents consent.33

Maternal Authority

Historically, as the home and family became increasingly delineated as the woman’s domain and responsibility, the mother was enjoying an auspicious time in establishing her new authoritative status within the family. Theories of motherhood were based on the assumption that a mother’s love “usually exceed[s] the love of the Father.”34 This notion, established in the eighteenth century as the reason for granting to mothers a special ‘authority,’ went hand-in-hand with the notion, just beginning to crystallize in the middle of the century, of the mother’s critical role as the primary carer of children. By the time Clarissa appeared, maternal authority and the mother’s role as the primary carer of children were widely accepted as the norms for virtuous, natural motherhood.35

Mrs. Harlowe appears to be an exemplary middle-class mother. She is said to have been “delighted” with her family, to have instructed her children by

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32 See section entitled ‘The Eighteenth-Century Reader’s Perspective’ later in this chapter.
34 Allestree 1677, p. 205.
35 In her chapter ‘Female virtue and maternity in ‘Pamela, Part 2,’ Bowers argues that that Richardson presents Pamela – the mother – as each family’s central figure, and “makes disobedience to maternal authority a frightening idea ... Pamela’s children ... learn to consider their mother’s word to be law, her experience primary, and her authority over them next only to God’s” (1996, p. 91).
her “example,” as having taken “pride and ... pleasure” in them, and to be the source of a family “she had so blessed” (p. 1162). Clarissa describes her as a mother of “gentle and sensible mind, which has from the beginning, on all occasions, sacrificed its own inward satisfaction to outward peace” (54).

Apart from the fact that Mrs. Harlowe did not breastfeed Clarissa, Mrs. Harlowe is the kind of mother who up to this point in time appears to have behaved according to the precepts of maternal excellence espoused in conduct literature. Her apparent U-turn in maternal behaviour may reflect Richardson’s perception of the changes in the structure of the family occurring around the same time. In her study, Novel Relations: The Transformation of Kinship in English Literature and Culture, 1748-1818 (2004), Ruth Perry argues that, by the middle of the century, a woman’s role in the family had changed considerably from the kin- and community-centered families of the seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries. The transformation from consanguineous to conjugal kinship in eighteenth-century English family life led to what Perry describes as “the great disinherittance” of women; the situation whereby young women, having lost position in their birth families, desperately tried to establish ties in a marital family. This situation left women of the middle class in a precarious state, always teetering on the brink of ruin and disaster which the loss of access to familial networks promised.

Ruth Perry uses the concept of the loss of familial connection and the panic it engendered as a new backdrop for investigating eighteenth-century English novels. In an interesting reading of Mrs. Harlowe’s position in her family, she argues that Richardson deliberately “accentuates Mrs. Harlowe’s powerlessness” within her marriage by giving her only a sister for a sibling [Aunt Hervey], a sister moreover married to a man who is financially indebted to Mr. Harlowe. This situation precludes the possibility of sisterly sympathy or solidarity Aunt Hervey might have been able to exert, and emphasizes how the changes in kinship isolate and overpower the helpless female who may find her only source of support and consolation in an equally

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38 Margaret R. Hunt relates this argument to members of the eighteenth-century middle class (1996, The Middling Sort; Commerce, Gender and the Family in England 1680-1780, University of California Press, Berkeley, p. 1). I think her argument is especially relevant to the middle class woman.
vulnerable sister. Because of the precarious existence to which women were subject, many women were drawn into situations by patriarchal coercion that they would not have necessarily chosen. This is a point Beasley makes when he argues that there are many cruel and corrupt women in Clarissa – Arabella Harlowe, Mrs. Sinclair and numerous others - but in every instance, they have been “overcome by men and dislocated from their natural virtuous state.” Mrs. Harlowe’s powerlessness is partly a result of her realization of her diminished power and influence within the family structure. She is representative of the emergent model of the family structure by which a woman, separated from her blood family, is denied access to the protection, support, and a sense of belonging with which the blood family was traditionally associated. Mrs. Harlowe’s powerlessness is never more evident than in her capitulation to her husband’s unpleasant demand to marry her favourite child to a man she detests.

To what extent, however, is Mrs. Harlowe actually powerless? If it is the case that Mrs. Harlowe shirks maternal responsibility by refusing to assert her maternal authority, it must be considered what, exactly, maternal authority meant at the time. Maternal authority was not specifically defined but, by the middle of the century, it was taking shape as being at the core of the responsibility and decisions relating to the day-to-day care of the home and children. Yet, maternal authority was complicated by the fact that the authority of the father was still paramount, a situation that had not changed since early in the century. In 1705, Bishop Fleetwood had declared in his treatise, The Relative Duties of Parents and Children, Husbands and Wives, Masters and Servants, for example, that:

The Father is the Superiour Authority, and must be obeyed, because both the Laws of God and Man have subjected the Wife to the Husband; she is not presum’d to have a Will contrary to her Husbands, and therefore the Child disobeys not his Mother, who obeys the Father’s command, because the Mother is to be obedient also.

Richardson appears to adhere to this principle in Clarissa in that Mrs. Harlowe defers completely to her husband’s authority. Her deference (and refusal to oppose, in another sense) is ultimately the basis of her deficient motherhood.

39 Perry 2004, p. 73.
40 Beasley 1996, p. 50.
But, how could she exert authority, and what form could it take? If she adheres to those rules prescribed for a wife, she is stymied in her maternal authority, for the authority of the husband always overrides it. In a sense then, the promotion of a maternal authority – by conspicuous absence and by alluding to it as the one thing that could potentially stop the Harlowe men from insisting on an unwanted marriage - is moot. Even if Mrs. Harlowe wanted to exert maternal authority – and sometimes she indicates that she would if she could - she still would still be forced, through abuse of some kind, to capitulate to the ‘Superior’ Authority of her husband. Whether or not Richardson intended to demonstrate this paradox is debatable, but certainly he does show Mrs. Harlowe in constant conflict between maternal authority and patriarchal control.

The notion of maternal authority was an even more illusive concept when considering how it was complicated by the notion, persistent throughout the century, that it must not be overt, and could be implemented only surreptitiously. Advice for women on asserting authority, or on what was seen as ‘getting ones’ own way,’ so to speak, abounded in conduct literature. In Advice to a Daughter, the Marquess of Halifax, George Savile, wrote that women’s power resides in knowing how to ”twist the secret Chains that bind / With gentle Force the captivated Mind.”42 In Female Conduct, Thomas Marriott wrote that women should employ “Insinuating Streams,” “lenient Art,” and “soothing Blandishment” to get their own way,43 and Eliza Haywood advised in The Female Spectator that, “it is not by force our sex can hope to maintain their influence over the men ... whenever we would truly conquer, we must seem to yield.”44 In other words, maternal authority was possible only through some form of obsequiousness to the patriarch.

Clarissa writes how Mrs. Harlowe has exhibited maternal authority in the past by influence rather than command. Apparently, Mrs. Harlowe “had the address, for a great while, absolutely to govern [the family] as she pleased by her directing wisdom, at the same time that they knew not but her

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prescriptions were the dictates of their own hearts; such a sweet art had she of conquering by seeming to yield” (p. 1162). Mrs. Harlowe has shown that she has successfully exerted her authority in the past, which leads us to ask why Mrs. Harlowe does not exert that same kind of maternal authority – authority that was being prescribed by social forces as the maternal right and obligation – at this crucial stage in her daughter’s life? In fact, why Mrs. Harlowe does not exercise her ‘sweet art … of conquering by seeming to yield’ to convince her family of the terrible wrongs they are committing against Clarissa is a fundamental question in the reading of Clarissa as a narrative of deficient motherhood.

Clarissa understands Mrs. Harlowe’s mixed feelings between what she perceives as her duty to her husband and her feelings of tenderness and pity for her daughter. She believes that her mother “may be brought over” (77) to her side and would help her if she could, but that she is stopped from doing so by the bullying tactics of the Harlowe men. She tells Anna: “How willingly would my dear mamma show kindness to me, were she permitted! None of this persecution should I labour under, I am sure, if that regard were paid to her prudence and fine understanding, which they so well deserve” (187). Clarissa believes that if her mother would “but exert that authority which the superiority of her fine talents gives her, all these family feuds might perhaps be crushed in their … beginnings” (54). Mrs. Harlowe’s maternal abdication is not lost on those who seek to take care of Clarissa. Later in the novel, Clarissa’s cousin, Colonel Morden, reproaches Mrs. Harlowe for her meek submission to her son’s threats to disown the family if she visits the now severely ill Clarissa and says, “what hearts of flint am I related to! … Are you, madam, to be taught by a son who has no bowels, to forget that you are a mother?” (p. 1324) When Clarissa is said to be attended by a friend who is described as being “as careful of her, as if she were her mother,” Colonel Morden responds, with a sneer, “and more careful too … or she is not careful at all!” (p. 1350)

The cause of Mrs. Harlowe’s failure to exercise her authority lies, in part, within a society in which men dominate in all areas of life. In marriage, in law, and in economics, men had the upper hand. The domineering, aggressive behaviour of the Harlowe men is the embodiment of patriarchal
control over the feminine, yet, at the same time, it is naturalized.\textsuperscript{45} It is intimated in the early stages of the novel that Mrs. Harlowe is subject to patriarchal victimization of some sort, and throughout the novel, she is accorded some leeway on that basis by Clarissa, Mrs. Howe, Aunt Hervey and, to a limited extent, even Anna. It soon becomes apparent however, that Mrs. Harlowe’s persistence in forcing such an undesirable match is excessive, and Mrs. Harlowe becomes as much a tyrant as her husband, her tyranny manifested, ironically, not by her assertion but by her abdication of maternal authority.\textsuperscript{46}

\textit{Conditional Maternal Love}

A ‘good woman’ in the eighteenth century was identified, primarily, as a ‘father’s daughter,’ a relationship based on paternal desire for obedience and possession. A daughter who failed in her duty to fulfill that desire lost her connection to her father, and with it, her identity.\textsuperscript{47} Mrs. Harlowe’s association with the patriarch also determines her identity – she is ‘wife’, equally ‘tradeable’ (as she was when she brought her father’s fortune into her own marriage) and expendable (as she will be if she does not do what is demanded of her – to extract Clarissa’s promise of marriage to Mr. Solmes). This weakened position of mothers, daughters, and maternal relatives is an insistent reminder that although women were agents of the process of accumulation of wealth, they were rarely its beneficiaries.

In light of her parents’ severe reaction to her disobedience, it is evident that Clarissa’s refusal to marry Mr. Solmes is her first and only refusal to obey her parents and that Clarissa’s relationship with her parents is based on her submission, and their expectations for her submission, to their wills. That said, Clarissa’s accounts reveal that she considers that she and her ‘dear mamma’ have shared a close and tender relationship in the past. Mrs. Harlowe addresses Clarissa with endearments, for example, such as “best child” and “best beloved of my heart” (89), and Clarissa tells Anna Howe that

\textsuperscript{45} Robert B. Shoemaker points out that violence was an accepted method of disciplining inferiors, whether they were servants or wives (1998, \textit{Gender in English Society 1650-1850}, Longman, London, p. 104). Also, Susan Staves notes how in court cases of the period, justices “resisted scrutinizing very closely” domestic cases in the belief that “each husband and father was in important ways to be the judge of what went on in his own family, and public justices disliked interfering with this jurisdiction” (1990, \textit{Married Women’s Separate Property in England, 1660-1833}, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, p. 228).

\textsuperscript{46} Bowers 1996, p. 200.

Mrs. Harlowe is “so excellent and so indulgent a mother” (54). That a tender relationship existed between mother and daughter before the novel opens is revealed through Clarissa’s expectations that her mother will take her part against the rest of the family and object to the unwanted marriage or, at least, object to the force of the family’s coercion. Clarissa’s expectations for her mother’s concern and support are the product of a series of beliefs that she has formulated and nurtured over the eighteen years of her life. Those expectations are revealed explicitly through Clarissa writing of her continued distress at her mother’s failure to listen to her, at her interruptions when she tries to reason with her, and at her protests against Clarissa writing to her.

Clarissa believes that her submission to her mother’s needs is her contribution to a relationship of reciprocal love, care, and understanding. In her letters to Anna, Clarissa reveals how she has taken on for her mother the roles of housekeeper and nurse. When Clarissa’s brother proposes that Clarissa should be removed to Scotland to manage his household (56), for example, Clarissa reveals that “my mamma intends to oppose [the suggestion] for her own sake; because, having relieved her … of the household cares they must again devolve upon her if I go” (56). Clarissa also relates how her mother relies upon her to act as her nurse, writing to Anna that, “My mamma has been very ill and would have no other nurse but me. I have not stirred from her beside, for she kept her bed, and two nights had the honour of sharing it with her” (54). Clarissa is not only of great practical use to her mother, she is also a great emotional support for her as a de facto marriage counsellor. Mrs. Harlowe consistently evokes the sense that the ‘hardships’ she suffers are directly related to her husband, a man who, throughout the novel, she refers to, in various guises, as a tyrant - as one who “will neither be prescribed to, nor entreated” (124), who has “no patience” (124), and who forces by “direction” (125). It is little wonder that Mrs. Harlowe should find comfort in her relationship with Clarissa, her “dear girl” (188), with whom she could:

repose all my griefs – sure of receiving from HER prudence, advice as well as comfort: and both insinuated in so humble, in so dutiful a manner, that it was impossible to take those exceptions which the distance of years and character between a mother and a daughter would, from any other daughter, have made one apprehensive of (584).

Mrs. Harlowe writes to Clarissa of the “uneasiness between your papa and me” and laments how Clarissa was “once all my comfort [and] made all my hardships tolerable” (124). She writes:

You know, my dear, what I every day forgo and undergo, for the sake of peace. Your papa is a very good man and means well; but he will not be controlled, nor yet persuaded. You have seemed to pity ME sometimes, that I am obliged to give up every point. Poor man! HIS reputation the less for it; MINE the greater; yet would I not have this credit, if I could help it, at so dear a rate to HIM and to MYSELF. You are a dutiful, a prudent and a WISE child ... you would not add, I am sure, to my trouble. You would not willfully break that peace which costs your mamma so much to preserve ... I charge you, on my blessing, that all this my truly maternal tenderness be not thrown away upon you ... On this one quarter of an hour depends the peace of my future life, the satisfaction of all the family (89).

Mrs. Harlowe’s reliance on Clarissa has created a relationship based on mutual dependency. Mrs. Harlowe depends on Clarissa for her ‘advice’ and ‘support,’ and Clarissa depends on her mother for love. As Mrs. Harlowe’s confidante, Clarissa takes on the responsibility for her mother’s marriage and her mother’s needs, and becomes increasingly confused by the connection she perceives to be between her obedience and her mother’s well-being. Clarissa construes their relationship to be one of shared love and responsibility, on the understanding that the more Clarissa does (as housekeeper or as nurse, for example), the more she offers (as sympathizer or counsellor, for example), and the more humble, obedient, and dutiful she is, the more she will be loved. Such a mindset has resulted in Clarissa being overly concerned with her mother’s well-being, as seen, for example, when, confined to her room and rejected by her mother for her ‘obstinacy,’ she writes:

I am extremely affected on my mamma’s account – more, I must needs say, than on my own – And indeed, all things considered, and especially that the measure she is engaged in (as I dare say it is) against her own judgment, she DESERVES more compassion than myself. Excellent woman! (112)

Even after her mother’s repeated rejections, Clarissa still worries that her “poor mama” is not well and blames herself that her own “reputed undutifulness has touched her [mother’s] heart” (327) and caused her ill health. Clarissa believes that her ‘undutifulness’ is directly linked to her mother’s love, a belief of which Mrs. Harlowe takes advantage by making her maternal love a condition of Clarissa’s submission to the family’s demands.

49 Frega 1998 and Barchas 1996.
According to Donnalee Frega, Mrs. Harlowe has effectively communicated to Clarissa a model for female behaviour that incorporates her insecurities, anxieties, fears, and hostilities, and Clarissa subsequently appropriates this model as her own.\(^{50}\) Within this “mirrored framework,” Clarissa is not able to conceive of herself beyond her mother’s needs or judgment. In her need to behave and perform according to her mother’s needs, Clarissa has an understanding of herself only in relation to her mother’s expectations of her and of her perceptions of herself as a loving and dutiful daughter.\(^{51}\) Indeed, whatever Clarissa says or does is interpreted as expressing something about the mother.\(^{52}\) The mirroring of mother and child operates unconsciously between the two, but its manifestations affect everyone around them. Others, for example, see Clarissa’s disobedience as Mrs. Harlowe’s disobedience: Mrs. Harlowe is “as much blamed and as much punished” (124) as Clarissa for being a “too indulgent … and too fond mother” (126).

While Clarissa is confined to her room, consistently bullied by her family, Mrs. Harlowe writes to her:

> You don’t know what I have suffered within these few weeks past; nor ever will be able to guess, till you come to be in my situation; which is that of a fond and indulgent mother, praying night and day, and struggling to preserve, against the attempts of more ungovernable spirits, the peace and union of her family (189).

Mrs. Harlowe increases her daughter’s distress by referring to herself always as the victim and dwelling on her own sufferings. She refers to herself being “as much blamed and as much punished” (124) as Clarissa, as “more innocent” than Clarissa (124), and as the “more unhappy” (231). Clarissa believes that her mother’s failure to help her is, in part, due to her mother’s conception of her duty; something of which Clarissa is well aware. She says, “there is not a worthier person in England than my mamma … I know not any family which lives up more to their duty, than the principals of ours” (249). Because Clarissa is not conforming to what she believes to be her daughterly duty to obey her parents, she sees that she has “unhappily offended” them (p. 1140) and that her mother has “suffered by [her] rashness” (p. 1337).

51 Michael F. Suarez argues that Clarissa is deeply disturbed at the loss of parental approval that has been so central to her own understanding of herself as a good and dutiful daughter (1996, 'Asserting the Negative: "Child" Clarissa and the Problem of the "Determined Girl,"' in Albert J. Rivero (ed.) 1996, New Essays on Samuel Richardson, St. Martin’s Press, New York, p. 69). I think that, because Clarissa identifies with her mother through their mirrored relationship, she is especially disturbed by her mother’s disapproval as it threatens her sense of a female self. 52 Frega 1998, p. 21.
Mrs. Harlowe’s sister, Clarissa’s Aunt Hervey, tells Clarissa that she “believes that this order is from [Mr. Harlowe] without consulting my mother upon it” (65). Mrs. Harlowe admits to Clarissa that she has been “put upon a harsh service; an unreasonable service” (96) in demanding this marriage, confessing that she has “undertaken this task, with some reluctance, because the man is not everything, and because I know you carry your notions of perfection in a man too high” (91). Yet, she continues to insist that “obedience is better than sacrifice” (89), and that Clarissa should, “to oblige us all, overcome a dislike” (188). One of Mrs. Harlowe’s main assertions is that Clarissa’s obedience is crucial not only to the peace of her own marriage, but to the happiness and honour of the family. In obvious sincere belief of this, Mrs. Harlowe becomes the chief spokesperson for the family and she voices the family’s demands through increasingly frightening threats. She applies to Clarissa’s sense of familial duty by telling her that, “on your single will … depends all our present happiness” (188). She applies to Clarissa’s sense of filial duty to her father, by appealing to her compassion with the threat that his life will be shortened by her undutifulness (109). She charges her with responsibility for her parents’ marriage, asserting that her compliance would “once more make us happy in you, and in one another” (189). Finally, she threatens her with the withdrawal of her and her father’s love. She tells her, “if you now at last comply … I shall then … give you the most tender proofs, how much I am your truly affectionate mother … You must resolve to have Mr. Solmes, or never to be looked upon to be our child” (189). However reluctant Mrs. Harlowe may initially have been to demand Clarissa’s submission, she comes to see it as the only thing that will bring “the peace of my future life, the satisfaction of all the family, and [Clarissa’s] own security from a man of violence [Lovelace]” (89).

When Clarissa refuses to submit, Mrs. Harlowe resorts to covert cruelty. Barraged by her mother’s threats, and distraught by her mother’s loyalty to her vicious brother, Clarissa remains silent. Mrs. Harlowe construes Clarissa’s silence as the sign of her acquiescence, “I see, my dear … that you are convinced. Now, my good child, now my Clary, do I love you! It shall not be known that you have argued with me at all. All shall be imputed to

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54 Clarissa writes that her mother has warned her that Mr. Harlowe’s “frequent gouty paroxysm (every fit more threatening that the former) gave him no extraordinary prospects either of worldly happiness, or of long days: that he hoped, that I, who had been supposed to have contributed to the lengthening of his father’s life, would not, by my disobedience, shorten his” (109).
that modesty which has ever so much distinguished you. You shall have the full merit of your resignation ... all your scruples, you see, have met with an indulgence truly maternal from me” (96). Clarissa is distraught by her mother’s misinterpretation of her silence and, in one of her few disparaging comments of her mother, she writes to Anna, “Did this seem to border upon cruelty ... in so indulgent a Mother? – it would be wicked ... to suppose my Mother capable of art – but she is put upon it; and obliged to take methods to which her heart is naturally above stooping; and all intended for my good” (97).

Clarissa’s excuses for her mother are valid in that Mrs. Harlowe is indeed ‘put upon’ by the family to force Clarissa to submit to their demands, and perhaps Mrs. Harlowe does believe that she wants the best for Clarissa by marrying her to Mr. Solmes and securing her “against a man so vile” as Lovelace (90). Yet, Mrs. Harlowe also believes that her daughter’s submission to the demands of the Harlowe men will ensure the stability of her own marriage. Appeasing the Harlowe men will free Mrs. Harlowe from whatever abuse she herself suffers under them. The concept of Mrs. Harlowe’s suffering is intimated by Clarissa in her observation that Mrs. Harlowe is “a most indulgent and sweet-tempered mother; but having to deal with violent spirits, she has too often forfeited that peace of mind which she so much prefers, by her over-concern to preserve it” (p. 1200). Certainly, Mrs. Harlowe is a victim of domestic tyranny that is never fully articulated; a point that Anna makes clear when she asks Clarissa, “What must have been [Mrs. Harlowe’s] treatment, to be thus subjugated?” (132)

The reader is never made aware of exactly what abuse Mrs. Harlowe suffers, yet, who knows what kind of abuse her husband, son, or brothers-in-law inflict upon her? Richardson could never bring himself to speak of Clarissa’s rape, for example, as anything other than a “black transaction” (883), and, through Clarissa, the “vilest of all outrages” (p. 1161). Is the abuse of Mrs. Harlowe another unspoken ‘black transaction?’ Did Richardson have the same squeamishness about, for example, domestic violence, or marital or familial rape?55 Whatever the cause, Mrs. Harlowe’s situation at home is one of forced and unwilling compliance, of “struggling ... against the attempts of ungovernable spirits” of her violent son and her demanding brothers-in-law

55 There was, of course, no concept of such a thing in eighteenth-century marriage law.
(189), and against the intimated threats of her passively despotic husband. Mrs. Harlowe intimates that she is abused in some way by her husband, referring to herself as being “punished” by him” (124); of her “hardships” (124); of having “suffered” (188); and of being at the total behest of a man who “will not be controlled, nor yet persuaded” (89). Richardson articulated in a private letter his belief that “fear, as well as love, is necessary, on the lady’s part, to make wedlock happy,” and it appears that this belief forms the foundation of his creation of the Harlowes’ marriage. Even though Mrs. Harlowe’s fear of her husband is never fully articulated or explained, her experience shows that she shares with Clarissa (and women in general) violation at the hands of men.

Mrs. Harlowe, Clarissa, and Female ‘Value’

Jealousy pervades Clarissa, the most obvious example of which is that demonstrated by Clarissa’s siblings - James and Arabella – of Clarissa. James is jealous of Clarissa’s favoured place in the family and of her inheritance (which he sees as rightfully his own) from their Grandfather. He seems to take sadistic pleasure in bullying and taunting his sister, suggestive perhaps of an incestuous lust for her. Arabella is also jealous of Clarissa, one reason certainly being that Clarissa is now the object of Lovelace’s amorous attentions instead of herself, and the other, for what she sees as Clarissa’s “air of superiority” (196). It is the notion of Clarissa’s ‘superiority’ that might prompt a question about Mrs. Harlowe’s possible jealousy of her daughter. Clarissa’s ‘superiority’ is the outward manifestation of her innate sense of self-worth - as a female and as an individual - and it is her sense of self-worth that enables her to refuse to marry a man she dislikes, even though her refusal threatens her role as dutiful daughter. To her family, Clarissa’s refusal is an expression of her sense of her own superiority, which

57 Critics who comment on the incestuous undertones of familial jealousy are Carol Houlihan Flynn 1982, Samuel Richardson: A Man of Letters, Princeton University Press, Princeton, NJ, p. 92; and John Stevenson 1981, ‘The Courtship of the Family: Clarissa and the Harlowes Once More,’ in ELH 48, pp. 757-777. The notion of James’ incestuous lust as being a significant reason for his torment of Clarissa is suggested, for example, in the BBC film version of Clarissa, in which James is shown to enjoy (and be aroused by) his imaginings of the sexual activity between Clarissa and Solmes with which he taunts Clarissa. In an interesting deviation from the novel itself, but in keeping with the undercurrent of incestuous desire apparent in the novel, brother and sister - James and Arabella Harlowe - are shown in the film to have incestuous desire for each other, which intimates their shared sexual pleasure in imagining their ‘pure’ sister sexualized and abused. Robert Bierman (Director) 1996, Clarissa, BBC TV Production, Sentinel Films.
becomes the source of the family’s jealousy, and of the frustration that provokes them to more insistent demands and punishments. To Mrs. Harlowe, Clarissa’s superiority is painfully reminiscent of the value she once placed on herself and of the moral ascendancy she once enjoyed over the rest of her family.

It is noteworthy that the value Clarissa places on herself – her ‘superiority’ in that sense – was not universally admired or understood by readers of the novel. Richardson commented in a letter to one of his most ardent readers, Lady Bradshaigh, that “half [Clarissa’s] own sex” have been “set … against her” because her “life, manners, and maxims … are affronts,” thereby implying an irreducible distance between his heroine’s moral bearing and that of her female “misreaders.” An ‘irreducible distance’ does exist in the novel between Clarissa and all the other characters, due undoubtedly to her air of superiority. Martha Koehler argues that Clarissa is the paradox of a model who cannot be imitated, and that her role as exemplar of her sex precludes the possibility of any genuine connection between women. It is this notion that is at the core of my argument that Mrs. Harlowe is jealous of her daughter, her jealousy – largely unconscious I would suggest – based on her recognition of her daughter’s justified sense of self-worth, and thus one motive for her to endorse the rest of the family’s cruel demand.

Mrs. Harlowe’s recognition of both Clarissa’s superiority and of the loss of her own value is the catalyst that precludes any further genuine connection between mother and daughter, and the basis of Mrs. Harlowe’s unconscious jealousy of her daughter. In her first letter for example, Mrs. Harlowe upbraids Clarissa for her “delicacy” which, she argues, “is not to be quite so much regarded, as I had once thought it deserved to be” (188), and reproaches her with the curious comment that, “I hope you won’t put such a personal value upon yourself” (189). Mrs. Harlowe’s use of the term ‘value’ modified as it is by ‘personal’ is reflective of her understanding of herself, of Clarissa, and of all women, as commodities in a mercantile or economic sense; of ‘value’ to men only for the economic advantages they bring to marriage. Mrs. Harlowe’s ‘value’ to the family was, as Clarissa discloses, an economic one. The family’s social ambitions are funded by her mother’s

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58 Martha J. Koehler 2005, Models of Reading: Paragons and Parasites in Richardson, Burney, and Laclos, Bucknell University Press, Lewisburg, p. 31, citing a letter from Richardson to Lady Bradshaigh, March 1751.
59 Koehler 2005, p. 77.
fortune; Mrs. Harlowe was the “one who had brought into the family means, which [the family] know so well the value of” (82), for it was she, “who first and last brought a still larger fortune into the family than [Clarissa] will carry to Mr. Solmes” (188).

The Harlowe men’s desire for Clarissa’s marriage to Mr. Solmes is in pursuit of “family aggrandizement” (82), the achievement of which will be of no economic, social, symbolic, or personal benefit to either Mrs. Harlowe or Clarissa. Mrs. Harlowe recognizes that Clarissa not only commands value in an economic sense, she also commands value as a desirable object (for she has less wealth than Mrs. Harlowe had and Mr. Solmes still wishes to marry her). That Clarissa values herself enough to reject a wealthy suitor and to defy her parents’ wishes signifies Clarissa’s sense of self-worth (outwardly manifested as superiority), which highlights Mrs. Harlowe’s own devalued and inferior position in the family. Although Mrs. Harlowe married a suitor of her choice, she is less valued by a man of her choosing than Clarissa is by a suitor whom she [Clarissa] hates. So, despite submitting to the wills of the Harlowe men, Mrs. Harlowe is aware that she no longer carries any value within the family structure. With her fortune and aristocratic heritage absorbed into the bourgeois framework, Mrs. Harlowe’s value has been absorbed into the patriarchal family, and any value she may command within the family is now based only on her acquiescence in, and execution of, the needs and demands of the family.

In what may be seen as a disturbing analogy, Mrs. Harlowe is no more valued by the men in her family than the brothel keeper and Lovelace’s accomplice, Mrs. Sinclair, is by Lovelace and the men who pay for her services. In what is perhaps a far-reaching and disturbing comparison, both Mrs. Harlowe and Mrs. Sinclair share a similar relationship to patriarchy in that they both attempt to trade Clarissa in some form of patriarchal exchange. Mrs. Harlowe desires and attempts to trade Clarissa in exchange for the ‘peace’ she will enjoy when the patriarch’s (Mr. Harlowe’s) demands are met, and Mrs. Sinclair desires and attempts to trade Clarissa’s body in exchange for
the patriarch’s (Lovelace’s) continued favour. Some critics have seen the connection between the two women. Robert E. Erickson comments on a connection between Mrs. Harlowe and Mrs. Sinclair, suggesting that “it is Clarissa’s fate to be forced to deal with a disguised bawd long before she meets Mother Sinclair.” In their discussions of Mrs. Sinclair, Tassie Gwilliam calls her “the madam disguised as dowager [who] deforms maternity,” and Terry Castle considers her a “more nightmarish version of Mrs. Harlowe, the original non-mothering mother in Clarissa.” However a connection may be construed, it seems possible to suggest that Mrs. Harlowe and Mrs. Sinclair are connected to each other and to the patriarchal order as representatives of women’s assimilation into patriarchy through their participation and perpetration of a system that commodifies women. Clarissa is aware of Mrs. Harlowe’s marginal position and considers the position of women in marriage generally to be one by which she is either ruined or deprived of all power, and it is with true conviction of marriage as inimical to female autonomy that Clarissa begs to “live single with all my heart” (139). With her fortune and her grandfather’s estate, Clarissa has the means to do so, but her mother and her family see her single status as the cause for “uneasiness” (189) and continue to demand she marry Mr. Solmes.

Clarissa has beauty, youth, breeding, and a sizeable fortune; everything that Mrs. Harlowe once had, and much of which she surrendered in marriage. Mrs. Harlowe, Clarissa says, has “purchased” her value in the family not only with the wealth she brought into the marriage but, more significantly, with her “compliances” (82). By attempting always to comply with the wishes of her family, Mrs. Harlowe has lost their respect, a point that Clarissa makes of

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61 Erickson 1986, p. 113.

her mother early in the narrative when she says:

[I]t is my opinion that had she been of a temper that would have borne less, she would have had ten times less to bear than she has had... I am sometimes tempted to think that we may make the world allow for and respect us as we please, if we can but be sturdy in our wills, and set out accordingly (54).

Devoid now of all sense of self-worth, Mrs. Harlowe knows only one form of womanhood: submission in marriage of wealth, title, self-respect, and 'value' and, as such, Mrs. Harlowe cannot provide a good model for motherhood or womanhood. In Mrs. Harlowe's beleaguered position as both victim and perpetrator of patriarchy, she finally has no sense of her self as either valued or loved, and consequently lacks the ability to value her “extraordinary” daughter.63

The concern for female 'value' impels both Clarissa’s sense of superiority and Mrs. Harlowe’s jealousy and their relationship of mutual dependency is fundamental to Mrs. Harlowe's attempts to coerce and manipulate her daughter.64 Mrs. Harlowe’s jealousy of Clarissa finds its source in this process of identification that becomes more insistent the more Clarissa resists. Mrs. Harlowe seeks to devalue Clarissa as she herself has been devalued, and she desires Clarissa’s continued dependence on her love that marriage to a despised husband would ensure. Either way, Mrs. Harlowe ‘keeps’ Clarissa in a relationship of codependence, through their shared misery under patriarchal abuse and through their mutual love for each other that precludes others.

Clarissa’s Death
Following her escape from the family’s abuse with Lovelace, and her family’s subsequent denial of her, Clarissa frantically looks for "something paternal and maternal in everyone ... to supply to herself the father and mother her dutiful heart pants after" (p. 1082). In ‘losing’ her parents, Clarissa has lost the source of meaning by which she has only ever understood herself, that of

63 Erickson 1986, p. 114.
64 Nancy Chodorow argues that mothers establish boundaries with their sons but not with their daughters, since they cannot help identifying with the same-sex child. Sons learn to separate from their mothers and become autonomous, but daughters never do, and the mother-daughter relationship becomes one of ambivalent codependence that repeats from generation to generation: the source of what she argues to be the reproduction of mothering, whereby women’s mothering reinforces and perpetuates women's relative powerlessness (1978, The Reproduction of Mothering: Psychoanalysis and the Sociology of Gender, University of California Press, Berkeley, p. 31).
a dutiful and loving daughter, and she turns to her aunt, uncles, friends, and finally even strangers for the “unquestionable love” (p. 1162) she felt she once had from her parents. Clarissa learns that the parental love she thought was unquestionable is illusory and that no such love exists on earth. Subjected to tyranny and abuse, Clarissa can no longer express, or be the recipient of, the kind of love she desires and needs. She therefore looks to the only future she can envisage - a future with God: death represents not only redemption for her tortured self, but also her attainment, through communion with God, of unquestionable and unconditional love:

I am persuaded, as much as that, I am now alive, that I shall not long live. The strong sense I have ever had of my fault, the loss of my reputation, my disappointments, the determined resentment of my friends, aiding the barbarous usage I have met with where I least deserved it, have seized upon my heart: seized upon it, before it was so well fortified by religious considerations as I hope it now is. [...] God will soon dissolve my substance; and bring me to death, and to the house appointed for all the living (p. 1118).

It is clear that Richardson considers Clarissa’s desire for and achievement of communion with God through death as his heroine’s triumph, but interpretation of it as such is problematic. As Angus Ross points out, Clarissa cannot will her death, for that would be tantamount to suicide, which, for a paragon, is impossible.65 In order to avoid any such suggestion, Richardson makes Clarissa’s death an act that connotes the divine and the mythic. Clarissa must, and does, emerge, according to Robert Erickson, as a person of “godlike influence, armed with the power of outraged innocence and moral condemnation.”66 It should not be overlooked however, that although Richardson certainly intended Clarissa’s death to be representative of human transcendence to the divine and mythic, there is the very real sense, throughout the novel, of human suffering. Clarissa is a young woman who is consistently manipulated, disrespected, violated, and brutalized by those who should love and protect her, a tragic figure who pays a penalty so greatly out of proportion to her offence that she becomes a figure of tragedy rather than a mere object lesson.

Richardson impels the reader to view Clarissa’s death as triumphant affirmation, but it is not immediately obvious just what it affirms. As Anne Robinson Taylor remarks, Clarissa “has been called so many times a mythic

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figure, but it must also be said that she is a very terrible one,” for Clarissa’s selfhood, if such it can be called, is obtained only through self-annihilation. To Richardson however, it seems clear, Clarissa’s death is complete triumph in its affirmation of vindicated purity. In the Postscript, he writes:

And who that are in earnest in their profession of Christianity but will rather envy than regret the triumphant death of CLARISSA, whose piety from her early childhood; whose diffusive charity; whose steady virtue; whose Christian humility; whose forgiving spirit; whose meekness; whose resignation, HEAVEN only could reward? (p. 1498)

Many critics have commented on what they see as Richardson’s heavy-handed use of Christian allegory in the manner of Clarissa’s death. Richardson makes clear his intention for Clarissa’s “triumphant death” to be viewed as her transcendence from the material world to the religious sublime, where Heaven is the only reward for her earthly goodness. Clarissa’s declaration in her Will that she dies “in perfect charity with all the world” (p. 1413), and Richardson’s subsequent assertion of her “forgiving spirit” (p. 1498) suggest that a great part of what makes Clarissa’s transcendence possible is her supreme act of forgiveness of all those involved in her tragedy.

In order that readers should not interpret Clarissa’s sufferings as being the result of her own doing, Richardson ensures that Clarissa dies pure of heart, in a state of forgiveness with the world. To challenge or blame anyone for her demise would preclude the virtual sainthood Richardson creates for her. Yet, in order to consolidate Richardson’s didactic message, Clarissa must die in full knowledge of her persecutors in order to achieve two objectives. First, Clarissa’s forgiveness demonstrates that she has learned Richardson’s lesson that she should not have disobeyed her parents and run away with Lovelace. Second, it makes her into a paragon from whom the other characters ‘learn’ the error of their ways. Richardson achieves his purpose by conflating these two aims. It is possible, however, that there exists a gap (Paula Backscheider refers to it as a ‘liminal’ gap) between Clarissa’s forgiveness of her mother and Richardson’s didactic purpose for mothers.

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Just as Richardson subtly undermines Mrs. Harlowe’s role as Clarissa’s mother in his description of her at the beginning of the novel, there is the suggestion at the end of the novel that he undermines her again. I propose that, in order to fulfill his didactic purpose to instruct mothers how not to behave, Richardson suggests that Mrs. Harlowe is more to blame for Clarissa’s tragedy by subtly, but deliberately, making Clarissa’s forgiveness of her mother more *abstract* than her stated forgiveness of any other character. This is not to say that Clarissa does not fully forgive her mother, it is rather to say that Richardson does not forgive the mother because she exists in the novel as Richardson’s primary object lesson.

In *Clarissa’s Ciphers: Meaning and Disruption in Richardson’s ‘Clarissa’* (1982), Terry Castle suggests that Richardson was insecure about assuming the role of narrator and cites a letter by Richardson in which he writes of his lack of assurance in making direct assertions of “authority” as narrator. Of *Clarissa*, Richardson writes:

> Some may have wished that the Story had been told in the usual narrative way of telling stories designed to amuse and divert, and not in Letters written by the respective Persons whose history is given in them. The author thinks he ought not to prescribe to the taste of others; but imagined himself at liberty to follow his own. He perhaps mistrusted his talents for the narrative kind of writing.

The idea that Richardson was insecure about claiming narratorial authority is a useful starting point for consideration of the relationship between Richardson’s assertions of narratorial authority and his didactic concerns. In my reading of Clarissa’s Will, Richardson uses *covert* narratorial authority to assign to Mrs. Harlowe blame for Clarissa’s tragedy in order to enforce his maternal lesson.

Richardson’s creation of ambiguous messages in Clarissa’s Will concerning Mrs. Harlowe suggests that he was motivated more by his didactic impulses than by his spiritual concerns. In a private letter, Richardson blames Mrs. Harlowe, the “too timid Mother [who] tamely deserted the just Cause of her

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69 I deliberately use the term ‘stated forgiveness.’ Clarissa does not mention forgiveness of Mrs. Sinclair, for example, and I take this to mean that Richardson omitted her deliberately to show that Clarissa cannot forgive her.

Child,” but he could not allow his heroine to reciprocate in kind, for she exists in the novel as a model of exemplary, virtuous womanhood. For Clarissa to blame her mother for failing her would be antipathetic to Richardson’s dual purposes, to teach young women how to behave and to demonstrate Clarissa’s superior humanity. On the other hand, to have Mrs. Harlowe forgiven for her part in her daughter’s tragedy would be antipathetic to Richardson’s purpose to teach mothers how not to behave. An interpretation such as this is the result, undoubtedly, of reading against the grain, yet, the careful wording of Clarissa’s Will suggests that Mrs. Harlowe’s absolution is the site of challenge. Just as I see the potential for a ‘liminal gap’ in the novel around the interpretation of Clarissa’s death, between a suicide-like death (brought on by self-starvation) and divine intervention, I also see the potential for an ironic gap between authorial and narratorial purpose.

In the knowledge that she will probably not see any of her family or friends again, Clarissa prepares a Will, a thorough document that she uses as the means both to communicate her forgiveness of those who were involved in her tragedy, and to dispose of her personal possessions to those she loves. Against this framework of forgiveness and love, Clarissa does not write that she forgives her mother, nor does she bestow directly upon her any personal item or keepsake of herself. Clarissa’s forgiveness of those who abused her is evident in her Will. She states clearly, for example, that she “most sincerely forgive[s] Mr. Lovelace for all the wrongs he has done [her]” (p. 1413). She demonstrates forgiveness to her father and siblings by bestowing on him directly, and on them indirectly, “all the real estates in or to which [she has] any claim” (p. 1413). She takes particular – and rather peculiar – care in the disposal of all her possessions to relatives, friends, acquaintances and servants. To favoured friends and family, she bestows keepsakes of herself. To her “kind and much-valued cousin” Miss Dolly Hervey, for example, she bestows her library of books and her musical instruments (p. 1415), and to her “worthy cousin William Morden” she bestows a gold-framed miniature of herself and a diamond ring “in remembrance of a kinswoman who always honoured him as much as he loved her” (p. 1415).

To her mother, Clarissa indirectly bestows two items, both on the proviso that she ask the primary beneficiary for them. Clarissa bestows upon her

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71 Richardson 1964, p. 200.
aunt Hervey, for example, a “whole-length picture [of Clarissa] in the Vandyke taste” with the proviso, “except my mother shall think fit to keep it herself” (p. 1416). To her friend Anna Howe, “the sister of my heart,” she bestows, among various things, a full-length drawing of herself, her best diamond ring, and, unless “my good mother chooses to keep back any one piece,” (my emphasis) all her finished and framed pieces of needlework (p. 1416). Both these items - Clarissa’s portrait and her framed needlework – had been “taken down and thrown in [her] closet … to perish” (509) when the family believed her to have made a “wicked … shameful elopement” (509) with Lovelace. At that time, Clarissa’s father had “imprecated on his knees a fearful curse upon,” renouncing her “for ever” (509-510). That these items are re-introduced at such a crucial point in the novel – and in such a bizarre way - is surely of some significance. Perhaps Richardson inserts these items as symbolic reminders to the family (and the reader) of the family’s part in Clarissa’s tragedy and of the extraordinary act that Clarissa performs in her forgiveness of them. It might be considered, too, how these specific items would have an even greater impact on the guilt-ridden mother. As visual and tactile representations of her daughter, these items would be constant reminders to Mrs. Harlowe of the daughter she loved and betrayed.

To extend this argument, I also see Clarissa’s wishes for the disposal of the family jewellery as representative of Richardson’s political project to demonstrate the extent to which patriarchal laws devalue women and mothers. Clarissa bestows her jewels acquired through the paternal line to “any of my family [who] choose to have them” (p. 1419). The jewellery Clarissa has acquired through the maternal line, the “diamond necklace, solitaire and buckles … presented by my mother’s uncle Sir Josias Brookland” (p. 1419), however, she wills to be sold – outside of the family - to cover the uses of her Will (1419) (my emphasis). In a far-reaching analogy, jewellery is aligned with women by way of their beauty and their economic value. Similarly, women, too, are commodities to be traded through marriage, as they are valued only for their beauty (in virtue and obedience) and economic value (in wealth and social standing), both of which are appropriated by patriarchy. In a more poignant reading, the jewels from the maternal line that will be sold to pay for Clarissa’s funeral expenses can be seen as a form of compensation paid by the mother for the guilt incurred by her daughter’s death.
In this abstract sense, the Will represents the key to the pattern of allusion of deficient motherhood that haunts the novel. Richardson designs the Will so that it enables Clarissa to make known her understanding of her mother’s part in her tragedy and, simultaneously, to maintain a virtuous, forgiving, and transcendent air. From her early lament as a self-described “poor distressed child” (258) to her frantic search for “finding out something paternal and maternal in everyone ... to supply herself the father and mother her dutiful heart pants after!” (p. 1082) Clarissa finally sees herself as an orphan (p. 1275), acknowledging that she truly is “nobody’s” (p. 1413).

It is important to Richardson’s purpose that Mrs. Harlowe acknowledge her maternal crimes. Even though she appears to blame the family for Clarissa’s death when she cries, “We must for ever be disturbed for those acts of unkindness to so sweet a child” (p. 1396), she blames herself for her passivity: “I have been too passive, much too passive in this case! - The temporary quiet I have been so studious all my life to preserve has cost me everlasting disquiet!” (p. 1396). In what may be seen as irony indeed, Mrs. Harlowe is shown, finally, to have some influence on her husband at the reading of Clarissa’s Will:

> the unhappy Mother, being supported by the two Uncles, influenced the afflicted Father to over-rule all his Son’s objections [to Clarissa’s Will], and to direct a literal observation of the Will; and at the same time to give up all the sums to which he was impowered by it to reimburse himself; as also to take upon himself to defray the funeral expences (p. 1423).

Mr. and Mrs. Harlowe are “far from being happy or easy in their reflections upon their own conduct,” and Mrs. Harlowe lives for only two and a half years “after the much-lamented death of her excellent daughter” (p. 1489). Both parents are said to have “comforted themselves” in their last hours before death, “that they should be restored to their BLESSED daughter, as they always (from the time that they were acquainted with her happy exit) called her” (p. 1489).

The Eighteenth-Century Reader’s Perspective

The response of his readers was important to Richardson, and he repeatedly corrected and revised Clarissa in efforts to influence their judgments. He was horrified to discover, for example, that some of his readers misconstrued his intentions, especially with regard to the main characters, Clarissa and Lovelace. Where Richardson had intended to create a paragon of female
integrity and purity in Clarissa, for example, some readers charged her with prudery, and where he had created a libertine of demonic proportions in the character of Lovelace, some readers found him attractive.\textsuperscript{72}

Carol Houlihan Flynn says that modern-day readers and critics have “an often adversarial relationship ... with this novel,”\textsuperscript{73} one reason being, undoubtedly, confusion over Mrs. Harlowe’s maternal behaviour. It may be true that mothering practices are different now from the eighteenth century, and in this regard, care must be taken not to assess Mrs. Harlowe’s maternity against our own expectations of maternal behaviour. It is therefore useful, where possible, to examine the critiques of readers of the period.

While we can never know exactly what all types of readers thought or believed about either Mrs. Harlowe’s maternal behaviour, or the novel itself, there exists a copy of the first edition of \textit{Clarissa} (1747-48) - heavily annotated, corrected, and revised by an eighteenth-century aristocratic female reader, Lady Bradshaigh, one of Richardson’s (and \textit{Clarissa’s}) most ardent and diligent readers. Richardson had an ongoing dialogue with many of his female readers, but a particularly rewarding and auspicious one with Lady Bradshaigh, whose notes and annotations provide important clues to ideas about eighteenth-century expectations for motherhood through her reading of Mrs. Harlowe.

In her study, \textit{The Annotations in Lady Bradshaigh’s Copy of ‘Clarissa,’} Janine Barchas lists and comments upon the hundreds of annotations hand-written by Lady Bradshaigh in her personal copy of the novel. From corrections of phraseology to criticisms of plot and character, Lady Bradshaigh made some significant changes to Richardson’s text, to the extent that she “partially re-author[ed] \textit{Clarissa} in the course of her active reading”\textsuperscript{74} by making suggestions that became the basis of changes Richardson made for his revised publication in 1751. Lady Bradshaigh is not representative of a ‘typical’ eighteenth-century reader, since she speaks from a highly privileged vantage point, but her comments – and Richardson’s counter-comments – suggest that she was representative of the readership to whom the novel was addressed. Barchas cites as one example of this Richardson’s underscoring -

\textsuperscript{74} Barchas 1998, p. 30.
in Lady Bradshaigh’s personal copy – of Clarissa’s line “I am really very much discomposed,” and his comments alongside, “Dear Ladies, pity her!” Barchas argues that Richardson invokes a broader audience by referring to ‘Dear Ladies,’ for example, and not ‘Dear Lady,’ thereby articulating his belief that Lady Bradshaigh was standing in for a wider female readership, a representative function that is sustained throughout the marginalia.75

Lady Bradshaigh’s comments reveal that she condemns Mrs. Harlowe’s maternal conduct most emphatically because Mrs. Harlowe does not assert her elevated class position, as the daughter of an aristocrat, to defend her daughter against the greed and social pretensions of the middle class; nor does she exercise appropriate maternal authority to protect her daughter from unreasonable familial demands. To Lady Bradshaigh, Mrs. Harlowe violates the values of her noble birthright that her wealth and status should have enabled her to preserve and exercise. Mrs. Harlowe is “cowardly and mean spirited” because, on this reading, her aristocratic birth allows her the freedom to act virtuously. In the novel, Anna Howe comments that Mrs. Harlowe has “long behaved unworthy of her birth” and is consequently, “the less to be pitied” (133). Lady Bradshaigh, in agreement, comments alongside, “I cannot pity her.”76 Indeed, for Lady Bradshaigh, Mrs. Harlowe’s maternal delinquency serves as a paradigm of bourgeois greed and tyranny; a point she makes when commenting that Mrs. Harlowe “might be born a Harlowe a Tyranic Harlowe.”77 Mrs. Harlowe’s passivity and her failure to exert her proper maternal authority are, according to Lady Bradshaigh, tantamount to active collusion in Clarissa’s abuse. Lady Bradshaigh considers Mrs. Harlowe “the worst person in the family” because she has no motive to behave as she does to her child, but is driven by “cowardice, and with great cruelty to her child.”78

Janine Barchas also refers to another eighteenth-century female reader who comments on Mrs. Harlowe’s motherhood. In her Remarks on Clarissa (1749), Sarah Fielding presents her comments as those of a fictional group of readers. While Fielding comments that “it was unanimously agreed” by the

75 Barchas 1998, p. 18.
76 Barchas 1998, p. 29.
77 Barchas 1998, p. 69, p. 29 and p. 29.
78 Barchas 1998, p. 28.
group that Mrs. Harlowe is to blame for Clarissa’s tragedy, the view was expressed by one member of the ‘group’ that Mrs. Harlowe is prevented from exercising her maternal authority because she, like Clarissa, is subject to the patriarchal authority of the Harlowe men, and remarks:

To preserve any Charity in censuring her, I think it should be considered, how much a Woman must be embarrassed, who has for many Years accustomed herself to obey the very Looks of another, where a Point is peremptorily insisted on, which, to comply with, must fall her to the Heart... And perhaps she flatter’d herself, that she might gain more Influence by seeming to comply, than if she had attempted absolutely to resist the Storm gathering in her Family. And this I think, the many Hints she gives, that if she was left to herself, it would be otherwise, is full Proof of.

Although Mrs. Harlowe is largely condemned by these eighteenth-century readers for her transgressions of class and maternal authority, the view is expressed that Mrs. Harlowe would be a better mother if she did not have the Harlowe men terrorizing her. That Mrs. Harlowe is dislocated from her naturally virtuous state is intimated throughout the novel by various characters as they express sentiments on Mrs. Harlowe’s potential for maternal goodness. Clarissa says to Lovelace, “you know not, sir, half the excellencies of my dear mamma! And what a kind heart she has, when it is left to follow its own impulses” (695); Aunt Hervey suggests that Mrs. Harlowe “is obliged to act a part entirely contrary to her inclinations” (p. 1259); and even Lovelace sees Mrs. Harlowe as being “faultless [as a mother], had she not been [Mr. Harlowe’s] wife” (145).

“Mamma” Norton and Richardson’s Promotion of Maternal Breastfeeding

The relationship that provides Clarissa with her most satisfying sense of a mother-daughter bond and the spiritual support she needs is with her nurse, Mrs. Norton, Richardson’s representation of ideal motherhood in the novel. Even Mrs. Harlowe recognizes Mrs. Norton’s superlative maternal role, established by her breastfeeding. She says to Mrs. Norton, “Many of [Clarissa’s] excellencies were owing to yourself; and with the milk you gave her, you gave her what no other nurse in the world could give her” (584), and even refers to her at one point as being Clarissa’s “more natural Mother” (p. 1405). The fact that Mrs. Norton breast-fed Clarissa is imperative to Richardson’s didactic purpose and to his political agenda. His didactic

purpose is accomplished through his creation of a more natural bond, established through breastfeeding, between wet-nurse and child than between mother and child, and his political agenda – that of validating middle-class and maternal ideology – is served by creating mothers that epitomize the social classes and their maternal habits. As the breastfeeding mother, Mrs. Norton is representative of the selfless, virtuous, affectionate, domestic, and ideal middle-class mother.

Yet, Mrs. Norton does not fall easily into the social hierarchy of the ‘middle class,’ particularly when assessed against the model for the middle class represented by the Harlowes. In the first place, Mrs. Norton is a wet nurse, an occupation for women who earn money by selling their milk, and a role most often associated with the working class. Moreover, her economic situation is an indicator of her lower station. Clarissa says of Mrs. Norton that she is "a woman deserving of all consideration for her wisdom, and everybody thinking so, but who, not being wealthy enough to have due weight in a point against which she has given her opinion, and which they seem bent upon carrying, is restrained from visiting here, and even from corresponding with me" (82). Because Mrs. Norton is not “wealthy enough” (that is, she is not as wealthy as the Harlowe family) she is deemed by the controlling members of the Harlowe family to be of a lower social status and therefore subject to their orders.

It is, however, to Mrs. Norton that Clarissa turns as she starts to detach herself from Mrs. Harlowe. Clarissa says, “Surely you are mine own Mother; and, by some unaccountable mistake, I must have been laid to a family, that having newly found out, or at least suspected, the imposture, cast me from their hearts, with the indignation that such a discovery will warrant” (986). Later, Clarissa writes to “my dear mamma Norton [from] one who loves and honours you more than she can express” (pp. 1200-1201). By distancing herself from Mrs. Harlowe, and with an added maturity acquired throughout her ordeal, Clarissa starts to see her mother in a more dispassionate light. There comes a point, much later in the narrative, when she no longer even wishes to be reunited with her family and, apart from her father’s retracting his curse and granting a last blessing upon her, asserts that she desires and needs nothing more from it.

81 Bowers 1999, p. 142.
82 It should also be noted that wet-nursing - as a practice and choice – was certainly frowned upon by this stage of the century.
No longer deferential to, or anxious for, her mother, Clarissa writes into her Will Mrs. Norton’s central maternal role, thereby conclusively displacing the daughterly devotion she once had for Mrs. Harlowe to her “mamma” Norton:

I bequeath to my ever-valued friend Mrs. Judith Norton, to whose piety and care, seconding the piety and care of my ever-honoured and excellent mother, I owe morally speaking the qualifications which for eighteen years of my life made me beloved and respected, the full sum of six hundred pounds [and] also...thirty guineas for mourning for her and for her son my foster-brother (p. 1415).

Although Clarissa aligns the two mother figures by way of their “piety and care,” Mrs. Norton is shown to be the more natural mother than Mrs. Harlowe. Mrs. Norton, who has been subtly displayed throughout the novel as a strong and valued maternal figure, becomes, in the Will, the archetypal ‘good’ mother; the mother who consistently displays those maternal characteristics idealized as the fundamental characteristics of maternal excellence - maternal breast-feeding, constant maternal supervision, and moral guidance.

In her Will, Clarissa consolidates Mrs. Norton’s maternal position in several ways. First, she refers to Mrs. Norton’s son as her own “foster-brother.” Second, she makes a touching bequest to Mrs. Norton of a book of meditations because “it is written all with my own hand.” Lastly, she leaves to Mrs. Norton the management of her fund for the poor because Mrs. Norton “knows my whole mind in this particular” (pp. 1418-9). Clarissa’s request that “my dear Mrs. Norton” should pass the “remainder of her days” at Grove House, and her admission that she (Clarissa) “had once thought to have been very happy there with her” (p. 1414), emphasizes Mrs. Harlowe’s loss. If Clarissa had been allowed to live the single life for which she had begged, she would be sharing her life not with Mrs. Harlowe, but with “mamma” Norton.

Mrs. Norton appears to fail Clarissa when she does not attend her on her deathbed, yet it is relevant to Richardson’s purpose to consider that the reason that Mrs. Norton is not at Clarissa’s side is that she is nursing her own child, her son, through illness. In showing Mrs. Norton fulfilling her maternal obligations to her biological rather than substitute child, Richardson adds yet another layer of nuance to the comparison between the two mothers.
Another distinction between the two ‘mothers’ that is critical to Richardson’s didactic purpose is their opposing spiritual and secular concerns. Richardson observes that Christianity is “an authority ... not of the greatest weight with ... modern critics” (Clarissa, Postscript, p. 1495), the truth of which he demonstrates in the novel by showing the Harlowe family as lacking the spiritual framework that should inform their decisions and authority. Mrs. Harlowe is motivated throughout by secular rather than spiritual concerns and therefore demonstrates that she has no higher order than patriarchy to inform her judgments. Conversely, Mrs. Norton is one of the few characters in the novel who exhibits behaviour commensurate with true Christian principles. Because it is she, and not Mrs. Harlowe, who has been Clarissa’s moral and spiritual teacher, the distance between the values of mother and daughter is the more pronounced. It is through Mrs. Norton’s teachings that Clarissa has a spiritual sense of her own self-worth that enables her to resist the demands of her family.

Richardson’s portrayal of the wet nurse as a loving and tender lifelong presence and a positive maternal influence is a testament to the value Richardson himself places on what he saw as the fundamental precepts of maternal excellence, particularly those of maternal breastfeeding, moral teaching, and spiritual guidance through Christian doctrine. Mrs. Norton exists as one of Richardson’s excellent mothers, a member of the paradigm for excellent motherhood that he promoted in two other novels: Pamela Volume Two (1751) and Sir Charles Grandison (1753-4). In these novels, mothers are made excellent by their commitment to maternal breastfeeding.

In the more-than-usual didactic novel, Pamela Volume Two, Richardson addresses the issue of maternal breastfeeding with great attention to its social and sexual context. He pits the excellent mother’s view of maternal breastfeeding, as espoused by the bourgeois Pamela, against the sexualized male’s view espoused by Pamela’s husband, the gentleman, Mr. B. In the novel, Pamela waxes lyrical about maternal breastfeeding, insisting that, “a mother ought, if she can ... be the nurse to her own children,” and that it is “the natural duty of a mother ... a divine duty.” Mr. B. refuses to allow Pamela to breastfeed their child, however, because he fears she will be less sexually attractive to him. He says:

My fondness for your personal graces, and the laudable, and, I will say, honest pleasure, I take in that easy genteel form, which every body admires in you, as first sight, oblige me to declare, that I can by no means consent to sacrifice these to the carelessness into which I have seen very nice ladies sink, when they became nurses.\(^{84}\)

Pamela succumbs to Mr. B’s demands and hires a wet nurse to breastfeed their son. Although Richardson clearly wanted to promote maternal breastfeeding, the desired outcome – that of Pamela breastfeeding her own child – is shown to be impossible because the husband does not allow it.

In his last novel, *Sir Charles Grandison* (1753-4), Richardson worked to resolve such conflict, and exhibited his understanding that, in order for the patriarch to allow his wife to breastfeed, he must himself have a positive experience of it. Richardson demonstrates this precept in a scene in which a husband’s response to the sight of his wife breastfeeding their baby is not just positive but positively rapturous:

Never was a man in greater rapture. For Lady Gertrude had taught him to wish that a mother would be a mother: He threw himself at my feet, clasping me and the little varlet together in his arms. Brute! Said I, will you smother my Harriet – I was half-ashamed of my tenderness – Dear-est, dear-est, dear-est Lady G – Shaking his head, between every dear and est, every muscle of his face working; how you transport me! – Never, never, never, saw I so delightful a sight!\(^{85}\)

The ordinary maternal function is developed into a beguiling vignette; an activity of shared tenderness between husband and wife rather than one of shared necessity between (any) lactating woman and child. The conflation of marital tenderness and husbandly devotion with maternal activity became central to the vision of an idealized family, espoused by male and female writers alike, a vision which was elaborated through the remainder of the eighteenth century. By 1792, for example, Mary Wollstonecraft was still echoing Richardson’s visions of domestic bliss compounded by maternal breastfeeding when she wrote in *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*:

Cold would be the heart of a husband, were he not rendered unnatural by early debauchery, who did not feel more delight at seeing his child suckled by its mother, than the most artful wanton tricks could ever raise; yet this natural way of cementing the matrimonial tie ... wealth leads women to spurn. To preserve their beauty, and wear the

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flowery crown of the day, which gives them a kind of right to reign for a short time over the sex, they neglect to stamp impressions on their husband’s hearts that would be remembered with more tenderness when the snow on the head began to chill the bosom, than even their virgin charms.86

In this vision, maternity is the ‘natural way of cementing the matrimonial tie.’ The maternal woman supersedes the sexual woman in that the male is promised a more satisfying experience (‘more delight’) from the sight of his child being breastfed by its mother than from the sexual act itself (‘the most artful wanton tricks’). This vision was one of many varied and contradictory visions of motherhood, and the projection of maternity over sexuality complicated the way in which the mother was conceptualized in the cultural imagination. The mother became effectively desexualized as maternity was promoted as a woman’s only desire, contributing to a general cultural mindset that maternity and sexuality are mutually exclusive, and that women are “nurturing rather than desiring ... supportive rather than appetitive,”87 ideas that take hold more firmly in later novels, particularly those of the nineteenth century.

**Clarissa** has been critiqued from a variety of perspectives, regarded as emblematic of a diverse number of social, historical and critical positions. It has been described as “a scathing indictment of the bourgeois family;”88 as “the true history of women’s oppression at the hands of eighteenth-century patriarchy;”89 as “arguably the major feminist text of the [English] language;”90 and as perhaps one of the most authoritative and doctrinaire affirmations of patriarchal ideology in all of eighteenth-century novels.91 **Clarissa** is all of these, yet, it is as a narrative of deficient motherhood that it resonates as a ‘modern’ text. Through fictional representation of a mother dealing with the conflicting demands and loyalties of familial and social circumstances, Richardson demonstrates that, although maternal agency and

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89 Eagleton 1982, p. 17.
90 Eagleton 1982, p. viii.
91 Beasley 1996, pp. 35-52.
maternal responsibility may be indeterminable, ultimately they are defined by love, integrity, and courage.
CHAPTER THREE
Maternal Absence and the Rise of the Woman Novelist

Daniel Defoe and Samuel Richardson demonstrate through their fictions a keen interest in the mother, and both pursue, within the larger narrative constructs of their novels, a sub-narrative relating to the mother’s role in a social, economic, and familial context. Among other things, Defoe highlights the discrepancy between the model of maternal excellence and the reality of economic conditions, and Richardson highlights the discrepancy between appropriate and inappropriate maternal authority.

In less foregrounded maternal sub-narratives in other popular novels around the middle of the century, the deficient or deviant maternal practices (sometimes both) of mothers and mother figures contribute to a variety of different themes the novels promote. In *Tom Jones* and *Tristram Shandy*, for example, deficient mothers contribute to the confusion and comedy of the protagonists’ stories. In *The Adventures of Peregrine Pickle*, the cruelty of the hero’s mother resonates through the narrative, and in *The Castle of Otranto*, the weak mother contributes to the horrors of sexual deviance and familial collapse. What these novels share with *Moll Flanders*, *Roxana*, and *Clarissa* is a focus on the behavioural aspects of mothering. Despite their very different heroines and mothers, Defoe and Richardson can stand as representative of other writers in the first half of the century who created monstrous, weak, selfish, ineffectual, cruel, or wayward mothers as one means by which to define, by opposition, excellent motherhood, thereby validating the image of what the conduct manuals of the day asserted a mother should be. That is, they show mothers performing activities or displaying sentiments that are different from the expectations and representations of appropriate motherhood promoted in other forms of maternal discourse.

Around the middle of the century, the ‘sentimental’ novel emerged. The cult or culture of sensibility, which grounds the novel of sentiment, flourished in England (as well as on the Continent) until late in the century. Sentimental novels assumed the individual and social importance of sensitivity to the troubles of others. Adam Smith described in his *Theory of Moral Sentiments* (1759), the nature of sympathy (as a component of sentiment or sensibility) as “a kind of identification with the other that comes from imagining oneself
in another’s situation. Thus we sympathize with the man on the scaffold because we recognize how we ourselves would feel in the same predicament. And we sympathize with those in less extreme circumstances by virtue of the same capacity.”¹ Novels such as The Vicar of Wakefield (1766) by Oliver Goldsmith and The Man of Feeling (1769) by Henry MacKenzie are exemplars of the form; both heroes representative of the kind of extraordinary sentimental responsiveness that would dominate the sentimental novel.² Deficient mothers are not a major feature of sentimental novels. When they do appear, they are depicted as misguided rather than deviant. Mostly, they contribute to the happy family vignettes – particularly evident in The Vicar of Wakefield, for example – where their purpose is to demonstrate and celebrate the quality of the hero’s sensibility. The Vicar Mr. Primrose is such a ‘good’ person, for example, and his family so influenced by [or appreciative of] that goodness, that the reader cannot fail to feel sympathy for them during all their trials and tribulations.

One sentimental novel stands apart in its criticism of mothers, the provocative Memoirs of Miss Sidney Biddulph (1761), written by Frances Sheridan. One of the few sentimental novels with a heroine, this novel is particularly useful for my brief examination for two reasons. First, it is no more than implicit in its criticism of mothers. Second, it was published between Clarissa and Evelina, incorporating the themes and tropes of the one and anticipating those of the other, and is therefore suggestive of a point at which a transition from the tropes of maternal failure to maternal absence may be figured.

In Memoirs of Sidney Biddulph, two of the many sentimental stories that make up the novel include tales of misguided mothers. The first mother is made the instigator of events that lead to the heroine’s sad story. The heroine’s mother misreads a letter from the man Sidney loves, Orlando Faulkland, believes that he has seduced and impregnated another woman, and forbids Sidney to marry him. She insists that Sidney marry a Mr. Arnold who subsequently commits adultery and leaves Sidney in poverty. The husband returns but dies not long afterwards and Sidney and her children are

² Patricia Meyer Spacks notes that Sarah Fielding originated the sentimental form with her novel, David Simple in 1744, which was followed by the sequel, Volume the Last in 1753 (2006, p. 128).
left in poverty and sickness. After being saved from destitution by a rich uncle, Sidney eventually marries her beloved, who subsequently commits suicide when he discovers his previous wife still lives.

The second deficient mother in the novel is Lady Grimston, her deficient motherhood related by her daughter, Mrs. Vere. Mrs. Vere, who is a widow when Sidney meets her, has married against her mother’s will. In revenge, Lady Grimston arranges for her daughter to be excluded from her rightful share of the paternal inheritance. Mrs. Vere bears a stillborn child and almost dies herself, but lives to help pay for a lawsuit in which her mother is engaged. Lady Grimston grudgingly forgives her, but continues to treat her with disdain for years afterwards.

While these two mothers are mildly criticized in the novel for making decisions that instigate their daughters’ miseries, they are not made to bear the main blame. Instead, the daughters are blamed for their own sufferings. Sidney’s brother appears to speak for Sheridan, for example, when he taunts Sidney for her folly in trusting their rather irrational mother’s judgment and for allowing her to dictate the course of Sidney’s life.3 In this surprising reconfiguration of deficient maternal behaviour, Sheridan’s novel prefigures the theme of personal responsibility through the narrative trope in which the daughter takes charge of her own life. Later writers indicate awareness that, in order for a woman to be the author of her own life, she must take responsibility for herself. One way novelists could do this was by removing the mother from the narrative, the mother’s absence forcing the motherless heroine to assume the responsibility for herself that a present mother might not plausibly have allowed.

Later in the century, mothers became a focus of sentimentalism as they were imbued with an innate sensibility, their success as mothers made dependent upon their expressions of love, sentiment, and sympathy. This maternal image became a powerful component of maternal ideology later in the century, and one that continued in forms of fiction and non-fiction throughout the nineteenth century. Even though the maternal sub-narratives were rarely, if ever again, as didactic as Richardson’s for example, they did contribute to the overarching maternal discourse in which motherhood featured as an important subject for consideration, and the mother or

3 Spacks 2006, p. 151.
mother-figure featured as an important agent of social, cultural, and political admonition and instruction.

In the later part of the century, fictional deficient motherhood appeared in novels as a combination of two tropes, those of the absent mother and the substitute mother. In these novels, the absent mother is effectively deficient because she is not available to be the mother to her child and must therefore leave her (for it is nearly always a daughter) in the care of others. The others are substitute mothers whose various behaviours show them to be in some way deficient. The deficient substitute mothers exist in the novel to evoke, in all sorts of ways and among other things, the absent mother’s potential for maternal excellence. These novels are less concerned to show deficient maternal activities as a means of instruction and admonition - although they do function in that way also - than to examine the existential and experiential dimensions of motherhood. Writers of these types of novels of deficient motherhood – and they tend to be female writers – concentrated on what was taken to be the supposed ‘essence’ of motherhood, on what a mother is, rather than on the construction of motherhood and on what a mother does. Social class and gender continue to be major themes in these later novels, and the mother remained open to validation or castigation on the basis of her position in society and her ‘performance’ of her gender.4

Within the framework of a society made up of ideologies and cultural perceptions and expectations, the mother – and women in general – were under constant scrutiny and the home and family, with the potential for comfort and protection, became sites of challenge.

Through the related trope of the motherless heroine, writers of the novels of deficient motherhood later in the century also examine the social, cultural, political, and sexual codes by which women were bound, and explored possibilities for female autonomy. Motherhood was of particular interest, and later novels promote notions of an essential maternal nature. Concepts of motherhood as a special aspect of womanhood, and maternal feeling as innate and inescapable, were supported in part by a shift in conduct manuals toward identifying women rather than men as the source of authority on

4 Judith Butler 1990, *Gender Trouble*, Routledge, London, p. 136. The performative function of motherhood is a term Judith Butler uses to define motherhood as a culturally constructed concept that is authorized by biological processes that have no inherent significance in and of themselves. The maternal body’s surfaces reveal “the performative status of the natural itself.”
motherhood and maternity. Earlier (male) writers’ versions of maternal experience are necessarily constructed and imagined, focused principally, and inevitably, on the activities that make up experience rather than the feelings that inform and constitute the lived experience. The volume and intensity of conduct material devoted to the teaching of proper female conduct appear to suggest, as Jane Spencer remarks, that eighteenth-century women “needed a good deal of educating into their ‘inborn,’ ‘natural,’ feminine qualities.”

Prompted by the onslaught of material devoted to educating women about their inborn, natural, feminine qualities, and to advising women and mothers what they should be and what they should do, female writers examine possibilities for what women and mothers actually are. As the workings of the sex-gender system emphasized the differences between male and female experience, women’s experience of maternity and motherhood was deemed to carry special authority. A text perceived to have been written by a woman would be considered of commercial value in that it would appeal to the growing number of female readers for its authority of experience as well as for its sheer novelty value.

Male writers were tempted to appropriate this authority, and some saw the opportunity to write as females as the means to impart their notions of appropriate maternal conduct. As Susan Staves’ research shows, Christopher Smart, for example, wrote as the midwife, Mrs. Mary Midnight, in his periodical The Midwife; or, The Old Woman’s Magazine from 1751 to 1753. Other male writers, adopting sober female guises, promoted new ideas of delicate, modest femininity as integral to the ideal mother. John Hill, for example, wrote two books under the pseudonym, “The Hon. Juliana-Susannah Seymour”, entitled The Conduct of a Married Life: Laid Down in a Series of Letters (1754) and On the Management and Education of Children. A Series of Letters Written to a Neice [sic] (1754). Hill makes clear that women’s articulation of their own experiences of maternity and motherhood has special value for other women, and that men can impart nothing of importance on this subject since they do not have the necessary experience:

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7 Staves 2005, pp. 164-165.
Having been written by one of our Sex, [these letters] contain many Sentiments peculiar to us; and they are therefore useful in that they have something new. Men are the general Writers, and there pass many Things in our Hearts of which they know nothing. A Woman can best advise a Woman in Things which herself has experienced.\(^8\)

The concept of women being best able to advise other women, not only on maternity, but on all aspects of being a woman, gained credence and authority over the century. Magazines designed specifically for women were used to promote ideas on appropriate maternal conduct and sentiments. Depictions of women in The Lady’s Magazine (arguably the most popular women’s magazine in the late 1700s), for example, show how the ideas of women and their place in society changed. As Beth Fowkes Tobin notes, where women had once been depicted as sweethearts and wives and as “beautiful objects made to please men,” they became increasingly depicted “as mothers and even as benefactresses who nurture their own family and the families of the less fortunate.”\(^9\) Indeed, the notion of ‘nurture’ – the provision of loving care and attention or of physical and emotional care and nourishment – was conceptualized not only as the foundation of excellent motherhood, but also as an innate sensibility of womanhood.

As changes in the familial structure and in the roles for women in the family took place, novelists gave fictional representation to familial relationships, and tropes of familial discontent, in one form or another, flourished. As Ruth Perry notes, from the middle of the century, particularly, there are novels in which daughters are forced to marry against their wills, irresponsible older brothers gamble away the inheritance of younger children, and brothers live off the labours and savings of their sisters. Other tropes of orphaned children with complicated relations to their guardians, secret marriages, illicit seductions, sibling rivalry, and lost inheritances thrived alongside.\(^10\)

In the later part of the century, the mother’s absence was the source of many a familial complication in fiction, and one that enabled female writers to examine the anxieties and implications of victimized motherhood and motherless womanhood. Writers used the trope of maternal absence to focus

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attention on the theme of the nature of motherhood, and on the theory of an organic connection between mother and child – most often a daughter - that neither death nor absence could eradicate. Female writers seem inclined to redeem the mother from all that she had failed to do in the novels of the first half of the century, by projecting, through maternal absence, a sense of all a mother could be. Seeing the excellent feminine mother as a social construct, a patriarchal emblem, and an icon of middle-class morality, many female writers considered how the mother had come to represent an impossible ideal, certain to fail with reference to the restrictive ideologies to which she had become bound. In order to remove the mother from these ideological constraints, many female writers found it necessary to eliminate the fictional mother’s physical presence from the narrative, and thus to separate her from the physical reality of mothering.

Why, though, did female writers simply not represent mothers as excellent? To answer this question, it is useful to consider how an excellent mother could be represented in novels. According to what had become the widely accepted template of maternal excellence, the excellent mother would be easily identifiable. She would be decorous and properly ‘feminine,’ and attentive and obedient to her husband’s desires and needs. She would remain in the home, would breastfeed her own children, and would stay in constant attendance upon them. She would guide her daughters in feminine propriety, decorum, and virtue until marriage. In all things domestic, the mother would act with appropriate authority in the management of the household and the care of the children, deferring, when demanded, to the superior authority of her husband. If, however, she deviated in any way from the prescribed and expected practices, she would no longer be the excellent mother.

Stripped of any identity other than those of mother and wife, the excellent mother in novels has no story of her own. The excellent and present mother would be likely to serve in the novel as a representative of the type of motherhood that operates according to submissive acquiescence to patriarchal authority and quiet acceptance of the status quo. Yet, she would use her enormous emotional power to force, or inadvertently to lead, her daughter along the same path of passivity and self-denial that defined the feminine ideal of the time and the one she herself embodies. The daughter, inextricably linked to the mother’s fate, is forced to defer to the mother
rather than think and act on her own initiative.\textsuperscript{11} As Marianne Hirsch writes, “It is the mother’s absence which creates the space in which the heroine’s plot and her activity of plotting can evolve.”\textsuperscript{12} The strength of purpose and the moral character the heroine eventually gains by having to perform tasks that a mother would traditionally perform enable the heroine to survive the dangers caused by her motherless state, and provide a kind of retrospective justification for her mother’s absence.

In later novels, much attention is given to gender, and the unnatural mother is shown to lack what were increasingly considered the natural feminine attributes of the mother, such as docility, and the natural maternal attributes of the female, such as compassion and tenderness. The monstrous mother in later novels therefore often functions differently than in the earlier novels, used less as the means to define, by opposition, excellent maternal behaviour (although she sometimes does this as well) than to evoke, again by opposition, the tender, compassionate, selfless, and innate nature of feminine motherhood.

The narrative trope of maternal absence may appear, superficially, to suggest that mothers are either unnecessary or expendable in a daughter’s life. However, just as one effect of the fictional representations of deficient maternal conduct had, by implication, evoked excellent maternal conduct, maternal absence evokes, by implication, maternal presence. The mother’s absence produces the site in the novel “around which maternal ideals are articulated and reinforced and, as the family and social order collapse without the mother, the novels of maternal absence prove her fundamental importance.”\textsuperscript{13}

Maternal absence even suggests that the excellent mother (as the absent mother is assumed to be) is potentially so powerful a figure that her presence would disrupt the momentum of the novel by her ability to foreclose the experiences her daughter must face in order to reach maturity and self-awareness. The absent mother therefore exists in the heroine’s (and the reader’s) unconscious as the ideal mother whose presence would prevent the

\textsuperscript{11} Perry, p. 338.
ordeals and dangers that the heroine faces, and that propel the drama of the novel. The heroine must, however, have the type of care that keeps her alive through infancy to adolescence, and this task is typically performed by a substitute ‘caretaker’ mother or mothers. The particular kind of maternal care (or nurture) the young heroine needs is evoked through the social contexts of the novels. The heroine’s task is, ultimately, to marry and to take her place as a woman and future mother in society. In order to make that transition she must move from the private world of family into a social world of dangers, in the form of predatory men, economic anxieties, and concerns for propriety and femininity. The father’s part in this transition is clear in that he must provide his daughter with enough money to attract appropriate suitors. The mother’s tasks however, are more numerous, more subtle, and less tangible. She must facilitate the transition by controlling her daughter’s interactions with the public world; she must handle her daughter’s social contacts; she must insist upon propriety; and she must prevent inappropriate suitors from gaining her daughter’s affections. Whether or not a substitute mother is successful in these tasks is dependent on her understanding of them and on her desire and her ability to perform them. For one reason or another, the substitute mothers fail to perform the specific tasks expected of them (by heroine and reader) and, for that reason, these tasks are presented as specifically maternal tasks, not because they are performed adequately but because they are performed inadequately.

Through their depiction of women who question female submission to male authority and supposedly superior male intellect, these later novels demonstrate a keen awareness of patriarchal concerns to ‘manage’ women. They create worlds that highlight the potential dangers women face, thereby exposing the inadequacy of the - essentially ornamental - education typically available to women and girls. The novel became an important source of female representation and, in this respect, it also became an authoritative category of advice literature and, arguably, a significant means of communicating and disseminating ideas on the felt, experiential aspects of womanhood and motherhood. By negating the mother through absence or death and endowing her with a flawed but sincere maternal nature, at the same time shifting the blame for deficient maternal conduct to non-biological
mothers, some female writers, such as Frances Burney and Ann Radcliffe, were able to assert maternal dignity, authority, and power. 14

The mother figure in the ‘Gothic’ novels of Ann Radcliffe and the writers that followed, is a more amorphic character than in earlier fictions.15 Gothic writers put familial relations at the heart of their narratives, and the mother-child (most often the mother-daughter) relationship was scrutinized by either removing the mother from the narrative or by making her villainous and vindictive. As familial relationships are obliterated by death and deceit, the Gothic mother is either dead or absent and unable to protect her child; or else she is evil, manipulative, and unwilling to protect her child. Either way, the heroine is defenceless and at the mercy of everyone, but particularly, and most usually in the Gothic narrative, the tyrannical father figure.

The child unable to cope with the loss of the mother was deemed more often than not to be the daughter. Charlotte Dacre’s Zofloya, or the Moor (1806), is an obvious exception to this.16 Sensationalist even amongst Gothic literature, the daughter, Victoria, is the villainous strength of the family, and the mother is an errant philanderer. Most Gothic texts are concerned with the trope of the helpless and motherless young virgin in constant fear of the patriar,” characterized as an evil Other that is, as Eugenia C. DeLamotte argues, “profoundly alien, and hostile, to women and their concerns.”17 In The Italian, and in Radcliffe’s other Gothic novels, the evil Other is a

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14 There were women writers before Frances Burney who explored female subjectivity through investigation into female sexuality (such as Eliza Haywood, in novels such as The History of Miss Betsey Thoughtless (1751), Love in Excess; or The Fatal Inquiry (1719-20), and The Injur’d Husband (1722) and Lasselia (1723), and in her pamphlet writings in The Female Spectator (1745) (Eliza Haywood 1999, Selections from ‘The Female Spectator’: Women Writers in English 1350-1850, ed. by Patricia Meyer Spacks, Oxford University Press, New York) and into education for females (such as the first English woman of letters, Mary Astell – her life and work examined in Ruth Perry 1986, The Celebrated Mary Astell, An Early English Feminist, University of Chicago Press, Chicago). I consider that later women writers – Frances Burney and those that followed – used the motif of absent and dead mothers in a way that highlights the difficulties peculiar to women and mothers.

15 The term ‘Gothic’ refers to the literary mode of English fiction popular in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, characterized by an atmosphere of mystery and horror and with a pseudo-medieval (‘Gothic’) setting. Horace Walpole’s Castle of Otranto (1764) and all of Ann Radcliffe’s Gothic romances, including The Mysteries of Udolpho (1794) and The Italian (1797) are exemplar of the form.

16 Charlotte Dacre 1997, Zofloya, or the Moor (1806), Oxford University Press, Oxford. It is interesting to note that the murderous Victoria, “by nature more prone to evil that to good,” attributes her nature entirely to her mother: “She saw exemplified, in the conduct of her mother, the flagrant violation of a most sacred oath – she saw every principle of delicacy and of virtue apparently contemned” (p. 28).

patriarchal despot, deemed both profoundly alien and hostile to women. He is alien because he represents a power that the motherless heroine does not know or understand, but to which she fears she may be forced to succumb, and hostile because he is a misogynist, who neither considers nor values her.

Lacking a maternal role model for adult female subjectivity and sexuality, the motherless heroine must create for herself a model for motherhood of her own. The fictional mother’s absence is the gap in her daughter’s existence, and it is also the gap in the reader’s ‘existence’ in the world of the novel, the empty moral space that invites the process of self-discovery, in response to the expectations and assumptions that underlie her perceptions of motherhood. The daughter learns to ‘read’ herself as future mother on the basis on those expectations and assumptions, just as the notional reader learns to ‘read’ herself in relation to her perceptions of the mother as evoked through her absence. In both cases, the ‘ideal’ mother is the object of their own devising. Freed from the ‘failures’ that an ideology of maternal excellence makes inevitable, the excellent mother is consequently evoked as ‘every mother’. She is excellent not by virtue of the maternal activities she does or does not perform, but by her imagined capacity for an innate maternal love that provides the potential for individual, maternal, familial, and social enrichment.

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Evelina was published anonymously in January 1778. Described recently as “the most celebrated novel of its age,” it was received initially with astonishment at the range of lifestyles it depicted, at the authenticity of its characters from the ‘highest’ to the ‘lowest’ stations in life, and at its acute observations of “the best and the worst of the human soul.” By this time, the role of the middle-class mother was well established. It was generally accepted and expected that the responsibilities of the mother included the care and emotional support of her children in the home, and the extended attention to daughters on matters of propriety and femininity until marriage. Despite the adoption of the values of a particular type of motherhood as ideal, fictional representations of the deficient mother continued, most persuasively in later novels in the form of maternal absence. The absent mother – through death or disappearance – is, superficially, deficient first, because she is unable to be a mother to her child herself, and second, because she must leave the care of her child to substitute mothers who are generally in some way maternally deficient. This trope initiates two sub-tropes, first and most conspicuously, the trope of the motherless heroine (for it is always a daughter), and second, by which the motherless heroine must rely on people other than her biological mother for the care, guidance, and protection – activities construed as those specifically maternal – she needs in infancy and adolescence.

It is through the activities of the substitute mothers that maternal deficiency is made visible. The maternal deficiencies of the substitute mothers and the trials of the motherless heroine create a framework within which, ironically, the absent mother is evoked as a paragon – as the excellent mother. Indeed, just as the mother’s presence is evoked by her absence, her excellence is evoked by the deficiencies of others. The absent mother exists within the narrative framework as, ostensibly, the only person with the

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1 Frances Burney 1994, Evelina or The History of a Young Lady’s Entrance into the World (1778), edited by Margaret Ann Doody, Penguin, Harmondsworth. All references are from this edition and appear in this section with page numbers in parentheses, as follows (---).
(untested) power, authority, and concern to save her daughter from the social dangers she faces. Absent from the inevitability of maternal failure against society’s conception of, and codes for, ideal motherhood, the absent mother is, paradoxically, the ideal mother.

*Evelina or the History of a Young Lady’s Entrance into the World* is an epistolary novel in three volumes. Evelina, the heroine, is a beautiful young girl, the unacknowledged daughter of the dissipated aristocrat, Sir John Belmont. Following her mother’s death in childbirth, Evelina is left in the care of her mother’s surrogate father, the kindly vicar, Mr. Villars, with whom she stays in the country until her eighteenth year. Through a series of social adventures, Evelina stays with three different women, all of whom assist Evelina in some way to make her entrance in the world, and all of whom are effectively substitute mothers. In their care, Evelina learns to navigate the complexities of English society, to become betrothed to a distinguished nobleman, and to be legitimized by her errant father.

A consequence of Evelina’s motherless state is her desire for familial connection. This is indicated in the novel by Evelina’s ‘familialization’ of the people in the novel she esteems. Julie Shaffer describes ‘familialization’ as the practice whereby people see non-family members ‘like’ family, used to denote a close relationship based on familiarity and trust and representative of a deep regard for the person being familialized.4 Burney uses the motif of familialization in all her novels, but to particular effect in *Evelina*, as Evelina has created for her, and continues to create for herself, ersatz family members as the means for emotional and social support. At various points in the novel, Evelina creates a ‘father’ of Mr. Villars (26); a ‘mother’ of Mrs. Mirvan (31); a ‘sister’ of Polly Green; and a ‘brother’ of Lord Orville (292). The practice of familialization enabled writers to explore friendships and love outside the family. To Evelina, familialization of a particular character is her (and Burney’s) highest form of praise.

In *Evelina*, in Burney’s subsequent novels, and in a number of female-authored novels that followed, there appears to be a preoccupation with the narrative trope of the substitute mother. Why is this so? Why did female writers choose to write out the biological mother only to replace her with the

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substitute mother figure? Ruth Perry suggests that this figure attests to what was being lost in the cultural shift in power, autonomy, and voice.⁵ She argues that the extent to which this character appears in novels of the second half of the century particularly, suggests that there was a cultural concern to retain a model of female strength and competence at a time when the social construction of femininity was undergoing a change in the opposite direction. The powerful substitute mother is not an ideal mother figure, but she is representative, in many ways, of an alternative form of female power and autonomy. This representation contradicts the evolving social definition of the ‘feminine’ woman as soft, pliant, docile, weak, sweet, and hyperemotional - the type of woman depicted, for example, in pornographic novels such as John Cleland’s *Fanny Hill: Memoirs of a Woman of Pleasure* (1749) - and the type that men, particularly, may have considered a model for ideal femininity and womanhood.⁶

The trope of a powerful older woman as substitute mother might be interpreted as being a narrative device to refigure the mother as a more autonomous and powerful figure than had appeared in novels in the first half of the century. This notion is complicated however, by considering the tendency of female writers to characterize this figure as slightly ridiculous, a tactic Burney deploys, for example, in her characterizations of Madame Duval and Mrs. Selwyn.⁷ These characters lack, to varying degrees, the attributes of ‘femininity’ – of manner, appearance, decorum, and speech, for example – and both are consequently the objects of ridicule and disdain that render them inappropriate role models for the young heroine. Through these characters, Burney demonstrates the extent to which the sex-gender system and maternal ideology were forces in a woman’s life, and the potential for a

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⁶ John Cleland 2000, *Fanny Hill: Memoirs of a Woman of Pleasure* (1749), Wordsworth, Ware, Hertfordshire. *Fanny Hill* is an epistolary novel that tells the story of Fanny’s arrival in London as a country innocent, her entrapment into prostitution, and her experiences in the bawdy houses of the time. The most striking aspect of Fanny’s memoirs is that, in contrast to contemporaneous English whore-biographies in which heroines are seen to come to no good and in bitter repentance, Fanny achieves the goals of every romantic heroine: a good marriage and respectability. Following publication of *Fanny Hill*, Cleland made a case for using obscenity in novels as a means of moral enlightenment; his didactic purpose being, it seems, the promotion of the beneficial pleasures of sexual activity. The type of woman that Cleland and other male writers promoted as ‘feminine’ was one that enjoyed sexual activity with abandon, and could also be respectable and ‘worthy’ of marriage within the bourgeoisie.

woman who lacked any trait attributed to femininity – for whatever reason – to be ridiculed at best, despised at worst.

Burney’s substitute mothers fall short of maternal excellence largely because they do not operate within the realms of acceptable maternal, domestic, and/or feminine norms, their inadequacies measured less against the reality of mothering than against the ideology of mothering. In fact, the substitute mothers do not actually fail the heroine. Despite – and because of - these women’s maternal deficiencies, Evelina makes a successful ‘entrance’ into the world. Each of the ‘mothers’ perform specific functions that enable this transition. Mrs. Mirvan introduces Evelina into society and to her future husband. Madame Duval brings Evelina to a sense of selfhood through recognition of her female and moral worth and, more importantly, she is the source of maternal authority that settles the question of her legitimacy. Finally, Mrs. Selwyn guides Evelina through social complexities and assists her in confronting her father to achieve her rightful place in the world. As Evelina must navigate situations and dangers with appropriate feminine decorum, the substitute mothers are a valuable source of social initiation and education. Despite their deficiencies then, each substitute mother helps the heroine in her journey to womanhood, to marriage, and to her place in the social order as wife and future mother.

In *Evelina*, motherhood is a complex matrix of representation and evocation. Burney suggests that maternal tenderness and concern are expressions of, either, an innate connection between mother and child or, an innate desire to mother. Seen in this light, the trope of maternal absence can be considered as one way in which female writers could assert maternal dignity and value, as they enabled the ideal mother to exist in the imagination of the child, and of the reader, as an ideal of their own, rather than society’s, construction. *Evelina* is not, however, primarily about motherhood or being motherless. It is concerned with society, and with the social factors and material conditions that make people behave as they do. Against the framework of social relations that structured an increasingly class-specific hierarchy, Burney’s mother figures are representative of a woman’s role in a society that evaluates woman’s potential (for marriage and good motherhood) on the bases of her placement in the class system, her performance of gender, and her contained sexuality, all of which are performed through ‘manners.’
The practice of ‘Manners’ refers to “the modes of life, customary rules of behaviour, conditions of society, prevailing in a people” and “external behaviour in social intercourse, estimated as good or bad according to its degree of politeness or of conformity to the accepted standard of propriety.”

Manners became a subject of intense interest in the later part of the eighteenth century, the outward expression of ‘good’ or ‘bad’ manners the critical measure of a person’s worth and arbiters, in a sense of social and class positioning. The ‘novel of manners’ evolved as women writers in particular experimented with novels focused on social detail, the form of which *Evelina* is exemplar. Within the framework of manners, mothers and mother figures (along with every other character) are shown to maneuver through the virtual minefields of social class and gender as enacted through manners, always in danger of transgressing the boundaries of one or another at any point.

**Frances Burney’s ‘Feminism’**

In *Evelina*, Burney depicts a strictly ordered class system of defined social etiquette within a carefully controlled society that, effectively, mirrors her own social milieu and the dominant ideologies of her own existence. Felicity Nussbaum suggests that women writers of this period structured their novels in a way that mimicked the dominant ideologies ordering their own lives. If this is the case, then *Evelina* indicates that Burney was a woman who was guided in her life and writing by a sense of feminine propriety and morality, and defined and inhibited by traditional concepts of femininity. Described as “protean” in her ability to “always shift … from one body to another,” Burney constantly shifts position and focus as she deflects confrontation and challenge with the social conventions of class, femininity, propriety, and etiquette by which she herself was bound.

Burney’s admission that she was “fearful of doing wrong,” and that this was “always the leading principle of [her] internal guidance,” have led critics to condemn her for her “timidity, stultifying conventionality, self-suppressing submission to others’ wishes and to her own narrow ideals of proper

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behaviour,”\(^{12}\) and to consider her novels “priggish and snobbish” social commentary.\(^{13}\) Burney’s confession to her friend, Samuel Crisp, that she “would a thousand times rather forfeit [her] character as a writer, than risk ridicule or censure as a female”\(^{14}\) provokes similar criticism. Critics have suggested that Burney is a “prude of contained heart … excessively prim and righteous,”\(^{15}\) and a self-repressed “fixed and fixated woman,”\(^{16}\) more inhibited by the social conventions of femininity than even the characters in her novels.

Certainly, it is apparent in Evelina that the heroine’s entire existence depends upon her reputation, which is explicitly defined and knowable by her femininity and associated innocence. Evelina is acutely aware of the importance of her femininity and manners and to how others perceive her, an awareness that often appears in her letters to border on the hysterical. Femininity is always highly esteemed in the novel, and never criticized, and Burney’s concern to assert the importance of femininity over all other female attributes has led critics to try to establish what – if any - ‘feminist’ position she exhibits in her writing. Julia Epstein, for example, considers that Burney is a “conflicted but self-conscious social reformer” who derives her narrative strategy from a combination of repressed rage and desire.\(^{17}\) She contends that beneath the surface of Burney’s reticence and polite social commentary lurks angry protest against the restrictions imposed upon women by her society. Evidence of such angry protest is discernible, according to Epstein, in what she sees as Burney’s “obsession with violence and hostility.”\(^{18}\) Burney’s depictions of violence against women – implicit and explicit – are expressions of a simmering rage, that, because of their apparent humour, are expressions of Burney’s concerns to neither provoke nor challenge patriarchal authority.

\(^{12}\) Katharine M. Rogers 1990, Frances Burney: The World of Female Difficulties, Harvester Wheatsheaf, Hemel Hempstead, pp. 3-4.
\(^{13}\) Eva Figes 1982, Sex and Subterfuge: Women Writers to 1850, Persea, New York, p. 37.
\(^{14}\) Burney 1891, pp. 101-2.
\(^{18}\) Epstein 1989, p. 5. See also Zonitch, Barbara 1997, Familiar Violence: Gender and Social Upheaval in the Novels of Frances Burney, University of Delaware Press, Newark.
Audrey Bilger argues that many female writers - Frances Burney, Maria Edgeworth, and Jane Austen, for example - use humour as the means to challenge women’s subordinate position in its exposure of the “irrationality of patriarchal discourse.” Certainly, in its use of humour and in its portrayals of violence, *Evelina* exposes the sexist bias of Burney’s society, but in my reading, Burney’s ‘feminism’ – such as it is - manifests itself as a concern that the female must come to self-awareness through an understanding of her role in the society that exists. Even though Burney does not appear to challenge patriarchy overtly, she does challenge patriarchal abuse in her exposure - through humour – of the pettiness, pomposity, and potential cruelty of it, as manifested most obviously in *Evelina* through her comedic gibes at patriarchal figures and in surprising moments of patriarchal violence. As Elizabeth Abel argues:

> A female writer asserts her identity within philosophical, literary and linguistic traditions shaped by men … the woman writer … can express her difference only through a posture critical of prevailing discourse. Since she has no alternative to discourse, however, the woman writer must inscribe her disaffection either through a deliberate mimicry that, by its very imitation, gestures toward unthinkable alternatives, or through metaphors of female desire.

In *Evelina*, Burney’s ‘disaffection’ for patriarchal abuse is manifested in her characterization of mothers and mother figures either as the victims of such abuse or as the butt of misogynist jokes. The bursts of real violence and abuse that occur in the novel, such as Captain Mirvan and Sir Clement Willoughby’s attack on Madame Duval, and the sudden tangential and bizarre events such as the old ladies race, for example, are expressions of misogyny and male domination. Whatever form misogyny takes, it represents what Margaret Ann Doody describes as “the grotesque, macabre, and perverse elements and symptoms of society, and of the wildness in the human psyche that leads to the creation of such strange structures as society itself.”

Through mimicry and comedy, Burney examines womanhood and motherhood, focusing on their relationships to class and gender. The mother, in various manifestations, is the catalyst for Burney’s exploration of what it meant to be a woman in her society.

Class structure as Narrative structure in ‘Evelina’

Burney constructs *Evelina* in a way that mirrors mid- to late-eighteenth-century society, or at least the society to which Burney had access. K.G. Hall suggests that *Evelina* has a three-tier class structure, one in which all characters – male and female - are ordered according to their social class and according to their attitude and behaviour to women. This structuring of the novel and characters in relation to social class and behaviour is a particularly useful tool for analyzing the behaviours of the substitute mothers.

The first category, to which Evelina herself belongs, is the genteel or polite category of the middle class and aristocracy. Mrs. Mirvan, the most genteel (and aristocratic) of the substitute mothers belongs to this category. She is portrayed as the type of woman Caroline Belmont would be had she lived. Burney draws attention to this comparison by making Mrs. Mirvan the only substitute mother Evelina calls “mamma,” by making both women aristocratic (Mrs. Mirvan by birth and Caroline by marriage), and more subtly, by her characterization of the men that both these women marry. Burney draws parallels, for example, between Captain Mirvan’s and Sir John Belmont’s brutish behaviours. Captain Mirvan is brutish in virtually everything he does, and Sir John’s brutish behaviour is evident in his burning of his marriage certificate, leaving a young, pregnant Caroline Belmont unprotected and, ostensibly, in the eyes of society, unmarried. The parallel between the two women is also emphasized by the fact that they are both victims of patriarchal abuse. Mrs. Mirvan deserves, according to Evelina, “a better lot” (42) than being married to the boorish Captain Mirvan, and Caroline, the “much-injured lady,” (144) deserved better too.

Lord Orville, who Evelina considers “a model of perfection, - one whose elegance surpassed all description, - whose sweetness of manners disgraced all comparison,” (286) also belongs in this genteel or polite category. Possessing “all that is amiable in a man,” (308) Lord Orville is “a favourite” with Mrs. Mirvan (299) and the only male character Evelina likens to her beloved Mr. Villars as one “who, when time had wintered o’er his locks, would have shone forth among his fellow-creatures, with the same brightness of worth which dignifies my honoured Mr. Villars” (291). Mr. Villars, also belongs to this category of course and he, along with the others of this

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category, is presented as above reproach, morally, practically, and aesthetically excellent.

The second category is the misogynistic or masculine category, and is populated by the widest range of social classes: Madame Duval, Evelina’s maternal grandmother, from the lower class – along with Mr. Smith and Tom Branghton; Captain Mirvan from the middle class; and the aristocrat, Sir Clement Willoughby. Captain Mirvan, “one of the worst men in the world” (172), according to Evelina, is the character that most epitomizes the misogynistic or masculine category. His misogyny is apparent in all his dealings with women. He regards all young women as inane “parrots” (121); he makes rude remarks about older women being “wrinkled old hag[s]” (65); and he physically and verbally abuses Madame Duval, and delights in the “sight of [her] distress” (72). Ironically, Madame Duval also occupies this category. Rude, obnoxious, and aggressive, she has no sense of social decorum or feminine delicacy and treats everyone, particularly Evelina, with contempt.

The third category is the sexually or competitively motivated category, populated mostly by many of the aristocratic young men. The people in this category are discernible by their competitive and gaming natures and by their duality of personalities and conduct. The men in this category are discernible by their rakish behaviour, licentious remarks, and their preoccupation with sexual conquest. To these men, young women are of value to them for their sexuality, a notion that Lord Merton illuminates when he says, “I don’t know what the devil a woman lives for after thirty: she is only in other folks’ way” (305). The men in this category share characteristics with those in the misogynist category in that they too disregard and devalue women, an attitude voiced again by Lord Merton that, “a woman wants nothing to recommend her but beauty and good nature; in everything else she is either impertinent or unnatural. For my part, deuce take me if I ever wish to hear a word of sense from a woman as long as I live!” (401) These men also, significantly, overlap the polite and genteel category, and it is their duplicity that makes them so dangerous to the young, innocent Evelina.

The most dangerous of these men is Sir Clement, who represents duplicity *par excellence*, his apparent genteel politeness masking a rakish and licentious character. When Evelina goes astray in Vauxhall Gardens and is
confronted by the group of riotous young men, for example, Sir Clement ‘rescues’ her and then proceeds to take her into another dark alley with the intention of taking advantage of her (220-221). When Evelina, offended by his conduct, bursts into tears, Sir Clement offers extravagant (and insincere) apologies (221). Sir Clement’s easy oscillation between attitudes and conduct is alarming and confusing to the innocent heroine. Only when Evelina discovers that a letter of dubious sentiment supposedly written by Lord Orville was written by Sir Clement (286-287) does she learn that the world contains men who are not as they seem.

Evelina also learns that the world contains women who are not as they seem. Mrs. Selwyn belongs in this category because she too has a dual character. She jokes, for example, how Mrs. Beaumont “thought I was a woman of quality [but] was miserable when she discovered me to be a mere country gentlewoman” (315). Mrs. Selwyn behaves in contradictory ways. In her interactions with the aristocratic young males, for example, she appears nonchalant as she jokes with them and makes fun of them, but is secretly desirous of their approval. Moreover, in her acknowledged favouritism for Sir Clement, she is shown to be somewhat lacking in moral judgment. Because of her forthrightness, however, Mrs. Selwyn is the only one of the substitute mothers who is strong enough to take control of Evelina’s situation and to confront the formidable Sir John Belmont and it is she who insists Evelina confronts Sir John to establish her rightful place in society, as the legitimate daughter of an aristocrat.

Within this tripartite narrative framework, Burney examines each of the substitute mothers separately, and illuminates how certain types of maternal conduct considered natural or unnatural and certain types of behaviour considered naturally masculine or feminine, are manifestations of social and cultural ideologies and circumstance. What she exposes through her fiction is the social reality that women are judged according to their adherence to prescribed definitions of femininity, and mothers and mother figures are accepted and valued for their adherence to definitions of femininity and ideal motherhood.

**Burney’s model of Excellent Parenthood**

Before Evelina encounters the three substitute mothers and members of her own family, she must leave behind her guardian, The Reverend Mr. Villars,
the only parent figure she has ever known, and the person she refers to as the “Parent of my heart!” (372) Mr. Villars was chosen by Evelina’s mother, Caroline, to take care of her child even before the child was born. Mr. Villars relates how Caroline, on her deathbed:

frequently and earnestly besought me, that if her infant was female, I would not abandon her to the direction of a man so wholly unfit to take the charge of her education; but, should she be importunately demanded, that I would retire with her abroad, and carefully conceal her from Sir John, till some apparent change in his sentiments and conduct should announce him less improper for such a trust (140).

Mr. Villars is afraid “to expose [Evelina] to the snares and dangers inevitably encircling a house of which the master [Sir John, Evelina's father] is dissipated and unprincipled, without the guidance of a mother, or any prudent and sensible female” (141). By keeping Evelina with him, Mr. Villars unconsciously defines his own roles, by default, as the ‘caretaker’ parent – the father that is not ‘dissipated and unprincipled’ and as the replacement for the ‘guidance of a mother, or any prudent and sensible female.’

In her biography of Frances Burney, Margaret Ann Doody suggests the possibility that Burney's creation of Mr. Villars is evidence of an autobiographical element in Evelina, and that Mr. Villars is modeled on Burney’s dear friend and confidant, Samuel Crisp, to whom she referred throughout her life as “Daddy” Crisp.23 Samuel Crisp’s encouragement of Frances in her novel writing, as well as their shared dislike of Frances’s stepmother, forged a bond of great affection between them, and Crisp occupied in Frances’s life a role akin to, what Janice Farrar Thaddeus has described “an eccentric version of a substitute mother.”24 Against this interesting analogy, could it be that the friend served as the role model for the character in his occupation of dual parental roles - as ‘Daddy’ and as an ‘eccentric version of a substitute mother’?

Evelina hints at the possibility of Mr. Villars’ dual roles in one of her first letters, when she asks him, “my most honoured, most reverenced, most beloved father! For by what other name can I call you?” (26) This question most likely refers to a confusion she feels about calling Mr. Villars ‘father’ when she knows she already has a father.25 Reading as I do however,

23 Doody 1988, p. 31.
perhaps Evelina is expressing confusion for calling Mr. Villars ‘father’ when she considers his parental role more than that of a ‘father,’ he is representative of the ‘mother’ too. This notion is not so far-fetched when considering Evelina’s later comments in which she articulates perfectly the dual parental role Mr. Villars has played:

Never had orphan so little to regret as your grateful Evelina! Though motherless, though worse than fatherless, bereft from infancy of the two first and greatest blessings of life, never has she had cause to deplore their loss; never has she felt the omission of a parent’s tenderness, care, or indulgence; never, but from sorrow for them, had reason to grieve at the separation (243).

The Reverend Mr. Villars, who has taken care of Evelina from birth, is a gentle, wise, and loving parent, and Evelina honours and obeys him because she loves him and respects his wisdom and judgments. He has educated her to the best of his abilities, and he intends to leave his fortune – all he has - to her when he dies. His only consideration is “to see [his] Evelina happy” and (27) to see her married to a man of her choice, “who may be sensible of her worth” (16). As the only one of the substitute parents actually chosen by the biological mother, Mr. Villars is consequently a reflection of the biological mother. His parental excellence evokes maternal excellence because he is the one person the (ostensibly excellent) mother considers an ideal substitute for herself. Mr. Villars is ‘more’ than a father because he exists in a liminal space - like kin, but not kin; like father, but not father; like mother, but not mother. Evelina articulates his central importance and dual parental roles when she writes to him, “Ah Guardian, Friend, and Protector of my Youth! – by whom my helpless infancy was cherished, my mind formed, my very life preserved, - you are the Parent my heart acknowledges, and to you do I vow eternal duty, gratitude and affection” (388).

Through her creation of Mr. Villars as the ideal parent, Burney seems to demonstrate the notion that ideal parenthood is less dependent on ‘nature’ (as it is constructed in ideology as the female’s purpose and occupation) as on ‘nurture’ (the actual process of bringing up children). Mr. Villars demonstrates that a natural bond exists between birth mother and child (a bond that he embodies as the birth mother’s appointed substitute – and ideal - parent) and a bond, constructed by nurture, between substitute parent and child, created by his selfless desire to parent. Burney demonstrates the intransigence of the sex-gender system. In ‘reality,’ Burney contends, a man can just as easily as a woman feel the sentiments and perform the activities
attributed to motherhood if he has invested himself in the life and well-being of the child. Burney’s construction of Mr. Villars is a deliberate ploy to examine how expectations for maternal and paternal conduct are bound to constructions of gender. Burney’s insinuation of the possibility of a male ‘mothering’ (i.e. feeling the sentiments accorded mothers and performing the duties prescribed to mothers) challenges the construction of motherhood as a naturally feminine occupation and as one to which only females are naturally predisposed. Moreover, the form of ‘masculinity’ that Mr. Villars - and Lord Orville – display – the form that Burney promotes as exemplary – is in stark contrast to the violent, misogynist, or sexist ‘masculine’ behaviour of the other males in the novel. It is not imposing too much on this reading to suggest that Burney’s interest in gender construction is evident throughout the novel, made initially apparent by her careful construction of ideal masculinity and excellent parenthood (and potential motherhood) in the character of Mr. Villars.

It is beyond Mr. Villars’ capabilities to help Evelina make her ‘entrance’ into the world. Beyond his quiet and humble retreat, and beyond his care and protection, his ‘child,’ now a young woman, must find a place in a society of which Mr. Villars has little knowledge, and in which he has no place. The substitute mothers take over from him to assist Evelina in her maturation. Between them, they introduce her into society where she will meet appropriate male suitors, help her negotiate the potential pitfalls of that society, instigate the circumstances that will ensure her legitimacy, and prepare her for womanhood.

Mrs. Mirvan - “A true feminine character”

Mrs. Mirvan appears to be closer in sensibility and delicacy to Evelina than either Madame Duval or Mrs. Selwyn. Used here, ‘sensibility’ refers to a person’s moral, emotional, or aesthetic ideas or standards, and ‘delicacy’ refers to a person’s consideration for the feelings of others and a person’s avoidance of vulgarity or offensiveness.26 Mrs. Mirvan is described by Lord Orville as “gentle and amiable ... a true feminine character” (321). She is the only substitute mother who has what can be considered a maternal bearing.

26 Mrs. Mirvan has the appearance of ‘delicacy,’ but her delicacy is challenged in two ways, both of which are discussed further in this section. First, she disregards Evelina’s feelings at the ball when she insists Evelina dance with a stranger, bringing into question her delicacy as a mother. Second, she is subject to the vulgarity and offensiveness of a husband that disregards and disrespects all women, bringing into question her delicacy as a woman.
She assures Mr. Villars, for example, that Evelina will be treated like her second child, and that both Evelina and her daughter Maria, her “two children, shall equally share her time and attention” (24), thereby articulating her desire and intention to take on a maternal role. Lady Howard, Mrs. Mirvan’s mother, furthers the notion of a familial bond when she expresses her wish that her granddaughter and Evelina “would love each other as sisters” (23). When at Lady Howard’s house and in Mrs. Mirvan’s care, Evelina is drawn to the family of women and to the “house of joy” (25) they all occupy. She is enamoured with Mrs. Mirvan whom she describes as “extremely kind,” and is so delighted to have her call her “her child” (31), that she returns the endearment by referring to her as “My mamma Mirvan” (31).

Mrs. Mirvan’s husband, a captain in the navy, has been absent for the past seven years, and Mrs. Mirvan, under the care herself of her own mother, Lady Howard, therefore occupies an unusual role for a female and a mother. She is a daughter, she is married and she is a mother, yet she is free from the patriarchal authority of father and husband. Without the presence of a husband, but with her reputation protected by her married state, and by being the daughter of an aristocrat, Mrs. Mirvan enjoys the level of freedom, economic comfort, and respectability normally only enjoyed by wealthy widows. Because of this rather unusual marital situation, Mrs. Mirvan is free from the demands of a patriarchal authority that may have confined her to the domestic sphere and the maternal role. Instead, she enjoys a full and interesting social life, attending plays, balls, and parties, playing cards, going shopping, and enjoying the company of many acquaintances – male and female.

Mrs. Mirvan has two reasons to encourage Evelina to be a part of her small female-centric family. She imagines that Evelina would be an ideal companion and friend to her daughter, Maria. They are of the same age and, as daughters with no siblings of their own, they are predisposed to become good enough friends to be like sisters. Evelina’s presence would be beneficial to Mrs. Mirvan too. As Maria’s companion, Evelina offers a form of social protection for Maria - at parties and balls, for example – that enables Mrs. Mirvan to pursue her own social pleasures without having to be a constant
Evelina, however, turns out to be rather more of a responsibility than Mrs. Mirvan may have wished - in need of social protection, rather than able to supply it. Evelina is very beautiful, “so striking, it is not possible to pass it unnoticed” (22), and consequently attracts a lot of male attention. Because she lacks the sophistication to handle their advances, however, Evelina needs the type of protection – generally associated with the protection that a mother would supply - that would ensure her protection from the unwanted attentions of predatory males and guidance on the appropriate feminine conduct in social situations.

Evelina’s inexperience of fashionable society and her inability to deal with social situations are demonstrated in her first outing to a private ball given by one of Mrs. Mirvan’s fashionable friends. Evelina relates to Mr. Villars how, at one ball, Mrs. Mirvan had promised to sit with Maria and her until they were both “provided with partners” (31), after which Mrs. Mirvan would join the card-players. Evelina does not question who is actually responsible for providing her and Maria with partners, but the panic with which she retells the rest of the incident suggests that she believes it to have been the responsibility of Mrs. Mirvan.

As young men approach Evelina, Mrs. Mirvan is neither available to act as intermediary (a customary maternal role in such situations), nor to rescue Evelina from embarrassing situations. Evelina accepts the offer to dance from the then unknown Lord Orville, but is “seized with such a panic” when she realizes that she is not only dancing “with a stranger” (32) but that she is in a room full of strangers, with neither Mrs. Mirvan nor “one person that [she] knew” anywhere to be seen (32). When Evelina finally finds Mrs. Mirvan and tells her of her ‘disasters,’ Mrs. Mirvan “good-naturedly blamed herself for not having better instructed me, but said she had taken it for granted that I must know such common customs” (37). Evelina’s behaviour is, as she herself concludes, somewhat “silly” and “childish” (34), but it is, after all, her first outing into fashionable society and, as “quite a little rustic [who] knows nothing of the world” (20), she obviously needs help in negotiating the social niceties and pitfalls of that society. The help she needs is evoked through the narrative as help that would conventionally be

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27 The notion of Evelina being a ‘companion’ to Maria is echoed later in the novel by Mr. Lovel, who implies that Evelina is not a social equal to Maria Mirvan by insultingly referring to her as a “toad-eater” (327), a hanger-on who provides companionship, possibly for benefits, including subsistence, like the humble ‘female companion’ of a rich lady.
expected to come from a mother or from a respectable older woman in the role of a mother figure and, in this respect, Mrs. Mirvan, as the only person in that role, is therefore rendered deficient.

Mrs. Mirvan’s comments reveal that the responsibility of another daughter, particularly one who is both alluring and socially inept, is a strain. At another ball, Evelina is pursued by the then unknown Sir Clement Willoughby and, mindful of Mrs. Mirvan’s advice following her first social blunder that “it was highly improper for young women to dance with strangers, at any public assembly” (44), Evelina refuses to dance with him. Mrs. Mirvan acknowledges that this man is a stranger, both to herself and to Evelina, and she also acknowledges as apt Evelina’s disgust and confusion at “his nonsense” (46) in pestering her to dance with him, yet she tells Evelina that she “must either go down one dance [with him], or avoid his importunities by returning home” (48). Evelina is “obliged to consent” (48), and she dances with the stranger, but makes it clear to him that she has been “forced … against [her] will” to do so. Evelina is particularly distressed when Mrs. Mirvan reappears with Lord Orville and Sir Clement insinuates that Evelina ‘belongs’ to Lord Orville – as a “prize … not to be neglected” (51). When Sir Clement persists in seeking Lord Orville’s permission to dance with Evelina, Mrs. Mirvan loses patience with Evelina and demands, “For Heaven’s sake, my dear … what does this all mean?” (52) Evelina, overwhelmed by Mrs. Mirvan’s anger, bursts into tears. Aware of the effect of her words, Mrs. Mirvan immediately tries to make reparation, “with the kindest concern” by asking “What is the matter, my dearest love?” (52)

This incident is a turning point for Evelina, as she recognizes that Mrs. Mirvan is not the mother figure she wants and needs. Burney shows in this incident that the most “unaccountable and perplexing” (53) aspect of Evelina’s circumstance is the lack of control she has over her own actions and choices. This is highlighted by the fact that even in her choice of dancing partner, for example, Evelina is entitled only to the power of refusal and, even on refusal, is subjected to wrath, disdain or ridicule from those with power – the male, certainly, but also, the mother. The mother’s power, applied as appropriate maternal authority and meaningful maternal judgment, would have saved her ‘child’ from unwanted advances. It is therefore significant that Evelina does not burst into tears at Sir Clement’s tormenting her “to death” (49), but at Mrs. Mirvan’s anger towards her. In fact, Sir Clement’s torment appears,
suddenly, as harmless banter in comparison to Mrs. Mirvan’s outburst. Following this incident, Evelina continues to refer to Mrs. Mirvan in the kindest of terms – she is a “sweet woman” (58), a “dear lady” (115), and a “dear and generous friend” (192) but, significantly, she no longer refers to her as “mamma.”

Mrs. Mirvan not only fails to be a maternal role model, she also fails to be a female role model, the foundation of her failure due entirely to her being married to the “surly, vulgar, and disagreeable” Captain Mirvan (42). As the Mirvan females anticipate Captain Mirvan’s return home, Evelina revels in “the cheerfulness and felicity enjoyed by the rest of the family” (24). After her first encounter with Captain Mirvan however, Evelina writes of her shock that Mrs. Mirvan could marry such a man:

Almost the same moment that Maria was presented to him, he began some rude jests upon the bad shape of her nose, and called her a tall, ill-formed thing...that kind and sweet-tempered woman, Mrs. Mirvan, deserved a better lot. I am amazed she would marry him. I cannot imagine why the family was so rejoiced at his return. If he had spent his whole life abroad, I should have supposed they might rather have been thankful than sorrowful...I hope they do not think so ill of him as I do. At least, I am sure they have too much prudence to make it known (42).

Evelina’s amazement at Mrs. Mirvan’s apparent choice of husband (if indeed he was her choice) implies Evelina’s disappointment in Mrs. Mirvan for what she perceives as her having demeaned herself (for she “deserved a better lot”) by marrying this vulgar, abusive man. Mrs. Mirvan becomes manager of her husband’s rambunctious behaviour, her “principal study,” according to Evelina, being to heal “those wounds which her husband inflicts” (59). Mrs. Mirvan is employed throughout the rest of Volume One “remonstrat[ing] with the Captain” (57); arranging to “divert the Captain’s ill humour” (62); begging with him to “desist” (132); expostulating with him (170); and apologizing for his “ill-manners” (171). Mrs. Mirvan, bullied, coerced, and finally forced “never speak to [him] when he is out of humour” (171), is silenced by “one of the worst men in the world” (172) - the “greatest brute in
nature” (446) and becomes representative of the female who, despite perceptions of freedom and possibilities, has neither.

Captain Mirvan’s appearance and Evelina’s subsequent separation from Mrs. Mirvan are essential to Burney’s maternal plot. Mrs. Mirvan, more than any of the other substitute mothers, is the only mother figure Evelina chooses to take the place of “mamma.” If Captain Mirvan had not appeared, Mrs. Mirvan and Evelina may have constructed a mother-daughter bond, and such a bond is counter-productive to Burney’s plot by which the motherless heroine comes to a sense of autonomy and self-worth and vindicates her mother along the way. Mrs. Mirvan, stifled, repressed, and abused by a misogynist husband, is forced to withdraw any potential for a meaningful connection with Evelina. Unable to find any sense of self beyond her husband’s control, Mrs. Mirvan is the woman that Evelina must not use as a role model. In this respect, Captain Mirvan is simultaneously the catalyst both for Burney’s return to her narrative trope and for the expressions of misogyny that justify its use.

**Madame Duval - “So vulgar…and so familiar to me”**

Madame Duval is Evelina’s maternal grandmother, the only one of the substitute mothers who is a familial relation, and the only one with a known history of dubious maternal behaviour. It is Madame Duval’s maternal history and her character that are the subjects of the letters between Lady Howard and Mr. Villars at the opening of the novel. Lady Howard relates that Madame Duval has sent her a letter stating her intention to remove Evelina from the care of Mr. Villars and to take her to live with her in Paris; an attempt, as Lady Howard describes it, “to repair the wrongs she has done,” while at the same time wishing “the world to believe her blameless” (11).

At Lady Howard’s request, Mr. Villars explains the histories, as he knows them, of all the people involved in Caroline and Evelina’s stories. Mr. Evelyn - Madame Duval’s first husband and the father of their daughter Caroline - requested on his deathbed that Mr. Villars, his trusted friend and tutor, share the care and upbringing of Caroline with Mrs. Evelyn (Madame Duval). Mr.

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28 Even the wealthy, widowed Lady Howard is metaphorically silenced by Captain Mirvan. Following the tales of Monsieur Du Bois’ supposed “arrest,” Evelina tells Mr. Villars how she believes that “Lady Howard … suspected some contrivance of the Captain … yet she would not hazard the consequence of discovering his designs … there seems to be a tacit agreement between her and the Captain, that she should not appear to be acquainted with his schemes; by which means she at once avoids quarrels, and supports her dignity” (158).
Villars is made responsible for Caroline’s education and Mrs. Evelyn is made responsible for her economic security. Caroline lives with Mr. and Mrs. Villars until she is eighteen years old and then returns to her mother, who is now remarried and living in Paris. Madame Duval tries to arrange a marriage for Caroline to a man Caroline dislikes and threatens her with poverty and ruin if she does not comply (15). In desperation of the threat, Caroline unwisely rushes into a private marriage with the young aristocrat, Sir John Belmont. Sir John, however, “disappointed of the fortune he expected, [and] by the inexorable rancour of the Duvals” (15), burns the marriage certificate, denies ever having been married to Caroline, and summarily deserts her, leaving her alone, disgraced, and pregnant. In this state, Caroline returns for protection to Mr. Villars, now widowed. Despite Caroline’s endeavours to prove their marriage, Sir John Belmont continues to disclaim it and, when Caroline dies giving birth to their baby, Evelina, Sir John refuses to claim the child as his own. Mr. Villars, at Caroline’s dying request, therefore becomes Evelina’s only parent.

Knowing Madame Duval’s maternal history, Mr. Villars considers her “by no means a proper companion or guardian” (13) for Evelina. Significantly however, he does not seem to attribute her unworthiness solely to her maternal shortcomings. He acknowledges, for example, the possibility that “this wretched woman is ... awakened to remorse” (13), and regards her, even, as an “unhappy woman ... an object of pity” (13). He also suggests that Madame Duval’s maternal tyranny was at the instigation of her second husband, Monsieur Duval, and considers that Madame Duval was filled with “agonies of grief and remorse” when told of her daughter’s death (16). Mr. Villars’ reactions seem to suggest that, while Madame Duval’s maternal behaviour is dubious, it does not necessarily preclude her from being a better grandmother than she was a mother.

Mr. Villars’ objections to Madame Duval’s potential guardianship of Evelina are due to his opinion of her character and of what he describes as her “low-bred and illiberal” social origins (14). Lady Howard agrees with Mr. Villars and refers to Madame Duval’s character as “unnatural” and “unworthy” (12), as evidenced by her manner of writing, which Lady Howard describes as “violent, sometimes abusive” (11) and as “vulgar and illiterate as when her first husband, Mr. Evelyn, had the weakness to marry her” (12). Madame Duval is described as “uneducated and unprincipled; ungentle in her temper,
and unamiable in her manners” (13), a description similar to Evelina’s description of Captain Mirvan as “surly, vulgar, and disagreeable” (42). These two characters inhabit the misogynist or masculinist category of Burney’s narrative hierarchy. They are both vulgar, irreverent characters who behave in outrageous, exaggerated ways. Captain Mirvan’s exaggerated form of masculine (misogynist) behaviour, for example, propels him to perform irreverent and grotesque actions against women, which appear to him and are superficially, comedic, but are instead cruel and demeaning. Madame Duval’s exaggerated femininity also has a dual effect. She dresses “very gaily [and] paints very high” (59), feigns a French accent (54), and mimics aristocratic mannerisms. In her dress and manner, Madame Duval makes “such an exhibition of her person” (248) that even the innocent Evelina recognizes that “she is ... very unlike other people” (86). Indeed, Madame Duval is unlike other people. She displays overt and highly visible forms of femininity that render her more a grotesque and irreverent caricature of femininity than a real woman, akin to the modern ‘drag queen’ - who enacts outrageous femininity by means of excessive hair styles, heavy make-up, and bizarre, colourful dress - her outré public femininity highlighting the private, innate and ‘real’ femininity exemplified by Evelina.

Madame Duval and Captain Mirvan both ‘perform’ their genders in such exaggerated ways that they distort gender definitions, the term ‘perform’ used here deliberately to signify the theatrical nature of their behaviour. Emily Allen suggests that the inclusion of these characters in a novel is Burney’s gesture towards the relationship between the eighteenth-century theatre and the emergent novel, and to what she describes as the ultimate triumph, towards the end of the century, of the “privatizing paradigms of the novel.”29 Allen argues that Evelina is a “narrative of generic conflict and transformation” and Evelina is aligned, increasingly throughout the narrative, to the private world of the novel as she opposes the public world of the theatre - as personified by Madame Duval and Captain Mirvan. Her preference for (and return to) the private world - endorsed by characters such as Evelina and Mr. Villars through the private reading and writing of the

letters that make up the novel – indicates the triumph of the novel over the theatre.

In Allen’s reading, Evelina’s maturation can be seen to be a process of rejecting the theatre, made tangible by her rejection of her grandmother’s theatrical performance of femininity. Theatrical amusement pervades the novel, but is most evident in the characters of Madame Duval and Captain Mirvan. Madame Duval, particularly, is representative of the outrageous character types that were a known, and extremely popular, presence in eighteenth-century theatre. She epitomizes the type of character that a largely middle-class audience would view as the Other, representation of the lower classes as vulgar, illiterate, and unprincipled, and as an assurance to the middle class, in a sense, of its own moral superiority. Madame Duval’s posturing as a woman of quality, through her pretentious language and ostentatious dress, accentuates her lower-class origins, which are made obvious by her ignorance of decorum. Similarly, Madame Duval’s posturing as a caring grandmother, through her expressed desire to repair the wrongs she has done, accentuates her monstrous maternity, which is made visible by her violent behaviour towards Evelina, as she treats her with “violence and vulgarity” - forbidding (74), scolding (95, 114), slapping (165), bullying (182, 185), and upbraiding (281) – and threatening to disinherit her (182).

It is as a victim of violence, however, that Madame Duval’s performance of femininity is exposed and made grotesquely comic. When Captain Mirvan and Sir Clement feign a highway robbery, for example, they take Madame Duval from the carriage, throw her in a ditch, bind her feet together, and tie her to a tree (164-165). Evelina describes Madame Duval's appearance, thus:

> Her head-dress had fallen off; her linen was torn; her negligee had not a pin left in it; her petticoats she was obliged to hold on ... She was covered with dirt, weeds, and filth, and her face was really horrible, for the pomatum and powder from her head, and the dust from the road, were quite pasted on her skin by her tears, which, with her rouge, made so frightful a mixture, that she hardly looked human (164-166).

Madame Duval, “sobbing ... almost roaring ... in the utmost agony of rage and terror” (164), is ridiculed by the attendant (male) servants, who “die with laughter” when they see her (166). This supposedly comic scene - certainly one of the most theatrical of the novel - is also one of its most disturbing,
and one that has implications beyond the comic. Madame Duval is, in effect, the figure of spectacle, or the “object-to-be-looked-at” of theatre, which is, as John O’Brien suggests, “in excess of the narrative, creating an emotional or thematic surplus that cannot in the end be fully accounted for by the logic of the story.”

What O’Brien suggests here is that Madame Duval’s exaggerated behaviour and responses make her the spectacle that other characters and the reader of the novel are forced to observe. The theatrical nature of her attack results in a form of visual comedy, but the comedy hides the meaning of the act and becomes the ‘emotional or thematic surplus’ of the novel. Madame Duval, stripped of the adornments of her femininity and of her social pretensions, exceeds the parameters of the social framework created in the novel. The reader, therefore, is forced to take notice of Madame Duval’s situation and to question the logic and meaning of the act.

In light of Burney’s concentration on gender and class in *Evelina*, the meanings of Madame Duval’s victimization are correspondingly two-fold. She is representative of the ways society expects women to adhere to codes of femininity, and of the ways patriarchal domination of women can occur.

Selfish, highly-strung, and violent, Madame Duval is, as Terry Castle remarks, “a spectacularly sinister … depraved … grotesque harridan.” She manifests monstrous motherhood and monstrous femininity, and serves in the novel, not only as the antithesis of a role model, but also as a serious threat to Evelina’s future. Emblematic of the lower classes, “the riotous, swarming, diverse, public body that both threatens and ensures the dream of bourgeois individualism and identity,” Madame Duval is herself representative of the ‘riotous, swarming, diverse, public’ self. As such, she is

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32 In *The Politics and Poetics of Transgression*, Peter Stallybrass & Allon White formulate the distinction between the carnivalesque body and the body of the bourgeois individual. Drawing on Mikhail Bakhtin’s vocabulary of the “grotesque body” and the “classical body”, they argue that, “the grotesque body stands in opposition to the bourgeois individualist conception of the body, which finds its image and legitimation in the classical” (1986, Cornell University Press, Ithaca, p. 22). The grotesque body is associated with “impurity (both in the sense of dirt and mixed categories, heterogeneity, masking, protuberant distension, disproportion, exorbitancy, clamour, decentred or eccentric arrangements, a focus upon gaps, orifices and symbolic filth … physical needs and pleasures of the ’lower bodily stratum, materiality and parody.’” The classical body, on the other hand, is closed, pure, and private, constructed as the “high, inside, and central by virtue of its very exclusions” (p. 23).
potentially hazardous to Evelina’s acceptance into society and to her attainment of her rightful place in the social order.

During the time she spends in Madame Duval’s company, Evelina is exposed, as never before, to the public world. Even though Evelina experiences her first forays into Society under the care of Mrs. Mirvan, it is with Madame Duval that Evelina experiences her most public outings - to dances, picnics, theatres, and pleasure gardens - her most embarrassing moments, and her most distressing interactions with others. Madame Duval, described as one who always makes “such an exhibition of her person” (248), is a ‘public’ person in the sense that she is happiest when she is on display. It is under Madame Duval’s care that Evelina finds herself also on display, an object, according to Elizabeth Bennet Kubek, of public consumption.33 With Madame Duval, Evelina participates in an urban culture that objectifies her. She is, for example, the target of threats of sexual assault, which escalate in relation to her public exposure and to her time spent with Madame Duval. Through continued public exposure, the question of Evelina’s legitimacy and her consequent social position become public too. With her reputation hovering between legitimacy (the fact of which is known only in the private sphere) and illegitimacy (the potential for which exists in the public sphere), Evelina is at the mercy of a society that insists upon a patronymic as the source and evidence of her legitimacy.

As Evelina’s grandmother, Madame Duval is Evelina’s only blood link to her dead mother. Lady Howard, Mrs. Mirvan, and Mrs. Selwyn all know the story of Caroline’s marriage to Sir John and they know that Evelina is Sir John’s legitimate daughter. To the outside world however, proof of Evelina’s legitimacy is important. It is the only means by which potential suitors assess Evelina’s social positioning and sexual availability. To the aristocratic licentious males – arguably the young versions of her own father - Evelina’s legitimacy is essential to their understanding of her. If Evelina is not the legitimate daughter of Sir John Belmont, she is fair game for their sexual

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advances, but if she is the legitimate daughter of a baronet, she is a potential wife who commands their show of respect for her wealth and title.

It is in this regard that Madame Duval is a threat to Evelina’s reputation. Madame Duval’s vulgar behaviour, outrageous social pretensions and sexual experience (she has been married twice and travels with a younger man, in whom she obviously has some romantic interest, as evidenced by her jealousy when he shows a romantic interest in Evelina) all contribute to her dubious reputation. As Madame Duval’s granddaughter, Evelina could be viewed as a pretender to aristocratic birth and legitimacy. Caroline, Madame Duval’s daughter, unable to defend herself and to prove that she was legally married to Sir John Belmont and that her daughter is legitimate, is, to those who do not know her or her circumstances, of questionable reputation. To the outside world Caroline is either a ‘bad’ woman of loose sexual morals with an illegitimate child, or a ‘good,’ respectably married (but betrayed) woman with a legitimate child.

While this may appear somewhat reductionist, it is relevant to consider how, in the rigorous class structuring of eighteenth-century England, inter-class marriage was relatively rare. The arrival of Madame Duval brings into focus the legitimacy of Evelina’s claims to aristocracy for two reasons. First, Evelina has not previously been in society, and the only people with whom she has been in contact know of her circumstances and of her legitimacy. Second, Evelina is an innocent, well-mannered and educated, if somewhat ‘rustic’, young woman who has the bearing and sensibility of one of high birth,34 thus making her appear – certainly in an eighteenth-century view – credible as the daughter of a baronet. Madame Duval challenges Evelina’s credibility. Belief that Caroline was the wife of Sir John Belmont is not so very difficult when her charming, beautiful, and innocent daughter could be considered, perhaps, the embodiment of her. However, belief in Sir John’s marriage to Madame Duval’s daughter falters if the daughter was the embodiment – in character as she is in appearance – of the vulgar Madame Duval. In her representation of the lower classes, Madame Duval also represents the loose moral standards and sexual liberties assumed by the

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34 Evelina’s class differentiation from the lower class is highlighted in her interactions with her ‘family,’ Madame Duval and the Branghtons. The younger Branghtons are deferential to Evelina and, even though she is as young, or even younger than them all, and they are technically “family,” they refer to her throughout as “Miss Anville” or “Miss.” The girls are particularly embarrassed in front of Evelina when she visits them with Madame Duval at their ‘humble’ apartments.
middle and upper classes to be standard conduct of the lower classes. Sir John Belmont is also typecast, representative of the aristocracy’s libertine morals and disdain for the lower orders. Evelina’s embarrassment about her vulgar relation masks her concern that she will not be believed to be who she knows she is, and that she will be forever branded illegitimate.

Despite her flaws however, Madame Duval plays an important part in Evelina’s narrative, not least because of her beauty, which is the source of both Caroline’s and Evelina’s beauty and that is the source, eventually, of Evelina’s legitimation. Madame Duval’s beauty enabled her to transcend her lower class origins by marrying someone of a higher class. Indeed, all three generations of women are beautiful enough to attract suitors ‘above’ their social class. Madame Duval’s beauty, “still very visible in her face” (59), is the common thread that runs through the maternal family line. Evelina is described as having “complete beauty” (22), and her mother, Caroline, is described as beautiful by virtue of Evelina’s resemblance to her when Sir John exclaims that, “never was likeness more striking” (428). Because of the beauty she inherited from her mother, Evelina is immediately recognized by Sir John and he subsequently ‘owns’ her. So, while Madame Duval serves in the novel as a deficient mother figure, first, as the antithesis of the models of femininity and maternity to which women were increasingly bound, and second, as a model for Evelina of all she should not be, she is an important maternal figure. Through her beauty passed from generation to generation, Madame Duval represents the power of female beauty to intersect social classes that, by extension, illuminates the arbitrary nature of social structures. At the same time, Madame Duval evokes a form of female and maternal power – through transmission of physical beauty – in its potential as ancestral authority.

Mrs. Selwyn - “Our satirical friend”

Mrs. Selwyn is the most unusual of the substitute mothers because she treats Evelina “as an equal” (326). She only ever refers to Evelina as ‘Miss Anville’ and she cajoles and torments Evelina “unmercifully” (361) with “her satirical humour” (316). Mrs. Selwyn is very astute, the only person, for example, who suggests that Evelina is not as “innocent as [she] pretend[s] to look” (364). This does not of course constitute an authorial indictment of Evelina’s virtue, but is rather Mrs. Selwyn’s assessment of Evelina as a young woman who understands perfectly her situation and the importance of her
legitimation as it pertains to her place in the world. Mrs. Selwyn then, is the only substitute mother who actually regards Evelina as a person in her own right, not as a child, as Mr. Villars does, not as her daughter’s teenage companion, as Mrs. Mirvan does, and certainly not as a granddaughter to be manipulated and controlled, as Madame Duval does.

Mrs. Selwyn is “a lady of large fortune” (291), a fact that automatically sets her apart from the majority of women who are financially dependent on their husbands. Evelina describes Mrs. Selwyn as “very urgent” (292) with her, as tormenting her “unmercifully” and as overpowering her with “the force of her arguments” (359). With her “air of uncommon sternness [and] a commanding air” (303), Mrs. Selwyn is intimidating not only to Evelina, but to everyone with whom she comes into contact. Mr. Villars is “disgusted” with Mrs. Selwyn’s “unmerciful propensity to satire,” and had to overcome “his dislike” for her when committing Evelina to her care (300). Lord Merton refers to her as a “queer woman” and describes Evelina as having “got into bad hands” (305) by being in her care.

Mrs. Selwyn is the only one of the substitute mothers who actually does something to “learn the truth” of Evelina’s legitimacy (351), and she is the only one who confronts Sir John face-to-face on Evelina’s behalf. Within a short period and with a minimum of fuss, Mrs. Selwyn ensures that Evelina is properly ‘owned’ by her father. By this act alone, Mrs. Selwyn is recognizably the most modern of the substitute mothers, what Patricia Meyer Spacks calls, “a provocative image of female intelligence and force.” As provocative as it may be, however, Mrs. Selwyn’s intelligence and force is detrimental to her potential as a female and maternal role model for Evelina. Mrs. Selwyn is “extremely clever,” but has, according to Evelina, “lost all the softness of her own [sex]” (300). Described as “masculine” in her understanding with an “unmerciful propensity to satire” (300), Mrs. Selwyn is an uneasy blend of male and female characteristics that render her feared, disliked, or ridiculed by both sexes.

Mrs. Selwyn demonstrates an ability to operate outside of patriarchal control, yet she also ironically demonstrates a desire and a need for its approval. Evelina describes Mrs. Selwyn as a woman who “reserve[s] herself for the

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gentlemen” (320), demonstrated by her verbal sparring and intellectual rivalry with the young, aristocratic men. Evelina is intimidated by Mrs. Selwyn most obviously because she lacks what Evelina considers to be feminine qualities, and in particular the quality of “gentleness” that she considers “so essential a part of the female character that [she] is less at ease ... with a woman who wants it, than ... with a man” (300). Evelina laments to Mr. Villars, “How often do I wish I was under the protection of Mrs. Mirvan?” (326) and “I had a thousand times rather ask the protection of Mrs. Mirvan” (351), but the fact is that Mrs. Mirvan is incapable of protecting Evelina or of controlling events to effect the changes that she desires and needs. It is only Mrs. Selwyn who does both.

Despite Mrs. Selwyn’s brusque manner – and Evelina feeling “awkward” in her company – she is “very kind and attentive” (300) to Evelina, and assumes the role of a substitute mother in the way she protects Evelina on various occasions. She ardently protects Evelina from the unwanted advances of young men, assuring her that Evelina can depend upon her for keeping unwanted admirers at bay (307). Mrs. Selwyn uses her sharp wit to dissuade Lord Merton from his advances and from taking Evelina’s hand, by telling him: “My Lord ... in detaining Miss Anville any longer, you only lose time, for we are already as well convinced of your valour and your strength as if you were to hold her an age” (348). Mrs. Selwyn also guides Evelina through the social niceties and advises her on potential pitfalls. When Evelina has been insultingly described by Mr. Lovel to Lady Louisa as a “toad-eater” (327), for example, Mrs. Selwyn is quick to advise Evelina to “pay court to ... Mr. Lovel; for ... though he is malicious, he is fashionable, and may do you some harm in the great world” (327). Mrs. Selwyn in undoubtedly speaking for Frances Burney herself in announcing this great truth, that the world in which a female must operate is one in which she is bound by social and patriarchal forces and that, in order to survive, she must use her femininity wisely. Innocence in society may save a young woman, but ignorance of it will not.

Mrs. Selwyn considers Evelina’s predicament of legitimacy the catalyst for her to exercise her strong sense of justice for female worth. It is also relevant that Mrs. Selwyn considers Evelina’s predicament to be an exciting drama, and as one in which she clearly sees herself playing a significant part. She insists that Evelina should seek out her father to have the issue of her
legitimacy “cleared up” (351). Mrs. Selwyn recognizes the power of the mother, or more specifically, the power of the maternal ‘image,’ as the defining factor in Evelina’s quest for legitimation, and she assures Evelina that she has “too strong a resemblance to [her] dear, though unknown mother to allow of the least hesitation in [her] being owned, once [she is] seen” (351). Mrs. Selwyn is, however, astute enough to consider that Sir John has reason enough to refuse to see Evelina. She recognizes that the sudden emergence of a child from a marriage he has denied will be an embarrassment, and could provoke his anger rather than his admission. Despite this, Mrs. Selwyn insists on meeting Sir John and is brave enough to speak to him with “severity” (415) in order to bring about the meeting of father and daughter that will ensure Evelina’s future.

Evelina does not appreciate Mrs. Selwyn as a mother figure because she is forthright and not properly feminine, but this does not detract from Mrs. Selwyn’s importance in the novel. She is representative of the morally upright middle-class in her condemnation of the libertine habits of the aristocracy, and in her concerns for moral and social justice. Moreover, as a lively, interesting and engaging character, Mrs. Selwyn epitomizes the new kind of woman emerging in the late eighteenth century, a woman who believes in her worth as an individual and who asserts her right to a place in society and the world.

*The Absent Mothers*

Ideal motherhood in *Evelina* is realized through forms of sacrifice, absence, and death, exemplified in the figures of Dame Green and Caroline Belmont. Dame Green is the mother of the child that Sir John has cared for since birth in the belief that she is his own daughter. Dame Green was Evelina’s wet-nurse - her first substitute mother - who performs the vital function of keeping Evelina alive when Caroline Belmont dies. While feeding Evelina, Dame Green is also feeding her own baby. When the opportunity arises for her to pass off her own baby as Sir John’s, Dame Green has “little regard for any body but her child” (416) and hands her own child over to be brought up as the daughter of an aristocrat. In doing this, Dame Green forsakes her own motherhood by privileging her daughter’s life over her own that enables her daughter to have better opportunities in life than she could have had with her mother. In this way, Dame Green is Burney’s subtle representation of selfless - and excellent - motherhood.
When Sir John burns the certificate of his marriage to Caroline Belmont, he commits a crime against her hardly imaginable today. In refusing their marriage, Sir John denies Caroline the legitimacy, protection, reputation, and social standing that his name confers. His conduct highlights the social and political reality of how women are the ‘other’ - defined in opposition to the other sex that creates all the laws, controls economic arrangements, and defines social connections which give or withhold status.\(^{36}\) Caroline’s potential for ideal motherhood hinges on the question of her marriage. If Evelina is illegitimate, then Caroline was irresponsible and sexually promiscuous, and is therefore not a suitable female or maternal role model. If Evelina is legitimate, then Caroline represents suffering female virtue, her reputation unsullied, and her maternal ‘excellence’ unquestionable. The sentiments Caroline expresses in her posthumous letter to Sir John illustrate her potential for ideal motherhood. She expresses maternal love for their yet unborn child, “Oh babe of my fondest affection! For whom already I experience all the tenderness of maternal pity!” (376) She writes that it is her “feelings of a mother, a mother agonizing for the fate of her child” that give her the courage to offer Sir John the opportunity to bargain her forgiveness of his treachery for his acceptance of Evelina as his “lawful successor” (376).

Evelina’s only ‘proof’ of her identity is her resemblance to her dead mother, a literary motif used by women writers of the period as the means, according to Susan Greenfield, to explore the symbolic possibilities of the mother-daughter connection and in its potential for exposing the limitations of patriarchal authority.\(^{37}\) The mother-daughter resemblance is the signification of Evelina’s legitimacy and representative of the mother’s authority\(^{38}\) that is crucial to the novel’s satisfying (‘fairytale’) ending and its exposure of the instability and weakness of paternal authority.\(^{39}\) In her letter, Caroline makes clear the imperative for Sir John to acknowledge and validate their marriage in order to legitimate Evelina:

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\(^{36}\) Doody 1988, p. 45.


The public appearance of a daughter of Sir John Belmont will revive the remembrance of Miss Evelyn’s story in all who have hear it, - who the mother was, will be universally demanded, - and if any other Lady Belmont shall be name, - the birth of my Evelina will receive a stigma, against which honour, truth, and innocence may appeal in vain! A stigma which will eternally blast the fair fame of her virtuous mother....I will not suffer...the ashes of your mother to be treated with ignominy! Her spotless character shall be justified to the world – her marriage shall be acknowledged, and her child shall bear the name to which she is lawfully entitled (374).

While it is true that Evelina’s legitimacy is based on the natural arbitrary good fortune of her physical resemblance to her mother – connoting some form of matrilineal power – Evelina’s social legitimacy is only realizable through the political, traditional, and formal, patrilineal seals of authority, such as a marriage certificate and patronymic. Even so, Burney’s consideration of the notion that matrilineal descent is the ‘natural’ law of legitimation with the potential to override man-made laws and social conventions is suggestive of a radicalism with which she is rarely credited. While the absent biological mother stands in the narrative for natural and perceived excellent motherhood, the substitute mother stands in her place, as best she can, to assist Evelina in making her entrance into the world. Deprived of a maternal authority and devoid of the natural maternal feelings of selflessness that the absent mother is imagined to possess, the substitute mother is shown to be only a pretender to ideal motherhood. She lacks maternal authority because she is in some way flawed, and she lacks the selflessness that ostensibly characterizes the ‘natural’ mother. In many ways, each of Evelina’s substitute mothers take on a form of maternal responsibility for Evelina for the needs she satisfies in each of them. Evelina provides companionship to Mrs. Mirvan’s daughter to enable Mrs. Mirvan to enjoy her social life and to relinquish some maternal responsibility. She provides the opportunity for Madame Duval to assuage her maternal guilt. She provides the opportunity for Mrs. Selwyn to display her quick-wittedness, to fight for female justice, and to play a central role in an exciting drama. Although the substitute mothers may be unaware of their ulterior motives for taking care of the young heroine, they all share one thing; they are not committed, life and soul, to the life and soul of this child. In the figure of Mr. Villars however, Burney suggests that childcare is not a specifically female activity. The care of a child is predicated on desire - the desire to be, or act as, a parent, and the desire to invest in the care, welfare, and life of a child.
Motherhood in *Evelina* is composed of a multitude of sentiments, behaviours, and activities. Burney creates maternal characters that reflect the infinite scope of the human and maternal psyche - the grotesque and the macabre, the selfish, and the weak, the loving and the selfless. Through their particular behaviours and attitudes, the substitute mothers influence the way Evelina comes to view the world and to understand her role in society. None of the substitute mothers is a role model. Mrs. Mirvan is trapped in a marriage to a virtual sadist; Madame Duval is regarded a travesty of femininity and maternity; and Mrs. Selwyn is feared and ridiculed. Even the ‘ideal’ mothers are flawed: Dame Green gives her child away and leaves her motherless; and Caroline Belmont is dead, leaving the mothering of her child to others and the question of her legitimacy in abeyance. Burney does not create her deficient mothers and mother figures to challenge notions of motherhood, nor as the means to either validate or castigate maternal ideology. Rather, she creates a variety of mothers and mother figures to assert the notion that motherhood itself can inhabit a variety of forms.

For a female writer whose ‘feminism’ remains ambiguous, Frances Burney may well have been before her time in her vision of childcare as a shared, arbitrary, and potentially fulfilling experience for both mother and father. Moreover, while the mother is afforded little deviation from the models of maternal excellence that are embedded in the fabric of her society and in the fabric of the novel, she is, at least, allowed to fail without the severe repercussions that were created in earlier novels of deficient motherhood. It may not seem a big step for womankind perhaps, but Burney’s incisive social critique and wit, in which the mother figures play no small part, enable her to expose and ridicule the pomposity of the strict social rules by which she and all women were bound.

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In novels of deficient motherhood at the end of the century, female writers continued to use the tropes of maternal absence and maternal surrogacy as the basis for the narrative of the motherless heroine. Deficient mothers also appeared in the guise of unfeeling – even monstrous – mothers but, despite the similar conditions of the maternal tropes of absence, surrogacy, and monstrosity in earlier novels, the expressions and purposes in later novels are different. Indeed, maternal behaviour and sentiments that were once represented as monstrous, for example, are ambiguous, filled with meaning for and connotation of all manner of social, cultural and political issues. It is in the female-authored Gothic novel or Gothic Romance that appeared and flourished towards the end of the century that these differing representations of deficient motherhood are best illustrated.

The Gothic novel enabled female writers to express dissatisfaction with their lot without appearing to challenge the precepts of patriarchy. Whether female writers were only dimly aware of their social victimization, or deeply dissatisfied with what they saw as a world of injustice and deep disorder, the Gothic novel gave them scope to examine distinctively female concerns and issues. The central focus of the Gothic is the home and family. Sentimentally envisaged in the real world as the sites of domestic comfort and harmony, the home and family are disrupted in the Gothic. The home becomes a place of imprisonment and death, the family the locus of perversity and danger. Within this framework, the female is objectified, in danger of victimization by a tyrannical male figure, and the mother more often than not already a victim of the patriarchal abuse inherent in the Gothic mode.

As in other eighteenth-century novels of deficient motherhood in which the mother is absent, the absent mother in the Gothic novel often provides the impetus, acknowledged or otherwise, for the daughter-heroine’s adventures as she strives to “resolve the problem of the mother’s victimization and

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1 Ann Radcliffe 1998, *The Italian* (1797), edited by Frederick Garber, Oxford University Press, New York. All references are from this edition and appear in this section with page numbers in parentheses, as follows (---).
reputation.”2 The difference between the Gothic novel and other female-authored novels of maternal absence however, is that maternal absence is representative less of the exploration of the social imperatives of motherhood than it is of the exploration of an innate connection between mother and daughter and the potential for “female identity and female bonding.”3 The parent established throughout the century as the most important to a child’s well being was that of the mother, and the child unable to cope with the loss of the mother was more often than not, the daughter. Gothic writers put the mother-daughter relationship under scrutiny by either removing the mother from the narrative or by making her villainous and vindictive.

'Mother Radcliffe’ and the Gothic Novel
By the 1790s, Ann Radcliffe became the pioneer and inspiration for women writers that Frances Burney had been in the 1780s.4 Radcliffe was the dominant and pivotal figure in what had become a developing battle between men and women for recognition as novelists, “the very name of Ann Radcliffe, in the hands of women writers,” according to Rictor Norton, was “a metonym for equal genius, if not superiority, of female novelists.”5 Radcliffe was one of the major literary figures of her day and for a long time after she ceased writing. By the time The Italian was published, Radcliffe was already enormously popular. Her novel, The Mysteries of Udolpho, was a sensation on its publication in 1794. It was so widely read and praised that, almost twenty-five years after its publication, when Jane Austen used it as a reference point in her novel, Northanger Abbey6, it was well enough known not to need explanation or explication, evidence, suggests Dale Spender, of Radcliffe’s influence in literary circles and among the reading public.7

The Italian is generally regarded as Radcliffe’s most accomplished and exciting novel,8 and at the time of its publication in 1797, Radcliffe’s reputation was such that her novels were admired and eagerly read as avidly

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3 Eleanor Ty 1993, Unsex’d Revolutionaries: Five Women Novelists of the 1790s, University of Toronto Press, Toronto, p. xii.
by learned gentlemen as by young men and women. Evidence of Radcliffe’s popularity was the payment of the then enormous sum of eight hundred pounds for *The Italian* (she had received five hundred pounds for *Udolpho*), “magnificent remuneration,” according to Spender, and significantly more than other female authors of her day. Although Radcliffe was not the first female writer of Gothic novels, she established the Gothic novel, specifically the Gothic Romance, as the predominant form for the novel at the end of the eighteenth century. “Mother Radcliffe,” Spender argues, “left behind an invaluable legacy from which many still profit.” Spender uses the term ‘Mother’ to define Radcliffe’s place as the mother of Gothic novels, but the term has also been applied to Radcliffe to represent her role in relation to the novel and to its readers. David Punter suggests that, while reading Radcliffe’s novels, there is a sense that the reader is “constantly expected to collaborate with Radcliffe as wise but acceptably worldly parents,” a point Jessamyn Jackson elaborates by arguing that a female author not only mothers her book the same way a mother authors her child, she mothers other people through her books.

*The Italian* is a Gothic romance; the story of the young Neapolitan nobleman hero, Vincentio di Vivaldi who falls in love with, and wishes to marry, the beautiful orphan heroine, Ellena di Rosalba, a match strongly opposed by Vivaldi’s manipulative mother, the Marchesa di Vivaldi. With the help of a vindictive monk, Schedoni, the Marchesa plots to thwart the match and安排es to have Ellena abducted, imprisoned, and murdered. Ellena is rescued from her convent prison by Vivaldi with the help of an unknown nun, who Ellena later discovers is her presumed dead mother, and she is saved from being murdered by Schedoni when he mistakenly believes her to be his daughter. In the meantime, Vivaldi is arrested for having abducted a

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12 Spender 1986, p. 239.
supposed nun (Ellena in ‘disguise’) and is taken for interrogation by the Inquisition. He survives his ordeal and when the two lovers are finally reunited, they marry.

_The Italian_ follows a similar narrative pattern to Radcliffe’s earlier popular (and arguably more famous) novel, _The Mysteries of Udolpho_ published in 1794. The orphaned heroine is attracted to, and helped by, a number of strong mother figures that guide her through myriad dangers that threaten her virtue and the romantic outcome of her narrative. Both novels focus on the trope of motherlessness as the means of female growth and autonomy, but it is in _The Italian_ particularly, that the notion of an innate essence of motherhood – a primal connection between mother and child – is examined and affirmed.

Motherhood is not a central consideration of the novel, yet Radcliffe’s interest to say something about motherhood is evident in her creation of several mother figures, five of which are variously used as the means for Radcliffe to explore and comment on the major issues that women of her time faced. Through her mother figures, Radcliffe comments on motherhood, gender, social class, female sexuality, and female subjectivity through female ‘voice’, the term used here to refer specifically to ideas, opinions, and points of view that women make visible (through the narrative as writer or character) that relate to a woman’s place in society. In _The Italian_, mothers are powerful and able, morally strong and mentally robust, delicately feminine and emotionally stable. Yet they are also evil and manipulative, immoral and corruptible, monstrously unfeminine and emotionally dysfunctional. Motherhood is a multitude of different behaviours and sentiments, and the notion of motherhood being a knowable entity consisting of specific rules of maternal excellence is always challenged.

Each of the five mother figures in the novel serves as the catalysts for each of the issues. The categories I use for discussion of each of the mothers are useful as heuristic devices to facilitate demonstration of the strong thematic plots of the novel and are useful starting points to demonstrate the extent to which Radcliffe’s political agenda motivates female voice in her fiction. Signora Bianchi, the substitute mother, is the catalyst for expressions of an

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15 Reference is made later in this chapter to Radcliffe’s use of similar imagery in _The Mysteries of Udolpho_ and _The Italian_.
ideal – caretaking - form of motherhood. Olivia, the absent mother, is the catalyst for the exploration of female sexuality. The Marchesa, the monstrous mother, is the catalyst for the examination of gender. The Mother Abbess of the Convent San Stefano, the Malevolent Mother, is the catalyst for the heroine’s (and Radcliffe’s) assertion of female subjectivity. The Abbess of the Convent of Santa dalla Piéta is Radcliffe’s representation of the Benevolent Mother.\(^{16}\) She is the catalyst for the refiguring of social class and the promotion of utopian ideas in which the mother is the source of a compassionate way of life through the establishment of female bonding and ‘sisterhood,’ the term ‘sisterhood’ being used throughout to mean the community of feeling and mutual support between women. These are not definite categories as there is overlap in the ‘messages’ each mother conveys. Olivia, for example, is not only the catalyst for examination of female sexuality; she is emblematic of patriarchal brutality, of suffering female virtue, and of ‘good’ motherhood. However, it is as a character that brings into focus the heroine’s sexuality that enables her to be representative – in this study – of a particular female (and Radcliffian) concern.

Despite the many different forms that mothering takes in this novel, however, there is thematic purpose to delineate maternal behaviours as ostensibly ‘good’ and ‘bad.’ In other words, we are left in no doubt as to who is representative of deficient motherhood and who is representative of ideal motherhood. While this appears reductionist, representations of good and bad motherhood are complicated by way of distortions, for example, in cause and effect. That is, all the mothers variously propel and impede the heroine to a satisfactory conclusion. The good mother, for example, wants to propel the heroine towards the hero, but often inadvertently thwarts advancement to their union. Signora Bianchi’s approval of Vivaldi’s advances based on her concerns for leaving her beloved ‘daughter’ unprotected in the world when she dies, for example, is discovered by Ellena at a later stage to have set in motion a series of events that have led to her abduction and imprisonment. Ellena, now aware of the situation in which the Vivaldi family “had not only been reluctant, but absolutely averse to a connection with hers” (69), is suffering the consequences of her aunt’s well meaning but impetuous plans for her future.

\(^{16}\) Santa della Piéta is spelt in this edition of the novel with and without the accent on the é. It is standardized here, with the accent.
This distortion is made even more complex in Radcliffe’s creation of Olivia – Ellena’s biological mother - and on her influence on her then unknown daughter. Ellena is attracted to her unknown mother to the extent that she feels more for her than she ‘should’ feel for her suitor, Vivaldi. As such, Olivia – Radcliffe’s representation of the good mother – inadvertently thwarts Ellena and Vivaldi’s union by effectively replacing him in Ellena’s affections. Conversely, the mother that is representative of ostensible bad motherhood, attempts to prevent the union but inadvertently impels advancement to it. The Marchesa’s refusal to accept Ellena and her plans to imprison and murder her, for example, are the means that impel Vivaldi to pursue Ellena with greater intensity. Similarly, the Abbess of San Stefano’s denunciation of Ellena’s involvement with Vivaldi serves to incite in Ellena resistance to such injustice and to motivate her to consent to Vivaldi’s attentions.

**The Caretaker Mother**

Ellena’s first mother is a substitute mother - her maternal Aunt - Signora Bianchi, the only mother Ellena has ever known. Signora Bianchi is the mother that epitomizes the self-sacrificing, compassionate, caretaking mother recognized in contemporary culture as the ‘ideal’ mother.\(^{17}\) Described as “a figure not of an order to inspire admiration” (24), Signora Bianchi exists in the narrative only to provide Ellena with the necessary protection and day-to-day caretaking that ensures Ellena reaches adolescence. Ellena returns Signora Bianchi’s loving maternal care with filial love, respect, intimacy, empathy, and by being her economic and emotional support, “the sole support of her aunt’s declining years ... patient to her infirmities, and consoling to her sufferings; [repaying] the fondness of a mother with the affection of a daughter” (9).

Although Signora Bianchi is aging, frail, and infirm however, she has complete authority in the domestic realm. She is fiercely protective of her niece, and worries that when she dies, Ellena will be “a young and friendless orphan,” unprotected against the many dangers of the outside world (24-25). Filled with “parental anxiety” about Ellena’s future without her, Signora Bianchi looks upon Vivaldi’s courtship as the opportunity to ensure Ellena’s future protection. Although she is aware that Vivaldi’s family will oppose the union, Signora Bianchi goes against her better judgment and “descend[s]  

from the lofty integrity, which ought to have opposed her consent that Ellena should clandestinely enter any family” (25), and encourages Vivaldi to pursue his suit to Ellena. Signora Bianchi insists on witnessing, “the certainty of [Ellena] being protected” after her death, and makes Vivaldi promise her that he will “guard [Ellena] from inquietude as vigilantly as [Signora Bianchi has] done, and, if possible, from misfortune” (38). Signora Bianchi, “determined to prevail” over Ellena’s reluctance (32), convinces her first, by “gentle remonstrances in [Vivaldi’s] favour [of the] prudence of such an engagement” (32), and then, by assertion of her maternal authority and insisting as her dying wish, that Ellena accept Vivaldi’s proposal. Ellena, who has previously disregarded Vivaldi as a suitor because of the impropriety of her betrothal to a man whose family disapproves of her, is subsequently coerced into agreeing to the union.

With her ‘daughter’ safely betrothed, Signora Bianchi dies. Once she has “performed the duties” (9) of a mother by safeguarding the infant through childhood to adolescence, the excellent mother disappears from the novel, her death a convenient and necessary development to enable the heroine to get on with her adventures without maternal interference. Signora Bianchi’s death, however, prefigures two central themes of the novel: the theme of an innate intimate connection between biological mother and daughter, and the theme of maternal authority that continues to inform Ellena’s decisions throughout.

An intimate connection between mother and daughter is evoked through Signora Bianchi’s death and Ellena’s subsequent devastation at her loss. When Signora Bianchi dies, Ellena not only loses “her only relative, the friend of her whole life,” (56) she loses her ‘mother’ again – effectively orphaned for a second time. It is through the mourning of her ‘mother’ that Ellena finds solace in the only other potential caring relationship she has, the one between herself and Vivaldi:

The more tenderly she lamented the deceased relative, the more tenderly she thought of Vivaldi; and her love for the one was so intimately connected with her affection for the other, that each seemed strengthened and exalted by the union (57).

Ellena’s feelings for the mother and the lover are explicitly connected, a connection that Signora Bianchi herself intimates when she secures a union for her daughter with a man who will “watch over the happiness of Ellena
with a care as tender, as anxious, and as unceasing as [Bianchi’s] own” (39), replicating entirely love based on maternal care. This theme is made explicit in the description of Ellena’s strong attraction to her unknown mother. Through a series of ambiguous erotic and tender images, the scene in which Ellena first sees her unknown mother evokes, among other things, a sense of the potential for an unconscious, primal identification with the mother, and the notion of the potential for the ‘natural’ mother–daughter bond to transcend the ‘constructed’ (as in the ‘choice’ to construct) heterosexual bond. That the mother’s authority informs Ellena’s decisions is evident in all of Ellena’s interactions with the various mother figures. Ellena’s acceptance of Vivaldi, based as it is on her fulfilling Signora Bianchi’s dying wish is the first of many decisions that Ellena makes in response to maternal authority. All of the mothers in the novel use an authority (grounded as it was in maternal ideology as rightful maternal authority) that ultimately changes the ways Ellena behaves and thinks.

**The Absent Mother and the Exploration of Female Sexuality**

The motherless daughter, Ellena, is innocent, beautiful and motherless. E.J. Clery says that Ellena, at first glance, is considered by some critics to be a “rather colourless heroine,” but Ellena is not what Allon Lloyd Smith calls “the embattled figure that traditionally haunts the Gothic.” Indeed, She is not the archetypal dreamy, romantic, poetry-writing type of Gothic heroine like Emily in *The Mysteries of Udolpho*, for example. Ellena actually works for a living, earning enough to keep herself and her Aunt, and she speaks out, when necessary, for personal integrity and justice. Ellena is atypically self-possessed and self-reliant, traits usually considered to be the reserve of the male, which enable her to negotiate the patriarchal world more successfully than her mother did. Through her creation of this strong, purposeful, dignified heroine, and through her adventures, Radcliffe is undoubtedly concerned to encourage her female readership to identify with this model for womanhood beyond her readers’ own domestic domains and rules of conduct.

Although Ellena is described as an orphan, her mother is still alive, living as a nun, and hidden away in a faraway convent. Olivia – Ellena’s mother, the

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Countess di Bruno - fled the family home after her second husband (the brother of her first husband and later identified as the evil monk, Schedoni), tried to kill her. Olivia escaped and took her two daughters (Ellena and a second daughter by Schedoni who dies shortly thereafter) to be looked after by her sister, Signora Bianchi. Olivia has allowed herself to be presumed dead in order to prevent Schedoni from seeking her out and to save her family from the disgrace that would befall it if it were known that her second husband - the Count’s brother - murdered her first husband - the Count di Bruno and Ellena’s father. Ellena has no remembrance of either her mother or of these events, Signora Bianchi’s excellent maternal care having “obliterated from [Ellena’s] mind the loss and the griefs of early infancy” (241).

As was seen in earlier novels, the leaving of children – albeit with a relative – can be interpreted as a mother abandoning her children. In *Moll Flanders* and *Roxana*, for example, the two women’s ostensible abandonment of their children, even to relatives, renders them failed or monstrous mothers. In the Gothic novel however, the abandoning mother is not a failed mother if she is representative, as is Olivia, of suffering female virtue. Conceiving of her ‘abandonment’ of her children as a direct result of patriarchal abuse, Radcliffe makes Olivia representative of suffering female virtue and maternal goodness. Olivia suffers abuse and oppression, yet demonstrates selfless maternal devotion and piety whenever possible, and never loses her faith or integrity. As such, Olivia exists in the novel as the means to cultivate the type of heightened sensibility that exposes the social and political oppression that women face.

Olivia and Ellena’s initial meeting is, in effect, a meeting of two strangers, neither being aware that they are mother and daughter. Radcliffe’s description of Ellena’s response to her first sight of Olivia is an ambiguous combination of emotional thoughts and erotic imagery:

> Among the voice of the choir, [Olivia’s] expression immediately fixed [Ellena’s] attention ... Ellena felt that she understood all the feelings of the breast from which it flowed ... [Olivia’s] face was concealed by a black veil, whose transparency, however, permitted the fairness of her complexion to appear...

> [Olivia] rose from her knees, and Ellena, soon after, observing her throw back her veil, discovered, by the lamp, which shed its full light upon her features, a countenance ... touched with a melancholy kind of resignation; yet grief seemed still to occasion the paleness,
and the air of languor, that prevailed over it ... to impart to it somewhat of a seraphic grandeur. At those moments her blue eyes were raised towards Heaven, with such meek, yet fervent love, such sublime enthusiasm ... which renewed, with Ellena, all the enchanting effects of the voice she had just heard (86-87).

Susan Greenfield suggests that this description is indicative of an intense erotic connection between the two women. She argues that Ellena’s immediate passionate response to her unrecognized mother prefigures an erotic attachment to the mother, the lynchpin of what she sees as the novel’s double movement, first away from the marriage plot, and then back towards it. From this first meeting, Ellena consistently demonstrates a desire for Olivia that is of far greater intensity than the desire she demonstrates for Vivaldi. As such, Ellena’s attraction to her unknown mother complicates the romantic plot of the novel as Ellena’s supposed erotic love for her mother disrupts the course of the expected, and inevitable, heterosexual love Ellena should feel for Vivaldi.

This disruption is represented by Vivaldi’s overt jealous reaction to Ellena’s expression of feelings for Olivia - a device which itself heightens the perceived erotic aspects of Ellena’s attraction – and his demonstration of concern that Olivia is his rival for Ellena’s love. When Vivaldi rescues Ellena from her convent prison, for example, Ellena, assisted by Olivia in the escape, is distraught at leaving her. Vivaldi, with his assistant’s help, must literally pull the two women apart:

The fears of Ellena now gave way to affectionate sorrow, as, weeping on the bosom of the nun, she said ‘farewell! O farewell, my dear, my tender friend! I must never, never see you more, but I shall always love you; and you have promised, that I shall hear from you; remember the convent della Piéta!’

‘You should have settled this matter within,’ said Jeronimo, ‘we have been here these two hours already.’

‘Ah Ellena!’ said Vivaldi, as he gently disengaged her from the nun, ‘do I then hold only the second place in your heart? ... I envy your friend those tears,’ said he, ‘and feel jealous of the tenderness that excites them. Weep no more, my Ellena’ (135-6).

Ellena continues to display heightened emotions, and Vivaldi becomes the target for her distress, anger, and confusion. Ellena, having “wept ... and lingered” (135) for so long that she is reprimanded by Vivaldi’s accomplice for keeping them all waiting, has to be “disengaged” from her embraces with

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20 Greenfield 2002, p. 65. Norton 1999, p. 94, also regards this first encounter as a highly charged depiction of erotic love at first sight.
Olivia in order finally to make their escape. Despite her lengthy and impassioned farewell with Olivia however, Ellena snaps at Vivaldi for dawdling and wasting time when he suggests (for her protection) that they marry immediately: “This is not a moment ... for conversation; our situation is yet perilous, we tremble on the very brink of danger” (145). Yet, still in haste and fearful of being followed, she stops with her rescuers to “admire” the scenery and to engage in a lengthy conversation on landscape aesthetics (158-163) - a scene that Mark Blackwell wittily refers to as, “no more likely than escaped convicts pausing to stargaze and chat about astrophysics while the police are hot on their trail.”  

Blackwell suggests that these ‘pauses’ in the novel (of which there are many) serve several purposes. They are Radcliffe’s narrative device to adjust the pace of the narrative, specifically to enhance the reader’s experience by adjusting the tension of the narrative plot. They also serve as an indicator of a character’s ‘goodness,’ for it is only the good characters that take time away from the dangerous plot to identify with the magnificence and sublime beauty of nature that allows them transcendence from their concerns and dangers at the same time as it establishes their moral and aesthetic superiority to their tormentors.  

The pause is also, arguably, a literal pause in which a character reflects on their actions. Ellena’s impatience with Vivaldi and her lack of interest in his romantic overtures suggest that she is confused about her feelings for Vivaldi because of her feelings for Olivia. It is only after she is separated from Olivia and has paused to consider her place in the world against the backdrop of the sublime power of nature that she is able to confront her attitudes towards Vivaldi and the ‘debt’ she owes him for his saving her and wanting to marry her. Feeling concern for Vivaldi’s “tranquility,” rather than erotic or romantic passion for him, Ellena considers that she must repay Vivaldi for saving her life by making the ‘sacrifice’ to marry him (181). That her decision to marry Vivaldi is a sacrifice is demonstrated by her manner of accepting him: “I am yours, Vivaldi,” replied Ellena faintly, ‘oppression can part us no more.’ She wept, and drew her veil over her eyes” (182). Ellena’s stammered reply, her weeping, and her drawing of the veil across the eyes indicate her reluctance and resignation, to marry. These are not necessarily signs that Ellena is reluctant to marry Vivaldi per se; rather they are signs that indicate Ellena’s  

reluctance and resignation to marriage in general and to her understanding of it as the definitive act by which she must renounce her love for Olivia.

This notion becomes apparent when Ellena is reunited with Olivia again. Comparing Radcliffe’s descriptions of Ellena’s reunion with Olivia at Santa della Piéta with her subsequent reunion with Vivaldi after his release from the Inquisition, suggests the differences in the depths of emotion Ellena feels for the two. Ellena and Vivaldi have had no contact with one another for more than two hundred pages (because Vivaldi has been imprisoned and questioned by the Inquisition), yet their reunion, in which “joy was exalted almost to agony,” is reported in two brief paragraphs (408-9). In contrast, Ellena’s reunion with Olivia, after a much shorter separation, is described in detail evoking a reunion of lovers rather than friends (369-70).

One of the most ambiguous images in the novel is that of the veil, and one repeated so frequently that it is apparent that Radcliffe intended it to have significant meaning.23 The veil is used throughout the novel (and throughout Radcliffe’s other novels) as expressions both sexual and maternal. Either one, or a combination of both, the veil is a powerful image that Radcliffe deploys throughout The Italian for a variety of purposes. As a sexual image, the veil often connotes forbidden sexual desire in some form. When Vivaldi first sees Ellena, for example, she is wearing a veil that hides her face one moment and partially reveals it the next, suggestive of an erotic, forbidden pleasure: “the breeze from the water caught the veil … and wafting it partially aside, disclosed to him a countenance more touchingly beautiful than he had dared to image” (6). Ellena’s initial response to the veiled Olivia is similarly expressed; Olivia’s “face was concealed by a black veil, whose transparency, however, permitted the fairness of her complexion to appear” (86). The veil takes on the form of a fetish for Ellena, first as she observes Olivia’s every move with the veil - as it is thrown back (86), “lifted,” or “dropped” (88) - and later as she preserves the veil “as a sacred relique of her favourite recluse” (257).

Seeing the veil as also an expression of the maternal, Susan Greenfield suggests that Olivia’s protective veil is symbolic of the mother’s womb. She cites Radcliffe’s use of birthing imagery to describe Olivia’s part in Ellena’s

escape from the convent: “Olivia ... was as willing, as Ellena was anxious, to
dare every danger for the chance of obtaining deliverance” (133). Olivia
‘delivers’ her child from confinement to freedom, and the veil is the means
for that deliverance. Olivia gives Ellena her veil so that she can disguise
herself as a nun during her escape, the veil being used as a safe enclosure
within a world of dangers. Like a child during its birth, Ellena travels through
the avenues of the convent into the open air of the garden. The birthing
imagery continues as the mother guides her daughter to the outside world,
consoling her with the words: “my veil, though thin, has ... protected you”
(133).24

The idea of Olivia ‘delivering’ her daughter is repeated in the novel, as Olivia
effectively ‘delivers’ her daughter several times after her physical birth, first,
to Signora Bianchi’s protection, then to freedom from imprisonment in the
convent, and finally, to the security and protection of Vivaldi in marriage.
The maternal signification of the veil continues when Ellena believes that
Schedoni is her father and she is now travelling with him to safety. Believing
that she is safe under her ‘father’s’ protection, she “lay[s] aside the nun’s veil
for one of a more general fashion” (257). This action of laying aside of
Olivia’s veil at this particular time has a two-fold interpretation. It connotes
Ellena’s penultimate transference from matriarchy and the care of the mother
to patriarchy and the order of the father, and it prefigures Olivia’s final
‘deliverance’ of her daughter to Vivaldi and Ellena’s return to the patriarchal
order in marriage.

The image of the veil is also used extensively in The Mysteries of Udolpho,
and for a variety of purposes. The veil is used throughout to connote erotic
allure, and Emily and all the women to whom she is attracted use the veil as
a means to fascinate. Emily is attracted to a young woman, for example,
who sings and plays on her lute, “with her veil half thrown back,” and Emily
draws this image and gives it to her as “a pledge of her friendship.”25 Emily
is similarly attracted to the Lady Abbess, whose veil is “thrown half back”
(Udolpho, p. 484), suggesting a mysterious half-hidden secret or mystery.
The heavier veil-like pall is also an important image, and in Udolpho is the
source of one of the most terrifying (for its time) moments in the novel, as

Oxford University Press, New York, p. 188.
Emily is confronted with what she thinks is a dead body moving underneath the pall (Udolpho, pp. 535-6). The veil or pall is used, literally and metaphorically, to denote something about the mother. When Emily is wrapped in the veil belonging to a now-dead mother figure, the Marchioness de Villerol, for example, Emily is told that she and the Marchioness share a striking resemblance, at which point Emily attempts “to throw off” the veil (Udolpho, p. 535). The connection between the image of the veil and the mother is made concrete as Emily attempts to throw off the veil in an attempt to throw off the mother – or, more specifically, to deny the union between mother and daughter. The veil becomes the means to express the daughter’s ambivalence to the mother.

In The Italian, the connection between Ellena and Olivia is also representative of the narrative device of the Gothic ‘double,’ which represents “an extreme effect of sympathy, a hypothetical moment when two sympathizers feel, think, and act so much alike that they appear the same.” If Olivia’s and Ellena’s relationship can be understood as an example of Gothic doubling, their shared love and their mutual sensibilities expressions of an intense sympathy with each other, then their connection becomes less erotic than ‘primal,’ a profound identification between mother and daughter that is beyond social constructs, and signified by an elemental power. Mother and daughter connect not because (ethically or conventionally) they should, but because they must, and because they know that each serves a need in the other. This intense sympathy – or connection – is the means by which a kind of eroticism is generated between the doubles.

Whether Radcliffe suggests a homoerotic connection or a primal identification between mother and daughter, it is evident that she intended the connection to be meaningful and powerful. It is his recognition of this that affects Vivaldi. He recognizes in the intense sympathy between Ellena and Olivia the basis of a relationship that he can never share; a relationship that he assumes to be erotic because that is the only connection he has with Ellena. His jealousy therefore, is based not on the reality of an erotic connection...
between mother and daughter, but on what he perceives as an erotic connection. The bond between mother and daughter is a bond, which, by its female nature, is beyond masculine understanding. In this construct, the narrative is structured around the female perspective, which necessarily views the male as the ‘other.’ This perspective enables the woman writer, through her fictional female characters, to express women’s most intimate fears or, more precisely, their fears about intimacy. In other words, Ellena connects with her mother not because she is erotically attracted to her, but because she is fearful of an erotic attachment to the male. George Haggerty has argued that the “female Gothic” is representative of novels by women in which a “complex understanding of female bodily self-awareness [is] often expressed in terms of female-female desire.” Haggerty argues that the use of female–female desire in eighteenth-century novels is not necessarily homoeroticism, but is, instead, the means by which a woman comes to understand herself and her sexuality. Emma Donoghue elaborates on this point and argues that the representation of female-female desire disrupts the conventions of femininity rather than denies womanhood itself, and is a means for the writer to negotiate and explore the implications of gender definitions. In this model, Ellena’s attraction to her mother is, arguably, representative of her desire for womanhood and for the element of ‘completion’ it brings. That is, Ellena sees in her unknown mother the type of woman she wishes (and instinctively ‘knows’ herself) to be.

The primacy of Ellena’s attachment to Signora Bianchi foreshadows her passionate primal response to her actual (though unrecognized) mother. That is, Ellena’s response to Olivia is a consequence of Ellena’s loss, need, and recognition; the loss of the only mother she has ever known, her consequent need for a substitute mother to love and protect her, and recognition, at a primal level, of her biological mother. The primacy of the mother-daughter connection is, according to Claire Kahane, a critical aspect of the Gothic novel. Kahane says that in the critical period of early infancy in which mother and infant are locked into a symbiotic relationship, they experience a state of one-ness that is characterized by a blurring of boundaries between mother and infant, what is, essentially, a dual unity that,

for the child, precedes the sense of a separate self. While the male child, by the fact of his sex, can differentiate himself from the mother, the female child, who shares the female body and its symbolic place in the culture, remains locked in a more fundamentally ambivalent struggle for a separate identity. The Gothic mother provokes crises in identity that produce sexual, maternal, and familial anxieties, and it is the female’s struggle against these anxieties that Kahane considers to be at the centre of the Gothic. Ellena, recently orphaned for what is effectively the second time, and subject since the day of the death of the only ‘mother’ she has known to abduction, imprisonment, humiliation, and threats has reason and anxiety enough to desire a mother figure to love and protect her.

This interpretation suggests a different connotation to the first encounter between mother and daughter. As Ellena gazes at her then unknown mother, she is described as “not only soothed, but in some degree comforted, ... that she thus knew there was one human being, at least, in the convent, who must be capable of feeling pity, and willing to administer consolation” (87). Radcliffe’s wording in this scene is important. Ellena is ‘soothed’ and ‘comforted’ by just gazing at this unknown woman, and ‘knows’ that she is capable of ‘feeling pity,’ and ‘willing’ to administer ‘consolation.’ These are not the words of erotic passion, but are, instead, the words of recognition of empathy and sympathy, recognition of a figure that has the potential to administer the kind of love that Ellena refers to as seemingly “necessary to her heart” (88), and one that she subliminally simultaneously recognizes as, and desires to be, maternal. In other words, Ellena recognizes in Olivia the potential for a relationship that provides her with what Nancy Chodorow describes as the “rich, various, and vital sources of feminine selfhood” that emerges from the mother-daughter relationship and from other relationships between women.

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31 Coppelia Kahn 1985, ‘The Hand that Rocks the Cradle: Recent Gender Theories and Their Implications,’ in Nelson Garner, Shirley, Kahane, Claire & Sprengnether, Madelon (eds), The (M)other Tongue: Essays in Feminist Psychoanalytic Interpretation, Cornell University Press, London. Kahn explains how Nancy Chodorow, in her reorientation of Freudian theory, rejects the notion of woman as castrated man, and discovers in the mother-daughter relationship and in other relations among women, rich, various, and vital sources of feminine selfhood (p. 76).
Although Ellena’s reactions to Olivia are sexually ambiguous, Olivia’s reactions to Ellena are less so. Norton argues for Olivia’s equal erotic attraction to Ellena by suggesting that her gifts to Ellena of a knot of fragrant flowers and a volume of poetry by Tasso are “unambiguous love token[s].” These are indeed gifts of love, but they are not necessarily gifts of erotic love. These gifts can just as easily be evidence instead of Olivia’s concern for a frightened young girl imprisoned by a tyrannical Abbess with villainous intentions, concern that is just as attributable to a mother as to a lover. Rictor Norton runs the risk perhaps of overstating the erotic aspects of Olivia’s behaviour as though the return of Ellena’s erotic feelings is imperative to the narrative. The point is that reciprocation of an erotic connection is not necessary either to Radcliffe’s maternal project, or to Ellena herself. Radcliffe is exploring the notion of an innate mother-daughter connection, and the concepts of female self-awareness and autonomy. Whether that connection is manifest through erotic feeling, as it may be with Ellena, or whether it is manifest through maternal feeling, as it may be with Olivia, it is still a connection, based on recognition of some kind, of benevolence, of compassion, of empathy, and of shared womanhood.

What should not be overlooked is Olivia’s continual demonstration to Ellena throughout the narrative of “sympathy” (89), “pity” (89), “interest” (93), “advice” (93), and “generous compassion” (384). She shows “the tenderest interest in [Ellena’s] welfare, [and is] deeply affected by her situation … her eyes were often filled with tears, while she regarded her young friend, and she betrayed so much emotion that Ellena noticed it with surprise” (123). Olivia also risks her own life, “dare[s] every danger” (131), and gives Ellena “every possible assistance towards her escape” (128). Olivia demonstrates a maternal sensibility in all her dealings with Ellena, the reason for which may be Olivia’s almost-recognition of Ellena as her daughter at their first meeting. Radcliffe indicates the possibility of recognition earlier when, for example, Olivia regards Ellena with an intensity that Ellena “could not perfectly interpret. It was not only of pity, but of anxious curiosity, and of something like fear” (91), and comments how her “features have some resemblance to those of a friend I once had” (93). Later, Olivia tells Ellena that she was struck by the “slight resemblance she bore to the late Count de Bruno” (384). It is, however, the physical likeness between Olivia and Ellena that consolidates the moment of recognition and reunion, when Bianchi’s servant,

Beatrice, comments that Ellena is “so like” Olivia (377). As was seen in *Evelina*, the daughters’ identification through, and with, the mother is the final seal of validation for both mother and child, and the potential site of maternal authority and power.

In *The Italian*, Ellena’s entitlement to the position of high birth is not authenticated until Olivia, as the only person who can resolve the mystery of Ellena’s parentage, recognizes and claims her daughter. Proof of ancestry, the core of patrilineal transmission and patriarchal order is therefore knowable, as it was in *Evelina*, through the mother. That mothers could undermine patrilineal outcomes had contributed to the generalized cultural anxiety about women’s roles in patrilineal transmission. Gothic novels, in particular, highlight the truth that the mother is the author of her child, and the creation of a physical resemblance between mother and daughter was used as the vehicle to consolidate that maternal power and to give unique significance to the mother-daughter bond.

Just as ambiguity defines Ellena’s responses to Olivia, her then unknown mother, so too does it define her response to Olivia as her known mother. Ellena is “nearly overwhelmed by the various and acute feelings this disclosure occasioned” and she can “no longer return [Olivia’s] caresses.” “Joy,” at the discovery, is described as “evidently a more predominant feeling with the parent than with the child” (378). Olivia is delighted with the discovery that Ellena is her daughter, and immediately presses her daughter to her bosom, “weeping, trembling, and almost fainting” (378). If Ellena is erotically attracted to Olivia, then she is forced to confront the fact that the nature of her love must immediately be transposed from erotic to filial love. As Greenfield argues, the daughter “can and will desire her mother so long as such feelings are preverbal and unconscious,” but once Ellena is aware that Olivia is her mother, “the incest taboo is immediately operative, and her passion for Olivia must cease.” 33

If, however, Ellena’s attraction to her unknown mother is based on a primal recognition of the mother figure, then the discovery that Olivia is actually her mother is the discovery too, that her mother abandoned her. When Ellena gazes “upon Olivia with an intenseness that partook of wildness” (378), there is a clear connotation of feelings of disbelief and anger. Ellena’s “agitated

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33 Greenfield 2002, p. 70.
spirits” may be due to her understanding that her passion for Olivia must cease, but they may also be due to her realization that the woman with whom she has a meaningful emotional connection is her own deficient mother. Olivia, however, dispels Ellena’s conflicted emotions by explaining her victimization and her enforced abandonment of her children to Signora Bianchi, thus confirming the bond of patriarchal abuse they now share. Through her story, Olivia also affirms her role as the representative of suffering female virtue which serves - as the narrative means certainly - to absolve her of her deficient maternal behaviour in ‘abandoning’ her child.

Moreover, Olivia immediately restores the symbolic order by demonstrating appropriate maternal authority and consenting – with the Marchese’s consent - to Vivaldi’s and Ellena’s marriage (410). Ellena enters the symbolic order as she is validated by two fathers, her own father – the Count di Bruno - whose paternity has been verified by the mother, and Vivaldi’s father – the Marchese di Vivaldi – who is restored by the death of his wife, to the authority she had usurped. Ellena “proceed[s] to express the happiness she had received from the discovery of a parent, whose virtues had even won her affection long before she understood her own interest in them” (409). Olivia, “in thus relinquishing her daughter so soon after she had found her, suffered some pain, [is] consoled by the fair prospect of happiness, that opened to Ellena” (411), and is rewarded with filial love and respect as a “beloved parent” (411). No longer required for guidance, care or protection, the good mother returns to obscurity, in “pensive happiness” (411), as a nun, under the benevolent care and guidance herself, of another exemplary mother figure, the Abbess of the Convent of Santa della Piéta.

**The Monstrous Mother and the Examination of Gender**

The monstrous mother of the Gothic novel fills the space that the caring mother’s absence produces, her function being to disrupt the already fractured familial and domestic structure of the motherless heroine’s life by creating obstacles in her journey to womanhood and self-awareness. Maternal monstrosity is shown in *The Italian* through the characters of Vivaldi’s mother, the Marchesa di Vivaldi, and the Mother Abbess of the Convent San Stefano.

The Marchesa is described “of violent passions, haughty, vindictive, yet crafty and deceitful; patient in stratagem, and indefatigable in pursuit of
vengeance, on the unhappy objects that provoked her resentment” (7). She is “absolutely averse” (69) to her son marrying Ellena, and her scheming to prevent their union is central to the deviant Gothic plot of the novel. Described as being “possessed of a man’s spirit, [with] his clear perceptions,” (168) and as having “a man’s courage” (168), the Marchesa is cast as the unfeminine, unnatural mother. Radcliffe deliberately masculinizes the Marchesa in order to examine the implications of gender, and specifically to draw attention to the social restrictions and political laws that inhibit women’s autonomy and authority.

The Marchesa is aligned with patriarchy in one respect through her concern to validate her heritage and to promote her position as a descendant of “a family as ancient” as that of Vivaldi’s father, the Marchese. Focus on the Marchesa’s concerns for her own family’s importance, is Radcliffe’s subtle gesture to the fact of real life that women not only lost their family name on marriage, they were also subject to a form of social erasure. Following the principle of English common law written into the Commentaries on the English Constitution by Blackstone in 1758, a woman became a feme covert when married and no longer existed as a separate legal identity. Under this law of coverture, the woman’s legal identity was “covered” by that of her husband and she forfeited all rights to possess property and custody of her own children. Through marriage then, a woman underwent civil death.34 Making the Marchesa “equally jealous” of her importance and her own family name (which, of course, we never learn because she is only known by the Vivaldi name) is Radcliffe’s way of subtly ridiculing the woman who defines herself by patriarchal codes and a system that only objectifies her. Radcliffe’s creation of the monstrous Marchesa is her commentary, if such it is, on a highly contentious issue such as coverture, and suggests a radical slant to The Italian. Yet the novel would have defied description as a work of political radicalism mainly because of Radcliffe’s deployment of several narrative devices that deflect direct comment. First, the story is a retelling of a story – it is read and retold by an unknown ‘Englishman.’ Second, the story is a foreign story, and therefore geographically and conceptually distanced from England and its political mores. Third, the story takes place in the past, and potential references to political issues are therefore placed at a ‘safe’ distance from the present.

The Marchesa is further masculinized and aligned with patriarchy in two significant ways. First she is preoccupied with concerns that were traditionally conceived to be the concerns of the male. Second, she assumes control of the family - control usually assumed to belong to the patriarch – by usurping her husband’s authority and by reprimanding their son. The Marchesa considers her son in a dispassionate light, considering him only for his position as “the last of two illustrious houses, who was to re-unite and support the honour of both,” rather than “with the fondness of a mother” (7-8). She is interested in her son on the basis only of his potential, through marriage, to elevate the family’s estate and title. The Marchesa’s lack of maternal sentiment is emphasized throughout the novel, “the welfare of her son did but slightly divide her cares” (10). She is a distant and indifferent mother, “insensible to the sufferings of her son” (105), displaying only “displeasure” and “resentment” towards him (53), as well as a fiercely controlling one, able to “lose the mother in the strict severity of the judge” (111).

The Marchesa’s lack of maternal feeling and feminine sensibility is in sharp contrast to the more passionate and caring nature of Vivaldi’s father, the Marchese. He is shown to be the source of parental goodness, demonstrated by his “parental anxiety and affection” (112) and his expressions of tender “feelings of a father” (296). Against the aggressive and dominant nature of his wife, who is “less passionate than the Marchese in her observations and menaces ... more dexterous in her questions, and more subtle in her conduct” (33), the Marchese is somewhat feminized, a device that Radcliffe uses (like Burney before her) to indicate an appropriate and ideal form of masculinity. Vivaldi is treated similarly. To some extent by default, to some extent by way of his characterization with the more ‘feminine’ traits of excessive passions, feelings and sensitivity, and to some extent by way of his mother’s dealings with him, Vivaldi is also feminized. As the objectified and commodified child, Vivaldi becomes representative of the role of the daughter in a family. In Radcliffe’s distortion of gender definitions then, the Marchesa is masculinized and made monstrous – an aberration of nature so to speak, and the males are feminized and made appropriately masculine. This ironic reordering of gender attributes highlights - and normalizes - the reality of a patriarchal system in which fathers can trade their daughters, through marriage, for economic and social advancement and the inevitability of the female’s weakened position within the patriarchal order.
The Marchesa disapproves of Vivaldi’s attachment to Ellena but, despite her bullying and threats, and despite her orders that Vivaldi relinquish all ties with her, Vivaldi remains “unconvinced by her arguments, unsubdued by her prophecies, and unmoved in his designs” (33). He remains suitably deferential, and “never for a moment, forgets the decorum which was due to a mother” (33), but continues to pursue Ellena. His disavowal of the Marchesa’s threats is partly because he does not “sufficiently understand her character to apprehend her purposes” (33) and he does not know to what ends she will go to achieve her purpose, but mostly because he is unaware that she has the monk, Schedoni, “an auxiliary of no mean talents” (33), as an accomplice.

It is through her close association with Schedoni that the Marchesa’s “imperious and vindictive nature” (122) is fully realized. Schedoni is the Marchesa’s “confessor and secret adviser” (33), but his religious persona masks an evil nature that matches “the baseness of [the Marchesa’s] own heart” (33). Throughout the novel, the Marchesa and Schedoni are allied in several ways. They are both hypocrites, in their religion and in their behaviour to others and to each other. They are also arch and manipulative casuists, possessing “the power of assisting the other; Schedoni had subtlety with ambition to urge it; and the Marchesa had inexorable pride, and courtly influence; the one hoped to obtain a high benefice for his services, and the other to secure the imaginary dignity of her house, by her gifts” (35).

Schedoni is representative of the dangerous Gothic male. He is the patriarchal despot that reflects the legal reality that the father and the husband, who promote marriage and whose economic plots and possession of the woman are supported by marriage, are the primary causes of the civil (and potentially, in Schedoni’s attempted murders of both Olivia and Ellena, the actual) death of the woman. Through her association with Schedoni, the Marchesa is representative of woman’s concession to, and participation in, patriarchal control of the female. Schedoni exists in the novel as the evil patriarch, but through his association, and by comparison, with the Marchesa, he exists to highlight the potential for paternal (and parental) reform. By making evident the differences in each of their potential for parental compassion, Radcliffe highlights the Marchesa’s monstrous maternity. The Marchesa exhibits no “solicitude for [her son’s] welfare; resentment appearing to be the only emotion she retained towards him”
(296), whereas Schedoni, when believing Ellena to be his daughter, demonstrates the capacity for parental benevolence by his admission to the “first pangs of parental affection” (239) that causes him to feel concern for her welfare.

Although the Marchesa has little influence on her son’s romantic pursuit, she unknowingly has great influence on the motherless heroine. Ellena refuses Vivaldi’s marriage proposal in deference to the Marchesa and to what she sees as the Marchesa’s rightful maternal authority to reject an unsuitable match. After Vivaldi has rescued Ellena from the convent and insists upon an immediate marriage, for example, Ellena tells him that she cannot give her hand in marriage when his mother forbids it, “Resentment can have no influence on my conduct towards you; I think I feel none towards the Marchesa – for she is your mother” (151).

What Vivaldi considers maternal “injustice and cruelty,” Ellena considers the rightful authority of the mother, an authority she respects. That the Marchesa’s maternal authority influences Ellena is no more evident than in the way her romantic responses to Vivaldi appear to be determined more by the Marchesa’s refusal of the prospective marriage than by any ardent protestations of love that Vivaldi himself makes. The daughter’s deference to the mother is an important paradigm in the novel as Ellena accepts Vivaldi on the authorization of five mother figures. Signora Bianchi’s authorizes the union in the form of her dying wish, the Mother Abbess of the Convent San Stefano’s inadvertently authorizes the union by inciting Ellena to rebel against her injustice, the biological mother authorizes the union with patriarchal consent, and the Abbess of Santa della Piéta authorizes the union through her consent to the marriage in the convent. The Marchesa authorizes the union – on her deathbed - as “her only hope of forgiveness, both for the crime she had meditated, and the undeserved sufferings she had occasioned” (385).

The Malevolent Mother and the Affirmation of Female Worth

While *The Italian* is representative of all of Radcliffe’s novels that effectively outlines and regulates a model of feminine virtue and propriety, it also effectively promotes, sometimes quite stridently, female autonomy, and the Mother Abbess is the catalyst for Ellena’s growing sense of her self as an autonomous individual. Described as a “stately lady, apparently occupied
with opinions of her own importance” (69), the Mother Abbess of the Convent San Stefano has a long history of misappropriation of maternal authority, and is shown to be a mean mistress to the nuns in her care, one of whom is Olivia. When she suspects Olivia has helped Ellena to escape, for example, the Abbess is described as having “both the inclination and the power to render Olivia very miserable” (370), behaviour that she has obviously demonstrated over the many years Olivia has been at the convent:

Olivia, during many years, had been unhappy in her local circumstances, but it is probable she would have concluded her days within the walls of San Stefano had not the aggravated oppression of the abbess aroused her courage and activity, and dissipated the despondency, with which severe misfortune had obscured her views (371).

The Abbess governs by cruel oppression rather than compassionate guidance: a trait that is recognized by all the good characters with whom she comes into contact. When Vivaldi appeals to the Abbess for Ellena’s release, he is shocked to discover that the Abbess has no sent of justice or pity, “her notions of right … inexorably against him, and … pride and resentment usurped the influence of every other feeling” (120).

The Mother Abbess apparently shares a “warm friendship” (120) with the Marchesa. Believing that “of all possible crimes, next to that of sacrilege, offences against persons of rank were least pardonable” (67), the Mother Abbess joins with Marchesa in the conspiracy to abduct and imprison Ellena and “deprive her for life of liberty” (120) as punishment for “having sought clandestinely to unite herself with the noble house of Vivaldi” (67). Ellena, assailed by “[f]ear, shame, and indignation” responds to the accusation by demanding on whose will she had been “torn from her home, and by whose authority she was now detained, as it appeared, a prisoner” (67-8). While Ellena speaks out against patent oppression, she reflects in private that the Abbess’s “accusation was partly just” (69) and that she does deserve punishment for presuming to accept a marriage that she knew to be “unwillingly conferred” (69). The word of the ‘mother’ is Ellena’s ultimate authority, and she plans to “resign … Vivaldi for ever” (69).

In her musings however, Ellena is confronted with the fact that she is being ‘ordered’ to give up Vivaldi. While she has heretofore shown a rather meek romantic response to the young man, the Abbess’s objection to her involvement with him stirs within her an increased desire for him. Ellena
considers that, “the anguish she suffered told her how much more she dreaded to lose than to accept Vivaldi, and that love was, after all, the most powerful affection of her heart” (70). In these moments of self-reflection, Ellena effectively prepares herself, unknowingly, for confrontation with the Abbess. At their next meeting the Abbess delivers the ultimatum, that Ellena must be prepared “to accept the veil, or the person whom the Marchesa di Vivaldi had ... selected for her husband” (83). Ellena speaks out against the injustice to which she is subject, facing adversity “not merely with stoicism but active resistance.” This scene is worth citing to some extent since it amply demonstrates the female ‘voice’ that Radcliffe conspicuously deploys:

‘It is unnecessary,’ said Ellena, with an air of dignified tranquillity, ‘that I should withdraw for the purposes of considering and deciding. My resolution is already taken, and I reject each of the offered alternatives. I will neither condemn myself to a cloister, or to the degradation, with which I am threatened on the other hand. Having said this, I am prepared to meet whatever suffering you shall inflict upon me; but be assured, that my own voice never shall sanction the evils to which I may be subjected, and that the immortal love of justice, which fills all my heart, will sustain my courage no less powerful than the sense of what is due to my own character. You are now acquainted with my sentiments and my resolutions. I shall repeat them no more.’

...‘Where is it that you have learned these heroics...the boldness which enables you to insult your Superior, a priestess of your holy religion, even in her sanctuary!’

‘The sanctuary is prophaned,’ said Ellena mildly, but with dignity: ‘it is become a prison. It is only when the Superior ceases to respect the precepts of that holy religion, the precepts which teach her justice and benevolence, that she herself is no longer respected. The very sentiment which bids us revere its mild and beneficent laws, bids us also reject the violators of them: when you command me to reverence my religion, you urge me to condemn yourself.’

...Her judgment approved of the frankness, with which she had asserted her rights, and of the firmness, with which she had reproved a woman, who had dared to demand respect from the very victim of her cruelty and oppression (84-85).

In this astonishing rhetoric, Ellena’s defiance of the Abbess is, as Rictor Norton succinctly remarks, “very nearly republican” in its insistence for, and articulation of, individual (female) worth. The Abbess – the malevolent mother - has served in the novel as the catalyst for the heroine’s maturation. Ellena’s fierce rhetoric serves to highlight the Abbess’s violation of the maternal power bestowed upon her by her religion and her position. As the guardian of a female community, the Abbess misuses her authority by

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“violating some of the plainest obligations of humanity and justice” (120). Through her “pride and resentment [that] usurped the influence of every other feeling” (120), the Abbess ultimately supports a patriarchal system that devalues and abuses women.

*The Benevolent Mother and the Promotion of ‘Sisterhood’*

The Abbess of Santa della Piéta is Radcliffe’s representation of benevolent and universal motherhood. Radcliffe reshapes notions of motherhood by invoking a model of maternal care that is not a privatized occupation centered on one’s own family, but is a communal activity of equality and benevolence. The Abbess of Santa della Piéta is described as:

> a shining example to governesses of religious houses, and a striking instance of the influence, which a virtuous mind may acquire over others, as well as of the extensive good that it may thus diffuse. She was dignified without haughtiness, religious without bigotry, and mild, though decisive and firm. She possessed penetration to discover what was just, resolution to adhere to it, and temper to practise it with gentleness and grace; so that even correction from her, assumed the winning air of courtesy: the person whom she admonished, wept in sorrow for the offence, instead of being secretly irritated by the reproof, and loved her as a mother, rather than feared her as a judge (299-300).

Radcliffe envisions a form of motherhood that resembles what we have come to know as ‘sisterhood.’ The Abbess is the ‘mother’ of a community in which people live according to an ethic of care, a state of living that Carol Gilligan describes as an “ideal of care ... an activity of relationship, of recognizing and responding to need, taking care of the world ... so that no one is left alone.” Anne Mellor has called the relationship based on an ethic of care an “ideal state,” closely associated with the mother, that insists on the primacy of the family or the community and their attendant responsibilities, and one in which “the rights of all are respected, and in which ‘all mankind’ finds maternal shelter and sustenance.” The Abbess, loved by all as a mother, oversees a community operating according to an ethic of care in which women live in mutual feeling and support of each other, and the Abbess is representative of the mother who makes possible such social order and familial harmony. In this Utopian imagining, people are guided by the principles of maternal love, and live according to “sisterly kindness, universal charity, and the most pure and elevated devotion” (300).

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The image of this kind of community is projected briefly in Radcliffe’s description, at the end of the novel, of the community of Santa della Piéta, a “society ... like a large family, of which the lady abbess [is] the mother” (300). In this female-centric, anti-patriarchal imagining, Radcliffe subtly exposes and contests a society that operates according to defined dichotomies; the virtuous matriarch versus the villainous patriarch; the private, nurturing, domestic feminine sphere versus the public, violent, political masculine sphere; and the ethic of care versus an ethic of domination and injustice. Radcliffe imagines a community in which women “establish familiar structures based on mutual love and communal responsibility,” and in which all people are respected for being “ideal citizens of public-minded private spheres.”

In this community, which incorporates emerging liberal ideas, personal initiative is valued and agency given to women and other groups that are not culturally dominant. Radcliffe works against the notion of the “patriarchal doctrine of the separate spheres” of male and female existence, and imagines an alternative way of living to the violence and injustice inherent in a patriarchal world. This is a world in which ‘family politics’ is practiced, one in which women have a legitimate place in a community based on an ethic of care and equality, where they are able to take care of themselves, their children, and their community, and where they can live without fear of tyranny or injustice, administered by an ethic of care. This is not a female world, but a mother-centered one, the creation of what Mellor calls a “political program that would radically transform the public sphere.”

The ethic of care extends to an ethic of equality of all individuals that is realized at Ellena and Vivaldi’s wedding. In Radcliffe’s Utopian imagining, the beauty of nature is interspersed with the beauty of the notion of equality. The wedding is a splendid celebration to which not only “persons of distinction” are invited, but also “all the tenants of the domain,” a gathering over which Ellena is, “in every respect, the queen” (413). In this idyllic scene of “enchantment” and “gaiety,” the grounds of the Vivaldi villa are opened to all people of “each rank” to enjoy (413). In this brief, enticing vision,

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40 Mellor 1993, p. 84.
42 Mellor 1993, p. 84.
Radcliffe imagines a mother-centered Utopia in which all people are accorded agency and value, and the mother is the benevolent head of a community that is reproductive in nature with the potential to re-imagine and perpetuate itself.43

The Gothic Mother’s Legacy

In *The Italian*, there is no one right way to mother, and the ambivalence of the pattern is remarkable. Olivia, representative of the ‘good’ mother, for example, fails in several key principles that are, theoretically, tantamount to achieving maternal excellence. Justification and reasoning aside, Olivia abandons her daughter, fails to guide, protect, and educate her, and remains absent from the home and her daughter for the duration of her daughter’s formative years. At the same time, the Marchesa, representative in the narrative of the ‘bad’ mother, actually fulfils certain criteria of maternal excellence simply by not abandoning her son, and by being a constant physical presence in the home, in his life from birth to adulthood. Evaluated within an ideology of motherhood that mandates constant maternal presence, therefore, the Marchesa is, in this sense, more a ‘model’ of excellent motherhood than Olivia.

Ultimately, the Gothic mothers all serve in the novel as representatives of female experience. It is the heroine’s concern to seek within expressions of those experiences a legacy of motherhood that will enable her to live her life differently. Ellena’s marriage is, in a sense, a return to the patriarchal order, yet it also constitutes a new beginning. Radcliffe allows her heroine to survive physical separation from her mother and substitute mother and socialization into patriarchal society. During her imposed separations from her mother(s), Ellena is forced to act for herself because she does not have a mother to protect her. In those motherless times however, she acquires self-reliance, which enables her to negotiate the public, patriarchal world more successfully than her mother could. Ellena, with the strength and self-knowledge acquired through her ordeals, now has a sense of herself as an autonomous individual that enables her to define her world differently from the one in which her mother was brutalized. As a potential mother, Ellena is the ‘queen’ who can promote an ethic of care that refigures the way people – all people - live their lives.

In the Gothic world in which maternal abandonment, maternal cruelty, maternal displacement, maternal loss, and maternal death constantly disturb the fabric of family life, the fictional Gothic mother is, superficially, representative of embattled motherhood. Yet, she also provides the impetus for the fantasy of female power that lies at the heart of the Gothic novel. Ellena’s entitlement to the position of high birth, for example, remains to be authenticated over the course of her adventures. Proof of her ancestry comes through the mother. Daughters’ identification through – and with – their mothers bears much thematic significance in The Italian (and in Radcliffe’s other novels). Mothers are figures of suffering female virtue oppressed by men who abuse the power patriarchy invests in them (as well as by women who encourage those men to do so). As these mothers are reconnected with their daughters by various means, their recovered histories play a crucial role in circumventing that oppression, enabling their daughters to assume their rightful place in the world.

The Gothic mother is indicative of the female author’s concern to say something about women and about mothers and, in her various manifestations, the Gothic mother has voice, influence, and power. More importantly, the Gothic mother encourages a new generation to strive for the voice, influence, and power that will enable them to construct a society based on principals of humanity and to revise ideas about women’s participation in society and the grounds for their belonging. Ann Radcliffe’s novels give voice to the potential for female strength, integrity, and justice. By example or by default, her representation of all types of mothers provided a legacy of motherhood that created resistance to social construction and patriarchal control, invoking a model for motherhood that the Gothic mother could never realize, but that her daughter just might.
CONCLUSION

Mary Wollstonecraft’s Vision of Motherhood

The concern to keep women at home caring for children and away from public life was one way to ensure a woman’s virtue that reflected the patriarchal concern for patrilineage. In The Life of Samuel Johnson (1776), Boswell wrote, “Consider, of what importance to society, the chastity of women is. Upon that all the property in the world depends. We hang a thief for stealing a sheep; but the unchastity of a woman transfers sheep, and farm and all, from the right owner.”¹ This was the concern - the anxiety - that perhaps more than any other promoted the development of motherhood as a ‘naturally’ private occupation (the mother kept away from the public gaze of other men) that subsequently evolved into the cultural proclivity to assign to the mother greater moral sensibility and familial responsibility.

Defoe had shown early in the century how a mother’s capability of being an excellent mother was largely dependent upon her economic circumstances. Adam Smith echoed Defoe’s sentiments half a century later in The Wealth of Nations in 1776, in which he said that poverty was “extremely unfavourable to the rearing of children ... the common people cannot afford to tend them with the same care as those of the better station.”² Yet, across all social classes, ideal maternity was defined as an occupation that required constant maternal presence. For mothers of the working class in particular, being able to afford to stay at home only to take care of children was an impossible ideal, available to the middle class only and the positive effects of capitalism for motherhood were not apparent in the (respectable) working class until late in the nineteenth century.³

The ideologies of domesticity and femininity that held sway throughout the eighteenth century continued to be integral to the ideology of motherhood in the nineteenth-century. The interest in defining maternal practices and sentiments, together with the consolidation of the nuclear family, of the recognition of children as individuals, and of childhood as a special life

¹ Citation from Bridget Hill 1984, Eighteenth-Century Women: An Anthology, George Allen & Unwin, p. 33.
experience, all made for radical changes in how the mother was defined by society, and how she defined herself. The mother’s role was constructed – through the sex-gender system that prescribed women as biologically more passive and more nurturing than men – as naturally inclined to the private and domestic sphere. As overseer of the home and family, her role was increasingly infused by popular culture with values and ideals such as devotion to family, uncomplaining commitment to duty, and moral goodness – idealized to the extent that by the end of the century, it was commonly represented as the full-time occupation and source of permanent interest for women.⁴

Such values gained widespread acceptance right across the political spectrum. Even a radical ‘feminist’ like Mary Wollstonecraft applauded this ideal of motherhood. It gave women more credit for their maternal abilities than the older, paternalistic theories of parenting, and allowed middle-class women, particularly, an increased status within the family and society. Moreover, despite changes in labour patterns, the wife and mother still had this most significant role to play.⁵ Wollstonecraft propounded theories on motherhood in many of her writings. In her ‘Thoughts on the Education of Daughters’ (1792), she argued that “maternal tenderness arises quite as much from habit as instinct,” and that only the performance of the “office” of mothering “produces in a mother a rational affection for her offspring.”⁶ Wollstonecraft suggested that there was nothing innately instinctual about maternal affection and that it was cultivated through a network of material practices. She was therefore situating maternity as ultimately, ‘performative,’ and the mother’s gendered body as having no ontological status apart from the various acts that constituted the reality of mothering.⁷

Despite arguing that it is not instinct but reason that creates nurturance and that a maternal bond is not a given, Wollstonecraft does recognize that a mother-daughter bond of some sort exists. In writing about her fears for her

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own daughter, Fanny, for example, she says, “You know that as a female I am particularly attached to her – I feel more than a mother’s fondness and anxiety, when I reflect on the dependent and oppressed state of her sex.” Wollstonecraft suggests that the mother-daughter bond is based on their shared ‘womanhood’ and the shared bond of oppression they face. This bond is the foundation of ‘sisterhood,’ an ideal that was appropriated by female writers at the turn of the nineteenth century (as we see in The Italian) as the means to refigure woman’s role in a community by asserting the value of personal initiative and, by implication, of woman’s potential and need to learn, to earn, and to govern.

That women should be educated was one of Wollstonecraft’s main concerns. She argued that, as one of the most important duties of life, the raising of children required the strength of body and mind thus far denied women, and that women could not be capable of producing good children and citizens if they themselves were not educated to be virtuous adults and citizens. Wollstonecraft believed that motherhood was one of the most important duties of women, and she attempted to separate the activities of maternal nurturing from the prescribed duties of domesticity, the two having been consistently promoted and accepted throughout the century as mutually inclusive aspects of motherhood. Wollstonecraft argued that women should not be confined, by virtue of their maternal capacity, “to domestic concerns”, strongly maintaining, throughout her writing, that the feminine character inculcated by society at that time was thoroughly inappropriate for what she considered the virtuous fulfillment of motherhood.

By asserting the existential quality of motherhood, Wollstonecraft’s political radicalism on women’s behalf impelled her to promote an idealized model of motherhood, which was, in a sense, a more sentimentalized model than the earlier behavioural model, which prescribed a set of rules to which women should adhere. According to the anatomical and physiological thinking of the time, the female constitution was specially designed by God and Nature for childbearing, while psychologically too they were meant to be soft and

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nurturing, thereby suiting them to matrimony and that “chief end of their being”, motherhood.¹¹ That women should devote themselves entirely to the maternal role for which Nature had fashioned them had been propounded in an extreme form by Jean-Jacques Rousseau in his pedagogical treatise *Emile* (1762). Wollstonecraft, a keen admirer of Rousseau, endorsed his notion that women’s unique endowment lay in childbearing. She argued that women could be good mothers and sound educators, however, only by cultivating the rational faculties with which they had been blessed. If the male must “necessarily fulfill the duties of a citizen, or be despised”, his wife should be equally intent to “manage her family, educate her children, and assist her neighbours.”¹² In Wollstonecraft’s view, women needed education and moral training so that future generations would prove worthy daughters, wives, and mothers. In her view, it was tyranny that women were made to “remain immured in their families, groping in the dark.”¹³ The ideal marriage should be one based on neither sexual attraction nor romantic passion, but on mutual respect and compatibility.

Wollstonecraft’s views on motherhood are complex. She argues, in effect, that any set of rules for good mothering are almost certain to restrict women’s freedom as political and social agents, yet she does not want to advise women not to be good mothers. Therefore, she locates good motherhood where it will not interfere with how women live their lives, and what they do as individuals, since what is important is their innate ‘mother-ness,’ the concept of which dovetailed into the sentimentalized notions of motherhood that emerged and developed through the turn of the century.

*The ‘Sentimental’ Mother*

The rise of sentimentalism in English fiction enabled writers to present a new view of human nature that valued feeling over thinking, passion over reason, and personal instincts of pity, tenderness, and benevolence over social duties. In an essay in ‘The Universal Magazine’ in 1778, sentimentality is described, thus:

> The character of delicacy of sentiment ... is certainly a great refinement on humanity ... It must be allowed that Delicacy of

Sentiment ... adds greatly to the happiness of mankind, by diffusing an universal benevolence. It teaches men to feel for others as for themselves; it disposes us to rejoice with the happy, and by partaking to increase their pleasure ... It excites a pleasing sensation in our own breast, which if its duration be considered, may be placed among the highest gratification of sense.14

Sentiment is linked to morality and manners, the idea of which was the foundation of the concept of the ‘refinement of humanity’ that characterizes sentimentalism. The narrator of an anonymous, virtually unknown novel, *Matilda, or the Efforts of Virtue* of 1785, describes sentiment as:

> a refinement of moral feeling, which animates us in performing the dictates of Reason, and introduces many graces and decorums to the great duties of morality, which are plainly felt by the sentimental mind, though not easily defined. It adorns our actions with a certain delicacy, which not only makes them just, but bright.15

In earlier popular sentimental novels, such as Oliver Goldsmith’s *The Vicar of Wakefield* (1766), Laurence Sterne’s *Sentimental Journey* (1768), and Henry Mackenzie’s *The Man of Feeling* (1771), the sentimental man is represented as the excellent man.16 The representation of the sentimental mother as the excellent mother was, arguably, a logical step. Unencumbered by the desire to teach appropriate maternal conduct and less inclined than female writers to promote a ‘feminist’ agenda - or simply less able to plausibly present an experiential sense of an innate maternal essence - male writers could just as easily as female writers assume authority on the newly sentimentalized mother by applying sentiment to every maternal practice.

The sentimental mother, then, became the new (ideological) authority on motherhood, represented by both male and female writers as the emotional and moral centre of the nuclear family - a maternal theme that dominated fiction in the nineteenth century. The sentimental mother was disposed to ideal motherhood by her natural tendency to feeling rather than reason. She represented an innate maternal nature, her motherhood quantifiable by the

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extent to which she demonstrated sentiment, delicacy, and sensibility. This was not a change from motherhood defined as a particular set of activities, behaviours, and sentiments to motherhood seen as an intangible and unquantifiable mix of feelings. Instead, it was the blending of the two notions of ideal motherhood and the further means of consolidating the notion that motherhood – in all its specificities and peculiarities – is based on innate female nature and desire. In all manner of literature, including conduct manuals, philosophical works and novels, motherhood was still innate, but maternal activity was primarily an activity of feeling. This is amply demonstrated in an excerpt from Peter Gaskell’s treatise, The Manufacturing Population of England, Its Moral, Social, and Physical Conditions, and the Changes Which Have Arisen from the Use of Steam Machinery; with an Examination of Infant Labour, of 1833:

Love of helpless infancy – attention to its wants, its sufferings, and its unintelligible happiness, seem to form the very wellspring of a woman’s heart – fertilizing, softening, and enriching all her grosser passions and appetites, it is truly an instinct in the strictest acceptation of the word. A woman, if removed from all intercourse, all knowledge of her sex and its attributes, from the very hour of her birth, would, should she herself become a mother in the wilderness, lavish as much tenderness upon her babe, cherish it as fondly ... sacrifice her personal comfort, with as much ardour, as much devotedness, as the most refined, fastidious, and intellectual mother, placed in the very centre of civilized society.

It is noteworthy that in a treatise concerned with the moral, social, and physical conditions of the manufacturing population of England, a mother’s maternal activities are expressed entirely in terms of sentiment. Maternal ‘instinct’ is the ‘very wellspring of a woman’s heart’ and maternal activity is ‘softening’, ‘enriching’, cherishing and devoted. There are no rules on how to mother or how not to mother. The writer advances the view that the mother instinctively feels the appropriate way to perform her function.

Woman, as the ideologically assigned custodian of the home, was central to the formation of what would become the ideal Victorian woman – the ideal wife, woman and mother who was expected to be devoted and submissive to her husband: passive and powerless, meek, charming, graceful, sympathetic,

self-sacrificing, pious, pure, moral, and, above all, virtuous. Gaskell encapsulated the tenor of this ideal when he wrote:

The moral influence of woman upon man’s character and domestic happiness is mainly attributable to her natural and instinctive habits. Her love, her tenderness, her affectionate solicitude for his comfort and enjoyment, her devotedness, her unwearying care, her maternal fondness, her conjugal attractions, exercise a most ennobling impression upon his nature, and do more towards making him a good husband, a good father, and a useful citizen, than all the dogmas of political economy.19

In this model of ideal womanhood, woman is responsible for man’s behaviour. The idealization of womanhood and the consigning to women of unfathomable and immeasurable responsibilities to husband and children became, in the course of the nineteenth century, a matter of overt idolization and deification of women that ultimately contributed to an ideology in which women were fetishized, distanced, cloistered, mystified, and inert.20

One of the key features of the fetishization of women was assigning them moral goodness and moral responsibility. John Locke’s seminal representation of the newborn’s mind as white paper, void of all characters, recurs frequently in the writings of preceptors who are concerned to impress on mothers the critical importance of their performance.21 Hugh Smith, for example, explaining why every mother should be watchful of her own conduct and perfectly satisfied with the dispositions of such servants as she entrusts with the care of her children, wrote in 1801:

The human mind, in its infant opening, has justly been compared to a blank sheet of paper, susceptible of every impression: whence it may be supposed, children receive their prejudices and inclinations from the dispositions of those persons to whose care they are entrusted, in like manner as these letters convey the sentiments of the author.22

The increasing attention to the importance of maternal authority and the re-conceptualization of women’s emotional and mental capacities necessitated by the redefinition of motherhood contributed to women’s authority as writers

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in certain genres, especially didactic writing and the novel.\textsuperscript{23} The novel in particular was associated with women, and became a vehicle of legitimate female authority.\textsuperscript{24} Over time however, there was a reaction against this authority. The analogy drawn between mothering and authorship gave rise to a patriarchal concern about the influence women writers exerted over their readers.

With maternal authority came the notion of mothers as ‘managers’ of the children and of the home. In \textit{A Guide for Self Preservation, and Parental Affection; or Plain Directions for Enabling People to Keep Themselves and their Children Free from several Common Disorders} (1794), Thomas Beddoes advises a father to be “sober and industrious” and a mother to “learn to manage well.”\textsuperscript{25} The role of domestic ‘management’ was abstractly prescribed as one in which the mother handled the day-to-day running of the home. This included the organization of servants into various domestic duties in wealthy households, and the actual doing of the domestic cleaning and cooking in less wealthy households. It included the care of children, and the practical duties of cleaning, dressing, and feeding of children, the emotional duties of nurturing them, the pedagogical duties of teaching them to read and write (as far as she was able), and the responsibility for their spiritual guidance and moral teaching. The equation of women with domesticity came to be one of the fixed points of middle-class status and, by the end of the century, the role of home and child management consolidated into maternal ideology and was promoted as the role to which the middle class mother was naturally predisposed.\textsuperscript{26}

Mothers became ‘managers’ of the Victorian home and, as educators of children, (middle-class) women were represented as not only protecting virtue, but also, increasingly, incarnating virtue. Despite the fact that women contributed significantly to the consolidation of bourgeois wealth and power,

their economic support was conceived in terms of morality and affection, the extent of their contribution increasingly represented (and accepted) as the emotional labour motivated (and guaranteed) by maternal instinct.27

**Fictional Motherhood in the Nineteenth Century**

Most nineteenth-century novels by women use the home as a central image. This is not particularly surprising since, like their heroines, female writers themselves were almost exclusively confined to the home. Because women’s experiences were therefore not as broad as those of their male counterparts, women’s novels often display a highly static way of life. Because of their limited experience of the world beyond the domestic sphere, female writers used the subjective – the experiential - voice in their novels, but they were aware of its disadvantages. In a world where woman exists as object and not subject, the subjective female voice was suggestive of a reaction against standard morality, yet the female writer had to conform to this morality in order to have her work published. Despite these difficulties, female novelists developed the subjective voice in their novels as a viable form for the expression of female experience and of the subject in process.

The home, over which the mother presides, exists in novels and in the cultural imagination as the peaceful, safe haven from, and antithesis to, the public sphere. ‘Home’ is associated with nostalgic concepts such as purity, safety, and love, ideals similarly associated with motherhood. The mother was the ideological centre of the Victorian bourgeois ideal, an image that was evoked, consistently, by representations of the mother as an icon, whose “sacred mission” is to rear children, and whose “spiritual grace” fills the domestic sphere.28 The mother’s maternal instincts justified not only woman’s domestic authority, but also her moral authority. The moral mother was therefore fundamental to nineteenth-century ideologies of women, with responsibility for the production of properly acculturated members of society. Physician and popular advice writer, William Buchan, wrote in 1809:

> The more I reflect on the situation of a mother, the more I am struck with the extent of her powers, and the inestimable value of her services. In the language of love, women are called angel; but this is a weak and silly compliment; they approach nearer to our idea of the

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Deity: they not only create, but sustain their creation, and hold its future destiny in their hands: every man is what his mother has made him.29

Buchan’s concept of motherhood echoes earlier pronouncements about ideal mothers being “manifestly intended to be mothers and formers of a rational and immortal offspring.”30 Buchan’s analogy of mothers with God, however, is a complicated form of flattery, for it was a concept that necessitated assigning to women and mothers emotional, intellectual, and moral qualities that they were traditionally thought to lack. Indeed, assigning mothers such great responsibility also required investing them with authority over their children, since “[N]othing”, declared advice writer, Jane West, “can be so detrimental to domestic good government as maternal insignificance.”31

Representations of deficient motherhood that counteracted these idealized notions of motherhood continued throughout the nineteenth century. The theme of deficient motherhood – in a variety of forms - continued to be important for female writers, particularly as it enabled them to explore specifically female issues and to promote possibilities for female autonomy. In the works of Jane Austen and early George Eliot for example, heroines follow a similar pattern to those in the works of Frances Burney. The heroines resist patriarchal definition at first, but later conform through their fear of the subversive, marginal, and potentially criminal behaviour of substitute mothers and sometimes of biological mothers. Eventually, the heroines of these novels succumb to the patriarchal order rather than risk the dangers of identifying with the mother, who is invariably depicted as tasteless, promiscuous, violent, or weak and in need of help herself.

In Jane Austen’s *Pride and Prejudice* (1813), for example, Mrs. Bennett lacks propriety, and is a source of embarrassment to her two eldest daughters, Jane and Elizabeth - her presence potentially a greater threat to her daughters’ marriage prospects and social advancement than her absence.

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29 William Buchan 1809, *Advice to Mothers, on the Subject of Their Own Health; and of the Means of Promoting the Health, Strength and Beauty of Their Offspring*, published together with Buchan’s *Domestic Medicine*, Boston, p. 507, cited in Jackson 1994, p. 162.


would have been. Elizabeth’s refusal of two (ostensibly advantageous) marriage proposals can be seen as a form of resistance to patriarchy, though this is delightfully complicated by the affectionate complicity she enjoys with her actual father. Defined by patriarchy only as ‘daughter’, the heroine therefore continues to be aligned with the mother from whom she wishes (consciously or unconsciously) to escape. The heroine escapes the embarrassing mother only by marriage and reconfiguration into patriarchy as good wife and potential excellent mother, thereby conforming to the paradigms of femininity and maternity her mother transgressed.

By contrast, the surreal, Gothic, and fantasy narrative patterns that occur in the novels of Ann Radcliffe, and are replicated (with major variations) in the novels of the Brontë sisters, for example, evoke a far more dangerous maternal energy. Patriarchy dominates the female-authored fictional world, and the mother-figures of these novels are a part of the overall female project to disrupt patriarchal values and redefine the novel. The trope of the absent mother remains a common one in nineteenth-century novels. It represents patriarchy’s manipulation and control of women, acting as a rhetorical instrument for female writers’ ‘feminism’ and for expressing their understanding of their society as unjust, dissipated, and immoral. Some of these novels shift the focus from maternal absence to the motherless heroine, emphasizing the psychic rather than the social implications of motherlessness. In Charlotte Brontë’s *Jane Eyre* (1847) and Emily Brontë’s *Wuthering Heights* (1847), for example, the motherless heroine struggles to assert her own identity and autonomy against the rules and conditions of a society that attempts to regulate and contain her.

The absent mother also formed the basis of what Dorothea Von Mücke terms “the bourgeois tragedy”, in which the absent mother is evoked as a “careful construction of a sublimation script from nostalgia for a happy childhood.” The trope functions differently than in eighteenth-century novels. The absent mother is not only evoked as an excellent mother, she is specifically

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‘remembered’ as the key figure in an especially happy phase in one’s life. In this model, the positive emotional associations with the figure of the mother as primary care-giver in childhood are of central importance. Yet the mother does not even have to exist in order for those associations to be vivid and perceived as real. The Mother now exists as a ‘cultural postulate,’ paradigmatic of the type of mother a child should have had, of the happiness the child should have experienced by being loved unequivocally by a mother, and a measure by which the adult can reconstruct her individual story in the light of her childhood. It is therefore not so much the presence or absence of an ideal mother, but the individual’s construction of an idealized mother, that enables the individual to emerge and evolve.

Many nineteenth-century female writers made woman the subject of their novels, or deployed female experience, as a form of literary rebellion against their own deliberate marginalization both as women and as writers. The domestic authority that had been so rigorously promoted and freely given by the dominant order in the course of the eighteenth century, continued to the extent that maternal and domestic authority became a site of real power that threatened patriarchy. Novels in the nineteenth century therefore often focused on cultural anxieties about how to reconcile new ideas of maternal influence with older forms of patriarchal power. In order to have their works accepted for publication, however, female writers usually invoked a form of male authorial discourse that was easily recognizable and unthreatening to the male publisher, even though it contradicted their aim of creating a discourse of resistance. Yet the possibilities for subverting the social order were always present in their writing. In Anne Brontë’s *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall* (1848), for example, the heroine, Helen Huntingdon, is a mother driven to leave her awful husband in order to save her son from what she sees as his ‘contaminating influence:’

It is hard that my little darling should love him more than me; and that, when the well-being and culture of my son is all I have to live for, I should see my influence destroyed by one whose selfish affection is more injurious than the coldest indifference or the harshest tyranny could be. If I, for his good, deny him some trifling indulgence, he goes to his father, and the latter, in spite of his selfish indolence, will even give himself some trouble to meet the child’s desires; if I attempt to curb his will, or look gravely on him for some act of childish disobedience, he knows his other parent will smile and take his part against me. Thus, not only have I the father’s spirit in the son to contend against, the germs of his evil tendencies to search out and eradicate, and his corrupting intercourse and example in after
life to counteract, but already he counteracts my arduous labour for the child’s advantage, destroys my influence over his tender mind, and robs me of his very love; - I had no earthly hope but this, and he seems to take a diabolical delight in tearing it away.  

Helen’s role as mother is “all she [has] to live for;” her feelings for her child taking precedence over any other feeling. She speaks of the authority she has over her son in terms of discipline - to “deny him;” to “curb his will;” or “to look gravely on him” - and of her maternal care as “arduous labour.” Helen’s selfless motherhood is in direct opposition to selfish fatherhood, manifested in her husband through his indolence, indulgence, and ‘diabolical delight.’ Helen knows that the father is engaged in the seduction of his child only in order to torture her, but she is afraid that the father’s charismatic ways have the potential to lure the child away from a virtuous life (and from her), so she takes their son and leaves him, a most daring undertaking for its time. Brontë’s novel presents a mother assuming greater maternal authority than patriarchy was willing to allow, openly provoking patriarchal concern with excessive and unsanctioned maternal authority.

Representations of motherhood were not only important to female writers as the means to promote ‘feminist’ ideals or to explore female sexuality and subjectivity. Charles Dickens, for example, used the trope of the weak mother in his semi-autobiographical novel, *David Copperfield* (1849-1850), as the means to examine the mother’s impact on the male. Clara Copperfield is exemplar of a weak mother, a child-woman, in need of help herself. The hero is profoundly affected by his mother’s deficient motherhood. She marries without his knowledge; she fails to stop her new husband from beating and starving him; she fails to rescue him from the cruelty and servitude of factory work; she seemingly transfers her once-devoted maternal attentions for him to a new baby; and finally she dies and leaves him alone in the world. Yet David’s adoration of this woman he considers the perfect mother remains undiminished. Devastated by her death, he looks to repeat his great love for her by marrying Dora Spenlow, another child-woman, who, just like his mother, is weak and in need of help herself. The conflation – or mutual inscription – of mother and wife in *David Copperfield* provides the liminal space for examination of female sexuality and male desire. The helplessness displayed by Clara Copperfield and Dora

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Spenlow – mother and potential mother – is a form of sexual provocation yet their vanity and willfulness ensure that David can never be confident in securing their love. In his desire for them and his desire to help and take care of them, David is made aware of his own sexuality. The adored, weak, sexualized mother is therefore the catalyst for the son’s psychological maturation.

**Some Reflections on Contemporary Society**

In their reflection of issues women faced in the eighteenth century, the novels of deficient motherhood serve today as the means to expose the power of ideology and its part in the construction of ideas about women as mothers and as human beings. Maternal ideology ‘performs’ in the same way as any ideology. It presents partial truths, omissions, and gaps rather than outright lies; it smoothes over contradictions, appearing to provide answers to questions which, in reality, it evades; and it masquerades as coherence and logic in the interests of maintaining the social relations generated by, and necessary to, the reproduction of the existing mode of production. Novels of deficient motherhood are involved in destabilizing the ideology of maternal excellence as ‘natural,’ ‘normal,’ and knowable; yet they also construct, by opposition, notions of maternal excellence as desirable. These novels reflect a sense of the emotional, physical, cultural, social, political, legal, sexual, and spiritual forces that continue to surround the biological act of giving birth.

In current Western societies, the mother still undergoes construction and mythologizing. Yet, cultural expectations of the mother have varied little since the eighteenth century. Psychologist and social philosopher, Erich Fromm, presents contemporary motherhood as the source of female identity:

Love, care and responsibility of others are the creations of the mother; motherly love is the seed from which all love and altruism grows. But beyond that, motherly love is the basis for the development of universal humanism. The mother loves her children because they are her children, not because they fulfill this or that condition or expectation ... the basic principles of the mother-centered culture are those of freedom and equality, of happiness and unconditional affirmation of life.38

37 Poovey 1988, p. 97.
Fromm here describes sentiments of maternal love with which few people in Western societies are unfamiliar. The belief in a mystical, magical, deep maternal love is embedded in the social conscience, and it is against this image that the modern women and mothers continue to measure themselves.

Feminists in the 1970s resisted this kind of interpretation of the mother by arguing for “Matrophobia,” which Adrienne Rich describes as the “essential female tragedy” whereby the female desires to “become purged once and for all of our mothers’ bondage, to become individuated and free.”39 In this construction, the mother is representative of the victim in the female self – the oppressed woman and the martyr. Rich contends that the mother’s personality dangerously overlaps with the daughter’s personality and blurs it to the extent that the daughter must actively resist her mother in order to separate herself from her mother’s model of repressed womanhood and motherhood. Rich argues that the female-authored novels of the late eighteenth-century expose how mother and daughter are estranged by patriarchal norms for female behaviour and self-identity. Being a ‘good’ woman in a sexist society requires conformity to feminine stereotypes, and being a ‘good’ mother entails indoctrinating one’s daughter with these false ideals. As Mary Daly argues, mother and daughter became enemies as “mothers in our culture are cajoled into killing off the self-actualization of their daughters, and daughters learn to hate them for it, instead of seeing the real enemy ... the ‘real enemy’ being a culture, which denigrates female potential and achievement.”40

In the 2000s, the image of the mother has undergone reconstruction in myriad ways as the means to advance particular images on which our culture thrives. Representations and images of ‘sexy’ motherhood, powerful motherhood, surrogate motherhood, single motherhood, and lesbian motherhood abound in all media. Contemporary novels, films, television shows, and magazines reflect conflicting images. There is the sexualized ‘yummy mummy’ described, with some improbability, as the woman who ‘manages’ to have children and stay attractive. There is the movie star with babe in arms as though it were the ultimate fashion accessory, advancing the

image of motherhood as ‘hip’ and trendy and as something every modern woman should ‘have.’ There is the smiling, confident mother serving healthy, nutritious, home-cooked food to a horde of happy, healthy children. There is the ‘miracle Mum’ who somehow knows exactly what to do and what to use to get those white clothes sparkling clean. All these images represent the variety of notions associated with our culture’s ideas of good mothering. Theoretically, the ideal mother is a strong, confident, capable, beautiful woman who can achieve whatever she wants to achieve, yet she also continues to be promoted as the authority on caring for children and the home.

Although we seem so much better off than our maternal ancestors, how far have we actually come from the models represented in the eighteenth-century novels of deficient motherhood that have been examined in this thesis? It is interesting to observe just how little things have really changed. The modern mother, like Moll Flanders, works outside the home to make enough money to survive. She juggles her time between the work by which she earns money and the work she does at home, and balances the money she earns with the money she pays for outsourcing childcare. Like Roxana, modern mothers attempt to maintain their looks and their sexual allure in order to look good enough or young enough to get the right jobs, and to be afforded the same respect as their male and younger female colleagues. Like Mrs. Harlowe in Clarissa, the middle-class mother who attempts to be the perfect mother and the perfect wife must ‘manage’ the needs and desires of her husband against those of her children, trying to keep both parties happy, compromising her own needs and desires along the way. Like Evelina, the modern woman has no symbolic maternal legacy on which to model her own womanhood and motherhood. Her maternal role models who mothered in the 1970s, 80s, and 90s, fought against the very models of maternity that are now being promoted. The young woman who wants to express her own desires, or who may choose not to mother, is deemed somehow unnatural by a form of gender bias that defines her according to her sexuality and her potential for maternity. Finally, the potential mother who values female integrity and community is, like Ellena of The Italian, destined to struggle in a society that glorifies women only for their sexual allure, and in a world that pays only lip service to communities and ways of life based on an ethic of care.
In their reflection of issues women faced in the eighteenth century, the novels of deficient motherhood serve today as the means to expose the power of ideology and the part it plays – in the fiction and conduct manuals then, or in novels, films, television, and newspapers now – in constructing ideas of ourselves as women, as mothers, and as human beings. Mothering – like any other kind of caring labour – is relational work in which others’ responses serve as an fundamental and principal measure of achievement. Mothers are identified not by what they feel, but by what they try to do. Maternal activities are always measurable and open to assessment and judgment by any and all who wish to do so; and the mother’s greatest critic is often herself. What is clear is that, as the bearer of life, the mother will continue to be mythologized, constructed, redefined – variously disparaged and idealized - representative of a power that validates the needs, desires, and choices of humankind. Against the images of the monstrous, the weak, the selfish, and the ineffective mothers, and against the images of the absent, the dead, and the brutalized mothers, the compassionate, tender and all-loving mother is a comforting image to which humanity turns in order to perceive itself as compassionate, good, and worthy of existence.

Representations of deficient motherhood in English novels of the eighteenth century worked to naturalize some aspects of motherhood and to challenge others. They provide a social and historical context for the myriad maternal representations in our culture today. I am suggesting that reading these novels today may help to put into perspective many of the ideas about motherhood that we consider natural. It may also put into perspective the sense of guilt, which many mothers in Western societies admit they feel for not being the type of woman, wife, or mother they are expected, or expect themselves, to be. Many of the ideas about motherhood that we hold dear in Western societies today were constructed, in a very different time and place, to suit the needs of that time and place, and for a variety of reasons, many of which have nothing to do with the biological act of giving birth.

I hope I have shown that the eighteenth-century English novel is a successful vehicle for social criticism of its time, and a cultural form from which we can still gain much in our reading today. This is one of the novel’s greatest strengths and one of the major reasons for its development into the leading literary form of our time. I have been analyzing the novels in this study with the intention of showing how and why representations of deficient
motherhood exist and function in a selection of popular English novels of the eighteenth century. Through this focus I hope I have shown how novelists were able to articulate the fictional representation of the mother with many of the more pressing issues of the age. It is not imposing anything on these novels to read them through contemporary concerns. It is, rather, to open up a dialogue with our predecessors. These are texts that continue to resonate for us now precisely because of their enthusiastic engagement with problems we continue to face in our society: conflict between individual and society, between the social classes, between the sexes, between family members, and between our past and our present.
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