

American Society for Eighteenth-Century Studies (ASECS)

Eliza Haywood's Amatory Aesthetic

Author(s): Kathleen Lubey

Source: *Eighteenth-Century Studies*, Vol. 39, No. 3, New Feminist Work in Epistemology and Aesthetics (Spring, 2006), pp. 309-322

Published by: The Johns Hopkins University Press. Sponsor: American Society for Eighteenth-Century Studies (ASECS).

Stable URL: <https://www.jstor.org/stable/30053473>

Accessed: 04-04-2020 06:18 UTC

REFERENCES

Linked references are available on JSTOR for this article:

https://www.jstor.org/stable/30053473?seq=1&cid=pdf-reference#references_tab_contents

You may need to log in to JSTOR to access the linked references.

JSTOR is a not-for-profit service that helps scholars, researchers, and students discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content in a trusted digital archive. We use information technology and tools to increase productivity and facilitate new forms of scholarship. For more information about JSTOR, please contact support@jstor.org.

Your use of the JSTOR archive indicates your acceptance of the Terms & Conditions of Use, available at <https://about.jstor.org/terms>



JSTOR

The Johns Hopkins University Press, American Society for Eighteenth-Century Studies (ASECS) are collaborating with JSTOR to digitize, preserve and extend access to Eighteenth-Century Studies

ELIZA HAYWOOD'S AMATORY AESTHETIC

Kathleen Lubey

Why did Eliza Haywood's early fiction concern itself with love? Most readers of her work today find that the amatory staples of sex and seduction enable Haywood to represent the customs of her age from a particularly persuasive feminine perspective. By narrating the experience of love, they suggest, she achieves the various goals of critiquing cultures of masculinity, arousing readers' erotic interests, and creating for them a space of voyeuristic fantasy.¹ But Haywood's own words undercut the notion that her fiction exists, on the one hand, to expose feminine subjugation or, on the other, to please by constructing a "fantasy world" of scandalous love plots.² In the dedication of *Lasselia: or, the Self-Abandoned* (1725), Haywood asserts that her work instructs readers, and that it does so in a particularly purposeful and irresistible manner:

My Design in writing this little *Novel* (as well as those I have formerly publish'd) being only to remind the unthinking Part of the World, how dangerous it is to give way to Passion, will, I hope, excuse the too great Warmth, which may perhaps, appear in some particular Pages; for without the *Expression* being invigorated in some measure proportionate to the *Subject*, 'twould be impossible for a Reader to be sensible how far it touches him, or how probable it is that he is falling into those Inadvertencies which the Examples I relate wou'd caution him to avoid. (105)³

The purpose of her fiction, Haywood asserts, is to improve readers' capacity to reflect on their interiors and experiences. In order for readers to derive lessons

Kathleen Lubey is an Assistant Professor of English at St. John's University in Queens, New York. Her current manuscript studies the relationship between sexuality and aesthetics in British literature from 1660–1760. She received her Ph.D. from Rutgers University New Brunswick in 2005.

Eighteenth-Century Studies, vol. 39, no. 3 (2006) Pp. 309–322.

from fictive events, Haywood must present them in the titillating and inflammatory manner in which characters receive them. The special attention generated by erotic description will enhance readers' interaction with the text, allowing them to experience libidinal sensation while reflecting on characters' actions and their own. Readers must "be sensible" of—that is, both aroused by *and* detached from—their own passionate "falling" into the immoderate states of excess about which they read. Through this experience of absorption and detachment, Haywood's readers emulate the sexual pleasure that undoes her heroines, feeling the sensual force of the very temptations they must consciously monitor and resist in their own lives.

Haywood's conception of reading as an act that stimulates the body while it edifies the mind situates her work firmly in the period's ongoing consolidation of the aesthetic as a category of affective, edifying experience. Like her contemporary theorists of the aesthetic, Haywood conceives of her readers' imagination as a mediating force that, when employed purposefully, sustains the pleasures of body and mind but forestalls a decline into unthinking sensual gratification. Her amatory conventions have been seen as cultivating amoral, pornographic "imaginative state[s] of equipoise" that lead her audience to forsake edification for sensual pleasure;⁴ but Haywood's strategies for engaging her readers refuse to posit a contest between illicit pleasure and morality. In fact, Haywood utilizes eroticism for pedagogic ends, demanding that readers detoxify their visceral response to "warm" description by remaining mentally attentive to the instructive warnings contained therein. While her early work has often, in the eighteenth century as today, been read as indifferent to the *raison d'être* of fiction Samuel Johnson would announce two decades later in *Rambler* 4—to uphold morality unambiguously—Haywood in fact offers her erotic subject matter as that which fixes with the utmost force a reader's comprehension of the perils of seduction. Readers will best be secured from corruption by a concurrent indulgence in and management of aesthetic pleasure.

Joseph Addison provides perhaps the most well known template for explaining aesthetic transport as an edifying experience that, as in Haywood's fiction, is generated and sustained by the imagination of self-conscious subjects. Addison's spectator enjoys a pronounced and dynamic appreciation of his surroundings: "He can converse with a Picture, and find an agreeable Companion in a Statue . . . It gives him, indeed, a kind of Property in every thing he sees" (*S* 411).⁵ This spectator's awareness of the power of his imagination increases the value of his interactions with both the external world and with his own consciousness. This imagination is agile and active: a stimulating spectacle "serves us for a kind of Refreshment, and takes off from that Satiety we are apt to complain of in our usual and ordinary Entertainments;" we take pleasure in having our "Thoughts a little agitated and relieved at the Sight of such Objects as are ever in Motion, and sliding away from beneath the Eye of the Beholder" (*S* 412). Aesthetic pleasure resides in spectators' interaction with scenes that create surprise and vitality.⁶ While such imaginative experiences raise the spectator's desire, this desire is elevated above appetites of the sense that would seek actual, physical gratification. Like Haywood's program for reading, Addison's account of aesthetic experience is defined by the subject's dynamism—not physical or mental sta-

sis—in relation to that which stimulates him. These interactions refresh desire, ward off satiety, and compel spectators to pursue objects imaginatively, securing such activity within “the Sphere of . . . innocent Pleasures” that joins arousals of sense with action in the mind (S 411).

Reading enjoys a privileged status in these imaginative experiences.⁷ While visual apprehensions of compelling objects produce aesthetic pleasure, descriptions enhance that pleasure because they elicit a private, individualized reaction in the reader. The most forceful of descriptions “represents to us such Objects as are apt to raise a secret Ferment in the Mind of the Reader, and to work, with Violence, upon his Passions. For, in this case, we are at once warmed and enlightened [sic]” (S 418). The pleasures of reading originate at a deeply interiorized level, where language is transformed into a visual spectacle, and where that spectacle produces caloric arousals that accompany the spectator’s “enlightenment.” Even more than the visual encounter with actual objects, reading rescues passion and warmth from being mere bodily responses, since the mind must continually conjure mental pictures in response to description: the “new Principle of Pleasure” in reading, for Addison, resides in “the Action of Mind, which *compares* the Ideas that arise from Words, with the Ideas that arise from the Objects themselves” (S 418). This “secret” work of the mind stimulates readers’ interiority, since it relies on their capacity to fabricate “Ideas” in response to words *and* to appreciate the pleasing difference between those ideas and the objective world. All aesthetic experiences allow spectators to evaluate the conditions of their pleasure; but reading sharpens their evaluation of their own imaginative productions against things as they are in actuality—precisely the distinction Haywood expects as she invites her reader to both enjoy in the imagination and condemn in actuality the “inadvertencies” of her heroines.

But, for Addison, certain books can impede the dynamic comparative faculties that ought to be triggered by textual description. While Haywood believes her amatory fiction can reach readers’ understanding and judgment through stimulations of their bodies, Addison suggests that erotic moments in texts might stall purposeful, reflexive acts of reading. As Mr. Spectator praises the variety and coverage of Lady Leonora’s book collection in *Spectator* 37, he notes two subtle details that make her French romances stand out from the rest of her library: Scudéry’s *The Grand Cyrus* has “a Pin stuck in one of the middle Leaves;” and more suggestive still is her copy of *Clelia*, “Which opened it self in the Place that describes two Lovers in a Bower.” Since Mr. Spectator warmly admires Leonora’s character—she is intelligent, retired, independent—he knows that her reading is tempered by reason and a healthy detachment from the fictional world of romance. But even a disciplined reader like Leonora, as her books show, attends with unusual and repeated attention to amatory scenes. If for Addison the edifying aspects of reading involve the self-conscious “Action of Mind” that compares and interprets, Leonora’s recurring visits to erotic scenes poise her at the limit of such an aesthetic engagement. While Mr. Spectator praises the spectrum of taste represented by her library, he yet calls to our attention the potential for even model readers to get stuck in the quagmire of erotic scenes, which, because they produce peculiar states of arousal, invite idiosyncratic and repeated readings.

This lethargic kind of reading is particularly troubling for women, whose libraries, at least by Addison's estimation, are the likely homes for romance fiction and whose minds, unencumbered by political concerns, afford greater leisure to indulge amatory fantasy.⁸ But of more concern than scandalous feminine reverie are the stalled imaginative states these scenes can cultivate. Resting in this singular, static pattern of erotic reading would seem to create what Addison considers pleasures of the senses, which "suffer the Mind to sink into . . . Negligence and Remissness" (S 411). As they abandon the dynamic reading process, readers of amatory fiction might enter states of languor that gratify sensual appetite rather than engage imaginative curiosity. In the instance of amatory fiction, the most extreme bodily "remissness" would be a masturbatory indulgence of libidinal desire. In this light, Haywood's erotic techniques might be seen to invite an unhealthy, immoral imaginative stasis. Her descriptions of passionate transport might threaten to arouse too much delight with too little direction toward propriety, not simply because they contain eroticism but because such eroticism was thought to take hold of readers in aberrational, irresistible ways. Readers might not simply imitate amorous characters but may read irresponsibly, neglecting the dynamic and edifying energies described by Addison as their sensual faculties disproportionately gravitate toward images of sexuality.⁹

But, for Haywood, it is this very brush against anti-aesthetic immodesty that endows amatory fiction with an exceptional facility for instruction. Haywood heartily subscribes to Addison's belief that literature exerts the most influence on readers when it elevates the imagination to "secret" states of "warmth" and "work[s], with Violence, upon [the] Passions;" but unlike him, she believes stories of love and seduction are most likely to sustain their active and self-conscious interaction—that is, their aesthetic engagement—with texts. While love is indeed "the subject and generating ground of [her] plots," Haywood chooses amatory content not only as a call to a sexually attuned audience, but as a mode of immersing her readers—especially women, as we'll see below—in states of extreme aesthetic engagement that acquaint them with human experience with an intensity no other material can (Ballaster, 158). Far from being a degraded form of sensationalist writing, amatory fiction contains the most instructive potential for eliciting readers' affect *and* calling their attention to the implications of that affect. Amatory matters provide, in fact, the most immediate access to human interiors, as she writes in her 1726 treatise *Reflections on the Various Effects of Love*:

Love, like the Grape's potent Juice, but heightens *Nature*, and makes the conceal'd Sparks of Good, or Ill, blaze out, and show themselves to the wond'ring World! It gives an Energy to our Wishes, a Vigour to our Understanding, and *adds* to the *Violence* of our Desires, but *alters* not the *Bent* of them. (83)¹⁰

Being neither virtue nor vice, Haywood proclaims, love possesses no inherent content or value. Like wine, it cannot create proclivities, but it intensifies those that already reside in the individual's constitution and thus provides the most immediate access to their "Nature." We can see "blaze[d] out" in the love-struck individual qualities that, under less extreme circumstances, are "conceal'd." Love,

as the hyperbole of all passions, allows observers to decipher the motivations and behaviors of individuals and, subsequently, to monitor more closely their own passions. Readers are encouraged to recognize love for its epistemological value: love, as a universal and extreme passion, allows readers to see human nature in its most pronounced form and to compare self-consciously their own amatory behavior with those accounts Haywood goes on to describe.

Haywood acknowledges that her subject matter is of particular urgency for women's edification against harmful indulgences of the passions. Women, for Haywood as for her male contemporaries, possess perceptions, minds, and bodies that receive particularly enduring impressions from what enters through the senses—impressions that differ not in kind but by degree from those experienced by their male counterparts. They are made, quite literally, of softer stuff than men; and while both sexes undergo identical stimulations of the senses and passions, women's impressionable interiors register the effects of these stimulations with more force and visibility. Women, therefore, must love with greater caution than men: since men have "Natures being more rough and obdurate, [they] are not capable of receiving those deep Impressions which for the most Part are so destructive to the softer Specie" (84). The concrete occurrence of "Impressions" on a woman's malleable constitution results in extreme and ineradicable effects. This proclivity for permanence is perpetuated by women's imaginative tendency to replay past scenes of amorousness: "Women . . . generally love forever. They have not Strength enough of Mind to repel the sweet Remora's which past pleasures yield,—they re-enjoy them in the Imagination" (116).¹¹ As Addison's *Leonora* revisits amatory scenes, so the woman who has loved feels and feels again, involuntarily, the pleasures of seduction. The woman's imagination continually reinvigorates these deep impressions because it cannot erase them or replace them with new material.

Disengagement from worldly experience worsens women's tendency to receive deep impressions by foreclosing on their receiving new impressions to replace the old: "wanting . . . those Amusements which a Variety of Company affords the other Sex, [women] have more Leisure, as well as more Desire to indulge their Thoughts, and sooth deluded Fancy: Thus do they, self-deceiv'd, supply Fuel to the unceasing Fire which consumes their Peace, and rarely is extinguish'd but by Death" (116). The dangerous institutions of idle time and space facilitate the imagination's stagnant fixity on a lost love object.¹² A lack of stimulation creates new desire for old objects, heightens "deluded Fancy," encourages misinterpretation, and finally augments distraction in women. Like the Addisonian imagination, that of Haywood's women readers is eager to produce and explore interior visions. But, denied the variety and surprise of the public life enjoyed by men, the feminine mind has comparatively little opportunity to engage new ideas, and so it continues to churn previous experience. Reworking this old material, rather than lead to the delight and surprise that defines healthy aesthetic discovery, generates delusion and falsehood. While this rumination over expired scenes indicates women's imaginative vitality, it also attests to women's dire need for worldly interaction, which would provide their active interiors with fresh perspectives and greater varieties of aesthetic stimulation. To this end, Haywood suggests, women, even more than men, must seek out new experiences,

visions, and texts, espousing Addison's belief that "[d]elightful scenes have a kindly Influence on the Body, as well as the Mind" (S 411). These psychological and physiological benefits, specified by Addison as occasional to the leisure, aesthetic experience, for Haywood have a utility in women's everyday lives as a means of keeping their psyches active and agile. They should seek, then, new imaginative stimulation in society and in books.¹³

The *Reflections* provides miniature amatory tales intended precisely to offer readers this aesthetic pleasure of reading joined with valuable lessons about the world. It is in this spirit that Haywood shares the story of Sophriana, an aristocratic young woman who forsakes the conventions of marriage for a passionate love affair with Aranthus, a young rake who briefly returns her affections before abandoning her. Enraged by his aloofness and neglect and after several unsuccessful epistolary attempts to resuscitate his interest, she sets out to confront him at his dwelling. The spectacle of Aranthus from afar intensifies the several passions he has produced in Sophriana: "The Sight of him giving a fresh Alarm to her Indignation, and all her Spirits being hurried between Love and Rage, she had no Leisure to reflect on what might probably be the Catastrophe of so wild an Undertaking, but wholly depending on her Disguise, she went boldly to the House which he had just enter'd . . ." (108). Unlike the leisured female reader who is encouraged to reflect on the passions, Sophriana lacks the imaginative mediation that would endow her with self-conscious control of her actions. A testament to Haywood's theory of love, Sophriana reacts with absolute extremity to the stimulus of Aranthus' image, which creates a disturbing degree of passion as it meets her eye and sets her spirits in a confusing flux of motion. Her indulgence of these passions leads to wild, anti-social behavior: she forces her way into his apartment, only to be dodged by him and jeered by a group of passersby on the street who believe her to be mad. It is not merely because she is a woman that Sophriana reacts with passion against Aranthus, but because her imagination has ceased doing its job—namely, mediating passion by finding new objects of affection. As a woman, Sophriana is more likely to be fixated on one object, causing her to suffer maddening repetition rather than enjoy new entertainments. Sophriana's story thus stands as a cautionary tale, warning readers—especially women—to monitor their own passions and seek new sources of affect.

Sophriana (along with, arguably, all of Haywood's heroines) is placed at the center of this story not out of an emancipatory or modern feminist impulse but because she teaches the most unmistakable lesson about love: that its overwhelming force must be closely monitored lest it escalate into impropriety. Women's passions, more extreme because more deeply impressed in their minds, can be clearly comprehended by readers who need instruction on the processes by which love produces feeling and reaction. By contrast, men's motives for pursuing love and sex seem almost invisible. In the tale that follows that of Sophriana's intrigues, Hibonio's forsaking of his wife for a prostitute results from drunkenness and trickery rather than any deep imaginative work. Like many of Haywood's rakish male characters, he seems altogether to lack passion or motive, to lack an aesthetic imagination that might explain his pursuit of a love object. Masculine experiences of love, often driven in Haywood's fiction by dumb lust or simple interest, lack the depth to function as paradigmatic illustrations of passionate

experience. This distinction does not necessarily result from Haywood's favoring of a feminine sensibility over a "destructive and indulgent male appetite," nor does it seem that her work "unsettles patriarchal fictions of law, heterosexual romance, and textual authority."¹⁴ Haywood's authorial logic does not espouse a binary opposition to masculinity but makes the more subtle point that women's experience most poignantly registers the effects of social and amorous interaction. It is by reading about women that her audience will receive the most urgent and instructive accounts of the passions, since her women characters are challenged by harsh limitations on their social circulation and imaginative engagement with the external world. Women make the best characters because, as Richardson's *Pamela* would make clear several years later, their behaviors and thoughts make the starkest commentary on a public from which they are isolated. Sophriana's responses to amatory disappointment exceed those of Hibonio in instructive and narrative potential because Sophriana inhabits a distilled, therefore volatile, interior life. Haywood's choice to represent women's experiences of love and morality is based not on an overvaluation of feminine morality but on an aesthetic pragmatism. Women characters, because they betray an instrumental transparency that reveals the origins and movements of the passions, possess the greatest potential to raise and sustain readers' affect. Such aesthetic engagement in readers is heightened—and made more precarious, as Haywood states in her preface to *Lasselia*—as characters enter into erotic transports, the descriptions of which demand the most conscious and disciplined management from readers who must remain committed to discovering social precept rather than gratifying their libidinal appetites. As they moderate their passions in response to these intense textual moments, readers ought to learn how to intervene in such affective escalations as they occur in their own interiors. Haywood's readers emerge from this instructive treatise with the ability to moderate—that is, to monitor *and* to temper—their amatory passions.

Of the most instructive value to her readers, then, are protagonists whose interiors can be plumbed for the insight they offer on the process by which feeling is produced and heightened by a love object. Haywood's *Lasselia* presents a heroine who models a particularly complex and exemplary spectrum of responses to love and sexual desire. Unlike the unsullied heroines of novels like *The Distress'd Orphan* (1726) and *Philidore and Placentia* (1727)—and equally unlike the duplicitous anti-heroine of *The Injur'd Husband* (1725)—*Lasselia* possesses good intentions that become blurred by the temptations of love and that evade designations under the usual terms of virtue or vice. *Lasselia* flees the amorous advances of the king in Paris only to find herself irresistibly attracted to a married gentleman, Monsieur de l'Ameye, a central figure of the rural social scene in which she seeks refuge. They consummate their love for each other, and *Lasselia* allows herself to be kept as a mistress. The novel's conclusion conveys the difficulty of fully condemning these actions: upon having their affair exposed, de l'Ameye reconciles fully with his wife, and *Lasselia* calmly and voluntarily retires to a convent. Both receive the narrator's praise for their reformations.

Haywood is aware of the blurry message this plot and its narrative method can convey to a reader. In the novel's dedication, as we've seen in the opening of my discussion, she explains the alluring quality of her prose. Its purpose is to

compel readers at once to be absorbed into and to remain detached from the heroine's own temptations, to be "invigorated" and "touche[d]" while comprehending the "caution" expressed by her stories. As the novel begins, Haywood structures this dual involvement of her reader by encouraging affective identification with Lasselia. The novel addresses readers "in the know," similar to those Richetti associates with *Love in Excess*—a community of readers who share knowledge and experience of erotic feeling and can identify with the heroine's temptations. These readers are adept in the grammar of eroticism that characterizes the heightened scenes in the novel (the gasping effects of dashes, inverted syntax, and other arrhythmic prosody), a grammar that both linguistically and typographically raises desire *and* distances readers as they decode the tropes and ostentatious narrative techniques that relate scandalous content (see Richetti, *Popular Fiction*, esp. 200–1). In *Lasselia*, ideal readers, fluent in this amorous language, are ones who have loved: "whoever has known any thing of Love, will easily confess, that that Passion brings with it a consequential Train of Images, sufficient to fill the most extensive Soul, and too strong to suffer any Intermixture of Opposers" (115). Crucial to optimal comprehension is the reader's capacity for identification. But the identification is not simply with the giddiness, heat, swooning, or other sorts of inexplicable behavior that accompany the onset of love. While appreciating the force of these reactions, her readers also can identify with the associative process that accompanies a strong stirring of the emotions. The narrator's invocation of the universality of this experience for "whoever has known any thing of Love" readies the audience for irresistible involvement in Lasselia's transports, a transport they should approach with the wisdom and reflection earned by experience.

Haywood, however, does not encourage only this affective response to the novel. Even as they are seduced by characters' feelings, readers are to approach characters and events with a readiness to interpret significant detail. Early descriptions of Lasselia foreground that love, like most emotive experience, is not irrational or inexplicable but predicated upon empirical processes of the mind and body: sense perception, feeling, and response. Love begins with visual apprehension and grows into imaginative play. Given the ease with which women give way to the feelings wrought by love, as Haywood asserts in *Reflections*, women readers stand to gain valuable knowledge as they witness the origins of Lasselia's passion. Haywood signals the aesthetic prowess of Lasselia herself very early in the novel, emphasizing the window provided by "her Eyes," which "had an uncommon Vivacity in them, mix'd with a Sweetness, which spoke the Temper of her Soul" (107–8). Readers can expect refined perception from such a lively subject and should aspire to possess this energy that unites the eye with the soul. But the force of Lasselia's beauty suggests she will also function compellingly as an aesthetic object:

. . . her Charms encreas'd by being often seen, every View discover'd something new to be admir'd; and tho they were of that sort which more properly may be said to persuade, than command Adoration, yet they persuaded in such a manner, that no Mortal was able to resist their Force—And, indeed, when Passion enters the Soul by such gentle and unperceiv'd Degrees, it generally takes a surer hold, and is with much

less ease extirpated, than when it rushes all at once upon us, and boldly tells us that we must obey. (108)

Like Addison's properly aesthetic scene, Lasselia functions as a beautiful and compelling spectacle because in her, the viewer constantly discovers new qualities to appreciate. She is a lively object who engages affection by sustaining pleasure and interest. As readers are absorbed into the particulars of Lasselia's beauty, they are offered the general precept that the gradual development of esteem produces a more permanent kind of love than does the superficial flurry of feeling that accompanies extravagant beauty. This heroine will function as both aesthetic object and subject, as both producer of and receptor for feeling. Her persuasive beauty and her prudent perception are precisely what occasion the plot, in terms both of her flight from the King's attempts at seduction and of her much-anticipated surrender to her feelings for de l'Amye; and they render her experience entirely visible to the watchful eye of the reader.

The initial stages of Lasselia's passionate experience dramatically show the reader that love resides almost entirely in the imagination. Love is not a simple affair of the heart but a passion that disrupts a peaceful mind and creates new work for the aesthetic subject, particularly in the realm of self-government (as we witnessed in the story of Sophriana). Amatory concerns function epistemologically, providing a particularly intense and immediate view into the overlapping activities of the senses, the imagination, and the mind. In early parts of *Lasselia*, readers foresee the approach of such a volatile event as they witness Lasselia's enviable freedom from worry: "[t]he Felicity [she] enjoy'd, was of another, and more durable Nature than that which Love, even at the best, affords; her Pleasures were unmix'd and pure, nor did she so much as dream there was a Day of Woe in store. . . ." (113). Soon, this peace and constancy is replaced by chaos. Haywood uses an antiquated trope to cast a pall over the initial meeting between de l'Amye and Lasselia; as they are introduced, "three Drops of Blood fell from his Nose, which stain'd a white Handkerchief she happen'd to have in her Hand" (113). This clichéd corporeal sign of impending misfortune performs the double function of amusing the company and immersing Lasselia in real concern over the emotional disorder that ensues within.¹⁵ Love, for Lasselia, presents a reaction that cannot be codified according to previous experience.

While there is a tumult of action in the pages that intervene between this initial meeting and the consummation of their love, almost all of that action occurs in Lasselia's imagination. The reader is privy to her process of reasoning, which attempts very thoroughly to navigate the course of her passions. Her attempts at comprehension show an awareness that her feelings are connected to the spectacle that initiated the unsettling turns of her imagination:

Is it impossible, *said she to herself* that the seeing a Person so every way agreeable as *de l'Amye* cou'd give me Shocks such as, one wou'd think, cou'd only be inflicted by the Appearance of some horrid Spectre, some frightful Enemy to Nature!—What is there either in his Person or Behaviour to terrify?—Is not all about him lovely and engaging?

At this point still immune to the effects of love, Lasselia finds the seeming contradiction of her feelings too puzzling to interpret. Although he is "lovely and engag-

ing,” de l’Amye occasions so much unrest in her that she only can imagine her reaction is one of terror. Suddenly, in a flash of aesthetic decoding, she begins to understand this feeling as one of pleasure:

Oh! yes (*cry’d she after a little Pause*) I ne’er before beheld a Form so perfectly compleat, a Shape so exquisite, Eyes so bewitching, an Air so soft, so charming, and, I too well remember, the fond Endearments he paid to Madam [his wife], first struck my Soul with that chill Horror, which ever since remains. (115)

It is the beauty of his person and the nearly sublime “Horror” of his marital affections that challenge Lasselia’s interpretive capabilities by producing such strong feeling. Love, as we see through Lasselia’s experience, plunges one into the most extreme case of aesthetic stimulation, mobilizing a confusing sort of pleasure through visual apprehension of the desired object. She does not enter some pure state of heartfelt elation. Rather, Lasselia receives de l’Amye’s figure visually; it enters her imagination and produces unsettling motions there that demand interpretation and explanation. The images received by her imagination are subject to questions that emerge from more rational sources (such as, for instance, why de l’Amye’s fondness for his wife disconcerts her), and it is through this process of self-examination that love takes root and is discovered. The peculiar force of this agitation inaugurates a new plane of knowledge and action for Lasselia and, by having access to her experience, for the reader as well. Lasselia models a laudable capacity to examine her own interiority, one that readers, too, have been urged to cultivate since the preface. Haywood presents this self-scrutiny as something readers ought to be internalizing.

After this recognition of the strange feelings de l’Amye inspires, Lasselia’s mind and soul continue their usual operations, but the images with which they are filled depart from the simple and innocent joys to which Lasselia was previously accustomed. Now, being in love, she realizes “how fatal an Enemy to Repose, the sight of an Object too amiable may prove; but tho she resolv’d not to give way to an Impression so pernicious, she found it impossible to erase it” (115). Not surprisingly, Lasselia cannot rid herself of the effects left on her by her visual encounter with de l’Amye. Her imagination does with his image what it is most feared women’s imaginations will do: it creates a full erotic fantasy life, with de l’Amye at its center. Lasselia dreams of him “dissolving, melting in amorous Languishments;” and, worse yet, she indulges the play of these tempting images during her waking hours. She,

wrap’d in the extatick Contemplation, went so far sometimes . . . as to kiss, embrace, and possess, in *Idea*, a thousand nameless Joys, which Love too soon inspires a Notion of: but these Excesses we’ll suppose she permitted only, when she found there was a Necessity by chearing her languid Spirits with an *imaginary Bliss*, to preserve her from falling into a *real Despair*. (117)

Lasselia here subscribes to Addison’s belief that pleasures of the imagination belong to the “Sphere of . . . innocent Pleasures” into which one “may retire . . . with Safety”: she hopes that the virtual indulgence of sexual fantasy “in *Idea*” will substitute for the fulfillment of her desire in reality. In her parallel phrasing and

typescript of “*imaginary Bliss*” and “*real Despair*,” Haywood implies that the two experiences are distinct; that is, the real despair of giving way to her passion for de l’Amye would necessitate a sensual desire that, Lasselia hopes, will be circumvented by her sexual interactions with de l’Amye in the self-conscious realm of fancy. Haywood distinguishes between kinds of erotic engagement here: the imagination can provide the virtual space in which to explore inclinations that are starkly unacceptable in actuality—precisely the balance her audience should strike as they encounter erotic scenes.

Haywood quickly, however, warns the reader that resisting libidinal desire during such states of fantasy will be difficult indeed, linking Lasselia’s actual seduction to the inflammation of her erotic imagining. Her virtual renderings of erotic pleasure only serve to predispose Lasselia to an easy seduction. When de l’Amye, in disguise, hands a letter to her confessing his love, he finds that her imagination has put her in a state of arousal: “It was in one of those longing, wishing Moments, already mentioned, when the amorous *Lasselia* extended at her length on a fine grassy Bank . . . was told a Messenger waited with a Letter . . . ” (117). Lasselia, already worked into a state of amorousness by her imagination, occupies a dangerous reading posture. The elevation of her senses wrought by erotic fantasy inclines her to a kind of reading that lacks the reflexivity she exhibits in earlier, less libidinally charged moments. So aroused is Lasselia that she reacts passionately to the letter even before she reads its contents; the mere recognition of de l’Amye’s handwriting evokes emotional and bodily states of chaos: “confus’d and trembling, now blushing with Shame, then pale with Fear, she broke the fatal Seal, and read [the] lines” that declare his love (118). This is a risky endeavor in reading indeed, since Lasselia’s characteristic thoughtfulness and composure have been suspended in her indulgence of erotic arousal. All of her admirable self-consciousness collapses. As she experiences this flurry of her passions, de l’Amye reveals his identity, and any possibility of contemplative, distanced reading vanishes. The words on the page of his letter are quickly forgotten; the sphere of imagination and reading give way to actual desire and sexuality.

If readers are to follow her prefatory claim to show “how dangerous it is to give way to Passion,” they must resist the total absorption into erotic fantasy they witness in Lasselia. In the description that ensues, Haywood tests readers’ capacity to be swept into erotic excitement even as they receive her warning against seduction. In a typically Haywoodian burst of prose, the narrator describes the subsequent erotic events in phrases that nearly overflow their sentences. The reader enters into a virtual experience of Lasselia’s overwhelming arousal that may initially seem to encourage sensual abandon:

[W]ith a thousand Kisses and Embraces [he] restor’d her to that Sense she had so lately lost and shew’d her the Deceit he had been guilty of— It was in vain she struggled to rise—in vain that she endeavour’d to repel the soft Endearments of his Lips and Arms; her Eyes confess’d the unwilling Transport of her Soul, and told him all he wish’d to ask: nor was he scrupulous of letting her know how well he was acquainted with his Happiness—he made her sensible of it by a thousand Liberties, which a Man who had not been certain of Forgiveness, wou’d not have dared to take . . . (119)

The scene escalates at length until de l'Amye's fear of being caught interferes with their transport. The actual outcome of their meeting is left obscured by the narrator's speculation in a series of negative statements: "if he did not obtain the highest Favour she cou'd grant, he had too much to boast of, to fear she cou'd deny him any thing; and 'tis probable that he had not left her without the utmost Gratification of his Wishes, had he not been apprehensive of a Discovery . . ." (119). The narrator's inability to comment clearly on the outcome of the encounter testifies to Richetti's claim that Haywood's "breathless rush of erotic/pathetic clichés . . . is in a real sense unreadable" and designed, rather than to produce clear meaning, "to evoke by its conventional formulas familiar and thrilling scenes."¹⁶ Haywood's erotic prose performs the double function of replicating the fragmented, contradictory excitement of illicit desire while grammatically and syntactically withholding the finality of their encounter.

This scene does less to narrate the plot of *Lasselia* than to impel readers toward its goal of instruction by arousing an increasingly durable identification with Lasselia, de l'Amye, and their experience of sexual desire. As readers closely observe Lasselia's imaginative world break down into a sensual one—filled with foreboding consequences—they also experience, to a virtual degree, the transports that lead her to a collapse into desire. The detachment involved in the aesthetic experience of reading—the Addisonian showing and withholding, stopping and starting, and sustaining readers' desire for more—secures the reader as an aesthetic, rather than a merely sensual, observer. Even as they are lavished with erotic detail, readers confront boundaries of knowledge and grammar that they cannot traverse. Reading secures them from the devolution into sense experienced by Lasselia as soon as she *stops* reading and finds herself confronted by the body of her beloved. As a mode of replicating Lasselia's instructive experience to the reader, this amatory aesthetic aptly fuses desire with curiosity, encouraging readers to keep reading rather than to put the book down and indulge any sensual desire that has been raised. Erotic content, in calling to the imagination and the body, most holistically secures their interest in her narrative and encourages them to recognize, while enjoying, the danger of "giv[ing] way to Passion" she warns against. Readers, if Haywood has trained them effectively, will emerge from this narrative with a resistance to the actual corporeal indulgence to which Lasselia surrenders—with an ability, that is, to witness their own affective and sensual arousals as aesthetic events, which they can manipulate, mitigate, and control. This capacity to feel, to judge, and to apply the wisdom of the heroine's experience to one's own life seems a far more useful, more flexible end for a reader of this amatory tale, since its colorless conclusion (which finds a penitent Lasselia in a convent and de l'Amye reunited with his wife) lacks both persuasive and emotive force. A binary morality is not Haywood's instructive goal. Instead, as she predicted in her dedication, her readers will have immersed themselves most fully in the erotic adventures of her characters—and it is through the narrative techniques of these scenes, rather than in the novel's conventional ending, that Haywood seeks to shape her readers' understanding of sexual conduct.

Rather than preach against sensual indulgence, Haywood creates in *Lasselia* a space in which readers might learn the process by which passions are ignited, intensified, and consummated. This process involves examining the interiors

of women characters who, thought to be unencumbered by interferences from public or political life, provide a transparency through which their passionate perceptions and experiences are made available to readers. Lasselia, rather than function as a voice of oppositional feminism on the social and sexual matters of her age, possesses an innocence and clarity of mind that allows her consciousness to present itself with simplicity and immediacy. In turn, the reader can enter virtually into Lasselia's transports because they arise with a special degree of intensity, uncomplicated by any concerns external to love. And as Haywood suggests in the dedication, Lasselia's amorous encounters are worthy of literary consideration because they produce reactions in readers no other plots can, asking them to manipulate their own passions as they witness love's influence over her actions and decisions. Sex, far from being a degenerate literary content, is of great epistemological importance because it throws the human passions into relief, allowing readers unadulterated access to the workings of characters' minds and bodies. The imaginative work elicited by erotic content leads not to the demise of propriety but to an internalization of social and moral precept that helps readers guard against "falling into those Inadvertencies" associated with love and passion. In this way, Haywood invents a specific strategy—an amatory aesthetic—for creating the imaginative conditions that were thought to please and instruct in the literary culture of the period. It is by entering into extreme situations of love and lust, most often through the transparent perspective of her heroines, that all readers come to acquire the most essential knowledge regarding the workings of human consciousness and desire, a knowledge that readers will convert into active self-scrutiny and self-government in social and sexual realms. Through this focus on the transports of body and mind, Haywood shows the eighteenth-century imagination to be a resilient entity indeed, capable of performing interpretive acts of abstraction even as it is aroused by the most extreme subject matter: illicit erotic images of feminine sexuality. The literature of the eighteenth century seeks to achieve the lofty aim of creating readers with fully internalized aesthetic and moral codes of conduct. Eliza Haywood made manifest that this instructive project necessitated stories of sexuality.

NOTES

1. For readings that find in Haywood an explicit opposition to masculine literary and social dominance, see Mary Anne Schofield, *Eliza Haywood* (Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1985); and the recent collection *The Passionate Fictions of Eliza Haywood: Essays on Her Life and Work*, eds. Kirsten T. Saxton and Rebecca P. Bocchicchio (Lexington: Univ. of Kentucky Press, 2000), especially the essays on her early fiction by Bocchicchio, Saxton, Ros Ballaster, and Margaret Case Croskery. On the erotic pleasure afforded Haywood's readers, see Ballaster, *Seductive Forms: Women's Amatory Fiction from 1684–1740* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992), and William Warner, *Licensing Entertainment: The Elevation of Novel Reading in Britain, 1664–1750* (Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 1998), esp. 116–27.

2. John Richetti, *Popular Fiction Before Richardson: Narrative Patterns, 1700–1739* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1969), 182.

3. All references to *Lasselia* are from *The Injur'd Husband and Lasselia*, ed. Jerry C. Beasley (Lexington: Univ. of Kentucky Press, 1999) and appear in text.

4. Alexander Pettit, "Adventures in Pornographic Places: Eliza Haywood's *Tea-Table* and the Decentering of Moral Argument" in *Papers on Language and Literature* 38 (2002): 258. On her

translation of French pornography, see Patrick Spedding, "Eliza Haywood, Writing (and) Pornography" in *Women Writing, 1550–1750*, eds. Jo Wallwork and Paul Salzman (Victoria, Australia: Meridian, 2001).

5. All references to the *Spectator* appear in text by issue number and are from *The Spectator*, ed. Donald Bond, 5 vols. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1965). While at least one critic has located a problematically "grasping imperialism" in this passage, I emphasize the value it places on spectator's self-consciousness. See Erin Mackie, *Market à la Mode: Fashion, Commodity, and Gender in The Tatler and The Spectator* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins Univ. Press, 1997), 84.

6. On this dynamic aspect of Addison's aesthetic, see Ronald Paulson, *The Beautiful, Novel, and Strange: Aesthetics and Heterodoxy* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins Univ. Press, 1996), Chap. 3.

7. For a discussion of the powerful analogy between reading and seeing in Addison's aesthetics, see Neil Saccamano, "The Sublime Force of Words in Addison's 'Pleasures'" in *ELH* 58 (1991): 85–106.

8. Mr. Spectator makes clear in his discussion of "party patches" that women ought not participate in public expressions of political ideology (S 81). For his recommendations for the ideal library for women, see *Spectator* 92. For a discussion that emphasizes the gendered aspects of the Addisonian imagination, see Mackie, esp. Chaps. 2 and 4.

9. For a discussion of reading's material effects on the imagination, see Adrian Johns, "The physiology of reading," in *The Practice and Representation of Reading in England*, eds. James Raven, Helen Small, and Naomi Tadmor (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1996). For studies that address the specific concern with women readers' impressionable imaginations, see Barbara Benedict, *Curiosity: A Cultural History of Early Modern Inquiry* (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 2001), esp. Chap. 3; and Jacqueline Pearson, *Women's Reading in England, 1750–1835: A Dangerous Recreation* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1999).

10. All references to the *Reflections* appear parenthetically in text and are taken from *Selected Works of Eliza Haywood*, vol. 1, ed. Alexander Pettit (London: Pickering and Chatto, 2000).

11. "remora," "2. An obstacle, hindrance, impediment, obstruction (Common in 17–18th c.)," a figurative reference to "1. the sucking-fish (*Echeneis remora*), believed by the ancients to have the power of staying the course of any ship to which it attached itself" (*OED*).

12. The *Spectator* suggests that women, to keep the imagination calm, ought to experience muted, miniaturized versions of aesthetic experience. See *Spectator* 606, in which Thomas Tickell authors a mock legislation that women only create art in needle-point, an activity that prevents them from substantively entering literary, artistic, and political culture.

13. Haywood reiterates this argument for women's participation in the literary and social world throughout her oeuvre. Later in her career, she would exemplify the perils of naïveté in her hapless heroine Betsy Thoughtless, whose social and moral bungling results from her lack of exposure to the customs of urban London; and in *The Female Spectator*, she would warn Sarah Oldfashion, a concerned correspondent, against too severe a restriction on her daughter's social circulation (see *The Female Spectator* vol. I, bk. V [London: 1745]).

14. Such characterizations of Haywood's work are not unusual, but these particular references are taken from one of the more zealous of these accounts by Kirsten T. Saxton, "Telling Tales: Eliza Haywood and the Crimes of Seduction in The City Jilt, or, the Alderman turn'd Beau" in Bocchicchio and Saxton, eds. *Passionate Fictions* (115–42).

15. David Oakleaf discusses this trope of blood as an ironic commentary on the patrilineal social structure that prevents de l'Amye from pursuing his passion for Lasselia; see "The Eloquence of Blood in Eliza Haywood's Lasselia" in *SEL* 39 (1999): 483–98.

16. John Richetti, "Voice and Gender in Eighteenth-Century Fiction: Haywood to Burney" in *Studies in the Novel* 19 (1987), 266.