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**The Widow's Might: Law and the Widow
in British Fiction, 1689-1792**

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Submitted to the School of Graduate Studies and Research
of the University of Ottawa in partial fulfillment
of the requirements of the Doctor of Philosophy



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Abstract

The Widow's Might: Law and the Widow in British Fiction, 1689-1792

Repeatedly in eighteenth-century fiction, the widow embodies a narrative agency that has as its actual counterpart the directive relation to property granted to widows by English law: unlike a wife, a widow had a separate legal identity and could hold real property as could a man.

Common law dower granted her a life interest in her husband's estate, but over the course of the eighteenth century, dower was increasingly barred by jointure, a monetary provision negotiated in the marriage settlement. Jointure was contractual in nature, often unconnected to land, subject to the ideological vagaries of the Courts of Equity, and violable in ways that dower was not.

Running parallel to this legal alteration is a demographic decline in the rate of remarriage for widows. These historical phenomena together provoke speculation about the widow's disadvantaging through jointure over dower. From the perspective of a feminist reading, the replacement of a common law right with a discretionary claim, and its corollary substitution of mobile for real property, indicate an anxiety about the widow's potential might in accumulating wealth in land.

This uneasiness infuses contemporary representations of widowhood. Satirical treatments both mock the widow's lubricity and apprehend a re-allocation of property through remarriage. Conduct manuals advocate the strictest modesty to contain the widow's energy.

The thesis elucidates, within the context of these representations, the legal and historical developments affecting the widow and reads, accordingly, a range of British fictions. Short fictions by Aphra Behn, Jane Barker, and Eliza Haywood, and novels by Frances Sheridan, Sarah Scott and Clara Reeve are analyzed to assess a widow's entitlement to desire, to examine her capacity for narrative agency, and to question her security in a transactional economy. Although the widow exerts a consequential narrative authority in the texts under consideration, a familiarity with eighteenth-century law reveals what the novelists imply: the contemporary valorization of acquisitive inclination over disinterested civic virtue, and its legal parallel of unchartered contract over entrenched status right, register a diminution of the widow's proprietary might.

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Table of Contents

The Widow's Might: Law and the Widow in British Fiction, 1689-1792

Abstract	ii
Acknowledgements	iii
Introduction	1
Chapter One: The Widow's Story in English Law	12
Dower	12
Jointure	25
Dower vs. Jointure	34
The Remarrying Widow	37
Chapter Two: Remarrying Widows in Behn, Barker and Haywood	47
Aphra Behn: <i>The Unfortunate Happy Lady</i>	48
Aphra Behn: <i>The History of the Nun</i>	58
Jane Barker	72
Eliza Haywood	76
Chapter Three: Widows and Will(s) in <i>Memoirs of Miss Sidney Bidulph</i>	89
The Climate of Conduct	91
A Conspiracy of Widows	94
Widows of Impropriety with Property	101
A Widow without a Will of her Own	109
Chapter Four: Collective Might, Individual Plight: Scott's Widows in <i>Millenium Hall</i> and <i>The History of Sir George Ellison</i>	116
Georgic Utopia in <i>Millenium Hall</i>	117
The Widows' Collective Might	123
The Widow's Plight: Remarriage and Rescue in <i>The History of Sir George Ellison</i>	136
As Widows, As Wives: Notions of Slavery and (Re)marriage	138
The Widow's Plight: Secondary Widows	149

Chapter Five: The Widows' Might? Clara Reeve's Novels of Protest	163
Exemplary Widows	165
Education and Georgic	173
Illusory Power: Quiet Protest	179
Counsel and Property	189
 Conclusion	 199
 Bibliography	 204

Introduction

The widow who "enjoys an independent fortune." observes William Alexander in *The History of Women* (1779), "is almost the only woman who among us can be called free."¹ Alexander's testimony to the special status of the widow emerges in eighteenth-century British fiction as a fascination with the disruptive potential of women who survive their spouses. Repeatedly in eighteenth-century novels and short fictions, the widow embodies a crucial energy that has multiple functions: exploring the implications of female desire, assessing the potential for female subjectivity within a patriarchy, destabilizing the established gender dynamic that governed marriageable young heroines. Such narrative agency has as its actual counterpart the directive relation to property granted to widows by English law. The status of coverture—a married woman's complete lack of separate legal identity—is overturned upon the husband's death, and the widow becomes a *feme sole* who may, in theory, hold property and transact commercially as would a man. This authority is contingent, of course, upon social standing: the widow of a wage-labourer who had neither held property nor amassed any capital might require parish-relief for her subsistence. A middling-class, gentry, or aristocratic widow, however, enjoyed an interest in property or a pecuniary income, and would thus experience the social privileges attendant on moneyed status, without the interference of spousal surveillance or the anonymity of spinsterhood.

Over the course of the eighteenth century, the increasing importance of mobile over real property was reflected in an emphasis on the social and political transformations that commodification encouraged. These developments were registered in changes at common law that dramatically affected the property rights of the widow. Included as an addition to the Magna Carta in 1217, dower was a widow's entitlement to forced thirds of her late husband's property. Later enshrined at common law, dower granted to the widow a life interest in one-third of all the freehold property of which her husband had been the legal owner at any time during the marriage. Dower

was an entrenched right for which the widow had formal remedy at law in the case of infringement or fraud. Unlike patrilinear inheritance, it was not contingent upon issue. The behavioural strictures preventing dowability were few. Dower could not enforce any mortmain restrictions on a widow's future decisions. In a culture that understood property as one index of citizenship, dower arguably entitled the widow to a certain identity.

However, contemporary legal authorities had long been vexed by the "inconveniences" of dower. William Blackstone famously complained in his *Commentaries* that it was a "great clog to alienations," because if a man wanted to sell any part of his estate, his wife had to sign a writ in order to release her future claim on that land. From the 1535 Act Concerning Uses and Wills onwards, and increasingly throughout the eighteenth century in particular, dower rights were frequently superseded by a marriage settlement negotiated between bridegroom and father of the bride, in which a jointure---a yearly income---was pledged to the bride in case of widowhood.

Although a liberal bias often interprets this legal narrative as indicative of a larger movement from the fixity of custom to the individual autonomy of middle-class capitalism, a feminist reading may tell a different story. Jointure had increasingly less relationship to real property and was often realized in the more unstable forms of annuities and stocks, paper promises that might be wasted before a husband's death. A private arrangement under the jurisdiction of the Courts of Equity, jointure did not afford common law rights per se: subject to the ideological vagaries of the current Lord Chancellor, and thus partly discretionary, jointure was contractual in nature and contingent upon individual negotiation. Despite contemporary claims touting the safety and certainty of jointure, it was violable in ways that dower was not. Jointure did not stipulate full disclosure of any changes to its integrity, such as mortgage or outright sale, and thus a wife could be unwittingly swindled out of her future security as a widow.

Furthermore, conditional jointures were not uncommon---forfeited upon remarriage, for example---whereas common law dower could not dictate a widow's matrimonial inclinations. Running parallel to this legal alteration is a demographic decline up to and throughout the eighteenth century in the rate of remarriage for widows; this historical phenomenon provokes speculation about the widow's disadvantaging through jointure over dower. From the perspective of a feminist reading, then, the replacement of a common law right with a discretionary claim, and its corollary substitution of mobile for real property, might well indicate an anxiety about the potential exercise of power that could come with women's significant accumulation of wealth in land. Had dower rights prevailed over the century, "dowagers would at any one time have been in possession of one-sixth of aristocratic lands" in Britain."²

This uneasiness infuses contemporary representations of widowhood, as the widow both affirms the potential for female agency and complicates it with her unique position. She has fulfilled social dictates in marrying but is now husbandless. At the same time, she is no longer subject to the kinds of censure that restrain unmarried women. She enjoys a legal ranking as a *feme sole* similar to that of a single woman but assumes a consequential authority: the husband's willing to his "relict" not only his property but also something of his power grants the widow a transgendered authority. While the virgin stands as intact property to be transferred to a husband, the widow's value is no longer invested in the body, giving her independent social command over both self and estate. A widow's post-marital existence generates two fundamental concerns: either the uncontrolled female liberty of a sustained widowhood, or the potential for a second marriage to re-allocate property. The widow's standing is premised upon a husband's death, and thus she is to men a sly affront, a living *memento mori*. Finally, the widow induces sexual mistrust. Carnally awakened by marriage, she is assumed to be insatiable. The widows in one contemporary satire, for example, dedicate themselves "to cry[ing] up the pleasures of a single life upon all occasions, in order to deter the rest of their sex from marriage, and engross the whole male world to themselves."³

The rich array of contemporary tracts about widowhood establish the widow in terms of these public perceptions, reflecting her place in a society in which marriage served as the pinnacle moment in female life. Satires and jest-books mocked the widow's lubricity and penchant for unseemly remarriages with younger men and often expressed a revulsion for sexual impropriety in terms that betray their overriding displeasure at women's potential for property ownership. The 1714 *Spectator*, for example, records the fictional detailings of a "Widow-club," whose members remarry compulsively both to satisfy sensual appetite and to accrue wealth from their various settlements. Misogynistic pamphlets excoriated the widow's intractability: "thou canst not wrest them from their Wills....One [man] having married with a froward Widow, she called him....many...unhappy Names; so he took her and cut her Tongue out of her Head; but she afterwards would make the Sign of the Gallows with her Fingers to him."⁴ From a more serious standpoint, conduct manuals, such as Richard Allestree's *The Ladies Calling*, advocated perpetual widowhood, modest retirement, and philanthropic projects in an attempt to restrain the widow's energy from disordering the status quo. These extremes share an anxiety about the widow that is directly related to her status of widowhood. Seldom do contemporary writers make the point Thomas Dilworth does in his detailed refutation of a scurrilous anti-widow tract. Dilworth argues that a woman's virtues are intrinsic and that a mere exchange of marital standings does not corrupt them: "must a Virgin, who has both natural and acquired Accomplishments, forfeit them all in the State of Widowhood and turn She-Devil?"⁵ Eighteenth-century fictions frequently draw upon the specific vocabulary of these varied constructions, a vocabulary which contextualizes the novels' representations of widowhood.

This work elucidates two historical developments—the changes in eighteenth-century property law that modified the rights of the widow and the phenomenon of the remarrying widow—and reads a range of British fictions in light of their consequences. The aim of the work is also partly recuperative: certain of these texts, such as Frances Sheridan's *Memoirs of Miss Sidney Bidulph*,

have only recently been republished. Others have been out of print since the eighteenth century—Clara Reeve's *School for Widows* and *Plans of Education*—and consequently have attracted only limited scholarly attention. Still others, like Eliza Haywood's *The City Widow*, are unfamiliar and appear to have provoked no critical response to date. The more established works, like Sarah Scott's *A Description of Millenium Hall* and *The History of Sir George Ellison*, have not been studied from the vantage point of the widow figure, in spite of her narrative importance in both novels.

Recent feminist scholars, such as Patricia Meyer Spacks, Janet Todd, Margaret Anne Doody, and Susan Staves, have crucially advanced our understanding of the eighteenth-century female self, and of the implications of courtship and marriage to women's writing. However, there has been little specific attention paid to representations of the literary widow, which is surprising, given their significance in both canonical and uncanonical fictions. A consideration of the legal implications of jointure and its reliability, read in the context of the century's constructions of widowhood, and of the remarrying widow in particular, illuminates the ways in which primary texts offer significant paradigms of a displaced female authority. That authority tends to be displaced in one of several ways: by locating the widow at the margins of the core story and thus endowing her with an "antiheroic" liberty; by locating the widow's story in an utopic community delineated with both verisimilar and fabular attributes; or by undercutting it wholly through revelation of its vulnerability to the violability of the laws erected for the widow's protection. Elizabeth Bergen Brophy asserts too confidently that a "woman's 'writings,' the legal documents setting up the terms of her jointure or pension while a wife, became her only protection against a spendthrift or penurious husband."⁶ Profligate husbands could and did defraud their wives out of their entitlements as widows: both legal history and novelistic representation attest to this. But through their own writings, eighteenth-century novelists could, if not protect, at least protest women's exploitation by recording in their texts the legal abrogations of the widow's rights.

The thesis, in short, asks: if "the characteristic fates of eighteenth-century heroines---marriage or death---render them women without property, [making them] subject to the terms of a discourse that returns the exclusive authority to confer meaning to male characters,"⁷ what happens when these fictions are explored from the perspective of widows with property who have outlived their marriages and their husbands?

Chapter One traces the modern legal history of the widow, with attention to her customary and common-law rights and their increasing replacement with jointure settlements. Two influential sources are given close scrutiny: Edward Coke's 1628 *Coke upon Littleton*, republished throughout the eighteenth century, often with additional notes, and William Blackstone's *Commentaries on the Laws of England* (1765-1769). Key statutes---27 Henry VIII, which created the body of law barring dower---and a series of benchmark cases (1678-1783) provide the historical framework in which to evaluate the widow's legal autonomy. Feminist historians Susan Staves and Eileen Spring focus on the ideological biases that often shaped the decisions of the Lords Chancellor. More conservative theorists, such as G.E. Mingay and Alan Macfarlane, remind us that jointure's unchartered nature made possible a more liberal recognition of the widow's worth. A comparative study of both dower and jointure together, however, does suggest that the widow was generally disenfranchised by the suppression of her common law right, as jointure may be interpreted as a meritocratic gift bestowed in recompense for a bride's beauty and portion.

A small but important body of scholarship confirms a demographic decline in the rate of remarriage for widows throughout the eighteenth century: from the mid-sixteenth to the mid-nineteenth centuries, the rate of remarriage dropped by nearly one-third.⁸ Whether widows' increased wealth left them uninclined to resubmit to the restrictions of coverture or whether

conditional jointures devalued widows' worth on the remarriage market is not finally clear. But as Chapter Two reveals, the complexities attached to the remarrying widow are fully played out in the fictions of Aphra Behn, Jane Barker, and Eliza Haywood.

There was of course no law preventing a widow's remarriage, although doctrinal writers urged chaste widowhoods, and, when forced to contemplate a second marriage, worried relentlessly about redispositions of property. A widow was sternly reminded to respect the trust, both pecuniary and figurative, that she was bound to uphold in regard to the children from her first husband.⁹ Property and propriety are similarly liable to compromise by the widow's ability to alienate them at will: contemporary writers, both satirical and serious, fear the widow's power to buy a second husband. This upended commodification—widows replicating patriarchal consumerism in matters of love—has both sexually and socially transgressive corollaries.¹⁰ One widow derided in the *Spectator* "was a widow at eighteen, and has since buried a second husband and two coachmen."¹¹ This compressed narrative synoptically discloses a prevailing anxiety about both the widow's lethal sexual appetite, which successively dispatches new lovers, and her heedless breach of class hierarchies in order to satisfy her lust.

The novellas and story fragments under consideration in Chapter Two—Aphra Behn's *The History of the Nun* (1689) and *The Unfortunate Happy Lady* (1698), Jane Barker's "Philinda's Story out of the Book" from *The Lining of the Patchwork Screen* (1726), Eliza Haywood's *The City Widow: or, Love in a Butt* (1729)—variously respond to a widow's entitlement to sexual desire and the impediments to its legitimacy. Blackstone's definition of coverture, in which the woman becomes the personal property of her husband, is splintered in widowhood into its constituent elements of integral identity, and then re-subsumed in remarriage. While women's legal identity seems flexible enough to withstand these alterations, the sexual experience that attaches to matrimony is awkwardly brought into the second marriage as a kind of unwanted chattel made over to the new husband. In *The History of the Nun* and "Philinda's Story out of the

Book," not even the lawfulness of remarriage excuses the impropriety of desire, which is literalized as bigamy and results in murder in a blighted attempt to reassume purity. In *The City Widow*, Bacchalia is the widow who "burns" but rejects the Pauline remedy of remarriage to sanctify ardour. Her contraventions are social rather than criminal, so they doom her not to death, but to bleak social alienation. *The Unfortunate Happy Lady* is decidedly more light-hearted about the widow's right to both property and sexual propriety, even when the heroine is (charmingly) venal and unapologetically aspirational in first marrying an old man to reap the fiscal benefits of his will, and then buying a former lover in remarriage to satisfy her own inclination. But this novella also plays with the conflation of property and propriety, although it deflects them onto another character: here the widow possesses only a "life interest" in settling her own marital affairs. She is unable to will her autonomy to the woman in her care and expends another's happiness to purchase her own.

These issues of entitlement and willfulness are explored in Chapter Three, which investigates Frances Sheridan's 1761 novel, *Memoirs of Miss Sidney Bidulph*, in part to query what happens to the exemplary woman who suppresses her own will, desire, and principles in obedience to parental dictate. Sheridan is pessimistic about the potential for women's autonomy in a culture that privileged chastity and compliance to ensure legitimate transferrals of real property. Through her protagonist, she traces the history of a woman's early indoctrination in passivity, which even in widowhood—even, at last, in a wealthy widowhood—fixes her inability to act advantageously. As it is in Behn's and Barker's narratives, desire, painfully accommodated in Sidney's lexicon of self-suppression, is punished here with bigamy and its consequences: the lover's suicide and the heroine's boundless grief.

Only from the heroine's perspective, however, does autonomy produce tragedy: other widows, key to narrative developments, possess agency to great personal effect. They impose their behavioural wills on others, shape love-plots to satisfy their sexual or retributive desires, and re-

allocate property by breaching both the spirit and the letter of the law. Widows write improper wills that disinherit headstrong daughters. They engage in transgressive liaisons that squander other widows' jointure provisions. Within the economy of the novel, these formidable dowagers not only remain unpunished but also end up individually gratified. A familiarity with eighteenth-century legal developments makes clear to the modern reader what is implicit in Sheridan's novel: the violability of the private contract that deputizes for the widow's putative status right to post-marital security penalizes the decorous, unprotesting widow and exalts the outlaw who manipulates the arrangement for her own benefit. The only price of this victory is a narrative relegation to the subplot.

Conversely, Sarah Scott's *A Description of Millenium Hall* (1766), considered in Chapter Four, is optimistic in its portrayal of female autonomy. In this novel, the only requirement for a widow's agency is a locational remove from the (re)marriage market of high society: within the confines of the structured community that the widows themselves create in a bucolic landscape, widows are free to act with intent and positive consequence. Enriched with wealth either as widows themselves or through legacies from moneyed widows, Scott's women reinterpret gentry capitalism as feminocentric georgic, expending their initiative in improving both the estate and the lives of the disenfranchised who form an integral element of eighteenth-century hierarchies. Scott's novel testifies to her belief in the benevolence of matriarchal economy and law: her widows—Mrs. Morgan, Mrs. Thornby, Mrs. Allworth—are entitled to devise their property by will and at will, with unfettered freedom in ways which the Courts of Equity often disallowed actual widows.

The conclusion of *Millenium Hall*, however, reflects some of the legal violability that curtailed the widow's certainty of estate. This implicit anxiety is amplified in the sequel. In *The History of Sir George Ellison* (1762), the eponymous hero inherits the georgic humanism embodied in *Millenium Hall* by the widows. In the latter text, though widows occasionally transmit property

or wealth, they more frequently emphasize the economic jeopardy of their state and the behavioural conflicts generated by the lack of their own secure property. *Sir George Ellison* unfolds with verisimilitude (as Behn's and Barker's fictions did with sensationalism) the thorny implications of remarriage: *Ellison's* widows are forced to consider remarriage without the taint of pecuniary interest, despite their improvident marriage settlements, while still maintaining the honour that befits them as "good" widows within the novel. What Scott implies in the histories of Mrs. Tunstall and Mrs. Blackburn, she makes overt in the interpolated narrative of Mrs. Maningham. A jointure, even in real property, notwithstanding protective entails to loving sons, is a private covenant exposed to the predations of the unscrupulous. Only within a collective, as in *Millenium Hall*, or communally gathered under the aegis of a paragon like George Ellison himself, is the widow secure.

In *School for Widows* (1791) and *Plans of Education* (1792), Clara Reeve returns to the concerns of Frances Sheridan, questioning the incompatibility of female agency within the parameters of constructed femininity. Chapter Five elucidates Reeve's optimism in transvaluing the misogynistic traits attributed to widows---design, deception, gossip---and rewriting them as feminocentric schemes of philanthropy, rehabilitation, and the informative exchange of personal stories. On the whole, Reeve's widows triumph in the end. Both Rachel, recompensed by jointure and estate, and Frances, denied her widow's due and forced to parlay bourgeois industry into money and property interests, choose a sustained widowhood that permits them pecuniary comfort and the liberty to establish schools and communities that grant other women a legacy of security and self-sufficiency. However, both novels suggest in the end that widows no longer have property rights of any significance, only gifts rightly bestowed and subject to men's caprice. Rachel's generous settlement and Frances's violated jointure and subsequent meritocratic settlements at the hands of patriarchal surrogates betray Reeve's concern at the elasticity of the law in according substitutive boons over proprietary entitlements.

¹Alexander, *The History of Women* (1779) (New York: A.M.S., 1976), II, 338.

²Eileen Spring, *Law, Land, and Family* (Chapel Hill and London: University of North Carolina Press, 1993), 65.

³*Spectator*, ed. Donald F. Bond (Oxford: Clarendon, 1965), Vol. 4, 517.

⁴Ward, *Female Policy Detected* (London, ?1720), 65.

⁵Dilworth, *An Advocate for the Ladies, concerning the Sacred State of Matrimony: in answer to a late but scandalous Pamphlet intituled [sic], The Folly Sin, and Danger, of Marrying Widows* (London, 1746), 59.

⁶Brophy, *Women's Lives and the Eighteenth-Century Novel* (Tampa: University of South Florida Press, 1991), 27.

⁷April London *Women and Property in the Eighteenth-Century English Novel* (Cambridge University Press, 1999), 8. London's postulation concurs here with Nancy Armstrong, who introduces her political history of the novel by asserting that "stories of courtship and marriage offered their readers a way of indulging, with a kind of impunity, in fantasies of political power that were the more acceptable because they were played out within a domestic framework where legitimate monogamy---and thus the subordination of female to male---would ultimately be affirmed." Armstrong, *Desire and Domestic Fiction* (Oxford University Press, 1987), 29.

⁸E.A. Wrigley and Roger Schofield, *The Population History of England 1541-1871* (Harvard University Press, 1981), 258-59.

⁹In his letter "[t]o a rich Widow Lady, with Children, dissuading her from marrying a Widower of meaner Degree who has children also." Samuel Richardson argues against the widow's remarriage in terms of sexual propriety ("your late good spouse, my dear friend...would have been much grieved...that the man he would not have accompany'd with, should succeed him in his bed") and the rightful protection of the estate for her children from her first marriage. Richardson, *Familiar Letters on Important Occasions* (1741) (New York: Dodd, Mead, & Co., 1928), Letter XCIV, 121.

¹⁰"In the literature of the period...emerges an hysterical obsession among middle- and upper-class males. In the event of their death, would their widow squander their wealth on a gigolo figure after a lifetime of repression and boredom?" Olwen Hufton, "Women Without Men: Widows and Spinster in Britain and France in the Eighteenth Century," *Journal of Family History* (1984), 373.

¹¹*Spectator*, 518.

Chapter One: The Widow's Story in English Law

Dower

To understand the authority of the propertied widow we must understand its origin, namely the rights to property enshrined in the common law, reconfigured in statutory declaration, and reconsidered in the courts of equity. The indispensable legal source for the eighteenth century was Edward Coke's 1628 compendium of property law premised upon the fifteenth-century *New Tenures* of Thomas Littleton, entitled *The First Part of the Institutes of the Laws of England; or, A Commentary upon Littleton*. Known commonly as *Coke upon Littleton*, it was republished often in the eighteenth century with supplementary notes. The later eighteenth century also had recourse to William Blackstone's *Commentaries on the Laws of England* (1765-1769), an analysis "intended to give educated gentlemen an introduction to the legal system of their country."¹ At common law, a widow was entitled to dower, an entitlement formally established in the thirteenth century, although long practised through customary rights.² Dower gave the widow a life interest in one-third of all the freehold property---whether held in fee simple or fee tail---of which her husband had been seised at any time during the marriage. Coke explained that "to dower three things doe belong, viz. marriage, seisin, and the death of the husband. Concerning the seisin, it is not necessary that the same should continue during the coverture, for albeit the husband alieneth the lands or tenements, or extinguish the rents or commons, etc. yet the woman shall be endowed."³ This last distinction is significant: should a husband wish to sell any of his lands during his marriage, he was forced by law to obtain his wife's consent through a legal mechanism called a *fine*, or "final concord." The execution of this conveyance required that the wife be separately examined by the court to determine her willingness to waive this source of future income.⁴ If the fine was not properly executed, a widow could include in her thirds the land now held by the third-party purchaser. The resultant insecurity of land title was of great

concern to legal intellectuals, and dower was commonly criticized as a "great clog to alienations."⁵

Dower came in four basic forms: common law dower, customary dower, dower *ad ostium ecclesiae*, and dower *ex assensu patris*. Common law dower required a certain legal ritual to enforce its validity: the widow was to remain in her husband's house for forty days after his death, during which time his heir at law was to assign the widow her dower. This interim period was called a *quarentine*.⁶ If the heir failed to assign the lands as stipulated or if he assigned lands "unfairly", that is, lands of inferior quality to the rest of his estate, the widow had a remedy at law to compel the heir through a writ of dower from the local sheriff.⁷ It was important that a widow understand her common law rights and the requisite measures to claim them: as Coke warns, "It is necessary for the wife after the decease of her husband as soon as she can to demand her dower before good testimony, for otherwise she may by her owne default lose the value after the decease of her husband and her damages for detaining her dower. For if she bring a writ of dower against the heire, and that heire cometh into the court upon the summons the first day, and plead that he hath always been ready and yet is to render dower, etc. if the wife hath not requested her dower, she shall lose the mean values and her damages; but if she hath requested her dower, she may plead it, and issue may be thereupon taken."⁸ It was crucial too that the widow comprehend any restrictions on her immediate behaviour, namely that she was disallowed remarriage within the forty-day quarentine without an accompanying loss of dower.⁹

Customary dower applied to copyhold estates---lands owned by the lord of the manor and held by the tenant for a specified number of years or lives. Copyhold dower rules varied locally: "by the custome of some county, she [the widow] shall have the halfe [of her husband's estate], and by the custome in some towne or borough, she shall have the whole; and in all these cases she shall be called tenant in dower."¹⁰ This type of dower was known as "freebench" and carried with it certain circumscriptions; the majority of manors allowed widows to retain the tenement for the

duration of her life "so long as she remayneth sole, chaste and unmarried."¹¹ Dower *ad ostium ecclesiae*—dower at the church door—was an old form of dower used to circumvent the tedious and possibly costly procedural assignment; in this case a "tenant in fee-simple of full age, openly at the church door, where all marriages were formerly celebrated, after affiance made and...troth plighted between them, doth endow his wife with the whole, or such quantity as he shall please, of his lands; at the same time specifying and ascertaining the same: on which the wife, after her husband's death, may enter without farther ceremony."¹² And lastly, dower *ex assensu patris*—by the father's assent—was a form of church-door dower which required the groom's father to consent "expressly" to the endowment of certain lands to his daughter-in-law in case of widowhood.¹³ These last two forms of dower were instituted so that "widowes might have certaintie of estate, and that they might enter and not be driven to suit" because the specific quantity and location of the lands would eliminate later negotiations with the heir-at-law.¹⁴

All of this power through property, this widowed independence, should be considered in light of the restrictions of a *feme covert*, a wife "covered" by the protection and influence of her husband. Blackstone's famous definition of coverture describes the husband and wife as "one person in law: that is, the very being or legal existence of the woman is suspended during the marriage." He goes on to stipulate the limitations of a married woman—disallowed the making of contracts, except for necessities, denied the devising of real or personal property by will, forbidden the holding of property to her exclusive use unless by special arrangement—all of which he acknowledges as "disabilities," but declares them necessary measures for "her protection and benefit. So great a favourite is the female sex in the laws of England."¹⁵ This safeguarding did not unequivocally secure the rights of a *feme sole*, however: the widow could be barred from the entitlement to her dower rights by her own behaviour, by her husband's action, or, as we shall see, by statutory amendments that made it extremely difficult for dower to attach to property. Although dower was not effectually nullified until the Dower Act of 1833, and not abolished

wholly in England until 1925, widows of propertied men were frequently blocked from enjoying a right lawfully theirs for the entire eighteenth century.

Common law dower's most basic contingency was sexual propriety for the wife during her coverture. However, adultery alone could not deprive a wife of dower; it had to be accompanied by permanent separation. "If the wife elope from her husband, that is, if the wife leave her husband and goeth away and tarrieth with her adulterer, she shall lose her dower until her husband willingly without coercion ecclesiasticall be reconciled unto her, and permit her to cohabit with him."¹⁶ The timing of the impropriety is significant: while wives are punished for betraying their vows of marital continence, the personal conduct of widows is not subject to stricture. Nor may common law dower influence a widow's future by any kind of mortmain limitations: that is, a widow under common law dower has the right to remarry and retain her life interest in the third part of her first husband's estate. Naturally, she reassumes the mantle of a *feme covert* in this case and, unless equity-approved conveyances are carefully executed, her property falls under the command of her second husband. Still, it is important to understand that common law dower could not dictate a widow's matrimonial inclinations.¹⁷ We should also note that dowability was not reliant upon a wife's reproductive success---childless widows were wholly eligible---although the rights of succession in a fee tail had at the least to be granted in theory to the widow's issue (which they usually were), even if she produced neither son nor daughter: "it was enough that issue by her might have succeeded."¹⁸ Interestingly, dower's masculine equivalent, the right of *curtesy*, was dependent upon the production of children; however, the widower was compensated for the discrimination with the entirety of his wife's property, not merely a fixed third.¹⁹

Respectable comportment alone did not guarantee dower rights. Coke also warns that high or *petit* treason on the part of the husband would result in a complementary forfeiture of the widow's dower; the reasoning informing this causal relationship is the unity at law of the husband

and wife. Blackstone encapsulates the barrability of dower into a kind of recipe, which reads: "How dower may be barred or prevented. A widow may be barred of her dower not only by elopment [sic], divorce, being an alien, the treason of her husband, and other disabilities...but also by detaining the title deeds, or evidence of the estate from the heir; until she restores them; and...if a dowager alienes the land assigned to her for dower, she forfeits it *ipso facto*, and the heir may recover it by action. But the most usual method of barring dowers is by jointures, as regulated by the statute 27 Hen.VIII. c.10."²⁰

Before we delve into the complexities of the eighteenth-century jointure, which came to be an acceptable substitute for dower rights in the eyes of most contemporary legal thinkers, we must be acquainted with a common obstacle facing widows in the fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries, for this impediment, and the transformative Statute of Uses (1535), had a fundamental effect on the widow's prerogatives in the eighteenth century. We have seen that the widow's common law dower was bolstered against loss through undue spousal influence by third-party investigative assessments. Her rights extended to all the lands her husband had held at the outset of their union, notwithstanding any subsequent alienation, and she could not be swindled out of her attachment as long as she followed procedural quarantine. Theoretically, then, as long as the wife remained sexually continent and the husband forbore seditiousness, the rights to dower were absolute.

However, a legal arrangement called a *use* often barred a widow's rightful claim to dower. The use is an early version of the modern trust. A feudal attempt on the part of a landowner to evade the burdens and liabilities of legal ownership (feudal dues, wardship and marriage stipulations), the use essentially bifurcated legal and equitable title to the land. A man's property would be held by feoffees to his use but, as legally he held no real estate in his own name, he was not subject to any charges on that land. A significant corollary of the use was its incontestable preclusion of dower. 'No dower out of a use' was an established legal truism. As seisin forms one of the triple

requisites for dower to attach, the implication is clear: if a man is not seised of his estate, the widow has nothing on which to attach her claim.

The preamble to the 1535 Act Concerning Uses and Wills (27 Henry VIII, c. 10), known commonly as the Statute of Uses, indicts the craftiness inherent in the use and excoriates its sustained defrauding of the King and the lords of the land. Tucked in amongst the litany of its victims are widows: the "subtle Inventions" of the use have resulted in post-marital disinheritance. Men have lost their rights to curtesy, the Statute complains, and "Women their Dowers."²¹ Essentially, what the Statute did was convert the beneficiary of the use into its legal owner, that is, it collapsed the separation of equitable and legal title into ownership proper. Although the Statute on the one hand protects widows by outlawing evasive arrangements of title and thereby facilitating dower attachments, it also enshrined within its text a surrogate, called jointure, which marks the erosion of the widow's common law rights, an erosion accelerated in the eighteenth century through several benchmark cases.

A husband who had enfeoffed land to his use would likely have wanted to arrange some support for his widow, who would be unable to claim dower. The origin of this support, the jointure, has its roots in a shared piece of property: a husband would instruct his feoffees to "convey some land to himself and his wife for their joint lives, she to have use of it for her life should she survive him, the land ultimately to go to the heirs of the marriage. This is jointure in its original form, an enfeoffment of land to the joint use of a husband and wife, with survivor rights to the widow for her life."²² However, Coke early on encapsulated the essence of jointure into a definition often quoted by eighteenth-century legalists, explaining that jointure extended equally to a sole estate as to a joint estate held with the husband, being "a competent livelihood of freehold for the wife of lands or tenements, etc. to take effect presently in possession or profit after the death of her husband for the life of the wife at the least."²³ The Statute of Uses basically formalized the validity of jointure as a legal impediment to dower rights, stating that "every

woman married having such jointer [sic] made or hereafter to be made shall not claim nor have title to have any dower of the residue of the lands, tenements, or hereditaments, that at any time were her said husband's, by whom she hath any such jointer...but if she have no such jointer, then she shall be admitted and enabled to pursue, have, and demand her dower by writ of dower after the due course and order of the common laws of this realm." In addition, the Statute gave real weight to the timing of the jointure arrangements, which were able to bar dower only if prenuptially executed. Otherwise, if the wife had lands or tenements settled upon her in jointure "after marriage," she was "at her liberty" at the death of her husband to choose either the jointure terms or her common law right to dower.²⁴ Once again, the basis of this distinction is the legal unity of persons during marriage: a wife could not by definition contract meaningfully with her husband during her coverture.

While many of the implications of the Statute of Uses were subsequently vitiated, the barrability of dower by jointure settlement had an absolute and permanent effect.²⁵ Blackstone justifies the lasting potency of the jointure substitution on the grounds that the Statute would have permitted an early version of "double-dipping" by making dowable widows who had already been jointured, that is, as a result of the statutory convergence of the equitable use and legal title to the land, "all wives would have become dowable of such lands as were held to the use of their husbands, and also entitled at the same time to any special lands that might be settled in jointure; had not the same statute provided, that upon making such an estate in jointure to the wife before marriage, she shall be for ever precluded from her dower."²⁶ The temporal flaw in Blackstone's exaggerated scenario is clear: the danger of double entitlement was in fact a contained one, affecting only women who were already widowed and had had jointures settled upon them. And as long as the Statute did not function retroactively, even these widows would not be twice compensated.²⁷

Coke in 1628 praised jointure as being "more sure and safe for the wife" than dower, as the widow could enter into her jointure provision without either the procedural delay of the quarentine or a costly and time-consuming lawsuit against the heir. Blackstone echoes this commendation nearly one hundred and fifty years later. He particularly applauds the expediency of the jointure system, "whereas no small trouble, and a very tedious method of proceeding, is necessary to compel a legal assignment of dower."²⁸ This rhetorical sleight-of-hand ascribes blame to the widow for what was wholly the fault of the heir-at-law. In her breakthrough analysis of eighteenth-century women and property issues, Susan Staves characterizes Blackstone's critique as "feeble"---legal remedy was unnecessary as long as the heir cooperated by immediately setting out dower lands for the widow's timely, uncomplicated occupation of them---and notes that Blackstone in other situations praises similar legal complexities as guarantors of liberty and property.²⁹ Blackstone offers a pointedly negative commentary on dower, however, denouncing it as a "great clog to alienations" and "otherwise inconvenient to families."³⁰ Voiced too by Lords Chancellor and other legal commentators, this became an eighteenth-century maxim, indicating, as it seemingly did, a deep commitment to ensuring the unencumbered disposability of land, so important to that century's increasingly money-based economy. But both Staves and Eileen Spring identify the weakness inherent in the alienability argument: a model for dower reform was readily available in the freebench system of copyhold lands, in which a husband had unfettered freedom of estate transactions, and a widow was limited to lands of which her husband had died seised: this obviated the possibility of a future purchaser finding an unexpected widow's charge on his land.³¹

Furthermore, the legal commentators so convinced of the jeopardy of clogged alienability through dower rights were untroubled by anti-alienation provisions in other contexts. This selectivity shows itself both in particular instances, and, more generally, in the widespread eighteenth-century practice of strict settlement, which entailed property to male heirs and restricted rights of the current occupier to a life interest only³². "[N]o one," Staves argues, could

deny that the latter was a far more onerous clog on alienability than dower. "and yet the judges collaborated with the conveyancers to permit strict settlement."³³ Spring recognizes the power in the Statute of Uses that could have restored simple dower rights but posits bluntly that "[p]arliament did not want dower restored. Quite the contrary."³⁴ Staves carefully but consistently speculates on the validity of a feminist analysis of dower history, which shows patriarchy tolerating a forced share system when it supports a spare existence without much opportunity for property accumulation, but when men start to amass large parcels of land, and consequently their widows are entitled to a portion thereof, "forced share schemes are criticized, evaded, or repealed."³⁵

Before we consider in detail the development of the jointure, we need to examine the status of dower during the eighteenth century. Despite the Statute of Use's legitimization of barrable jointures, dower continued to be claimed in specific cases up until the early nineteenth century, when an extensive survey by the Commissioners of Real Property concluded that women no longer anticipated the actual enjoyment of dower rights.³⁶ But after the benchmark decision rendered by Lord Chancellor Talbot in *Chaplin v. Chaplin* (1733), dower was, in fact, extremely difficult to secure. What is shocking about this case is that Talbot openly admits to premising his judgement upon a long-standing but undeniable legal solecism. This is particularly surprising given the provenance of the judgement: the courts of equity were instituted in order to supplement the findings handed down in the common law courts. Acknowledged as equity's mandate was its self-conscious protection of those individuals disenfranchised at common law, summed up in the maxim *aequitas erroribus medetur*, that is, equity corrects errors. Thus what we have here is a forceful impediment to a widow's claim not only upheld by the very court appointed to protect her interests, but also flagrantly authenticated as a legal mistake. We can therefore accept on the whole Janelle Greenberg's work in distinguishing between the constraints of common law and the mitigating remedies of equity in terms of married women's rights, but we should question her portrayal of equity as sustainedly protective.³⁷ When to defend female

entitlement proved too detrimental to patriarchal interests. equity did not hesitate to rule accordingly.

In the 1733 equity case, the plaintiff, Lady Chaplin, claimed her dower out of a rent charge of which her husband had died seised in tail male. The text of the case is charged with a certain disapproval: the plaintiff's counsel seemingly skews the details, blurring the distinction between seisin and trust: "it was afterwards disclosed to the court, that the legal estate of the rent in fee was in trustees, in trust for *Porter Chaplin* in tail male: and that on his dying, the trust of this estate-tail descends to his only son *Sir John Chaplin* in tail, the husband of the plaintiff the Lady *Chaplin*, who (*inter al*) brought her bill of dower of this rent: and then the case was no more, than whether the wife of a *cestuy que trust* in tail should be endowed?"³⁸ Lord Chancellor Talbot decided against the plaintiff, providing a range of highly revealing justifications:

His Lordship took notice, that by the preamble of the statute of uses (27 *Hen.* 8. c.10) it is recited, that by means of these uses the wife was defeated of her dower: by which it appears, that the wife of *cestuy que trust* was not dowable at common law: and if so, then, as at common law an use was the same as a trust is now, it follows, that the wife can no more be endowed of a trust now, than at common law, and before the statute, she could be endowed of an use, so that here was the opinion of the whole parliament in the point: that it had been the common practice of conveyancers, agreeable hereto, to place the legal estate in trustees on purpose to prevent dower: wherefore it would be of the most dangerous consequence to title, and throw things into confusion, contrary to former opinions, and the advice of so many eminent and learned men, to let in the claim of dower upon trust estates: that he took it to be settled, that the husband should be tenant by the curtesy of a trust, though the wife could not have dower thereof...for which diversity, as he could see no reason, so neither should he have made it; but since it had prevailed, he would not alter it.³⁹

Talbot's revisionary approach is suspect from the first sentence. Indeed, the Statute of Uses's preamble did specify that uses barred women from dower, but it employed this very fact as evidence of the secretive and fraudulent nature of the use which the Statute intended to crush. It was commonly accepted that uses developed into trusts and hence were more or less analogous.

so Talbot's citation of a significant legal development---the Statute of Uses---to bolster his judgement is sound, but he chooses for his juridical context the state of affairs "before the statute," exhibiting a willful blindness toward the express purpose of that amendment. Talbot then puts his misappropriated legal history aside and offers an unapologetically pragmatic piece of reasoning for his denial of dower: it has long been the "common practice" of conveyancers to place lands in trust "on purpose to prevent dower" from attaching, and to attempt now to reverse the custom would be to destabilize certainty of title and thus "throw things into confusion." The need for conveyancers had arisen during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries because of the increasing complexities of the land law: by the eighteenth century, conveyancers were a well-established and powerful professional class who took great pride in satisfying through technical evasions their landed male clients otherwise encumbered by "inconvenient rules" of common law such as dower.⁴⁰ The mystery and unintelligibility often ascribed to eighteenth-century conveyancers are strongly represented in Talbot's judgement: he admits openly to a legal anomaly directly relevant to the matter at hand, and then decides notwithstanding to reify the skill of the conveyancers and let stand the status quo. His final justification---"that the husband should be tenant by the curtesy of a trust, though the wife could not have dower thereof"---points to a puzzling gender discrepancy. Various cases had debated the issue of curtesy of a trust---*Watts v. Ball* (1708), for example---and, while controversial, such instances of curtesy had come to be established as valid.⁴¹ Although Talbot is seemingly bothered by the inconsistency ("for which diversity...he could see no reason"), he lets it rest ("since it had prevailed, he would not alter it"), much to the future detriment of would-be dowagers. *Chaplin v. Chaplin* became a legal precedent for defeating dower of a trust. In short, since much eighteenth-century land was held in trust, Talbot's decision had material consequences.

Staves argues that such "legal accidents" were particularly likely to harm women, whose depressed social standing and lack of public voice eased the acceptance of error as established law.⁴² While we further consider the consequences of the *Chaplin* case, let us keep in mind that

eighteenth-century trusts were considered "creatures of equity," that is, arrangements executed in and approved by the court system aimed partly at "mitigat[ing] the common law disabilities" of married women.⁴³ Eighteenth-century men were within their legal rights not only to secure their property in a trust to preempt any dower clogs, but also to omit such information from any marriage settlements thereafter negotiated. The same latitude did not apply to eighteenth-century women who attempted to protect property to their own use by conveying it to trustees. To be more precise, while the judiciary often allowed the "unselfish" disposition of a remarrying widow trying to protect property for the benefit of her first-marriage children, it was uneasy about endorsing trusts established for her own good—despite the woman's status, at this moment, as a *feme sole*, with "masculine" rights of ownership and the like—and could deny their legitimacy as fraudulent against the husband's common-law rights. Certainly fraud was easily alleged and easily upheld unless the husband-to-be had been made privy to his future wife's trust arrangements: this unequal obligation of disclosure had no basis in law but was nonetheless established practice.⁴⁴ Even if a woman were legally entitled to such protection, it was of little use if she had neither the knowledge nor the means—fiscal and otherwise—to enjoy it. There is convincing evidence that contemporaries were acutely aware of the societal handicaps detailed by modern feminist historians. Mimicking a juridical dialogue, Sarah Chapone in *The Hardships of the English Laws in Relation to Wives* (1735) explodes the notion that theoretical protection affords actual remedy:

Obj.[ection] III. The wife may put her Fortune into Trustees Hands before Marriage, and by that Means secure it for her own use.

I acknowledge this to be available, if done with the Consent of her Intended Husband, otherwise the Courts of Chancery will relieve him. But if we reflect how extreamly ignorant all young Women are as to points in Law, and how their Education and Way of Life, shuts them out from the Knowledge of their true Interest in almost all things, we shall find that their Trust and Confidence in the Man they love, and Inability to make use of the proper Means to guard against his Falsehood, leave few in a Condition to make use of that Precaution.⁴⁵

Trusts were not, however, the only conveyancing techniques available to men who wished to secure their estates from dower claims. Indeed, some landowners feared the very tightness of the trust that made it impenetrable to outside charges might impinge upon their ability to liquidate at their pleasure. There are long and complicated histories of the legal devices of mortgage, merger, and contingent remainder, all of which caused difficulties for the equity courts in evaluating dower claims and resulted in some tricky policy work that frequently revealed its ideological bias.⁴⁶ The simplest example of these abstruse conveyances is perhaps the mortgage. If an estate was mortgaged, and the mortgagor breached a condition of the mortgage, he lost legal title but still possessed the equitable title, a right called an "equity of redemption." A logical extrapolation of this severance of ownership means that the estate becomes subject to claims of dower by the mortgagee's---the legal owner's---widow.

A series of cases from 1678 to 1783, traced by Staves in some detail, debated whether or not an equity of redemption should be treated as a mere equitable right---a "chose in action"---or as an actual estate in land. It was largely argued that an equity of redemption conceptually resembled a trust estate and that as analogous entities, there should be no dower of such a notional holding of land. A 1678 ruling by Lord Northington denied the mortgagee's widow any dower relief. Lord Chancellor Hardwicke then resolved in *Casborne v. Scarfe* (1737) that an equity of redemption should indeed be treated as real estate: Hardwicke found for the widower and decreed that there should be curtesy on such a settlement, and that in theory "the nearest way to right would be, [also] to let in the wife to dower of a trust estate." But the subsequent *Dixon v. Saville* (1783), involving a mortgagor's widow attempting to attach dower to an equity of redemption, rejected the precedent validity of *Casborne*. Lord Chancellor Loughborough decided against the widow, criticizing Hardwicke's ruling as anomalous rather than as righting a misunderstanding of the essence of mortgaging components. Thus, "since dower to the mortgagee's wife from an equity of redemption had already been eliminated on the ground that the mortgagee was only a trustee with no beneficial interest in the land, and now dower to the mortgagor's wife was eliminated on the

ground that the mortgagor's estate was a trust estate from which there could be no dower, dower in mortgaged land virtually disappeared."⁴⁷ Just as much eighteenth-century land was held in trust, much, too, was mortgaged to satisfy debt and provide ready money. Dower's status right, once seemingly clear-cut and indefeasible, was now regularly invalidated by complicated avoidance strategies.

Jointure

"Safety" and "liberality" are certainly the articulated and underlying descriptive terms employed by most eighteenth- and twentieth-century historians in extolling the virtues of the jointure system. As already noted, Coke and Blackstone famously praise jointure's superiority because of its surety of possession. Coke particularly admires its magnanimity in letting stand a jointure settled upon a traitor's widow.⁴⁸ Blackstone stresses the purposeful frailty of jointure should it prove untenable: "if by any fraud or accident, a jointure made before marriage proves to be on a bad title, and the jointress is evicted, or turned out of possession, she shall then...have her dower *pro tanto* at the common law."⁴⁹ More recently, G.E. Mingay has approved the "generous provision" granted widows in this arrangement, remarking that such settlements afforded middling and upper-class women notable autonomy, monetary assurance, and thus "considerable defence against masculine domination."⁵⁰ Alan Macfarlane is unequivocal in his interpretation: "The aim of the contractual jointure was merely to provide more generous terms for the wife, over and above the common law dower."⁵¹

How valid is this approbation? Did jointure actually benefit widows more than had dower? Although no systematic comparison has been pursued, modern historians tend to split along gender lines, with critics such as Habakkuk, Mingay, and Stone verifying the improved situation of the eighteenth-century widow, while feminist historians such as Staves and Spring forward a less sanguine reading. Colourful examples of aggressively wealthy jointresses exist: Sarah,

Duchess of Marlborough's fantastic £20,000 jointure added to her special-status dower rights: Elizabeth Montagu's unencumbered £7,000 a year. Complementary instances of misfortune are likewise available.⁵² But one particular contemporary example effectively and very specifically unsettles the so-called certainty of jointure:

A young Lady, well born, with five thousand Pounds to her Portion, married a Gentleman possest of an hundred and seventy Pounds *per Annum*, which she accepted of, as a Jointure for her five thousand Pounds. As the Gentleman was one of the learned Professions, he had besides his real Estate, some Place which brought him in a considerable Revenue: Before this Marriage he was bound for his Father, for a large Sum of Money, and was also in Debt himself, both which he concealed from her, neither did she ever know it, till after his Death, which happened five Years after their Marriage. In that Time she had four Children, and was breeding of the fifth when he died. Her Father-in-law died a Month before her Husband, and in a short Time after her Husband's Death the old Gentleman's principal Creditor took out Letters of Administration, by Virtue of which he seized her Husband's personal Estate to answer the Money for which he was bound for his Father. But the personal Estate not amounting to that Money, the Administrator showed no Mercy to the unhappy Widow, but took even her Wedding Ring, from her Finger, and all moveables, except the Cloaths on her own, and her Childrens Backs at the Time of the Seizure. The Widow was then left with four Children, a naked House, and an hundred and seventy Pounds *per Annum* Jointure. She became a Widow within a few Days after an half yearly Payment from the Tenant, who rented this Estate: consequently she could make no Demand upon him for near half a Year after. Within which time, she was to support the Expences of her Lying-in as well as to provide for the four Children she had already.⁵³

This cruel bit of bureaucracy smacks absolutely of the "tedious" delays Blackstone so disliked in dower law.

The Statute of Uses, partnered by a sixteenth-century body of law, had attempted to guarantee certainty of jointure.⁵⁴ although it failed to anticipate such technical impediments. Blackstone offers an economic quartet of requisites, but in fact there were six conditions to a "perfect joynture" that would effectually bar dower: it is "to take effect for her life in possession or profit presently after the decease of her husband. Secondly, that it be for the terme of her owne life, or

greater estate. Thirdly, it must be made to herself, and to no other for her. Fourthly, it must be made in satisfaction of her whole dower, and not of part of her dower. Fifthly, it must be expressed or averred to be in satisfaction of her dower. And sixthly, it may be made either before or after marriage," but as Coke later notes, a post-nuptial settlement is subject to repudiation by the widow in favour of common-law dower.⁵⁵ Most relevant to an eighteenth-century context is Coke's subsequent and firmly entrenched redaction of the above stipulations---"[s]o as to comprehend all in few words"---into a competent livelihood of freehold to take effect at the death of the husband for at least the life of the widow. The specification of *freehold* land tries to ensure a qualitative equivalency between dower and jointure.

But these sixteenth-century markers of land value---freehold, copyhold, leasehold---had by the eighteenth century given way to a reliance upon liquid revenue as a means of assessment: estates were described as worth so many pounds *per annum*.⁵⁶ Paralleling this change is the substitution of land by dower with a pecuniary annuity by jointure. Conceptually, the replacement is revolutionary: a common-law status right, an automatic entitlement, is exchanged for a private contractual agreement, individually subject to negotiation. Although sixteenth-century jurisprudence had attempted to regulate its parameters, the agreement was specifically consolidated by the respective parties, frequently in the pre-nuptial marriage settlement, an arrangement hammered out by the respective families of bride and groom (or groom alone if he were of age).

The settlement had a number of purposes: it documented the portion brought into the union by the bride-to-be; it determined accordingly the jointure allowed to the wife in case of widowhood; and it set out portions for future daughters and younger sons to be produced from the marriage. The so-called "strict settlement," an increasingly utilized and equity-sanctioned legal device, was a complex deed that, in addition to the functions noted above, fixed the primogenitive inheritance patterns for at least one generation in an attempt to forestall land loss by indebted heirs. It

restricted alienability by keeping the current heir a life tenant only, and it named extended male kin if the marriage failed to produce sons, rather than allowing the estate to fall to daughters as coparceners, a legitimate but oft-evaded common law right. Perpetual restrictions were sometimes difficult to uphold, so it was assumed that the strict settlement pattern would be re-established when the primogenitive impulse asserted itself in an adult son about to arrange land rights for his future progeny.⁵⁷ In addition, married women's property could be kept as "sole and separate estate"—immune to the liabilities of coverture—when conveyed to trustees in a special type of marriage settlement upheld at equity.⁵⁸

Staves devotes an entire chapter to analyzing what other historians either gloss over, or read as wholly positive, that is, the development of the doctrine of "equitable jointure," a body of equity decisions originating in the sixteenth and extending through the eighteenth century in which the above-noted prescriptive conditions of a "perfect joynture" as defined in the Statute of Uses were gradually eroded. By the eighteenth century, "a dower right worth £1,000 a year could be barred by a jointure of £100."⁵⁹ Several aspects of this doctrine are, particularly from a feminist perspective, noteworthy. The substitution of holdings not necessarily secured by land for real property exacerbates the widow's fiscal uncertainty: in *Drury v. Drury* (1760-1761) Lord Chancellor Hardwicke remarked upon the historical changes unforeseen by the Statute and hence not sanctioned by its strictures: "How many species of property have grown up since [the Statute of Uses] by new improvements, commerce, and from the funds. Equity has therefore held, that where such provision has been made before marriage, out of any of these, she shall be bound by it. Consider how many jointures there are now made on women out of the funds, and not one of them within the statute of 27 H. 8."⁶⁰

But stocks and annuities do not possess the same solidity as dower land that cannot be sold off without the wife's formal consent: paper promises can be lost, spent, or stolen. Further, despite a changing economy, in eighteenth-century England land still connoted power and prestige.

Jointure had originally existed as an enfeoffment of land to the use of the married couple for their joint lives, and if applicable, to the use of the widow alone: thus the widow had actually held land in her own name, albeit only a reversionary life interest. In strict settlements, however, the jointure existed only as a rent charge, with the actual land held by the heir; Spring sees this as a "further demotion for the widow, who ceased to hold even jointure land, let alone land in dower."⁶¹ Notwithstanding Hardwicke's belief in the progressive improvement of jointure arrangements as better reflecting a growing commercial society, and despite H.J. Habakkuk's inference that the "increasing flexibility" of jointure allowed gentlemen to settle more than thirds on a prospective wife (much to the detriment of the estate's solvency), the movement away from a freehold land requirement for jointure likewise permitted a husband to settle much less on his wife than dower would have demanded.

What had also occurred amidst all these re-formulations was nothing less than a new origin for the widow's provision: what had begun as a widow's claim to her husband's land was now an obligation borne by the bride's family, as it was her bridal portion that determined the jointure in a more-or-less fixed ratio.⁶² Most historians, from Habakkuk onwards, agree that by the eighteenth century, the ratio stood roughly at ten percent, that is, £100 of jointure settled for every £1000 brought into the marriage from the bride's family fortune.⁶³ Of this relocated support, Spring observes bluntly, "[t]he husband's land, the very item that dower was all about, has dropped off the balance sheet."⁶⁴ The historians and legal commentators who praise jointure's surety and safety and its more relevant realization in moneyed form tend not to address this transference, because notwithstanding individual or even collective success stories, the widow has lost an automatic, legally enshrined share of her husband's estate. The symbolic recognition of the value of her union is also lost in the contractual jointure arrangement, which spoke only to her family's monetary or societal worth in the marriage market. The Statute of Uses' effort to make widows' maintenance a matter of public imperative through its sexpartite conditionals had refigured itself in a wholly private way: the only real bargaining power an eighteenth-century

woman had in the marriage articles depended on her father's ability to supply promptly a significant portion, thus appeasing a needy groom who would be likelier to grant her a suitable jointure.

There are palpable uncertainties inherent in the jointure colloquy that do not arise in the matter of dower's forced thirds. In her consideration of the "social contract" as it developed throughout the eighteenth century, Nancy Armstrong isolates as a whole what could distort the contemporary jointure covenant in particular: a difference in wealth unbalanced at the outset the negotiating parties.⁶⁵ A father's dynastic aspirations might deliberately dull his keenness in haggling over the best possible jointure for his daughter. Or a lack of prompt liquidity might skew the power dynamic: "[a] bride's father who needed or wished to persuade a groom to agree to a deferred (and possibly uncertain) payment of a portion might well accept a smaller jointure on his daughter's behalf."⁶⁶ Or an underage bride might be compelled to accept a settlement that never transpires: the novelist Charlotte Smith, for example, writes of being "not quite fifteen" when "[her] father married [her] to Mr. Smith," citing her own inexperience and alluding to paternal negligence in executing defective "marriage articles in which there are two flaws that deprive me of any jointure in case of his death."⁶⁷

Thus a widow's right to a life estate in freehold land was transformed by equity into a jointure of less worth in less secure personal property for less than the term of her life.⁶⁸ More specifically, the potential existed for a conditional jointure, namely, a maintenance contingent upon a sustained widowhood. To date there has been no extended survey of jointure arrangements, so we have no way of determining what percentage of eighteenth-century husbands denied remarriage to their widows via threatened disinheritance. However, it is troubling that equity upheld conditional jointures as valid, conveniently forgetting their analogical relationship to dower, a status right disallowed any post-coverture decrees. Coke himself, who fathered the definitive word on jointure (... "competent" ... "freehold" ... "for the term of her life" ...), judged that an estate

durante viduitate—during widowhood—was "an estate for her life, and it cannot determine without her own act, and therefore it is a jointure" in accordance with the Statute of Uses.⁶⁹ The compiler of *Baron and Feme* (1738) in his lengthy chapter on jointure delineates carefully what does and does not constitute "a good Jointure within the Act [the Statute of Uses]"; he is satisfied that a maintenance predicated upon a continued widowhood is synonymous with a life estate, seemingly because the widow has the potential to *make* it so by refraining from remarriage: "if a Man make a Feoffment in Fee to the Use of himself for Life, and after to the Use of his Wife, *durante viduitate*, this is an Estate for Life to her, if she Will; and therefore it is a good Jointure within the Act." Nor does the writer consider this prohibition severe. His subsequent comment allows that a widow may waive jointure and take up her dower "if the Condition bind her to any unreasonable Thing": permanent widowhood, he implies, is perfectly reasonable.⁷⁰ Bridget Hill rejects this stolid complacency, highlighting instead the ways in which a husband's will could radically "penaliz[e]" a remarrying widow, through loss of jointure, home, land, and possibly guardianship of the children. She asks provocatively, but without any subsequent evidence, "[w]as it for these reasons that many widows wishing to remarry chose a common-law type of union?"⁷¹

So far, two of the important six conditionals from the Statute of Uses have been devalued. A third conditional, that the settlement barring dower be explicitly articulated as such—that is, a direct acknowledgement of the substitution of jointure for dower—demanded of eighteenth-century equity courts some rhetorical manoeuvring. Although wives were legally entitled to elect either dower or jointure in the case of a post-nuptial settlement, the growing tendency of husbands to bequeath property to their widows by testamentary devise complicated the matter.⁷² Hypothetically a widow with no pre-nuptial arrangement to the contrary would claim her dower land and, if lucky enough to find a bequest in her husband's will, would enjoy that as a bonus. Realistically, widows who received testamentary devises often found themselves at suit with heirs-at-law irritated by the dower clog on their inheritance. The courts, interpretively loosened

through long allowing a monetary sum to mimic the security of freehold, were likewise increasingly slack in requiring a formal renunciation of dower for valid jointure. Staves details how they "wandered into the realm of speculation about the testator's intention. As dower became a more archaic and less frequently enjoyed right, it became more plausible to suppose that a testator must have intended to bar dower---even if he neglected to say so."⁷³

Although the portion brought into the marriage was ideally supposed to be used to purchase land--the rent charge on which would provide the widow's annual stipend---indebted husbands might well use the money to settle their outstanding accounts, securing nothing regular for jointure payments: in these cases, the equity courts often interpreted a testamentary devise to the widow as replacing the dysfunctional settlement.⁷⁴ Furthermore, just as jointure had originated as freehold real property but was by the eighteenth century realizable as personal property (stocks, bonds, a lump sum of money), a testamentary devise could be a parcel of land, or the guaranteed rental income from it, but it might just as easily be a chattel (household contents, for instance). It was up to the increasingly flexible equity courts to decide whether the husband's bequest was passably akin to jointure so as to seem a rightful bar to dower. Thus, despite the patriarchal emphasis on the advantages of jointure as affording for both sides the autonomy of covenanting, the widow might well find herself forced to accept what was in fact a deathbed gift from her late husband in lieu of the rights for which she (or more likely her father) had specifically bargained. As Spring observes, these gifts were not in any way chartered as dower had been in the customs of the common law; rather, they "depended on the will of others and were uncertain."⁷⁵

Just as unsettling could be the courts' interpretation of a testamentary devise as a post-nuptial jointure, thereby granting the widow the power of election between the bequest and common-law dower rights.⁷⁶ This seeming liberty was undeniably restricted by eighteenth-century constructions of women as docile, dutiful, and quietly responsive to the will of their husbands. A woman would require considerable strength of character, and more than a little bravado, to bring

her matter to court, and, in doing so, appear publicly to flout her husband's final request in favour of dower's "inconvenience" to the estate. Likewise, while a wife's waiving of her dower rights required the legal mechanism of the fine coupled with a separate examination to rule out undue influence, jointure (or any kind of separate estate for that matter) demanded no such precaution: a wife might well lack the mettle to avoid, in contemporary parlance, being "kissed or kicked" out of her supposedly protected property. Indeed, comments one writer, "it is too notoriously known, that it [a separate settlement] has seldom been of Service to those who have done it, the Husband having so entirely the Disposal of the Wife's Person, that he easily finds means to bend her to his Will, insomuch that I have heard, that it is a frequent saying of one of our present eminent Judges, 'that he had hardly known an Instance, where the Wife had not been kissed or kicked out of any such previous Settlement.'"⁷⁷

One crucial issue that the Statute of Uses did not legislate was that of female minority in relation to a binding contract. If a woman were not yet of age (twenty-one) at the time of her marriage, could she really be said to contract herself meaningfully out of dower through her marriage articles? The signal case on this matter was *Drury v. Drury* (1760-1761), in which a widow endeavoured to have her settlement struck down because she had been pre-nuptially compelled as an underage and ignorant bride-to-be to agree to a jointure worth less than a dower estate. In the first trial, the plaintiff was permitted to elect her dower; in the subsequent appeal to the House of Lords, it was "indubitably determined that a female, though she was a minor, could contract to bar herself forever of dower."⁷⁸

Paralleling the widow's ongoing loss of dower rights in real property was her gradual forfeit of her customary rights to her late husband's chattels. A widow had had a long-standing right to at the least a definitive third of her husband's personal property—a kind of chattel-dower—if he died intestate. However, this right was wholly blocked by any jointure, notwithstanding the amount, according to the established eighteenth-century understanding of the Statute of Distribution

(1670).⁷⁹ Replicating this loss on a larger scale is the progressive denial to the widow of an absolute "fee simple" right to, rather than a life interest in, one-third of her husband's personal goods, an important entitlement for middle-class women, where wealth most often appeared as chattel rather than land. "Blackstone could not trace where the alteration began, but he cited authority to the effect that the right to one-third remained general law until the time of Charles I. Between that time and 1725---when the 'custom of London,' the last of several local ordinances, was abolished---he described the law as having been 'altered by imperceptible degrees' until a man became free to bequeath the whole of his personal property as he chose. Englishmen...could, if they were so minded, dispose of all their personal estate by will, and the claims of the widow would be totally barred."⁸⁰ Although the majority of husbands did not, of course, cut off their wives so absolutely, the widow's protected right has conceptually metamorphosed into a mere gift granted at the whim of the husband.

Dower vs. Jointure

The gradual erosion of customary shares to personal property, the increasing inclination to provide privately and individually for the widow in wills, the elastic understanding of what constituted "equitable jointure," the veritable catalogue of devices to bar dower: all of these sounded the death knell of dower, formalized in the Dower Act of 1833, in which forced thirds were blocked by a simple declaration in the husband's will. With the Dower Act, bequests could be subjected to whatever restrictions the husband chose to embed in his will: more specifically, "the husband's devise of *any* land out of which the widow would otherwise be entitled to dower (or any estate or interest in such land) to the widow would bar her of dower in *all* the husband's land in which she would otherwise have been entitled to dower."⁸¹

The annulment of dower meant the expulsion of widows from a traditional security through common law, the rejection of any public acknowledgement of their fixed share in marital

property, and their removal from the prestige of landholding. But how did jointure measure up against dower in terms of actual worth? In an increasingly moneyed and mobile society, were widows better off with a pecuniary allowance (provided they actually received it) rather than, say, a few unimproved acres? Once again, hard evidence is a problem: there is no statistical comparative study available. We have seen Coke's and Blackstone's representative opinions of the safety and certainty of jointure. The collected opinions of twentieth-century historians on this issue more or less divide along gender lines: the established male historians tend to reformulate but confirm jointure's generosity through the inference that jointures financially drained estates: the feminist scholars either reject or at least investigate this characterization.

H.J. Habakkuk can be seen as exemplary of one line of historical enquiry. His 1949 landmark article, "Marriage Settlements in the Eighteenth Century," draws attention to a number of legal transformations whose import is considered from a patriarchal vantage point. Although jointure in the very early seventeenth century tended to represent "one-third of the value of the estates which were settled on the husband"—reproducing at least in fraction the value of dower—it quickly dwindled into the established late seventeenth- and eighteenth-century ten percent ratio.⁸² Habakkuk uses this information to construct his theory of the growth of great estates, but what is not articulated seems clear enough: the widow's allotment suffered from this development. Furthermore, while Habakkuk cites the "flexibility" of jointure in allowing for more than a third's worth of the estate, he unwittingly highlights its most perilous aspect:

If the bride was young and beautiful, if her husband was much in love with her, if there was a prospect of her becoming an heiress, if she was of social status superior to his, the husband might accept a portion which, in relation to the jointure he settled on her, was below the standard ratio.

Dower, of course, did not discriminate against the unyouthful, the unlovely, or the unmoneyed. After this detailed emphasis on the liberality of unprescribed settlements, Habakkuk does rather curtly admit, "In the reverse of any or all of these conditions he [the bridegroom] might be able to

demand an abnormally large portion."⁸³ Lawrence Stone asserts the improved position of eighteenth-century married women through the marriage articles that secured their pin money and any separate property they might have brought into the union. Rather illogically, Stone argues that these "careful provisions for younger sons, daughters and widows secured the rights of all parties and thus undermined the principle of patriarchal power."⁸⁴ The mathematics here do not, of course, permit total equality, as widow and child become rival claimants. Lloyd Bonfield, discussing the economic liabilities of the landed classes in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, observes plainly that "widows were detrimental to the family interest" because they forced the estate "to support a second, if somewhat more modest household for a varying period." That is, jointure lands had to be maintained as separate settlements, supposedly inalienable, in order to generate potential yearly income in case of widowhood. With an attempt at dry humour, Bonfield then praises a woman's sense of familial economy in dying young: "A wife who had the courtesy to waive her demographic 'right' to survive her husband by upwards of fifteen years after having dutifully brought a substantial portion that had been intended to provide for her widowhood, might likewise contribute to painless retrenchment."⁸⁵

In a lone departure from the gender-specific debate, Amy Louise Erickson implies that jointures were potentially more lucrative for widows, who tended to outlive their husbands at a mean rate between 11.7 and 16.3 years, because "[a]t a ratio of ten to one, a widow who survived her husband for over ten years received more back in jointure than she had invested in portion."⁸⁶ Eileen Spring disagrees lengthily and vehemently with this argument, stressing the importance of assessing jointure not in terms of return on portion, but of dower's annuity of one-third of the husband's landed income, guaranteed to her "regardless of what she had brought her husband."⁸⁷ Spring executes a number of "elementary" calculations to demonstrate that widows were rarely a charge on their husband's lands, if the interest earned on the portion is taken into account. In fact, she argues, "[t]he widow has taken not a nibble at her husband's land. Indeed her husband has made a profit on the transaction involving jointure and portion—on top of the fact that he has

escaped dower through it." A ten percent allowance from her portion would almost always be far less than one-third of the husband's yearly rent charges. Pin money paid to wives notwithstanding, Spring concludes, "the widow's provision was reduced by about two-thirds under the most liberal of marital transactions."⁸⁸ Susan Staves, whose study is devoted to exploring the economic situation of women throughout the long eighteenth century, is wary of making specific comparisons between dower and jointure in light of the complexities of settlement schemes and demographic data. However, she is generally convinced that "eighteenth-century jointures gave widows much smaller fractions of the total estate of husband and wife than the thirds established as forced shares by dower and by the Statute of Distribution." Furthermore, "[t]he conclusion that jointure replaced dower in part because contemporaries resisted forced thirds as too much for women is irresistible. Supposedly, women traded their thirds, which had become insecure, for smaller shares, which were more secure."⁸⁹ But as we have seen, and as Staves also remarks, dower had become insecure through the faulty determinations of equity, not from any kind of organic socio-economic evolution.

The Remarrying Widow

The "average" eighteenth-century widow who outlived her husband between twelve and seventeen years thus enjoyed a substantial portion of her life once again as a *feme sole*. Or did she? How often did the eighteenth-century widow exchange potential social and economic freedom for the protections of a second coverture? There is a small but significant body of scholarship that examines the case of the remarrying widow in early modern England, primarily the sixteenth to early eighteenth centuries. In the most general sense, permanent widowhood was not an unfamiliar phenomenon, and "'Widow' was a title affixed to a name, like 'Mrs.' (as in Widow Brown, Veuve Cliquot), for which there is no masculine equivalent."⁹⁰ Certainly the issue of remarriage generated ambivalent responses, invoking as it did questions of female sexuality. There was no set ecclesiastical policy forbidding remarriage in eighteenth-century England, but a

sort of decorous piety clung to permanent widows, a virtue ratified by the New Testament injunction, "Honour widows that are widows indeed" (1 Timothy 5:3). This was replicated in secular literature, which often acclaimed the chaste widow whose refusal of a second marriage both honoured the memory of her dead husband and protected the interests of her children from the emotional and legal domination of a second spouse. The development of reliable poor relief through local parishes in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries also meant that indigent widows who might have had to remarry could choose to maintain their independence, however humble.⁹¹

What historians confirm on the whole is a decline in the rate of remarriage up to and throughout the eighteenth century. Lawrence and Jeanne Stone, Barbara J. Todd, Susan Staves, and Jeremy Boulton all base their analyses on data gathered by E. A. Wrigley and Roger Schofield, data which reveals that although in the mid-sixteenth century, 30 per cent of brides and grooms were remarrying for at least the second time, by the mid-nineteenth century remarriages occur at the rate of a mere 11.7 per cent, with the rate for remarrying widows at an even lower percentage.⁹² Longer life spans cannot account for the decrease, as mortality rates for marriageable adults did not change significantly during this three hundred year period.⁹³ In the first of two important articles on remarrying widows, Todd examines a regionally-defined group of women between 1540 and 1720 in order to discount the theatrical stereotyping of unscrupulous dowagers on the prowl for second husbands.⁹⁴ Amongst other factors discouraging second marriages, Todd considers indeterminate issues of love and duty and loneliness, as well as the "sense of insecurity" that could deter remarriage "no matter what protection could be made for a separate estate."⁹⁵

Vivien Brodsky contends that while poor widows (through lack of opportunity) and propertied widows (through lack of necessity) often maintained their single state, sixteenth- and seventeenth-century London middling-class widows remarried quickly, suggesting "that it may

be timely to reconsider the commonly held view that widowhood afforded unique opportunities for independence, economic self-sufficiency, and a 'social freedom' absent from the lives of both single and married women."⁹⁶ Jeremy Boulton effectively disputes Brodsky's contention that poor widows could not afford to attract a second husband, but is in turn challenged in a second article by Todd for his heavy reliance on demographics, which lead him to conclude the "necessity and preference" for remarriage as a given.⁹⁷ Todd discounts a unilaterally demographic explanation for changing remarriage patterns. Rather, she sees as a significant factor "the widow's agency" in choosing to maintain a single life.⁹⁸ Bolstered spiritually by doctrinal repudiation of remarriage and materially by a parochial commitment to widows' financial support, women might choose "to remain 'free' widows in part because of the special opportunities widowhood gave them to fulfill their role as mothers, as Christians and as members of their society."⁹⁹

One important development that these historians neglect to consider is, of course, the increasing exchange of jointure arrangements for common law dower. Todd touches on the question of landed widows and their consequent disinclination to remarry. But she refers only vaguely to the "rules of land tenure that may have discouraged remarriage." Because "gentlemen's widows held more of their wealth in land," Todd reasons, their "propensity to wed" again was adversely affected.¹⁰⁰ But she does not pursue this possibility. We have seen that in some counties, freebench was forfeited upon remarriage, but we know that common law dower as applied to freehold land could not legislate a widow's matrimonial propensities. Although there was no such legal entity as "conditional dower" once the woman was already widowed, there were, as we have seen, conditional jointures realized only *durante viduitate*, with yearly income and custody rights to be revoked if the widow wed again. There are no comprehensive data specifying what proportion of seventeenth- or eighteenth-century jointures were encumbered by provisional clauses, but they turn up as late as 1791 and must therefore be considered as deterrents.¹⁰¹

Staves advances two possibilities derived from Lawrence and Jeanne Stone's data that show a radical decline in widows' remarriages to inheritors of great estates throughout the early modern period of 1549 to 1800.¹⁰² On the one hand, the loss of dower or the burden of a conditional jointure may have considerably lessened a widow's assets and thus impaired her attractiveness to potential suitors. On the other, "if widows were making out like the bandits some seem to think them"---Staves here refers to the historians who consider widows' claims a heavy charge on the estate---perhaps widows increasingly chose to remain single and independent. Reinterpreting the Stones' theory that because portions came to be paid upon the age of majority rather than marriage and that therefore young women could afford not to marry, Staves writes: "This argument is probably more plausible as an explanation of declining remarriage rates for widows than it is as an explanation for a high female celibacy rate in the eighteenth century. To marry once is to escape the social dysfunction and social opprobrium attached to spinsters; twice is unnecessary for this purpose."¹⁰³

Although the theories are many and convincing, there is consensus on the demographic course: the rate of remarriage for widows declined throughout the eighteenth century. In a kind of inverse correlative, eighteenth-century novels consider widows with increasing frequency and narrative detail. In the late seventeenth and early part of the eighteenth century, Aphra Behn, Jane Barker and Eliza Haywood employ widows to diverse narrative ends in short fictions. As the century unfolds, there is an explosion of feminocentric novels with crucial widow characters, including *Memoirs of Miss Sidney Bidulph* (1761), *A Description of Millenium Hall* (1762), *The History of Sir George Ellison* (1766), *The School for Widows* (1791), and its sequel, *Plans of Education* (1792). The subsequent chapters consider this array of novels as both literary texts and paradigms of the property entitlements and disqualifications explored here.

¹Susan Staves. *Married Women's Separate Property in England, 1660-1833* (Harvard University Press, 1990), 4.

²Kenelm Edward Digby specifies that the 1217 addition made to the Magna Carta essentially "fixed the law of dower" to forced thirds; see *An Introduction to the History of the Law of Property* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1897), 127.

³Sir Edward Coke. *The First Part of the Institutes of the Laws of England; or, A Commentary upon Littleton* 19th ed. (1832) (New York: Garland, 1979), Lib. I. sect. 36.

⁴Staves, *Separate Property*, 151. Alan Macfarlane is thus too categorical when he states that dower "could not be taken from [the widow], waived or undermined"; see *Marriage and Love in England* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1986), 282. See also Janelle Greenberg, "The Legal Status of the English Woman in Early Eighteenth-Century Common Law and Equity," *Studies in Eighteenth-Century Culture* 4 (1975), 171-81. Once executed, the fine was absolute in deciding final title to land, hence the court's interest in ascertaining whether the wife was acting under duress. Greenberg explains that under common law "this was only method by which she could convey estates in which she had a right" (175). Greenberg accepts the underlying paternalism of such a requirement, but emphasizes the need to set this provision against our contemporary generalizations about eighteenth-century common law reducing married women to mere chattel. This point is set within the context of her larger argument that the courts of equity were empowered to mitigate some of the harshness of the common law in regard to married women. Greenberg advises us to include this system of law in our consideration of eighteenth-century female status.

⁵William Blackstone. *Commentaries on the Laws of England* (1765-1769) ed. Stanley N. Katz (Chicago University Press, 1979), II. 136.

⁶Charles Carlton reads provocatively a legal term that simply reveals its latinate origin (*quadraginta* = forty): "In London the first forty days of a woman's widowhood were known as her 'quarantine'—as if she were liable to start an epidemic of promiscuity": see "The Widow's Tale," *Albion* 10.2 (1978), 127. In fact, the term "quarentine" denoted the waiting period for any widow claiming dower under common law, not just Londoners.

⁷Blackstone, *Commentaries*, II. 136.

⁸Coke, *Coke upon Littleton*, Lib. I. Sect. 36, cap. 5 33b.

⁹Anonymous, *Baron and Feme. A Treatise of Law and Equity* (London, 1738), 115.

¹⁰Coke, *Coke upon Littleton*, Lib. I. Sect. 37.

¹¹Quoted in J.H. Bettey, "Manorial Custom and Widows' Estate," *Archives* 88 (1992), 209. Bettey's article examines copyholds in seventeenth-century Dorset and the ways in which a copyholder could manipulate manorial custom to extend his tenure. Bettey cites William Marshall, who, in his *Rural Economy of the West of England* (1796), describes the "'Frauds practised on the respective lords of manors, by the customary tenants marrying in the last stages of decrepit old age to very young girls, by which, according to the custom of copyhold tenures in this country, the widow is entitled to her free bench on the husband's copyhold.'" Quoted in Bettey, 210. A widower could thus provide for young children by remarrying at the last minute a young woman content to sustain a widowed existence in exchange for a secure home.

¹²Blackstone, *Commentaries* II. 133.

¹³Ibid II. 133.

¹⁴Coke, *Coke upon Littleton*, Lib. I. sect. 39. He particularly praises the clarity ("that the law doth delight in") and the certainty ("the mother of quiet and repose") of these two forms of dower.

¹⁵Blackstone. *Commentaries*. I. 433.

¹⁶Coke. *Coke upon Littleton*. Lib. I. Cap. 5. sect. 36. Macfarlane is incorrect in stating that a widow "was automatically entitled to her third, even if she was separated from her husband for adultery." *Marriage and Love in England*, 282.

¹⁷Customary dower was, as above noted, often forfeited upon a remarriage. This restriction may well stem from the fact that the actual "free-bench" was often located within the house of the son from the first marriage, which might make for a tense dynamic, should a widow require that her second husband share her dower-house rights. Bridget Hill evidently confuses the different parameters of common-law and customary dower: she mistakenly describes common-law dower as "conditional on [the widow's] not remarrying": see *Women, Work and Sexual Politics in Eighteenth-Century England* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1994), 248.

¹⁸Spring. *Law, Land, and Family*, 41.

¹⁹Staves defines curtesy as the common law "legal right or interest which the husband acquires in the real estate of his wife. A life estate in all the lands and tenements in fee simple or fee tail of which she was seised at any time during the marriage. Four things are required to give an estate by curtesy: marriage, seisin of the wife, issue, and the death of the wife." *Separate Property*, 235.

²⁰Blackstone. *Commentaries*. II. 136-37.

²¹Text drawn from *Statutes at Large 1461-1603* (London: Mark Basket, 1770), II. 226.

²²Spring. *Law, Land, and Family*, 43.

²³Coke. *Coke upon Littleton*. Lib. I. Cap. 5. Sect. 41 (36 b).

²⁴Statute reproduced in Digby. *Introduction to the History of the Law of Real Property*, 352.

²⁵Spring. *Law, Land, and Family*, 48.

²⁶Blackstone. *Commentaries*. II. 137.

²⁷Spring. *Law, Land, and Family*, 48.

²⁸Blackstone. *Commentaries*. II. 139.

²⁹Staves. *Separate Property*, 113-114.

³⁰Blackstone. *Commentaries*. II. 136.

³¹Spring. *Law, Land, and Family*, 49; Staves. *Separate Property*, 47-48. Staves notes the "obvious[ness]" of such a solution "shown by the fact that the Connecticut legislature passed such a statute in the seventeenth century."

³²In particular, a series of gambling statutes executed throughout the first half of the eighteenth century outlawed the mortgaging of estates for debt reclamation.

³³Staves. *Separate Property*, 90.

³⁴Spring. *Law, Land, and Family*, 48.

³⁵"Dower might be well and good amongst thirteenth-century manor folk or eighteenth-century Massachusetts farmers, but one could hardly expect an eighteenth-century English magnate to sacrifice a potential life estate in a third of his family's lands to a woman." Staves. *Separate Property*, 36. The *Spectator* worries similarly about women's accrual of property through jointures, satirizing "Mrs. Snap, who has four jointures, by four different bedfellows, of four different shires. She is at present upon the point of marriage with a Middlesex man, and is said to have an ambition of extending her possessions through all the counties in England on this side of the Trent." June 30, 1714, vol. 4, 516.

³⁶Staves. *Separate Property*, 28.

³⁷Greenberg. "The Legal Status," 171-181.

³⁸*Chaplin v. Chaplin* (1733) 3 P. Wms. 232 *English Reports* eds. A. Wood Renton et al (Edinburgh: W. Green, 1900), vol.1, 1040.

³⁹Ibid. 1041-1042.

⁴⁰William Holdsworth, *A History of English Law* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1922-66) vol. 7. 382, 384. Staves offers a sarcastic definition: "Conveyancers, removed from the sordid and material worlds of criminal law or tort law, manipulate highly abstracted interests in land or other valuable resources for the benefit of those eminently respectable clients most able to reward the best lawyers." Staves, *Separate Property*. 56.

⁴¹Staves, *Separate Property*. 41.

⁴²Staves quotes the legal maxim—*communis error facit jus* (common error makes the law)—that underlies much procedural disadvantaging of women. Ibid, 41.

⁴³Greenberg, "The Legal Status," 176.

⁴⁴Staves, *Separate Property*. 49-53. "There was no theoretical reason why the complaints made in the ordinary language of contemporaries that men's conveying their property to uses or trusts in contemplation of marriage was a 'crafty,' 'cautelous,' or 'devious' [language found in the Statute of Uses] derogation of women's dower rights could not have been translated into a legal rule that a conveyance by a man to trustees in contemplation of marriage to defeat his wife's dower right was fraudulent and void" (51). Staves finds only one instance of specific remonstrance of a pre-marital trust (and this is couched in the conditional): in *Radnor v. Vandebendy* (1697), counsel admits: "Perhaps it must be agreed, That if the Husband had just before Marriage made a long lease on Purpose to prevent Dower, and the Woman expecting the Privileges which the Common Law gives to Women married and survived him. Equity might have interposed" (50).

⁴⁵Sarah Chapone, *The Hardships of the English Laws. In Relation to Wives* (London, ?1735). 32-33. The tone of this post-Astell/pre-Wollstonecraft document is consistently rational yet acerbic in its analysis of women's vulnerability under English laws.

In Daniel Defoe's *Roxana* (1724), the Dutch Merchant tries to persuade the widowed Roxana to marry him by promising her a continued control over her fortune: he alludes, presumably, to protecting her separate property in a trust: "I will not touch one Pistole of your Estate, more, than shall be with your own voluntary Consent; neither now, or at any other time, but you shall settle it as you please, for your Life, and upon who you please after your Death." Roxana responds at last in "an elevated Strain," denouncing marriage as slavery and refusing to cast herself as a matrimonial "Upper-Servant." She admits to the reader, however, that this is a sham: "I own...the divesting myself of my Estate, and putting my Money out of my Hand, was the Sum of the Matter, that made me refuse to marry." Throughout the century, most (male) writers were unequivocally opposed to married women's separate property. Roxana, admittedly, is a highly complicated character, but I think at least part of her unwillingness reflects her lack of confidence in the patriarchal ideology that informed the Courts of Equity. Defoe, *Roxana* ed. David Blewett (London: Penguin, 1982). 186-87. See also Jane Barker's "Philinda's Story out of the Book," discussed in Chapter Two, which explores the consequences of a wife's keeping "a little private purse."

⁴⁶Staves writes at length about these highly complex property tactics; see *Separate Property*. 56-94.

⁴⁷Ibid. 76-78.

⁴⁸"She shall not be barred of her joynture [sic] albeit her husband commit treason." Coke, *Coke upon Littleton*, Sect. 41 36(b).

⁴⁹Blackstone, *Commentaries*, II. 138. *Pro tanto* = "for as much as may be."

⁵⁰Mingay, *English Landed Society in the Eighteenth Century* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1963). 30, 226.

⁵¹Macfarlane, *Marriage and Love*, 282.

⁵²On the subject of poor widows, see Olwen Hufton, "Women Without Men: Widows and Spinsters in Britain and France in the Eighteenth Century," *Journal of Family History* (1984), 355-76; Peter Earle, *The Making of the English Middle Class* (London: Methuen, 1989), 167-68; Richard M. Smith, "Some Issues Concerning Families and Their Property in Rural England," in *Land, Kinship and Life-Cycle* ed. Richard M. Smith (Cambridge University Press, 1984), 75-78.

⁵³Anon., *The Hardships of the English Laws*, 34-35.

⁵⁴Lloyd Bonfield, *Marriage Settlements 1601-1740* (Cambridge University Press, 1983), 3.

⁵⁵Coke, *Coke upon Littleton*, Sect. 41, 36(b).

⁵⁶Staves, *Separate Property*, 127-28.

⁵⁷The strict settlement issue has a long and rich history amongst twentieth-century historians, who have conducted an extended analysis of its meaning and significance. These critics examine widows only peripherally in connection to this subject (and are consequently employed in my text when directly relevant), but their body of work is important to the scholar concerned with eighteenth-century women and property. See in addition to scholars cited in this chapter Eileen Spring, "The Family, Strict Settlement, and the Historians," *Canadian Journal of History* 18 (1983), 379-98; and Barbara English, *Strict Settlement: A Guide for Historians* (University of Hull Press, 1983).

⁵⁸Amy Louise Erickson, "Common law versus common practice: the use of marriage settlements in early modern England," *Economic History Review* I (1990), 21. Erickson's position is unequivocal: "For most people marrying in early modern England, the principal purpose of a marriage settlement was the protection of the wife's property" (37). Staves probes this notion of protective paternalism, arguing "that it was not so much a pure liberal desire to make women more autonomous that inspired eighteenth-century doctrines concerning married women's property as a concern that women be effectively protected, prevented from becoming public charges, and a desire that the wife's father's property should pass to his grandson without being wasted by his son-in-law. The power shift that occurs looks less like a shift from men to women than one from the husband's father to the wife's father..." *Separate Property*, 84.

⁵⁹Staves, *Separate Property*, 128, 94-130.

⁶⁰Eden 39, 65-66. Thus Gillian Skinner misstates that "[a] jointure guaranteed a widow a certain annual income from land." "Women's Status as Legal and Civic Subjects," *Women and Literature in Britain 1700-1800* ed. Vivien Jones (Cambridge University Press, 2000), 94.

⁶¹Spring, *Law, Land, and Family*, 56.

⁶²"The size of the provision which a man made for his wife's possible widowhood was *naturally* dependent on the amount of money she brought into the family." H. J. Habakkuk, "Marriage Settlements in the Eighteenth Century," *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society* 32 (1950), 21. The emphasis is mine: why *naturally* dependent in regard to jointure, given the irrelevance of this relationship in dower?

⁶³Spring, *Law, Land, and Family*, 56.

⁶⁴*Ibid.*, 50.

⁶⁵Armstrong, *Desire and Domestic Fiction*, 32. "The idea of free individuals voluntarily entering into a contract with one another was obviously impossible to realize in a state where people were already born into different classes and status groups that denied them an opportunity to make the kind of choice which the contract specified as necessary for its success." Armstrong, 36-37.

⁶⁶Staves, *Separate Property*, 127.

⁶⁷Alan Dugald McKillop, "Charlotte Smith's Letters," *Huntington Library Quarterly* 15 (1952), 239.

⁶⁸Staves, *Separate Property*, 99.

⁶⁹Vernon's Case (1572), 4 Co. Rep. 3a.

⁷⁰Anon., *Baron and Feme*, 153.

⁷¹Hill, *Women, Work, and Sexual Politics*, 249-50.

⁷²"The statute [of Uses] did not contemplate jointuring by testamentary devise, for the obvious reason that until the Statute of Wills (1540), five years later, landowners did not have the legal power to dispose of freeholds by will." Staves, *Separate Property*, 104.

⁷³*Ibid.*, 107.

⁷⁴*Ibid.*, 111.

⁷⁵*Ibid.*, 58.

⁷⁶Staves emphasizes the need for eighteenth-century widows to be fully aware of their legal rights, lest these rights be unwittingly made void: "If a widow was unaware of the existence of her right to election and took *any* benefits under the will, for instance, receiving an installment on an annuity or continuing to live in the house in which she had lived with her husband, she might find herself judged to have given evidence that she had elected to take under the will." *Separate Property*, 111.

⁷⁷Anon., *Hardships of the English Laws*, 33.

⁷⁸Spring, *Law, Land, and Family*, 60. Both Spring and Staves trace in some detail the particularities and implications of *Drury*: see Spring, 59 ff. and Staves, *Separate Property*, 119 ff., esp. 122-27.

⁷⁹Staves, *Separate Property*, 98.

⁸⁰Spring, *Law, Land, and Family*, 62-63. "Blackstone did not even attempt to say why the widow's right to personal property became barrable. 'Thirds,' unlike dower, were not a clog on alienations. Indeed for once Blackstone failed to deliver an encomium on a law of England, and reading between the lines, he seemed uncomfortable with what he had to relate." Spring, *Law, Land, and Family*, 63.

⁸¹Staves, *Separate Property*, 113.

⁸²*Ibid.*, 26, 21.

⁸³*Ibid.*, 27, 26.

⁸⁴Stone, *The Family, Sex and Marriage in England 1500-1800* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1977), 244.

⁸⁵Bonfield, "Affective Families, Open Elites and Strict Family Settlements in Early Modern England," *Economic History Review* 39 (1986), 344. Staves is also struck by this and comments, "Painless for whom? a female reader is apt to wonder. I imagine Professor Bonfield's unaccustomed levity in this passage was prompted by an understandable desire to liven up his exposition of what is usually thought to be a rather tedious subject, and I am confident that he has no personal wish to bring back *suttee*; nevertheless, the passage does illustrate the focus of many of these male writers on the interests of the male heir or the interests of the reified 'estate.'" Staves, *Separate Property*, 278.

⁸⁶Erickson, "Common law versus common practice," 30.

⁸⁷Spring, *Law, Land, and Family*, 118-19.

⁸⁸*Ibid.*, 51-55.

⁸⁹Staves, *Separate Property*, 215, 115-16.

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- ⁹⁰Beatrice Gottlieb, *The Family in the Western World from the Black Death to the Industrial Age* (Oxford University Press, 1993), 65.
- ⁹¹Barbara J. Todd, "Demographic determinism and female agency," *Continuity and Change* 3 (1994), 427.
- ⁹²E.A. Wrigley and Roger Schofield, *The Population History of England, 1541-1871* (Harvard University Press, 1981), 258-59.
- ⁹³Roger Schofield and E.A. Wrigley, "Remarriage Intervals and the Effect of Marriage Order on Fertility," *Marriage and Remarriage in Populations of the Past* eds. J. Dupaquier *et al* (London and New York: Academic, 1981), 212.
- ⁹⁴Barbara J. Todd, "The Remarrying Widow," in *Women in English Society 1500-1800* ed. Mary Prior (London: Methuen, 1985), 54-92.
- ⁹⁵*Ibid.* 75.
- ⁹⁶Brodsky, "Widows in Late Elizabethan London," in *The World We Have Gained* eds. Lloyd Bonfield *et al* (New York: Basil Blackwell, 1986), 123.
- ⁹⁷Jeremy Boulton, "London Widowhood Revisited," *Continuity and Change* 5 (1990), 323-355; Todd, "Demographic Determinism and Female Agency," 422.
- ⁹⁸Todd, "Demographic Determinism," 443.
- ⁹⁹*Ibid.* 430.
- ¹⁰⁰Todd, "The Remarrying Widow," 71
- ¹⁰¹*Caruthers v. Caruthers* (1791) refers to a settlement made in 1771 concerning a landed jointure to the widow "to take the rents for life (in case she should so long continue a widow)." Quoted in Staves, *Separate Property*, 264.
- ¹⁰²Lawrence Stone and Jeanne C. Fawtier Stone, *An Open Elite?* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1984), 122, 142. The Stones use this data to evidence their theories about the rise of companionate marriages: they view widows' invitations of remarriage as always coloured by the possibility of mercenary motives.
- ¹⁰³Staves, *Separate Property*, 217.

Chapter Two: Remarrying Widows in Behn, Barker, and Haywood

Widows, writes Richard Allestree in *The Ladies Calling* (1727), "are their own choosers" when it comes to remarriage.¹ But such power of choice can be as burdensome as it is liberating, and in late seventeenth- and early eighteenth-century texts, remarrying widows range from brisk businesswomen trading in the currency of love to impetuous murderers unable to accommodate their sexual pasts. Widowhood for Aphra Behn, Jane Barker, and Eliza Haywood serves as an index to the paradoxes of the female condition in the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries: it permits the fantasy of independence, which is revealed as unsustainable when the protagonists attempt to re-place themselves in society through remarriage. The widow's disturbing "unfixability"---floating between the marital containment of her past and the freedom of her future---is strangely exacerbated by the prospect of a second wifehood. Allestree pronounces marriage "so great an adventure, that once seems enough for the whole Life."² Thus remarriage smacks transgressively of appetite. It raises the spectre of a sexual history usually disallowed by the patriarchal insistence on chastity. And it skews the customary power dynamic of first marriages: whereas a girl's portion is generally transferred from the masculine control of father to new husband, a widow even of meagre worth is empowered to negotiate on her own behalf.

A remarrying widow provides an easy target for opprobrium, an insult to men through her refusal to make her existence coterminous with her late husband's. Blackstone's famous definition of coverture---that the husband and wife are one person in law---is splintered into an unsettling constituent part: the widow, formerly subsumed in marriage, emerges as an integral legal entity. This legal autonomy, however, is compromised by the widow's vulnerability to extrinsic forces such as reputation. Mourning garb aids in subjecting the widow to cultural labelling through its very blankness: its black hues smooth out distinctiveness, its veil literally covers the face.

blotting out individual identities. Like the masquerade's domino, whose blank and thus "infinite signifiatory possibilities" represent "the exchangeable female body, the empty sign" onto which others can project their desire, the new widow exists as a *tabula rasa*, ready to be inscribed with age-old prejudice and social anxiety about her post-marital manlessness.³

Aphra Behn
The Unfortunate Happy Lady

In two complementary late-life fictions, Aphra Behn explores the liberty and the vulnerability of widowhood.⁴ *The History of the Nun* (1689) and *The Unfortunate Happy Lady* (1698) seem antipathetic in their respective conclusions: the former ends with the decidedly dysphoric execution of its doubly widowed heroine, the latter with the happy second marriage of its wealthy protagonist. However, both novellas are complicated by narratorial ambivalence. Thus the "monster" that Isabella becomes at the end of *The History of the Nun* must be weighed against the sympathetic portrayal of her childhood education in artifice and notoriety, both of which shape her destructive actions as a widow.⁵ And while *The Unfortunate Happy Lady* on the one hand creates an "attractive portrait of [the] moral but pragmatic" Philadelphia, it on the other indicts the materialism that characterizes her interested responses.⁶ In particular, both remarrying widows share from a young age an understanding of their sexual currency, whether as marriageable commodity or social exemplar. From this vantage, the two narrators can be seen to offer alternate constructions of widows -- cannily self-seeking and modestly retiring.

First published posthumously in 1698, *The Unfortunate Happy Lady* seems to have been written in 1684.⁷ Throughout the text, Behn attends to questions relating to money, particularly in the second half of the story, where she draws on the grasping stereotypes associated with widowhood in order to reveal the interestedness of the heroine, Philadelphia. Thus, while *The Unfortunate Happy Lady* is a study of "the paradoxes of...female powerlessness,"⁸ it is also an indictment of

the narrator's money-based economy and the distortions it generates in its participants. Behn's portrayal of Philadelphia's life through the three stages of virgin, wife, and widow encourages an emblematic reading of Philadelphia as representative of the female condition.⁹ An inversion of gendered attributes allows Behn to register more fully her anxiety about the dehumanizing power of ready money. Gracelove will discard his mercenary ethos (symbolized by the shipwreck that destroys his commercial affluence) and assume a feminized responsiveness to love, while Philadelphia will ultimately flaunt in her widowhood the brutal authority that can accompany moneyed advantages. That virtuous female characters, conventionally depicted as affective and sentimental, can sacrifice familial bonds to consolidate fortune stresses the alienation inherent in commercial transactions.

The story's subtitle, "A True History," is common to late seventeenth- and early eighteenth-century prose tales, as is the narrator's assertion of authenticity through her first-hand knowledge of the events depicted. In *The Unfortunate Happy Lady* the narrator's account "was attested to me by one who liv'd in the Family, and from whom I had the whole truth of the Story."¹⁰ This claim is not logically consistent—Philadelphia's private musings could only be relayed by an omniscient narrator—but the insistence on eye-witnessed truth encourages a belief in the story's verisimilar representation of mercenary interest and the disorder it can cause.

The story itself, plotted with shipwrecks and marriage settlements, combines sensationalism with quotidian middle-class detail. Sir William Wilding's succession to his late father's unencumbered estate of £4000 a year releases the usual gentlemanly extravagances of equipage, gambling, and women, and rapidly leads to bit-part mortgagings to pay off debt. Sir William's one required disbursement is a £6000 portion to his only sister Philadelphia, an amount which the narrator assures us he might easily have paid "in a little time", had he not started sinking the capital. In an effective mix of romantic metaphor and pecuniary realism, the beautiful and virtuous Philadelphia is described as "fore-seeing the utter ruin of the estate, if not timely prevented," and

daily begs Sir William "with Prayers and Tears. that might have mov'd a Scythian or wild Arab...to pay her her portion" (365).¹¹ Romantic heroines rarely pause to consider in detail their own financial futures, and mercenary characters are rarely heroines: Behn's protagonist is something of both. Philadelphia's astute participation in a transactional economy will be replayed more obviously in her widowhood.

The narrator both defends Philadelphia's obsession with money and condemns her hardness: this ambivalence reveals Behn's understanding of the gender and pecuniary politics at play in a marriage settlement, as well as her distaste for the unfeeling commodification they encourage. On the one hand, Philadelphia's familial situation requires strategic pragmatism. Fatherless, Philadelphia is dependent upon a profligate brother for marital negotiations: portionless, she is powerless. However, her subsequent misadventures make clear her own privileging of pecuniary value over human worth. The notion of female commodification is first played out in a brothel, in which Sir William tells the procuress that Philadelphia is a "cast Mistress of his" whom he wishes to discard "to prevent the trouble and charge, which [Lady Beldam] knew such Cattle would bring upon young Gentlemen of plentiful Estates" (366). The Middle English form of *chattel* used here describes the propertied valuation of the woman in suitably animalistic terms. The unwitting Philadelphia anticipates from Lady Beldam a proposed education in social graces. Yet Philadelphia is also attuned to concerns of fortune and hopes secretly that Lady Beldam will assist in remedying Sir William's "unkindness" in withholding Philadelphia's portion.

While the beautiful virgin clearly differs from the unscrupulous madam, the narrator aligns their materialism through both action and language. When Philadelphia goes to bed the first night, Lady Beldam rushes in to assess her nakedness and inventories Philadelphia in a catalogue that quantifies body and garment: "she then had the opportunity of observing the delicacy of her Skin, the fine turn of her Limbs, and the richness of her Night-dress, part of the Furniture of her Trunk" (371). Notwithstanding some instinctive uneasiness, Philadelphia employs a colloquialism—she

takes "for sterling" Lady Beldam's promises of happiness—which forges a kind of kinship between the two women, who, despite their social differences, both comprehend female value in market terms (369). As the subsequent plot development makes clear, even "good" characters are susceptible to the corruptions of ready coin.

When Gracelove first encounters Philadelphia in the brothel, their conversation marks the transition from the erotic to the sentimental through its symbolic references to personal property. Initially, he tries to woo his whore with a detailed enumeration of her sexual worth and promised income: "Come, Child...here are an hundred Guineas for you; and I promise you yearly as much, and two hundred with every Child that I shall get on thy sweet Body." Perplexed and terrified, Philadelphia flees as Gracelove clarifies the terms: he has already paid "two hundred Guinea's [sic] for [Philadelphia's] Maiden head." But when Philadelphia recounts her history of familial betrayal, Gracelove discards his rakish demeanour and turns saviour. In return, Philadelphia, in a displacement of sexual penetration, asks that he "open that Trunk within, where you will find Letters from [her brother and late father]....Pray satisfie [sic] me, Sir, and see the Truth!" Gracelove signals the integrity of his transformation by his conviction that Philadelphia has "greater Beauties within, than those I admire without," before delving into the contents of the trunk (375). Although his comments pay overt compliment to Philadelphia's virtues, they also, and importantly, refer to the documents in the trunk that confirm her value in monetary terms, namely the unpaid portion. This deflected intercourse also initiates Philadelphia into the realm of experience. Once oblivious to Lady Beldam's racy allusions to "conversation," Philadelphia now engages with her in a language of double meanings—"I am strangely oblig'd to you for your care of me: and am sure I shall never be able to return your obligations as I ought, and as I cou'd wish" (376)—as Gracelove whisks her away from Beldam's house and lodges her with his cousin, Counsellor Fairlaw.

Despite apparent affection for Gracelove, Philadelphia rejects his offer of matrimony because of their financial discrepancy: he "had so plentiful a fortune. and she nothing but her person and innocence." Alluding to Matthew 25 and the parable of the talents, Philadelphia attests to the richness of her feelings but desires more prosperous circumstances in which to realize her attachment: "as much [love] as you can wish. I have in store for you. and so I beg it may be kept till a better opportunity" (378). This punctilious dedication to equity, however, actually masks a shrewd understanding of the prevailing gender dynamic within marriage. As a legal and economic contract, marriage requires a pledging of assets: Philadelphia evidently distrusts the romantic balancing of her beauty against his wealth. She wants actual currency to support her participation in a union with Gracelove. Such pragmatism is hardly out of place in late seventeenth- and eighteenth-century society, and Behn is quick to exploit both this ranking of money over love and its consequences in subsequent episodes.

Gracelove, who has set off for business in Turkey, is lost at sea and presumed dead. A chance acquaintance tells the Fairlaw clan "[t]hat his loss in that Ship amounted to above 12 [sic] thousand pounds: with this dreadful amazing news, the good old Gentleman returns home....and almost kills unhappy Philadelphia." The syntax suggests that it is "this" news---the enormous loss of money---that fells Philadelphia, rather than the death of her lover. What supports this reading is her reaction to the news that she is irretrievably fortuneless:

Sir William Wilding...mortgag'd all his Estate, which was near four thousand a year: and carry'd the Money over with him into France on Saturday last. This, added to the former news, put so great a check on her spirits that she immediately dropt down in a swoon: whence she only recover'd, to fall into what was of a much more dangerous consequence, a violent Fever. (379)

Philadelphia's somatic responses suggest that on this occasion (as in the earlier one in which the trunk stood in for her body), she defines identity in material terms.

This material identity is explored more fully through the narrator's representation of widowhood. Lady Fairlaw on her deathbed presses her husband to marry Philadelphia because "she would prove an excellent Nurse to him, and prolong his life by some years" (380). Fairlaw's proposal is striking, as it emphasizes the lucre of widowhood over matrimony. He reminds Philadelphia of her freedom in marriage matters, with Gracelove dead and Sir William absent, "not forgetting at the same time, to let her know, that his Widow, who ever had the good fortune to be so, would be worth above thirty thousand pounds, in ready Money: besides a thousand a year."¹² Adding emotional obligation to pecuniary enticement, Fairlaw "above all...urg'd his dying Lady's last advice to him...and hop'd [Philadelphia] would see the Will of the Dead satisfied."¹³ Fairlaw's pun offers Philadelphia two incentives to overcome her reluctance: if she abides by Lady Fairlaw's figurative will, she will later be recompensed by the terms of Counsellor Fairlaw's literal one.

The narrator records explicitly the jointure package Philadelphia is offered: it guarantees her as a widowed *feme sole* the post-marital fortune that a union with Gracelove, recovered portion notwithstanding, would have eliminated with its attendant *feme covert* status. Philadelphia's settlement is fabulously remunerative, especially when compared to the meagre hundred pounds Gracelove offered for her virginity. In retrospect, Philadelphia appears to have been a cunning broker, rejecting underfunded offers from both seducer and betrothed, and waiting for the rewards of widowhood. Behn's fiction provides the widow not only with a handsome yearly income predicated on nothing more than Philadelphia's beauty and modesty (her promised £1000 *per annum*, by the fixed ten per cent formula, might realistically have secured a £10,000 dowry), but also with unrestricted access to the capital—"above thirty thousand pounds, in ready Money"—money, that is, unhampered by any devolutions to Fairlaw's daughter Eugenia or alternate entailments.

The difference between virgin and widow suggests a cynical valuation of women's worth—nothing in and of herself, everything courtesy of a late husband—a valuation registered in the

narrator's portrayal of Philadelphia's response to Fairlaw's proposal. The tartness that the narrator has reserved for general topics such as women's proclivity for gossip ("our sex seldom wants matter of tattle") is now directed toward Philadelphia, highlighting her opportunism and sham decorum:

broken in sorrows, and having mortify'd all her Appetites to the enjoyments of this World, and not knowing where to meet with so fair an overture, though at first, in modesty she seem'd to refuse [Fairlaw's offer] as too great an honour, yet yielded in less than a quarter of an hours Courtship. (381)

This blend of surface modesty and pecuniary interest similarly marks Philadelphia's transition into widowhood. After a month's marriage, the new Lady Fairlaw persuades her husband to move house: shortly thereafter, Fairlaw dies. The narrator's gloss is both amusing and sharp—"Whether it were the change of an old House for a new, or an old Wife for a young, is yet uncertain, tho' his Physicians said, and are still of opinion, that (doubtless) it was the last"---with its subversive suggestion that Philadelphia's portion of youthful energy killed her husband. Although the narrator allows for a certain sincerity in Philadelphia's mourning, she identifies its materialist origin: "she lov'd him perfectly, and pay'd him all the dutiful respect of a Virtuous Wife, while she liv'd within that state with him; which he rewarded, as I have said before" (381).

The text now advances its mirror half. Philadelphia's "Fortune began to mend thus", the narrator tells us: the penniless, powerless virgin handed from reprobate brother to amorous rake to faithful betrothed to elderly husband is now a rich and independent widow. Contemporary conduct literature tends to excoriate the widow as "that double Plague of a Man's Life...[who] takes all Opportunities to steal away the Marrow of a Man's Bones, and shorten his Days."¹⁴ Philadelphia, however, is plagued during her "year of...widowhood" by scores of admirers. Meanwhile, her brother is thrown into the King's Bench prison for small debts and dreams hopelessly of reconciliation and rescue from his sister. The narrator notes the pleasing symmetry of this reversal of fortunes: "on that very day that old Fairlaw died," thereby releasing

Philadelphia to independence and wealth. Sir William is jailed (382). The widow anonymously redeems the man who sold her virginity and stole her portion: "In less than a year, Philadelphia had pay'd £25.000 and taken off the Mortgages on £2500 per Ann. of her Brother's Estate" (383). She more than quadruples in payments the amount of portion money her brother earlier withheld from her.

As with the reversal of fortunes, so too with sexual roles: Philadelphia finds Gracelove, weary and poor, wandering along the road to London and initiates a rehabilitation that counters the brothel's power to confine, undress, purchase, and view voyeuristically. She orders her servant to "take" Gracelove to an inn and "[t]hat then he shou'd be brought home to her own house, and be carefully look'd after, till further orders from her." Enjoying her anonymous power, the widow gives her lover "Money for his pocket expences" and outfits him in the "most modish rich suits...that might become a private Gentleman of a thousand pounds a year." She takes any opportunity to spy upon him, including obliging "her Steward to invite him to a Play: wither she follow'd 'em and sate next to Gracelove, and talk'd with him; but all the while masqu'd" (383-385). The widow's veil, traditionally symbolizing "humility and submission towards the dead and to the Deity" is here metaphorically transformed into a harlot's vizard, hiding a woman who wholly controls her sexual object of desire.¹⁵

The register of Philadelphia's suitors develops the notion of her as a consumer and counters the earlier cataloguing of her sexual attributes. Here the men are weighed in the balance: "a Lord of a very small Estate, tho' of a pretty good Age; a young blustering Knight: who had a place of £599 a year at Court, and a Country Gentleman of a very plentiful Estate, a Widower, and of a middle Age" (385). Despite the humour apparent in such a scene—a well-propertied admirer is called "Mr. Fat-acres"—Behn addresses the dangers of human commodification. As the men line up hoping to be bought in matrimony by the rich widow, she prepares to sell off her beloved friend and stepdaughter, Eugenia. Philadelphia relates to Eugenia "all her brothers past extravagancies"-

--notably omitting his attempt to prostitute his own sister---and begs her to marry him, convinced that "such a virtuous Wife, as [Eugenia] wou'd prove, must necessarily reclaim him" (385). Although Eugenia pledges to "be direct'd and advis'd by [her stepmother] in all things," she is clearly reluctant to be served up to Sir William at Philadelphia's dinner party.

In the dinner party scene, the widow's consummate authority plays out in patriarchal form. Philadelphia sits at the head of her table and publicly settles her own remarriage, pronouncing grandly, "it will be of some satisfaction to you to know whom I have made choice for my next Husband" (386). Jacqueline Pearson observes that Philadelphia "rescinds" her autonomy with the declaration of wifely quiescence that immediately follows, thereby rendering ambivalent notions of "female power": "The person to whom I shall next drink," Philadelphia announces, "must be the Man who shall ever command me and my Fortune" (386).¹⁶ However, her verbal imperative and Gracelove's feminized response problematize an imagined smooth transition from independent widow to obeisant wife: she boldly announces her desire and commands her lover to submit to it: "My dear Gracelove...I drink to thee; and send thee back thy own Ring with Philadelphia's heart." Gracelove is unmanned: he "blush[es] and look[s] wildly." The widow, however, presses her suit. "Nay, pledge me (pursu'd she) and return me the Ring, for it shall make us both one the next morning." In the face of such commanding energy Gracelove is speechless but compliant: he bows, kisses the ring, and returns it as ordered. Having wordlessly agreed to matrimony, Gracelove's single comment at the end of the evening---"my Mistress and my friend are found, and still are mine"---seems a failed attempt to claim some personal territory: his widowed mistress is very much her own master.

This "unconventional, quasi-paternal power" on the part of one woman is permissible because another---Eugenia---"consents to act with conventional submissiveness".¹⁷ But what Pearson sees as a "polarized" tale of "virgins and whores", with Philadelphia reinterpreting the female license of the brothel, is more symmetrically a story of virgins and widows. The widow Fairlaw

exercises her patriarchal power with the sacrifice of the virgin, independently moneyed Eugenia--Philadelphia tells her brother that Eugenia's portion is £20,000---to an arranged marriage with an unfeeling wastrel. There is a subversive hint of dynastic motivation behind this decision: with this union, the widow redirects Fairlaw fortune to the patrilineage of her own family. That it is an emotional sacrifice is rendered unequivocal. Sir William "eagerly" kisses Eugenia's hand; she blushes and says with evident dismay, "Thus Madam, I hope to shew how much I love and honour you" (387). While Philadelphia "resists being written into a patriarchal story" by taking closure into her own hands, her commodification of Eugenia complicates any protofeminist ascriptions.¹⁸

Philadelphia's actions are not criminal and she does not approach the psychotic excesses of Isabella in *The History of the Nun*, but there is something decidedly calculating about the unfortunate happy lady. If Janet Todd is correct in ascribing to Behn a rejection of commercialism and mercantile marriages, then Philadelphia is more complex than Salzman's "attractive portrait of a moral but pragmatic woman," and the text generates more than just the "fine air of moral charity" that George Woodcock sees as its distinguishing feature.¹⁹ Through the vehicle of widowhood *The Unfortunate Happy Lady* examines the ways in which a moneyed economy encourages human objectification. The young Philadelphia is increasingly aware of pecuniary valuations, but virginal and portionless, cannot act with any authority. Her acceptance of a "proposal of widowhood," however, quickly dispatches her husband, emasculates her lover, and rewards a reprobate brother with a profitable marriage that sacrifices both her stepdaughter's happiness and material independence.

Aphra Behn
The History of the Nun

That Edward Ward regards women as mendacious is no surprise given the title of his pamphlet—*Female Policy Detected: or, The Arts of a Designing Woman Laid Open*—and his overarching belief in a female mandate "to tempt cunningly and deceive slyly [sic]." But he is particularly vigorous in publicizing the degeneracy of widows, who appear unequivocally wicked in their alignment with sexuality and vice: "The Love of a Virgin is innocent and lasting, as her Vertue. The Love of a Just Wife, friendly and delightful. The Love of a Widow politick and deceitful, the Love of a Lewd Women [sic], lustful and revengeful"²⁰. Richard Allestree rejects such summary generalizations and attempts in Section III of *The Ladies Calling* to delineate the appropriate path a widow should follow. Although he yields to the scriptural authority permitting remarriage—"that *the wife, when her husband is dead, is at liberty to be married to whom she will* 1 Cor. 7.39"—he counters with other biblical sources advocating perpetual widowhood ("Honour widows that are widows indeed" Timothy 5.3), as well as with his own carefully structured metaphors of widowhood as a singular state of grace.²¹ In fact, for Allestree widowhood is a kind of remarriage with God, one that supersedes any human attachment. The ordinary secular pleasures of matrimony yield to a spiritual engagement of the highest order:

Those hours which were before her Husband's right, seem now to devolve on God the grand Proprietor of our time: that discourse and free Converse wherewith she entertain'd him, she may now convert into Colloquies and Spiritual intercourse with her Maker: and that Love which was only Human before, by the change of it's [sic] Object acquires a sublimity, is exalted into Divine: from Loyal Duty and Conjugal Affection becomes the Eternal work and Happiness of Angels, the Ardour of a Cherubim. (232)

Such lofty analogies render actual remarriages rather sordid: in the economy of this construction, a widow who rejects a heavenly partnership in favour of another man merits the opprobrium accorded her by a society keenly attuned to any hint of willful sexuality. Not only does a

remarrying widow compromise her honorary fidelity to her first husband, but in Allestree's metaphor she also breaks a covenant with God.

Behn's 1689 novella, *The History of the Nun*, scrutinizes in psychologically complex ways such questions of betrayal and deceit. Although Jacqueline Pearson observes that Isabella's decision to remarry in *The Fatal Marriage* (1694), Thomas Southerne's dramaturgical version of Behn's prose tale, "transgresses the boundaries of proper sexual behaviour in a widow," there has been little attention paid to the connection between Isabella's religious and sexual betrayals of faith.²² Furthermore, while Pearson interprets the nun as paralleling the social limitations of the wife, and Ros Ballaster sees in the nun an exotic symbol of female passion, neither has pushed the metaphor to include widowhood. In fact, it is the widow who most closely approaches the nun in her particularities of costume, her situations of physical retirement, her stipulated devotion to charitable works, and her chastity, whether dictated by social nicety or canon law. This doubling of the nun and widow, replicated in contemporary conduct tracts, emphasizes in Behn's text a sophisticated treatment of female sexuality.²³ Through the widow, Behn explores the conflicts of purity and experience: through the story's sensationalistic consequences, she makes clear the cultural strictures attaching to sexual history that vex the potential for a widow's happy remarriage.

The History of the Nun; or, the Fair Vow-Breaker tells the story of Isabella de Vallary and her widowed father Count Henrick, who places his only child in a convent under the tutelage of his sister, the Abbess. Isabella grows up precocious, beautiful, and bent upon satisfying all family hopes for her religious devotion. Calmly renouncing the world at large, as well as an assortment of worthy suitors, she takes her vows and becomes a nun. However, she falls passionately in love with the brother of one of the nuns, and after much dissimulation and plotting, she and Henault run off and marry. But they suffer extended ill fortune, including poverty, miscarriage, and then permanent childlessness. Henault's father, enraged by his son's desecration of Isabella's holy

bond, demands that Henault fight in the war against France to revive the family honour. Henault agrees and is killed on the battle field, much to Isabella's inexpressible grief. However, she is comforted by Villenoy, a companion of her late husband's in the war, and himself a former admirer of hers. He by degrees overcomes her widowed scruples and they are eventually married and live happily together and in great material comfort. One night when Villenoy is away, a ragged beggar turns up at Isabella's door: it turns out to be Henault. Isabella panics, smothers Henault, concocts a half-truth for Villenoy, and, in a moment of hysteria, causes him to be drowned while disposing of Henault's body. Both corpses are discovered, Isabella confesses, and is executed. The putative moral of the tale, conveyed through the narrator's opening and Isabella's closing remarks, stresses the severity of punishment meted out to a breach of sacred vows.

The narrator introduces the tale with an indictment of broken vows: "Of all the Sins, incident to Human Nature, there is none, of which Heaven took so particular, visible, and frequent Notice, and Revenge, as on that of violated Vows, which never go unpunished."²⁴ Moving from the general to the particular, the narrator specifies the "degrees of Vows" and the "degrees of punishment" that accompany their dissolution: marriage is a solemn vow, the narrator admits, but one which pales in comparison to the holy promise of a religious one: "of all broken Vows, these are those, that receive the most severe and notorious Revenges of God" (211).

The passage emphasizes punishment without engaging directly the issues of individual guilt or responsibility. The dedication of the novel, however, does offer an oblique comment on the crime of vow-breaking. The dedicatee, Hortense Mancini, Duchess of Mazarin, fled a dismal marriage to a cruel husband and sought refuge in England; she became one of Charles II's mistresses and later received a pension from him. As Jacqueline Pearson notes, "[t]he dedication, with its convincing respect for Mancini, gives a different slant to a tale ostensibly about broken vows, suggesting that subjection to the church or to a husband need not necessarily be a virtue and that what the world calls female guilt may be understood in completely different ways."²⁵

The narrator addresses overtly this notion of mitigating circumstances in her gendered investigation of vow-breaking, concluding that men are biologically inclined towards a pattern of love, deceit, and abandonment, which they then impose on their otherwise virtuous lovers. Drawing upon a metaphor of suttee, the narrator describes unadulterated female nature as the apotheosis of fidelity: "For without all dispute. Women are by Nature more Constant and Just, than Men, and did not their first Lovers teach them the trick of Change, they would be Doves, that would never quit their Mates, and like Indian Wives, would leap alive into the Graves of their deceased Loves, and be buried quick with 'em" (211-212). So women's supposed fickleness, argues the narrator, is but a learned habit, "taught by the Lives of the Men" until it becomes an artificial second nature.

Wise from personal experience---"I once was design'd an humble Votary in the House of Devotion"---the narrator argues the impossibility of lifelong chastity and spiritual dedication, given the flightiness of youth and the power of beauty. The narrator herself narrowly escaped Isabella's fate by recognizing in time her inability to withstand worldly temptations: denied the serenity of the cloister, she avoids the shame of a broken pact with God. She inveighs against premature commitments to marriage and holy orders alike, tacitly aligning their similar requirements of honour, containment, and dedication. She desires "the prevention...of Mischiefs and Miserie, that Nunneries and Marriages were not to be enter'd into, 'till the Maid, so destin'd, were of a mature Age to make her own Choices." But, lamenting undue parental influence and her own inability to change custom or make laws, she leaves "the Young Nuns inclos'd to their best Endeavours, of making a Virtue of Necessity: and the young Wives, to make the best of a bad Market" (213).

With a few paragraphs, Behn and her narrator contextualize Isabella's actions. The plot details only accentuate these complexities, which begin at the story's outset, when Isabella is two and her

aristocratic, widowed father indulges his private emotions at the expense of his public responsibility: he divides her inheritance between the monastery to which he retires, and the nunnery in which he places Isabella. He assuages any guilt with instructions that: "if, at the Age of Thirteen, Isabella had not a mind to take Orders, she should have such a proportion of the Revenue, as should be fit to marry her to a Noble Man, and left it to the discretion of the Lady Abbess." The "known Piety" of his sister and her kinship with Isabella convince him of the "Justice" of his choices (213). But Count Henrick's decisions—forcing upon a daughter an extreme mourning for a mother she has barely known, renouncing his responsibility in matrimonial negotiations, housing his aristocratic public figure in a wholly private retreat—amount to a series of broken pledges. This renunciation of his patriarchal duty generates a pattern for Isabella, further developed by her childhood education, and then replicated in her widowhood.

The nunnery is a house of psychological manipulation and mercenary considerations: here Isabella will absorb the values that facilitate her own deceptions and crimes. Her aunt is "not a little proud" of her superb niece and is quite conscious of the "Credit"—both monetary and figurative—"she would do her House, by residing there for ever." Particularly loath to part with Isabella's "considerable Fortune, which she must resign, if she returned into the World," the Abbess "us'd all her Arts and Strategems to make her become a Nun, to which all the fair Sisterhood contributed their Cunning" (214). The nuns further contaminate their spiritual focus by asking all visitors how "Amours and Intrigues pass'd in the World" (235). With reverse psychology, the Abbess tries to seduce Isabella with stories of worldly pleasure, but is "very well pleased, to find her (purposely weak) Propositions so well overthrown" by the thirteen year-old Isabella. Even a brief foray into society cannot sway her, and she declares her readiness for holy vows. Her father visits and confesses, "[s]he had argu'd according to the wish of his Soul, and that he never believ'd himself truly happy, till this moment that he was assur'd, she would become a Religious" (216-217).

These manipulations and familial expectations burden Isabella and prevent her from developing her own conscience. Throughout the novella reiterated references to Isabella's reputation for piety and goodness emphasize her transformation from individual to exemplar. Her life acquires a proverbial quality distinct from her actual personality. "She became the whole Discourse of the Town. and Strangers spread her Fame. as prodigious. throughout the Christian World" (214); her "Virtues were the Discourse of all the World" (216); "her Life was a Proverb. and a [precedent]. and when [the townspeople] would express a very Holy Woman indeed. they would say. *She was a very ISABELLA*" (220). This distinction between self and reputation. exacerbated by a childhood education in hypocritical trickery. encourages Isabella to court public approval at the expense of personal principle. Many of Behn's heroines are similarly "caught between subject and object. between experiencing themselves as active and being seen as consumable commodities": this can lead to what Pearson terms "painful self-divisions".²⁶ Such divisions in Isabella enable a series of transgressions. ranging from the impropriety of a secret correspondence to the double murder of two husbands in one night.

The misdeeds originate in a small example of vow-breaking. and multiply incrementally. Of all her admirers. Isabella "lik'd Villenoy's the best." a preference which she admits in her heart but refuses to countenance. rejecting marriage with Villenoy's for dedication to God. Villenoy's nearly dies from grief: the remorseful Isabella placates him with the promise that "he was the first. and should be the last. that should ever make an Impression on her heart: that what she had conceiv'd there. for him. should remain with her to her dying day" (219).

Immediately after this pledge of lifelong fidelity (almost a mock marriage in its pledge of virginal regard to "dying day"). the narrator introduces Sister Katteriena's brother Henault. with whom Isabella falls violently in love. Her somatic responses---"Fits. Pains. and Convulsions" (225)---make clear the anguish of transgressive passion. here rendered in a doubly adulterous context:

she betrays God with her love for Henault and Villenoy to whom she has vowed eternal devotion. Edward Ward's misogynistic lexicon of feminine treachery applies here to Isabella, especially since her name remains publicly synonymous with virtue. "[S]he knew she could dissemble her own Passion, and make him the first Aggressor: the first that lov'd, or, at least, that should seem to do so" (228). She fools both Henault and his sister with a veneer of propriety, a sham serenity that the narrator describes as a "masterpiece...of art."

However, unlike Philadelphia's narrator, who stands bemused at her heroine's self-interest, the narrator of *The History of the Nun* is sympathetic to Isabella's plight. Thus Isabella's immodest announcement of love to Henault is qualified by a series of narratorial rationalizations. Isabella is alternately "by Nature innocent," unable to sustain her mask of indifference (232), even noble in her attempt to resist: "I have already said, she had try'd all that was possible in Human Strength to perform, in the design of quitting a Passion so injurious to her Honour and Virtue, and found no means possible to accomplish it" (235). Critics have suggested that Behn's duplicitous females are accorded narratorial forgiveness in such matters, because "their lack of power within society means that dissimulation can be their only resource."²⁷ But Isabella's social powerlessness does not preclude casuistic self-interrogation on the subject of vow-breaking:

to fly, and marry him: or, to remain for ever fix'd to her Vow of Chastity. This was the debate: she brings Reason on both sides: Against the first, she sets the Shame of a Violated Vow, and considers, where she shall shew her Face after such an Action: to the Vow, she argues, that she was born in Sin, and could not live without it: that she was Human, and no Angel, and that, possibly, that sin might be as soon forgiven, as another: that since all her Devout Endeavours could not defend her from the Cause, Heaven ought to excuse the Effect: that as to shewing her Face, so she saw that of Henault always turn'd...towards her with Love: what had she to do with the World, or car'd to behold any other. (236)

The shifting between philosophical abstractions and experiential immediacy, here conveyed by the intermittent present tense, is finally settled by recourse to romance to excuse her impropriety.

But what follows this is an escalating string of broken promises, dating from Henault's death in battle.

Behn renders Isabella's grief with convincing psychological realism that draws on the conventional association of nuns and widows. The veiling of both nuns and widows blots out their individual identity, while their dark colours and loose garb disallow vanity. A "widow often looked like a nun because both eschewed contemporary fashions....Just as nuns shaved off their hair, widows often hid it. And it is not fortuitous that 'nun's veiling'...was recommended for mourning."²⁸ But the analogy extends beyond mere costume. As with a nun, a modest widow rejects earthly distractions: "when God takes away the Mate of her bosom, reduces her to solitude, he do's [sic] by it sound a Retreat from the lighter Jollities and Gayeties of the World."²⁹ Spatially contained, the nun lives in isolation to encourage introspection and pious devotion; from another perspective, the absence of social compromise fosters the development of a "selfish and powerful ego."³⁰ Conduct books require that widows adjust inner emotions to external representation: "as in compliance with Civil Custom [the widow] immures her self, sits in darkness for a while," Allestree explains, "so she should put on a more retir'd Temper of Mind, a more strict and severe Behaviour: and that not to be cast off with her Veil, but to be the constant dress of her Widowhood."³¹

While Isabella at first behaves exactly as a faithful widow, she soon returns to her pattern of self-deception and broken promises. Behn's narrator speaks of convent walls as "inclosing" the nuns: Isabella spends the first year of her widowhood "thus inclos'd...never suffering the Visit of any Man, but of a near Relation" (244). Like Allestree's exemplum, Isabella hangs "her chamber with Black, and liv'd without the Light of Day: Only Wax Lights, that let her Behold the Picture of this Charming Man, before which she daily sacrific'd Floods of Tears" (244). Such evident sorrow again wins her public acclaim. The beautiful young widow gains "wondrous Fame" based on "Awe and Reverence," and once again all "men of Quality...Adore her." She rejects all

missives of courtship, although she permits the visits of Villenoy's, returned from the Turkish siege with details of Henault's martial valour and untimely death. Despite Villenoy's admiration, Isabella resolves "to marry no more, however her Fortune might require it" (244). A few scant paragraphs later, however, Isabella rescripts this intent: "She had made a Vow to remain three Years, at least, before she would marry again, after the Death of the best of Men and Husbands, and him who had the Fruits of her early Heart, and, notwithstanding all the Solicitations of Villenoy's, she would not consent to marry him, till her Vow of Widowhood was expir'd" (246). A masterful wordsmith, Isabella here clarifies, redefines, and reissues promises in an attempt to uphold her integrity while yielding to her changed will.

Despite her explicit vow to the contrary, fortune is precisely what motivates her marriage to Villenoy's. "[T]was for Interest she married again," the narrator frankly confesses. The romantic girl---"bred to a devout and severe Life" and eager to withstand material deprivation for Henault's love---has grown into a pragmatic widow. Listening idly for two years to Villenoy's fevered declarations, "what subdu'd her quite, was, That her Aunt, the Lady Abbess, dy'd, and, with her, all the Hopes and Fortunes of Isabella, so that she was left with only a Charming Face and Meen, a Virtue and a Discretion above her Sex" (245).

With Isabella's change of heart comes a change in the terms of her representation. Behn now develops the erotic resonances of the nun-widow figure: Villenoy's finds Isabella "in her Mourning, a thousand times more Fair": having loved her as a young nun, "he now ador'd her." (245). Ros Ballaster identifies the icon of the nun as "an erotic challenge": the veil renders her enigmatic, freely interpretable by both lover and reader. The devotional vows only augment her sexual appeal, and the focus of her fervour is easily "converted" from spiritual to bodily.³² The widow's veil carries the same blank power, reflecting for the spectator his own desire, the enticement of a sexual history, perhaps, or the possibilities of property willed by a late husband. Contemporary writers address in various manners the widow's allure. Richard Allestree warns

against the hypocrisy of widow's weeds as seductive adornment---"she that can make her Mourning-veil an optick to draw a new Lover nearer to her sight, gives cause to suspect the Sables were all without."³³ Edward Ward recounts the sexual narrative of the widow with revulsion: "thou [the husband of a widow] shalt have a branded Slut, like a Hell-hag, with a pair of Paps like a pair of Dung-pots".³⁴

Nun or widow, Isabella is sexually charged for Villenoy's. But Ward's strictures alert us to the dangers of such eroticism. The widow is a reminder of male mortality, a fleshly link between sex and death. The widow's body, which Edward Ward describes as "fram'd to the conditions of another man," is in Behn's portrayal latent with a homoerotic energy: the widow's lover was as a "Brother" to her late husband on the battlefield.³⁵ These ambivalences identify the sensual appeal of both widow and nun as at once powerful and repulsive. Henault thus experienced an unsettling mixture of dread and lust for the nun Isabella: could he "possess" Isabella "without Sacrilege"? Although "he ador'd the maid," he wonders "whether he should not abhor the Nun in his Embraces?" (229). His abhorrence must stem not only from her besmirched purity, but also from his knowledge of her capacity to break troth with God.

The ambivalence associated with the nun-widow figure allows Behn to explore the problem of female sexuality, even when licensed by a (re)marriage. Although Isabella lives with Villenoy's "more like a Nun still" in her austerity and wifely modesty, she is nevertheless punished for her delight in her second husband by the reappearance of her first. The narrator's descriptions of the transition from grieving widow to contented wife shield Isabella from opprobrious judgement: the widow mourns Henault at the beginning of her marriage "but she was prudent, and wisely bent all her Endeavours to please, oblige, and caress, the deserving Living, and to strive all she could, to forget the unhappy Dead...so that she had now transferr'd all that Tenderness she had for him, to Villenoy's" (247). Isabella's philanthropic approach to her barrenness---her charitable projects "make the Poor her Children"---accords with Allestree's recommendations ("tho' [the

Widow] no more encrease one Family. she may support many"). But even her modest activities while Villenoy is away hunting—needlework and prayers—cannot save her from the literal manifestation of her transgression. An "old rusty Fellow" shows up at Isabella's door and announces, "I was once the happy Man you lov'd" (249).

If we recall the narrator's introductory references to "degrees of punishment" for broken vows, we now understand the specifics: the retribution for a violated pledge of widowhood turns out to be a nullification of that widowhood. The desire for a second husband is penalized with the coexistence of the two. The remarriage is retrospectively tainted by material consideration: the death of the Lady Abbess crushes Isabella's testamentary expectations, and the narrator tells us that Isabella remarries "for Interest" (245). Notwithstanding its implicit development into true marital love, the second marriage is literalized as bigamous.

Isabella's murderous handling of the situation provokes diverse readings. It has been criticized by some as a "structural failure" of the novella, with its overly rapid conclusion and muddled focus: "Great attention is given to the conflict in Isabella's mind" but "she murders twice after hardly a paragraph of analysis, and until that point is never revealed as suffering any qualms of conscience about her choice."¹⁶ On the other hand, the text has been praised by others as a "remarkable study in the psychology of crime and guilt."¹⁷ But both observations ignore Behn's fundamental interest in the implications of female sexual experience. Isabella's shock at seeing Henault blossoms into a complex assessment of her respective feelings, past and present, for two husbands whom she has loved intimately. Henault's return makes her *un*widowed but doubly wived: she replicates in bigamy the two betrayals she first perpetrated at the convent in her early renunciations of Villenoy and God. She agonizes over the anticipated loss of her exemplary public image, once jeopardized by her convent defection and then at pains regained through a sober widowhood and seemingly wifehood.

The passage that describes Isabella's reaction verges on free indirect discourse, and in doing so conveys to the reader the narrator's sympathy. Behn's awareness of the censure attached to lubricious widows in particular and experienced women in general is revealed through Isabella's assumption that she deserves condemnation:

She finds, by [Henault's] Return, she is not only expos'd to all the Shame imaginable: to all the Upbraiding, on his part, when he shall know she is marry'd to another: but all the Fury and Rage of Villenoy's, and the Scorn of the Town, who will look on her as an Adulteress; She sees Henault poor, and knew, she must fall from all the Glory and Tranquillity she had for five happy Years triumph'd in: in which time, she had known no Sorrow, or Care, tho' she had endur'd a thousand with Henault. She dyes, to think, however, that he should know, she had been so lightly in Love with him, to marry again and she dyes, to think, that Villenoy's must see her again in the Arms of Henault: besides, she could not recall her Love, for Love, like Reputation, once fled, never returns more. (249)

"Frantick" with mortification, Isabella smothers Henault in his sleep. She tells Villenoy's that Henault died of shock upon hearing of her remarriage. The devoted Villenoy's resolves to throw the corpse in the river to save his wife from legal apprehension and scandal: the body is a literal souvenir of Isabella's sexual familiarity and thus injurious to her "Honour" now that she shares another man's bed.

This incident concentrates on the paradoxical pairing of purity and experience. Isabella's "Hellish" musings upon her crime stress the mortification of sexual notoriety over the guilt of murder: she designates the corpse "her Shame." Although Villenoy's has no knowledge of Isabella's crime, "[s]he imagin'd, that could she live after a Deed so black, Villenoy's would be eternal reproaching her, if not with his Tongue, at least with his Heart" (253). This phrase takes on a *double entendre*: Isabella refers in part here to the black deed of concupiscence. Villenoy's, unaware of the murder, would be forcibly reminded of Isabella's sexual experience by the corpse of her first husband. A man "loses half his Relish for the Enjoyment of [conjugal] Rights" with a widow, argues the True Penitent, "by the Reflection of [the widow's] having been heretofore

possessed by another." The widow is indisputably tarnished by prior experience, and the husband must treat her as a "second-hand Piece of Household Furniture...because he knows not how it may have been used, nor what secret Cracks, Flaws, or Stains it may have received by the Carelessness and ill Usage of the former Possessor."³⁸

Henault's body would also serve as a memorial catalyst for Villenoy's masculine failure, for while Isabella the nun wrote words of not-quite love to Villenoy, she risked excommunication and endured penury to marry Henault. Furthermore, Henault represents the first of Isabella's broken vows: the first pledge of lifelong devotion to Villenoy, the second pledge of chastity to God. Just as Isabella could not control her public image which circulated through the town with identifying epithets, so here she has no authority over her history of compromised honour. It is inextricably bound up in the bodies of her two husbands, and she murders both to destroy their narratorial potential.

Isabella's crime "radically subverts a conservative ideology."³⁹ She deliberately sews Villenoy's coat collar to Henault's body-sack, and her second husband drowns alongside the corpse of her first. Thus a needlework motif---and we recall that Isabella is sewing when Henault reappears---that generally signifies domesticity and appropriate feminine activity here introduces the corporeal reminder of Isabella's first marriage and its cluster of broken promises, and serves as the instrument of murder.

Although she does not excuse the murders, Behn extends an ambivalent sympathy to Isabella by describing the material contexts ("she sees Henault poor and knew, she must fall from all the Glory...") that in part influenced her criminal actions. When Villenoy's body is recovered and its eyes suddenly snap open and "fix" on Isabella, the townspeople are reluctant to read this according to their local superstitions---murder will out, etc.---not only because Isabella is known for great "Piety and Sanctity," but also because Villenoy had long since settled "by Will, all he

had...on Isabella." Thus "the World, instead of Suspecting her, Ador'd her the more, and every Body of Quality was already hoping to be the next" (256). Isabella's fatal effect on two husbands cannot deter the gold-diggers convinced of their ability to survive the widow and command her fortune.

It is in her downfall that the widow is at last able to unite her reputation for goodness with complementary actions and a full acknowledgment of her crimes and merited punishments. She confesses to the murders as soon as she is accused. Oddly sympathetic, the townspeople bewail "her Misfortune," emphasizing her choicelessness in the matter. But Isabella clearly acknowledges her responsibility. "Chearful and Easie" to the last, she replaces her private devotions with more public demonstrations, including what Allestree terms the only "consecration" of women's money: she donates all her wealth to "the Poor of the Town, especially the Poor Widows" (257). She mixes her alms with exhortations, especially to the young and beautiful, "never to break a Vow, for that was first the Ruine of her." The proximity of this admonition to the widow reference lets it stand for both of Isabella's betrayals of chastity, the vow of holy orders and the vow of widowhood. The execution unites the nun, the wife, and the widow: Isabella ascends the scaffold "all in Mourning" but "Chearful as a Bride," wearing a "Mourning Vail" that recalls her convent garb.

These images reproduce the significant stages of Isabella's life. Through the sympathetic examinations of a flawed individual and the misogyny implicit in the period's formulations of widowhood, Behn indicts in *The History of the Nun* the double standards that punish a woman for sexual history, suggesting that constructions of femininity subject any remarriage, specifically illegitimate in the economy of the plot, to implications of adultery. In *The Unfortunate Happy Lady*, Behn highlights the economics of a society that force a woman not only to participate through marriage as a pawn in her own sale, but also to replicate this commodified paradigm

even when she has the authority to empower other women. In both stories together, through the figure of the widow, she undercuts the potential for women's sexual and fiscal autonomy.

Jane Barker

The needlework motif used by Behn for ironic effect in *The History of the Nun* is adopted by Jane Barker to legitimize female writing in her 1726 novel, *The Lining of the Patchwork Screen*. As in the previous work, *A Patchwork Screen for the Ladies*, the central character, Galesia, offers interpolated narratives, poetry, and anecdotes as the "fabric" for a decorative screen.⁴⁰ Wary of the disrepute that posthumously coloured Behn's literary endeavours, but inspired by her imaginative energy, Barker "cannot stop retelling or imitating Behn's fiction" and "Philinda's Story out of the Book" is thus an unacknowledged revision of *The History of the Nun*.⁴¹ Taken together with the frame narrative, Barker's version is an unequivocal indictment of desirous women. It is a monitory account of the dangers inherent in female independence, whether through actual widowhood or a transgressive liberty that mimics the freedom of widowhood.

Barker radically compresses Behn's plot and significantly alters its essence. The protagonist is not the complex and psychologically realistic Isabella, but a nameless nun. The impersonal narrator of the tale refers to the wartime "Irregularities" that permit a beautiful young nun to instigate an amour with a handsome Cavalier: "nor did they stop there, but promis'd personal Enjoyment, and to live together as married People."⁴² Barker's nun suffers no immediate material punishment: she defects from the convent, marries, and "liv'd in the midst of Plenty and conjugal Happiness, till her Husband's Devoirs called him to the Army" (215) A friend of her husband's, "a good Man," the narrator says, stays behind to assist her.

Word comes that her husband is dead. Although the narrator describes the "disconsolate Relict" as suffering "many Days and Weeks in the utmost Disquietude", she does not undertake Isabella's

vow of perpetual widowhood and is rather matter-of-factly cured: "Time, which devours all things, by degrees drank up the Tears of the Widow." As with Villenoy's, so this unnamed friend is attracted to the widow's beauty and likewise to "that tender Affection which she daily express'd for the Loss of his good friend her Husband" (215). He proposes marriage. Again, with remarkable economy, the narrator describes the courtship, marriage, and climactic reappearance of the first husband: "How she received these Addresses at first, or by what degrees or steps he climbed into her Affection, is yet unknown; but so it was, in some time they were married together and lived happily enough, till the suppos'd dead Husband return'd, which was after they had been married but a few Weeks." She is shocked, but engages in "mutual Caresses" and then "resolve[s] his death, before her other Husband should return: for he was gone abroad" (215-216).

Only now do we encounter some narratorial commentary, a reproachful litany of the experiences shared by the nun and her first husband, ending with a bathetic comment upon the particular injustice of the murder. But unlike Behn's version, there is little particular emphasis placed on the violation of sacred vows. The broken pledge is just one of the nun's many nullified markers of love for her first husband.

for whose sake she had broke through the laws of God and her Country, dishonour'd her self and her Family: him, for whom she had shed a Flood of Tears, utter'd millions of Sighs and Lamentations, and was for divers Months the most disconsolate Creature living; yet had the Cruelty now to shed his Blood, who had given her no provocation, but on the contrary, had fatigue'd himself to a great degree with travelling far that day, to arrive at her Embraces. (216)

But this brief expression of narratorial interest ends with an abrupt refusal to explore the emotional complexities of the murderess: "No doubt, but her thoughts were greatly perplex'd at what she had done, and what to do when the other Husband should come home; which we will leave to the Consideration of any that shall hear the Story" (216). Interestingly, Barker's nun confesses to her second husband the details of her crime, which she defends as prompted by an

"Excess of Love" for him. Although he regards her "as a bloody and hateful Monster, never to be forgiven by God or Man," he decides it would be "cruel to expose her to the hand of Justice, for a Crime she had committed for his sake." He also assumes some responsibility for the tragedy, "turning his Wrath upon himself, for having supplanted his Friend, before greater assurances of his death" (217).

The most significant difference between Behn's and Barker's nuns is that Barker's kills her second husband accidentally. In addition, there is no tacit musing upon questions of sexual history or carnal shame. This is striking: Barker's character, we are told, engages in "mutual Caresses" with her first husband while married to her second, but there is neither self-reproach nor narratorial condemnation for this infidelity. (Behn's Isabella stays sexually chaste within the confines of her second marriage, but is crazed by the impropriety of her remarriage---which she considers from the perspectives of both husbands---and murders her way out of adultery back into widowhood).

Barker's nun and second husband both agree that their union was overly hasty, and they experience hysterical remorse. "[B]etween 'em," the narrator tells us, "they acted a miserable Scene of Horror." Thus the cause of the second death---fumbled needlework, "in her Fright, by mistake"---acquires overtones of providential vengeance, "demonstrating the power of God to punish sinners."⁴³ As with many of Barker's tales, this one concludes with a homiletic adage oddly incommensurate with the preceding melodrama: the bodies are found: "the miserable Lady soon confess'd, and told the Story, for which she received Punishment from the Hands of Justice, and in which she fulfilled the Proverb, *Marry in haste, and Repent at leisure*" (217). Jacqueline Pearson reads this ending as an attack on "female assertiveness."⁴⁴ But Barker's revisions of Behn, while emphasizing the disciplining of female desire, acknowledge male culpability. Thus, the second husband in "Philinda's Story out of the Book" admits to a sinful covetousness and a

consequentially rushed marriage to the widow. The providential government at work in Barker's tale metes out punishment to husband and widow alike.

Barker's frame narrative complements this little morality play. The married Philinda, who has told the story of the nun, manages her personal property in the spirited style of an independent widow. Her story is in turn narrated by Lady Allgood, who tells Galesia and company that Philinda "saved a little private purse to her self, unknown to her Husband; a way which many an excellent good Wife takes, whether to have something of their own fancied Property, and more directly at their Service, or only to have a little Cash to look on, matters not" (211). Barker's phrasing makes it clear that Philinda's separate purse is not pin money, stipulated in a settlement and paid with a husband's knowledge, but marital property kept secret for individual use. Philinda lends £50 "privately" to a gentleman friend, who likewise wants the loan kept secret from his wife. The process of repayment involves a clandestine correspondence, furtively seized and misinterpreted by the gentleman's wife, and quick negotiations in a hastily chosen locale, which turns out to be "a House of ill Repute" in the midst of a constabulary raid. Attempts at reparation are gender-specific: the gentleman flees at Philinda's urging, while she endures the disgrace of prison and her husband's public repudiation. A delayed confession from the gentleman and an explanation from his jealous wife finally resolve the confusion and all four individuals are happily reunited. The jealous wife alone receives narratorial reproof for her epistolary interception, "not only a great Indignity and Breach of good manners, but a Crime that deserves a Punishment, equal to that of picking Pockets, breaking a Lock, or the like" (214). Philinda and her husband agree "to have no more separate Purses each from other, whereby to cause Contention" and a disconcertingly inappropriate proverb---"*After a Storm comes a Calm*"---closes the tale.

The frame story, in addressing the jeopardy of women's writing, warns that a woman's text, with its reliance upon an uncontrollable exegesis, "may be misinterpreted, even used to define her

unjustly as a whore."⁴⁵ The repayment of the debt in a brothel conflates money and sex in terms that are reinforced by the subsequent penetration of the correspondence, misread as literally sexual. The final castigation of the meddling wife, with its emphasis on property crime, combined with Philinda's covert control of her finances, enforces further this anxiety about female empowerment, particularly one predicated on separate resources. The *Spectator* similarly condemns married women's protected property: "Separate Purses, between Man and Wife, are, in my Opinion, as unnatural as separate Beds. A Marriage cannot be happy, where the Pleasures, Inclinations and Interests of both Parties are not the same."⁴⁶ Because Philinda---a wife who tried to evade the strictures of coverture to disburse her property as might an independent widow---recounts the tale, it is transformed into a moral exemplum of what befalls willful women. Reading "Philinda's Story" in relation to Barker's frame narrative suggests that the conjunctions of desire and power, perilous for the female sex in general, become lethal in the hands of the widow.

Eliza Haywood

Eliza Haywood's varied literary career is usually divided into her 1720s amatory fiction and her post-1740 didactic novels, with the fallow 1730s representing a post-Dunciad turn from writing to acting. Thus the 1729 novella *The City Widow: or, Love in a Butt* exemplifies the transition from the sensationalism of female passion in *Love in Excess* (1719) to the taming of desire into conformist femininity in *The History of Betsy Thoughtless* (1751). Haywood's recurrent explorations of "the problem of female identity within a social context" are likewise played out in *The City Widow*, although to date there has been no specific consideration of this novella.⁴⁷ The "profound melancholia and pessimism" that in general mark Haywood's depiction of female possibilities are in *The City Widow* revealed through the stereotyped characterizations of the widow as strong, predatory and lubricious at the outset of the text, and restrained, fearful and

victimized by the end.⁴⁸ The mobility of the remarrying widow, as in Behn and Barker, once more generates the key tensions of the plot.

The City Widow begins with a dedication that anticipates the novel's key concerns: the dedicatee, "Mrs. Burscoe Relict of Mr. John Burscoe, Vintner," is a paragon of middle-class gentility whose "perfections," though "highly conspicuous of themselves," shine more brightly when compared to Haywood's protagonist: "it [is] impossible to consider the faults of my Widow, without applauding the excellent conduct You have maintain'd, since the death of your justly lamented Spouse."⁴⁹ The mundane details of Mrs. Burscoe's status as the well-behaved widow of a vintner recall the text's title, with its suggestion of urban modernity, but the poetic epigraph that introduces the dedication incorporates a pastoral reference to "the chaste Sylvander." Ros Ballaster argues that Haywood's amatory narratives "reinscribe the 'truth' of woman's oppression at the hands of men," but seek to compensate female readers with "the pleasures of fiction."⁵⁰ *The City Widow*, however, initially engages the reader with a lusty presentation of female libido, safely removed from realism through its heavy reliance on classical allusions, and then proceeds to close the text with a dark portrayal of female isolation. Despite the widow's sexual and social transgressions, Haywood's narrator is sympathetic. Because the widow is rich and isolated, she is prey for grasping servants and mercenary relatives. Kirsten T. Saxton maintains that it is not desire per se that dooms the Haywoodian heroine, "but her lack of awareness of how to negotiate that desire within a heterosexual marketplace."⁵¹ Saxton's comment is particularly apt for the widow: because she is amorous but wholly rejects the (re)marriage marketplace, she is particularly vulnerable to the threat of notoriety.

The opening references to Bacchus, Cupid, and Hymen set up an antithesis between sober marriage and lascivious intoxication. The protagonist's name, Bacchalia, aligns her with wine and revelry. Her recent widowhood permits an indulgence that generates sexual appetite⁵²: "She now indulg'd herself in rich Tokay, Frontignac and Hermitage, whose generous influence, renew[ed]

that vigour the approaches of age had somewhat impair'd" (6). Haywood introduces a classical superstructure of controlling forces—Bacchalia seems a mere plaything upon which Hymen may revenge "his Antagonists Deities"—which promises a mythological romance, but the conceit is essentially dropped after the initial presentation. Sylvander is the focus of Bacchalia's desire: he is divinely programmed to love Bacchalia but only within the bounds of marriage, the "burthen" from which Bacchalia has just been "happily deliver'd" by the death of her husband (6).

At first the childless Bacchalia appears to belong to Haywood's panoply of "unnatural" and "aggressive" females, wealthy and therefore powerful enough to satisfy their desires at the risk of social condemnation.⁵³ "A very few days after their acquaintance," Bacchalia confesses her love to Sylvander and attempts to seduce him with lots of wine in a private room. "They drank, they kiss'd, they toyed away the hours, yet still Sylvander contain'd himself within the bounds of modesty," much to Bacchalia's dismay (7). The widow, "quite wild with the ungovernable flame," immediately mounts a campaign of physical caresses that the narrator describes in martial terms and in increasing detail. The scene deliberately inverts the more usual seduction trajectory in its imagined exchange of genders—"the modest Sylvander had been in danger of a Rape, from the vehement extasies of the enamour'd Bacchalia"—and in Bacchalia's evasion of Sylvander's marriage proposals, a rejection of the usual feminine aspiration, to which the narrator responds with incredulity (8-9). But finding that she can neither relinquish the potential "enjoyment" of Sylvander nor subdue his sexual propriety, Bacchalia "at last purpos'd once more to reconcile herself to the nuptial bonds" (9).

Widows are entitled to assuage their desire in a remarriage. It is scripturally licensed as an alternative to unbounded concupiscence (the famous Pauline contention that "it is better to marry than to burn," 1 Cor. 7:9). Continence is deemed "God's Gift," in Thomas Dilworth's tract; in the absence of this gift, widows are "not...at all the more culpable, if they make use of the Remedy that Providence has provided, viz *Matrimony*."⁵⁴ But in the economy of this novella, the

possibility of remarriage unlocks a host of repercussions. Revealed now is the social analogy to Bacchalia's sexual transgressions: her carnal liberties are replayed as class inversions. Bacchalia puts herself in the power of her maid Betty by asking her advice about the wisdom of the proposed marriage. Betty, "knowing it to be infinitely more for her interest to keep her Mistress in a single state," responds with a plan of attack against remarriage which uses the vocabulary of contemporary widow tracts (9).⁵⁵

Betty's psychological strategy draws for support on the arguments of both Edward Ward and Richard Allestree. Ward contends that "[i]t is seldom or never seen, that a Man marrieth with a Widow for her Beauty nor for her Personage, but only for her Wealth and Riches."⁵⁶ Allestree, in turn, summarizes the etiquette of remarriage according to two criteria, an adequate interval of time between husbands, and "the Equality of the Match." Only "frenzy" and "madness" result when an older widow settles upon a younger husband: such a remarriage, "an inversion of Seasons," makes a "mongrel" calendar of May and December. "No young Man" who does not require a widow's fortune "will take her Person. For tho' some have the humour to give great rates for inanimate Antiquities, yet none will take the living *gratis*." Artifice cannot help: "she may buy beauty, and yet can never make it her own: may Paint, yet never be fair." And because death cannot dissolve such skewed unions quickly enough to suit young husbands,

the Man bids adieu to the Wife, tho' not to her Fortune, takes that to maintain his luxuries elsewhere, allows her some little Annuity, and makes her a Pensioner to her own Estate. So that he has his design, but she none of hers: he married for her Fortune, and he has it: she for his Person, and has it not: and which is worse, buy's her defeat with the loss of all, he commonly leaving her as empty of Money as he found her of Wit.

The abundance of cautionary historical precedents robs the widow-wife of pity from friends and substitutes "censures and reproaches....Women in this condition can expect no mild descants on them."⁵⁷

With such arguments Betty fans the fears of Bacchalia, who has "all the timidity incident to her sex and trembled when she reflected on a husband's power." Betty encourages Bacchalia's sexual insecurities: were Sylvander truly in love, he would never have been able to resist Bacchalia's charms. Rather, "the love, he is possess'd of, is for your fortune: your person is the least happiness he aims at," and once he appropriates Bacchalia's separate property through coverture, he will neglect her entirely (10). The maid then enlists the support of Bacchalia's greedy relatives, who fear testamentary loss through remarriage. They "besieg[e]" her with a "battery" of remonstrances against the "unequal match," thereby insinuating the spectre of social humiliation described by Allestree (11). The maid is in full control of the mistress, concocting narratives of delay for Sylvander, accepting his bribes, controlling his access to Bacchalia. There is a repeated attempt at seduction, a reiterated litany of Bacchalia's desperate "indecencies", and, after Bacchalia's indictment of Sylvander's sexual failings ("He cannot, sure, be a Man...and have contained himself as he has done"), Betty ensures Bacchalia's commitment to "[n]ever to put a man in possession of her Fortune, who promis'd so little to oblige her Person" (16). Although Bacchalia yearns for extended intimacies with Sylvander, she cannot yield "to the tye of Wedlock: so deeply had the lessons of her friends, join'd to her own aversion to that state, work'd on her more libertine inclinations" (18-19). Sylvander presses marriage as an ultimatum.

Unwilling to sacrifice her widow's liberty of conduct and fortune, fearful of humiliation both social and emotional, and bolstered by the self-interest of her naysaying kin, she plots rejection through the insult of a third-party farewell: she has her cousin Hammonia effect the break with Sylvander. This stratagem has an unexpected narrative consequence: up to now we have had no physical sense of Bacchalia beyond Sylvander's ongoing attraction but Hammonia's accusation locates the widow in the commodified hell as recorded by Ward and Allestree: "the plainness of [Bacchalia's] person admits no room to believe a man of your age and good taste in beauty, can be greatly charm'd with any thing, besides her fortune" (20). Sylvander protests this mercenary slander, and his inherent goodness is proven by his initial reluctance to taint Bacchalia's

reputation with details of their amours. notwithstanding that his history of their relationship would clear his blackened name. But a last meeting with an unresponsive Bacchalia. "being either not mov'd with his reproaches in reality or affecting an indifference to them." converts Sylvander's love into rage.

The fantastic romance of Greek gods and scheming widows has been progressively redefined over the course of the narrative according to realist imperatives. but Haywood makes *The City Widow* entirely contemporary when she invokes the terms of the anti-widow tracts that circulated throughout the eighteenth-century literary marketplace. Edward Ward's dedicates his misogynistic hyperbole to "the Apprentices of London" in an attempt to save them from the widowed "Vultures in Peacocks Plumes." Likewise. the spurned Sylvander threatens to publish Bacchalia's indiscretions: "tho' his generosity had hitherto prevail'd to conceal the encouragement he had receiv'd from her. he wou'd now expose the whole story in the *Publick News Papers*" (25). Haywood stresses the notion of a punitive broadcast with two further references. Sylvander's futile endeavours to reap "a return of the expences. the Fair Deceiver had caus'd him to be at" animate his desire for retribution: he inquires of Bacchalia's kin "whether his resolution of publishing the facts could be stil'd ungenerous or base" after her offensive behaviour (29). deeming such journalism "a piece of justice to his sex. that no more of them shou'd be deluded by the artifices of Bacchalia and her Maid. to waste their time. their fortunes. and forfeit their more precious piece [sic] of mind" (28).

Haywood rewrites the destructive power dynamic of a mismarrying widow as an equally harmful social contravention. Bacchalia avoids the potential humiliation of an opportunistic young husband but is threatened with the published shame of sexual misconduct. a situation exacerbated by her inappropriate reliance on predatory inferiors. Surprisingly constant in her love for Sylvander. Bacchalia sends Betty to find her paramour: Sylvander likewise beseeches Betty to be intermediary to his beloved. Cunning and shrewd. however. Betty acts to prevent any

remarriage: while Bacchalia remains an "independent" widow, Betty "is entrusted to the whole management of her affairs," which she slants to her own advantage, but "cannot expect to have the same opportunity of cheating [her mistress] when married" (17). Defeated at last, Sylvander retreats to the country, where the narrator hopes his family and vocational possibilities may obliterate the memory of Bacchalia's false charms.

Conned by her family into rejecting Sylvander, forestalled in her illicit attempts at reunion by the treachery of her own maid, Bacchalia's despair extends beyond the close of the story:

To this day the fair Languisher remains in the utmost uncertainty and grief: irresolute, remorseful, timorous, and terrify'd, between the imagin'd resentment of the noble-minded Sylvander, and the bugbear remonstrances of her unfaithful servant, and some of her kindred. (30)

The libidinous widow who plotted liaisons at the beginning of the text belongs to the world of comic romance. This world subsequently darkens as the widow is subjected to conflicts between personal desire and public reputation, between the denial of seduction and the imprisonment of remarriage. The romance is then wholly displaced by the widow's final victimization: she is alienated and subject to the plots of both her avaricious kin and her servant. Haywood's narrative moral recalls Barker's simplistic maxims---"How little it is...in the power of riches to bestow true happiness"---and thus seems to recall the genres of fable or morality tale. But her commentary quickly becomes gender-specific:

to what numberless inconveniencies [sic] is a Woman of fortune expos'd! Those, who have the least prospect of gaining by her, scruple not to sacrifice the quiet of her whole life, when it promises gratification of their mercenary wishes (30).

This particularization, combined with the characterization of the widow as sexually powerful but socially duped, makes clear Haywood's outrage at the cultural impediments to female autonomy, notwithstanding a wealthy widowhood that might have granted personal liberty. She registers

through the widow her discouragement: although the widow is empowered by fortune, she cannot control her intellectual property---the self-story that is her reputation---because definition remains a masculine prerogative. David Oakleaf observes in a related context that Haywood "confronts directly the social conventions which, by making female desire unspeakable, silence her protagonists."⁵⁸ Here she explores the widow's double transgression---the gender inversion that makes Bacchalia the active suitor and her rakish desire for liaisons without remarriage---that ultimately doom her to isolation. Only Betty, paradoxically free in her servant status from the constraints of genteel conduct, acts with initiative and remains unpunished. The negation of romance potential and the reduction of the widow from her initial power to her final dependence, however, weights *The City Widow* with a pessimism about the potential authority of gentlewomen in eighteenth-century society.

Within the generic confines of these early eighteenth-century short fictions---the novella, the tale, the moral exemplum---Behn, Barker and Haywood all reveal a surprising pessimism about the viability of the widow's autonomy: unsurprisingly, perhaps, the complications arise from remarriage, whether actual or contemplated. Remarriage not only reinserts the *feme sole* into the familiar constraints of coverture, but it also makes explicit the question of chastity through the widow's unsettled status as neither virgin nor wife. Contemporary categories of femininity do not on the whole have the elasticity to accommodate an experienced woman's sexual history. Whether it is the reappearance of a dead husband, or the menace of public scandal, a remarrying widow's sexual probity is available for others to exploit. Those fictional widows who escape the charges of lubricity and possess enough property to exercise authority may negotiate their own remarriage, but are denied the benevolence to make their success social by establishing the marital and material happiness of any women under their control.

In subsequent chapters, I consider a range of works that use widows to represent the cultural impediments to female autonomy. Frances Sheridan's *Memoirs of Miss Sidney Bidulph* limits the agency of widows, allowing only those opposed to her heroine, and playing peripheral roles, a full realization of their wills, both behavioural and testamentary. In Sarah Scott's and Clara Reeve's novels, widows occupy more central positions and are able to utilize their independence for social good within discrete communities or partnerships; those who are isolated, however, are still vulnerable to predatory forces. But whatever the particular roles assigned the widows in these novels, all three writers query the century's gradual replacement of dower law with private jointure settlements by highlighting the violability of these contracts and its detrimental consequences to the widow.

¹Allestree. *The Ladies Calling* (1673) 12th ed. (London, 1727), II. 242.

²Ibid. II. 236-37.

³Ros Ballaster. *Seductive Forms: Women's Amatory Fiction from 1684-1740* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1992), 191.

⁴Much Behn criticism has been combined with biographical analysis: Sara Heller Mendelson notes that Behn was herself likely a widow, with her "probable marriage in 1664" and "widowhood a year or two later." *The Mental World of Stuart Women* (Brighton: Harvester, 1987), 121.

⁵John J. Richetti in his introduction to the tale admits that Isabella remains "a sympathetic figure even when she murders two husbands," but unequivocally describes the "passion and self-interest that transfor[m] her at length into a monster." *Popular Fiction by Women 1660-1730* eds. Paula R. Backscheider and John J. Richetti (Oxford: Clarendon, 1996), 2.

⁶Paul Salzman, ed. *An Anthology of Seventeenth-Century Fiction* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1991), xxv.

⁷Most critics agree that references to a still-reigning Charles II require a pre-1685 date of composition: Salzman, *Anthology*, xxv; Frederick M. Link, *Aphra Behn* (New York: Twayne, 1968), 136; George Woodcock, *Aphra Behn: The English Sappho* (1948) (Montreal: Black Rose, 1989), 167.

⁸Pearson, "Gender and Narrative in the Fiction of Aphra Behn," *The Review of English Studies* (1991), 179.

⁹Richard Allestree writes in *The Ladies Calling* that "the principal and most distinct scenes, in which a Woman can be suppos'd regularly to be an actor, are these three, Virginity, Marriage, and Widowhood." II. 2.

¹⁰Aphra Behn, *The Unfortunate Happy Lady*, in *The Works of Aphra Behn* ed. Janet Todd (London: William Pickering, 1995), Vol. III, 365. All further references to this work will be noted parenthetically within my text.

¹¹In terms of narrative mode, Link dubs the story "a romance with many realistic details." *Aphra Behn*, 136. Janet Todd comments on Behn's prose works as "helter-skelter" storytelling which "mingl[es] fact and fiction," noting that "characters are named from the romance, despite the contemporary and sordid nature of their predicaments. Todd, *The Sign of Angellica* (London, Virago, 1989), 76. Paul Salzman concludes that the terms "romance" and "realism" are too limited to be useful for Behn's *oeuvre*; rather, Behn works "within a series of conventions which do not distinguish between romance and realism in this way....Behn is aware of the popularity of both the elevated hero of romance and the detailed description of setting, and so puts both devices to good use." Salzman, *English Prose Fiction 1558-1700* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1985), 314.

¹²Counsellor Fairlaw anticipates by thirty years Mrs. Peachum's oft-quoted advice to her daughter Polly: "The comfortable Estate of Widow-hood, is the only hope that keeps up a Wife's Spirits. Where is the Woman who would scruple to be a Wife, if she had it in her Power to be a Widow whenever she pleas'd?" *The Beggar's Opera* 1.10 (1728).

¹³Fairlaw, pressed thus to marry a beautiful young woman, promises "to fulfill [his wife's] Will". This phrasing plays on the gendered differences between testamentary and behavioural will. Whereas a man had the power to make conditional his wife's jointure and through his testamentary will perpetuate her widowhood, here a wife wills of her husband an undeniably attractive second marriage.

¹⁴Ward, *Female Policy Detected*, 64-65.

¹⁵Phillis Cunningham and Catherine Lucas, *Costumes for Births, Marriages and Deaths* (London: A. and C. Black, 1972), 152.

¹⁶Pearson, "Gender and Narrative," 180.

¹⁷*Ibid.* 180.

¹⁸Salzman, *Anthology*, xxv-vi.

¹⁹Janet Todd notes in Behn's work a commitment to "the power of love and the need for it to exist between people for its own sake and not be transformed into a commodity, an item to be exchanged for money, influence, or selfish gratification." The royalist Behn, Todd observes, privileged the "love and liberation" symbolized by the court of Charles II. and rejected the ethic of puritanism as well as its economic corollary of commercialism. Todd does not treat *The Unfortunate Happy Lady* directly, but her comments work productively in the context of the novella. Todd, *Sign of Angellica*, 70, 72. See also Salzman, *Anthology*, xxv; Woodcock, *Aphra Behn*, 168. Link disagrees with Woodcock's estimation of the story as "told with masterly conciseness" and instead refers to it as crudely episodic, "one of the weakest of Mrs. Behn's stories." Link, *Aphra Behn*, 137.

²⁰Edward Ward, *Female Policy Detected: or, The Arts of a Designing Woman Laid Open* (London, ?1725), 11.

²¹Allestree, *The Ladies Calling*, II, 236.

²²Pearson, "The History of *The History of the Nun*," in *Rereading Aphra Behn* ed. Heider Hutner (Charlottesville: Virginia UP, 1993), 239.

²³Pearson, "The History," 245-246; Ballaster, *Seductive Forms*, 100-02.

²⁴Aphra Behn, *The History of the Nun* in *The Works of Aphra Behn*, ed. Janet Todd, Vol. III, 211. All subsequent citations will be noted within my text.

²⁵Pearson, "The History," 244. Pearson adds that the Comtesse de Soissons, one of Mancini's sisters, had been accused of murdering her husband, strengthening the dedicatory link between Mancini and the story's happenings.

²⁶Pearson, "Gender and Narrative," 48.

²⁷*Ibid.* 49.

²⁸Cunnington, *Costumes for Births, Marriages, and Deaths*, 153.

²⁹Allestree, *The Ladies Calling*, II, 230.

³⁰Salzman, *Popular Fiction by Women 1660-1730*, 2.

³¹Allestree, *The Ladies Calling*, II, 231.

³²Ballaster, *Seductive Forms*, 100-01. "Behn, never slow to recognize popular trends, must have realized the potential of the figure of the nun in amatory fiction following the publication of Sir Roger L'Estrange's translation of the *Portuguese Letters* in 1678. Many of her 'little histories' exploit the topos of the desiring nun." (101).

³³Allestree, *The Ladies Calling*, II, 238-39.

³⁴Ward, *Female Policy Detected*, 67.

³⁵*Ibid.* 93.

³⁶Link, *Aphra Behn*, 145.

³⁷Woodcock, *Aphra Behn*, 207.

³⁸True Penitent, *The Folly, Sin, and Danger of Marrying Widows* (London, 1746), 13.

³⁹Pearson glosses the narrator's comment on Isabella's dark plans—"when Fate begins to afflict, she goes through stitch with her Black Work"—as follows: "Fate, more usually imaged spinning, is here seen as a seamstress ironically like Isabella herself, and the idiomatic phrase 'through

stitch.' meaning 'thoroughly, completely.' has its last element taken absolutely literally. 'Black Work' may seem a general phrase to refer to the sinister activity of Fate, but more specifically it also refers to a fashionable kind of fine embroidery. By these puns, Fate is seen as a sewing woman like Isabella, and needlework, conventionally an image of female subordination, becomes a locus of female power. Such paradoxes emphasize Isabella's ambiguous status as virtuous murderess, innocent adulteress." Pearson, "The History," 248-49.

⁴⁰Jane Spencer explains that "Galesia's story of her writing career is thus set in a framework which justifies it by relating it to feminine accomplishments." *The Rise of the Woman Novelist* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell), 68. The framework of ladies chatting and "lining" the screen with their narrative efforts "is a deliberate attempt to sell female fiction to a wider audience by making it eminently respectable." Richetti, *Popular Fiction*, 239.

⁴¹Pearson, "The History," 241.

⁴²Jane Barker, *The Lining of the Patchwork Screen in The Galesia Trilogy and Selected Manuscript Poems of Jane Barker*, ed. Carol Shiner Wilson, 214. All further page references will be inserted into my text.

⁴³Pearson, "The History," 249.

⁴⁴Ibid, 249.

⁴⁵Ibid, 242. Given Barker's overarching motif of needlework to authorize female creation, this is a particularly provocative story.

⁴⁶*Spectator* ed. Donald F. Bond (Oxford: Clarendon, 1965), February 7, 1712, vol. 3, 53.

⁴⁷Mary Anne Schofield, "Expose of the Popular Heroine: The Female Protagonists of Eliza Haywood," *Studies in Eighteenth-Century Popular Culture* 12 (1983), 96.

⁴⁸Ballaster, *Seductive Forms*, 169.

⁴⁹Eliza Haywood, *The City Widow: or, Love in a Butt*, London (1729), 3. All further references will be incorporated in my text.

⁵⁰Ros Ballaster, *Seductive Forms*, 195.

⁵¹Saxton, *The Passionate Fictions of Eliza Haywood* eds. Kirsten T. Saxton and Rebecca P. Bocchicchio (Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 2000), 4.

⁵²The Widow-club described in the *Spectator*, similarly enjoys a bottle or two: as in Haywood's text, there is an explicit linkage of alcoholic and sexual thirsts: "As [the widows] have most of them the misfortune to be troubled with the colic, they have a noble cellar of cordials and strong waters. When they grow maudlin, they are very apt to commemorate their former partners with a tear. But ask them which of their husbands they condole, they are not able to tell you: and discover plainly that they do not weep so much for the loss of a husband as for the want of one." *Spectator*, vol. 4, 517.

⁵³Richetti in *Popular Fiction* uses these adjectives to describe Aloisa in *Love in Excess*, 188: Ballaster observes that Haywood's fictions "abound with representations of vicious, libidinous, usually older women who....transform themselves into art objects in order to seduce the young lovers they pursue in their attempt to control and direct the amatory scene." *Seductive Forms*, 177.

⁵⁴Dilworth, *An Advocate for the Ladies*, 48.

⁵⁵Haywood anticipates here the relationship of Lady Booby and Mrs. Slipslop in *Joseph Andrews*.

⁵⁶Ward, *Female Policy Detected*, 66.

⁵⁷ Allestree. *The Ladies Calling*. II. 238. 243-45.

⁵⁸ Eliza Haywood. *Love in Excess* ed. David Oakleaf (Peterborough: Broadview, 2000). 12.

Chapter Three: Widows and Will(s) in *Memoirs of Miss Sidney Bidulph*

In *Memoirs of Miss Sidney Bidulph* (1761), Frances Sheridan considers the viability of female agency within a culture that valued passivity and obedience in its women. This epistolary sentimental novel details its heroine's exemplary submission to parental authority and the tragedies that result from the conflicts between duty and desire.¹ However, the novel is dysphoric only from the vantage point of the heroine: there are numerous widows, crucial to the plot, who possess agency to great effect.² In the economy of this novel, a legacy of manlessness transfers to widows the consequence and impunity of patriarchal will: their elections are almost invariably honoured as they manipulate Sidney's tractability in order to satisfy their material and emotional needs. In a larger socio-juridical context, however, Sheridan, as will Scott and Reeve, concerns herself with the violability of jointure, the elasticity of the law, and the ultimate subservience of all widows to the patriarchy that controls them.

Recent scholars concentrate on the gender issues at play in *Sidney Bidulph*. Several note the subversiveness of a novel that at once urges and undercuts the behavioural standard required of eighteenth-century women.³ The novel valorizes benevolence and compassion, which it codes as feminine attributes, but at the same time demonstrates that these virtues "inevitably form social victims...who are powerful only in the fact that they can entail misery on those who love them."⁴ Patricia Meyer Spacks finds a "curious aggressiveness" in the novel's handling of its recurrent theme, "the entire subordination of 'good' women not only to men but to other forms of familial authority."⁵ However, she also observes that the novel features women who satisfy their transgressive desires without any evidence of narrative correction: "[t]he more violent these women are in claiming authority over their own lives and over those of others, the more likely they seem to get what they want."⁶

These women get what they want because all are widows. Their desires directly animate the events in the novel. Lady Bidulph's experience of and reaction to a blighted romance in her youth "really form the major action of the story. From this event all else springs."⁷ Rich widows—Lady Bidulph and Lady Grimston—define the outcome of all love plots and undermine testamentary and jointure settlements. Appetitive widows—Mrs. Gerrarde and the widow Arnold—destroy Sidney's marriage, bankrupt her husband's estate, and make public her private humiliations. A widow of no material wealth—Mrs. Vere—mortifies Sidney into a loveless marriage and serves as a sharp warning against the behavioural and testamentary evils of female will.

Even widows who do not play an independent part in the text possess narrative significance. Formally, Cecilia provides the narrative frame, acting as the intended reader for the entirety of the one-sided epistolary novel, editing the accumulated letters in the interests of both focus and discretion, and keeping the manuscript safely for some fifty years until it is re-considered and published at the request of her son's friend. She also voices the overt Christian message in the novel, which considers the lack of 'poetic justice' at work in the story: "to use the good things of this life with that indifference....to consider the evils which befall us, as equally temporary, and no more dispensed by the great ruler of all things for punishments, than the others are for rewards."⁸ And Ned Warner's prosperity, which expeditiously saves Sidney from ruin, is widow-derived: "I married the widow of a merchant, with whom I got an immense fortune. This lady I truly loved" (363).

While virtually every widow in *Sidney Bidulph* is empowered to pursue her version of happiness, the heroine's sorrows only multiply in widowhood. Sidney's active generosity with her tiny jointure impresses Ned Warner into endowing her with money and property. But this wealth levels the material inequality between her and Faulkland and facilitates their marriage, allowing her to accept as a rich dowager what she had declined as a poor widow. This one, belated attempt at satisfying desire yields a bigamous remarriage, a suicide, and unending grief. The novel will

reward agency in the peripheral characters but Sheridan draws attention to the combative forces of initiative and convention by disallowing Sidney positive authority in widowhood, no matter how moneyed or propertied.

The Climate of Conduct

While the ambiguous status of widows attracted the attention of pamphleteers, conduct books were primarily interested in addressing problems of female will as these applied to young women. These texts carved the female life into three degrees of matrimonial relationship, denominated by Kathryn Shevelow as "wives, past wives (widows), future wives (daughters or other young unmarried women), or ineligible (mistresses, cast mistresses, prostitutes)."⁹ The issue of female initiative is almost wholly confined to daughters and wives: widowhood, with all its worrying potentiality for female determination, is rather vaguely advertised as a time for modest retirement and philanthropic works.

Sidney Bidulph was written before the second great wave of conduct literature published in the 1770s (by, amongst others, John Fordyce, John Gregory, and Hester Chapone). The behavioural imperatives that cause conflict in the novel—an unquestioning obedience to parental and spousal authority—find their correlative in seventeenth-century conduct writers, such as the Marquis of Halifax and Richard Allestree, whose texts continued to circulate in the following century.¹⁰ The notion of female compliance—described variously as subjection, subservience, and meekness—punctuates both the patriarchal doctrine and the dissenting assertions of Mary, Lady Chudleigh and Mary Astell. The male conservatives tend to enlist scriptural tradition to endorse their views.¹¹ John Sprint in *The Bride-Woman Counsellor* (1699) writes that a woman who flouts authority "doth wickedly pervert the end of her creation."¹² Allestree likewise condemns female insubordination as a spiritual contravention: "Since Gods assignation has thus determined subjection to be the womens lot, there needs no other argument of its fitness, or for their

acquiescence."¹³ He discounts the possibility of rejecting parental guidance even when it is inappropriate: wifehood is merely an extension of childhood conformity.¹⁴ From a protofeminist perspective, Chudleigh and Astell express bitterness at the inequities of marriage and especially at the deference required of a wife for an inferior husband but in the end they too counsel submission.¹⁵ A wife's suppression of her will is both pragmatic and moral, protecting her from malicious gossip and granting her an "inward joy...which naturally arises from the apprehension of having done good and laudable actions."¹⁶ She should employ a religious perspective to solace any marital unhappiness: the "prospects of heavenly rewards" are paradoxically the only earthly comforts available.¹⁷

Widows, on the other hand, are evidently perplexing to conduct writers. God, according to Richard Allestree, considers widows "sad wracks" because they are "masterless." They are seen on occasion as helpless relicts, devoid of social status ("widows and orphans" are often linked together, consonant in their lack of power, protection, and resources); alternatively they are presented in the context of dowagers left wealthy with land and jointure, described with rancour by one pamphleteer as "libertine...know[ing] No Laws but their own Passions, no Restraint but the Limits of their Fortunes."¹⁸ Allestree alludes to these powerful women too, denouncing them as unwittingly miserable, but his description is brief and unparticularized. His later chapter devoted to widows generalizes its strictures. He privileges a sustained widowhood, counsels "a more retir'd Temper of Mind, a more strict and severe Behaviour," advises against differences of age and fortune in the event of a remarriage, reminds the widow to guard her children from financial mismanagement, and praises a personal disbursement of alms as the highest vocational calling: the widow's soul achieves benediction "by a Charitable dispensing"; reason, conscience, and future salvation are simultaneously secured with a commitment to "seasonable Alms."¹⁹ The importance placed on charity strives to contain a rich widow's liberty to spend her time and money.

In contrast to the pious directives of *The Ladies Calling* are those misogynistic tracts which lambaste widows as froward, boozy gossips implicated in deception, lechery and trickery of all kinds. "[W]hen a widow seems fond of your conversation, besure 'tis through Design" because "the Love of a Widow is politick and deceitful."²⁰ Widows are "much more desirous then [sic] Men....Therefore, in making Love never mind denials, for their Hearts seldom go with their Tongues, eager for what they seem to slight and refuse."²¹ The widow Dramanthe, who exemplifies vice in the True Penitent's tract, is, "tho' a young Woman...an old Hypocrite, and a grievous Offender against the Rules of Female Sobriety and Decorum." In her second marriage, she has a liaison with her man-servant because he supplies her with the drink that her new husband forbids. Detailing her transgressions, the author presents this biography as metonym for all widows:

Almost every English widow, in some Degree resembles Dramanthe. 'Tis true, they are not all guilty of Drunkenness, or Adultery...but I venture safely to affirm, that most of them are degenerated from the Virtuous Simplicity and Innocence of their Virgin State.²²

The bulk of Dramanthe's "crimes" are committed while she is a wife for the second time. But the author associates them explicitly with her previous state, presenting the corruptions of widowhood as infectiously seeping into a subsequent marriage.

Between these extremes---Allestree's selfless paragon of modesty and the lubricious shrew of contemporary tracts---lies Sheridan's more verisimilar depiction of widowhood. Although the widows in *Sidney Bidulph* forward their own desires at the expense of the heroine's welfare, they invariably achieve their ends. Within the scope of the novel, however, their victories of agency cost them either social approbation---Mrs. Gerrarde, the widow Arnold---or familial happiness---Lady Bidulph, Lady Grimston, Mrs. Vere. Through Sidney's widowhood, Sheridan makes clear the impracticable construction of orthodox femininity: when one spends girlhood and wifehood restraining initiative, widowhood merely prolongs the subservience. But without the authoritative

half of the hierarchical relationship---the parent, the spouse---one is correspondingly unbalanced and weakened against exploitation, even, as the novel shows repeatedly, by fellow widows.

A Conspiracy of Widows

Lady Bidulph is a widow of means and social consequence. She has a title, a comfortable jointure, a life-interest in Sidney-Castle, a London apartment. From one perspective, she is a sexual pioneer, repudiating traditional ascriptions of shame to the dishonoured woman and insisting on her rights to societal reinstatement. "I will never bring down the curses of an injured maid upon my daughter's head," Lady Bidulph informs Faulkland, "nor purchase her worldly prosperity at the expense and sorrow of another woman" (47). Margaret Anne Doody is struck by Lady Bidulph's "unconventional feminist stand," as the widow "feels not disgust but sympathy for the woman in the case---an unusual attitude."²³ The vehemence of Lady Bidulph's protofeminism, however, distorts her perception: she reads without nuance, casting amorous men as predatory and seduced women as innocent. The flipside of her vindication of the rights of "Woman" is an essentialist denial of female individuality. The widow insists on a paralleling of hers and Sidney's experiences that require a textbook response of individual sacrifice for the greater good of womankind.

All of Lady Bidulph's protective actions are warped by her formidable will, which crushes her daughter into subservience, even when she knows her compliance will bring her unhappiness. Sidney underlines the futility of her situation with refrains of powerlessness: "she [Lady Bidulph] knows I am flexible by nature, and to *her* will yielding as air. What can I do?....Fain would I bring myself chearfully to conform to my mother's will, for I have no will of my own. I never knew what it was to have one, and never shall, I believe" (85). Sir George disdains his mother's tyranny---"you are absolute mistress of your daughter's will"---and scorns Sidney's unwavering acquiescence (90). Even an acute awareness of her mother's psychological tactics fails to liberate:

with reference to her imminent marriage. Sidney writes: "To sum up the whole in one word. my mother is resolved. and you yourself acknowledge that her will is absolute. She has used the most irresistible argument to obtain my consent. *viz.*, that it would make *her* happy" (93).

While Lady Bidulph's obsessive campaigning for Miss Burchell's marriage is psychologically understandable---it must serve as a consolatory extension of her own premarital sacrifice. reaffirming her actions as conscientious and right---less so is the widow's reduction of her daughter's jointure settlement:

My mother. who you know is integrity itself. thinks that I ought not to have more settled on me than the widow of Mr. Arnold's brother had. whose fortune was superior to mine. Mr. Arnold makes a much handsomer proposal: lady Grimston is for laying hold of it....I do not care how they settle it: but I fancy my mother will have her own way in this....

A few lines later. Sidney's intuition is confirmed:

All preliminaries are settled....My mother has carried her point in regard to the jointure: and has made choice of that little estate in Kent to be settled on me. as it is a complete three hundred pounds a year. detached intirely from the rest. and has a pretty house on it....[M]y mother says. a single woman. bred in retirement as I have been. who cannot live on that. does not deserve to live at all: adding: that as the estate was already subject to one jointure. and the widow so young a woman: if it should be also my misfortune to become one early. a great part of the fortune would be swallowed by dowagers. and the heir not have enough to support his rank. (94)

Sheridan depicts a surprising example of the uncertainties inherent in the jointure colloquy. discussed at length in Chapter One. But here a widow, possessed of a so-called "partiality to her own sex." argues against the best material interests of her own daughter (50). She deliberately pledges herself to the dynastic objectives of patriarchal estate management. favouring the prosperity of a stranger's estate---and the well-being of another widow---over Sidney's future security. Lady Bidulph's negotiations not only fail to promote Sidney's comfort. they actively

undermine it: according to the jointure-to-portion ratio of one-to-ten (examined in Chapter One) considered standard in eighteenth-century marriage settlements, Sidney's £4000 dowry merits at the least a corresponding £400 jointure. Notwithstanding Lady Bidulph's good sense in selecting a discrete jointure estate (Arnold's contiguous property will be entirely lost in the widow Arnold's fraudulent law-suit), her dramatic contention that a widow who cannot live on £300 yearly "does not deserve to live at all" both represents her destructive generalizations---reading a mere fragment of Faulkland's exonerating letter, for instance---and foreshadows Sidney's near death from penury and illness, exacerbated by her limited jointure.

Sheridan stresses the disregard that this "truly good" widow displays toward her daughter's future. Although Lady Bidulph subsidizes her daughter's difficult widowhood, she is forestalled by law from leaving Sidney any meaningful bequest: her widowed wealth amounts to a life interest only: "when I die, you lose the best part of your income, as my house, together with my jointure, revert to Sir George" (254). Yet despite her foreknowledge of Sidney's precarious survival and its contingency upon her own assistance, Lady Bidulph's last days are unmarred by worry. Sidney reads her mother's peace as the transition into an otherworldly existence, but Sheridan's phrasing is pointed: "'Tis strange, my Cecilia, that this best of parents, who has always so tenderly loved me, expresses not the least unhappiness at the forlorn condition in which she must soon leave me" (331). This reading of Lady Bidulph is endorsed at a structural level: Lady Bidulph triumphs to see Miss Burchell married to Faulkland (letter of June 28) but within a page starts to deteriorate in health (July 8), and dies four pages later. The proximity is symbolic. She may be precluded from arranging her material affairs by testamentary will, but Lady Bidulph redresses juridical powerlessness through the assertion of her own misguided desires. Once the terms of her will are satisfied---the marriage of Faulkland and Miss Burchell---she dies without regret.

Lady Bidulph's collaboration with Lady Grimston and Mrs. Vere in arranging Sidney's marriage to Mr. Arnold is dubbed by Margaret Anne Doody "a maternal cabal."²⁴ But in fact, these women are more than just mothers: all three are formidably willful widows. Lady Grimston "has been a widow for many years, and lives upon a large jointure at Grimston-hall": she is austere and "extravagantly rigid" in her opinions (61). She dresses in mid-seventeenth-century fashions, and her mantua is "always the same, always ash-coloured tissue" (63); the outmoded style and the funereal hues associate her with stasis and death. Although Lady Grimston satisfies Allestree's vocational charity—she performs "abundance of good things in the neighbourhood" (62)—her philanthropy is a public counterfeit: she proves dictatorial in authority and brutal in realizing her self-interests.

Lady Grimston's tyranny is revealed through the story of her widowed daughter, Mrs. Vere, who tells Sidney that even during marriage, Lady Grimston behaved like a widow, that is, without deference to a male authority. Bypassing the husband entirely, suitors ask Lady Grimston about marriage arrangements for her two daughters, "as she was very well known to hold the reins of government in her family" (66). Lady Grimston tries to foist an advantageous but unwanted match on her daughter, who loves and secretly marries the unpropertied Mr. Vere, a marriage quietly supported by Lord Grimston. He draws on his daughter's portion, giving her £5000 at her wedding and promising to bequeath another £5000 upon his death. Lady Grimston is enraged at the marriage and, unaware of her husband's disbursement, threatens marital separation unless she is granted testamentary revenge: she wants her daughter denied her father's inheritance.

Lady Grimston governs by will and is punished accordingly. Her insistence on controlling the terms of her husband's will ends in a sabotage of her own material circumstances. She demands that Mrs. Vere be "cut off with one shilling" and her intended fortune bequeathed to her married sister.

My mother was made residuary legatee to everything that should remain, after paying all bequests. This would have amounted to a considerable sum, if the half of my portion, which was already paid without her knowledge, had not made such a diminution in the personal estate, that after paying my sister the whole of what was specified in the will, there was scarce any thing likely to remain....She insisted upon his leaving the whole of what he designed for me to my eldest sister: as well to convince him, she said, that she had no self-interested views, as to be an example to other rebellious children. (70-71).

Lord Grimston "durst not" inform her "how much she hurt herself by forcing him to such measures": his silence tacitly avenges his years of marital oppression. He promises to make a new, secret will honouring his promissory bequest to his daughter, but dies before this can be drafted. And so the first will stands. After the legacies are apportioned and the debts paid, the widow Grimston, the "sole executrix," finds that the estate's "residue"---her testamentary inheritance---amounts to nothing. "[H]ad my father's just intentions taken place, in leaving me five thousand pounds," Mrs. Vere tells Sidney, "[my mother] would have come in for the other five: but the whole ten thousand now went to my sister" (72).

This episode seems at first tidily symbolic: Lady Grimston exercises a malicious will in trying to restrict her daughter's circumstances: she is herself accordingly straitened by her husband's will. But volitional widows are not noticeably corrected in the novel: Lady Grimston is the one of the few widows in *Sidney Bidulph* who has, in Susan Staves's sense, official "separate property." Sidney tells us that though Lady Grimston's jointure is a life interest only---as almost all jointures were---and the estate is entailed upon a male heir, Lady Grimston nevertheless possesses a "large personal fortune," evidently protected by equity, and therefore in her power to disburse by will. Sidney explains that Lady Grimston could make Mrs. Vere "full amends" with a monetary grant. But closing her history with a final show of ill will, Lady Grimston leaves her fortune "to charitable uses: not a sixpence to either of her daughters!" (279).²⁵

Testamentary compensation by her mother is both deserved and required because Mrs. Vere, in an attempt to stop litigation against Lady Grimston, has impaired the security of her own widowhood. This important detail and its surrounding narrative anticipate Sidney's own history of widows and legal menace. Mrs. Vere is widowed and at once becomes an unwilling link in a legal wrangle: her father-in-law sues Lady Grimston for the remaining £5000 of Mrs. Vere's portion (which her mother invalidated in forcing a revision of her husband's will). The widow is meanwhile delivered of a stillborn daughter and poignantly assumes this might placate Mr. Vere Sr.: the estate now devolves to the Vere sisters. But Mr. Vere "love[s] money," hates Lady Grimston, and presses the suit. Desperate for family peace, Mrs. Vere satisfies both parties by pledging half her jointure to Mr. Vere if he will drop his claim. He agrees. She then falls ill, nearly dies, and is later informed that "Mr. Vere repented his agreement at that juncture, and told some of his friends, that if he had not been so hasty, he should have had a chance for [her] jointure and [her] fortune too" (75). (The jointure land, purchased with the wife's portion, would revert back to the patrilineal estate after the widow's death: but Mr. Vere would have had to continue his suit against Lady Grimston to win the rights to his dead daughter-in-law's unpaid fortune). This chilling detail exacerbates Mrs. Vere's pitiable status. Unmoneied and unprotected by family, this widow is fit prey for a greedy patriarch. She is likewise exposed to the lasting spite of her dowager mother: Lady Grimston neither forgives her daughter nor recompenses her for the forfeited jointure: "her permitting me to see her, she thinks sufficient amends" (76).

Mrs. Vere is poor, husbandless, childless, and effectively motherless. Her dead daughter can be read as "a tragic, haunting icon of the stillborn, infantilized daughterdom promoted at the novel's surface,"²⁶ or, on the other hand, as punishment for her earlier rebellion: she does, after all, reject the authority of one parent, convincing the other, weaker parent to endorse her headstrong initiative in marriage. In this sense, Mrs. Vere's history is a monitory paradigm: she weds the forbidden love of her life but is immediately widowed. (Sidney's hasty and illegitimate second marriage to the forbidden love of her life unwives her and actually returns her to the state of

widowhood.) On the other hand, Mrs. Vere may be materially vulnerable, but she is narratively consequential. Her highly interested guidance of Sidney's sense of duty pushes Sidney into the unwanted marriage with Mr. Arnold.

The critical references to *Sidney Bidulph* as "conduct-book fiction" are particularly apt in this instance. Mrs. Vere spouts exemplary doctrine on the subject of feminine desire and matrimony. As long as Sidney feels toward a suitor "no disinclination, it is enough." Invoking the standard alchemy promised to respectable women, Mrs. Vere predicts that if Sidney marries Mr. Arnold "with nothing more than indifference, gratitude will soon produce love in such a breast as yours" (82). Sidney is affected by her friend's delivery of standard counsel, acknowledging its effectiveness over the persuasive powers of the two older widows: "Had lady Grimston said this to me, it would have put me upon my guard, as suspecting a design on my liberty of choice. Even my good mother might have been listened to on this subject not without uneasiness." She wrestles for a moment with her old love for Faulkland, but is felled by Mrs. Vere's manipulative, "Oh Miss Bidulph...who would refuse to gratify such a parent as that? had *my* mother condescended to treat me so, I am sure she could have wrought on me to do any thing she liked, even though it had been repugnant to my inclination." Sidney responds immediately that she will "obey that kindest best of mothers" (88).

Doody's "maternal cabal" is thus more specifically an orchestration of widowhood: all three women exploit Sidney in the privileging of their own desires. Lady Grimston pushes the marriage simply for the pleasure of getting her own way; Lady Bidulph preemptively silences rumours about Sidney's fractured betrothal with a favourable match; and Mrs. Vere locates in Sidney a deferred opportunity to rewrite her own wayward will by yielding this time to parental authority.

Widows of Impropriety with Property

As various widows control Sidney's love plot, so other widows direct her material fortunes and their loss. One of the two crucial subplots in *Sidney Bidulph* involves Mr. Arnold's late brother's wife, known simply as "the widow Arnold." In what will retrospectively appear coincident with the unravelling of her marriage by Mrs. Gerrarde---Sidney is thus defrauded emotionally and financially by designing widows---the widow Arnold circulates a narrative that gradually takes on the gloss of truth and redirects the patrilineage of the estate. Childless during the marriage, then separated from her husband for a full two years before his death (drawing upon her jointure settlement as a "separate maintenance" income), she broadcasts the news that she is pregnant by her late husband. "The lady pretends that she was not conscious of it herself till within this fortnight: yet her husband had been dead four months." Sidney writes; the Bidulphs are told this is "possible but not common" (105). The widow claims to have enjoyed a secret rapprochement with her estranged husband, days before he took ill and died. Sidney's recollection of the widow's indifference at the funereal, however--- she "did not then hint a word of this reconciliation"--- confirms for the reader the suspect nature of the account.

Fittingly, it is Lady Bidulph, in her problematic status as Sidney's protectress and most effectual enemy, who voices the damaging potential of this development. The widow Arnold was married to the elder brother and thus "[i]f this child should make its appearance in the world time enough to prove the possibility of its being the offspring of the late Mr. Arnold...it must be considered by the law as his heir, notwithstanding the husband and wife lived apart" (106). A variety of lawyers reassure the Arnolds of their right to the estate, but the widow is delivered of a daughter whose arrival (barely) supports a claim of legitimacy. Sheridan delicately but explicitly tracks the pregnancy date, which, coupled with Sidney's voicing of popular opinion (that the widow Arnold's claim is "infamous and unjust" and that she is likely the pawn of an interested party), directs us to read the widow's reclamation of the Arnold estate as corrupt.²⁷ "[O]ur cause came to

a final hearing...and it is given against us". Sidney explains. "Mr. Arnold by this stroke loses 900 pounds a year, beside considerable costs. Nothing now remains but my jointure" (242). That Sidney should be forced to redeem her jointure while her husband still lives---making her a kind of married widow, her husband a ghostly, impotent presence---exacerbates the failure of Mr. Arnold as the guardian of wife and family.

With the subsequent revelation that Sidney cannot draw freely upon the settlement that is rightfully hers, Sheridan draws attention to one of the crucial failings of jointure. Unlike dower's surety as an entrenched common law right, jointure contracts were private in nature and therefore susceptible to exploitation. Unprotected by dower's insistence on equitable disclosure before any land was sold---a wife had to execute a documentary *fine* to signal her compliance---jointure land could be sold or otherwise devalued without the wife's knowledge. In the novel, this violability is represented by Arnold's secret mortgaging of Sidney's jointure estate in order to finance his mistress's requests. In showing the subservience of Mr. Arnold to Mrs. Gerrarde's command---Arnold confesses "he had been prevailed upon to do this, in order to deliver Mrs. Gerrarde's brother out of gaol"---Sheridan represents the transgressive sway of the widow, who upends conventional gender politics, and her powerful self-interest, which furthers her prosperity at, literally, another widow's expense.

A familiarity with eighteenth-century legal developments makes clear to the modern reader what is implicit in Sheridan's text: the orthodox provenance of Sidney's jointure only exacerbates its fragility. It is not a chattel of any sort. It is not one of the so-called equitable jointures that Lord Chancellor Hardwicke worried about in 1761, the new "species of property" from "improvements, commerce, and from the funds" that might have proved unstable. The jointure estate in Kent is jointure in its original, sixteenth-century form, which Coke *et al* praised as sure and safe: an enfeoffment of land to the joint use of a husband and wife, with survivor rights to the widow for the rest of her life. A contemporary writer is convinced of neither the equitability

of jointure nor its impregnability by a greedy spouse. She cites the accepted doctrine, "A Wife cannot be said to be divested of all Property, since she does retain a reversionary Property in her Jointure, which is out of the Husband's Power to alienate," but sniffs at its effectiveness: "supposing she does retain that reversionary Property (which considering the Authority of the Husband she may not always be able to do) yet Jointures are not sufficient for all Occasions."²⁸ The gravity of such a loss in *Sidney Bidulph* is stressed by Lord V's incredulity: "We were told...that a part of South-park was mortgaged, but did not believe it, as we knew it was settled on you" (251). That Sidney does not even know about the compromising of her jointure property until it has already been relinquished and then regained by Lord V (who undertakes the mortgage), emphasizes the widow's vulnerability to competing interests and the failure of private contract to guarantee the security of the widow as would have done a common-law right.

The last segment in the jointure narrative shows that Sheridan's widows are incapable of assisting other widows in need, whether by design or by circumstance. Lord V dies unexpectedly. The widowing of his wife (cushioned for her by a "pretty considerable" settlement) has severe consequences for Sidney: widowhood sends Lady V into a decorous retirement with her sister, another widow, removing her from the sphere of Sidney's everyday life and thus preventing any regular administration of aid. Financially, Lady V's widowhood devastates the beleaguered Arnold family: her son assumes the estate and instantly recalls Arnold's debts. Sidney of her own initiative "beg[s]" her husband to sell her jointure in order to clear their name: "We are come to a resolution to sell two hundred and fifty pounds a year. We shall then have but fifty pounds a year in the world which we can call our own" (280). As the standard rate of interest was 5 per cent, Sidney's jointure, the estate in Kent which generates £300 per annum, is worth £6000. She and Arnold evidently plan to sell land worth £5000, leaving a remainder of £50 a year. Not only can self-interested widows such as the widow Arnold and Mrs. Gerrarde jeopardize Sidney's future, but respectable friends, such as Lady V., become unwitting instruments of Sidney's misfortune as soon as they become widows themselves.

In the figure of the widowed Mrs. Gerrarde, Sheridan unites the love and property plots individually exemplified by the other widows. Whereas the widowed cabal of Bidulph, Grimston, and Vere concentrates on either the thwarting or the urging of a particular suitor for Sidney, and the widow Arnold functions solely to destroy the integrity of the estate through a fraudulent reclamation, Mrs. Gerrarde disrupts both marriage and property. Unlike the widow Arnold, Mrs. Gerrarde is no mere conduit for destruction; she deliberately generates chaos for those around her. Faulkland's liaison with Miss Burchell, as Sidney eventually learns, was fostered by Mrs. Gerrarde, who opportunistically pandered her niece to Faulkland for gambling money; the implication of prostitution is, in turn, what ultimately decides Lady Bidulph against Faulkland and guarantees Sidney's unhappiness in love.

Mrs. Gerrarde enchants Mr. Arnold out of his marriage, dissipates his funds, and impels Faulkland to finance at considerable expense her safekeeping in a second marriage. Although not directly responsible for the lawsuit against Mr. Arnold, Mrs. Gerrarde serves as the symbolic link to the contamination of the future estate. As Sidney explains, the witness who testified to the widow Arnold's secret rapprochement with her late husband

proved to be Mrs. Gerrarde's brother. That very brother whom Mr. Arnold had redeemed from a gaol and peril of hanging. This man it seems had been very intimate with her during her husband's life-time, while she was in a state of separation from him....'Tis however most certain, that she was suspected of an intrigue with him, and in all human probability that child, which is to inherit the Arnold estate, is his....Mr. Arnold little imagined, when under Mrs. Gerrarde's influence...that he was bestowing on this wicked wretch power to ruin him. I do not imagine Mrs. Gerrarde was in this secret. I suppose she would not knowingly have contributed to beggar the man by whom she was supported in affluence. (243)

While Sidney comments on the relief she feels in hearing that the widow Arnold has married the witness and hence bears a different surname---"I am really glad she has lost the name of a family to which she was a disgrace" (294)---she does not make overt the greater transformation: that the

estate will through the inheritance of the unlawful daughter descend through an entirely new patrilineage.

As does Miss Burchell, Mrs. Gerrarde serves as an alternative feminine paradigm for Sidney. But while Miss Burchell serves as Sidney's libidinous double, (and thus one who belongs to the sentimental romance plot of the novel), Mrs. Gerrarde, in fact, offers a complex portrait of a widow who, facing economic distress, responds with an effectively amoral pragmatism.²⁹ Thus, while she plays the stereotypical role of the wily temptress, she also relates to Sheridan's secondary realm of interest, the verisimilar details of money and property. Sidney behaves in perfect accordance to the tragic heroine's trajectory: she suffers poverty, illness, and nearly dies, but is providentially recompensed for her goodness with the *deus ex machina* appearance of Ned Warner. Mrs. Gerrarde has no recourse to the heroine's plot, and must scrabble together the means of survival. In the limited world of eighteenth-century female vocations, this widow makes a career out of other women's husbands.

Although modish and convivial, Mrs. Gerrarde is a veritable black widow, subsisting on the deaths of men and marriages alike. She renovates her small jointure-house in Kent as a "fairly palace," financed by "a considerable addition to her fortune by the death of a relation" (123). Sidney's phrasing is unintentionally ironic: she refers to a testamentary bequest but unwittingly speaks to the death of the relation between her and her husband, who has relocated to their Kentish estate for the express purpose of facilitating his amours with the widow.³⁰ Subtle and scheming when necessary, Mrs. Gerrarde assumes a public presence once her private machinations play out: she contrives what looks like a secret liaison between Sidney and Faulkland, succeeds in having Sidney cast off by Mr. Arnold, and then flaunts Faulkland (misreading his retributive interest as desire) like a jewel. Lady V comments disapprovingly, "I suppose the lady had a mind to shew the world she is above restraint, and chose to make her infamy a sort of triumph" (165).

The antithesis of conformist, submissive Sidney Mrs. Gerrarde's willfulness and anti-heroine status allow her to treat an ascription of shame as triumph. The epithets that attach to her throughout the novel can be read as efforts to name, denigrate, and thereby contain the widow's chaotic energy. For the most part, the language is drawn from the stock lexicon of eighteenth-century misogynists. In his history of Mrs. Gerrarde's remarriage, Faulkland pelts the widow with every conceivable insult: she is a "silly toad": "as fantastic as an ape": a "mercenary witch": a "serpent": a "cockatrice": a "jezebel": a "vile harpy": and a "gipsey" [sic], (170, 172, 173, 204, 218).³¹ Faulkland excoriates her ruling passion as a base "avarice," that leads her to privilege possessions over chastity ("she would be less shocked at finding there was a design on her person, than on her diamond earrings"). Onomastically granted magical powers, she is described as erasing Mr. Arnold's public identity, "engrossing him wholly" so that he is "quite invisible to every friend he has" (164). Arnold himself casts Mrs. Gerrarde as a kind of Circe to excuse his bad behaviour: "I have been for this year past in a dream, a horrid delirium, from which that vile sorceress, who brought it on me, has but just now roused me" (248). These terms of opprobrium degrade the widow by reference to animal analogies, mythical creatures, and the quintessential eighteenth-century marker of transgression: the widow "was bred a Roman Catholic" (218).

Sheridan's interest in widows' financial stability shows in her inclusion of the circumstances that mitigate Mrs. Gerrarde's behaviour. The widow justifies her moral violations through reference to her privation. Although Faulkland feigns compassion to win the widow's trust, his words nonetheless underline the fragility of her situation: "I know, at Captain Gerrarde's death, your pension as his widow, and the very small jointure at Ashby, was the whole of your income" (181). Mrs. Gerrarde's telling of her story even conveys to the reader a certain authorial understanding:

I was married very early to an old man, and had never experienced the happiness of reciprocal love: he died, and left me destitute. Mr. Arnold's generous, though I

must confess unwarrantable passion. rescued me from distress. I did not know he was married when I first unwarily accepted of his addresses. and it was too late to retreat before I found out. (191)

As did Villenoy with Isabella, as will Sir George Ellison and Captain Maurice in Scott's and Reeve's novels. Arnold responds to the sexual allure of the widow as *memento mori*. He meets and propositions Mrs. Gerrarde when she is in deep mourning. "[her] weeds and [her] melancholy looks" functioning as aphrodisiac to his fervour (196). The initiative that begins this liaison is not wholly confined to the widow: Mr. Arnold is also cast, albeit briefly, as predatory.

Notwithstanding the context, Mrs. Gerrarde serves as a willful widow antipathetic to the efforts of the novel's heroine. Lest we entertain any real sympathy for Mrs. Gerrarde, we are granted further evidence of her inappropriate behaviour and her commodified approach to sexual relationships. A former lover makes a brief appearance expressly to confirm Mrs. Gerrarde's corruption. His lower social standing emphasizes the widow's infringement of moral and class boundaries:

It would be endless...to tell you the variety of stratagems she made use of to get money out of those whom she had in her power....I, for my part, was not rich enough for her, which was the chief reason I suppose of Mr. Arnold's supplanting me....She was not contented with the lodgings I had placed her in, but obliged him to take a handsome house, elegantly furnished for her: a very fine chariot and horses were the next purchase: for a hired one the lady would not vouchsafe to sit in: and I am sure I have seen her in the boxes at the play with as many jewels on her as my lady there. (241)

Indeed, both Sidney and Faulkland note the application with which Mrs. Gerrarde spent Arnold's income: "Mrs. Gerrarde...I have reason to believe, has been no inconsiderable sharer in Mr. Arnold's fortune." Sidney writes (160); later Faulkland corroborates that Arnold "is hurt deeply in his fortune" by the widow (204), so deeply, of course, that he is forced to mortgage his wife's jointure estate.

While Faulkland arguably avenges the injury Mrs. Gerrarde did him with Miss Burchell by forcing the proud widow into a socially mismatched marriage, Mrs. Gerrarde prospers at the close of her own narrative. Spacks observes that "[w]icked Mrs. Gerrarde...shows an Amazonian spirit in contesting with Faulkland."³² This observation underplays the widow's victories. Faulkland pledges to "double the portion [she has] already, and get it settled on [her]" and to add a "handsome yearly income," conditional upon good behaviour (212). He particularizes the lavish allocations to Pivet, the new husband: "Mrs. Gerrarde has eight hundred pounds of her own: I will add as much more to it...and this you shall settle on her, that she may be sure of a support in case of your death, and the interest you shall allow her for her own separate use" (224).

This settlement is staggeringly generous. Mrs. Gerrarde's income totals £1600 yearly. Sidney's jointure was ever only a mere £300, reduced after Mrs. Gerrarde's ransacking to a pitiful £50 annually. We should note too that Faulkland makes neither the jointure nor the interest on that jointure conditional (the only contingency is his additional "behavioural" bonus), and he invokes the rules of equity to safeguard the five per cent interest for Mrs. Gerrarde's individual use. In the end, Mrs. Gerrarde defects from the marriage, slipping into Paris "in quality of mistress to a young nobleman who maintains her in vast splendour" (391), and thus presumably forfeiting any separate income from her broken marriage. Nonetheless, she brokered a lucrative arrangement.

Mrs. Gerrarde's unchecked energy in choosing ever more solvent suitors is, finally, impressive. With a small detail, Sheridan stresses the resilience of Mrs. Gerrarde's identity: even after their marriage, Pivet does "not yet presume to call her by his own name" (229); she is never once referred to as "Madame Pivet" by anyone. Her name signifies her widowed status, which is coded as powerfully authoritative. Her noticeable lack of husband, and the appeal of her unprotected state—which she employs to great theatrical advantage—conjoined to her necessary sexual history as a former wife first attract the men whom she then exploits for personal gain. Mrs.

Gerrarde is only transgressive from the perspective of the heroine and her supporters. Sheridan herself tacitly honours her survivalist initiative by letting her flourish, albeit outside the margins of the core text, at the end of the story.

A Widow without a Will of her Own

In the Ned Warner episode, Sidney embodies in her saintly goodness the scriptural widow who gives alms notwithstanding her own penury (Mark 12:41-44).³³ But while Sidney's mite is transformed into material might by Warner's compensatory bestowals, she fails to enjoy any of the willfulness exercised by the other widows in the novel. Sir George makes clear both her need and her liberty to improve her position:

You are now become a free woman: Faulkland loves you still....Whatever pretence you might formerly have had to carry your punctilios to an extraordinary height, certain circumstances in your life have now made your situation very different. You are destitute of fortune, incumbered with children. Reflect on this, and let your imagination supply the rest. (295-296)

She disdains, however, to parlay her widowhood into remarriage for mercenary advantage, no matter how justifiable. In many ways her refusal to remarry is not an act of will but an extension of her daughterly compliance: Lady Bidulph continues to press Sidney, urging her to influence Faulkland to make amends with marriage to Miss Burchell. Sidney rehearses the language of exemplary widowhood—"I...profess myself wedded to [Arnold's] memory," she writes Faulkland; she cites her scrupulousness in not allowing her to marry one "who was the occasion of so much uneasiness" to her first husband (315-316); she claims, even, that "if there was no Miss Burchell, no parental guide to sway me...I never would be yours" (317). But these protestations seem peripheral to Sidney's more significant metamorphosis: she has spent a lifetime suppressing contrary yearnings and no longer needs the external prompts to encourage

her tractability. Daughterly meekness has been transmuted into a widowed reserve that guards against a second love.

The subsequent events allow Sheridan both to maintain Sidney's integrity as a perfect heroine and to generate tragic circumstances that undermine the value of such constructions of feminine virtue. The climax of the novel shows that desire does not die and that the pleasure gained from a praiseworthy suppression of will and desire---what Lady Mary Chudleigh called in her conduct tract an "inward joy"---cannot compensate for the loss of love.³⁴ When Sidney hears of Faulkland's reluctant marriage to Miss Burchell, she is shocked by her own pain. When Lady Bidulph dies soon afterwards, Sidney is free to admit that but for Miss Burchell, she would have married Faulkland ("My grief for [Arnold] was proportionate to my love. Yet...as time is an universal conqueror, it might have healed this wound...a few, a very few years would perhaps have disposed me to return Mr. Faulkland's still unabated passion"). Exacerbating her bereavement is the belated recognition that while Faulkland did liaise with (a willing) Miss Burchell, he was gulled by Mrs. Gerrarde into lending her money, giving the encounter the false taint of commodification that so effectually revolted Lady Bidulph.

Widows' egregiously willful behaviour guarantees Sidney's lasting unhappiness: Mrs. Gerrarde frames Faulkland as a mercenary libertine; Lady Bidulph refuses to read the entirety of his explanatory letter as offensive to her delicacy. Even Sidney's discovery of the letter and her understanding of the "palliating circumstance" that exonerates Faulkland do not unleash any reactionary energy. Her heart, she writes, "sigh[s] at recollecting the past" but she refuses to blame her mother for her impatient misreading: "the excellence of her own morals, made her scrupulous in weighing those of others....Her justice, her humanity, and her religion prompted her to act as she did; and her conduct stands fully acquitted in my judgment" (340). Even Sidney's one independent action---her impetuous decision to marry Faulkland---can be read as capitulation to his deranged insistence that she owes him personal happiness. The ensuing tragedy recalls the

unhappy fate of Behn's Isabella, for whom the transgressive desire for a second marriage is punitively literalized as bigamy. In Sheridan's novel, Sidney is unwifed by the irrepressible first Mrs. Faulkland, whose appearance suggests the unseemliness of any second marriage, haunted as it is by the spectre—or the actuality—of the previous wife. After Faulkland's death, which closes the tragic narrative, Sidney renounces any consideration of meaningful agency and pledges her obedience to the ultimate authority: "let me fulfil the intention of my Maker, by shewing a perfect resignation to His will" (459).

Margaret Anne Doody argues that the "Bidulph women in general, and Sidney most especially, rarely initiate important action: their strength is that of reaction."³⁵ Lady Bidulph, however, vindicates the passivity of her youth with a concentrated application of will throughout her adult life. All the other widows in *Sidney Bidulph* are similarly energetic, realizing different degrees of happiness and effecting varying kinds of narrative resolution. They act deliberately, and with consequence. Even the oppressed Mrs. Vere has enjoyed, however briefly, her husband of choice and the deferred satisfaction of metaphorically righting her marital transgression by pressing Sidney to yield to parental authority. Mrs. Faulkland (Miss Burchell) is the one widow whose misbehaviour creates, in the end, an unhappy fate: after Faulkland's suicide she is "abandoned and despised" by her friends and only lives a few years longer. Yet we know that she spends her years of widowhood in great material comfort, Faulkland having settled £1000 a year on her "and that too without every having informed himself of the state of her fortune" (325). This unlikely bestowal—disregarding any portion-to-jointure mathematics—gives evidence of Faulkland's magnanimity but also accords with Spacks's observation about uncorrected willful women in the novel.

There is "no with-holding a woman from her will." Mrs. Gerrarde taunts Mr. Arnold (263). The novel more specifically depicts a world in which there is no withholding a widow from her will. Some widows, like Lady Grimston, complement their initiative with a testamentary authority to will their property and effects entirely at their discretion. But willfulness does relegate female characters to the margins of the text, thereby quelling their heroine potential. The novels to be examined in Chapters Four and Five endorse both constructive female partnerships that positively sustain the protagonists and larger communities of experienced widows who use their resolution to assist their disenfranchised peers. *Memoirs of Sidney Bidulph*, however, offers no such alternatives to the predicaments it describes. Rather, Sheridan's widows, while not overtly celebrated, are dark creators of their own deliberately forged destinies. As such, outside the parameters of the core story, they are free to act with intent and effect.

¹The similarity between *Sidney Bidulph* and *Clarissa* is no coincidence: Sheridan was a close friend and admirer of Samuel Richardson and in fact dedicated the novel to the "exemplary Goodness and distinguished Genius...united in One Person...The Author of CLARISSA and SIR CHARLES GRANDISON." Modern critics note the novel's allusions to Richardson's *oeuvre*: Faulkland's "Grandisonian" attributes, discussed in Margaret Anne Doody, "Frances Sheridan: Morality and Annihilated Time" in *Fetter'd or Free* eds. Mary Anne Schofield and Cecilia Macheski (Athens: Ohio University Press, 1986), 343. Gerard A. Barker compares trait-for-trait Faulkland and Grandison in *Grandison's Heirs* (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 1985), 53-69. Patricia Meyer Spacks observes that Faulkland reveals a Lovelaceian ability to re-script Mrs. Gerrarde's life and notes Sidney's kinship of distress with Clarissa in *Desire and Truth* (Chicago University Press, 1990), 139. Patricia Köster and Jean Coates Cleary identify the debts to *Clarissa* and *Pamela II* in their introduction to the novel. Frances Sheridan *Memoirs of Miss Sidney Bidulph* (Oxford University Press, 1995), xvi ff. All further references to the novel will be incorporated within my text.

²*Memoirs of Sidney Bidulph*, written as a series of letters by the eponymous heroine to her friend Cecilia, opens with the near-marriage of Sidney to her brother's rich and gentlemanly friend, Orlando Faulkland. The union is both a love-match and materially advantageous to Sidney. Just before the wedding, however, Sidney is anonymously informed of Faulkland's recent intrigue with a Miss Burchell, enamoured of and now pregnant by him. The outraged dowager, Lady Bidulph, forces Sidney to break her engagement and recalls for her daughter her own similar tale of forfeited love: her betrothal was undone when her lover belatedly privileged his engagement with a seduced girl over his forthcoming marriage. Lady Bidulph applauded the gentleman's responsibility in the matter and requires of Sidney the same selflessness. Sidney is then persuaded to marry the unexceptionable (but unexceptional) Mr. Arnold: she has two daughters by him. Despite Sidney's exemplary decorum, the reader is aware of her undying, unspoken love for Faulkland.

Mr. Arnold falls in love with a designing widow, Mrs. Gerrarde, who dismantles his marriage, and loses his estate to the litigation of his brother's widow, who ruins him entirely. The still-devoted Faulkland reconciles the Arnolds but the harmony is short-lived: Mr. Arnold dies and Sidney is left a penniless widow with two small children, dependent upon her mother's kindness. Lady Bidulph stays alive long enough to see her protégée, the deserted Miss Burchell, married to a reluctant Faulkland, who agrees to the union only to please Sidney, who in turn promotes the marriage to please her insistent mother. Only after the wedding does Sidney learn of Miss Burchell's deceptions and active sexuality: she has in fact recently enjoyed a liaison with Sidney's brother, Sir George.

Distressed in spirit and in circumstance, Sidney nevertheless offers alms to an indigent stranger who claims kinship with her. This is an eccentric ruse: Ned Warner is a rich merchant and rewards Sidney with spectacular wealth for her kindness. But her tranquility is shattered when Faulkland appears, confessing to a crime of passion: he has shot his faithless wife and her lover *in flagrante delicto* and now insists that Sidney, the instrument of his unhappiness, relieve him with marriage. After much anguish, there is a private wedding, and Faulkland hurries to the legal safety of Amsterdam. Before Sidney can join him, word comes that the first Mrs. Faulkland is alive and unharmed. Sidney assumes stoicism and writes a farewell to Faulkland, who is found dead, presumably by suicide. The narrative trails off with an ellipsis, hinting at further misfortunes to assail Sidney and her family.

³"This complex doubleness—an insistent promotion of conduct doctrine coupled with an aggressive exposure of its unfortunate effects—operates with particular forcefulness in the matter of female delicacy, but it is a sabotaging presence as well in Sidney's subservience to a higher, parental-spousal will and in her devotion to religious principles which make such self-abnegating deference a virtue." Köster and Cleary in Sheridan, *Sidney Bidulph*, xix.

⁴Todd, *Sign of Angellica*, 166.

⁵Spacks, *Desire and Truth*, 134, 136.

⁶Ibid. 136.

⁷Doody, "Frances Sheridan," 329.

⁸Frances Sheridan, *Memoirs of Miss Sidney Bidulph* eds. Patricia Köster and Jean Coates Cleary (Oxford University Press, 1995), 6. All other references will be parenthetically noted in my text.

⁹Shevelow, *Women and Print Culture* (London and New York: Routledge, 1989), 17. Richard Allestree's contemporary tripartite division—"the principal and most distinct scenes...are these three, Virginity, Marriage, and Widowhood"—corresponds to Shevelow's. *The Ladies Calling*, Part II, 2.

¹⁰*The Lady's New-Year's Gift*, by Sir George Savile, Marquis of Halifax, remained in print for nearly one hundred years (1688-1784); Allestree's *The Ladies Calling* was first published in 1673 and required more than a century of reprints in order to satisfy the marketplace, with a late edition dated 1787.

¹¹The Marquis of Halifax is more secular in his approach. He coats his dictates with a veneer of sympathy ("There may be some bitterness in meer Obedience": "*Obey* is an ungentle word") but is unstinting in his insistence on female docility: "the Institution of Marriage is too sacred to admit a Liberty of Objection to it.... You are therefore to make your best of what is settled by Law and Custom, and not vainly imagine, that it will be changed for your sake." *The Lady's New-Year's Gift, or Advice to a Daughter* (1688) (Kensington: Cayme, 1927), 19.

¹²Quoted in Elizabeth Bergen Brophy, *Women's Lives and the Eighteenth-Century English Novel* (Tampa: University of South Florida, 1991), 40.

¹³*The Ladies Calling*, Part I, 39.

¹⁴"Now this Obedience...has no clause of exception, but only where the command is unlawful.... And if it should happen that some parents are not qualified...yet the general imbecility of [the children's] age, will remain a constant ground...so that they may safelier venture themselves to their parents misguidance, than their own." Allestree, *The Ladies Calling*, Part II, 5.15. Sheridan's pointed references to Lady Bidulph's bad judgement and her insistence on Sidney's utter submission to her will offer a fictional rebuttal to Allestree's contention.

¹⁵Astell is particularly sharp: she roundly condemns marriage as an institution that requires that a wife "give up her cause when she is in the right...and submit her enlightened reason to the imperious dictates of a blind will and wild imagination even when she clearly perceives the ill consequences of it, the imprudence, nay folly and madness of such a conduct." She goes on to particularize the injustice of the marital code: "to be denied one's most innocent desires for no other cause, but the Will and Pleasure of an absolute Lord and Master...whose Commands [a woman] cannot but despise at the same time she obeys them." *Some Reflections upon Marriage* (London, 1703), 6.

¹⁶Chudleigh, *The Ladies Defence: or The Bride-Woman's Counsellor Answer'd*, quoted in Brophy, *Women's Lives*, 144.

¹⁷Astell, *Some Reflections*, 95.

¹⁸True Penitent. *The Folly, Sin and Danger of Marrying Widows and Old Women in General* (London, 1746), 24.

¹⁹Allestree. *The Ladies Calling*. Part II, 234, 235.

²⁰Ward. *Female Policy Detected*, 11.

²¹*The Entertaining Fortune-Book* (London, 1755), 8.

²²True Penitent. *The Folly, Sin, and Danger of Marrying Widows*, 16, 19.

²³Doody. "Frances Sheridan," 331.

²⁴*Ibid.*, 340.

²⁵In keeping with her consummate self-regard, Lady Bidulph does not pass judgement on the pointed bequests of her friend. She appears oblivious to the testamentary vengefulness against Mrs. Vere, viewing Lady Grimston's death as the loss of a "valuable woman" (Lady Bidulph's unintentional pun enforces our recognition of Lady Grimston's fiscal worth and spiritual bankruptcy), and as "a memento, which warns her of her own approaching end, for they were just of an age" (279).

²⁶Köster and Cleary in Sheridan. *Sidney Bidulph*, xxxi.

²⁷"[U]pon an exact calculation, this little girl made her appearance just twelve days later than she ought to have done, to prove her legitimacy, dating the possibility of her being Mr. Arnold's, from the very day whereon he took that illness of which he died, and which confined him for five days to his bed" (114).

²⁸Chapone. *Hardships of the English Laws*, 33-34.

²⁹Köster and Cleary argue in their introduction that Sheridan uses Miss Burchell, the symbolic "other" who shares Sidney Bidulph's initial and represents the furthest extreme of Sidney's fledgling desires, to caution against sexualized love: "What the novel tells us metaphorically and through the object-lesson of Miss Burchell is that the consummation of an ardently felt, passionate love, even if it is sanctioned by marriage, is to be feared and must be avoided lest it lead to a sensual debasement synonymous with prostitution" (xxviii).

³⁰Sheridan quietly points to the enormous discrepancy in expectations for wife and paramour: in an oft-cited courtship scene, Sidney is reprimanded by Mr. Arnold for reading Horace rather than attending to her needlework ("did this not look, my dear, as if the man thought I ought to beg his pardon for understanding Latin?" [80]). Sidney remarks of the charming, vivacious Mrs. Gerrarde her negligence of conventional female employments: "this sprightly rogue is fonder of cards than of work" and "cannot endure people that are always poring over a frame" (124).

³¹The editorial notes define "cockatrice" as a "mythical monster with a cock's head and a serpent's tail: figuratively, a whore"; and "gipsey" as "a contemptuous term for a woman, as being cunning, deceitful, fickle" (473, 474).

³²Spacks. *Desire and Truth*, 136.

³³Todd reads Sidney's deliverance as schematic in the fashion of much sentimental fiction: "the person of true sentiment suddenly and unexpectedly receives support from someone else. This is not earned....although the reader does have the sense that it is a just reward for a kind of personality. Feeling and money, cash and compassion become weirdly interchangeable." Todd. *Sign of Angellica*, 172.

³⁴"Consciousness of doing right does not make Sidney truly happy inwardly, a fact noted in defiance of much of the dominant eighteenth-century morality, which insisted on the satisfactions of virtue." Doody. "Frances Sheridan," 339.

³⁵*Ibid.*, 345.

**Chapter Four: Collective Might, Individual Plight:
Scott's Widows in *Millenium Hall* and
*The History of Sir George Ellison***

With her linked novels, *A Description of Millenium Hall* (1762) and *The History of Sir George Ellison* (1766), Sarah Scott explores in combinatory terms what she breaks down and miniaturizes in her individual texts: a contrastive pairing that, taken together, yields meaning. Both novels feature a host of important widow characters. *Millenium Hall* in particular boasts rich and authoritative widows—or spinsters who have been empowered by widows' wills—who create a self-sustaining and harmonious community that so impresses a passer-by (named George Ellison in the sequel) that he devotes his life to imitating its charitable projects on his own estates, where he reveals an affinity for redeeming vulnerable widows with settlements of income.

The connections between the two novels are both formal, through their shared characters, and thematic: the novels focus on the philanthropic potential of gentry capitalism and the self-determination that comes from education. But considering both novels together allows us to see that only as a self-governing collective are the widows effectual in their improvements. In *Millenium Hall*, the women possess agency and independence and, unfettered by habitual gender restraints, may apply their energies to the disenfranchised, the landed estate, and the manufacture of goods. But these women have survived or evaded marriage and have pooled their resources in a collective economy that privileges the community over the individual and hence gains strength by numbers.¹ In *George Ellison*, the widows' might is transferred to the eponymous gentleman. The widows, now isolated in their representation, consequently appear blighted by their status, which is itself often compromised by a broken jointure. If wealthy and landed, as is Ellison's first wife, the widow is unbalanced by power and disrupts the social order by remarriage. If unmoneyed and defenseless, the widow may only prosper through the tricky decorum of a

remarriage, or through a propitious bequest from the hero. The widow may be mighty, Scott argues, given the protective context of a like-minded community. But the real world is unmistakably hostile to an individual widow with or without means.

Georgic Utopia in *Millenium Hall*

In a report to the Real Property Commissioners of Great Britain, John Humphries declared his bias against women with property, isolating the widow for special discredit: "I think women are unfit to manage real estate: they ruin estates: and they are themselves cheated and beggared....my great object would be to prevent the widow from meddling with the soil."² Conversely, what Sarah Scott highlights in her novel, *A Description of Millenium Hall*, is the widow's particular ability to regenerate the estate. Armed, as Gary Kelly notes, with traditionally feminine attributes, Scott's women "are not only capable of managing the estate...but can improve" it.³

The utopian complications of the narratorial representation of Millenium Hall as "truly pastoral" have been fully developed in the modern critical responses to the novel that refer to its "aristocratic pastoral idealism,"⁴ its "idyllic pastoral" setting,⁵ and its community of women enjoying "the hidden fruits of pastoral retirement."⁶ Two recent critics have suggested that the surface pastoralism which beguiles the male frame narrator needs to be distinguished from the women's more productive philosophy that actually informs the workings of the estate. Melinda Alliker Rabb sees Millenium Hall as a place of human work and seasonal change: "there are fields, mathematically divided, where farming may take place...[the Hall] has been and is sometimes the scene of rough labour and discords, not of a pastoral idyll....it must be part of the practical cycles of time, producing crops and making money: it is not a timeless paradise."⁷ April London pursues the genre implications to which Rabb's analysis gestures: the narrator's pastoral language "disallows the facts of labor so central to the women's sense of mission," and in fact the women's "reality" is one of "georgic enterprise."⁸ The classical origins of georgic locate Scott's

innovative widows within a traditional framework, lending respectability to their vocational endeavours. Unlike pastoral's association with aristocratic indolence, georgic's emphasis on the bourgeois virtue of personal industry affirms the social value of the novel's widows, countering the century's marginalization of them as extraneous and financially burdensome.

More than a didactic poem doubling as an instruction manual for farmers, georgic is a classical mode that extols the value of labour as a civilizing force. Reinscribed in Augustan culture by Dryden's 1697 translation of Virgil's *Georgics*, it proved a capacious trope for a variety of contemporary concerns, from the agricultural innovations of Jethro Tull to the shaky sense of political peace in a post-Civil War England intermittently involved in wars with France. Anthony Low's generous disquisition on georgic and its relationship to eighteenth-century literature is particularly applicable to Scott's texts. Low argues that georgic is "an informing spirit, an attitude toward life, and a set of themes and images" that accentuate "the value of intensive labor against hardships and difficulties." He distinguishes georgic's characteristics from linked genres:

it differs from pastoral because it emphasizes work instead of ease...it differs from epic because it emphasizes planting and building instead of killing and destruction...it is preeminently the mode suited to the establishment of civilizations and the founding of nations.⁹

The particular application of such a reading of georgic to Sarah Scott is suggested by Betty Rizzo's biographical remark: "It became an important tenet of Scott and her circle that any honest labor became a lady or gentleman who needed a subsistence, and that no work was demeaning that was useful."¹⁰ The women of the Hall carve up the day into a series of projects to be fulfilled and allot meaningful work as cure to society's neglected — the poor widow, the aged and the sick, the physically deformed. If the estate stands as a conventional metonymy for the larger realm, what Alastair Fowler notes as central to notions of georgic—"retirement" and "patriotic sentiment"—very clearly underpins the ideology of Millenium Hall.¹¹

Georgic proved particularly amenable to eighteenth-century depictions of widows. It values retirement over exhibition. It eschews the luxury and folly which contemporary misogynists often ascribed to wealthy dowagers.¹² It replaces the courtly modishness of pastoral with the modest purity of Christian philanthropy. It engages with time in a constructive and seasonal manner analogous to women's biological cycles and rejects the fantastic timelessness of a pastoral Golden Age.¹³ A fitting metaphor for bluestocking interest in education and scholarship, georgic highlights the utility and merit in working against obstacle. It substitutes female-friendly creation for gender-specific military vocation. Ultimately it both privileges private endeavour (planting) over political action (war), and assigns to this personal energy the status of patriotism (nation-building through agriculture), thereby granting women, and particularly decorous widows, scope for public participation.

The notion of improvement informs the exhortations of eighteenth-century georgic writers. Whether they mixed poetry and planting techniques, as did Walter Harte, or recorded actual agricultural experiments, as did Arthur Young in his various *Tours*, the object was to turn the land to better account. But throughout the seventeenth century, the instructional discourse had been frequently aestheticized in a classical blend of *dolce* and *utile*, and improvement had come to refer not simply to land but also more generally to "betterment or amelioration."¹⁴ This is reflected in part in the growth of conduct books throughout the eighteenth century. The extended association with human attributes---the potential for self-improvement---leads to widows being urged in contemporary courtesy tracts to relinquish the vanities of the world and to dedicate themselves to God and philanthropy. Richard Allestree's representation of widowhood as an ordained retirement "from the lighter Jollities and Gayeties of the World" accommodates the utopian enclave of Millenium Hall. Bolstered by her "retir'd Temper of Mind," the widow "has her Time and her Fortune at her own command, and consequently may much more abound in the works both of Piety and Charity."¹⁵

If one aspect of georgic highlights the redemptive value of labour in the face of adversity, then widows are preeminently suited to the mode. Although the catchphrase "odd women" was not popularized until the nineteenth century, widows were in the eighteenth century considered anomalous: husbandless, they did not fit the cultural construction of the proper woman, decorously yoked to a man. The cache of contemporary anti-widow misogyny has been examined in earlier chapters: descriptions of widows range from peculiar relicts to drunken devils. What Dorice Williams Elliott attributes to the eighteenth-century spinster is even more readily applied to the widow: she attracts opprobrium "because, like the poor, she was both too dependent and too independent. Without adequate economic resources, unmarried women of almost all classes could drain the finances of their families."¹⁶ Elliott's comments on female sexuality---"[v]irtuous women exist in order to marry and bear children"---allude to the difficulty posed by the widow in particular.¹⁷ A widow is by necessity a sexualized woman, but is no longer socially useful through the production of heirs.

Scott's widows may not be physiologically generative, but they alone can make meaning in the novel. The pleasing facade of Millenium Hall obscures to the core narrator its true functionality and he is reliant upon the various widows to unlock its significance. When he and his companion Lamont first tour the grounds, they are struck by the fineness of the landscaped woods and attribute it to "the direction of the person at present more famous for that sort of improvement." But the women require no Capability Brown. Lady Mary Jones, Miss Mancel and Mrs. Morgan simply oversee the "commonest labourers in the country," who execute their orders (68). Complementing this sense of unfussy improvement is the prelapsarian description of the woodland animals which "seem to have forgot all fear, and rather to welcome than fly those who come amongst them" (69). This natural harmony extends to the ecological balance between the aesthetic and the functional: Mrs. Morgan deconstructs what the narrator had thought only "a pretty temple" to reveal "a very large pidgeon [sic] house, that affords a sufficient supply to our family and many of our neighbours." The hill hides a warren "prodigiously stocked with rabbits";

the canal and river "furnish our table with a great profusion of fish"; the number of deer wandering the grounds provides "as much venison as we can use. either in presents to our friends. or our own family" (110).

The women's sensitivity in improving the estate with only the most respectful of transformations extends to their rehabilitation of society's outcasts: parish widows and the physically malformed. Long exploited by the corrupt squirearchy, the parish widows have been rescued by the ladies of the Hall, who first renovated their dilapidated cottages and then established a labour exchange programme to ensure the maintenance of their community. Each widow now works according to her ability to serve another's need: a crippled woman, for example, spins wool for the able-bodied woman who in turn cleans her house. The programme includes a kind of georgic childcare system. The Hall ladies rehouse the sixth child of every poor family on the estate with the cottagers. These old women---widows, judging from the phrasing---teach the children "to knit and to spin" before they go off to school: "They are pretty company for us," one widow tells the narrator, "and make us mothers *again*, as it were, in our old age" (67; emphasis mine). This experiment literalizes Richard Allestree's metaphorical imperative that a solvent widow focus her time and money on social charity: "Thus she may be a Mother when she ceases to bear: and tho' she no more encrease one Family, she may support many."¹⁸ Poor widows are here redeemed through a second motherhood: their work draws them into the community as vital contributors at an age when most are relegated to the margins. Fittingly, the old lady finishes her recitation with a reference to the friendliness---the "good will"---which is the only fee they ask from the children's families (67). As the interpolations unfold in the novel, this notion of "good will" assumes its literal meaning: generous testaments, to and from widows, have funded the creation of Millenium Hall and all its continuing schemes.

Scott acknowledges the predictable ascriptions of oddity to a female community by drawing together the physically deformed and the spouseless females. The women of the Hall extend their

good will and georgic philosophy to dwarves and giants and handicapped individuals: they hire the deformed to work for wages and protect the rest in the natural enclave on the grounds. The "monsters" all share histories of persecution and exploitation and serve therefore as a "distorted mirror image of the ladies" themselves.¹⁹ As Nina Auerbach notes, "female communities still tend to evoke the maimed, outcast image of the Graie---a collective amputee by definition."²⁰ Scott pre-empts criticism by highlighting their likenesses, granting all "a function, a space, and dignity." She introduces men from the public world into the isolated community, into the idealized gardens and the artistic house, right into the asylum itself: the "result is that...the male narrator's perceptions of deviance are radically changed."²¹ In the process physical beauty becomes defined as vulnerability and deformity which permits an evasion of the "sexual economy and its tropes."²²

This avoidance of the contemporary marriage marketplace arguably exists only in the "eu-topia (good place)," that is, "in Thomas More's pun, ou-topia, or no-place."²³ One recent scholar argues that it is precisely the women's "withdrawal from the world" and their subsequent containment in the "asylum" that is the Hall that allows them to exchange their sexualized status for philanthropic authority.²⁴ But Christine Rees points out the socio-political constraints placed upon creating any kind of alternative social structure for women beyond mere fantasy: "[t]he power to create an ideal state presupposes just that: *power*, the power to acquire territory and economic resources through discovery, conquest, or inheritance."²⁵ Eighteenth-century women exercise power through property, but the usual price of that property---marriage---contributes to the problematization of female autonomy through the implications of coverture. Women, then, paradoxically, may experience independent personhood only when "freed from the male domination enshrined in English marriage and property laws."²⁶ While sentimental novels tend not to speculate on alternatives to the status quo, Scott pragmatically employs widowhood as a viable trope for female agency: every character in *Millenium Hall* is financially independent by either her own widowhood or kinship with a rich widow.

The Widows' Collective Might

Two of the central figures in *Millenium Hall* are widows. Unsurprisingly, both play vital roles, holding the real and intellectual property that comprises both *Millenium Hall* the estate and *Millenium Hall* the text. Mrs. Maynard is the less wealthy, having been left only a small jointure by her late husband, but her authority is indisputable: she is the "master of the discourses in utopia," the insider who recounts and explicates the interpolated histories, granted confidential exclusivity by the widows who fill in the blanks when necessary.²⁷ For example, Mrs. Maynard tells the narrator that she has compiled her account of Mrs. Morgan's distasteful marriage "from others: Mrs. Morgan never mentions his name if it can possibly be avoided" (135). Decorous, continent, philanthropic, and dignified, Mrs. Morgan is one of the most admirable widows in the eighteenth-century novel. She has a briefly happy childhood, educated in reason, love, and piety by her impressive mother, Lady Melvyn, who, one critic argues, leaves at her death "a legacy more valuable than all the fortunes that made *Millenium Hall* physically possible...the model of good mothering that informs the entire project described in the rest of the book."²⁸

Shunted off to boarding school and then blackmailed into an unsuitable marriage by her step-mother, Mrs. Morgan has cause to draw on her maternal lessons of forbearance. Her marital home is old and dreary and ruled by Mr. Morgan's rich but contemptible sister: she is barred from any female friendship by her tyrannical husband. She suffers, Mrs. Maynard recounts discreetly, "less uneasiness from his ill-humour, brutal as it was, than from his nauseous fondness" (135).²⁹ At last, Mr. Morgan sickens and dies—not before testing his wife's health and patience by insisting on her constant attendance—and Mrs. Morgan is, surprisingly, well rewarded in her widowhood:

it appeared that [Mr. Morgan] had left his wife an estate which fell to him...where we now live. The income of it is a thousand pounds a year, the land was

thoroughly stocked: and the house in good repair. Mr. Morgan had at his marriage settled a jointure on his wife of four hundred pounds a year rent charge, and in a codicil...he bequeathed her two thousand pounds in ready money. (158)

The dividends of subservient wifehood are enumerated with care: they combine, and even surpass, the best of both jointure and dower entitlements. Mrs. Morgan receives a jointured annuity, which is backed by land---it is specified as a rent charge, a signal of its stability---a bestowal of ready money, and what appears to be an estate---enhanced by livestock, crops, and a well-appointed house---possessed in fee simple. There is no mention of a life-interest only in Millenium Hall, and the projects the women formulate imply a future continuance. This is a rare and highly complimentary will. Certainly Mrs. Morgan is one of the most autonomous widows in the novels under consideration in this study: she has an unrestricted ability to dispose of her property and her money at will and by will at a time when widows were not always authorized to disburse freely their legacies. Furthermore, of course, it is the widow's estate that provides the physical space for Millenium Hall and the fictional space for the text itself.

Gary Kelly suggests that in the novel "[m]oney is clearly shown to be power, and most women lack money of their own. Even women with money...use this power only to defend their own rank and interests."³⁰ But Mrs. Morgan is the propertied widow who proves the exception to this castigation of the eighteenth-century gentry as portrayed in *Millenium Hall*. Notwithstanding the abominable treatment she has received at the hands of her step-mother---from a slanderous attack on her reputation to the forced marriage---Mrs. Morgan uses her familial wealth to brace Lady Melvyn's widowhood, even though that lady's profligacy is responsible for the indebted Melvyn estate. Lady Melvyn's three children are all unprovided for, which flags great imprudence: the implication is that through Lady Melvyn's "extravagance" the estate is so bled of assets it cannot sustain the heirs. Mrs. Maynard tells the narrator that Mrs. Morgan had inherited £6000 through her mother's marriage settlement (again, the bounty of the first Lady Melvyn) which she promptly divides among her step-mother's children "and has besides conferred several favours on that

family, and frequently makes them valuable presents." Although the children sometimes visit, we are told that except for "that dull period of her confinement," Lady Melvyn finds the way of life at Millenium Hall "ill suited to her taste" (161). Thus, unlike Mrs. Morgan's, Lady Melvyn's solvent widowhood is wholly unearned: it is an unfettered gift, bestowed with charity by a powerful widow.

While Mrs. Morgan clearly deserves her testamentary endowments, Kelly questions the novel's sources of wealth as adventitious—"an unexpected inheritance, a lucky discovery, a fortunate friendship"—and suggests that this providential aspect reflects the "lottery mentality" characteristic of the disenfranchised.³¹ What Kelly neglects to observe is that all prosperity is bestowed by widows, and so is not merely fortuitous, but rather a reminder that widowhood could carry real fiscal authority. Scott's text does not offer corrective suggestions for the property laws of England—even Sheridan's indictment of the widow Arnold does not imply such a radical approach—but it does employ rich widows to transmit wealth to unmarried women, who in turn use the funds to create a sheltered community for both solvent and indigent single gentlewomen: this amounts to a matrilineal economy, exchanging marital bonds for same-sex, affiliative chastity.

Scott's trust in matriarchal wealth is evident in her treatment of Miss Mancel's story. Two characters, each variously responsible for Miss Mancel's welfare, form a contrastive binary designed to highlight the use of riches. Mr. Hintman is Miss Mancel's legal guardian. Indulgent and generous at first, he eventually reveals a predatory nature, but dies before he can attempt Miss Mancel's virtue. But he dies intestate, leaving Miss Mancel destitute, except for her accomplishments and personal beauty, which render her more vulnerable to sexual persecution than not. After the Edward Lambton interlude, which fulfills the text's mandate—"each woman first proves herself marriageable and is then freed from marital confinement"—Miss Mancel,

disguised in name, goes to live with a widow lady of fortune.³² The recitation of her autobiography reveals that Mrs. Thornby is Miss Mancel's long-lost mother.

Property and propriety are carefully conjoined in Mrs. Thornby. Adverse circumstances led her and her first husband to America, where he died, leaving her stranded and penniless and unable to book passage back to England to claim her daughter, left for protection with a sister. The widow attracts the attention of a rich and respected gentleman, who "urge[s] her to consent" to a second marriage. With impressive economy, the subsequent sentence justifies the only reason for remarriage, pre-emptively protects the widow's reputation, and both dictates and satisfies the protocol for a remarrying widow: "her poverty was no faint adviser [sic], and with general approbation, at the conclusion of the first year of her widowhood, she became his wife." When Mr. Thornby dies, he leaves his tropical property to a nephew, "but the money he had sent before him into England, which amounted to about forty thousand pounds, he left to his widow" (149). Mrs. Thornby and her recovered daughter live the next six years "in great figure" but again Scott emphasizes the widow's continence: it is evident Mrs. Thornby, unlike Mr. Hintman, has not disturbed her capital, as upon her death, she leaves her daughter "in possession of forty thousand pounds" (156).

The next interpolated narrative employs again a pairing for contrastive interpretation, but in the history of Lady Mary Jones, her guardians are both widows, whose respective trivialities will lead Lady Mary to seek the georgic retirement afforded by Millenium Hall. Lady Sheerness is as transparent and shallow as her name suggests; she is devoted to all manner of social diversion, rich ("her jointure was considerable: and her lord at his decease left her some thousand pounds in ready money"), and lavish in her spending (172). Most egregious is this widow's misuse of time, with which she nearly infects Lady Mary: their schedule of pleasures results in "so continual a hurry" that they cannot even evaluate their own amusement. (180). When Lady Sheerness becomes ill, she applies herself frantically to cards in case an interruption of visitors leaves a

moment for reflection—"from the time she rose, she took care not to have leisure to think"—and dies in a state of total spiritual unpreparedness (187).

The widow's extravagance overmatches the resources of the estate: though Lady Mary is confident of "succeeding to an easy fortune," and indeed the will appoints her sole heiress, she inherits only debt (188). This highlights by comparison the property management of Lady Mary's next guardian. Lady Brumpton is a widow of "small fortune," whose virtues of generosity and refinement adjoin one great flaw: a bluestocking aspiration for genius, or at least for the reputation thereof. She cultivates this with a series of pretentious acquaintances and "improves" herself with a scrambled collage of topical ideas.³³ Nonetheless this widow is careful with her means. She is first distinguished from Lady Sheerness by their differing legacies: Lady Brumpton's husband "had bequeathed her his whole fortune"; Lady Sheerness, though well provided for, is not honoured with the entirety of her husband's wealth.

Lady Brumpton proves her worth by settling part of it—a hundred pounds annually—on Lady Mary for her clothing expenses, with additional funds made available upon request. While this widow likewise becomes lingeringly ill, she is granted the sort of epiphany that eluded Lady Sheerness: "she saw how much a desire to gain the applause of a few people, had made her forget the more necessary aim of obtaining the approbation of her Creator" (194). She accepts her coming death and reflects this spiritual clarity in her material actions: she counsels Lady Mary "to remove...any anxiety on her own account...that she had bequeathed her ten thousand pounds, and all her plate and jewels" (194), an ample sum, incidentally, for a widow "of small fortune." In this episode, Lady Mary profits both materially and spiritually from her exposure to the widows: wearied of superficiality, enriched by her inheritance, she joins company with Mrs. Morgan and Miss Mancel and sets up house at Millenium Hall.

If Lady Mary's widows juxtapose notions of expenditure---both temporal and financial---to reveal in the contrast the philanthropic attitude that their niece will embody at Millenium Hall. Miss Selvyn's history, another found-mother plot, opposes the gender-specific potential for moral redemption. Miss Harriot Selvyn inherits a small fortune---three thousand pounds---from her tradesman father and rejects the marriage proposal of a young gallant with a maxim for rationale: "A reformed rake may be sober but is never virtuous" (208). She lives next with Lady Emilia Reynolds, who, on her deathbed, reveals to Harriot her secret history: her young love for Lord Peyton, a wedding delayed by complicated settlements, a passionate pre-marital consummation, a resulting pregnancy that produces Harriot. Sick with shame, Lady Emilia refuses to marry, despite Lord Peyton's wild entreaties; they hire Mr. Selvyn to raise Harriot as his own child. Lady Emilia and Lord Peyton pledge separation until old age has abated their passion, but Lord Peyton dies before this can happen.

Despite her sadness at finding her mother too late in life, Harriot rejoices in Lady Emilia's self-discipline: "What an example of virtue have you set me!....Blest you must be supremely by him who loveth the contrite heart" (218). By her mother's will---and surely Lady Emilia serves as a kind of love-widow, married by natural law---Harriot is heir to twelve thousand pounds and all her personal estate. Sharing an acquaintance with Lady Mary, she visits Millenium Hall and asks "leave to join her fortune to the common stock, and to fix intirely with them" (218). What seems most striking is the differentiation between a rake, even a reformed one, and a fallen woman: Harriot refuses to believe Lord Robert could ever be "virtuous", because of his rake's nature, and yet the first thing she mentions upon hearing her mother's story is her exemplary virtue.³⁴ Lady Emilia's personal will, her sacrifice of passionate love to temperate restraint, is actualized in her testamentary lucre, and once again a widow's will enriches the community at Millenium Hall.

In the subsequent interpolation, the twice-widowed Mrs. Alworth shelters her orphaned granddaughter, Harriot Trentham, an heiress of £11,000. This history, marked by its double

widow, is likewise packed with didactic messages: the perils of beauty, the realistic difficulties of life after marriage, the power of rich widows to bestow personal liberty. Mrs. Alworth is onomastically "an old lady of good sense and merit" (224). She is hopeful that the natural regard between Harriot and Master Alworth—cousins—will blossom into marriage. It nearly does. Settlements are drawn up but Mr. Alworth is meanwhile lured into marriage by a local coquette. The widow is dismayed at her grandson's preference, "an error for which she prophetically saw he would in time be severely punished" (233). She and Harriot wisely transfer their energies to the fractured marriages of the other grandchildren. Because of their interventions, the unions survive. At her death, Mrs. Alworth makes Harriot "mistress of her own fortune with the addition of four thousand pounds, part of it the accumulated interest of her paternal inheritance, the rest Mrs. Alworth's legacy" (235).

To validate the widow's wisdom, it happens that Mr. Alworth's marriage is unsuccessful and he finds himself again drawn to Harriot. Again it is a widow who interprets the situation: Mrs. Maynard, the core narrator, recognizes Mr. Alworth's inappropriate regard and warns her friend. Harriot's pained decision to leave the family estate is reinforced by a bout of smallpox which ruins her beauty and vitiates her love-plot. Restored to health by widow-care (Mrs. Maynard nurses her), endowed by widow-riches (Mrs. Alworth's legacy), Harriot commences a new life of reading and philanthropy and yields her fortune to the female community at the Hall.

It is striking that in these two histories the drafting of settlements, necessarily requiring some time, creates the space for personal error, namely Lady Emilia's ardour and Mr. Alworth's seduction. This links property and propriety in an uneasy proximity, as if somehow the brief suspension of law—the time taken to enshrine entitlements and obligations—unleashes a primal force of passion, necessarily at odds with the safeguarding of property and its insistence on patrilineal legitimacy and advantageous unions. This very faint but subversive aspect to settlements, their potential to disrupt what they are designed to protect, will be replayed in the

novel's conclusion, with its attendant anxieties spilling over into the sequel. *Millenium Hall* generally upholds the settlements drafted by widows for female legatees but the novel does, however tacitly, query the delays caused by jointure negotiations, so different from the automatic thirds accorded widows by dower.

Strict settlement policies of the eighteenth century, drafted to guarantee patrilineal chains of inheritance, meant that widows were rarely possessed of property in fee simple. It is thus unsurprising that the widows of the Hall---and the single women enriched by widows---use their funds primarily to build houses. Within the Morgan/Mancel history is an account of the purchase and maintenance of a mansion house for unmoneyed gentlewomen and widows in "their year of deep mourning" (117). Financial details are specified. Since no lady may live genteelly on a fortune of £2000, the mansion provides a welcome alternative to a toad-eating dependence on a diffident relative. The scheme is so successful that a second mansion is purchased by the community. Its placement in the novel's structure---immediately subsequent to the interpolated tale of Miss Selvyn---emphasizes the notion that widows may restore what men irretrievably ruin. Just as Lady Emilia privately resuscitates her virtue by containment and discipline---the potentiality for which her daughter will not honour in Lord Robert---so this second mansion, the "ancient seat of hospitality" degraded by first a miser and then a profligate, is both restored to its original glory and improved by the women of the Hall (221). The core narrator in his juxtaposition of the two owners alludes to a Popean use of riches in order to highlight the women's georgic amelioration of the battered estate. Various inhabitants restore the building, mend the furniture, and cultivate the garden, and the narrator is "pleased to see with how much art they repaired the decays of time" (222).

Interestingly, what helps to fund this enterprise is a variation on the jointure scheme: single women deposit whatever fortune they have with the administrator of the estate, who invests it accordingly, and uses the interest for the benefit of the community. With regard to the jointure

contract, the wife's portion is invested in land, and the rent charges later serve as her jointured annuity in widowhood. However, as discussed in Chapter One, there was no enforcement of this system. That some men squandered the capital or lost it in paper transactions also rendered jointure precarious. On the other hand, the fact that some of the Hall women at their deaths "bequeathed what little they had towards constituting a fund for the continuation of the community" (120) speaks to the contrastive matriarchal economy Scott envisages: women with control over their own resources, with the power to bequeath them at will and by will, with a vested interest in sustaining the community that sheltered them in their own moment of vulnerability. Their accumulated property is substantial: one critic counts £86,000 in money, plus jewels, silver, and the estate of the Hall itself.³⁵ Strikingly, this wealth is treated as communal, and thus the ways in which the widows and unmarried women, voluntarily linked through friendship, share their property equitably and without boundary represent "a challenge to every assumption about the position of women in eighteenth-century society, where they themselves become property in a male system of exchange."³⁶

A further challenge in her displacement of the conventional romantic heroine, the widow has outlived the experiences most novels anticipate in their focus on the threshold period between virgin and wife. Structurally, *Millenium Hall* rests on "every possible variation on the traditional love plot," yet, in its plurality and episodic form, offers "an alternative to the linear marriage plot."³⁷ Its focus on widowhood subverts the mid-century heroine's fate of marriage or death. Thematically, the widow's story provides the space for what is not so much radical revisioning as innovatory variations on a marital model. The gentlewomen of Millenium Hall fail in their ascribed cultural duty to marry successfully (and, exacerbating this, none produces children), but they generate new kinds of relationships that yield personal happiness and economic security. They create a hierarchical community that nevertheless refutes crucial tenets of English society: an economy that privileges the collective over the individual, a communal approach to property, an educational system that produces useful, self-supporting women.

As will Clara Reeve in her novels, Scott here uses the widow to defuse potential criticism of her presentation of female autonomy and women's capacity for improvement (of both person and property). Because the widow acts only after she has played out her constructed plot of marriage, her innovations seems less alarming. What Joseph Allen Boone remarks of Scott's narratorial choices—a first-person male narrator "to articulate an essentially alien feminist vision and render it accessible to her audience."³⁸—applies equally to her reliance on the widow in order to promote female agency. Further, the widows of *Millenium Hall* reflect Scott's interest in revisioning concepts of private property. From one perspective, the interpolated histories of the individual women give "private experience precedence over any overriding narrative shape:"³⁹ from another, the private experience is, as is the real property that is Millenium Hall, rendered communal: the women in the text bear certain resemblances to traditional love-plot heroines, but they virtually merge into one collective representation.⁴⁰ It seems crucial that none of Scott's widows is a mother herself. Freed from dynastic considerations, Mrs. Morgan creates a feminocentric middling space of Millenium Hall, one that houses neither the public marketability of the virgin, nor the private submission of the wife, but offers to gentlewomen a partnership in property and a vocational identity through philanthropy.

Scott introduces the widows by increment, from a single widow (Mrs. Morgan) through a pair of widows (Lady Sheerness and Lady Brumpton), to the twice-widowed (Mrs. Alworth). This deliberate accrual emphasizes the importance of widows as such. Smaller interpolations regularly punctuate the frame narrative, metonymically reinforcing the notion of the widow as a georgic landowner, using cultivation in both senses to stand for personal and property improvement. For example, the women and the narrator take tea at a neighbouring widow's house, which so inspires the narrator with its pretty shell-framed drawings and wallpapered rooms that he determines "to copy it" in his own home (195). Mrs. Maynard, the core narrator of widow tales, explains that this widow had been left with five young children in poor circumstances—by which we may read

unjointured---by her late husband. The widows of the Hall improve her fortune by first settling an income on her, redressing as widows the husband's failure to provide. They rent the house for her, furnish it, and lend her some hired girls to assist in its maintenance. Now the garden is neat and abundant: the children tend their own plots: the library is well-stocked with edifying texts: the widow is, accordingly, confident and energetic. Here, in miniature, the widows reanimate both property and person as they themselves have improved the Hall. That the narrator finds in this widow's house a model for his own estate both prefigures his own conversion at the end of the novel ("my thoughts are all engaged in a scheme to imitate them on a smaller scale") and confirms the import and impact of the widows' improvements. Formally, the narrator extends their influence by connecting the private enclave of Millenium Hall to the public world of London through his narratorial epistle addressed to a bookseller outlining a scheme for social improvement.⁴¹

The widows' success likewise offers a novelistic rejection of John Humphries' later contention that women could not manage real property. Granted agency as (or by) wealthy widows, the Hall women "receive their own rent and direct all the chief concerns of their estate", a primary involvement in the estate that tacitly alludes to the exploitation they have variously suffered at the hands of men (169). And this authority extends to the generation of new kinds of income. Harriot Trentham's fortune establishes a carpet manufactory in the parish and here too they refuse reliance on a male intermediary.

[A]s they feared an enterprising undertaker might ruin their plan, they themselves undertook to be stewards: they stood the first expence, allowed a considerable profit to the directors, but kept the distribution of the money entirely in their own hands: thus they prevent the poor from being oppressed by their superiors, for they allow them great wages, and by their very diligent inspection hinder any frauds.

This principled industry is comprehensively beneficial to the community: "scarcely any one is too young or too old to partake of its emoluments": and the fiscal profits are so great "as to enrich all

the country round about" (243). The women understand that education and economic self-reliance are key to true independence and thus "[w]hat is striking in this capitalistic enterprise is the untraditional role that women assume as stewards of the business."⁴² The diversification of the Hall's economy makes clear "a progressive understanding of change" in keeping with georgic's notions of time.⁴³ Not only does the manufactory mark the end of the women's reliance upon "adventitious wealth...the kind distinctively a woman's, inherited wealth," but it signals their limited foray into the world at large.⁴⁴

The last episode of the novel further underscores Scott's interest in writing widows as agents of improvement. After a tour of the rug manufactory, Lamont interrogates the women on their chosen way of life querying their finances and abstemious philosophies. The two unmarried women, Mrs. Trentham and Mrs. Mancel, discuss emotional matters and questions of piety. Significantly, only the widows discourse on financial matters. Mrs. Morgan enumerates the costs of Millenium Hall in great detail---down to the clothing of the house-girls---and explains that far from costing much, the Millenial projects actually leave funds in reserve, with which the ladies administer their manufactory. Despite their payment of "very high wages," that enterprise too turns a profit. With exemplary decorum, Mrs. Morgan illustrates their predicament and their resolution: "As we did not mean to drive a trade, we have been at a loss what to do with the profits. We have made a fund for the sick and the disabled, from which they may receive a comfortable support, and intend to secure it to them to perpetuity in the best manner we can" (247). Immediately following this section comes Lamont's religious conversion---he rises symbolically at day-break and commences his reformed life by studying the New Testament---and the narrator's account of his plans to model his estate and shape his life according to the georgic and philanthropic philosophies of the widow ladies. Thus the influence of the women, and in particular the exemplary widow Mrs. Morgan, is measured in the transformation of the two gentlemen.

Yet as women, and widows in particular, the Hall ladies know first-hand the perils of unsecured existence. Mrs. Morgan articulates the need to safeguard the charitable profits by settlement, alluding to one principle of legal fallibility in the women's resolve to fix regular income upon the disabled "in the best manner" they can. By mid-century, with jointure increasingly replacing dower entitlements and contractual disputes made possible by unsecured paper promises, it is accepted as a matter of course that settlements can be barred or dismantled. The epistolary language of the conclusion reflects this vague threat by reminding the reader that "there is no evidence that the community has authorized---or even knows about---the narrator's written account, which he sends to his narratee with the express hope that the recipient will see fit to publish it."⁴⁵ Although the narrator affixes "Millenium Hall" to the estate as a protective pseudonym, his very fear of "offend[ing] that modesty which has induced them to conceal their virtues in retirement" betrays a consciousness of his transgression (53). The women of Millenium Hall have deliberately chosen a secluded life and repeatedly make choices to avoid notoriety: their "innumerable" donations are frequently bestowed in secret (248), and Mrs. Morgan so abhors disclosing her private history that Mrs. Maynard has pieced together her narrative "from others" (135). Here their intellectual property---their personal stories as well as their georgic reforms---is unwittingly wrested from their control, filtered through two male voices (the narrator, the publisher), and sold for a price, the profits from which are not directed back into their community as they would be with any project they championed themselves.

Thus, a novel which repeatedly exalts the authority of widows to effect change through money, property, and charitable convictions ends on a discordant note of uncertainty and with the taint of betrayal. Widows may will, but justice can be appropriated by the knowledgeable and the rich. Widows may retreat from the world and re-build their Eden according to feminocentric principles, but gentlemen-travellers with their curiosity and their drive to disseminate such projects of novelty may penetrate their enclave and sell their secrets. This tacit anxiety spills over into the sequel. In *The History of Sir George Ellison*, the eponymous hero assumes the powers of

improvement embodied in *Millenium Hall* by the widows. Now the widows, though they occasionally transmit property or wealth, more frequently emphasize the economic violability of widowhood and the conflicts of propriety generated by the lack of secure and generative property of their own.

The Widow's Plight: Remarriage and Rescue
in *The History of Sir George Ellison*

Contemporary critics are increasingly turning their attention to *The History of Sir George Ellison*, the 1766 sequel to *Millenium Hall*. Although, as Betty Rizzo notes, the novel is "primarily a Utopia" that is likewise part exotic tale and part Christian exemplum, the novel at the same time deals extensively with slavery and is thus finding new readers interested in its portrayal of race relations.⁴⁶ Unsurprisingly, given the importance and proliferation of widows in *Millenium Hall*, its sequel likewise depends on the figure of the widow for thematic value and for structuring purposes. Vincent Caretta remarks that the "spate of marriages" which concludes the text "seems intended to offset the impression given in *Millenium Hall*, that, despite statements to the contrary, women are happier unmarried."⁴⁷ Remarking that the "idealized" eponymous hero "marries not one but two widows," one of whom is considerably older than Ellison himself, Elizabeth Bergen Brophy argues that Ellison's choices reflect a contemporary concern: Scott's "probable" motive for writing "was to contradict the prejudice against marrying widows."⁴⁸ Brophy's contention seems debatable in the case of the first Mrs. Ellison, who degenerates into a kind of monster by the time of her death, but certainly the courtships of both the second Mrs. Ellison and Mrs. Blackburn amount to a conduct tract for the remarrying widow.

The flurry of widow nuptials at the end of the text and Scott's promotion of delicacy in remarriage signal a dismantling of misogynistic stereotypes. However, there is a subtext of interest, both monetary and motivational, that impugns the widows who are otherwise drawn as

exemplary. Unlike those in *Millenium Hall*, the *Ellison* widows are represented as isolated characters, often playing out their plots in unconnected episodes. There are no communities of widows, as there are in Scott's earlier text, no utopian estates managed with feminocentric philanthropy. A consequence of this isolation is a tendency to remarry, forfeiting independence and authority in most cases for increased material comfort. Those who sustain their widowhoods are invariably vulnerable and require charity to secure even the most modest of livelihoods. So the interest that marks the remarrying widow both complicates the surface ascriptions of 'good' and 'bad', producing a strange subtext at odds with the novel's overt didacticism, and extends the socio-political interest in the widow that Scott revealed in *Millenium Hall*.

The novel's structure, which Vincent Caretta genders "masculine" in its "linear, progressive, chronological" form, is supported by the double instrumental function of its widows.⁴⁹ Ellison's history is significantly book-ended by marriages to two primary widows, yoked in a pairing that, as it did in *Millenium Hall*, invites the reader to make comparative judgments. These two widow-wives respectively introduce the hero's character flaws and make clear his correction. The binary organization embeds in the structure a moral education: Scott's preface declares her interest in Ellison as a man of virtue "within the reach of imitation," and thus her contrastive structuring, which requires the reader to make meaningful distinctions, reflects her overarching theme.⁵⁰ The first Mrs. Ellison, associated with slavery, will be compared to the second, connected with the notion of service, in order to query the contemporary politics of marriage, in part by extending the metaphor of subjection and marriage first developed in the narrative of Mrs. Morgan in *Millenium Hall*. The numerous assortment of episodic widows, whom Ellison assists throughout his life, contributes further to the exposition of character by confirming his integrity. They also reveal breaches in eighteenth-century law and in the security of jointure entitlements.

As Widows. As Wives: Notions of Slavery and (Re)marriage

Scott introduces Ellison's first future wife (meanwhile criticizing her hero's early privileging of profit over person) at the end of an extended metaphor that personifies "Commerce"---bedecked with the "gums of Arabia, the gems of India"---as the only temptress capable of distracting Ellison from his trade (8). But when a certain "widow lady" sets her designs on Ellison, he is forced to evaluate her interest. The widow is seven years older than Ellison, but still handsome, deemed prudent, and possessed of "ten thousand pounds in money and a plantation of no less value." Ellison's friends persuade him "not to let slip so good an opportunity of improving his fortune." They play down any imputation of pecuniary interest by observing that the widow's "character and person rendered it an eligible match" (9). Nevertheless, the sexualized commerce image and the description of the widow sit uneasily proximate, suggesting a tainted union---antithetical to the tenets of sensibility for which Ellison will eventually be celebrated---in which the woman is tantalizingly commodified.

Scott's inversion of the conventional gendered response to a marriage proposal makes clear the imbalance that will characterize Ellison's marriage as a whole. She figures Ellison as a feminine *tabula rasa*, willing to be guided in matters of courtship, and confident that matrimony will transform respectful neutrality into real love:

He...listened without reluctance to the advice of his friends. The lady was agreeable, her fortune desirable; and though his heart was void of those nice sensibilities, which he wished to feel for the woman with whom he entered into so intimate a connection, yet he flattered himself that her merit, joined with her personal charms, must soon excite a strong affection in a heart naturally warm and tender. (9)

Ellison here displays "traditionally defined feminine characteristics," which contribute to Scott's querying of gender and sentimentalism.⁵¹ But this feminization also accords with Ellison's reiterated awareness of the commodification of women and their usual loss of property through

marriage. He repeatedly highlights his awareness that the widow's reversion to the status of coverture involves material sacrifice---"[T]his estate being originally your's [sic]. I cannot think that marriage deprives you of your right in it"---and he accepts, uncomfortably, the necessity for maintaining the profitability of the plantation by slavery. (11). He is conscious that the widow's fortune has "enabled him to extend his trade" and he honours her "right to partake in the enjoyment of the income she brought him" (20). Even as the marriage degenerates, Ellison cannot reprimand "the woman whose affection had led her generously to put herself and so large a fortune into his power (for in this light he saw her marrying him) and who therefore had a just title to his gratitude" (22).

The phrasing is notable: wives usually forfeit "title" to any separate property; a remarrying widow---having experienced both marital submission and post-marital independence---might feel more keenly the loss of ownership. Ellison's friends variously fret over and scoff at his subjection to such a woman, but Ellison defends his marital behaviour with recourse to the commerce metaphor that first introduced Mrs. Ellison: his friends "must not wonder if his long application to merchandize had taught him to see everything in the light of traffic and his wife had bought him at so great a price, that he thought she had a right to make the best of the purchase" (23). This transposed commodification---Ellison the acquisition, the widow the purchaser---presages the skewed hierarchy of their marriage, with Ellison relinquishing the conventional authoritative office. But the repeated observations also isolate the emotional and material sacrifices women, and especially widows, are forced to endure through marriage. That it is the worthy, feminized hero who speaks both grants authority to the argument and softens any protofeminist stridency that might alienate the contemporary reader.

However, Ellison's sensitivity notwithstanding, Mrs. Ellison herself is rendered unsympathetically. While still a widow, she is equivocally represented: after marriage, she appears bigoted, cheaply sentimental, and conniving in her attempts to influence Ellison. When

she learns of Ellison's distaste for slavery and his refusal to administer corporal punishment for wayward behaviour. she is "mortified" and frets about potential fiscal loss (10). Then she reflects with "an inward exultation...that however it might be in other families. in their's woman was certainly not the weaker vessel. since she...had always kept her slaves in as good order as any man in the island" (13). Any subversive appeal Mrs. Ellison might hold as a woman of business and authority is voided by her unyielding prejudice and her recourse to the widow-tactics reviled in contemporary misogynist tracts.

These tactics implicates Mrs. Ellison in a range of manipulative behaviours. For example. when her beloved lap-dog breaks its leg. Mrs. Ellison sobs in a show of misplaced emotion. Ellison is agreeably surprised to witness this responsiveness---"in a heart that I feared was hardened against the sufferings even of her fellow creatures"---but Mrs. Ellison's subsequent indignation confirms her bigotry (13). According to Markman Ellis. her racist responses are "radical" even within contemporary anthropological discussions. Her status as a married woman---"slave to her husband by marriage"---and her identification with the pro-slavery interest "underlin[e] the perversity of her argument."⁵² Her shallow grief. her symbolic association with the lapdog. and her unfeeling heart. "steeped by habit." define her as a negative exemplum of the remarrying widow (17).

Her behaviour worsens after producing a son. embodying in its tricks and tantrums the strategies denounced in contemporary tracts. "If...thou do any thing contrary to her Mind." warns one such pamphlet. "she will say t'other Husband was more kind....If thou carve her the Best Morsel on the Table. though she take it. yet will she take it scornfully. and say. She had a Husband would let her cut where she liked herself."⁵³ Similarly. Mrs. Ellison rails at solitude and tries to control her second husband with unfavourable comparisons to her first: "'poor dear Mr. Tomkins...would not have used her so: he would rather have left any business unfinished. than have given her such terrors'" (20). In *The Folly. Sin. and Danger of Marrying Widows*. the True Penitent pities the

second husband of a wayward widow who complains "[t]hat her first Husband would never have behaved with so much ill Nature and ill Manners towards her: and, in fine, that she would not be controlled by him." and much "Clamour and Confusion" result in their discordant household.⁵⁴ But Mrs. Ellison is too "cunning", the text tells us, to fight openly: instead she fixes upon her husband the "disgraceful and unnatural yoke" of submission. Perceiving his inability to cause pain, she erects "her battery of sighs, tears, caresses, and reproaches," until "[b]y these arts," the narrator concludes, "she soon made her husband that slave which he would suffer no one to be to him" (22).

Scott evidently intends to link marriage and slavery, at least in regard to gendered misbehaviour. But while Ellison's first marriage is marked by uneven sexual power---Ellison's weakness, the widow's might---his second will be served up as a paragon of balance. More moderate than Astell or Wollstonecraft, Scott's mid-century Christian politics recognizes gender inequities but makes clear that corruption stems from an abdication of rightful authority. Ellison's bitter acceptance of slavery---"perhaps few have more severely lamented their being themselves enslaved by marriage, than he did his being thus the enslaver of others" (10)---does not blind him to its economic necessity on a plantation. Thus, in a reflection of Scott's "relentlessly pragmatic attitude to social problems," he assuages his conscience through ameliorative policies.⁵⁵ He handles his slaves humanely but masterfully, replicating in a racial hierarchy what he learned from the widows at Millenium Hall: a strategy of containment that grants freedom within limits, that reforms into sympathetic authority the dictatorial tendencies latent in a structured society.

Ellison's distinction between political and natural hierarchies---his accommodation of slave-owning to Christian equality---"may be intended to suggest that the subjugation of one sex by the other, like that of the African by the European, is based on custom and power, rather than nature and right."⁵⁶ Metaphorical slippage between the two states of marital and actual subjection was certainly conventional within the period. Defoe's *Roxana* complains that "the very Nature of the

Marriage-Contract was, in short, nothing but the giving up Liberty, Estate, Authority, and everything, to the Man, and the Woman was indeed, a meer Woman ever after, that is to say, a Slave."⁵⁷ Richard Allestree jeers at concupiscent, remarrying widows for "buy[ing] so undecent [sic], so ridiculous a slavery."⁵⁸ Matrimony and slavery are "typologically related" in legal writings such as Blackstone's *Commentaries* (the first volume of which is released in 1765, one year before *Ellison's* publication) in which chattel slavery and marriage are "sequentially discuss[ed]."⁵⁹ But Scott's gendered reversal of a hierarchical relationship in order to characterize a failed marriage highlights the delicacy of a power dynamic, maintaining that without a benevolent protectorate, any unequal relationship is susceptible to deviation.

The repeated plays on (re)marriage and slavery seemingly undermine Scott's philosophies of containment, suggesting that, as in *Millenium Hall*, women of spirit and competence profit most through widowhood, or at the least, spinsterhood. Scott resolves Ellison's marital slavery through the *deus ex machina* of a tropical fever, which kills Mrs. Ellison at the pinnacle of her monstrosity: she dies trying to teach her son the hypocrisy that will allow him to sham compliance with Ellison's dictates of virtue and discipline, while actually aping his mother by indulging his own cruel whims. This "timely death...releases Ellison from domestic tyranny, and never again will he relinquish his authority or his place in the domestic, political, or social hierarchy."⁶⁰ It is obvious that Mrs. Ellison's inversion and perversion of the marital dynamic underline the necessity of stratification and magnanimous control. After Ellison's marriage to the widowed Mrs. Tunstall, it becomes clear that Mrs. Ellison functions as a cautionary widow, dangerously powerful in an unbalanced marriage.

Ellison's own widowing fully activates his benevolence. He has been sensitized by his own marital thralldom to the distress of oppressed wives and poor widows. Amply enriched by both his own trade and his late wife's profitable estate, he reassumes what he let slip in marriage, the authority accorded him by gender. It is this combination of experience, property, and natural

character that animates Ellison's heroism. Transferring his ameliorative strategies of slave management to the community at large, Ellison undertakes a life of active virtue. He moves back to England and purchases an estate adjacent to his cousin, Sir William Ellison. Unsurprisingly, the symbolic relocation from the luxuriant disorder of Jamaica to the temperate realm of English rationality marks Ellison's mastery of the feminocentric gentry capitalism he learned at Millenium Hall. Throughout the rest of the novel, Ellison's choices will consistently involve improving the lot of women and widows in particular.

He first asks Mrs. Maynard to recommend a housekeeper for him, one schooled in philanthropic discourse. She hires for him a widow with a young daughter, which gladdens Ellison as he may exercise even greater charity in sheltering them both. He replicates this generosity on a larger scale, buying up cottages and re-housing the poor. The widowed housekeeper manages the project, observing any individuals in need and counselling "the kind of relief she judged most proper" (47): "[w]hen we consider where she had been bred [at Millenium Hall]," the narrator tells us, "we shall not think this was a difficult task for her to perform" (66). The subsequent reforms that Ellison institutes are described in detail (66 ff). He visits the Hall again, exchanging educational improvements with the widowed Mrs. Morgan, who outlines her most recent schemes for Ellison's commentary and permits him to visit her new community for dependent gentlewomen. Having progressed from the complexities of racial hierarchy in Jamaican slave management to the less controversial amendments for the English lower class, Ellison is ready to prove his grasp of gender politics through a second chance at love.

His second marriage to an English widow, Mrs. Tunstall, stands in contradistinction to his first as a companionate union of controlled passion and philanthropic ambition. The two share a history: they meet while she is still nominally Miss Allin, but promised to a Dr. Tunstall, their marriage delayed by her father's parsimony in providing the requisite £2000 portion. The situation is complicated by the fact that Mr. Allin then desires his daughter to jilt Tunstall in favour of the

newly arrived, very rich George Ellison, and even more so by Ellison and Miss Allin's burgeoning passion for one another. But Miss Allin is virtuous and resigned to her previous commitment and Ellison, though tormented, trumps her goodness by paying her portion, and providing her with a gorgeous trousseau, as recompense for compromising her heart. Fittingly, the marriage is disastrous: Dr. Tunstall turns drunkard and finally dies of a fever, that convenient dispatcher of inconvenient spouses. Ellison wrangles with his conscience not to rejoice and can barely restrain himself from flying to the "disconsolate widow" (167).

What follows is both a psychological examination of the widowed heart and a blueprint for proper remarital conduct. "[L]ack of money was to some the only understandable motive for a widow wishing to remarry," and a straitened widow with children was not necessarily censured for entering into a second marriage.⁶¹ If we recall the case of Mrs. Thornby in *Millenium Hall*, "poverty was no faint adviser" and the widow is permitted to enter into a second marriage at the end of her requisite mourning year with the "general approbation" of the neighbourhood. We learn by inference that Mrs. Tunstall has been widowed without jointure security, an even greater inducement to remarry. (If she still retains the £2000 capital that Ellison gave her as a portion, it is possible she might generate a meagre £100 yearly; Mrs. Morgan *et al* maintained the impossibility of living genteelly on just such a sum.) But Ellison desires Mrs. Tunstall with great ardour and cannot brook the thought that she might be swayed by mercenary considerations. He properly refrains from visiting her during the "first half-year of her widowhood" for fear that "her reputation might be wounded" (168). The narrator describes the conflicts in Ellison's mind, at the same time both legitimizing and subverting the understandable incentives of the remarrying widow:

Mrs. Tunstall being left with only the fortune Mr. Ellison had given her, to provide for herself and three young children, he had great reason to suppose, that when decency would permit, she might accept a hand that would make her mistress of large possessions; his conduct too had been such as might have inspired her with an esteem for him, and therefore from inclination, as much as

from interest. she might be induced to marry him; but these were neither of them motives that could content a lover of delicacy. (168)

Scott carefully establishes, before Ellison declares his love, that Mrs. Tunstall is innocent of any matrimonial design. The widow has assumed that his former inclinations have long been quelled: her children and her "years of care and vexation" free her from any romantic intuition.⁶² When Ellison articulates his desire, after her first year of widowhood has expired, Mrs. Tunstall is surprised and confused.⁶³ Although he begs her to speak plainly, putting aside "politeness, gratitude, and above all, interest," she asks for more time to discern her own heart, "that not having yet laid aside her widow's habit, she had not expected to be addressed." The narrator comments drolly on the widow's predicament, and her interjection, a rare feature in the novel, underscores the delicacy with which Mrs. Tunstall is forced to act. "I am persuaded most women must pity Mrs. Tunstall," she writes, "it is rather cruel for a man to insist on a woman's speaking plain in such a case: allowing nothing to prudery and custom, which have ordained that a little dissimulation is a female duty, and one of the first rules in the science of decorum" (175). Humour aside, this appeal to female empathy in particular---the novel's preface specifies a male reader---suggests an acute awareness of the eighteenth-century sexual politics at play here, in particular the paradoxical rules of femininity which required a conscious display of unwitting behaviour in order to affirm "natural" purity. That Mrs. Tunstall is a widow makes her adherence to these cultural dictates all the more nuanced. Any initiative she might normally employ is compromised by the amorous context, rendering her vulnerable to slurs of lubricity. Yet ignorance and prudery are unlikely attributes of an experienced widow. The narrator's solicitation of our compassion marks in particular the artifice of contemporary social custom.

If Ellison is anxious about the widow's compensatory motivations in remarriage, he certainly evaluates the state of widowhood with a surprising lack of sexual prejudice: not for him the crude contemporary jokes about appetitive widows, who "having once smelt of the Spit...always love a

good joint."⁶⁴ Nor does he seem poisoned by jealous distaste for the widow's previous experience. unlike the contemporary misogynist who argues that "though a Widow should preserve her Fidelity to a second Husband ever so religiously. yet still the Man will never have that tender Affection for her which he might have had. if she had never been married."⁶⁵ Rather. Ellison now regrets encumbering his proposal with requirements of disinterested love. thinking instead that if the widow "had married him on no other principal than esteem and gratitude. the tenderness of his passion could scarcely fail of exciting affection in the breast of a virtuous woman" (176). This is of course the combination of blank pliability and affective sensibility expected of all virtuous girls before marriage. and. significantly. it describes the exact state of Ellison's own heart on the eve of his engagement with the first Mrs. Ellison-to-be. On the one hand. this slippage between virgin and widow exalts the latter's sexual probity. returning her to the inexperience---and innocence---of girlhood. On the other hand. this moment marks Ellison's transcendence of the subservient role in love: he has by this point in the text assumed consummate authority and actively courts this widow for wife.

The two widow-wives are drawn into marked contrast by their different approaches to remarriage. Mrs. Tunstall is gentle. educated. refined. and disciplined. attributes not possessed by Ellison's first widow. Contrary to that widow's initiation of courtship with Ellison. Mrs. Tunstall is troubled about the propriety of remarriage in general. "Her delicacy had always led her to dislike second marriages: to love twice. or to marry where a woman does not love. had appeared to her inconsistent with true delicacy" (177). She conforms here to Richard Allestree's famous declaration that "Marriage is so great an Adventure. that once seems enough for the whole Life." Allestree goes on to specify the reasons: "She that has had a good Husband. may be suppos'd to have his Idea so fix'd in her Heart. that it will be hard to introduce any new Form....On the other side. if she have had a bad [Husband]...the memory of what she has suffer'd should. methinks. be a competent Caution against new Adventures."⁶⁶ Dr. Tunstall proved an odious failure but Mrs. Tunstall knows from experience Ellison's amiable virtue. At long last. "obliged to acknowledge

that she had refined too much" on the subject of remarriage, she thus accepts Ellison's proposal, with the proviso that she be allowed to complete a second full year of widowhood.⁶⁷

But despite the widow's caution, a threat of notoriety hurries the remarriage and self-interest sullies her exemplary status. The widow marries Ellison after only a six-month delay. "half a year short of the term she had been desirous of completing" (178). Ellison has argued convincingly that his deliberate absence during her early widowhood "must entirely secure her from any malicious imputations" (177), so it is not her reputation as a widow that concerns her. Rather, for all Ellison's reiterated anxiety that the widow not marry him for "sordid views," for "fortune," or for "interest," Mrs. Tunstall agrees to wed him at once when her father "jestingly told his daughter, that if she did not lay aside her foolish scruples, he would proclaim to the whole neighbourhood that she was guilty of a much greater indecorum than a far earlier marriage, as she was in great measure kept by Mr. Ellison" (177).

The widow learns to her astonishment that not only did Ellison provide her portion and wedding clothes—which she knew—but that he, and not her father, also rescued her late husband's failing business. She digests the news a moment, and then accepts the proposal, establishing gratitude as the grounds of love: "accept my thanks, accept me...such goodness is irresistible: henceforth command my will, for by your's, it must ever be regulated; I...find my affection for you grow so entire, that I must wish to have it made my duty to love you with a warm and undivided heart" (178). The financial arrangements that prompt the widow's abrupt turnabout may qualify the modern reader's acceptance of this scene, but its rhetorical and political intent is clearly dedicated by the author to signify the widow's responsive virtue. The rest of the novel documents the soon-to-be Lady Ellison's excellent mothering of their children, her charitable projects, her far-reaching influence on the neighbourhood. She properly "enter[s] into all his views and assist[s] him in every work of humanity" with a committed heart (186). Ellison's near-death experience

and religious introspection convert their early passion to a companionate marriage marked by "rational affection" and deepest esteem (185).

These overt meanings are, however, significantly compromised, when their larger context is considered. Bracketing the novel with marriages to two widows prompts a retrospective comparison which yields a contradictory subtext. Mrs. Ellison, the first widow, is portrayed as a manipulative bigot and a bad mother. Yet she seemingly marries Ellison for reasons of love. Apart from the taint of her Jamaican birth---Betty Rizzo footnotes the Jamaican gentlewoman as conventionally indolent and coquettish⁶⁸---there is no textual evidence that she is guilty of stereotypical sexual appetite. And the enumeration of the property she holds independently as a widow---her ten thousand pounds in ready money and her plantation of equal value---silences any accusation of financial design.

Mrs. Tunstall, on the other hand, accepts vast sums of money and clothing from a lover in order to marry some one else. She is, we are informed, "a slave to the most punctilious decorum," yet she turns a blind eye to the origin of the remittances that sweeten her marital distress, preferring to believe them gifts from her notoriously parsimonious father, despite the common knowledge that such gestures "contradicted all his former behaviour" (136). And the passage in which she abruptly consents to exchange her widowhood for wifehood is modified by its context of blackmail, with her father's threatening "jestingly" to make public the unorthodox source of her income. The final complication in the seeming contrast of bad and good widows is Ellison's testamentary bequest to Mrs. Tunstall before their marriage. Ellison falls dangerously ill, and worries that his death will rob Mrs. Tunstall of the security remarriage would have granted her. So he bequeaths her "ten thousand pounds," just in case. This is the exact sum he assumed by marriage to his first widow-wife. Its passage from marriage portion to love-jointure (Ellison drafts a will rather than a marriage settlement, so the sum is not technically a jointure) acts as a

leveller, bringing the widows into concert and implicitly querying categorical constructions of feminine virtue.⁶⁹

The Widow's Plight: Secondary Widows

Both the widow's socio-economic vulnerability and the contradictory impulses of self-interest and decorum, represented principally in the history of Mrs. Tunstall, are extended in the episodic interpolations which feature a cast of secondary widows. In the Maningham narrative, Ellison relieves the wretchedness of a dependent widow and her son in terms that emphasize marital obligation and the topical fragility of jointure. Later, Scott transposes the subversive implications of a widow's remarriage, which remain unexplored in the hagiographical treatment of Lady Ellison, to a symbolic interlude at the end of the novel, in which Lamont weds the widow, Mrs. Blackburn.

While Ellison conducts one of his prison tours (he funds the release of deserving debtors), he encounters an inspiring young man whose history he requests. He is informed that Mr. Maningham serves a sentence for a costly bond, incurred at the demand of his father. Mr. Maningham Sr., though possessed of a profitable estate and married to a woman of "ample fortune," squanders everything alienable and attempts to have his wife and son release their claims on all future inheritance. He bullies his wife so effectively "that she had agreed to relinquish her jointure, if her son would make over his title to the estate on which it was charged" (149). Again, as with Sidney's jointure in *Memoirs of Miss Sidney Bidulph*, a knowledge of eighteenth-century property law reveals what the text implies: Mrs. Maningham's jointure is, as was Sidney's, land-based and therefore supposedly bolstered against the volatility associated with mobile property. Mrs. Maningham's jointure estate is further protected by its being entailed upon her son, removed from the immediate reach of her grasping husband. But as will Clara Reeve in

School for Widows. Scott observes the transvaluation of property from patrilineal fixity to ready money and its resultant effect on the widow.

Steeped in a culture of marital obedience, a wife is hard pressed to preserve her security as a widow against her husband's pecuniary desires: Mrs. Maningham is distressingly aware of the "imprudence" of forfeiting her jointure, but cannot bear her husband's displeasure. She is prepared "to reduce herself to beggary" and sell her son's patrimony for her husband's present relief and promissory reform (149). The son wants to obey his parents' entreaties, but struggles against their implied consequence:

when he considered his mother must, by his cancelling the settlement, be totally destitute of support, if she out-lived her husband, he could not think of so unlimited a compliance, though she herself desired it: therefore the most he could do was to give up all except fifty pounds a year, which in case she was the survivor would just afford her bread, though it could not be deemed placing above want one who was born, and had always lived as she had done. (149)

Notwithstanding the gravity of this transaction---the beggaring of his widow and the bankrupting of his son---Mr. Maningham Sr. is quickly indebted again and persuades his son to share the liability for a thousand-pound bond. He dies shortly thereafter. The son cannot discharge the loan and thus pays for his filial acquiescence with a long-standing jail term. The widow, anguished at her part in ruining her son, begs him to release the rest of the estate to satisfy the creditor, but "he says, she has suffered too much by his father already...liberty could have no charms for him if purchased with her indigence" (150). Although we are not informed of the value of the remaining property, it is seemingly worth £1000, assuming the standard eighteenth-century interest of five per cent which would generate Mrs. Maningham's £50 yearly. This is exactly the sum of the remaining bond, but it would, of course, utterly impoverish the widow and require her to seek parish relief.

This incident employs some of Scott's signature tropes: wildly inappropriate familial demands, the vulnerability of the disenfranchised, the commodification of the individual, and a socio-political interest in the plight of the widow. Mrs. Maningham's predicament--being "kissed or kicked" out of her jointure---was exactly the peril that dower law, through its insistence on the legal mechanism of the *fine*, sought to avoid. This "final concord," if we recall from Chapter One, was the conveyance by which the wife released her dower lands so that her husband could sell them, and required that the wife be separately examined by the court to determine her willingness to waive this source of future income.⁷⁰ If the *fine* was not properly executed, a widow could retroactively include in her entitlement the land now held by a third-party purchaser. In Clara Reeve's *The School for Widows*, considered in Chapter Five, the entire plot of the widow Frances Darnford arises from just such a situation: her dissipated husband languishes in debtor's jail, and so, much to the contempt of her family, she willingly renounces her jointure. Her subsequent poverty requires her to re-enter the world with a vocation, a complicated task for a gentlewoman. Thus the violability of jointure by proper wifely conduct seems a significant contemporary concern: how to refuse one's husband the price of freedom from prison and still comply with conscience and convention?

Barred of dower by her jointure, cheated out of metaphorical and literal security by her wastrel husband, the widowed Mrs. Maningham has recourse to the lowest form of support---parish-relief---if her son will renounce the estate remnant that is generating her yearly stipend of fifty pounds. But Mr. Maningham, in words which highlight the social degradation of such a measure and allude to the father's breach of trust, cannot consent:

The very mention of her being brought to receive the poor pittance of parish bounty, accompanied with all the usual circumstances which must render it insupportable to a woman intitled to, and accustomed to the elegancies of life, overcame Mr. Maningham's fortitude. (151)

Represented as admirable. Maningham's explanation for his trusting folly is contradicted by neither Ellison nor the narrator: he was compelled by "duty" to obey his father's requests, as was his mother similarly bound to her late husband. "If they had carried it too far," we learn by narratorial indirection, "the imprudence was alike on both sides, and the motive equally right" (151). Yet without the fortuitous rescue by George Ellison, both widow and son in a version of Sidney Bidulph's quandary would be condemned to suffer what convention forced them to sacrifice.

His sensibility wholly engaged by this tableau, Ellison decides to redeem the bond, notwithstanding that this will lessen his own capital, a measure hitherto disallowed in his scheme of philanthropic improvements. Here the widow and her son play representative parts in the novel's themes of rightful hierarchies. Ellison is happy to free Maningham from his "loathsome prison", that is, from his enslavement to the creditor, an act of liberation that metonymically counterbalances Ellison's slave ownership in the West Indies. In addition, this deed allows him to preserve the widow's "scanty maintenance," which works to resolve the transgressions of her late husband, who contravened his patriarchal duty to protect his wife. Ellison thus redresses through his involvement with the lives of others his own marriage's upending of the traditional balance between husband and wife.

More specifically, Ellison rehabilitates the widow in several different ways. He discharges her son's debt, so that her jointure estate can be saved and regular income generated. He re-houses her first into "a very pretty apartment in a neat farm-house" on his estate, so that she can be near her son (166), and then, having secured Maningham the role of tutor to the children on his Jamaican estate, he outfits Mrs. Maningham with necessary items, so she may accompany her son on the journey. He also arranges to remit her jointure to her. But perhaps most importantly, his actions give the widow a sense of georgic purpose. Reunited with her son, grateful to Ellison, she determines "she might be of some use, as in a school female care is a necessary addition to

the instructions of the master" (171). Ellison greatly approves her decision to apply her maternal instinct to a genteel vocational context.

In a novel of narrative pairings, it is appropriate that the last extended episode mirrors the hero's own development. As Sir George's reformist impulses spring from his immersion in the principles of Millenium Hall and he marries two widows, so his companion Lamont, dramatically reformed from coxcomb to convert also at Millenium Hall, makes a final appearance in the novel and falls in love with a visiting widow. Scott's physical description of Mrs. Blackburn is highly detailed---thirty-six years old but still very pretty and young in appearance---and she emphasizes more than once the "delicacy" of the widow (207). Sir George is asked to intercede on Lamont's behalf after two months of quasi-courtship. Although Sir George believes Mrs. Blackburn "might live as happily by continuing her state of widowhood," he is confident that Lamont is an excellent risk should she choose "to hazard second nuptials." Recalling the tactics of the first Mrs. Ellison, but here to arguably positive ends, Sir George imagines that Mrs. Blackburn will be all the more sensitive to Lamont's merits "by the comparison she must unavoidably make between him and her former husband" (207).

Mrs. Blackburn asks for Sir George's advice but he refuses to give it, contenting himself with the repeated opinion that "if she was disposed to relinquish a single life," Lamont is an advantageous match. He is a man of sense and quality, "of no improper age"---crucial to the dignity of the remarrying widow---and "possessed of a considerable fortune...which was an undeniable proof of his sincere regard for her," by which the reader might infer that Lamont intends to settle a handsome jointure on his widow (208). Nonetheless the widow is uncertain: we are told that had Sir George advised her against the remarriage, she would have complied with "a good grace," obeying without defiance the laws of propriety. But Sir George will not---cannot, with his own two widow-wives!---condemn it. The widow is flattered by Lamont's attentions, likes him for himself, and, unsurprisingly, "his fortune afforded her some temptation." Yet.

not quite satisfied with seeming to chuse a second marriage. and yet unwilling to refuse it. she could not bring herself to give an explicit answer. but expressed a satisfaction in her present situation. that rendered her little inclined to change it: dropping at the same time some intimations of the advantages she should receive in point of fortune by an alliance with Mr. Lamont. if she could reconcile herself. at her age. to enter again into wedlock's bands. imagining it more decent to be influenced by the love of wealth. than by the inclination for the owner of it. (209)

Her wavering convinces Ellison that Lamont needs only a little "importunity" to persuade the half-willing widow. a gentler rendition of the courtship advised by misogynistic widow tracts ("If the Attack be made upon a Widow. there is no way after the Ice is once broke. like importunity and Resolution...not to be denied").⁷¹ Indeed. Lamont finds it "no very difficult matter to persuade the widow to relinquish her widowhood." Perhaps fearing that she has maligned the modesty of her remarrying widow. Scott rehearses approving phrases: the widow never appears "over-ready": she assumes "a dignity even in compliance": and finally. although this description verges on the satirical. the widow preserves "feminine decorum so well. that she appeared to yield to his reasons and importunity. rather than to her own inclinations." Sir George and Lady Ellison find "no small amusement" in watching the gamesmanship of such an affair (209). There is here only the reader's subtextual sense of irony. and no indication that Lady Ellison recognizes any similarity of situation.

The authorial pragmatism that marked *Millenium Hall* similarly informs Mrs. Blackburn's anxious sense of wedding etiquette: should her three children attend the ceremony? Everyone is aware of the delicacy of this matter. Her children might be averse to their mother's remarriage. Their presence and their maturity does not necessarily best complement her role as bride. Reasonably. the Ellisons argue that as this must soon be an everyday contrast. they had best "go through it with courage. and not increase any opinion of impropriety. by an appearance of a consciousness which would only serve to confirm it" (210). As the remarrying widow knows. it is not enough to be intrinsically virtuous. In a testimony to the hero's influence. the children are

pleasantly disposed toward the wedding because it takes place on Sir George's estate, and they are further impressed by Lamont's affectionate generosity in making them liberal gifts.

The conclusion of this particular remarriage episode manages to placate conduct authorities vexed about disadvantaged children and, once again, reinforces the conviction that in this novel "good" widows remarry primarily for reasons of interest. Richard Allestree condemns the corrupt widow who spends her son's fortune "to make...a better prize to a second Husband."⁷² But the text quietly implies the opposite, that the Blackburn estate is worthless and that neither the widow nor her children profited from it: "Mrs. Blackburn had the satisfaction of seeing her children take pleasure in an event which in fact promised them some advantages, and could not possibly injure them in any respect, she having nothing in her own power" (210).

For a widow to remarry an Ellison, or an Ellisonian disciple like Lamont, is indeed to experience an utopic escape from privation. Two smaller widow interpolations emphasize by inference the precarious nature of jointure, raised earlier in the narrative of Mrs. Maningham. The protector of widows everywhere, Sir George settles what amounts to a small jointure---£100 a year---on his friend and newly widowed neighbour Mrs. Lyne. Yet her comfort and confidence are so greatly increased by this security that she is able both to add the considerable sum of £500 to her marrying daughter's fortune and to re-settle near her daughter to assist in times of sickness or other need, while refusing a proffered widow's freebench in the new couple's house. Her rationale invokes Scott's recurrent theme of marriage and slavery. The widow argues, "'when a woman was married she ought to have no one's temper to study but her husband's: double subjection was too much" (190).

And at the very end of the novel, Sir George's eldest son, by his first widow-wife, is wrongfully imprisoned for an accidental death. The deceased is the father of the woman he loves. Not only does Sir George comfort his devastated son through the formality of the trial---his son is

exonerated on all counts---but he investigates the situation of the widow and her daughter, and learns that Mrs. Blanchard, "a woman of sense and merit," had long endured "ill treatment" and "pecuniary difficulties" because of her dissolute husband (217). Her marital sufferings have impaired her health and she is "not fit to struggle with poverty" but is too proud at first to accept what Sir George insists must be a token of her pardon: a lifelong settlement of £200 per annum, a comfortable jointure, on her and an accompanying settlement of £100 a year on her daughter, "who he saw would in all probability become his also" (218). Interestingly, Mrs. Blanchard tries to reduce the collective settlement to £100, a mere third, a dower-share of life-interest---but to no avail: Sir George insists on the entirety of his initial sums. His settlement on his future daughter-in-law serves as a kind of pre-jointure: should she be widowed, should she be tricked by her husband out of her rightful security, as are so many widows in the novel, Sir George's protective measure should prove compensatory.

These examples of egregious generosity underscore the portrayal of widows at risk in *The History of Sir George Ellison*. The georgic plenty that the widows generate in *Millenium Hall* from the vantage of the pendant text seems decidedly contingent upon their might as a community. Nina Auerbach observes that in fictional communities of women, "the male quest is exchanged for rootedness---a school, a village, a city of their own."⁷³ In *Millenium Hall*, the locational remove and utopic self-sufficiency of the estate additionally bolsters the authority of the widows, who are consequently empowered both to renovate old property---as with the decayed estate---and construct new kinds, as with the schools and boarding-houses. But the hint of anxiety that marks the conclusion of *Millenium Hall*---the violability of both paper and property settlements by men---extends to the sequel, which then asks, what happens in the "real" world, where widows live alone in a society predicated upon the structures of marriage? *The History of Sir George Ellison* repeatedly isolates the individual widow's financial vulnerability.

most particularly through the unreliability of jointure, and negotiates with ambivalence the necessity and the implications, both moral and material, of remarriage.

¹Olwen Hufton investigates the phenomenon of "spinster-clustering," middling and working-class widows and unmarried women living and working together for social and economic reasons. See Hufton, "Women without Men," 361.

²*First Report Made to His Majesty by the Commissioners Appointed to Inquire into the Law of England Respecting Real Property* (House of Commons, 1829), 258.

³Kelly in Sarah Scott, *A Description of Millenium Hall* (Peterborough: Broadview, 1995) ed. Gary Kelly, 28.

⁴*Ibid.*, 34.

⁵Linda Dunne, "Mothers and Monsters in Sarah Robinson Scott's *Millenium Hall*," *Utopian and Science Fiction by Women* eds. Jane L. Donawerth and Carol A. Kolmerton (Syracuse University Press, 1994), 57.

⁶Joseph Allen Boone, *Tradition Counter Tradition* (Chicago University Press, 1987), 288. Kelly calls *Millenium Hall* a "utopian vision of gentry capitalism reformed according to bluestocking feminism," and describes the "conventions of utopian writing"—the straightforward frame and exegetical core narrators, for example—that anchor Scott's writing. Kelly in Scott, *Millenium Hall*, 26, 29. Christine Rees notes the "imagining of fictional alternatives" that characterizes eighteenth-century utopias and, in particular, the narratorial mediation and personal conversions that mark the "separatist female utopia" that is *Millenium Hall*. Rees, *Utopian Imagination and Eighteenth-Century Fiction* (Longman: New York, 1996), 3, 216. Linda Dunne likewise recognizes Scott's creation of a "feminist utopian alternative" in "Mothers and Monsters," 65. Janet Todd refers briefly to the utopian elements in the novel, "the calm female paradise," "the bustling male hell outside," and "the skeptical gentleman observers." Todd, *Women's Friendships in Literature* (Columbia University Press, 1980), 344. Ruth Perry locates in Scott's "utopian novel" the "class privilege that had guaranteed women's social agency" in the Middle Ages and the Renaissance. Perry, "Bluestockings in Utopia," *History, Gender, and Eighteenth-Century Literature* ed. Beth Fowkes Tobin (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1994), 160. Barbara Brandon Schnorrenberg credits Scott with only a "modest utopian beginning" in "A Paradise Like Eve's," *Women's Studies* 3 (1982), 271. Vincent Caretta expands upon the notion of limitations to argue that Scott's vision is deliberately "a utopia of confines because restrictions and boundaries define the conservative concept of a benevolent hierarchy overseen by a loving patriarch that Scott accepts as necessary to the happiness and order of human existence." Caretta, "Utopia Limited: Sarah Scott's *Millenium Hall* and *The History of Sir George Ellison*," *The Age of Johnson* 5 (1992), 323. Felicity Nussbaum calls *Millenium Hall* a "feminotopia" and associates its tropes of deformity with the seraglio in *Torrid Zones* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1995), 150. Eve Walsh Stoddard draws attention to the feasibility Scott promotes in her novel, arguing that "the utopian practices represented in the text are realistic and susceptible of immediate implementation...on a smaller scale. Stoddard, "The Politics of Sentiment," *Studies on Voltaire and the Eighteenth Century* (1992), 796. Elizabeth Bergen Brophy particularizes the "utopian community of widows and spinsters in *Millenium Hall*," in *Women's Lives*, 199. Susan Sniader Lanser describes the text as "a utopia of rich, single and widowed women who have turned a country estate into a class-stratified, female, charitable society" in *Fictions of Authority* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1992), 225.

⁷Rabb, "Making and Rethinking the Canon: General Introduction and the Case of *Millenium Hall*" *Modern Language Studies* 18 (1988), 13.

⁸London, *Women and Property*, 116.

⁹Anthony Low, *The Georgic Revolution* (Princeton University Press, 1985), 7, 12.

¹⁰Sarah Scott, *The History of Sir George Ellison* ed. Betty Rizzo (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1996), xvii.

¹¹Fowler, *Kinds of Literature* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1982), 203.

¹²Richard Feingold, *Nature and Society: Later Eighteenth-Century Uses of the Pastoral and Georgic* (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 1978). Feingold includes a "disdain for luxury" amongst his categories of Virgilian-georgical attitudes, 24.

¹³Alistair Fowler implies that georgic is concerned with questions of time and seasonality in his brief treatment of *As You Like It* in *Kinds of Literature*, 254. April London notes that georgic reveals a "constructive engagement with the forces of change," and stands "in sharp distinction to what appears, in contrast, the high artifice of pastoral's depiction of a timeless Golden Age" in "Historiography, Pastoral, Novel: Genre in *The Man of Feeling*," *Eighteenth-Century Fiction* 10 (1997), 49.

¹⁴Kathryn Kirkpatrick, "Sermons and Strictures: Conduct-Book Propriety and Property Relations in Late Eighteenth-Century England," *History, Gender and Eighteenth-Century Literature* ed. Beth Fowkes Tobin (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1994), 200.

¹⁵Allestree, *The Ladies Calling*, II, 231.

¹⁶Dorice Williams Elliott, "Sarah Scott's *Millenium Hall* and Female Philanthropy," *Studies in English Literature 1500-1900* (1995), 541.

¹⁷*Ibid.* 542

¹⁸Allestree, *The Ladies Calling*, II, 232

¹⁹Dunne, "Mothers and Monsters," 69

²⁰Nina Auerbach, *Communities of Women* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1978), 7.

²¹*Ibid.* 7.

²²Nussbaum, *Torrid Zones*, 155.

²³Rees, *Utopian Imagination*, 1.

²⁴Elliott, "Sarah Scott's *Millenium Hall*," 537, 549.

²⁵Rees, *Utopian Imagination*, 205.

²⁶Stoddard, "The Politics of Sentiment," 798.

²⁷Kelly in Scott, *Millenium Hall*, 29. Although at first glance the frame narrator—a man—seems more significant (he brackets the narrative and is ostensibly responsible for its publication), "the narrator's description is prompted by *Millenium Hall*, which is the work of Mrs. Maynard and the other proprietors...and it is explained by Mrs. Maynard's discourse....according to the conventions of utopian writing, the narrator describes in a straightforward and naive manner....[and] an all-wise insider who explains utopia to this visitor" (29).

²⁸Dunne, "Mothers and Monsters," 61.

²⁹Mr. Morgan adds enforced isolation to his marital recipe of anger and lechery: "'Madam, my wife must have no other companion or friend but her husband's'" (130). The characterization anticipates that of Mr. Strictland in *The School for Widows*.

³⁰Kelly in Scott, *Millenium Hall*, 31

³¹*Ibid.* 32

³²Nussbaum, *Torrid Zones*, 152.

³³Critics—eighteenth-century and contemporary—have long held Lady Brumpton to be a portrayal, a critical one, of Scott's sister, Elizabeth Montagu. Betty Rizzo writes, "Scott lacked a strong inventiveness, and her acquaintance are often recognizably adapted for presentation in her novels...but never is this so blatant as in the portrait of Elizabeth Montagu as Lady Brumpton in

Millenium Hall. Lady Brumpton is an excessively vain patroness of parties at which wit is everyone's object and solid information considerably less obtainable. Moreover, her name derives from Steele's play *The Funeral*, in which Lady Brumpton schemes to be heir to all her husband's possessions and guardians of his dependents---exactly what Elizabeth Montagu attained at her husband's death in 1775. That Montagu forgave her sister, perhaps as the best way of repudiating the resemblance, cannot mean that Scott's graceless action---another effort to establish the moral differences between the two sisters---was not deeply felt by her. But the effect was to lead Montagu, who could bear no moral inferiority on her own part, for some years to try to win Scott's approval on Scott's own high-minded terms." Rizzo in Scott, *George Ellison*, xxv.

³⁴Here Scott, albeit briefly, raises the interesting and rather radical possibility that feminine purity can be meritocratic in nature, that virtue, once tarnished, is not irretrievably lost and can be repaired through compensatory behaviour.

³⁵Dunne, "Mothers and Monsters," 58

³⁶George E. Haggerty, *Unnatural Affections* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1998), 95.

³⁷Dunne, "Mothers and Monsters," 65. The episodes themselves are organized "according to a principle that is essentially accretive rather than causal." Boone, *Tradition Counter Tradition*, 289. The resultant repetition of such a strategy has a thematic value: the women's self-reliance "is an obvious, yet fragile truth...such that [Scott] must teach it through iteration and reaffirmation." James Cruise, "A House Divided: Sarah Scott's *Millenium Hall*," *Studies in English Literature 1500-1900* (1995), 556.

³⁸Boone, *Tradition Counter Tradition*, 289.

³⁹George E. Haggerty, "Unnatural Affections," 93.

⁴⁰Dunne notes that this collapse is rendered onomastically: "three [characters] have surnames that begin with M, two have the given name Harriot, and two have rhyming names." "Mothers and Monsters," 65.

⁴¹Elliott notes that this frame permits Scott overtly to link her novel "to a common form that philanthropic discourse assumed in the eighteenth century---the public letter." "Sarah Scott's *Millenium Hall*," 538.

⁴²Boone, *Tradition Counter Tradition*, 291.

⁴³London, *Women and Property*, 119.

⁴⁴Cruise, "A House Divided," 566.

⁴⁵Lanser, *Fictions of Authority*, 229-230.

⁴⁶Rizzo in Scott, *George Ellison*, xxxvi.

⁴⁷Caretta, "Utopia Limited," 322.

⁴⁸Brophy, *Women's Lives*, 230.

⁴⁹Caretta, "Utopia Limited," 323.

⁵⁰Sarah Scott, *The History of Sir George Ellison* ed. Betty Rizzo (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1996), 3. All further references will be included within my text.

⁵¹Felicity A. Nussbaum, "Women and Race," *Women and Literature in Britain 1700-1800* ed. Vivien Jones (Cambridge University Press, 2000), 81.

⁵²"Mrs. Ellison's rejection of the commonality of humanity is an implicit rejection of sentimentalism too." Markman Ellis, *The Politics of Sensibility* (Cambridge University Press, 1996), 96.

⁵³Ward, *Female Policy Detected*, 66-67.

⁵⁴True Penitent, *The Folly, Sin, and Danger of Marrying Widows*, 17.

⁵⁵Ellis, *The Politics of Sensibility*, 99.

⁵⁶Vincent Caretta, "Utopia Limited," 317.

⁵⁷Defoe, *Roxana*, 187.

⁵⁸Allestree, *The Ladies Calling*, Part II, 247.

⁵⁹Ellis, *The Politics of Sensibility*, 112. Ellis develops an extended analysis of the structures of domination and tropes of slavery in the novel. See especially pages 89 ff.

⁶⁰Caretta, "Utopia Limited," 318..

⁶¹Brophy, *Women's Lives*, 230. Interestingly, a penniless widower generally received no such understanding. The True Penitent, despite the scurrilous tone of his tract, turns serious when he expatiates on the sacred nature of marriage and the redeeming bonds of true love: marriage to a rich widow for reasons of interest "is no better than meer Fornication. He that marries meerly for the Sake of Money, or any Convenience of that Sort, cannot properly be said to have married a Wife, but a Bag of Money, a Piece of Parchment, &c. and therefore he is still without a Wife, in the strict and true Sense of the Word, and the Woman that he keeps may lawfully (so far as the Thing only regards the nominal Husband) make him a Cuckold, without committing Adultery: For all the Crime which can reasonably be imputed to her on that Score, seeing she is not yet married, is but Fornication at the worst: and even that not so blameable as in a single Woman, because she has been betrayed, and tied to a Man who only stands in the Place of a Husband without being really such: and who has wickedly deprived her of all Opportunities of disposing of herself in a Manner more suitable to what may constitute her Happiness." *The Folly, Sin, and Danger of Marrying Widows*, 11.

⁶²Alexander maintains that the appeal of the widow is similarly diminished: "when a woman has been married and is become a widow, she is generally past the bloom of life, and has lost, by the bearing of children and care of a family, a great part of those charms which procured her a husband." *The History of Women*, II, 290.

⁶³As discussed in Chapter Two, there is something erotic attached to the darkly-robed widow, and Ellison, notwithstanding his heroic qualities, is not excepted from this heightened attraction. When at last he visits Mrs. Tunstall, he finds her "more beautiful than ever"—so much so that he is momentarily silenced—and the "mournful garb of her and her children gave them an appearance of distress which made him behold them with additional tenderness." Perhaps the widow's "air of melancholy" merely reassures Ellison, grieved by the deceptions of his first widow-wife, that Mrs. Tunstall is a woman of genuine sensibility (173).

⁶⁴*The Entertaining Fortune Book* (London, 1755), 3.

⁶⁵True Penitent, *The Folly, Sin and Danger of Marrying Widows*, 13.

⁶⁶Allestree, *The Ladies Calling*, II, 236-37.

⁶⁷Betty Rizzo remarks that although mourning varied both regionally and by class, full mourning lasted a year, with a "second mourning of lighter colours" lasting another six months. Rizzo in Scott, *George Ellison*, 230n.3. Thus Mrs. Tunstall is extremely decorous in wanting two full years of widowhood.

⁶⁸*Ibid.*, 224n.6.

⁶⁹While some scholars isolate for comment the first Mrs. Ellison's apparent lack of prior name, she is in fact named by reference to her late husband, that "poor dear Mr. Tomkins." That the widows share the initial "T"—Mrs. Tomkins, Mrs. Tunstall—further aligns them, especially in light of Scott's preference for symbolic onomastic collapse in *Millenium Hall*.

⁷⁰Staves, *Separate Property*, 151.

⁷¹*The Entertaining Fortune-Book*, 25.

⁷²Allestree, *The Ladies Calling*, II, 229.

³Auerbach. *Communities of Women*. 8.

Chapter Five: The Widows' Might?

Clara Reeve's Novels of Protest

Clara Reeve explores themes similar to Frances Sheridan. Both question the compatibility of conduct-book strictures and reasonable female behaviour, juxtaposing the imperative of individual agency against the cultural reverence for female passivity. But while Reeve highlights the conflicts between dutiful wives and destructive husbands, *The School for Widows* (1791) and its sequel, *Plans of Education* (1792), present a rather more optimistic picture of eighteenth-century female subjectivity than does *Sidney Bidulph*. Reeve's novels graphically depict the various trials of bad marriages, but both protagonists are "rewarded" with widowhood, and granted either a rich jointure or the opportunity to secure a comfortable income. The widows further capitalize on their freedom and fortunes to help the disenfranchised with a series of philanthropic projects.

Reeve's reputation as a conservative feminist has been shaped by a number of factors: a recognition of marital inequity but a discouragement of active opposition; an emphasis on duty and industry; and a promotion of Christian forbearance. This conservatism flourished in the late eighteenth century, in which class distinctions became clearer, and the middling ranks distinguished themselves with new ideals comprising "independence and work, underpinned by a strong evangelical religion."¹ The limited critical attention to the novels has been divided on the optimism intrinsic to such a code. J.M.S. Tompkins finds the widows "exemplary and not ill-rewarded" and, once "released from their unequal bondage," able to "show their full quality."² A more recent appraisal concurs: the widows follow a "positive program" of independent endeavours: "control over their own economic affairs, good works, and an appreciation of their own personhood."³ Elizabeth Bergen Brophy, however, faults Reeve's resignation in *School for Widows*—"she seems to make no real protest against the established code of wifely submission to the authority of a husband"—and disputes the notion of a compensatory widowhood of

liberation, registering with surprise the novel's "explicit approval of a restrictive will which effectively binds Rachel Strickland to celibate widowhood."⁴ Scholars agrees that the novels are didactic, aimed at "inculcat[ing] a most wholesome moral."⁵ They belong to a blurred category—epistolary novels as "thinly-disguised courtesy books," suitable for Reeve to forward her "moral, pedagogical, and philanthropic concerns."⁶ Reminiscent of conduct manuals, *School for Widows* verges on a "practical guide...giving counsel to those in like marriages."⁷

These considerations are particularly valid from the perspective of the novels' focus on marriage. Yet the title of the first novel reminds us that Reeve is interested in concentrating on the last stage of women's lives. Widowhood in both novels stands for a form of authority that transvalues the negative qualities characteristic of the century's misogynistic tracts and reads them instead as individually curative and as the basis for collective harmony. Furthermore, Reeve pre-empts any critical reception of her widows' autonomy with a range of strategies, from phrasings that recall scriptural injunctions to honour the widow, to a dialogic play between the widows that can both assert and condemn joyful independence, to georgic tableaux that emphasize the widow's placement within a traditional order.

Highlighting her treatment of widows rather than wives also reveals a more trenchant consideration of contemporary legal doctrine. Reeve inserts in her didactic texts very specific considerations of settlements and wills and jointures. This material detail locates her novels within the century-long debate concerning widows' welfare, most especially in relation to the increasing substitution of jointure contracts for dower's common-law entitlement.⁸ Notwithstanding the rather fantastic good fortune finally accorded Rachel Strickland, and, to a lesser extent, Frances Darnford, what *School for Widows* unequivocally demonstrates is that widows no longer have property rights, only gifts rightly bestowed. The pecuniary ease of their widowhoods results directly from male authorization: both women are endowed with an essentialist propriety that is at once ingrained and self-conscious as each acts out her awareness

of the need to appear virtuous. A series of paternal and spousal surrogates in turn interact with both widows, explicitly conveying their approval, and making consequent rewards.

The subtext here is clear: jointures are precarious and property control comes only from controlling propriety to the satisfaction of others. Thus the traditional sources of support are unreliable. But Reeve does invest her widows' sociability with an "economic purposiveness", according substantive value to the widows' penchant for conversational exchange and narrative curiosity.⁹ Intellectual property---the proprietary entitlement to one's own story---assumes in Reeve's text a new security, one accessible to women in general and to the widow (freed from a husband's surveillance) in particular. By exchanging the stories of others and telling their own tales, Rachel and Frances plot their own lives, thereby creating the form of the text itself. Their receptiveness to personal histories also has precise material benefits, resulting in testamentary bequests, life interests in property, and annual income. The narratorial implications of this potential authority are exploited in both novels. If narrative comprises a kind of contract between the story-teller and the reader, then the *feme sole*, released from coverture and able to negotiate as an individual, makes a more enlightening narrator and involved auditor than the *feme covert*.

Exemplary Widows

The eighteenth-century documents concerned with widows range from pious reflections on the "objects of God's and good Men's Pity," to frivolous and bawdy "fortune-books" which use innuendo to delineate the steps necessary to court a widow, to misogynistic pamphlets on the "hidden Pit of Destruction" that awaits the hapless suitor of that "second-hand Commodity," the tainted "Relict" of another man.¹⁰ Four texts which span the century---Edward Ward's *Female Policy Detected* (?1725); *The Folly, Sin, and Danger of Marrying Widows, and Old Women in General* (1746); *The Entertaining Fortune Book* (1755) and *A New Fortune Book* (1770)---

deploy a variety of epithets, and attribute to widows a range of vices that Reeve either casts as beneficial or relocates in male characters.

Edward Ward stresses the widow's capacity for duplicitous plotting. He denounces "Intriguing Women," the "Vultures in Peacock's Plumes," who in their widowed state attempt to "bury [men] alive." Widows are irrational in temper: "if they Kiss in the Morning as Friends, yet before noon they are ready to throw the House out at [sic] Window." Widows are consistently affiliated with interested motive and entrapment: "[W]hen a widow seems fond of our conversation, besure 'tis through Design," because "the Love of a Widow [is] politick and deceitful." And a widow "that hath a design upon you, will first oblige you with some engaging Courtesie to become her Debtor, but be careful of those Women who are generous in the beginning, lest you pay with your ruin, for their kindness in the End."¹¹ The True Penitent expands the range of misogynistic insult to accuse widows of "deep Dissimulation" and "artful Appearances" and to install widows in the pantheon of malefactors: "[o]f all the Variety of Female Disguises, the Wiles of the Widow are the most intricate." She is an "incomprehensible Sort of Female," who vanquishes "all the Wisdom and Policy of Man." More specifically, the widow is defined by her incontinence, a vice which collectively breaches discretion, propriety, and sobriety:

her Frankness degenerates into an unbounded Licentiousness of Conversation, and all Appearances of Female Modesty are quite laid aside, especially in her private Cabals: and in fine, her sober Inclinations and Manners are turned into Voluptuousness, and the Cordial Comforts of the Bottle are her *summum Bonum*.¹²

Reeve's text as a whole refutes Ward's opprobrious views on women: the epistolary novel concerns two widows who "exchange life-histories and promise to monitor each other's conduct."¹³ Their experiences, "striking fictional pictures of the daily strains of...unhappy marriage[s],"¹⁴ are liberally laced with the stuff of romance—a prodigal husband, an aristocratic rake, a madwoman and murder—but this functions neither as inflammatory sentimentalism nor

the "false sensibility" that Reeve deplores in her Preface. She writes "with a better design: namely, to counteract the poison of Fashion, Folly, and Dissipation: to blend together the *utile* and the *dulce*: and to impress some moral inferences on the mind of the reader." Her two widows make secret transactions, abridgements, and collaborations but they "intrigue" with virtuous purpose. An incident at the very end of *Plans of Education* captures in miniature the honourable designs executed by the widows throughout both novels: the reformed Lord A thanks Frances for her deliberately elliptical transcriptions of his former behaviour, for "not exposing him to his lady."¹⁵

Particular episodes reappraise duplicity by putting it in the service of honour. Frances's scheme to cure her husband's excessive gaming emphasizes the lengths to which she is driven to plot her husband's improvement. "The *Gamester* was announced for Thursday following. I burnt the playbill, that he might not see what it was." Mr. Darnford agrees to go, but asks the name of the play: "I asked the servant for the bill: luckily he had not seen it. It could not be found..." (I. 128). Mr. Darnford is agitated at the *Gamester's* treatment of his own weakness, and wildly asks Frances her purpose in selecting such a play. She answers, "'To touch your heart, to serve you, and to save you.'" Her husband is shocked at her machinations: "'You chose it, then! ---You have torn my heart asunder!'" (I. 129). While her subterfuge reveals her religious and spousal devotion, Darnford's egregious appetites for gambling and wine align him with the incontinence of the True Penitent's widows.

That this interlude is immediately followed by Darnford's plot to dupe his wife into relinquishing her jointure property clarifies further Reeve's interest in deconstructing gendered iniquities. Frances receives an anonymous letter warning her that Darnford's financial ruin is near, and that she "will shortly be desired to set her hand to a writing, by which she will give up her jointure: which if she does, she is undone" (I. 133-34). Darnford does not possess the integrity to make a straightforward request: rather, he lies that his estates "are so tied up, that he could not sell

them"—he has in fact sold them already—and slyly promises his reformation if Frances will without inquiry sign a release of sale for a separate property. The estate is, of course, the jointure land that was settled on Frances in her marriage articles, preserved to garner her £300 a year in the event of her widowhood. Frances's crucial foreknowledge of this sabotage informs her indignant response: "You do not, I presume, ask me to give up my settlement, which is all that is left to support me!--You cannot be so base as to ask it!" (I, 135). She is, for the moment, more fortunate than the victimized wives "kissed or kicked," in contemporary parlance, out of their own protection. The adventitious receipt of the anonymous letter stresses jointure's dangerous flexibility: no longer protected by dower's procedural *fine*, a wife is easily cheated out of her future due.

The theatre episode further allows Reeve to play against cultural archetypes of designing widows by its reference to *The Fatal Marriage* (1694). Thomas Southerne's dramaturgical interpretation of Aphra Behn's novella *The History of the Nun* (1689), discussed at length in Chapter Two, Frances describes her sensitivity to the character of Isabella, "heart-probing[ly]" played by Sarah Siddons. While Isabella is "not a perfect character," Frances weeps in sympathy for her "because, though [Isabella] is guilty enough to be blamed, she is innocent enough to be pitied. Such are the proper subjects for tragedy" (I, 126). Thus Behn's and Southerne's doomed Isabella is freshly reviewed as *School for Widows* draws into concert a century's worth of literary widows. The late eighteenth-century Frances grasps the cultural proscriptions that tragically complicated the choices of the late seventeenth-century Isabella.

In *The Fatal Marriage*, Isabella, guilty of perjury as a novitiate, breaks her vow of chastity to marry. Reeve alludes to her in the characterization of *School for Widow's* third widow, the "mad woman" cured by Frances's course of reason and asexual affection. This Italian widow serves as a kind of inverse double to the original: whereas Behn's and Southerne's Isabella grapples with remarriage and new love, Reeve's Isabella is so utterly loyal to her late husband that she

continues to interact with him through the barrier of death. She conducts one-sided conversations that spookily reveal actual information and assembles a facsimile of his person to arm her against the unwanted attentions of a determined suitor. Like Behn's Villenoy who finds Isabella "in her Mourning, a thousand times more Fair." Reeve's Captain Maurice is aroused by Isabella's new widowhood. "During Antonio's life, I never entertained a thought...to obtain the love of Isabella." Maurice tells Frances, "but from the time that the funeral was over...I fixed my mind upon this expectation, and determined to be her husband" (III, 119). There exists, however, a crucial difference between the two suitors: while Villenoy woos a responsive Isabella, Maurice terrorizes a widow wedded to the memory of her dead husband.

The portrayal of Maurice's relentless pursuit of Isabella corresponds with contemporary pamphlets in both strategy and language. *The Entertaining Fortune Book* advocates an aggressive courtship and employs a lexicon of violence "[i]f the Attack be made upon a Widow."¹⁶ There is, we are told "no way after the Ice is once broke, like importunity and Resolution, (in spite of all Resistance) not to be denied, to haunt her like a shadow."¹⁷ *A New-Fortune Book* offers widow-woosers amorous particulars---"kiss them till their Ears rack"---and psychological analysis. If widows

seem coy and stand at a distance...this is all pure dissimulation. For take my word, they are much more desirous then [sic] Men, as their pleasure in the Enjoyment of a Marriage-Bed exceeds theirs: therefore in making Love never mind denials, for their Hearts seldom go with their Tongues, eager for what they seem to slight and refuse, and they would not have you believe them when they deny you.¹⁸

The intrigues and artfulness denounced by Ward and the True Penitent are in these later pamphlets articulated as erotic invitation. Maurice subscribes to this version of the widowed female. Using the very words of the Fortune Books, Maurice recounts how he "teazed" and "persecuted" Isabella continually. "After the ice was broken, I obliged her to hear me often. I thought on the old saying---'Faint heart never won fair lady.'" Although Isabella weeps and begs

him to desist, he cannot contain his desire. "I more than pitied---I adored her....My passion grew by opposition" (III. 121). Libidinous, obsessed, Maurice is startled by the "wildness" that appears in Isabella's eyes, as she invokes Antonio's spirit for comfort and protection. But even this does not impede his suit. To his incontinence and lechery, corruptions associated with the widow, Maurice adds design: he simulates matrimony with Isabella in the hopes that "she would be reconciled to her situation with me, and a new scene of happiness would arise to us both" (III. 134). She descends instead into total delusion.

Drunk, Maurice attempts to bed Isabella by force. Only Isabella's offhand question to her dead husband stops him in shock: "No, I do not believe that Maurice killed you, because you lived three days after. But, how could he hurt you, and leave no wound?" (III. 143). Reeve's Gothic touch---Maurice has indeed beaten Antonio to death and tended to the body secretly to avoid inquiry---for the moment preserves the widow's sexual propriety but cannot protect her real property: "I told her....I would not take advantage of the holy rites that made her mine....From that time I took possession of the house" (III. 136). It is not until Maurice sees Isabella roughly trussed up by her nurse that he compassionately declares himself "not so hardened a villain" and retracts his active interest in her body. Maurice protests that he has "enjoyed no advantage from this supposed marriage, but that of being acknowledged by the servants as their master" (III. 136). This is a significant position of power. An earlier passage describes how the grief-stricken Isabella willingly yields to Maurice the keys to the household *escritoire*, the ample contents of which "surpriz[e]" him: he reads Antonio's accumulated wealth as evidence of "his sordid and avaricious mind" (III. 116). Antonio's coffers also testify to a fiscal prudence which Maurice unhesitatingly exploits in his substitution of property for person. Denied sexual access to the widow herself, Maurice takes the keys and plunders the widow's stores.

With the interpolated history of Isabella, Reeve tacitly argues the instability of the widow's position, whether propertied or penniless, notwithstanding her unflagging propriety. Isabella's

resurrection of a protective husband---she buttons Antonio's suit over a chair and wraps the sleeves around herself---literalizes her memorial devotion in a striking realization of contemporary counsel. Isabella indeed symbolizes Richard Allestree's definition of proper widowhood as "[c]onjugal love transplanted into the grave": she relies rather too heavily, however, on his notion of "innocent Magick" by which "she may Converse with the Dead, represent him so to her own thoughts, that his Life may still be repeated to her."¹⁹ In her dramatic tableau---"Now I am safe! He dares not take me out of your arms!" (III, 141)---Isabella also enacts the popular stigma against remarriage, the "element of adultery" in the "overlap of sexuality."²⁰

Yet her fidelity guarantees neither her person, since her resistance is aphrodisiac for Maurice, nor her unencumbered claim to her husband's estate that, as a widow unconfined by jointure or any other limiting arrangement, she should enjoy. Her foreignness, her ignorance of English law, and her fragility, all collaborate to subject her to Maurice's control. Her counterfeit marriage, disclosed to the neighbouring community as legitimate, means that she cannot "dispose of her estate here...without his concurrence" (III, 237). Though widowed, she is denied a widow's authority by mere rumour of coverture. Maurice's plotting, artfulness, and designs, borrowed from the anti-widow tracts, facilitate his entrapment of Isabella's person and property.

A comparable "master in contrivance," the Lovelaceian Lord A attempts to impose a specific meaning on Frances through his nefarious web of plots (I, 222). He anonymously sends her expensive jewellery; he bribes her dissolute, destitute husband for sexual access; he purchases her sacrificed jointure lands; all in an attempt to seduce her and to make her his "wife of the left hand" (*Plans*, 19). This elaborate scheming to a single end is countered by the widows' ongoing discursive exchange. As the widows narrate their plots, they privilege an exegetical dialogue. Frances recounts to Rachel her narrow escapes from Lord A's predatory machinations, interpolating various communications from the rake himself; "I make you a present, my friend, of

this fine letter. You will draw many inferences: I shall only offer one" (I. 240). This kind of transaction is paradigmatic of the novel's structure: Rachel, for example, responds to Frances's biographical inquiries by requesting an interpretive gloss on her story: "I have given it sincerely: and I expect your remarks with respect and apprehension" (II. 318). Frances in turn opens the third volume with the comment: "I...declare myself highly satisfied with your conduct in trying situations. In some cases it deserves applause, and in others it claims excuse" (III. 5).

These exchanges allow Reeve at once to proffer bold protofeminist statements and to criticize them as undutiful and unfeminine:

Banished from society for near ten years. I am restored to my liberty by the death of my husband: an awful and important event, but not greatly deplored by me....After being the slave and prisoner of a tyrant for ten years. I feel as does the captive just delivered from his chains. It would be folly, it would be sinful, in me, to affect the part of a disconsolate widow. (I. 12)

So Rachel Strictland opens *School for Widows* with defiant joy in being unwifed. She uses a topical revolutionary language of despotism, confinement, and liberation to describe her experience of wedlock and widowhood. She refuses to assume a grief she does not feel.²¹ On the one hand, her admission does not go uncorrected: Frances writes reprovingly that Rachel "speak[s] very disrespectfully of [her] husband" and she expects her "to account for it" (I. 283). That such correction comes some two hundred and seventy pages after the opening passage, however, hardly undercuts the forcefulness of the opening cry. Moreover, Frances's request for further clarification downplays Rachel's transgression, implying that a widow's delight in her widowhood might be justified in particular circumstances.

Education and Georgic

This dialogic strategy, which balances radicalism and conservatism, extends through the novel to encompass not just a woman's relational status as wife or widow but her right to education and vocation. Reeve relies on georgic themes and phrasings to bolster these arguments. As discussed in Chapter Four, georgic emphasizes the value of labour to mitigate hardship and, in an eighteenth-century context, puns on the notions of cultivation and improvement. Both widows variously assist the disenfranchised over the course of the novels in ways suggestive of Anthony Low's description of Christian georgic, which stresses the power of work "to renovate the soul and to atone for social injustice."²² The widows' reforms move from the general to the specific, from schools for girls to detailed episodes involving restitutions of real and personal property, but all are scripted in terms which stress the widows' domestic sphere of influence and feminine attributes of modesty and care-giving. This glosses georgic's democratic potential—unlimited social ascendance through personal improvement—as sentimental ideal and thus restrains its energy under acceptable labels.

For example, Frances Darnford is universally praised for her intellectual refinements—she is a serious reader of secular and religious texts, a speaker of foreign languages, a writer of pedagogical proposals (most particularly the interpolated schemes for female improvement that constitute the bulk of *Plans of Education*)—but several key remarks weaken any threat of bluestocking authority. The local curate visits Frances and comments, approvingly, that the widow "had more knowledge, and less confidence in it, than any woman he had ever met with" (I. 24). Mrs. Martin, Frances's devoted landlady and fellow widow, claims women's entitlement to instruction by way of Frances's exemplary application: "She deserved knowledge, because she made a wise and good use of it: she taught us our duty" (I. 27). Education so as to know one's duty, without the boldness to effect substantial change: notwithstanding any aim to help women "deal better with society as it was," such an inclination is hardly troubling to the status quo.²³

In a like tactic, Reeve introduces by careful increment the concept of women's economic autonomy. Desirous of augmenting Mrs. Martin's subsistent jointure---the widow possesses a "house decently furnished and the interest of [her husband's] money for...life"---Frances suggests that she establish a haberdashery business of needles, pins, and threads. With Frances's capital loan and some detailed commercial advice, Mrs. Martin reaps "very considerable" profits (I. 31). Next, Frances proposes writing to a stationer to procure "pens, ink, and paper, wax and wafers, and school-books for the children" in order to expand her trade. And when Frances accepts the commission to cure Isabella, she transfers the school she has founded to the authority of Mrs. Martin. From this succession of projects, always facilitated by the widow's advice ("[s]he told me the way to realize my profits, and to employ the money I saved every year"), Mrs. Martin is able to contribute yearly to her late husband's investments, becoming "rich, provident, and easy" (I. 54).

The counsel moves Mrs. Martin from a very feminine type of commerce---the tools of needlework---to the more empowering realm of reading and writing, as one widow invests the potential of another widow, and, in the process, improves upon any spousal provisions. The progression is small and covert enough to pre-empt accusations of the "unsexedness" bandied about in 1790s gender politics. That Frances then teaches Mrs. Martin how to evade her son's disapprobation of her enterprise and his greed for her pecuniary returns testifies to a conscious management of both feminine duty and self-preservation against patriarchal assertion.²⁴ That she endorses a daughter's involvement in the widow's business only until the former's marriage reinforces the novel's balancing act between female agency and containment.

Reeve further sanctions her protagonist's cultivated intelligence by affiliating her with sacred texts. Mrs. Martin's summary of the widow's tutelage resonates with a quasi-biblical cadence: "Her conversations were to me as practical sermons, the best and pleasantest that ever I heard. In

short. Madam. we grew wiser. and happier. and better. every day of our lives" (I. 27). Her credo--Frances's "will is [her] law"---reinforces the biblical allusion. as does the economical parable she tells Rachel. "Everything prospered with us. my property daily increased; and. at the year's end. I was amazed at my own riches" (I. 33). She likens Frances to an Old Testament patriarch: "I may say of you. as the Scripture does of Joseph. *that wherever he went. he did good to these he lived with; and whatsoever he undertook. the Lord made it to prosper in his hands*" (I. 32). References to the Bible emphasize that *School for Widows* may serve paradigmatically as a spiritual and moral guide. Indeed. Frances's improvements yield personal security that likewise benefits the community. now the better for its new school and shops. The enumerated strategies extend the communal good on a metatextual level. as female readers "from the middling ranks learn about available source of public information."²⁵ The detailed vocational histories of the widows in turn reinforce "the respectability of female employment." especially when directed to reformative ends.²⁶

Reeve draws on these moral and vocational possibilities in describing Frances's response to "a call of a particular kind" from Captain Maurice to care for Isabella. Frances effects a sort of transubstantiation of Isabella's body. feeding the emaciated widow symbolic morsels of bread. milk. and wine from her own plate. She speaks to Isabella in Italian. strengthening the bonds of female community through a private language not understood by Maurice or the servants. She defetishizes Antonio's chamber with fresh air and new paint. helping Isabella to reclaim without distress the space associated with her late husband. But most importantly. she re-widows Isabella by correcting her narrative record: "I...then ventured to disclose the welcome secret. that she was not married at all: and that she was entirely her own mistress. and that of this house. and the lands belonging to it. She screamed for joy." (III. 205). As she frees Isabella from the illusory bonds of wedlock. so she relocates fiscal authority in the widow. metaphorically redressing Maurice's penetration of the *escritoire* by showing Isabella "two books I had made; in one of which I had set down all the money I had received on her account: in the other. all that I had

expended for her. I told her. I had hitherto been her faithful steward: but was ready to resign my office whenever she pleased" (III, 207). Stewardship here acts as metonymy that conflates rightful Christian behaviour and fiscal rectitude, to which gifts Isabella responds with explicit biblical metaphor. "I will say with the widowed Naomi.---'Thy people shall be my people. and thy God shall be my God'" (*Plans*, 170).

Reeve's conjoining of georgic and biblical offers cultural sanction to the widows' behaviour. Georgic, in particular, affirms "the civilizing capacity of labor", used by Reeve to license her widows' entrepreneurial industry.²⁷ While georgic carries with it divergent political connotations---a liberal ideal of progress, an abandonment of disinterested civic humanism---it is, as discussed in Chapter Four, an especially resonant context for female characters, and widows in particular. Frances draws upon the classical value of georgic to impress its healthful effects on her indolent husband, but he rejects her promotion of gentleman-farming with snobbish disdain: "I pointed out the study of agriculture.---He despised it, as fit only for vulgar people." She cites to no avail georgic's history of admirers: "I told him, that the greatest and wisest men, of all ages and countries, had not thought it beneath them to pursue these and the like studies" (I, 72). She herself is conscious of both the plenty of nature alone---"the trees, rich with fruit: and every flower...in blossom" (I, 88)---and the opportunity to cultivate it for natural profit: "My dairy, my poultry-yard, my orchard, every green plant, gave me pleasure. We might have lived well, out of the produce of our farm" (I, 93). More loosely, Frances embodies georgical energy in her tireless capacity for improvement---her school, Isabella, her pedagogical compositions---and in her perspectival attitude toward worldly disadvantage: "All of us have had our respective trials....We have all worked our way through them. I trust, that we are all the better for them: and we certainly have the better title to the blessings that remains to us" (III, 257-58).

But it is Rachel Strictland who is most literally associated with georgic, both as a doctrine of work and as related to real property. The rector's wife, Mrs. Elton, offers Rachel a remedy for her

excessive sensibility, a Puritanical method of accounting for each segment of the day: "Use yourself to a constant habit of employment: reduce it to a method—Such hours to your first duties: such to needle-work: such to reading....Thus your time will be filled up" (II. 176). More specifically, she advises spinning flax as a task that constructs a female community irrespective of class ("Myself, my daughters, and my servants, do more or less of it every day"), and renders both material profit and self-possession: "We spin all our sheets, table-clothes, towel, and kitchen-linen: it turns to very good account, and it makes us pleased and happy in ourselves" (II. 177). Rachel is willingly schooled in such an outlook, and subsequently reveals her gift for more eclectic enterprises: "I improved the garden. I made a green-house out of one of the uninhabited parlours, and filled it with exotics of various kinds" (II. 181). This reconfiguration of art and nature, bringing the outdoors into the parlour, is only briefly mentioned, but such a spirit tacitly animates Woodlands, the gloomy old hall that reminds Rachel "of all the haunted houses I had ever heard or read" (II. 109).

These references to her cultivational endeavours are significantly linked in the novel to her connection to a pair of old portraits: "I never failed to visit the two charming pictures, and my heart paid them an involuntary homage" (II. 181). The subjects turn out to be the forbears of the Marney family, the original owners of Woodlands. Rachel is drawn to them at first sight, supposing them to be Strictland's ancestors, but she is informed by her husband that they have been bought, part and parcel, with the estate and its mansion: "they serve to cover the walls as well as anything: I seldom look at them" (II. 113). A chance meeting with a ragged boy on the grounds of Woodlands, boldly touted as "the right heir of this house and estate, if every one had his own", prompts a long, interpolated narrative (II. 191). The boy is Henry Marney. He becomes a vehicle for differentiating gender-specific values of exclusion and communality. Strictland has whipped and bullied him off the property for his impudence in begging charity and claiming a familial link, but Rachel, more compassionate, bids his grandfather, Balderson, to "tell the story" of the Marney fortunes. (II. 194). Over a series of secret meetings, Balderson describes the family

feuds and corrupt testamentary practices that have allowed Woodlands to devolve from ancestral to commodified property, legally but wrongfully available to the Strictlands for purchase.

If on a macrocosmic level "[g]eorgic enables a purposive construction of the uncertainties in a world increasingly imagined in transactional terms," then Rachel's active generosity against the constraints of a bullying husband and a natural familial partiality---her "informing spirit," in Anthony Low's terms---works to redress Strictland's individual parsimony and his family's acquisitiveness.²⁸ She not only hears the entirety of Balderson's tale, but also exactly transcribes it for Frances---"You will always remember, it is Balderson who speaks"---and thus enlarges the audience for a tale that bourgeois interestedness has formerly silenced. When a wife, she secretly sends Marney to school with her pin money; widowed, her philanthropy is untrammelled and she adopts Marney, raising him alongside her own son. The two boys develop a strong bond, despite their difference in wealth and ability: Rachel scrupulously admits that Marney possesses the "superior talents" (III, 212). Furthermore, she considers Marney "the right heir of my son's estate" (II, 235). These disclosures and her own efforts to make restitution correct the past while protecting the modified patrilinear line. There is no consideration, for example, of legal recourse to right the Marneys' testamentary exclusion from Woodlands. But while she will not resuscitate the ancient status of the family and their hereditary property, she does establish a liberal program designed to shape Marney for employ, thereby replacing the old order with bourgeois potentiality. The trajectory of education mixes georgic with politics: Marney and her son make an Arthur Youngian tour of every county to "observe the produce and the soil...the trade and manufactures" and study "Blackstone's Commentaries" to learn "the laws, the government, and the constitution of their country" in order to form them as new gentlemen (III, 251-52).

Reeve's resolution of the competition between the Marney and Strictland families reveals a kind of feminocentric civic humanism. Once the estate is in the hands of the widow, the property is refined through a series of improvements reminiscent of Scott's *Millenium Hall*. Rachel repays

Mrs. Gilson's kindness by hiring her son as overseer: she rejects the consolidation of estates as exclusionary to the peasantry, of whom she declares herself "the protector and patronness": she renovates rather than removes five straggling cottages and appropriates them to the dislocated families: and she retains one cottage to house Balderson, an indigent widow and her spinster sister, whom together she declares "a comfortable and happy family" (II. 306). Thus the widow redeems the land not quite rightfully hers through a georgic of affective enterprise. By the end of *Plans of Education*, Frances describes Rachel's intention to bolster the improvements with "a School of Industry and...a manufactory in her own village" (216). Combining biblical rhetoric with georgical energy, Frances accords Rachel's work a divine capacity: "she will invite the ingenious, the virtuous, and the unfortunate, and build for them a real paradise" (*Plans*, 129).

Illusory Power: Quiet Protest

Rachel's curative version of civic humanism contrasts visibly with the negative bourgeois characteristics associated with her husband. Strictland takes advantage of a mishandled will to buy his place in landed society: unsurprisingly, he therefore displays none of the disinterested virtues the eighteenth century attached to property.²⁹ He is miserly and unfeeling and inattentive to the value of the past, symbolized by his indifferent purchase of the Marney ancestral portraits as mere wall-coverings (II. 113). But even a hereditary connection to property is no longer a guarantor of civic integrity. Lord A and Darnford are both corrupt and inclined to treat women as they do land: something easily alienable to gratify desire. All admirable qualities are transferred to the professional, bourgeois figure of Counsellor M, who alone exercises the compassion, justice, and societal responsibility long associated with the eighteenth-century gentleman.

This relocation of merit in bourgeois self-determination is common in the mid- to late eighteenth-century novel. What is striking here is Reeve's implication that the demise of classic civic humanism is harmful to the widow. The suppression of dower rights carried with it a gradual

erasure of the correspondence between a husband's land and his widow's security: what had begun as a widow's claim to her husband's land was transformed into an obligation borne by the bride's family, as it was her bridal portion that determined the jointure. If the jointure land is no longer tied to the patrilineal estate, it is temptingly alienable. If land represents permanence and tradition and engenders virtue, its saleability might nurture volatile impulses detrimental to the security of the widow. Reeve accordingly documents, through Rachel and Frances, the widow's jeopardy in an increasingly transactional society.

But once again, Reeve's critical treatment is subtle. She first explores the gendered power dynamic by probing the implications of both written and oral narratives: she then eases into an assessment of the nature of the widow's entitlements, seemingly entrenched in law but in the end, as revealed in Reeve's subtext, awarded by patriarchal whim. The young Rachel Strickland who detests unwomanly displays of domestic authority ("I had heard of women who...had assumed the reins of government, and ruled over their husbands. The latter I detested") nevertheless finds insupportable her miserly husband who denies her friends and books and refuses to disburse her pin money. She writes secretly to her guardians with a plea for rescue but Strickland intercepts the letter. What Reeve emphasizes here is the masculine scope of ownership and its power to crush independent female identity. An epistolary relationship extrinsic to the husband's scrutiny is disallowed, because correspondence, its letters a kind of chattel, is subject to the laws of coverture. As Rachel convalesces from the miscarriage caused by Strickland's rage, she turns for comfort to the housekeeper, Mrs. Gilson, and requests her history: the widow recounts a biography of "Christian patience and peace, under sufferings and misfortunes" and Rachel promises "to profit by it" (II, 161). Although the wife cannot relay her own story in any material form (like a letter) because her property rights are wholly subsumed in coverture, she may prosper by hearing the widow's: even an unpropertied widow, like Mrs. Gilson, has a purchase on her own story. This distinction finds its structural correlative in the novel's form: if, in general, written narrative is a currency that is circulated and exchanged, Reeve implies that a

feminocentric text is mobilized only after its tellers are widowed and free from spousal editorializing. *School for Widows* is therefore necessarily retrospective.

Oral narrative, however, is exempt from patriarchal authority and, in its colloquial form of gossip, associated with women, and particularly with widows in both scriptural and secular writings.³⁰ As such, it inspires a sense of community through "narrative possession of fragments of other peoples' lives," which, as Patricia Meyer Spacks suggests, often "constitutes an oblique moral discourse."³¹ Mrs. Gilson's personal parable thus recalls Rachel to feminine duty and secures for her a more equitable marriage. Their "long gossip" schools Rachel in the widow's paradigmatic resignation, but also leads Rachel to draft a series of conciliatory entitlements replicating in legalistic fashion a list of specific improvements: regular pin money payments; the right to hire a servant out of said pin money; the permission to keep company with the neighbouring gentry; the freedom to correspond with friends, and a general request for courteous behaviour until deserving otherwise.³²

Rachel's formal document, "Articles of Reconciliation between Mr. and Mrs. Strictland," recalls in its title the original marriage settlement, and with this episode Reeve begins to probe the instability of women's protected rights. A series of linked incidents subsequently criticizes the long-held safety and surety of jointure. Reeve is careful to map out the preliminary steps to marriage in terms that make Rachel appear exemplary: she has no emotional prepossession to any other man and accepts unreservedly the recommendation of her guardians "without any reluctance and without passion....I had a preference towards my husband, and I resolved to fulfill my duty" (II, 105). There are worrisome indications of Strictland's "mean and sordid mind" during the courtship, but these are "either concealed or smoothed over" by her rather mercenary guardians, who extol Strictland's prudence and economy, and "thought that, in giving me to such [a man], they had discharged their whole duty" (II, 105). Thus, as in *Sidney Bidulph*, an ideal young woman is sacrificed to her culture's valuation of feminine subordination. Unlike Sidney,

however. Rachel's alliance with a tactical widow grants her agency: "I rose, took my pen, and wrote as follows....[the Articles of Reconciliation]." Rachel's adoption of a masculine role in drafting a marriage contract suggests a patriarchal failure of the original articles to protect the interests of a "girl with near six thousand pounds in her pocket" (II, 107). That Mrs. Gilson dubs herself "the counsellor" for Rachel's "side" (II, 164)—Rachel the plaintiff with her allegations of marital mistreatment—encourages this sense of transgendered authority.

On the surface, and as Frances herself notes, it appears that Strictland "esteemed and put confidence in" Rachel as evidenced by his generous will (I, 284). Rachel is entitled to "six thousand pounds (somewhat more than he received with her) over and beside her marriage settlement" (II, 288). Strictland makes his widow "the residuary legatee," empowered to receive the rents and income of his fortune during the minority of his children. The will is by contemporary standards reasonably bountiful despite its being *durante viduitate*, that is, contingent upon a perpetual widowhood. Should Rachel choose to remarry, she loses guardianship of her children and her life-interest in the estate revenues. Although by modern standards this seems overly restrictive—"the tyranny of her ill-tempered husband continues beyond the grave"³³—it was commonplace enough for David Hume to declare in *A Treatise of Human Nature* that a remarrying widow generated disastrous conflicts of interest between her children and new husband, and for Sir Thomas Overbury to argue that a "virtuous widow would not remarry, 'for she married that she might have children; and for their sakes she marries no more.'"³⁴ In the event of remarriage, Strictland pledges to return Rachel's original fortune. Although at first glance, this looks like generosity, it was likely customary practice, and, as Eileen Spring observes in a related context, it granted as the widow's "only certain right the return of her own property."³⁵

Rachel's reaction to the testamentary stipulations seems pointed: "Now, my friend, what think you of this Will? I will tell you my opinion: that it is the most generous, just, and prudent one.

that I ever saw or heard of." Her commentary extends beyond simple appreciation of the will's merits. It blends conduct-book decorum with an impulse to protect children, property, and reputation from exposure, and sets itself against an imagined alternative:

I have, at this moment, in my mind's eye, a widow, turned sixty years of age, in whose hands a too generous husband left the disposal of a great part of his property. This woman, instigated by a passion that, at her years, is a disgrace to her sex, married a man under thirty; settled all her property on him; wronged, cheated, and insulted her children, and grandchildren; and became the contempt and disgrace of her family, of her sex, and of the world. (II, 290-291)

In terms which recall the *Spectator's* Widow-club and its satirized slippage between property and propriety, Rachel disdains equally widows' "squandering their fortunes and buying themselves husbands" (II, 290). Her widowhood is thus approvingly limited by contemporary restrictions: a will's enforcement of a widow's continence, the widow's own approbation of such a measure, the anecdotal spectre of a lusty widow whose sexual impropriety alters the rightful course of hereditary property in order to reinforce the consequences of an unchecked post-marital liberty.

However, Reeve once again undercuts her promotion of such strictures with a few provocative insertions. First, Strictland's version of patrilineage embeds a tacit affront: the land is entailed upon "his sons, grandsons, &c., and failing heirs, to his daughters; failing both, to his sister" (II, 288). The land is entailed and thus inalienable, and the hereditary interest might be secured through a *durante viduitate* proviso. With such available parameters to protect the estate, it is notable that the widow does not figure in the long list of potential grantees. Furthermore, the notion that Strictland's posthumous liberality redeems his past behaviour by honouring Rachel's good wifeliness is arguable. Although Frances concludes that Strictland proved his love with the will, "the last solemn act of his life," Rachel is at pains to elucidate Strictland's long-standing misogyny (III, 6). After registering her approval of the will's terms, she then disputes Frances's ascription of spousal esteem: "Mr. Strictland had a mean opinion of women: he had frequently told me so. He said, they were not to be trusted with power, nor with money." After recounting

several illustrative conversations, she concludes: "Thus thinking, and thus acting, how can I account for his last disposition of his property? Can I do otherwise than impute it to the influence of the two gentlemen, who assisted him in making his will?" (II 287). She tells Frances not once but twice that her co-executorship of the will is a compliment paid by her fellow administrators, who "owned that they had urged it, as it would enable me to receive the rents, and to act for my children" (II, 285).

This rather insistent detailing underscores the capriciousness of such a testamentary devise. Rachel "earns" her lucrative widowhood through the mastery of *her* recalcitrant will with the revision of her marriage articles. This is far from the primary entitlements of dower law: this is a precariously meritocratic approach, based on patriarchal approval of her marital conduct. And making this process even more whimsical is the provenance of the approval: it stems not from her husband, with whom she shares the most intimate connection, but from two neighbours, who happen to appreciate her comportment ("[t]hey both thought well of me," II, 282). Rachel's inheritance is portrayed as a kind of tribute rather than an entrenched right, a gold star of property and authority for good behaviour.

Eileen Spring notes that testamentary gifts "depended on the will of others and were uncertain."³⁶ Rachel is arguably possessed of an equitable jointure, one that her husband pledges by return of her fortune in remarriage to honour unconditionally, even if he makes child custody and estate management a bequest subject to his prescriptions. But the experiences of Frances Darnford argue even more forcefully that a widow's rights are susceptible to the vagaries of cultural expectations, that jointure is violable by both trickery and selfless love, that contractual settlements are in no way akin to the chartered rights of dower law and are changeably influenced by the allure of the woman in question. Reeve makes evident here a consciousness of the relational bonds between propriety and property. Frances's perfect code of conduct betrays an awareness of such a code: she deliberately protects her propriety from wrongful exposure.

Frances's tale moves full circle from the misguided settlements and trusts made by her loving but conventional father, to the broken trust of her wastrel husband, to the meritocratic settlements by admiring counsellors and captains, ending finally with the authoritative capacity to settle her own funds irrevocably on persons of her own choosing.

The scene between Frances and her dying father plays upon both affiliative and monetary trusts, and reveals the contemporary prejudice against protecting married women's interests with discrete settlements. Mr. Lawson has heard with concern of Darnford's profligacy but assumes that his daughter's prudence will serve as a "check." He tries to impress upon his son-in-law the affective value of his testamentary bequest:

As a proof of the good opinion I have of you, I leave the residue of my daughter's fortune in your hands. Consider, it is a sacred trust, and beware how you abuse it. I leave my dearest child in your protection. (I. 82)

The obvious conflation of daughter and property---in this case, equal to £1100---is an eighteenth-century commonplace, but Reeve details this scenario with contemporary rationale: "My father said, Mr. Darnford had acted so handsomely in making me a settlement of three hundred a year, that he could not tie up the residue he had to leave me: but that he would venture to give him a word of advice when he should take leave of him" (II. 78). That Mr. Lawson is aware of his daughter's jeopardy is evidenced by his gift of two bank-notes for £150, which he counsels her to hide "safely from [her] husband's knowledge." His broad-mindedness is suggested by the fact that his estate is left equitably to his three daughters as co-parceners and not entailed to the closest male heir. Yet he is reluctant to avail himself of any legal remedies for fear of affronting his son-in-law and risking the "liberal" jointure settled on his daughter. This attitude highlights again the instability of the contractual system. The forced thirds of dower are not affected by gratitude or timidity, while the wholly private nature of a marriage settlement makes it vulnerable to the

dynamic governing the negotiating parties. The widow, husbandless and often by that point fatherless, will be left alone to negotiate the outcome of a bad bargain.

William Alexander in his 1779 disquisition on the status of women unequivocally condemns the "not uncommon thing" that is married women's separate property. He refers to both divine and civil law to support his censure: such a measure is "an inequitable bargain" that "overturns the natural order of things, and destroys that authority, which the gospel and the laws of this country give a man over his wife; and that obedience and subjection which the rules of Christianity prescribe in the deportment of a wife toward her husband."³⁷ Kathryn Kirkpatrick notes that despite the dynastic aspect of separate trusts---a family's desire to protect their property not for their daughter but from a spendthrift husband---the family "[n]ot infrequently...appointed the husband himself" as trustee.³⁸ This is precisely what Mr. Lawson does for his beloved daughter: he endorses Darnford's command by making him trustee of her inheritance, notwithstanding his established extravagance.

When Darnford lands destitute in debtor's prison under protection of the King's Bench, Frances surrenders willingly what she had refused "upon compulsion". In signing away her jointure settlement---in un-widowing herself---Frances regains her husband, who is released from jail with the revenue from her sold estate. Such a devastating forfeiture, and Frances is "fully sensible of the sacrifice" (I. 212), is widely known and meets primarily with derision. Frances is heavily criticized for being "weak enough to give up her settlement" (I. 14 and I. 259). But social disgrace pales against the sexual jeopardy created by the public auction of her Essex estate. Lord A buys the estate himself, and dangles it as security to Frances for becoming his mistress. This scheme is wholly abetted by Darnford, who drunkenly explains the covenant: Lord A is to underwrite Darnford's lifestyle in return for access to his wife, whose lost propriety will be recompensed by the re-settlement of her original jointure estate. Frances flees in disgust, masquerading in fear as a *feme sole* to avoid inquiry: "[m]y husband, by his base conduct, had

made a divorce between us" (I. 224). Here a jointure is made contingent not upon chastity but its opposite: Frances must prostitute herself to earn back her widow's rights. Even the more conservative contemporary writers allowed that such illicit dealings dissolved the sanctity of marriage. Very soon afterwards, Darnford dies and Frances is literally widowed.

Reeve represents in the story of Frances Darnford not only the vulnerability of virgin and wife to the supremacy of father and husband (whether for good or ill), but also her complicity with the forces that direct her. Her selflessness and sense of duty have conspired in her being "kissed", in contemporary idiom, out of her jointure. Lord A's interested purchase of her estate emphasizes the alienability of settlement property. In a perverted play on marriage articles, he reinvokes the sexual terms of matrimony with the widow by settling the Essex farm on Frances "and her heirs, irrevocably" (II. 21). It is worth noting the widow's worth over the wife's: her original jointure arrangement would have granted her a mere life-interest in the estate, namely its £300 annual income. (That this is the case is demonstrated by the lawyer of the new heir-at-law to Darnford Hall; he writes ominously of the rumour that Frances has given up her settlement: "If this be true, my friend, the present Mr. Darnford is highly injured: for this estate would have devolved to him upon your death" II. 259). Yet, ironically, Lord A offers for her prostitution a settlement of comprehensive integrity, the right to possess land in fee simple, to bequeath it at will and by will, both freedoms disallowed married women. He sweetens the proposal with even more property, a "cottage...and a pretty little parcel of land about it, lately purchased; which, together, make a farm sufficient to amuse and employ one who delights in rural occupations" (II. 21-22). William Alexander explains that without fathers or husbands, widows possess "no person...so much interested in their welfare, no person...legally bound to defend or maintain them" and consequently pities their "forlorn condition."³⁹ Reeve carefully reverses the widow's plight: both father and husband have sacrificed their charge respectively to convention and self-interest. So while Lord A's terms are odious to Frances, his proposals reminds us that she is now legally a *feme sole* and can make her own decisions: "I treat with you as a free woman," he writes (II. 88).

Obviously, a virtuous widow cannot commodify her sexual allure, notwithstanding her penury and no matter how plenteous the compensatory property in question. But what *School for Widows* focuses on here is not the tacit potential for widows to capitalize on their propriety but the unchartered nature of jointure itself. That Lord A offers to re-settle Frances's jointure in return for sexual favours emphasizes its contingent basis. Dower had been an inalienable status right, except for certain limited exceptions; a contractual settlement is transparently affected by considerations of patriarchal power dynamics, personal beauty, and seemly comportment. Furthermore, because dower---a life interest in one-third of all the freehold property of which the widow's husband had been seised at any time during the marriage---pertains wholly to the estate of the husband, he might hesitate to sell it off for quick money; whereas, as exemplified by France's Essex farm, a jointure-estate is most often a discrete parcel of land, all the easier to dispose of without reducing one's hereditary property. And while the sale of dower lands required the protective legal mechanism of the *fine*---in which the wife was independently examined by the court to determine her willingness to sacrifice this future security---the relinquishment of a jointure is more expeditiously accomplished with a mere signature.

While contemporary texts remain convinced of the advantage of jointure over dower for both sexes, the primary reasons are by no means indisputable: "The jointure, thus legally settled, is still more inviolate to the wife than her dower; it cannot be touched by the creditors of the husband; and though a dower be forfeited by the husband guilty of high treason, the jointure is not."⁴⁰ Of the latter observation, one must question its actual frequency. And while it is true that creditors could not seize jointure property in lieu of payment, a simple release and a wife's faithful love for a ruined husband could effect the same outcome. "[I]t is too notoriously known," observes Sarah Chapone, "the Husband having so entirely the Disposal of the Wife's Person, that he easily finds Means to bend her to his Will."⁴¹ As Frances explains, "I could not see my husband sick, without doing everything in my power to set him at liberty" (I. 242). In *School for*

Widows, husband's will is anticipated by a responsive wife: her fulfillment of his need guarantees only her privation as a widow.

Counsel and Property

In a changing world, Reeve tacitly argues in *School For Widows*, traditional sources of support may prove unstable: fathers weakly agree to inequitable settlements for their daughters, and husbands relinquish their protectorate duties for venial pleasures. If the hierarchy is askew in Reeve's world, it is still essentially viable, but women must seek external guidance to direct their course. As Rachel learns dutiful wifeliness from a widow, so Frances shapes her entrepreneurial impulses with the help of a professional counsellor. Both characters benefit materially from their responsiveness to advice, a relationship that Reeve embeds metanarratively in the novel as a whole. From her pedagogical schemes to her declarative aim to show the reader "that virtue is active, and gathers strength from exercise" (preface, ix), Reeve addresses a decidedly middle-class audience, the "pseudo-gentry," whom Edward Copeland speculates might well require didactic instruction on how to marry employment and decorum.⁴² However, while *School for Widows* and *Plans of Education* document the widows triumphing over adversity to live in plenty, virtue intact, the novels at the same time reveal a subtext of distrust. The disenfranchised, here figured as widows, remain protected by law or surrogate patriarchy and are dependent for their agency on the marketing of traditional feminine attributes for direct financial recompense. Taking marriage out of the equation, as does widowhood, uncovers the conflict between propriety and female autonomy.

Widowed but without jointure, and harassed by the rapacious Lord A, Frances has only her reputation and her sense of industry. Her entrepreneurialism—her school, her governessing, her companionate work with Isabella—is remunerated with a series of settlements. That they are

named as such suggests their replacement of the marriage settlement sacrificed to Darnford's moral laxity and aristocratic excess. Again what is revealed is the precariously contingent basis of these settlements, based on patriarchal appreciation of the enterprises in question. James Fordyce's *Sermons to Young Women* (1766), counsels his readers to invest their virginal propriety for post-marital gain: the "reward" for exemplary conduct "will be a profitable settlement."⁴³ But widows are supposed to be protected from the vagaries of the market, having already fulfilled their matrimonial contract. *School for Widows* demonstrates the unstable state of widows' rights and the demand for coded behaviour in order to merit substitutive gifts of property.

Frances's self-conscious awareness of the need to display her inherent virtue is revealed in an odd incident in which she find herself, still married although temporarily deserted by Darnford, responding to the attentions of an admiring young man. While she confesses privately and retrospectively that she never saw a man "more to [her] taste" than Mr. Wilmot (I, 178), she rigorously refuses any friendship with him. She tells him she is "particularly circumstanced," with her husband abroad, and that she must "abstain from all appearance of evil" (I, 174). After Darnford's death, assistance comes to Frances in the form of a surrogate father who does not shrink from advancing the widow's interests as her father did the wife's. While relationships of sexual interest---Mr. Wilmot, Lord A---are unequivocally disallowed for and by both the wife and recent widow for reasons of propriety, a protectorate relationship---the helpful Counsellor M---is encouraged. This permits Reeve to air her protofeminist concerns without advocating changes to the gendered hierarchy, a strategy she replicates throughout the text. Counsellor M understands that Frances has of necessity been "persuaded or threatened" into releasing her jointure and is willing to monitor her future plans for employment. He is anxious that she "not hazard all [her] property," the banknotes from her late father, in her scheme for a girls' school. One of his many objections is that women's enterprises are materially influenced by hearsay: "schools are fluctuating and uncertain: a parcel of gossips will sit in judgment upon them and their conductors" (I, 255). He favours governessing as a vocation and Frances accordingly makes

a few attempts (which have the welcome effect of repulsing with her class transgression Lord A's pursuit). This role-playing extends through a series of episodes. Counsellor M advises: Frances complies: and in recognition of her obedience, he makes proactive decisions which permit the widow to sidestep the traps of financial vulnerability and juridical illiteracy.

Sarah Chapone in *The Hardship of the English Laws in Relation to Wives* (1735) noted the penalties incurred by this legal naïveté: most eighteenth-century women "are extreamly [sic] ignorant...as to points in Law...their Education and Way of Life shuts them out from the Knowledge of their true Interest in almost all things": they are consequently required to "Trust and Confid[e]" in men for judicial recourse.⁴⁴ In *School for Widows*, the new Darnford Hall heir tries to defraud Frances of her customary right to her late husband's chattels, but Counsellor M reminds him and his "rascally pettifogger" that the estate has a rival claimant in the widow (I. 264). Frances has, he specifies, "a lawful claim to one-third of all the personalities of her late husband....The goods and furniture of this house: the plate, linen &c. the farming stock, and utensils: and the crops now upon the ground" (I. 275).⁴⁵ Thus while the lost jointure estate cannot be re-settled without sexual trespass, a kind of chattel-dower is demanded and a release is once again signed but this time for ready money belonging to the widow herself. Counsellor M stipulates and receives £150 for Frances's share.

It seems no coincidence that this sum is identical to the banknote gift of her late father. Reeve emphasizes with this detail the contrast between the two patriarchs, one too apprehensive to enforce his paternalistic protection, the other professionally educated in the law and thus empowered to exploit its possibilities. Counsellor M not only equals the gift of her late father but increases its value with a subsequent investment in the "Long Annuities" on Frances's behalf: he obtains for her a yearly dividend of £20 (I. 280). This settlement of money carries with it political overtones. Though real property is the long-standing marker of authority, Frances's land is sold but her stock interest, despite much actual uncertainty in the eighteenth-century economy,

remains reliable. Furthermore, while Mr. Lawson was ready to privilege social niceties above his daughter's future welfare, Counsellor M establishes the investment as an insurance policy: "While you are young, I hope you shall live upon your own earnings; but, when you go down the hill, it is good to have a resource" (I. 280). The juxtaposition of the two men argues for Reeve's ambivalence toward civic humanism and her guarded preference for a progressive meritocracy. Mr. Lawson possesses a fortune and paternal authority, but abdicates his protective duty in sacrificing Frances to Darnford and to custom. Counsellor M, a bourgeois professional, extends his protection to Frances as a warranted marker of her worth. What should be ingrained and immutable---settlements of real property, a father's safekeeping---are violable. What should be granted by status---a widow's security of fortune---has to be earned.

Reeve demonstrates this by making explicit the link between Counsellor M's esteem for Frances and his testamentary bequest to her. He shields her from Lord A's courtship, registering the latter's aristocratic consequence but trusting to Frances's discretion ("you know the man and can judge of his honesty") and right conduct (I. 267). He extols for two pages her qualities, dismissing charges of her degradation through work and emphasizing that his assistance is a response to her self-determination:

It is this active and industrious temper and mind, that makes me her friend....Had she sat piping and whining, as many people in her situation would do...I should, perhaps, have pitied her, but I should not have stepped forward to her assistance....I respect that noble and independent spirit, which finds resources within itself for every thing....conscious rectitude supports it with fortitude and firmness. (I. 272-273)

Upon his death, Counsellor M settles upon Frances £500, "a noble legacy" which secures her "a competency for life" (III. 204). Between his investment of dowable chattel proceeds and the testamentary stipend which nets Frances an annual return, he has in essence granted her a replacement jointure. But again such security is framed as a boon, not as a right.⁴⁶ Frances's equity is not an entitlement of her widowhood through marriage, but a gift she earns through

behaviour agreeable to a mentor. While this meritocratic arrangement profits her in ways that her traditional "rights" did not, it in no way compensates for the loss of an entrenched prerogative, like dower, or the so-called "safety and surety" of jointure, as claimed by contemporary legal authorities.

Counsellor M and Mr. Lawson supply Frances with the same capital sum of £150: Counsellor M and Captain Maurice share the same onomastic initials, a similarity that underlines their related function in the novel. Captain Maurice's gifts to Frances for her rehabilitation of Isabella are likewise registered as settlements, and in his case, they register Frances's benevolence and deputize as salary. "Your goodness will be rewarded," he tells her, "both here and hereafter!" (III, 160). At no point do they discuss a fixed remuneration for her caregiving services (we have been given monetary details for her governessing employs), but he sends her "two writings, properly signed and executed. The first was a lease of three years of the mansion, and the ground adjoining; the other was a power of attorney to receive his rents, and the interest of his money in the funds, during Charlotte's minority" (III, 191). Again, the terms are reminiscent of a jointure-settlement. In the novel's sequel, Frances muses on the soundness of her financial investments during her tenancy with Isabella: "All this time my own property has been accumulating: so that I can truly say...I am as rich and independent as I wish to be" (*Plans*, 10).

But greater material marks of approbation are to follow: Frances at last dissolves Maurice's claim to Isabella's property, its alienability clogged by the local belief in her coverture. His admission returns Isabella to the legal status of widow with the authority "to dispose of her estate" at her discretion (*Plans*, 228). Frances terms his release "an act of justice" (*Plans*, 232). But this is a misnomer that only exacerbates his particular villainy—it has taken the better part of two prolix novels to obtain this—and the more general vulnerability of the widow, barred from her lawful entitlement by something as slight as a sham marriage and a village rumour. Maurice symbolically redresses some of this injury by granting Frances an interest in his estate and the

legal guardianship of his ward Charlotte. The terms are exactly those of an equitable jointure as originally defined by Edmund Coke. "a competent livelihood of freehold for the wife of lands or tenements. etc. for the life of the wife at the least." The particularities likewise recall Lord A's infamous proposal, but here they are markedly chaste. Maurice begs Frances's acceptance of

an act and deed which proves my gratitude for your great and real services to me and mine. This paper is an act of settlement of my farm at D—, upon my Charlotte, irrevocably: and the income to you, Madam, during your life. (*Plans*, 234)

Frances indeed is made so wealthy by the combined favours of Counsellor M and Captain Maurice that she ends *Plans of Education* with her intention "to settle a thousand pounds upon Patty Martin" (243), her adopted daughter by Mrs. Martin.

Thus the childless widow gains two daughters without sexual impropriety: the indigent widow kissed out of her jointure earns it back with interest and without remarriage. Rachel has had comparable success. The two widows are, in fact, significantly doubled in their representation. Both, aided by Counsellors (one literal, one metaphoric), procure new articles and settlements: both are granted conditional custody of their real or adopted children as premised upon a particular behaviour (perpetual widowhood in Rachel, feminine industry in Frances); both redress the specific vicissitudes of their married life—Lord A's lechery, Strictland's parsimony—with their charitable work as widows (Frances saves Isabella from Maurice's predations; Rachel builds her neighbourhood paradise of plenty). Their plots reveal a complementary structure, traceable back to Samuel Richardson's alternative feminocentric representatives. Rachel, a late-century heir to *Pamela*, plays the protagonist in a domestic novel. Her quotidian concerns with husband and children and household improvements are contrasted with Frances's story, whose sexual menace and spiritual resignation are borrowed from *Clarissa*. "Yes, you are the heroine," Rachel writes of Frances, although middle-class resourcefulness allows her to avoid the dysphoric ending of the heroine's plot, as described by Nancy K. Miller.⁴⁷

Reeve exploits her heroines' potential for agency through their relationship to narrative, their receptiveness to other characters' stories and their candour in giving their own. Rachel's material attention to Mrs. Gilson's example yields in the end her interest in the estate of Woodlands: her respect for Balderson's tale sanctions her right to the family property. Frances's mindful response to Counsellor M and her sympathetic audience to Captain Maurice accord her regular income and a life-interest in real property as well. If real property is one "guarantor...of selfhood" and a marker of virtue, then the expansive closures of both novels---each ending with a journey to Woodlands and the anticipation of a feminocentric community there---assert the widows' identity.⁴⁸ While it is true that there is some "correspondence between the women's achievement and the men's potential enactment of it" (Lord A's transformation from rake to family man is one instance), the novel does not particularly focus on this relocation.⁴⁹ Rather, the closing exchanges of both *School for Widows* and *Plans of Education* emphasize the widows' resolutions against remarriage (III. 242 and *Plans* 236) and their future pursuits.

William Alexander, pragmatic in his correlation of wealth and happiness in widowhood, concludes his *History of Women*: "she who, having laid a husband in the grave, enjoys an independent fortune, is almost the only woman who among us can be called free."⁵⁰ On the one hand, Reeve empowers widows with careful strategies of georgic contexts, tacit proto-feminism, and biblical rhetoric. She confirms their merit with a disposition of money and real property. But a careful examination of the texts makes visible her shaky faith in the contemporary state of the widow's legal entitlements, and a reiterated concern with the meritocratic nature of substitutive gifts.

¹Todd. *Sign of Angellica*. 201.

²Tompkins. *The Popular Novel in England 1770-1800* (London: Constable and Co.. 1932). 164.

³Frank David Kievitt. "Clara Reeve's *The School for Widows*." *Mid-Hudson Language Studies* (1980). 83.

⁴Brophy. *Women's Lives*. 186.

⁵Ernest A. Baker. *The History of the English Novel* (New York: Barnes and Noble. 1929), vol. 5. 180.

⁶Miriam Leranbaum. "'Mistresses of Orthodoxy.'" *Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society* 121 (1977). 291-292.

⁷Brophy. *Women's Lives*. 186.

⁸Gillian Skinner summarizes women's legal status in the eighteenth-century and concurs with Susan Staves's contention "that the gradual erosion of rights to dower in favour of jointure cannot be seen as an unmitigated good". Skinner. "Women's status as legal and civil subjects." 94.

⁹London. *Women and Property*. 24.

¹⁰Allestree. *The Ladies Calling* II. 229; True Penitent. *The Folly, Sin, and Danger of Marrying Widows*. 13.

¹¹Ward. *Female Policy Detected*. 2. 67. 69. 2. 11. 25.

¹²True Penitent. *The Folly, Sin and Danger of Marrying Widows*. 14. 15. In the *Spectator*, the Widow-club is dubbed a "society of She-Machiavils." June 30. 1714. vol. 4. 518.

¹³Spencer. *The Rise of the Woman Novelist*. 145.

¹⁴Brophy. *Women's Lives*. 182.

¹⁵Clara Reeve. *Plans of Education* (London. 1792). 242. All further references will be included in my text.

¹⁶The "tall, broad-shouldered, impudent, black fellow," who recounts the transgressions of the Widow-club in the *Spectator*, likewise figures his courtship of widows as "Attacks." June 30. 1714. vol. 4. 515.

¹⁷*Entertaining Fortune Book*. 26.

¹⁸*A New Fortune Book*. 2-3.

¹⁹Allestree. *The Ladies Calling*. II. 223. 224.

²⁰Macfarlane. *Marriage and Love in England*. 232.

²¹In a spirited reply to the treatise on the Widow-club (July 28. 1714), one of the members defends the widows' resilience: "you seem to ground your satire on our receiving consolation so soon after the death of our dears, and the number we are pleased to admit for our companions: but you never reflect what husbands we have buried, and how short a sorrow the loss of them was capable of occasioning." Mrs. President goes on to detail with some verisimilitude the indignities she has suffered in her many marriages: venal motives, repeated infidelities, infantilizing treatment, and, when she neglects in one marriage "to reserve [her] estate in [her] own hands," she is fleeced of all ready money in two days and sees on a London street her "stolen" diamond necklace upon a prostitute's neck. *Spectator*. Vol. 4. 557-58. The piece is ascribed to Lady Mary Wortley Montagu: see Bond's editorial note in the *Spectator*. Vol. 4. 556. Isobel Grundy describes the essay as combining fictional satire with "a serious point about male exploitation of women" and notes its "anti-didactic" tone, so different from the "moralizing" that characterizes most *Spectator* pieces. See Grundy. *Lady Mary Wortley Montagu* (Oxford University Press. 1999). 71-72.

²²Low. *The Georgic Revolution*. 164-165.

²³Schnorrenberg, "A Paradise like Eve's." 271.

²⁴Mrs. Martin's son wants her shop for his own use: Frances advises with considerable psychology: "You must tell him that your using the shop enables you to provide for him upon a larger scale of business. You must hire or purchase a piece of ground for a shop and timber-yard for him; and you must put him into business handsomely, and do not think of laying by money that year. You must give him his board and lodging the first year; and, if that is not sufficient, the second year also. You must assist him till he can stand firmly upon his legs. You must tell him, after so good an outset, he must depend upon his own industry, and that you have others to provide for as well as himself. When he marries, he must take a house for himself, for you must by no means part with yours" (I, 55).

²⁵Edward Copeland, *Women Writing about Money* (Cambridge University Press, 1995), 160.

²⁶Ibid 163

²⁷London, *Women and Property*, 5.

²⁸Ibid, 5.

²⁹Most scholars cite J.G.A. Pocock's model of civic humanism as reflective of eighteenth-century ideology; see *The Machiavellian Moment: Florentine Political Thought and the Atlantic Republican Tradition* (Princeton University Press, 1975). Joyce Appleby describes Pocock's connection of "the emergence of civic-humanist values to the political disorders of seventeenth-century England....After the failure of the Puritan commonwealth, Englishmen turned to classical political theory for explanations that could accommodate their reverence for the ancient constitution to the imperatives of a modern ruling class. There they found a chaste model of civil society where men exercised virtue by putting the common good before their own....Civic humanism offered a concept of public life that served the moral as well as the intellectual needs of the English gentry." Appleby, *Liberalism and Republicanism in the Historical Imagination* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1992), 293-94. London defines Pocock's model as a conception of property "in which the citizen's patriot virtue, secured by the leisure and impartiality granted by the possession of land, defines itself in opposition to the specialized acquisitive man of commerce, feminized by his passionate enthrallment to mobile or 'imaginary property.'" London, *Women and Property*, 20.

³⁰St. Paul in 1 Timothy 5:13 condemns "idle" and "wandering" widows as "tattlers...and busybodies, speaking things which they ought not." True Penitent's paradigmatic widow, Dramanthe, "becomes acquainted with half the tattling Gossips in the Neighbourhood...her Frankness degenerates into an unbounded Licentiousness of Conversation." *The Folly, Sin, and Danger of Marrying Widows*, 14-15.

³¹Patricia Meyer Spacks, *Gossip* (New York: Knopf, 1985), 160.

³²It is worth noting the fourth condition: if Rachel indeed wins the right to correspond outside of her marriage, why doesn't she write to Frances immediately? It is interesting that Reeve opens the novel with a conjunction between Rachel's widowhood and "the first use...of [her] recovered liberty...to enquire after the friends of [her] youth" (I, 12). This discrepancy anticipates Maria Edgeworth's explicit denial of epistolary integrity in marriage: "This is the last *confidential* letter I shall ever be able to write to you—for a married woman's letter you know, or you will soon know, become, like all the rest of her property, subject to her husband" Edgeworth, *Patronage* ed. Eva Figs (London: Pandora, 1986), 577.

³³Brophy, *Women's Lives*, 186.

³⁴Quoted in Macfarlane, *Marriage and Love*, 233.

³⁵Spring, *Land, Law, and Family*, 64. When James Balderson, the handsome and admirable uncle to Henry Marney, asks Rachel to marry him, she explains the limiting terms of Strictland's will. "He swore that my fortune was no object with him, and that he wished I had no fortune at all, that he might prove it" (III, 242-43). Presumably he could prove it: if Rachel is entitled to the return of her £6000 portion in the event of a remarriage, she might protect it in a trust for her own use. Unlike the Dutch Merchant in *Roxana*, however, Balderson does not specify such an available remedy. The point is of course rendered moot because of the will's more significant restriction: Rachel loses custody of her children if she remarries.

³⁶Ibid 58

³⁷Alexander, *The History of Women*, II, 332.

³⁸Kirkpatrick, "Sermons and Strictures, 205.

³⁹Alexander, *The History of Women*, II, 289

⁴⁰Ibid, 336

⁴¹Chapone, *Hardships of the English Laws*, 33.

⁴²"Didactic novels stress the respectability of female employment, especially its respectability for those women from the ranks of the pseudo-gentry, the daughters of clergymen and other genteel professionals...who have fallen on hard times." Copeland, *Women Writing About Money*, 163.

⁴³Kirkpatrick, "Sermons and Strictures," 207.

⁴⁴Anon., *Hardships of the English Laws*, 32.

⁴⁵Rules concerning testamentary rights to chattel differ widely and were subject to customary laws. For example, Alexander writes, "In the city of London, province of York, and in Scotland, the effects of him who dies intestate are generally divided according of the ancient doctrine of giving every one a reasonable share. If the deceased leaves a widow and children, the widow is first allowed the furniture of her bed chamber, and wearing apparel: then all the rest is divided in the following proportions: if the deceased left a widow and two children, the widow shall have eight parts (six by the custom, two by the law); if he leaves a widow and one child, each shall have one-half; if he leaves a widow and no child, the widow shall have three-fourths of the whole, and the remaining fourth shall go to the next relation." Alexander, *The History of Women*, 336.

⁴⁶Thus I disagree with Jeanine Mary Casler's contention that "Reeve's community of women...is noteworthy for its complete autonomy. Reeve's women do not reply on any male characters in any way." Casler, "Studies Toward a Critical Edition of Clara Reeve's *School for Widows* " DAI 61:8 (2001): 3182, 37.

⁴⁷Miller defines these terms---euphoric to mark a heroine's integration into society, usually through marriage, and dysphoric to signal her alienation, usually through death---in her introduction and uses them to structure her analysis. See Miller, *The Heroine's Text: Readings in the French and English Novel 1722-1782* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1980).

⁴⁸London, *Women's Property*, 8.

⁴⁹Ibid, 125.

⁵⁰Alexander, *The History of Women*, 338.

Conclusion

Of the marital injustices that form the plot in *School for Widows*, Elizabeth Bergen Brophy maintains that Clara Reeve does little to "challeng[e] the legal and social codes which made such situations possible."¹ The same argument might be made for the fictions analyzed here, as they often reinforce rather than controvert the established values of their society. Reeve's and Scott's widows may personally flourish and exercise their industry on the community around them, but their improvements conform unthreateningly to the dictates of feminine Christian philanthropy. Neither the feminized, bourgeois energies that animate Reeve's protagonists, nor the feminocentric civic humanism that governs Millenium Hall so much reform society as renovate it within its existing social hierarchies. Furthermore, certain prices are exacted for legal and social autonomy: the privileging of commonality over individual, and absolute sexual continence, with neither remarriage nor liaison permitted.

From the widows in *The History of Sir George Ellison* to the eponymous heroine in *Memoirs of Miss Sidney Bidulph*, from Bacchalia in *The City Widow* to Isabella in her two incarnations, these texts variously respond to the socio-economic obstacles to the realization of female desire. The exceptions to this generalization include *The Unfortunate Happy Lady*, in which Philadelphia is rewarded with (separate) property, authority, and (re)marriage—social markers normally mutually exclusive in female characters—and the peripheral widows in *Sidney Bidulph*, who flout the heroine's conventions to actualize with impunity their own self-interest.

However, Sheridan, Scott, and Reeve all stress the violability inherent in jointure that seemingly represents the "safety" and "certainty," as promised by Coke and Blackstone, of the widow's financial welfare. Through metonymic interpolations—the losses of jointure to Sidney Bidulph, Mrs. Maningham (in *George Ellison*) and Frances Darnford (in *School for Widows*)—the writers imply that the hegemony of acquisitive inclination over disinterested civic virtue, and its legal

corollary of unchartered contract over entrenched status right, register a diminution of the widow's proprietary entitlement.

The Dower Act of 1833 is often cited as the beginning of the legislative reforms---marked importantly by the Married Women's Property Acts toward the end of the nineteenth century---that eventually abolished dower in England by 1925. By the end of the eighteenth and throughout the nineteenth centuries, it was increasingly accepted that a wife's interests were best protected by a husband's metaphorical and testamentary will, rather than the stipulations of society and its laws. A small body of legislative decisions toward the end of the eighteenth century by judges like Lloyd Kenyon and Sir Richard Arden, which had permitted the compatibility of both dower and testamentary devise in a widow's claim, was effectively "silenced" by the Dower Act's comprehensive restrictions: "dower could be barred by a declaration in the husband's will (s.7)...it could be subjected to whatever restrictions the husband chose to declare in his will (s.8), and...the husband's devise of *any* land out of which the widow would otherwise be entitled to dower (or any estate or interest in such land)...would bar her of dower in *all* the husband's land [to] which she would otherwise have been entitled."² Thus it became again incumbent upon the wife either to arrange a provident pre-nuptial jointure or to have her husband declare expressly by testament that he would not bar dower in any form. If neither of these protective measures were taken, the husband "could bar her in his will of any share in either his real or his personal property."³

The political turbulence of the 1790s, combined with these legal developments, plays out in various ways in the decade's fictions. Eleanor Ty observes that "female chastity, maternity, and motherhood, figure prominently as they were contentious and in the process of being reconfigured."⁴ But the widow also plays a consequential role in fiction within this period. In Mary Robinson's epistolary *The Widow, or a Picture of Modern Times* (1794), for example, the eponymous and appetitive Emily Vernon deputizes as the author's critique of aristocratic

corruption. Though the widow is granted a certain destructive agency through her many schemes, she is oddly static. Poised through much of the novel upon the brink of remarriage with the villainous Woodley, she at last marries "a foreign adventurer, of the vilest character, who dissipated her fortune: reduced her to misery: and, finally, broke her heart."⁵

The other widow in Robinson's novel, the beleaguered and beautiful Julia St. Laurence, first feigns widowhood as a disguise, is then seemingly widowed in actuality, and is finally re-married to her lost husband, who dissolves his unwittingly bigamous second marriage to re-unite with her. Robinson invokes the widow Isabella from Thomas Southerne's *The Fatal Marriage* (and variously developed in Behn, Barker, and Reeve, as discussed in earlier chapters) in order to juxtapose notions of innocence and experience. From one perspective, Robinson is arguably less vexed at the end of the century than Behn was at the beginning by the complications of a sexual history. As a heroine of moral probity, Julia St. Laurence is allowed an euphoric resolution, irrespective of her marital state. However, Emily Vernon's many vices are funnelled through her widowhood, which, via the subtitle, stands as an index of contemporary degeneracy. Robinson employs this contrast in part to explore what Ty terms of Robinson's *oeuvre* in general the "fictions of...female selfhood."⁶

The anonymous *Elvira: or, The World As It Goes* (1796) shares with Robinson's novel a subtitle that promises verisimilar social comment. It in part considers the implications of testamentary malpractice: Lady Lusignan, a designing widow, disinherits the heroine through her husband's lawful but unjust will. This act effectually complicates the love-plot but in the end, the widow's deathbed repentance grants to Elvira the wealth that indirectly rewards her choice of a companionate marriage. The whimsicality of this turn in the plot discloses an authorial concern for the discretionary potential of testamentary devises, increasingly preferred to jointure or dower in the late eighteenth and throughout the nineteenth centuries as the means to enshrine best a

woman's welfare. That it is a widow who possesses the material influence to direct the novel's outcome, however, reasserts the eighteenth century's narratorial interest in the widow's might.

¹Brophy, *Women's Lives*, 186.

²Staves, *Married Property*, 113.

³*Ibid.*, 113.

⁴Ty, *Empowering the Feminine: The Narratives of Mary Robinson, Jane West, and Amelia Opie, 1796-1812* (University of Toronto Press, 1998), viii.

⁵Robinson, *The Widow, or a Picture of Modern Times* (London, 1794), II, 181.

⁶Ty, *Empowering the Feminine*, 25.

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