Marriage and gender in Aphra Behn’s *The Rover* and Eliza Haywood’s *Love in Excess*
Foreword

With this dissertation I attempt to crown four years of study in English literature with an analysis of two themes of my personal interest, marriage and gender, in two works by the Early Modern writers Aphra Behn and Eliza Haywood. This thesis involved much hard work and long hours of research, but not only on my part. I would like to thank my promoter Sandro Jung for his helpful, critical adjustments, suggestions and guidance throughout this whole process. I am especially grateful for his recommendation of Mary Astell’s pamphlet Some Reflections upon Marriage (1730), which serves as a connecting thread throughout this dissertation. Furthermore, I would like to thank my parents for giving me the opportunity to study a subject I am deeply interested in for four years, and for supporting me throughout. I am also very grateful to my sisters and Ruben for their unremitting support and encouragements during the writing process.
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Introduction

During the period of my English literature studies at the University of Ghent, I was lucky to encounter a specific point of interest for me: fiction and drama by women writers of the Early Modern period. These exceptional, professional writers cross traditional boundaries of their female gender role as they venture in public and market their writing, such as prostitutes do with their body, hence the frequent assimilation of female writers and prostitutes (Gallagher 24). My interest in these female writers was triggered in a course about Aphra Behn’s *The Rover* (1677), of which the humour charmed me into reading more works by this author. Consequently, my bachelor paper, which serves as a basis for my third chapter, analyses the portrayal of women’s sexual identity in *The Rover* and the sequel *The Second Part of the Rover*1. As I was taught more about Behn’s poetry and the early English novel, the prolific novelist Eliza Haywood caught my interest. Therefore, I have chosen to discuss Behn’s two-part play *The Rover* and Haywood’s novel *Love in Excess* (1719-20) in their relation to the themes of gender and marriage in my thesis2.

The first chapter provides the first part of the theoretical framework for my thesis. Here, I present an overview of the sociological insights of gender studies regarding the definition of gender: gender as a social construction, as a routine activity and performance in interactions, as a structural, powerful mechanism (hierarchically) organising collective life, as an ideology shaped by the dominant group that imposes gender biased definitions of linguistic terms and as a category of historical analysis, operating on metaphysical, social and individual levels.

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1 This unpublished dissertation was entitled “Female sexual identity in Aphra Behn’s *The Rover*” and was submitted in 2010.

2 For my discussion on Haywood I pick up some ideas elaborated in my unpublished essay “Gender and sexual desire in Eliza Haywood’s *Love in Excess*,” submitted in 2011.
The second chapter consists of the second part of the theoretical framework for my literary analysis. This section is based on historical information about the institution of marriage and relations between husband and wife in seventeenth- and eighteenth-century English society. Firstly, I discuss the notion of patriarchy, since patriarchal authority was pre-eminently embodied by the father who guided (or sometimes forced) his children on the marriage market. Especially in the upper classes, paternal consent was a necessary prerequisite for concluding marriage. Secondly, the legal and social patterns of courtship and marriage are expounded on. Historians like Lawrence Stone and Randolph Trumbach argue that the period witnessed a rise of affectionate marriages, where love rather than money became the motive for matrimony. Finally, conventional gender roles for husbands and wives in this period are illustrated by means of Mary Astell’s critical pamphlet *Some Reflections upon Marriage* (1730).

In the third chapter, the first literary analysis of gender and marriage is conducted in Aphra Behn’s plays *The Rover* (1677) and *The Second Part of the Rover* (1681). As initiated in my bachelor paper, I discuss the depiction of female sexuality, but I will also elucidate Behn’s blurring gender roles and denouncing commodification and commercialisation of women on the marriage market. She compares marriage with practices of prostitution, since both female spheres use women’s bodies as objects of exchange and consummation. Behn’s female characters attempt to oppose these powerful, patriarchal mechanisms by subverting their constructed gender role and asserting their female sexuality.

The fourth chapter examines Haywood’s best-selling novel *Love in Excess* (1719-20) concerning its use of the themes of marriage and gender. This work of fiction demonstrates that marriage based on ambition, meaning financial prospects, is bound to fail if it is not built on a foundation of mutual love. She thus joins Behn in her critique of enforced marriages and points out the powerlessness of an unhappy wife. Against that, Haywood celebrates spiritual
as well as physical love, although the latter is best to be introduced after taking the vows. She adduces patriarchal pressures of keeping female desire silent and “private,” but subverts this custom even in her most virtuous character, Melliora. Nevertheless, Haywood only offers a favourable future for her characters who give up their female identity as they merge with their husband in marriage.

The last chapter gathers insights from the previous ones to compare the discussions of gender and marriage in Behn’s plays and Haywood’s novel. As such, many parallelisms in their strategies of denouncing inequities for women are found in these three works, like the use of masquerade, the language of the eyes and military language. They also mingle traditionally female and male qualities in characters of both sexes and make a case for female sexuality by depicting the erotic desires of their female characters. However, their representation of marriage differs in that Behn is less able to reconcile love and marriage, whereas Haywood can only envisage a happy future for her characters in the realm of the patriarchally organised institution of marriage.
1. Introducing gender

This chapter introduces the concept of “gender” as defined by sociologists like Candace West, Don Zimmerman, Judith Butler and Judith Lorber as well as by historians Michel Foucault and Joan Scott. Gender has implications in many fields, such as education, identity formation, interactions, sexuality and power relations between the sexes. This overview of gender will serve as a framework for my discussion of Aphra Behn’s play The Rover and Eliza Haywood’s novel Love in Excess. I will apply notions of this chapter in these female authors’ conception of relations between the sexes in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. I will primarily examine their challenging traditional boundaries between gender roles for men and women. These authors expose gender roles as a social construction and a performance in interactions. They question gender as an institutionalised category legitimating inequalities between the sexes and an ideology conferring unequal power to the sexes in linguistic productions like plays and novels. I will equally discuss insights of the first feminist movement that apply to my texts, without expanding on the second and third feminist waves which are less relevant for my discussion.

1.1 What is “gender”?

1.1.1 Gender as a cultural construction: the social-constructivist approach

The opposition between sex and gender is frequently aligned with the contrast between nature and nurture, between biology and culture and between form and matter (Colebrook 17). In the middle of the twentieth century, the sexologist John Money used the grammatical term ‘gender’ to distinguish masculine and feminine characteristics in hermaphrodites from their miscellaneous male and female physical state. He defined gender role as “all those things that
a person says or does to disclose himself or herself as having the status of boy or man, girl or woman" (Money 254). Money initiated the idea that a person’s biological features like genitals, chromosomes, hormones and gonads could discord with his social behaviour and self-image as, for instance, in intersexuals (Friedman, url provided). Thus, Money exposed the constructedness and malleability of gender; sex establishes a person’s physiological functioning, whereas gender is “a product of learning, experience and indoctrination” (Diamond, url provided). Furthermore, psychoanalytic Robert Stoller differentiates between ‘gender identity’ and ‘sexual identity’ as developed separately, either depending on socio-cultural or biological stimuli. Both Money and Stoller emphasise the importance of education and social environment in the establishment of one’s gender identity (Friedman). From the late 1960s onwards, the language of gender introduced for research on intersexuality and transsexuality was extrapolated to feminist theories. After feminists had criticised the contemporary negligence of women as objects of study in social sciences, new disciplines like women studies and gender studies started scrutinising the importance of sex and gender (Friedman).

This image of gender role as socially and culturally constructed fits into the structural and social-constructivist principle that society imposes differences, meanings and categories on the world, which carries no universal truth or categories in itself. This notion goes back to Descartes’ formulation of the subject who can only experience the world through his senses (Colebrook 117). With this point of view, social constructivists counter the essentialist vision of the world. A male or female’s essence is inexistent, since we cannot perceive an essence or reality without the filter of language and culture (Colebrook 8, 13). Therefore, social structures, including gender roles, are historically and culturally variable. By contrast, essentialism portrays human nature as consisting of something definite and invariable - an

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3 René Descartes discusses the dualism of body and mind in Discours de la Méthode (1637).
essence of which the representation is then culturally, historically and linguistically relative. Social categories like masculine and feminine are not culturally produced, but are essential realities pre-existing human representation. Furthermore, social constructivists oppose the idea of “biology is destiny” (Colebrook, 8, 13, 117). Since human perception of the world is relative and modifiable, categories are arbitrary and fluid so that a person’s life path should not be determined by his gender, race, religion or sexuality. In the literary works discussed in chapters 3 and 4, “essential” masculine and feminine qualities are ascribed to men as well as to women. As the authors expose inequalities based on sex, especially in marriage, they question the validity of the sexual distinction by “masculinising” women and “feminising” men.

1.1.2 Gender as an interaction

An alternative social-constructivist theory of gender intends to transcend the individual level of gender role and identity to focus on the interpersonal repercussions of gender. West and Zimmerman argue that everyone is “doing” gender (126). A person not only achieves a certain gender role or identity, as previous sociologists claimed, but also accomplishes certain regulated gendered activities in order to assert his or her status as male or female in the community. In this sense, masculinity and femininity are “performed” as non-identity specific, but socially stereotyped ways of conduct. For instance, the clothes we wear, the things we say and how we say it, the way we behave, in short, our daily conduct and interactions are unconscious “routine” activities (126). These instances seem natural expressions of our personal identity, but, according to West and Zimmerman, we internalise social norms and values concerning gender and produce them to claim our membership in a certain sex category (127). This is reminiscent of Judith Butler’s later definition of gender as a performative activity. She considers the human identity as an assemblage of “fabrications
manufactured and sustained through corporeal signs and other discursive means” (Butler 417). She joins West and Zimmerman in their conception of a human essence as an illusion. To study human sexuality and gender, these two scholars propose three distinguished analytical categories that overlap in daily life: sex, sex category and gender. Sex refers to a person’s biological features, but the classification in two sexes is based on socially accepted standards in which, for instance, hermaphrodites do not fit. Furthermore, a person is ranged into one of two sex categories by his community, male or female, based on his outward appearances. One’s sex category mostly corresponds to one’s sex. Nonetheless, discrepancies between sex and sex categories emerge when a person’s “gender displays” indicate a membership to the sex category of the other sex, as with drag queens or kings (127). On the basis of one’s gender performance, the public attributes a sex to a person so that a supposed woman can in fact have a penis and that a seemingly male individual can have a vagina under his clothes. Kessler and McKenna call these the ascribed “cultural genitals” clashing with one’s biological genitalia (Kessler 86). Hellena, Ariadne and Violetta in The Rover and Love in Excess question by their masculine disguise the grounds on which gender is ascribed. Their “gender displays” clash with their culturally imposed female gender role. In their influential article (1987), West and Zimmerman stress the pressure of accountability while doing gender. Depending on the sex category one is ranged in, a person’s actions and behaviour are judged as appropriate or inappropriate (136). Again, this feature surpasses the individual because this collective control operates between people in every interaction. Therefore, the female characters dressed as men transgress the boundaries of propriety set for their sex by patriarchal standards, since they exploit their unusual freedom now they are seen as men. In brief, the interactional perspective of these sociologists represents gender as an activity based on social norms, which is only established during human interactions. According to sociologists like West and Zimmerman, the traditional definitions of gender identity and
gender role, respectively the psychological “self-attribution of gender” and the social expectations and norms concerning a gender, do not take into account the performative capacities of gender (Kessler 8, 11). Goffman’s term gender display also leads to a misinterpretation of gender according to West and Zimmerman as “displays” suggest outward testimonies of a natural gender (127, 130).

1.1.3 Gender as a social institution

Some other sociologists like Judith Lorber argue that gender as a social construction not only manifests itself in an individual’s gender identity and his or hers socially determined gender role, but equally functions as a social institution, i.e. as a process, a stratification system and a structure. Lorber transcends the individual level as the interactionists did, but instead of emphasising the actions through which gender emerges, she focuses on the “patterns of interactions” or the social structures and rules as the sources of our gender-inscribed actions (98). In its structuralist interpretation, gender is one of the grounds by which the collective life is organised and human beings are categorised. Depending on your gender, society maps out different job markets, statuses, wages, properties, music tastes, household chores, responsibilities for children and other occupations and values (97). In this sense, gender becomes a process which creates a social hierarchy and produces different rights and duties for men and women. Women’s fates were often already fixed by their fathers in Behn’s and Haywood’s society. However, their female characters frequently rebel against these restrictions imposed on them as a woman or a wife. Since gender operates as a process, rising against this normative conduct can cause institutionalised changes in the ruling definitions of the genders. Consequently, feminist revolts in the twentieth century have facilitated women’s access to leadership positions and mitigated the yoke of domesticity, while men have started

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4 Erving Goffman defines the term gender display in his article “Gender Display” (1976).
entering the traditionally female realms of child care and household chores. Although the
interpretation of female and male gender roles has altered, their unequal statuses have
remained intact (98). This hierarchical disparity between the sexes explains the function of
gender as part of a stratification system. Based on sexual difference, gender becomes a way of
establishing unequal relationships between the sexes. Simone De Beauvoir unfolds her
philosophical theory about the Other in *Le deuxième sexe* (1949) which bears on this
stratification of genders. She theorises an underlying social structure of the self versus the
other, privileging man as the subject who defines his active selfhood in contrast with the
female, passive object (Colebrook 232). The Other has always been regarded inferior and
subordinate to the dominant, normal Self like women are supposed to “lack the valuable
qualities the dominants exhibit” (Lorber 99). Thus, women’s achievements are valued less in
respect to men’s, as are, for instance, blacks’ actions and opinions. This social process does
not only provide the grounds for an unequal ranking of the sexes, it also engenders fixed
social structures conferring legitimacy to those in power (men). Different gendered patterns
constrain and encroach on our working life, our sexuality and our emotional conditions so as
to create structural inequalities which mostly remain unchallenged because only the privileged
male group has the power in hand to alter those structures (Lorber 100). The patriarchal
power of the female characters’ fathers, brothers and guardians in *The Rover* and *Love in
Excess* reinforces the established power relations for the sexes. They are the dominant group
with the power in hands to decide on women’s fate. For Lorber, the social institution of
gender has produced the inequality between the sexes and can be historically traced back;
unequal gender ranking does not result from differences in biology, but it is “produced and
maintained by identifiable social processes and built into the general social structure and
individual identities deliberately and purposefully” (100-101). Therefore, Lorber argues that
the raison d’être of the social institution of gender is to consistently subordinate women to
men’s power (101). In Behn’s and Haywood’s days, the institution of marriage created rather large disparities for the sexes, as women were subordinated to their husband’s or father’s authority. As such, the propertied classes attempted to secure the conveyance of their estate within the upper classes. Daughters were objectified in this process, as they represented the exchange of estate and fortune, rather than of persons. Florinda in *The Rover* is used by her brother and father as a marriage partner for the old Don Vincentio, a rich aristocrat. Alovysa in *Love in Excess* becomes a commodity for D’Elmont, who marries her out of mercenary motives.

1.1.4 Gender as an ideology

Considering the perspectives of the theories above, we can assume that abstract gender structures organise our emotional and sexual condition. However, concrete material objects, tales, myths and symbols, all cultural products, equally convey gendered connotations. Certain literary productions or commercials can support the traditional view of gender roles, whereas others subvert notions of normal sexuality (i.e. heterosexuality) and challenge gender boundaries, as is the case with Aphra Behn’s *The Rover*. This author uses her play to alter the traditional, linguistic interpretations of the terms “masculine” and “feminine” in her contemporary culture. In the sociological theories above, gender norms and symbols were taught (social-constructivists), exchanged (interactionists) or shaped by social structures (structuralists), but some scholars define gender as an ideology or discourse, repeatedly produced through the power of words. Poststructuralism and postmodernism have provided the tools for this approach by deconstructing reality as a linguistic and cultural product. Poststructuralism, on the one hand, originates in linguistics and challenges the notion of a direct relationship between signifiers and their signifieds, in Saussure’s terminology. All words have got a distinct meaning through their interrelations and contrasts within a web of
words, so they acquire their meaning through opposition with one another. Third-wave feminists pick up this poststructuralist approach to language and argue that definitions of femininity and masculinity falsely posit a natural, essential way of being a woman or man. The interpretation of femininity is only determined by its linguistic opposition to masculinity (both linguistic constructs) instead of founded on biology (Colebrook 85, 149).

Postmodernism, on the other hand, reacts against Enlightened ideas, such as the superiority and everlasting power of human reason and progress. Postmodernists argue that there is no universal truth or objectivity, but that “truths” always bear the marks of the context in which they are postulated. Applying this notion in gender studies means that femininity and masculinity can have no universally acknowledged interpretation. Michel Foucault explores this train of thought in his work *L’Histoire de la Sexualité* (1976) by arguing that linguistic interpretations and taken for granted “truths” are determined by powerful discourses of politically dominant groups. Foucault challenges the interpretation of Freud’s psychoanalyst theory about the repression of an inherent, essential sexuality which allows for the society to operate in harmony. Conversely, Foucault claims that powerful repressions of a so-called natural human sexuality yield the idea of a neutral, fixed human sexuality (Foucault 36-37). In this view, the conception of human sexuality is a result of a powerful rhetoric of repression, rather than its cause (Colebrook 206-207). The historian points to medical, psychoanalytic but also certain feminist discourses as producing a human essence and sexuality so it becomes an identifiable “object” to be known, whereas he emphasises that there is “no self, nature, subjectivity, or humanity, before the discourses and relations of knowledge and power” (Colebrook 207). Certain social institutions and persons having the power to define its objects of study or knowledge thus determine social hierarchical structures and control the conceptions of a reality which is, according to postmodern ideas, subjective and not veracious. This entails that a dominant group controls the linguistic realm of definitions,
whereas others subjected to this group consider the regular picture of reality as truthful. Gender discourses thus impose norms and definitions of masculinity and femininity and hold power over people’s lives in that they organise their lives according to this rhetoric of normality. As such, dominant notions of gender are absorbed and reproduced. In *The Rover*, Behn challenges the definitions of the most divergent sexual choices for women: virgin and prostitute. As such, she exposes the practice of commodification of women to be present in marriage as well as in prostitution. Haywood presents the culturally prevalent interpretation of female virtue as modifiable. As defined by the dominant group, female virtue should entail chastity, modesty and virginity, whereas her depiction of female virtue in the character of Melliora challenges this idea. She does not disavow her female sexuality, but still resists the dangers of indulging in her passions.

Butler explores how Foucault’s powerful discourse theory fits into gender studies by demonstrating that the definition of sex consists of cultural interpretations as well as the meaning of gender. In modern terms, sex is understood as a biological component of the human body prior to its actions and socio-cultural interpretation (gender) (Colebrook 211). However, Butler argues that sex (and consequently the body) is also a cultural construction. Queer studies focusing on crossing the borders of the binary gender frame have exposed that, occasionally, gender does not “reflect” natural sex, as sexuality does not necessarily proceed from gender (Butler 416). The dichotomy of gender presupposes a binary sexual humanity, and both ideas engender a false stabilisation of sex and gender to normalise and impose the heterosexual matrix (416). She insists on the performative nature of the body, which seemingly enacts a latent sexuality by repetition, but actually causes an image of an essential sexuality to arise through the bodily performance itself (Butler 416, 420). Butler, then, insists that gender discourses create this illusion as a strategy to normalise reproductive heterosexuality (417; cf. performativity in 1.1.2.).
1.1.5 Gender as an analytical concept

Historian Joan W. Scott has assembled different perspectives on gender, from theories focusing on the socio-economic determination of the sexes (feminist Marxism), or on the sources of patriarchy to theories of psychoanalysis situating gender in the realm of the psychic. She critically assesses their manipulation of the term gender in order to reconcile their universal principles and her own studies of contextualised historical variability (1057). She argues, as many of the above sociologists, for the deconstruction of the term gender that necessarily involves a stabilised dichotomy of oppositions and urges historians to consider the effects of gender and gendered processes of signification (1055, 1065). Therefore, she formulates a twofold definition of gender as a historical category of analysis. On the one hand, Scott defines gender as “a constitutive element of social relationships based on perceived differences between the sexes,” but on the other hand, gender is “a primary way of signifying relationships of power” since modifications in social connections imply modifications of power relations (1067). Following from the first definition, gender structures regulate social life through four interconnected components. Firstly, “cultural ... symbols” are interpreted in gendered terms (1067). Scott invokes Eve and Mary as emblems for female roles, but also mythic oppositions like lightness and obscurity or purity and impurity are associated with the sexes. The contexts and purposes of these symbols in discourses must be analysed to sketch the symbolic meta-level of gender. Secondly, the “normative concepts” determine the interpretation of these symbols so they are closely related to the previous level (1067). Mary is often represented as a mother figure to emulate, whereas Eve connotes seducing female capacities. The meanings attached to these symbols or oppositions can be retrieved from “religious, educational, scientific, legal and political doctrines” (1067). These texts associate values and norms to the concepts, sometimes by incorporating them in binary oppositions of, for instance, feminine vs. masculine (1067). Thirdly, social institutions like
the family, education, the job market, the army, and the encompassing organisation of the state are gendered in that sex-segregation and inequalities take hold of the system itself - the army has male connotations - but also interfere in men’s and women’s lives in different ways. In the literary works discussed, marriage enshrines such unequal gender roles as an institution. Fourthly, a person’s “subjective identity” is conceived in gendered terms (1067). Human beings form their own identity according to unconscious psychic structures (derived from psychoanalysis among others) and the image others have of them. Through this self-defining process, women and men consciously feel masculine and/or feminine. By defining gender as an analytical category, Scott intends to make historians study the connection between these four aspects. Furthermore, the second definition of gender as a domain in which power is exercised reminds us of Foucault’s relating sexuality, power and knowledge. Gender is invoked to legitimate established power relations because these hierarchical, unequal relations are considered factual. The historian’s job, then, is to distinguish the factual from the socially constructed and to make others aware of these processes (1069). The literary critic’s job, however, involves examining the literary depiction of gender and power relations.

1.2 Reading Gender

1.2.1 The legacy of first wave or liberal feminism

The first scientific approach to women as a study object, notably women studies, was initiated by feminists. However, women studies converted into gender studies, and the focus shifted from investigating the neglected female voice in history to exploring the relationships between the genders. As such, feminist literary criticism introduced gender literary criticism. Before unfolding a gender perspective in reading fiction, as attempted in chapter 3 and 4, I provide a short overview of the important legacy of feminist criticism by pointing out the
attitudes of the first feminist wave: liberal or Enlightenment feminism.

The first major feminist current in history is inspired by general humanist and liberal notions of the free, rational and self-determining individual (Colebrook 145). This individual is mostly represented as male, but feminists like Mary Wollstonecraft in the eighteenth century aspired to include the female within the liberal ideology. In the Enlightenment, Descartes’ division between body and mind was cultivated so that human reason was regarded as disembodied (117). The liberal feminist approach to this separation of body and soul was to distinguish sex and gender (although the theoretical division was only formulated in the twentieth century by social constructionists (cf. supra)). Moreover, they attempted to dissociate women from the purely physical and argued that there is only one universal human reason equally allotted among men and women (118). Even though they did not challenge the natural, biological differences between the sexes, essential gender identities were dismissed and they pleaded for female inclusion in the rights of men (119). This means that they considered the distinction between the sexes irrelevant in a modern society where their disparate physical strength and women’s reproductive burden should no longer legitimate men’s ascendancy in politics and the public sphere. However, they acknowledge the historical foundations of a patriarchal social organisation based on women’s lesser physical force (120, 121). The idea that women are irrational and weak has led to female self-identification with this ideological model, which remains this way when their reason is not cultivated as men’s through education. Wollstonecraft explains in *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (1792) that gender equality is the humanist solution for both women and men; As long as men consider women as sexually attractive, but rationally inferior objects, men themselves cannot exploit their full rational powers and remain enslaved to their “unreflecting position as tyrants” (Wollstonecraft 97; Colebrook 122). The proto-feminist Astell wonders in her *Reflections upon Marriage* (1730), “how ... a Man [can] respect his Wife when he has a
contemptible Opinion of her and her Sex?” (70). Further on, she asks, “how are these Lords and Masters help’d by the Contempt they shew of their poor humble Vassals? Is it not rather an Hindrance to that Service they expect, as being an undeniable and constant Proof how unworthy they are to receive it?” (sic; 71).

This cultivation of reason in both sexes would engender an ideal, equal and mutual respect in marriage, with women employing their reason in domestic tasks or motherhood and men in politics. Wollstonecraft clearly propagates a complementary ideal of marriage with distinct, but non-hierarchical roles for men and women (Colebrook 123, 124). The implications of liberal feminism for literary criticism are manifold. As Colebrook states, the reader must explore whether a fictional text maintains or rejects the stereotypes of women as irrational and weak, and whether it upholds a misogynist, determinist vision of the female “weaker” body as a justification of her lack of authority (239). In addition, does the text convey a moral about female equality and inclusion in men’s rights like education, property and legal and political autonomy?

1.2.2 A methodology for reading gender in imaginative prose

Combined with the first feminist approach, a gender perspective in literary criticism implies an investigation of power relations between the sexes and of the category of gender as such. Discourses stage gender binaries, but can also blur the distinction between them. Gender critics explore how sexual differences are depicted beyond the male-female boundary and how the text portrays humanity beyond dichotomised categories like male-female, but also masculine-feminine and heterosexual-homosexual (Colebrook 243). However, literary critics do not abandon gender as a category of analysis as such, but they stimulate the reader to think critically about our historically and socially established dichotomy of gender in order to shed a queer eye on the text.
In the third and fourth chapter, I will attempt to survey two literary texts with a gender critical eye, Aphra Behn’s two-part play *The Rover* (1677 and 1681) and Eliza Haywood’s *Love in Excess* (1719-20). I will not only ask the questions inspired by the first feminist wave, but I will also incorporate the sociological definitions of gender. How does gender expose itself as a social and cultural construct in the text? How are gender roles conceived? Are gender identities formed by social conditioning or do the characters actively apply their knowledge to perform a certain gender role? How do characters perform their gender identity in interactions? How do gender structures encroach on the characters’ lives, establish a hierarchy between the genders and shape social institutions like marriage and patriarchy? How do certain characters reveal attitudes towards gender in their discourses? What are the cultural symbols associated with masculinity and femininity? What are the norms and values concerning the genders? All these questions are important to encompass the scope of gender as a social, powerful mechanism. However, I attempt to include these questions within the realm of marriage. Are husband and wife portrayed as complementary partners united in marriage, involving a separation of masculine and female qualities, duties and emotional conditions? Or do they embody the contrary: soul-mates who are hermaphrodites becoming one in the realm of marriage? These two options represent two ideal images of marriage, but I will also study the less harmonious examples to unfold the mechanisms of patriarchy. The two literary works in which I will study gender and marriage deal with the theme of marriage in a time span of 40 years. As illustrated in the next chapter, some historians argue for a shift from enforced, patriarchal marriages to more affectionate examples, in which love and friendship rather than money direct the motives to marry. I will investigate how gender roles, structures, values and norms have shifted or persisted in the works by Behn and Haywood, where they both advocate mutual affection and respect between spouses.
2. Marriage and gender in late seventeenth- and early eighteenth-century English society

This chapter discusses the patterns of marriage in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries in English society. Particularly the marriage patterns of the upper(-middle) class are examined, as the characters in Behn’s The Rover and Haywood’s Love in Excess belong to this social category. Firstly, I discuss the notion of patriarchy as institutionalised in the Early Modern period. Secondly, I expound on the cultural customs of the institution of marriage, the power relations it implies for husband and wife and the paternal participation in the process. Finally, I explore the diverging gender roles established for men and women within a matrimonial union. The focus of this chapter will be historiographical in that I draw on the contemporaneous pamphleteer Mary Astell’s Some Reflections upon Marriage (1730) and on information gathered by historians like Stone, Trumbach and Shoemaker.

2.1 The persistence of patriarchy

The notion of patriarchy is crucial to comprehending the social dynamics in English history and especially the relationship between the sexes in marriage. In the following definitions, it becomes clear that patriarchy has religious, political, social and cultural implications in human interactions and communities.

1. a. A form of social organization in which the father or oldest male is the head of the family, and descent and relationship are reckoned through the male line; government or rule by a man or men.
   b. As a count noun: a society, community, etc., governed or organized in this way.

2. The predominance of men in positions of power and influence in society, with cultural values and norms being seen as favouring men. Freq. with pejorative connotation. (OED)
Considering these definitions found in the Oxford English Dictionary, one can note that this hierarchical organisation is especially prevalent in marital relationships and the domestic sphere. Here, the head of the family is the father, who assumes full authority in the household. A wife is subservient to her husband, as well as their children and the servants. According to Colebrook, the traditional, pre-modern conception of patriarchy was founded on the Christian belief that the first man Adam was subordinated to God, the first woman Eve was subordinated to Adam and their children were subservient to Adam (104). This order within the first human family justifies the hierarchical relationships between their descendants and exemplifies the relationship of a king to his subjects. This powerful position is stereotypically male in a patriarchal society, as the second definition above points out. This patriarchal model is “natural” in that the family is encompassed by the larger order of the cosmos so that humans are incorporated in an immutable ideology of nature denying them the power to establish their own political order (104). However, this metaphor of substitution, where the male represents the power of God, no longer serves as a model for the king’s rule over his subjects in modern bodies of thought. Enlightenment philosophers like Thomas Hobbes and John Locke argue for a dissociation of royal, political rule and familial hierarchy. To them, the king should not be regarded as a divine representative of Adam in his role of father governing all others, because they uphold that, in liberal terms, “all men are equal”; all men are fathers heading a domestic unit and the relationship among them can be called fraternal (Colebrook 110). The belief in a natural, divinely ordained hierarchy between kings and subjects is abandoned in favour of the egalitarian, liberal belief in man’s reason and capacities as a subject. Clearly, this liberal idea does not include women, so that this pre-political, natural order in families is justified by sexual difference. Women’s bodies are considered weaker and their childbearing capacities confine them to the domestic sphere, whereas men

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5 Thomas Hobbes expounds on this theme in *Leviathan* (1651) and John Locke in *Two Treatises of Government* (1689).
control public, political and economic aspects of life (Colebrook 106). Nevertheless, Locke implicitly challenges the custom of marriage as a hierarchical contract pre-established by a higher, divine order, since he defines all political institutions as secular and modifiable relationships. Therefore, the partners’ capacities and flaws ought to determine the power balance within marriage, which, in Locke’s view, continues to incline to the husband’s side. As Shoemaker points out, “his theory clearly, if implicitly, undermined arguments for patriarchal authority and encouraged a more companionate approach to relations between spouses” (emphasis added; 45). Being a Tory, a conservative in favour of absolute monarchy, Mary Astell, one of the first English proto-feminists, reacted against Locke’s political ideas by questioning “if absolute Sovereignty be not necessary in a state, how comes it to be so in a Family? Or if in a Family why not in a State[?]” (sic; Perry url provided; Astell 149). As such, when patriarchy can be largely dismissed in the government of the state to make place for a fraternal parliament, this ideology still remains present in the household as “a Kingdom that cannot be mov’d, an incorruptible Crown of Glory” (119). She exposes Locke’s arguments that “Woman is said to be the weaker Vessel” and man is superior in strength and mind to be prejudices, “for there’s no Dispute of their having the Brains to manage it [i.e., the power laid in their hands]” (emphasises added; 62, 120).

According to Shoemaker, the implementation of patriarchal values in England during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries did not change dramatically. The faithful still observed the precepts in the scripture underpinning the wife’s duty to obey her husband and the husband’s duty to love his wife, while governing the household (101). As Astell notes, a woman makes her husband “her Head” (60). Furthermore, in this patriarchal society, the

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6 Cf. 2.3.

7 From 1689, Tories and Whigs were the names of “the two great parliamentary and political parties” (OED). Tory supporters are royalists, as opposed to the Whigs who are parliamentarians. Tories consent to “the constituted authority and order in Church and State, and [to] opposing concessions in the direction of greater religious liberty” (OED). As a Tory, Astell adheres to the belief in the absolute power of the king and the Church of England.
husband not only possessed lifeless objects, but he could also consider the persons in his household (his wife, children and servants) as his property (Trumbach 119). As Stone notes in *The Road to Divorce*\(^8\), “a married woman was the nearest approximation in a free society to a slave. Her person, her property both real and personal, her earnings and her children all passed on marriage into the absolute control of her husband” (13). However, as Stone and Trumbach argue, the institution of marriage as shaped by patriarchal dominance gave way to a more “companionate bond” so that husband and wife treated each other more like equals (Stone, *The Family, Sex and Marriage in England 1500-1800* 241; cf. infra)\(^9\). Both enforced and voluntary marriages are depicted in *The Rover* and *Love in Excess*, where love is extolled as a necessary aspect of marriage, but patriarchal pressures are difficult to evade.

### 2.2 Legal and social customs concerning marriage

#### 2.2.1 Patterns of courtship

Marriage as envisaged in contemporary Western ideology is mostly considered as a social ceremony that officialises the bond of romantic love between two people, husband and wife (and when sanctioned, wife and wife or husband and husband). This contract between two individuals chiefly concerns the two spouses, whereas the matrimonial institution in the seventeenth century did not only affect the married couple, but also their parents, friends and other acquaintances. In the upper classes, parents interfered in the process of courting by proposing a suitable match or exercising their veto. Since fathers could defy a couple’s intention to marry, less personal motives than romantic love, sexual attraction or mutual affection equally directed the matrimonial contract. In any case, when a man spotted a favourable match, it was his job to initiate the courtship. Even if a marriage was arranged, it

\(^8\) Further on abbreviated in parenthetical references to *Road.*
\(^9\) Subsequently abbreviated to *Family.*
was the task of the future husband to make the first advance. All the proposed bride could do was to decline or encourage his advances (Shoemaker 94). Astell states that “[a] Woman, indeed, can’t properly be said to Choose; all that is allow’d her is to Refuse or Accept what is offer’d” (37).

By the eighteenth century, paternal permission was still required to initiate courtship, but reciprocal affection became the primary motive for parents and the couple in question to agree on a marriage according to Stone. He ascribes this change to the rise of “affective individualism” (Road 60). This new ideology entails a greater freedom for individuals to choose their own path in consideration of their feelings. Of course, courting patterns deviating from the former were possible; a man and woman could fall in love before a formal meeting supervised by the parents was authorised, so that secretive liaisons among the wealthy class were not out of the ordinary. However, when the couple desired a longstanding relationship, they would have to relate their personal wishes to their fathers and hope for their permission to marry (60). The wealthier and higher status one had, the more pressure one could expect from parents and kin. Within the propertied families of the middle class, various types of arrangements were possible. Some fathers exploited their authority to the full and arranged a financially favourable marriage for their daughter or son, while others allowed a free hand to their children in the making of their future. Stone asserts that among other European customs, English courting habits tolerated an exceptionally large freedom for marriageable men and women (61).

### 2.2.2 The ceremony of marriage and legal arrangements

Various ceremonies were in place to endorse the matrimonial contract of a couple before 1753, but I will specifically focus on those of the higher ranks of society. First, a written contract could be drawn up in order to secure a financial arrangement upon which the parents
of both spouses agreed (Road 31). In high society, estates and fortunes were at stake and this transformed marriages into exchanges of commodities. Women’s value on the marriage market was often determined by their dowry. Behn addresses this commodification of women in her play, where marriage is associated with prostitution. In the aristocratic classes, this settlement, “a legal disposition of family property,” was important particularly for the eldest son, since inheritances proceeded in a patrilineal and primogenital fashion. This means that a daughter could but seldom inherit her father’s title, as the firstborn son inherited or, in the case of no lineal male descendant, the eldest male relative descending from the father’s grandparents (Trumbach 70, 42). This marriage settlement was traditionally established by the family at the heir’s entrance into wedlock. This was called the family or strict settlement and it fixed the division of property for the generation to come to prevent future disputes among siblings (71). The resolutions comprised in the strict settlement covered financial arrangements for the entire family originating from the marriage, as well as for the heir’s younger brothers and sisters; the contract determined the latter’s portions and assured the eldest son’s “income during his father’s lifetime; it made provision for actual or probable younger children; it appointed jointures\(^{10}\) for probable widows, and pin money\(^{11}\) for wives; ... [and] it would sometimes indicate as well the uses to which a wife’s fortune was to be put” (Okin, Patriarchy and married women’s property in England 123; Trumbach 73)\(^{12}\). The wife’s father was usually intimately involved in the negotiations about the marriage contract, since his daughter often brought a considerable dowry to the family-in-law and he desired to guarantee his future grandchildren’s rights to inherit their father’s estate (74). After all, a

\(^{10}\) A jointure is “the holding of property to the joint use of a husband and wife for life or in tail, as a provision for the latter, in the event of her widowhood. Hence, by extension, a sole estate limited to the wife, being ‘a competent livelihood of freehold for the wife of lands and tenements, to take effect upon the death of the husband for the life of the wife at least’” (OED).

\(^{11}\) Pin money is a “(usually annual) sum allotted to a woman for clothing and other personal expenses; esp. such an allowance provided for a wife’s private expenditure” (OED).

\(^{12}\) Further on abbreviated to Patriarchy.
woman lost her legal identity\(^\text{13}\) by becoming the property of her husband, so that husband and wife become one (legal) person according to the common law principle of coverture (Trumbach 154; Bailey 62). Thus, she had to abandon any prerogatives on her personal property and real estate, except if a separate settlement\(^\text{14}\) was signed which guaranteed her ownership of this estate (Okin, *Patriarchy* 123). After drawing up the marriage settlement, the aristocracy proceeded with publishing the banns\(^\text{15}\) or obtaining a marriage licence and concluded the marriage in a public ceremony in the church of the bride’s town before 12 a.m. This was the only procedure prescribed by the ecclesiastical law and considered legal, but especially less well-off couples by-passed this tradition by contracting marriages with a performative vow, but without signing a contract (*Road* 53). However, the only way to legally confer property was to marry in public according to the common law, so that explains the habit of the propertied classes to contract enforced marriages and to sign family settlements (56).

In 1753, however, Lord Hardwicke’s Marriage Act established that the only valid marriage consisted of pronouncing the banns or acquiring a licence after which the priest formally declared the wedding valid in the presence of two witnesses. Moreover, the parents’ or guardian’s consent was obligatory for marriages with spouses under the age of 21. This reinforced patriarchal control over marriages in a time when marriage instigated by affectional motives became the norm (O’Connell 68; Trumbach 107).

\(^{13}\) After marriage, women were no longer considered a separate legal persona, which they only recovered as a widow. This entails that women could not “sue or be sued” in court apart from their husbands (Shoemaker 291).

\(^{14}\) Following the equity law, wives’ properties could be protected by a separate estate contract, but in practice, this land’s management was frequently given in the hands of a “trustee,” who was more often than not her husband and the wife’s financial independence became precarious (Okin *Patriarchy* 123, 134).

\(^{15}\) Banns were the official proclamations of marriage on three successive Sundays in church “in order that those who know of any impediment thereto may have opportunity of lodging objections” (OED; O’Connell 72).
2.2.3 Motives for marriage

Considering the financial stake in marriage, it becomes clear that other impetuses than affection can lead to this union. In the upper classes, the marriage engagement allows to climb the social ladder or just maintain one’s social status and wealth. Parental pressure was especially high in these classes. However, according to Trumbach, it became “distasteful” in the eighteenth century to marry for one’s financial sake only and marriage turned into a means of building a family based on an at least amicable understanding between two people (71). Money as a basis for marriage was particularly a consideration of women entering this state of financial dependence, but of course both sexes benefitted from a financially advantageous match. By acquiring his bride’s portion, a husband often “entered ... business, stabilised an existing concern, paid debts and, in some cases, made [his] fortune” (Bailey 86).

Although love relationships occasionally led to marriage, “which makes a mighty Noise in the World, partly because of its Rarity, and partly in regard of its Extravagancy,” practical and financial considerations played a larger role in the decision-making (Astell 31). However, this did not preclude a couple from developing a loving relationship after taking their vows (Shoemaker 96). In any case, a marriage based on love or sexual attraction did not guarantee a happy marriage, which was neither the current idea, nor the view of the pamphleteer Mary Astell (Family 181). As Trumbach argues, the nobility chose a partner for one or more reasons; the future bride or groom offered profitable financial prospects, was “powerfully connected, or beautiful, or virtuous, or for these or other reasons, beloved” (97). Astell explores all of these motives and concludes that marrying for love or beauty is not a warrant for lasting marital happiness, since a man’s “real or pretended Passion soon cools into Indifference, Neglect, or perhaps Aversion” (5). She states, however, that “[t]hey only who have felt it, know the Misery of being forc’d to marry where they do not love” (4). She asserts
this in the context of marrying “a Coxcomb” (4). Even when a man loves a girl’s “Wit,” this gift will not always please. Astell despises the interpretation of wit in her days, which was incompatible with “Decorum and good manners” and as such no permanent virtue (33). A woman should shun “Gallantry” lest she falls for a man’s hypocritical charms and seek for “Friendship” as a husband’s main incentive to marry her (11). Often men marry to increase their wealth, but he “must expect no other Satisfaction than that can bring him,” so he often seeks his happiness elsewhere (24). Therefore, she advices women to reflect thoroughly on their future as a married woman, of which the outcome will be sensible and positive if a wife has had a good education in the morals of life and can support the yoke of marriage with religion and devotion (116).

2.3 Gender roles in marriage in the 17th and 18th centuries

2.3.1 The separation of spheres for the sexes

Women and men were distinguished by the capacities of their mind and body. In this regard, women’s reason was considered to function less proficiently as men’s and they would be more reactive to physical impulses and desires (Colebrook 20, 21). Astell uses this claim to denounce a man’s tyrannical behaviour in which he exploits passions associated with femininity.

Since her Reason is suppos’d to be less, and her Passions stronger than his, he should not give Occasion to call that Supposition in Question by his pettish Carriage and needless Provocations. Since he is the Man, by which very word Custom would have us understand not only greatest Strength of Body, but even greatest Firmness and Force of Mind, he should not play the little Master so much as to expect to be cocker’d, nor run over to that Side which the Woman us’d to be rank’d in[.]

(63)
This hierarchy is echoed in Christian theology since Christ is the head of every man and man is the head of every woman (Corinthians 11.3). This means that men must aim at pure, rational and self-conscious actions, inspired by a “divine creative reason,” whereas women must aspire to reach the capacities of male reason. Colebrook emphasises that this Christian conviction is not based on the idea that women are devoid of reason. Only reason is the essence of human ontology and the embodiment of reason is man (28). This distinction between men’s greater authority in the domain of reason and women’s greater physical receptivity thus creates a separation between the sexes regarding their activities. Women were not allowed to participate in political affairs, but were confined to domestic services (Colebrook 20). This entailed a neglect of women’s education, which Astell elucidates in her rejection of the masculine connotation of reason and the feminisation of sensibility in her pamphlet. She states that “Sense is a Portion that God himself has been pleased to distribute to both Sexes with an impartial Hand, but Learning is what Men have engross’d to themselves” (156).

Trumbach argues for the rise of a more egalitarian family conceptualised in the Enlightenment, which is parallel to Stone’s concept of the companionate marriage based on affective individualism. Both scholars’ work has been questioned by, among others, Hitchcock, Okin and Shoemaker in terms of their chronology and neglect of evidence that both models (patriarchally organised marriages and affectionate marriages) can be traced from the beginning of our period as well as at the end and that, moreover, both models do not exclude one another (Shoemaker 308). According to Stone, the spouses’ growing involvement in the marital process engendered more harmonious marriages, which, in its turn, rendered husband and wife more equal (Family 325). Marriages became more private, separated from the community and enshrined warmer relationships between the spouses. Okin, however, acknowledges that the intimate nuclear household became the ideal family type, but asserts
that this consigning of sentiments to the private sphere resulted in women’s confinement to
the home, whereas men represented their family in public interactions and politics, legitimated by the separation of spheres. This new model of separate spheres for the sexes increased the political and social imbalance between husband and wife and reinforced patriarchal relations (Women and the Making of the Sentimental Family 74). In the lower classes, this division of domestic and public spheres stems from economic changes; at the beginning of our period, domestic economy was increasingly in the hands of men only and capitalism suppressed the domestic production of, for instance, dairy products. Their subsistence hung by a thread, whereas commercial work or labour in more public spheres became more remunerative. From then on, only men provided for their family by working outside the home, whereas their wives took care of domestic chores unimportant for the breadwinning. In the higher classes of society, these domestic chores were increasingly carried out by female servants, so that “idleness” became associated with bourgeois married women. If the estate in the case of the nobility was large enough, both spouses were exempt from working because their investments provided their income. This realm of economy separates the sexes by encompassing almost exclusively men in the eighteenth century (McKeon 298, 299). Klein and Shoemaker caution about radicalising this ideology of distinct spheres and creating a dichotomy parallel to the system of the genders, since the practical implementation of this body of thought in families is still challenged and overlapping tasks are noted by Shoemaker16 (Klein 101; Shoemaker 113). Moreover, the increasing amount of women writers living off their pen blur the boundaries between private and public, as shown in the following chapters about Aphra Behn and Eliza Haywood. In any case, prescriptive writings like conduct books fostered this idea of sexual separation in that they justified the

16 For a critical assessment of the interpretation of the words “private” and “public,” see Klein. He explains the immense variety of meanings attached to this opposition and difficulties for the private/public thesis. This entails affairs of the State vs. affairs not related to the State, society as a whole vs. the home, the economic public sphere vs. the household and sociability vs. solitude.
husband’s precedence over his wife outdoors by their difference in bodily strength. Cited by Shoemaker, *The Art of Governing a Wife, with Rules for Batchelors* (1747) provides the contemporary reader with an image of strict labour division according to sex.

Men: to get, to go abroad and get his living, deal with men, to manage all things without doors.

Women: to lay up and save, look to the house, talk to few, take of all within.”

(qtd. in Shoemaker 30)

Furthermore, wives are supposed to rear their children, keep an eye on the servants and stand by their husbands (Shoemaker 30). Fathers participated in the upbringing of their children, but mainly in terms of considering their career options or arranging their marriage and taking over their education from their wives when the children reached the age of 6 (Shoemaker 124, 125). Nevertheless, the complementary contributions to family life by the conjugal pair engendered a “marital relationship of co-dependency” in which women’s awareness of their vital participation made patriarchy endurable, irrespective of their superintending or manual work (Bailey 81, 83).

2.3.2 Stereotypical relations between husbands and wives

In the Early Modern period, power relationships between husbands and wives varied from couple to couple. Authority and responsibilities can be assumed by the male partner in all domains, in some or he can even be dominated by his wife. Of course, stereotypical ideas about the conjugal pair are found in conduct books, ballads, novels and pamphlets. For instance, Astell’s pamphlet *Some Reflections upon Marriage* (1730) deals with potential male characters found in marriage, but especially stresses the authoritarian, tyrannical qualities in a husband frequently emerging after the wedding. As such, a marriage to a “Coxcomb” can turn out very disagreeable, which she explains in the subsequent lines.
[He is] a disagreeable Person and [has] an imperious Temper, where Ignorance and Folly ... tyrannizes over Wit and Sense; [she is] to be perpetually contradicted for Contradiction-sake, and bore down by Authority, not by Argument; to be denied one’s most innocent Desires, for no other Reason but the absolute Will and Pleasure of a Lord and Master, whose Follies a wife, with all her Prudence, cannot hide, and whose Commands she cannot but despise at the same Time that she obeys them. (4-5)

Astell demonstrates how patriarchal power can burgeon a dictatorial and misogynist nature in men with ill will, which is difficult to conceal in public. But even when a man cherishes his wife before marriage, Astell fears his passion will soon turn into “Indifference, Neglect, or ... Aversion” (5). Haywood’s character D’Elmont in Love in Excess illustrates this assertion of a gallant husband’s alteration in behaviour towards his wife. He only consideres Alovysa’s vast estate as a motive to marry her but when he is struck by passion for Melliora, he becomes full of cold indifference. A woman must honour the virtues of her sex (including obedience, benevolence, sensitivity, empathy, modesty, discretion and chastity) by attempting to hide and make up for her husband’s misbehaviour (Astell 5, 7; Shoemaker 23). When her discretion fails or her temper prevails, she “accomplish[es the] ... Ruin” her husband initiated (Astell 8). Alovysa is led by her jealousy to catch D’Elmont red-handed, but she is killed in an unfortunate accident during the turmoil following the discovery of his adultery.

Furthermore, a woman should beware of the Gallant among the candidates, since he employs his “Arts” to express his so-called admiration in “Flatteries” (10). His “Treachery” can also ruin a woman’s reputation if she loses her modesty in his game (11). Willmore’s charms flatter every woman crossing his steps in The Rover, but his promiscuity is dangerous in marriage. Nevertheless, a gallant’s misconduct and indifferent, or worse, tyrannical use of his wife can become “a very great Blessing to her,” since it gives her the “Opportunity to exercise her Vertue” (sic; 27, 28). Whether a man marries for money or for love, Astell
interprets both motives as a man’s “irregular Appetites” (31). Fletcher identifies an image of
the male body as full of “appetites,” which a man’s self-control ought to overcome (423).
Therefore, male vices are often associated with these unrestrained appetites: drinking,
vio
ence and lust, apart from others like brutality and pride (423; Shoemaker 55). Especially
in the heyday of libertinism\footnote{Libertinism was a movement initiated by the licentious practices at the court of Charles II (1660-1685), which spread among the higher classes and later also among the mob. The term libertinism refers to liberating one’s sex drive, so that the adherents indulge in extra-marital hetero- and homosexual relationships (Family 530).} (after the Restoration in Aphra Behn’s days), male promiscuity
eclipsed the other flaws, but this “sexual assertiveness” was positively valued among other
men who saw it as a sign of masculinity (Fletcher 426). The male protagonists in the literary
works discussed, Willmore and D’Elmont, embody this type of masculinity as they attempt to
assert their virility in sexual triumphs. At the end of the eighteenth century, men’s sexual
activities out of wedlock were morally constricted. The image of female sexual identity was
already transformed from involving an unbridled sexuality to passive asexuality in the
beginning of the eighteenth century (Shoemaker 35, 36). Aligned with the reviewing of men’s
sexual nature, feminine virtues became increasingly appreciated in male conduct. Apart from
typically male qualities like intelligence, seriousness and discipline, the “cult of sensibility”
 fostered the image of the idealised husband as having a softer side, acting as a loyal and warm
husband for his wife (McKeon 314). These capacities recall typically feminine qualities like
“innocence, vivacity, kindness, and prudence” displayed in the domestic realm (Shoemaker
39).

When the tables are turned, dominant women can cause their husbands to be scolded
at as a cuckold. This was a husband’s greatest apprehension in marriage, since this threatened
his (self-)image as a man (Fletcher 432). This scenario is often exploited in popular ballads in
which women wear the breeches and are depicted as lascivious, dominant shrews oppressing
their impotent husbands (Shoemaker 37). Astell wonders why a wife must always be imagined as “a Domestick Devil, an Evil he must tolerate for his Conveniency” whereas a husband is either “a Tyrant or a Dupe,” as in the marriage between Alovysa and D’Elmont in *Love in Excess* (18). Besides, ballads, novels or plays like Aphra Behn’s *The Rover* and Eliza Haywood’s *Love in Excess* explore the way in which female characters can act as powerful, self-willed women fighting against the pressure of patriarchy. In this case, this female potency does not abase the husband, but renders an equal relationship between the sexes a realistic possibility.

Similarly, widows are considered frustrated, lustful creatures, so that remarriages were stereotypically condemned as a widow’s chance to yield to her libido, while the husband in question is supposed to marry her for her fortune (Shoemaker 137). Ciamara in *Love in Excess* embodies this image of the sexually voracious widow.  

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18 Similarly, widows are considered frustrated, lustful creatures, so that remarriages were stereotypically condemned as a widow’s chance to yield to her libido, while the husband in question is supposed to marry her for her fortune (Shoemaker 137). Ciamara in *Love in Excess* embodies this image of the sexually voracious widow.
3. Marriage and gender roles in Aphra Behn’s *The Rover*:
love’s knot vs. the juggling knot

This chapter analyses the portrayal of marriage and gender roles in Aphra Behn’s play *The Rover* (1677 and 1681). After a short introduction to Behn’s position in Restoration theatre and to the themes in the plays, the second section will examine the frequent comparison of practices in marriage and prostitution in *The Rover* and how these similarities denounce the mercenary commodification of women on the marriage market. Subsequently, I demonstrate that the characteristics of two opposing types of women, ladies of rank and prostitutes, are frequently mingled in Behn’s female characters. Therefore, the prostitute can be seen as a wife’s repressed alter ego in *The Rover*. The third section discusses the blurring of gender boundaries in the plays, going from discerning female and male qualities in both sexes to the trope of masquerade concealing one’s sex. Furthermore, the author depicts different types of female desire to account for female sexuality.

3.1 Introduction

At the end of the seventeenth century, Aphra Behn managed to stand her ground in the male-dominated theatre of her days, notably with successes like *The Rover*, or *The Banished Cavaliers* (1677) and its sequel *The Second Part of the Rover* (1681). Her biographical details are still unsure, but it is known that she was an educated, but rather poor female poet, fiction writer and playwright. She definitely was an exceptional presence in the predominantly male sphere of Restoration theatre. Female actresses were henceforth allowed on stage, but both female writers and actresses were considered to market their bodies on the stage or in their texts as they ventured in public (Gallagher 24). As such, the label ‘prostitute’ was frequently stuck on such women. Furthermore, she was a loyal subject to the house of Stuarts (Spencer,
Behn was able to adapt Thomas Killigrew’s play *Thomaso, or the Wanderer* (1664) with a female gaze. The storylines of the resulting plays *The Rover* and *The Second Part of the Rover* are constructed in the same manner. In these plays revolving around the rover Willmore, Behn addresses some delicate issues concerning men’s and women’s rights, duties and privileges in a society where male dominance is taken for granted. Willmore envisages marriage as a “juggling knot,” denoting a “cheating, trick-playing (marriage) knot” (*The Rover* 5.1.198: Spencer, ‘Explanatory notes’ 347). He opposes this to “love’s knot,” exemplified by his bond with Hellena outside the nuptial realm, since “[m]arriage is as certain a bane to love, as lending money is to friendship” (5.1.459, 451-1). The rake refuses to pronounce a marriage vow involving obedience to a legal and religious custom in the English patriarchal society. In the end, though, Hellena persuades him and they conclude their “bargain” (5.1.476). Behn clearly plays on the typical themes exploited in Restoration comedy: “the marriage market, sexual intrigue, masquerade [and] libertine flamboyance” (Diamond 524). Yet, she satirises them in her comical criticism of the marketing of women in marriage. As a royalist, Behn attacked the sexual prudishness of Puritans and “commercialism” of the Whigs in her Restoration comedy where the morally transgressive movement of libertinism counterbalanced this sexual hypocrisy (Spencer, ‘Introduction’ ix). Since *The Rover* ends with three marriages, this theme is very prominent in the play. In Naples, the banished cavalier Willmore seduces the Spanish Hellena, a maid of quality, and Angellica, a first-class courtesan, but he enters wedlock with the witty heroine Hellena. Hellena’s sister Florinda is matched with Willmore’s nobler friend Belvile after escaping numerous threats of rape, whereas her cousin Valeria obtains Frederick’s nuptial vow. In the end, Angellica tragically intends to murder Willmore for his infidelity, but then slinks off. However, in the sequel to *The Rover*, the prostitute La Nuche, Angellica’s substitute,

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19 Cf. the definition of “Tory” in the second chapter, p. 22.
promises to “follow” Willmore, whereas Hellena’s doppelganger Ariadne renounces her love for Willmore by complying with an arranged marriage with Beaumond. The second part takes place in Madrid with a notorious Spanish catholic background. Arguably, these dissimilarities between the two parts of *The Rover* indicate Behn’s growing critique on the practice of marriage and the inequality between the sexes. Her performative enacting of different patterns of marriage aims at reforming and educating her audience through laughter. Female actresses were often associated with prostitutes and their enactment of both wives and whores point out the performativity of gender roles. They interpret both roles, but also blur the distinctions between virgins and prostitutes, so as to demonstrate that ‘the prostitute’ is, in fact, the alter ego of ‘the wife’. In the sequel, Behn sharpens her criticism of mercenary marriages in that the fool Blunt and his friend Fetherfool endeavour to steal away two Jewish monstrous maids of fortune in a loveless marriage. In this chapter, I will argue that Behn deliberately confounds the notions of marriage and prostitution and of male and female, to expose fractures in the patriarchal system of defining the sexes. These fractures disclose the lack of a female stance in the patriarchally structured institution of marriage and the patriarchal hierarchy of the two sexes. Behn depicts her female characters as self-determined agents in love relationships, rebelling against social customs and restrictions concerning their sex. As such, these women struggle against patriarchal definitions of gender and social limitations for women to account for themselves as autonomous, rational beings with a sexuality repressed by the rules of decorum. First, this discussion will focus on Behn’s denouncement of forced marriages and women’s commodification in matrimony. Secondly, Behn’s destabilisation of gender roles will be examined. Both parts incorporate elements of gender theories and refer to the general historical context as discussed in chapter 1 and 2.
3.2 Marriage vs. prostitution

After the example of King Charles II, many subjects in Restoration England were guided by the libertine ideology that acted counter to Whig and Puritan prudishness (Staves 20). As a result of this licentiousness, prostitution was a thriving business in which women sold their body to become financially independent despite their low social status. However, men’s actions were not merely controlled by their hunger for sexual gratification; an advantageous marriage had to be arranged to procure financial stability. Consequently, both ladies of rank and prostitutes were integrated in an economic system of exchange, in which their value was considered monetary (23). A marriageable virgin had to acknowledge her status as “property” in an exchange market, in which her value was not only determined by her capacity to produce a legal heir, but also by her portion (Diamond 524). Prostitutes exchanged their body for money and became common property. Behn blurs the boundaries between marriage and prostitution to expose misogynist practices in marriage. Already in The Rover’s first scene, Florinda and Hellena both denounce their lawfully imposed submission to their father’s and brother’s will. Whereas Hellena is “designed for a nun,” Florinda is “designed for a husband” (1.1.29, 18). When their brother Pedro enters, he conveys to Florinda his father’s command to “consider Don Vincentio’s fortune and the jointure he’ll make [her]” (1.1.76). Florinda denounces “the ill customs of her country” by responding that her “youth, beauty and fortune ... ought not to be thrown away on his age and jointure” (1.1.63, 77-8). Pedro acts as a surrogate for the absent father in the play, but he also warns Hellena that his father will not agree with her disadvantageous marriage. As Trumbach notes, the father of the bride usually participates in the negotiations of the marriage settlement to secure his daughter’s and grandchildren’s interests (74). If we compare Florinda’s denouncing of marriage for money with the rake Willmore’s reproaches of the courtesan La Nuche, we encounter an opposition
in motives driving the two women in their sexual relationships. The courtesan understands that certain women prefer money from old gentlemen ‘of quality’ over poor, but potent lovers.

WILLMORE ‘Shart, I have known a Woman doat [i.e., dote] on Quality, tho he has stunk through all his Perfumes; one who never went all to Bed to her, but left his Teeth, an Eye, false Back and Breast, sometimes his Palate too upon her Toyliite [i.e., toilet-table], whilst her fair Arms hug’d the dismember’d Carcase, and swore him all perfection, because of Quality.

LA NUCHE But he was rich, good Captain, was he not?

(The Second Part of the Rover 1.2.14)

Considering women’s need for “reliable male protectors” in a society where they cannot support themselves, La Nuche defends Willmore’s undetermined female acquaintance whose actions he denounces (Staves 21). Both marriageable ladies of rank and whores contemplate the potential partner’s wealth to secure their own financial ease. Note how Willmore does not specify this woman’s status: prostitute or woman of quality? Afterwards, he even claims to have done with “all thy [i.e., La Nuche’s] Sex” (emphasis added; 1.2.14).

In the quarrel between Beaumond and Ariadne, the male character addresses the nature of marriage in which “the Bride was never the care of the Lover, but the business of the Parents” (The Second Part of the Rover 2.2.30). The institution of marriage is based on the families’ financial interest, especially high in the upper classes. Ariadne is not impressed by this argument, but refers to marrying him as “Tyranny” and “slavery” while condemning her future “Drinking Whoring Husband” (2.2.31). Beaumond justifies his “whoring” because “a Husband that will deal [her] some love is better than one who can give [her] none,” and ironically states that she “would have a blessed time on’t with old father Carlo” (2.2.31). He comically puns on the term love, denoting not only affection, but also sex. As Fletcher notes

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20 Since the first edition of The Second Part of the Rover has no line numbers, parenthetical references are to act, scene and page number.
in his overview of male identity formation in the Early Modern period, men’s “appetites” are celebrated and measure masculinity. Since Willmore and Beaumond indulge in whoring, drinking and eating, they live up to this model of manhood. Interestingly, La Nuche refers to Willmore’s libido in metaphors of food, so she links these different types of male “appetite”. She calls him “one of those healthy stomach Lovers, that can digest a Mistriss in a Night and Hunger again next Morning” (sic; 1.2.14). Like La Nuche, a courtesan, Ariadne, a lady of rank, considers an impotent, but rich and attentive partner “much better than a keeping Husband, whom neither Beauty nor Honour in a Wife can oblige” and thus they criticise the sex drive of contemporary libertines (2.2.31). As Staves suggests, women were often more concerned with the economic prospects of a proposed marriage, than with their emotional involvement (19). Similarly, prostitutes’ interests were financial, not emotional. According to Beaumond, if virgins and prostitutes both love outside of marriage, “[w]hat difference then between a money-taking Mistriss and her that gives her Love, only perhaps this sins the closer by’t, and talks of Honour more” (sic; 4.1.55). This argument supports Beaumond’s earlier contempt of Ariadne as “a Whore” (4.1.50). Later on, Beaumond compares her with “Gypsie[s],” who are “marginal and exotic females,” and thus comparable to prostitutes (4.1.55; Diamond 526). As Hellena, Florinda and Valeria in the first part engage in a gypsy masquerade, they draw an interesting link between matrimony and gipsydom; both systems determine men’s “fortune” or future, and Diamond calls the female participants of both institutions “retailers of fortunes (or portions)” (528).

An important difference between *The Rover* and its sequel is the female character who fulfils the central role in the plays’ action and who finally gains Willmore’s exclusive devotion. Behn inverts the virgin’s prevailing over the courtesan in the sequel, and portrays La Nuche as the superior rival of Ariadne in their struggle for Willmore. The playwright carries her social criticism a step further in the sequel by choosing the courtesan and not the
virgin as the principal female role and even heroine of the play. Burke considers this as another assertion of “the arbitrariness of [the] virgin/whore distinction” (131). In this manner, Behn makes a strong statement about traditional values in her society in that even labelling prostitutes as an inferior and dishonourable class of women does not render their character and power subordinate to the “upper” classes. Ariadne finally resigns to her patriarchally pre-established lot, and agrees to marry Beaumond. Because Behn suggests that women’s fate in prostitution is not necessarily worse than in matrimony within the aristocratic sphere, she rejects the contemporary oppression of women exchanged in the marriage market. Behn’s Ariadne inveighs against women’s subservient condition in marriage, saying “who wou’d marry, who wou’d be chaffer’d thus and sold to slavery” (2.2.31). La Nuche professes that her fortune as a courtesan is superior to Ariadne’s lot. She scorns marriage in calling Beaumond a “slavish Heir to Estate and Wife, born rich and damn’d to Matrimony” and thus equates it with slavery as well (4.1.51). These assertions are echoed in Astell’s Reflections upon Marriage (1730) denouncing marriages for money that render a wife a slave to her husband. This means that 50 years after Behn’s writing of The Rover such enforced marriages for financial purposes have not yet fallen out of use. To Beaumond’s future wife, La Nuche says that “[her] business is only to be belov’d not to Love [so she] leave[s] that slavery for ... Women of Quality” like Ariadne (4.1.53). Even if they would both fall in love, Ariadne’s “hours of Love are like the deeds of darkness, and [hers] like cheerful Birds in open day” (4.1.54). Only in The Second Part of the Rover do the virgin and whore competing for Willmore’s attention confront each other directly, which reinforces the audience’s awareness of their opposing social status, but also of their similar conception of marriage and interests in Willmore.

Apart from the comparison of practices in marriage to those in prostitution, Behn explicitly applies the same monetary terms to refer to both institutions. Willmore even points
out to Ariadne that “you Women have all a certain Jargon ... peculiar to your selves: of Value, Rate, Present, Interest, Settlement, Advantage, Price, Maintenance, and ... Ready Money, by way of Fine before entrance” (emphasis added; 2.1.19). Moreover, as Willmore assumes the role of a mountebank\textsuperscript{21} in The Second Part of the Rover, he endeavours to attract “City Wives” to sell his products to, calling them a “Shop [of] Commodities” for which his magical products “will retrieve [their] Customers” (2.1.24). Similarly, he states that La Nuche has “basely bargain’d with [him],” and he also tells Hellena that he wants their marriage to “be a bargain” (The Second Part of the Rover 3.1.48; The Rover 5.1.472). Frederick formulates his engagement with Valeria as “a bargain” as well (5.1.184). Diamond signals Behn’s view of forced marriage as a practice that commodifies women, which is substantiated by the use of the former mercenary terms (524). They become objectified as their body is commercialised and marketed in marriage. Like prostitutes, their body will be sold, since it represents their dowry, and consumed. Angellica hangs out her picture to attract customers, which Belvile names “the fair sign to the inn where a man may lodge that’s fool enough to give her price” (2.1.92-93). This prostitute is fully aware of the commercialisation of women’s bodies as she advertises herself. Blunt is overwhelmed by the price of a 1000 crowns to obtain a ticket to this inn, and states that they are “no chapmen for this commodity” (2.1.99-100). Even though Angellica expects payment in exchange of her body, virgins like Hellena and Florinda also enter this economic realm as objects of which the value is determined by the dowry they can bring to their future husband. As such, women serve as containers of male desire. They are no subject in marriage, but subjected to men’s objectification of their sex. Behn questions the lack of esteem for the woman as an individual, echoed by Astell asking “how can a man respect his Wife when he has a contemptible Opinion of her and her sex?” (70). This

\textsuperscript{21} A mountebank is “[a]n itinerant charlatan who sold supposed medicines and remedies, freq. using various entertainments to attract a crowd of potential customers” (OED). Note how Willmore’s act recalls the gypsy dress of Florinda and Hellena in the first part of The Rover. They are fortune tellers like Willmore, who falsely predicts La Nuche’s love life “from the Oracle in the Box” to reinforce her love for him (3.1.39).
monetary discourse reveals that the dominant ideology of patriarchy has the supremacy in defining the female sex.

As Staves points out, for the playwright “a maximally desirable woman simultaneously possesses beauty, the power to evoke desire in man, wealth and wit” (23). Paradoxically, the characters embodying the two extremes in the female spectrum of ‘quality’, virgins and courtesans, both intend to live up to this definition of a desirable woman and they are often confused. La Nuche and Ariadne are frequently confounded and Florinda, classified as a “person of quality” on account of her higher social rank, is mistaken as a prostitute. The latter is almost raped by Willmore, who recognises her as “[a] female!” and claims that he is “a dog if it be not a very wench!” (The Rover 3.5.14-5). Later on, Florinda is again exposed to a potential rape when Blunt attempts to “be revenged on one whore [i.e., Florinda] for the sins of another [i.e., Lucetta]” (4.5.51). Beforehand, Blunt was misled by the cunning prostitute Lucetta, who had given the impression of “a person of quality” (2.1.48). Moreover, in The Second Part of the Rover he states that “[i]f this [i.e., La Nuche] be a Whore, I understand nothing” and that “such a Wench would pass for a Person of Quality in London” (1.1.11).

If whores and virgins are physically confounded, they are equally so regarding their feelings and desires. As such, the prostitute can be seen as a wife’s doppelganger who articulates female desires and indulges in them. Hellena asks Pedro “what ... those

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22 A wench denotes “a whore” in this case, as stated in the explanatory notes to the play in Aphra Behn: The Rover and other plays (344).

23 Interesting points of view concerning the trope of rape in The Rover include Anita Pacheco’s and Dagny Boebel’s discussions. They expose how, according to male standards, the meaning of rape as sexual violation (especially on women) is modified into seduction by the lady herself, a legitimate act of violence, or an aggressive sign of the male love. In any case, dynamic power relations between men and women play a role in constructing attempted rape as temptation or male violence. As Anita Pacheco argues, the ambivalent interpretations of rape in Behn’s play plead for an assertion of a female subjectivity in sexual relationships (323). However, she finds “a disinclination [in the contemporary judicial system] to take rape seriously unless it was seen to involve a grave property offense, such as the rape of a man’s virgin daughter” (324). This implies that the interpretation of sexual assault as rape or seduction is not even important. The woman would all the same become “damaged property” (Boebel 66).
[divertissements] of the night [are]” in case Florinda marries Don Vincentio (1.1.102-3). Thus, she pleads for her sister’s sexual pleasure. She attempts to enfranchise herself and her sister through the physicality associated with whores. Behn satirises enforced marriages involving a large age difference by having Hellena ridicule the impotence of old husbands. Ariadne even thinks that cuckoldry is legitimated in such a marriage since she asserts that “a Woman may with some lawful excuse Cuckold him, and ‘twould be scarce a sin” (2.2.31). Interestingly, such sexual freedom and lust for women is irrevocably, though questionably, associated with prostitution. In Behn’s view, erotic feelings are natural to all human beings, and not necessarily to prostitutes or men alone. Consequently, she pleads for an acknowledgement of women’s sexuality, so that the prostitute no longer only serves as a wife’s alter ego, but can become a part of her identity. Moreover, unrequited love makes Angellica realise that her “virgin heart ... is gone” (4.2.150). Szilagyi depicts her as “a comprehensive character, incorporating the play’s same-generation women within the trope of prostitution” (448). Her and Hellena’s emotions of jealousy and disappointment run parallel, which is emphasised in their simultaneous and similar complaint about Willmore’s abuse.

ANGELLICA Oh, perjured man! Is it thus you pay my generous passion back?

HELLENA Why would you, sir, abuse my lady’s faith?24

ANGELLICA And use me so inhumanly?

HELLENA A maid so young, so innocent—

...

ANGELLICA Dost thou not know thy life is in my power?

HELLENA Or think my lady cannot be revenged? (The Rover 4.2.288-95)

24 Disguised as a man, Hellena acts only as a representative of the “lady” Hellena in absentia.
As Diamond states, the virgins in the play “market themselves as she [i.e., Angellica] does, compete for the same male affection, [and] suffer similar abuse” (519).

### 3.3 Behn’s destabilisation of gender roles

In the author’s attempt to expose fractures in the patriarchal traditions of defining female identity, Behn proceeds from blurring the distinction between virgins and whores, to questioning the “gendering” of human qualities. Should human properties inevitably be classified as male or female? This writer attempts to mingle traditionally labelled male and female qualities in her female characters. As Anita Pacheco observes, Hellena acts according to her own sexual drive, which clashes with patriarchal conceptions of femininity (341). Since the roles of Hellena and Ariadne are both in part breeches-parts, their association with male qualities becomes evident, destabilising traditional instances of gender displays. Disguising themselves as men, they translate their ‘masculine’ desire to court into physical appearances. Their male costumes reveal their need to conceal their feminine nature as patriarchal norms silence female sexual intents. Although Behn lived in the Early Modern period, she draws on the (still) persistent pre-modern belief that women have erotic desires as well. She reveals that society’s expectations have restricted this image to prostitutes, but also that this restriction is false. In their masculine dress, the virgins obtain more freedom to act and speak because, as Szilagyi notes, “dominance is still gendered masculine” (438). The virgins apply their knowledge of gender binaries and roles, including male privileges in discourse and turn them to their advantage.

Besides, Hellena claims to be as inconstant a lover as Willmore when she states that “our business as well as our humours are alike: yours to cozen as many maids as will trust you and I as many men as have faith” (3.1.185-7). Note that her libertine utterance functioning as an enfranchisement includes an assertion of their equality in temperament and wit; as “their
humours are alike,” Hellena endeavours to have Willmore recognise they are on equal terms regarding their intelligence and eloquence. The rover agrees that they are well matched, saying that she has “so much wit” and they “are so of one humour” (3.1.279, 5.1.472). Chernaik argues that “the evidence of inventiveness, spontaneity, independence and high spirits in the heroine predisposes the audience, like her chosen partner, to look with favour on her” (189). Stereotypically, the rational qualities of wit and intelligence are restricted to the male sex, but Aphra Behn evinces that women with courage can possess these assets as well. However, the best illustration of this assertion is Aphra Behn herself. As a seventeenth-century female writer, she holds authority in the midst of a mainly male group of authors. Therefore, it is no wonder that Behn called her artistic talent “my masculine part the poet in me” (‘Preface to The Lucky Chance,’ ll.127-8). Since she identifies her gift as masculine, she engages in the patriarchal ideology (determining linguistic interpretations) that reason is inherent to the male sex. However, simultaneously, she demonstrates the defect in this theory, for which she is the living proof. By reconstructing Behn’s “myth of the androgyne,” Chernaik concludes that she identifies creative and rational qualities essential to a writer as male in its nature, but equally allotted among men and women (183).

The commitment between Hellena and Willmore at the end of The Rover, and between La Nuche and this rake in the second part “envisages the possibility of a relationship between men and women not based on ownership or domination” (Chernaik 205). These so-called “free unions of equals” contrast with the bargaining nature of forced marriages and prostitution in the plays (205). The last scene between Hellena and Willmore even suggests a reversal of their (constructed) masculine and feminine sexual identities; the rover calls himself “Robert the constant,” whereas she is named “Hellena the inconstant” (5.1.483, 489; Boebel 68). Nevertheless, Aphra Behn disillusions her audience in The Second Part of the Rover, as, apparently, she could not imagine an utter parity between the sexes within the
patriarchal framework. While La Nuche promises to “follow” Willmore wherever he goes, Hellena has followed her lover to her own death at sea because her “fit of kindness” would not let her part with him (*The Second Part of the Rover* 5.4.81, 1.1.5). Both women commit themselves to him, while he continues to exercise his male prerogative of libertinism. La Nuche and Hellena are obliged to condone this behaviour, which he describes as his urge, “like cheerful birds, [to] sing in all groves, [a]nd perch on every bough” (*The Rover* 5.1.301-2). Therefore, Chernaik argues that the double standard still operates, but only for the male party (206). Although libertinism proclaimed the pursuit of sexual pleasure for both sexes, even the play’s rake demonstrates that this freedom is actually reserved for the male sex.

PEDRO Take her: I shall now be free from fears of her honour; guard it you now, if you can; I have been a slave to ‘t long enough.

WILLMORE Faith, sir, I am of a nation that are of opinion a woman’s honour is not worth guarding when she has a mind to part with it. (5.1.530-4)

Hellena’s “honour” is considered worthless in Willmore’s eyes, because her eagerness for sexual and emotional satisfaction engenders a disavowal of her only valuable treasure: her virginal virtue, which he previously called “an infirmity in woman” (4.2.175). The virtue he adores in her is “good nature,” because he “hate[s] a coy demure mistress” (5.1.428, 429). Nevertheless, Willmore’s reply to Pedro reveals how the patriarchal body of thought thoroughly affects even rebels like Willmore, who hypocritically claims to hold a liberal point of view for women too. The whoring Beaumond disavows Ariadne’s erotic needs as well, as he accuses her of, “so near the Wedding night, depriv[ing] him of the rights of Love” (4.1.50). Alluding to her virginity, he only envisages *his* rights in their relationship, while he carefully ignores the possibility of rights for the female party in marriage. Nevertheless, Hellena opposes this patronising attitude towards female sexuality, and longs to “know” the paths of
love and sex, which Florinda is reluctant to share with her “impertinent” sister, even though she is poorly educated in these matters herself (1.1.1). Diamond interprets this wish for knowledge as a rebellion against the lack of female education in Behn’s days (526). I would like to add to this idea that Behn warns for the consequences of inadequate instruction for women in the daily matters of life, including love and marriage. She demonstrates the dangers stemming from this gap in girls’ upbringing; Florinda risks to have her virginal status shattered in three rape attempts during the play because she naively misjudges the situation. She hopes, for instance, that Blunt, robbed of his clothes by a deceptive whore, will assist her when she searches for help, since he looks like “some rope-dancer, or fencing master” (4.5.21). He calls her “a virgin pullet,” pointing to Florinda’s inexperience (OED). Florinda becomes a victim of patriarchal restrictions concerning female education, which is also the butt of vehement protests in Astell’s pamphlet. She acknowledges the “ill Effects of a bad Education” of a woman in that, well instructed, “her Reputation and Honour ... are to be more nicely preserved” (86, 88). Nevertheless, this efficient instruction is practically unavailable for women so that they can only learn valuable lessons by trial and error. Astell identifies the painful effect of these experiences as “Affliction, the only useful School that Women are ever put to” so that a woman “now distinguishes between Truth and Appearances” (29).

To wind up this Matter; If a Woman were duly principled, and taught to know the World, especially the true sentiments that Men have of her, and the Traps they lay for her under so many gilded Compliments, ... that Disgrace would be prevented which is brought upon too many Families. (113-114)

In this view, family honour and respectability are closely linked to the reputation of the female descendants. The fact that women carry the weight of patriarchal traditions and limitations resounds in the words of feminist philosopher Susan Moller Okin. She states that gender roles are most importantly established in the domestic sphere or in family life.
Patriarchal cultural values are predominantly “practised” in the private sphere to which the wife is confined. To preserve female subordination, the patriarchal values are mostly concerned with these “personal, sexual and reproductive” aspects of life, sustaining women’s position as dominated by men (Okin, *Is Multiculturalism Bad for Women?* 12). This accounts for the greater importance attached to a woman’s reputation as a virtuous virgin or as a faithful wife and for the fatal consequences of rape, expressed in Florinda’s fearful exclamation “Oh, I am ruined” when Willmore signals his ill intentions (3.5.41).

In a society where patriarchal norms proclaim female chastity and misogyny is endemic, the female sexual appetite was disregarded and its nature was obscure. This could lead to insecurity for men, whose sense of power derived partially from their sexual potency and domination over women (Lakhoua 179). This denial of a female eroticism makes it impossible for men to judge the female sexual identity, the strength of which could damage the constructed image of the masculine self. This is illustrated in Blunt’s cruel intentions to revenge his own inadequacy to judge women to their real “value,” i.e. honest virgins or deceptive prostitutes. This failure renders Blunt insecure about the true nature of women and their true feelings; is their attraction to him genuine or feigned? In my view, this squire translates these fearful doubts about the female disposition into doubts about his own character. He attempts to reassert his male power over a woman other than Lucetta, notably Florinda, in a violent manner, as if this is the only way in which potent virility can be demonstrated. Therefore, Blunt seems to be a product of this dominant perspective as well (Chernaik 207). His misogynist nature is exposed after his encounter with Lucetta, a courtesan who seduces Blunt to rob him of his money and clothes. After having equated all women to whores in an undifferentiated way, he violently seeks revenge on Florinda. Another illustration of misogyny occurs in *The Second Part of the Rover*. Fetherfool and Blunt attempt to arrange an advantageous, but horrible match with two sisters, a Giant and a Dwarf. The two
friends, coxcombs according to Astell’s definition, call their future wives in law “Lady Monsters,” but especially Fetherfool is afraid from his “SheGarigantua” (2.1.21, 3.1.33). He appears determined by ideological meanings of words, as he calls the Giant a “Monster as big as the Whore of Babylon” (3.1.33). The woman realises his degrading view of her person and exclaims that she “will marry none whose Person and Courage shall not bear some proportion to [hers]” (3.1.35). As Fetherfool identifies her as “Heroical and Masculine,” it becomes clear that he is intimidated by the lady’s physical largeness and power (3.1.35). This monstrous creature seems to personify the powerful, thus “Masculine” capacities that women can possess and which evoke fear and doubts in the male sex. Owen argues that the Lady Monsters demonstrate the monstrousness of the libertine ideology, which not only downgrades the woman to a commodity, but even slights her personal qualities (21). Willmore appears guilty of this practice too. He is controlled by the persuasion of money, which “speaks sense in a Language all Nations understand, ‘tis Beauty, Wit, Courage, Honour and undisputable Reason” (The Second Part of the Rover 3.1.43). By this statement, he illustrates how money renders all other qualities in women redundant. Fetherfool forgets the grotesque looks of the giantess, and exclaims “[h]ow amiable looks that Neck with that delicious row of Pearls about it” (5.4.75). It is a courtesan, Angellica, who demonstrates how prostitution is equally practised by men while refuting Willmore’s attack on women’s hankering for financial ease (Szilagyi 448). They ‘sell’ themselves to the highest female bidder in marriage.

ANGELLICA Pray tell me, sir, are not you guilty of the same mercenary crime? When a lady is proposed to you for a wife, you never ask how fair, discreet, or virtuous she is; but what’s her fortune: which if but small, you cry ‘she will not do my business’, and basely leave her, though she languish for you. Say, is not this as poor? (2.2.89-94)

This critique on the male stance regarding marriage, prostitution and fortune is echoed in the sequel to The Rover. When Willmore’s plan to marry one of the wealthy ‘monsters’ is
overheard by La Nuche, she accuses him of being more controlled by financial concerns than herself. She reacts to Willmore, saying “you call me mercenary, but I would starve e’re suffer my self to be possest by a thing of horror” (sic; 3.1.43).

As already illustrated above, qualities stigmatised as typically male or female are attributed to members of the opposing sex. Sometimes, this even results in role reversals within the gender relationships and interactions. La Nuche and Angellica both give money to Willmore, which results in a role reversal of prostitute and client. As La Nuche pays the cunning Willmore disguised as a mountebank for a fortune-telling, he displays the same hypocrisy he identifies as a vice of “the cozening sex” (The Rover 2.2.123). Furthermore, La Nuche scorns Willmore at one point, out of fear of infamy. Her pride would not let “all the envying Women of the Town … cry, Is this the high priz’d Lady, now fall’n so low to doat upon … a poor disbanded Captain” (3.1.47). Note how these women’s jealousy stems from La Nuche’s desirable status, and not from Willmore’s precious love. The courtesan becomes the superior in this game, even though only temporarily. In the play in general, Behn revels in subverting the patriarchally established order. As she chooses a carnival setting in Naples, a patriarchal city, she applies the “dehierarchizing effect” of carnival to deconstruct the patriarchal system and the social construction of gender (Bakhtin qtd. in Boebel 55). Behn’s female characters use this unique freedom to take control over their own lives. In fact, all ladies are represented as important agents, deceiving and seducing their desired lovers. Already in the opening scene of The Rover, the perspective and atmosphere are gendered feminine (Lakhoua 180). Florinda and Hellena freely express their critical thoughts regarding their male relatives and take control. Hellena steps up to Willmore and “instead of telling him his fortune, [will] try [her] own” (1.2.124-5). She takes the first step in their game of seduction, which she calls “a-captain-hunting” (4.2.345). Likewise, Florinda hands over a

25 Mikhail Bakhtin explores the dehierarchising effect of the ‘carnivalesque’ in Rabelais and His World (1965).
letter to Belvile to change her lot. As Belvile formulates it, she “invites [him] to deliver her from the threatened violence of her brother” (emphasis added; 1.2.249-50). Even a prostitute, Lucetta, ensnares Blunt by enticing him in the first place. He is ravished by Lucetta’s charms, who “soothed [his] heart from [his] bosom” (2.1.29-30). The overall principle entails that the female party makes the first move in encounters between the sexes, and pushes the play’s action forward. Here, it is rather the male characters who are objectified and feminised (Burke 123). Angellica, for instance, does not acquiesce in her rejection by Willmore, but draws a pistol, a symbol of “violent phallic power,” to kill him (Boebel 67). Willmore identifies her as a “virago” which denotes, besides a scold, a masculine female warrior (5.1.229; OED). More positive interferences are performed by Valeria, whom Florinda calls her “preserver,” because she succeeded in preventing Pedro from discovering Florinda’s arrangement with Belvile, but also rescues her from a potential gang-rape (5.1.144). Burke argues for a deconstruction of the cavalier “myth” in Behn’s plays. In this respect, the role reserved for the noble, knightly cavalier Belvile to heroically save Florinda is now fulfilled by a woman (127). Blunt adopts the role of a victim, after his threatening to rape the lady, when he states that Florinda “had doubtless committed a rape upon [him], had not this sword defended [him]” (5.1.72-3). Interestingly, rape denotes a robbery, but chiefly points to sexual violation (OED). As such, the spectator witnesses another role reversal in the play.

Staves notes how Behn’s representations of male and female desire are poles apart, but even these gendered features are sometimes mingled. Following the libertine ideology, male desire is centred on the present moment of sexual satisfaction. In fact, it equals a desire for conquest and the experience of potency, besides the orgasmic climax. According to this view, their pleasure is even heightened by resistance of the lady, whose fear would stimulate their gratification whereas pleased sexual partners would only spoil the man’s experience (22). This image validates the idea that men’s sense of identity and self-esteem are (at the least)
partly based on their sexual capacities to conquer a woman, as if they invade the enemies’ country. Pacheco also observes this relation between male eroticism and male power. The poor cavalier Willmore appropriates Angellica’s painting to himself without her consent as a compensation for his incapacity to buy and enjoy her. He claims the right “of possession” or of “conquest” (2.1.223, 256). Since Willmore cannot assert his masculinity through sexual satisfaction, he violently seeks an affirmation of his virility in possessing Angellica in a different manner (Pacheco 338). As such, Willmore can still exert power over Angellica, albeit rather symbolically.

As Aughterson notes, many characters employ the patriarchal terminology of conquest and submission to point to the dynamics between the female and male parties within love relationships. Florinda agrees with the patriarchal view that a man “ought to conquer [her] by submission,” but Angellica talks in the same terms about her “victory over [Pedro’s] heart [that] is as soon lost as won: a slave that can add little to the triumph of the conqueror” (4.2.76; 2.1.134). Willmore tells La Nuche how she “conquerest all [his] Soul” (sic; 3.1.46). This imagery of conquest, slavery and surrender is used throughout the plays and depicts male-female relationships in terms of struggles for power. Angellica calls her sullied honour “her richest treasure” of which “the remaining spoil could not be worth the conqueror’s care or value” (5.1.289, 290-1). Pedro regards his sister as “the spoils of a noble family,” as if Hellena was familial ‘war booty’ as in Angellica’s words. Her father’s and brother’s use of her body is nullified by her marriage to Willmore (Aughterson 83, 35; 5.1.507).

As opposed to the male counterpart, female desire is depicted by Behn as “soft, melting, [and] yielding” and implies an “experience of powerlessness” (Staves 22). Angellica

26 Florinda’s language recalls instances of her passive behaviour in male-female interactions. Paradoxically, she desires to be conquered, but with her permission. R.W. Connell has identified these instances of feminine compliance to patriarchal norms as “emphasized femininity” that colludes with “hegemonic masculinity” (23). He defines it as the female conforming to male interests and desires (23). As discussed in the following paragraph, Angellica’s and La Nuche’s expressions of their sexuality equally signal their emphasised femininity.
and La Nuche embody this yielding female sexuality in Behn’s plays. They resist Willmore’s charms until his reckless, violent and rakish behaviour strangely captures their hearts. Especially his sensuous eloquence melt their hearts, which Astell identifies as typical of gallantry. The pamphleteer warns against yielding to these charms. Even though La Nuche attempts to resist his enchanting words by harshly ridiculing his poverty and libertinism, “the Language of [her] eyes” gives him “proof” of her feelings (3.1.46). Moreover, these women “eroticize male violence” and willingly assume a subservient position (Staves 22). Nonetheless, these courtesans fight their own principles concerning their position towards men. As Angellica observes early in The Rover, “inconstancy is the sin of all mankind, therefore [she is] resolved that nothing but gold shall charm [her] heart” (2.1.135-6). She claims that “he that wishes but to buy gives [her] more pride, than he that gives [her] price can make [her] pleasure” (2.1.121-3). As long as Angellica’s vanity is fed, she feels no need to gain affective or sexual enjoyment. Only financial considerations could make her yield to a man. However, she recognises that her egotism has been shattered by her love for Willmore, which destabilised her sense of power and self-worth.

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{ANGELLICA} & \quad \text{Had I remained in innocent security,} \\
& \quad \text{I should have thought all men were born my slaves,} \\
& \quad \text{And worn my power like lightning in my eyes,} \\
& \quad \text{To have destroyed at pleasure when offended:} \\
& \quad \text{But when love held the mirror, the undeceiving glass} \\
& \quad \text{Reflected all the weakness of my soul.} \quad (5.1.283-8)
\end{align*}
\]

Clearly, Angellica demonstrates Behn’s idea of the surrendering female desire, in that she regards herself as weak and lacking the power she attributed to beauty. Likewise, La Nuche damns her failing beauty’s sway when she states, “[w]here is all your power, ye poor deluded eyes, Curse on your feeble fires that cannot warm a heart which every common Beauty
kindles” (5.1.70). She definitely realises that “[h]e has, he shall, he must compleat [her] ruin” (sic; 5.1.71). La Nuche is utterly infatuated with love. Although she realises that Willmore will continue his “roving” from woman to woman, she naively asks him if he would be “kind and true” because “[she] cannot think that [he] should be anothers” (sic; 3.1.47). These willing courtesans personify the stereotypical female sexual desire in Behn’s work, since they “struggle to resist libertine seduction and their own desires not to yield, not with simple rapture, but with despair over their own powerlessness” (Staves 22). Against all odds, this playwright who attempts to nourish the feminist plea for a feminine sexuality portrays it according to the patriarchal ideology. Moreover, she sides with the misogynist idea that women cannot control their sexuality (22). Even so, this assertion needs refinement; the attentive reader will acknowledge that Hellena’s and Ariadne’s erotic nature corresponds to masculine, libertine norms. Ariadne, like Hellena, condemns “Constancy” as Willmore’s kindred spirit because “it loses time and profit, [and] new Lovers have new Vows and new Presents” (2.1.19). Interestingly, Ariadne presents her sexual desires in terms of appetite like La Nuche defined Willmore’s. She believes that sexual fidelity is “like eating the cold meat ones self, after having given a friend a Feast” (sic; 2.1.19). These ladies of rank both prove that women’s sexuality is not bound to correspond to Staves’ definition. Presumably, Behn attempts to assert a female version of libertinism, for which she blurs the distinction between a typically male and female sexual identity. Furthermore, the reader notes a dissimilarity between the plays in that different sorts of women obtain Willmore’s “exclusive” love in the end. In The Rover the strong lady Hellena even gains Willmore’s matrimonial vow because she persists in this condition. By contrast, the courtesan La Nuche outstrips Ariadne, who is forced to marry her cousin Beaumond instead. Presumably, Behn applies this role reversal to demonstrate that both women with “male” and “female” desires can succeed in their game of

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27 Cf. my discussion of Hellena’s and Ariadne’s male qualities on p. 45-6.
28 Cf. p. 40.
love. La Nuche’s sentimental ‘powerlessness’ does not imply complete failure, but can even result in the achievement of her wish. Even though she yields to him, she still attracts Willmore. Nevertheless, as opposed to the first play, Willmore is not reformed, because his debauchery still triumphs over the condition of fidelity imposed by La Nuche (Owen 20).

Apart from the destabilisation of male and female sexual desire, the playwright represents madness as a compensation for the disregard of female sexuality in phallic discourse. Dagny Boebel observes how this was even classified as a mental disease, “erotomania,” by seventeenth- and eighteenth-century physicians (60). Interestingly, Hellena and Willmore both regard themselves as ruled by madness and acknowledge that this state proceeds from their insatiable libido. Hellena, a “mad creature,” wishes to experience the sweet taste of “innocent freedoms” during Carnival, where she can be “as mad as the rest” (3.1.63; 1.1.174; 173-4). She longs for “some mad companion,” while Willmore hunkers after “a mad mistress” (1.1.34, 5.1.430). Since Frederick and Belvile both identify Willmore as being “mad ... for a Wench,” there is a clear association with this besotted behaviour and sexual drive (2.1.284, 4.3.39). Hellena and Willmore’s sexualities are described in the same manner, which again links masculine and feminine eroticism by making the distinction less relevant. In fact, their eccentric conduct is caused by a similar repression of their sexuality. Hellena is compelled to become a nun and thus bound to disregard her sexual needs. Whenever Willmore is not involved in physical intimacies, when setting sail for instance, his libertinism puts a strain on his libido. Frederick explains that there is “[n]o friend to love like a long voyage at sea,” but Willmore retorts: “Except a nunnery, Fred” (The Rover 1.2.100-101). Although the repression of their physical desires is caused by divergent sources, it creates the same effect in their conduct. Aughterson notes, however, that Willmore’s expressions focus more on the sexual adventures of Carnival, while Hellena revels in unrestrained, adventurous “rambl[ing]” (171; 1.1.178). Especially in the male comradely
atmosphere of Carnival, Willmore glorifies female bodies. He suggestively talks about the women in disguise of courtesans, called roses, as something he “would fain plant in [his] bed” and at whose “bush” he would like to gather (1.2.85-86, 91). The erotic connotations of ‘bed’ and ‘bush’ (the female pubic hair) specify his search for “[l]ove and mirth” as a libertine thirst for sexual conquests (1.2.73; Aughterson 171).

As Hellena and Willmore are “so of one humour” in their madness, libertinism and wit, La Nuche and Willmore compete in terms of eloquence and mercenariness (5.1.472). Florinda and Belvile also resemble each other by their similarly elevated souls and constancy. Moreover, they occupy the same position as victim in perilous situations (Florinda’s exposure to rape and Belvile’s inequitable suspicion of wounding Antonio)\(^{29}\). Aughterson considers him as a “victim of a series of accidental events” but also as the idealised gentleman with courtly manners (106). Since Behn matches these two pairs in which masculinity and femininity are subordinate to their having similar states of mind, desires and statuses, she envisages a love relationship as a union of two hermaphrodites who reinforce each others’ traits. It is hard to discern whether she believed that marriage was an institution fit to establish this union, since she criticises the practice during the two plays (e.g. Ariadne and Beaumond’s arranged marriage). In any case, Florinda and Belvile embody the idealised couple in matrimony and their pairing is preserved in the sequel, where they still live together.

### 3.4 Conclusion

*The Rover* and its sequel demonstrate comic stock elements in Restoration theatre like weddings, rape attempts and mistaken identities, but these aspects leave a bitter taste in the mouths of the spectators. Since Behn’s female characters are self-willed, active and witty, the audience experiences a clash with the patriarchal social customs that restrain women’s self-

\(^{29}\) Belvile was accused of provoking a duel with Antonio for Angellica, while it was Willmore who was guilty of this rashness and who wounded Antonio.
fulfilment. In her use of marriage, the playwright exposes the unequal and mercenary nature of this institution that regulates and naturalises contemporary ideas of gender. She especially denounces forced or arranged marriages, in which the husband can enrich himself, but the female party can only confine her identity in the socially prescribed gender role for a wife. The motives, as discussed in chapter 2, are particularly monetary in the upper-class realm that she presents on the stage. However, in the first play, Hellena, Florinda and Valeria look to their own amorous interests in the marriage market by becoming the spouse of an English impoverished, but attractive cavalier. It is clear, though, that this companionate approach to the institution of marriage is exceptional and denounced by family and kin on rational “patriarchal” grounds. Pedro glorifies Florinda’s status in her potential marriage with Don Vincentio by ironically stating that “[i]t is a confinement to be carried into the country, to an ancient villa belonging to the family of the Vincentios … and have no other prospect than that pleasing one of seeing all her own that meets her eyes: a fine air, large fields and gardens, where she may walk and gather flowers!” (1.1.93-96). He adheres to the ideology of separate spheres, since his conception of women is patronising and domesticated, but this does not collude with his sisters’. Hellena even prefers a retirement in a nunnery than such a marriage with an old husband. However, in the sequel, Ariadne eventually complies with her parents’ arrangement of her future in that she marries her cousin Beaumont to retain their estate and wealth within the family. La Nuche and Willmore’s match discloses Behn’s sharpened criticism on the institution of marriage, since she portrays the possibility of a “utopian future of unwedded bliss” (Spencer, ‘Introduction’ xv). Like Astell, Behn could hardly conceive of a woman’s happiness as a wife and questions the foundations for the unequal relationship within marriage for the sexes. First of all, she equates practices in marriage to those in prostitution, exposing the similar mercenariness driving men, virgins and prostitutes, as well as the commodification and repression of marriageable ladies of rank and prostitutes.
Secondly, Behn challenges the traditional boundaries between genders by arbitrarily conferring masculine and feminine qualities to both sexes. Her conception of the constructed passive and yielding female sexuality is embodied by Angellica and La Nuche, whereas an unorthodox, but more spontaneous, sensuous identity is incarnated by Hellena and Ariadne. They pursue their erotic appetite like the male characters in the plays do. For Behn, both attitudes towards female sexuality are imaginable in heterosexual relationships. Even though Behn stages patriarchal, enforced marriages as well as companionate bonds, she finds it difficult to envisage the latter within the institution of marriage.
4. Marriage and gender in Eliza Haywood’s *Love in Excess*: “social” female virtue imperilled by natural desire

In this fourth chapter, I examine Eliza Haywood’s use of marriage and gender roles in her first novel, *Love in Excess* (1719-20). Firstly, I discuss her sombre depiction of marriage based on financial motives, since the fatal passion of love claims complete authority in her characters’ lives. As such, marriage can be the impetus for the modern striving individual to obtain financial security, but “Happiness is not always an attendant on Himen” (sic; *Love in Excess* 95). However, Haywood warns her readers against the potentially devastating consequences of pursuing one’s passion, especially for women’s virtue. Secondly, I analyse the destabilisation of gender roles and norms in her characters, whose masculine and feminine qualities come to the surface through the power of love. As such, Haywood transgresses boundaries between binary oppositions like public/private, desire/love and reason/sense, which traditionally separate the male from the female sex, to account for her characters’ androgynous desires.

4.1 Introduction

Eliza Haywood’s first novel *Love in Excess; or, The Fatal Enquiry* (1719-1720) is an excellent example of amatory fiction exploring amorous and sexual relationships in the first half of the eighteenth century. This “Great arbitress of passion” had an exceptional professional life as a woman, similar to Behn’s; she was a playwright, novel writer, pamphleteer and actress who stood her ground in the midst of successful authors like Samuel

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30 James Sterling called Haywood the great arbitress of passion in his celebratory poem addressed to this writer in 1732 (Oakleaf ‘Appendix to *Love in Excess*’ 277-278).
Richardson and Henry Fielding. She was widely criticised in her days for her erotic fiction and public persona, but did not abandon her pen. As such, she could provide an income for herself and her two children (Oakleaf 8, 9, 10). In *Love in Excess*, she deals with gender issues as well as marital harmony and strife while illustrating the patriarchal background of the period. The female reader is offered a narrative that functions as a mirror; by depicting female desires as well as the fatal consequences of their ‘excess,’ the novelist warns against their impact on the female reader’s own (marital) life. Haywood addresses the social construction of virtue in her novel, which is defined in patriarchal terms. Female virtue in her days encompassed chastity, modesty and even complete repudiation of a woman’s sexual nature. However, the author modifies this interpretation of women’s honour as *Love in Excess* reconciles female virtue and sexual desires. For Lubey, Haywood intends to immerse her readers into the characters’ interior turmoil so that they realise the fatal consequences such love in excess can engender for their virtue, but without invoking any feminist criticism on women’s inferior status. This scholar defines Haywood’s strategies to achieve this goal as “an amatory aesthetic” accommodating the delight of the imaginative, sensual world and admonitory instruction during the reading experience (321). Haywood’s objective in writing her novels is formulated in the preface to *Lasselia* (1723) and functions as the basis for Lubey’s argument.

My Design in writing this little *Novel* (as well as those I have formerly publish’d) being only to remind the unthinking Part of the World, how dangerous it is to give way to Passion, will, I hope, excuse the too great Warmth, which may perhaps, appear in some particular Pages; for without the *Expression* being invigorated in some measure proportionate to the *Subject*, ‘twould be impossible for a Reader to be sensible how far it touches him, or how probable it is that he is falling into those Inadvertencies which the Examples I relate wou’d caution him to avoid. (‘Preface to *Lasselia*” vi-vii)
Ballaster, on the other hand, argues that Haywood attempts to incite her readers’ sexual fantasies and identification with the heroine rather than urge some intellectual and critical engagement (170). My interpretation of *Love in Excess* combines Lubey’s amatory aesthetic based on Haywood’s own words with proto-feminist textual evidence from her first novel. I argue that Haywood celebrates love in excess, but also warns against crossing the boundaries of the patriarchal framework. In my view, her moral message conveys that excessive passion can be lethal, but if one is lucky, that is the way to happiness. If a person’s passion is unrequited or incompatible with social codes concerning class, fortune or reputation, such exuberant love can inflict misery and even death on the lovers. As opposed to Lubey, I read *Love in Excess* as an exposition of the ideological restrictions and inequities for the characters belonging to a certain sex category\(^{31}\). As such, the novel can be read as a proto-feminist denouncement of misogynist practices in the early eighteenth century, which is evinced with some stereotypical and discriminating ideas about masculinity and femininity. The author reveals the tension between the cogitations of her female characters in particular, like Melliora in whose consciousness social codes struggle against personal motives. Moreover, female and male characters are both ascribed masculine and feminine qualities, especially when they suffer from their excessive passion and their natural emotions prevail. However, whereas sexual gratification seems easily accessible and unproblematic for male characters, it forms an overwhelming conflict in the female mind. The double standard does not operate because of major sexual differences, but because of socially imposed gender roles confining women’s emotions but liberating male passions. By disclosing the nature of female sexuality and associating it with male desires, Haywood demands a space within the ideology of patriarchy for the acknowledgment of female passions, thus for women’s rights to liberate more natural impulses. Nevertheless, Haywood could only consider this acquisition of more

\(^{31}\) Cf. the analytical division of sex, sex category and gender by West and Zimmerman in 1.1.2, p. 9.
female rights within the patriarchal framework that dominated social interactions and institutions. As such, marriage encompassed female sexuality, in that a woman’s major virtue, her virginity, had to be preserved until the wedding night. If she gave a loose to her passions before her marriage or in an adulterous relationship, she became a fallen woman, whereas men like D’Elmont and the Baron in the novel ignored these restrictions, as the consequences are less severe in their case. Therefore, Haywood warns against loveless marriages, in which the wife’s sexuality is restrained, but where she is also subjected to her husband’s potential adulterous relationships. This sexual and emotional subordination manifests itself in arranged marriages as well, which offer few opportunities for marital love. In the following sections, I will exemplify these contentions by examining textual features as well as characters’ interactions and power relations and link these first to the realm of marriage, a main impetus in eighteenth-century individuals’ actions, and subsequently to gender roles.

4.2 Variety in marital relationships: from misery and confinement to bliss

According to Oakleaf, Love in Excess plays on the upcoming image of the self-made bourgeois, as portrayed in Defoe’s Robinson Crusoe (1719), but Haywood adds to this modern individualism the turnover from patriarchal to more companionate marriages (11). How does Haywood inscribe this focus on emotional motives, rather than economic ones, for marriage in her novel? First of all, Haywood celebrates the power and bliss of love. As Oakleaf notes, the novel starts with ambition, including financial motives in marriage; Count D’Elmont rejects a possible marriage to the impoverished, but still upper-class Amena because she cannot offer him an important dowry (11). However, he consents to a marriage with Alovysa, who enjoys an exceptional independence as “co-heiress (with her sister [Ansellina],) of a vast estate” (Love in Excess 38). As Trumbach notes, mercenary marriages
become less common in the eighteenth-century because of the emphasis on a good understanding between spouses (71). Whereas the Count embodies the striving individual of capitalism at this early point in the novel, Alovysa is driven by passion in her marriage. Haywood’s contemporary Astell inveighs in her *Reflections upon Marriage* against a gallant rake like D’Elmont, who ascribes Alovysa’s anonymous love letters to Amena and “consider[s] a mistress as an agreeable, as well as fashionable amusement” (40). In Astell’s words, the Count will be “trying all his Arts to gratify his brutal Passion, at the Price of all that is dear to her,” in this case Amena’s reputation (10). This libertine, but irresponsible conduct towards women demonstrates that he regards pre-marital sex as an “amusement” for himself, but does not consider the social sanctions involved for Amena. He even claims that a woman is only “a toy” (78). Moreover, this thought reveals that D’Elmont has not yet experienced passion and it prefigures his assertion that love is a “trifle and below the dignity of a man of sense” (42). He embodies the ideologically prevalent idea that reason is masculine, whereas physicality and subjection to feeling, i.e. sensibility, is feminine (Harrow 284). He considers it a sort of “disease,” which in women’s minds may degenerate into the psychosis of hysteria (76; Ballaster 172).

Astell cautions her female readers that a “real or pretended Passion soon cools into Indifference, Neglect, or perhaps Aversion” (5). Alovysa vividly experiences this transformation. Only a month after their wedding, she perceives an alteration in D’Elmont’s behaviour towards her. From attentive and affectionate, he becomes full of “coldness” after his infatuation with Melliora and lapses into a “damned indifference [that] is worse than the most vile abuse” (93, 131). Alovysa even becomes “distasteful to his fancy” (90). Before his

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32 In a patriarchal and patrilineal system, adultery or pre-marital sex was considered to entail more serious repercussions for women than for men. Property heritage through the male line could become precarious with bastards resulting from adultery. This responsibility for women would account for the sexual “double standard” for men and women according to Turner (13).

33 Ballaster’s identification of Alovysa’s madness as hysteria, considered a mental illness, echoes Boebel’s remark on “erotomania” in Behn’s *The Rover*, where “madness” can proceed from the disavowal of female sexuality (Ballaster 172; Boebel 60).
passion for Melliora has sprung up, the Count is one of those “insipids” whom the narrator criticises for their disregard of the power of passion (Drury 221).

These *insipids*, who know nothing of the matter, tell us very gravely, that we *ought* to love with moderation and discretion, - and take care that it is for our interest, - that we should never place our affections, but where duty leads, or at least, where neither religion, reputation, or law, may be a hindrance to our wishes. (186)

The narrator distances herself and other believers in passionate love from these “Wretches” (186). Haywood definitely considers the social institutions of “religion, reputation, or law” as things lovers “leave undone ... which [they] ought not” (186). Nonetheless, this obligation to conform does not appear to stem from moral considerations, because in Haywood’s ethics lovers are exalted. Living up to the patriarchal standards of social life is therefore a socio-cultural and economic necessity in her novel, not a moral duty.

Alovysa’s power in her marriage is ultimately revealed to be insignificant; D’Elmont’s adulterous behaviour fires Alovysa’s jealousy, but even when she confronts him with her suspicions and asserts her power, this will not do her any good. Although she is known as an “absolute ... mistress” in the household, she cannot sanction her husband’s behaviour, since she has selected him as her “Monarch for life” (*Love in Excess* 43; Astell 49). Her resentment is even used by her husband to legitimate pursuing his extramarital passion, since now he scorns her for making him “that wretched thing a husband” (99). The narrator formulates this use of adultery as a universal principle in marriage between “Man” and his “wife”.

Man is too arbitrary a creature to bear the least contradiction, where he pretends an absolute authority, and that wife who thinks by ill humour and perpetual taunts, to make him weary of what she would reclaim him from, only renders herself more hateful, and makes that justifiable which before was blameable in him. (96-97)
For D’Elmont, Alovysa now embodies the stereotypes associated with a wife by her “insolent – jealous – and censorious” behaviour, so she forces him to “exert the – husband,” the absolute ruler of the household (99; Drury 221). Because she lacks the capacity to subject him to her will, she attempts to distress him through his brother Brillian, who is in love with her sister Ansellina. She prevents the continuation of their courtship by calling on Ansellina’s familial loyalty to observe her wishes. However, this wife’s untamed passion for D’Elmont was not extinguished by his overt adultery, but even if it had been, Alovysa could not have escaped his authority by a divorce since “death was virtually the sole agent for dissolving marriage”34 (Road 2). Alovysa’s fate is sealed; in the final, climactic scene of part II of the novel she is stabbed by her husband’s sword in an unfortunate, nightly accident. Harrow considers this event a forceful reaffirmation of patriarchal authority through its “phallic symbolism” (297). Since Alovysa’s love letters challenged the notion of women’s imposed silence in love and marriage matters, she is punished for her impropriety to enter on a courtship with D’Elmont, which is reserved for the male party. Moreover, she seems to have internalised this cultural restriction concerning her “sex”. Even though she cannot stand the obligation of discretion and modesty which stops her from openly declaring her love for D’Elmont, she calls herself “bewitched to harbour such a thought as even the vilest of [her] sex would blush at” (44). This is reminiscent of Lorber’s statement that ascribed gender roles, and as such the patriarchal values constructing these roles, are incorporated in human nature. Thus, “culture becomes destiny” (Lorber 101). Similarly, R.W. Connell links hegemonic masculinity with “emphasized femininity,” formulated as the female conforming to male interests and desires (23). The mixture of these two behavioural concepts provides the driving

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34 This is with exception of a wife’s adultery which was a legitimate reason to conclude a divorce (Road 2). Astell notes that “There are some Reasons, (for the Laws of God and Man allow Divorces in certain cases) though not many, that authorize a Wife’s leaving her Husband, but if anything short of absolute Necessity, from irreclaimable Vice and cruelty, prevails with her to break these sacred and strongest Bonds, how is she expos’d to Temptations and Injuries, Contempt, and the just Censure of the World” (9). As such, a divorce was not an obvious option for women since their future life as a divorcee is condemned by their community.
force for the preservation of patriarchy (23). Furthermore, the male characters’ conception of women is in line with the established female gender role; at first, D’Elmont calls women “a toy,” an idea which his brother tries to reject, and cultivates the image of Melliora as a yielding maid who should “fall a sacrifice to love” (78, 114). The Chevalier has already fallen in love at this point, whereas the Count has not yet encountered this passion. Apparently, this objectification of women by D’Elmont and his brother’s disagreeing with this are related to their personal attitudes towards women.

Nevertheless, Alovysa continues to exploit her female agency. She witnesses the Count’s amorous interactions with Amena, and demonstrates her power by precluding a further liaison and betraying Amena’s passion for D’Elmont to the girl’s father. It is Alovysa who suggests him to send her to a convent, because, as Amena recalls, “she has power with [her] father” (60). Although Amena has not lost her virginity, which assures her marriageability, the suggestion of this possibility destroys her reputation. Moreover, Amena has hazarded her entire family’s reputation since family honour is often equated with the virtue of the female descendants; as stated before, Okin argues that the privacy of the household is the realm of unfolding patriarchal cultural values. Women bear the largest share of this ideological yoke in the domestic sphere (Is Multiculturalism Bad for Women? 12). This female responsibility is illustrated by Amena’s father’s upbraiding to his daughter that “neither the considerations of the honour of your family, your own reputation, nor my eternal repose [could] deter you from such imprudent actions” (48). Once a woman’s honour was discredited, she would become a marginalised, fallen woman to patriarchal norms and would scandalise her family. This degraded status is feared by all women in the novel and directs their actions.

The Count, on the other hand, enjoys his male privilege in adulterous relationships and transgresses his vow of loyalty to his wife Alovysa by having sex with Melantha, a flirt, while
he believes it is Melliora whom he seduces. When Alovysa enters the scene of the deceit, the Count is not first and foremost concerned with his own reputation and violated spousal duty, since “‘tis hard to say, which was the greatest, the Count’s concern for his imagined Melliora’s honour, or Melantha’s for her own” (142). Baron D’Espernay, who encouraged D’Elmont in his attempt to sneak into Melliora’s room is mortified when he realises it is his sister Melantha who received D’Elmont in her bed. Even though the Baron himself tried to bribe Alovysa for sex in return for revealing the Count’s lover’s name to her, he calls his sister a “shame of thy sex, and everlasting blot and scandal of the noble house thou art descended from” (144). Wild with anger, he even wants to “stabb thee” (sic; 144). Even outside the realm of marriage, the moral standard for women and men was unequal and conceived from a male hegemonic point of view, which was already demonstrated by the maiden Amena. This is also expressed by the narrator, who explains this phallocentric morality by saying “[f]ew men, how amorous soever themselves, care for that the female part of their family should be so” (sic; 144). As for the Baron, he is not in the least concerned with his sister’s love life, except for the consequences it entails for his own reputation. The coquette 35 Melantha eventually has sex with the Count, but the threat of social ostracism hangs over her head by her illegitimate pregnancy, so she deludes her future spouse by assuring that she is “married in a short time, and ha[s] the good fortune not to be suspected by her husband, though she br[ings] him a child in seven months after her wedding” (159).

The divergence of values connected to male and female honour exemplify another mechanism of the double standard in the aristocratic society of the period. As West and Zimmerman propose, people “do gender” as an unconscious “routine” activity (126). We incorporate codes concerning gender as part of our identity and feeling of self-worth (Lorber

35 A coquette is “[a] woman (more or less young), who uses arts to gain the admiration and affection of men, merely for the gratification of vanity or from a desire of conquest, and without any intention of responding to the feelings aroused” (OED).
Throughout the novel, the characters are made conscious of what it means to be, or rather, to be identified as belonging to the sex category of women or men, because they have to behave according to certain gendered rules. This means, for instance, that honour or virtue is defined differently for a man than for a woman. Men gain esteem in war through “brave actions,” like D’Elmont and his brother, whereas a woman had “virtue and pride [as] the guardians of her honour” and was only to accept “the way thro’ honour to receive [a man because] religion, reason, modesty and obedience forbid the rest” (Haywood 37, 58, 55). This disparity becomes a “structure” conferring and legitimating authority to those in power (Lorber 100). This is definitely true in light of the patriarchal background of Haywood’s plot.

Marriage as a social and religious institution creates and sustains this gender disparity. Often, the image of the husband as the head36 and the wife as the body was used to account for male domination in the private sphere (Turner 55). In this religious conception of a married couple as one person, it becomes clear how male reason and will are privileged, while the female is “headed” by (and as such subordinated to) her husband.

Interestingly, the Count’s adultery and the Baron’s intent to seduce Alovysa challenge the boundaries set by marriage vows, but they are not condemned for pursuing their sexual desires. The Count and Melliora marry at the close of the novel, the Baron’s treachery of the Count goes unproven, and even Melantha evades social scorn except for her brother’s reproaches. I believe that Haywood drew a discreet veil over these illicit sexual encounters to highlight the force of love, and to even celebrate excessive passion. Love becomes the most necessary condition for a happy marriage in Haywood’s novel, exemplified by D’Elmont’s reformation; although “[a]mbition was the reigning passion in his soul, and Alovisa’s quality and vast possessions, promising a full gratification of that, he ne’er so much wished to know, a farther happiness in marriage,” the reformed D’Elmont touched by passion also revises this

36 Astell warns women to “make a Fool her Head” (49).
conception of marriage (76). Later on he deplores his haste “to a hymen, where love (the noblest guest) was wanting” (90).

The ‘threat’ of marrying without love equally horrifies Camilla, who has found her lover in Frankville, not in the arranged repulsive spouse of Cittolini. As the daughter of Ciamara’s late husband, she is forced by this widow to make her brother Cittolini “master of her person,” which Ciamara “resolved to do … or confine her in a monastery for ever” (sic; 189). These two options are the only ones provided for Camilla, but “[a] Woman … can’t be properly be said to Choose; all that is allow’d her is to Refuse or Accept what is offer’d” (Astell 37). She escapes these trajectories, though, by evading the patriarchal authority transmitted from her father to her stepmother Ciamara. She elopes with Frankville. As Prescott notes, Amena and Melliora take the two courses stipulated by patriarchal standards: the way to a nunnery and the path of marriage. Those are the two major tracks of life delineated within the patriarchal framework in amatory fiction (432). Haywood employs the trope of a nunnery to challenge the traditional idea of confinement within a nunnery as opposed to the relative liberty in a married woman’s life. Amena, Melliora and Camilla all find a refuge from heterosexual interactions in the tranquillity of a nunnery. However, they do not have resort there completely according to their will; Amena is compelled by her father, and reluctantly says “adieu to all the gay delights and pleasures of [her] youth” whereas Melliora considers the monastery a location for a “voluntary banishment from all she ever … love[d], [and] the guilt of indulging that passion, which was a crime” (91, 159). In a subplot where Melliora is abducted by the Marques D’Sanguillier, she implores him to “[r]elease [her] from this captivity, … [and to] restore [her] to the monastery” (255). As such, she clearly defines his desire for obtaining and marrying her as a prison-like destiny, whereas the monastery is a place of freedom in this context. One should keep in mind that a monastery is a safe, but also a locked place with its own restrictions. Nevertheless, these seem far more
preferable than those entailed in a forced marriage for most female characters. Like Melliora, Camilla prefers a residence in a monastery although “a monastick life was what she had no inclination to, yet she would fly to that shelter, to avoid his bed” (sic; 192). Frankville was brought to think his Camilla a flirt and even when he recalls his words of distrust, she “is resolved to act the heroine [and] ... determined for a cloyster (sic; 230). It should be noted that in this place patriarchy has no say. Arguably, these women’s only possible retreat from patriarchy is preferred over an enforced marriage (cf. Camilla) or over the confrontation with patriarchal customs (cf. Melliora). As they cannot reform the dominant culture, because they are not in the privileged powerful position, their only choice is to lead the life that patriarchy has stipulated for them or to escape to a different life of subjection: a life dedicated to God. Harrow regards private spaces like bedrooms, enclosed gardens and nunneries as “spaces that body forth desire through language” (294). Amena and Melliora continue writing within the walls of the nunnery and express their passion to the Count in their letters. As such, the monastery is less a restrictive area than a liberating and exclusively feminine realm where the female characters are released from the patriarchal decorum of female silence and the disproportionate value set on their virtue. There they are neither silenced nor desexualised.

Nonetheless, the female characters who end up happily still find themselves encompassed by patriarchal obligations within marriage. Camilla voluntarily avoids Ciamara’s and Cittolini’s authority and a convent to subject herself again to Frankville’s authority as a husband. Melliora explicitly desires that “all power of disposing of [her]self must cease; ‘tis they [i.e., her brother Frankville and her guardian D’Elmont who] must, henceforth rule the will of Melliora” (261). Melliora’s companion in the nunnery, Charlotta, was abandoned by her arranged, but beloved spouse the Marques for the “matchless Melliora”

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37 Only Ciamara consents to a marriage for money to the much older Signior Fialasco because “she found charms enough in his wealth to balance all other deficiencies” (sic; 188). Like in D’Elmont’s mind, ambition instead of love determines her decisions in marriage.
This character even outstrips Melliora in her prostration before the Marques, which she performs in the knowledge of his betrayal and his wish to marry Melliora. She declares her everlasting love for him and by her dress as a bride also her wish to marry him; “Wonder not, my lord, … to see Charlotta here, nothing is impossible to love like mine; tho’ slighted and abandoned by you, still I pursue your steps with truth, with tenderness, and constancy untired” (emphasis added; sic; 262). Her wifely subordination to her future “lord” outshines all others, since she obediently returns to her proposed husband while recognising his disloyalty, even before their marriage. Even though these women conform to female “Passive-Obedience,” a necessary mode of conduct for a wife, they are presented as women who are free to settle their future (Astell 44; Oakleaf 20). All female characters pursue their emotional and sexual desires, so as to determine their own path of life, and thus cross the boundaries set by patriarchy. However challenging and transgressive these women’s actions may seem in this light, they ultimately confine themselves to the realm proposed to them by the dominant ideology; they marry (Alvysa, Ansellina, Melantha, Melliora, Charlotta and Camilla), become a nun (Amena and Melliora), or tragically flee to their death to evade a too important transgression of social codes (Violetta) or a too great suffering from their unrequited passion for the Count (Ciamara and Alvysa).

4.3 Challenging gender inequities

Eliza Haywood introduces feelings about and conflicts with gender in her seduction narratives, as other women authors like Aphra Behn and Delarivier Manley did before her. They address the problem of finding a language for female desire and power and they

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38 One should bear in mind that, although Alvysa does not commit suicide, she does escape the torments of living with the unloving Count, since her death separates them for good. Ciamara poisons herself in a moment of despair for the Count’s neglect of her love. Violetta dies in the arms of D’Elmont at the end of the novel. She fell ill from the knowledge that her father Cittolini became feverish due to her absence and eventually died. In her last moment, she confesses her love to D’Elmont, so that “after this shameful declaration, [it] would be the worst of punishments [to live]” (265).
question current ideas about masculinity and femininity in the depiction of their characters (Prescott 429). Even though political motives seem farfetched in amatory fiction, Behn and Haywood demonstrate how these can be combined with pleasure and instruction for the reader of novels or the spectator of drama. Haywood privileges a feminine world in *Love in Excess* and this offers the reader a unique insight in the lives, mainsprings and agency of the female characters. In this section, I will discuss her exposure and challenging of gender as a construction that places the sexes into two stereotyped categories of gender. Thus, it differentiates female and male desire, renders verbal language phallocentric, commodifies women and denies women a chance for education and experience, however necessary in a male hegemonic world.

The major theme in *Love in Excess*, excessive passion, enables the characters to act according to their personal drives and disregard some of their imposed gender role duties. Consequently, the reader observes correspondences between men and women, which the social need for gender role enactment precludes to show. Haywood appears to agree on the eighteenth-century belief that women’s senses are more receptive of impressions and thus as the “weaker Vessel” they are more prone to excessive reactions on passionate love (Astell 62; Lubey 313). D’Elmont expresses this ideology of the ‘softer’ woman as he wonders if “there was even a possibility for woman, so much stronger in her fancy, and weaker in her judgment, to suppress the influence of that powerful passion” (172). He believes that Ciamara’s “fancy” has unleashed her love for him, as it “too often, especially in [her] sex, blinds the judgment” (209). As such, Haywood supports the prevalence of reason and feeling in respectively men and women and sustains this dichotomy established along gender oppositions. Yet, these utterances are spoken by a male character and rather represent a paternalistic point of view; the inordinate mental states stemming from love, such as “madness” and hysteria are equally present in male and female characters in the novel. The narrator posits that “passion is not to
be circumscribed; and being not only, not subservient, but absolutely *controller* of the *will*, it would be meer madness, as well as ill nature to say a person was blame-worthy for what was unavoidable (sic; 185). Ballaster argues that they experience similar desires, but that a woman’s body undergoes more forceful sensations stemming from these feelings (171). However, from the use of the general term “person,” I deduce that Haywood postulates here that both sexes are subject to excessive passion. Melliora struggles “to madness” to resist the Count’s charms, but he gets “a wildness in his countenance, a trembling horror shaking all his fabrick” at the sight of her (sic; 124, 87). Alovysa “tore her hair and face, … and was ready to lay violent hands on her own life” (43). She also faints a couple of times, as does Ciamara in her distress about D’Elmont’s indifference. Ciamara even commits suicide in the end, avowing that “D’Elmont … was the cause of her dispar” (sic; 244). In the course of the novel, D’Elmont is no longer “this insensible” due to Melliora’s charms and “their admiration of each others perfections was *mutual*” (emphasis added; sic; 86). Presumably, Ciamara’s and Alovysa’s hysterical outbursts rather point to the “powerlessness” typical of the hysteric, since they crave for D’Elmont’s love in vain (Ballaster 173). Moreover, along with the other female characters, they are hushed regarding their strong feelings and encounter the borders of propriety set by the phallocentric culture. This confinement enhances their inner struggle, so that their hysteria becomes a way to express their impeded agency in heterosexual relationships. Even if Haywood concedes women’s lesser bodily strength, she does not disavow the potential force of their minds. During the elopement, Camilla and Fidelio (Violetta in disguise) suffer from the speed they take on irregular roads, so that they “would never have been able to support it, if the strength of their *minds*, had not by far, exceeded that of their *bodies*” (244). Furthermore, the narrator explains the nature of noble love where “*reason* is not … debased to *sense*, but *sense* elevates itself to *reason*, the different powers
unite, and become pure alike” (224). True love obscures the dichotomy of feminine sensibility and masculine reason and renders both qualities elevated in the souls of lovers.

Haywood blurs the cultural distinction of reason/sense, private/public and, as such, masculine/feminine (Harrow 284; Potter 173). Both women and men present stereotypically masculine and feminine qualities. D’Elmont is implicitly commodified as “the beauty of his person … made him the admiration of both sexes” (Love in Excess 37). The typical feminine objectification is occasioned by his charms, but he remains a very man and perfectly devoid of amorous feelings at that point (Potter 173). His ambition and military achievements locate him in the public sphere, but after Alovysa’s tragic death and Melliora’s entrance into a nunnery, “[a]mbition … was now wholly extinguished in him by these misfortunes” (163). He retires to his own privacy in Italy, where “[i]n vain, all the Roman nobility court[s] his acquaintance … [and he] prefer[s] a solitary walk” (165-6). As “he shun[s] as much as possible all conversation with the men, or correspondence with the women” he becomes the courted one because women like Ciamara do not refrain from sending him amorous letters (166). This Italian lady suffers from the “rigid rules [of her culture that] are bar’s, as well to reason, as to nature” (sic; 166). She considers them an ineluctable obstacle to satisfying her mental needs, as well as her ‘natural,’ emotional wishes. These prescriptions are even more severe than in D’Elmont’s France, “where women are allowed the previledge of being seen and addressed to” but where it would still be “a crime unpardonable to modesty, to make the first advances” (sic; 166). Ciamara points out that her urge to address him has crossed the rules of decorum, but she could no longer “feign an insensibility of [his] merit” (166). The role of suitor is thus interpreted by Ciamara, as it was by Alovysa in her anonymous courting letters.

The use of letters by these female characters is an act of rebellion against gender prescriptions and male hegemonic power over verbal language. Haywood’s use of this
epistolary genre paradoxically follows and opposes patriarchal expectations for women; women were allowed to write personal letters, but they were supposed to remain restricted to the private sphere, not to be published (Harrow 285). Potter states that Haywood expresses private experiences of female sexuality and offers them for sale on the public literary marketplace. As such, she situates “women’s desire and women’s communication in a sphere where the private has intrinsic economic value” (170). The meta-level of the narrative mirrors the actions by the female characters within the narrative, as they transgress the limited borders of articulating their feelings. They formulate their desires to their beloved D’Elmont, but “accidents … happen to letters” and, as such, offer them to public scrutiny (60). Potter develops John Richetti’s argument that “speech is marked as masculine” and links it to Love in Excess, where she encounters eight cases of women’s incapacity to express themselves, especially relating to their sexual desires, but even thirteen occurrences of male inexpressibility about emotions (Richetti 267; Potter 171). Verbal language is not apt for the expression of sexuality and love, even for male characters.

Gargano illustrates how the author compensates for this inefficiency in verbal language by having her characters share thoughts through the language of the eyes. Whereas “verbal language confines women and limits them according to rigid social codes, ... the language of the eyes offers a realm of female agency masked as an instinctual bodily response” (514). Haywood’s focus on the female gaze involves an androgynous reinterpretation of the term “voyeurism”. By privileging this nonverbal language as a communication form of sexual desire – in which verbal language is deficient – she blurs the subject/object distinction because the active and passive roles intermingle (cf. “spectator” vs. “spectacle”) (515). Both parties in an erotic exchange of glances receive as well as convey unmediated visual expressions. In this sense, women can overcome the discursive decorum of hushing up their interior feelings and communicate their attraction to their desired ‘object’.  

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Furthermore, Gargano states that this body language often conveys more authenticity than verbal language, since the latter medium can be used to deceive (515). In their game of love, D’Elmont and Melliora understand their mutual feelings, because the language of the eyes is “a covert code that is comprehensible to ‘all ... that truly love,’” but they still employ verbal language to “perform” socially acceptable, but deceptive behaviour (Gargano 527). Butler formulated gender as a “performative” activity, because the human identity consists of “fabrications manufactured and sustained through corporeal signs and other discursive means” (417). Gargano argues for the language of the eyes being unaffected by gender norms, as opposed to verbal language which encodes and sustains gender inequalities (522). This deception through speech seems to be a vital talent for women like Amena, in that “the art of dissimulation, so necessary to her sex” was lacking in her, so she could not conceal her sensibility to the Count’s gallantry (46). Melliora, on the other hand, demonstrates her internalised patriarchal values and her ‘art’ of concealment by explaining her perspective on meritorious love.

[Meritorious love is] in the first place that which we owe to heaven; in the next to our king, our country, parents, kindred, friends; and lastly, that which fancy inclines, and reason guides us to, in a partner for a life; but here every circumstance must agree, parity of age, of quality, of fortune, and of humour, consent of friends and equal affection in each other [.] (109)

This attitude makes the people in her company believe “she was born only to create desire, not be[ing] susceptible of it her self” (sic; 107). Melliora’s arguing “against giving way to [sexual] love” makes her a master in dissimulation (107). Yet, her own subjection to this passion is displayed in physical reactions, for instance when she “began to tremble, not with fear, but desire” as the Count entered her room (130).
As opposed to the “unmasking” language of the eyes, masquerade is a concealing strategy to evade women’s imposed silence (Gargano 527). As Hellena and Ariadne in *The Rover*, Melantha, Camilla, Ciamara and Violetta conceal their real identity to attain a certain objective. Melantha overhears her brother’s plan to secure the Count’s taking Melliora’s virginity and switches bedrooms with her, so she can share a night with him in Melliora’s name. Ciamara pretends to be Camilla when D’Elmont visits her stepdaughter at Frankville’s request. Thus, she can ascertain that the Count is not in love with Camilla. The latter assumes the identity of Violetta, Frankville’s proposed bride, since she longs to know if her unveiled face would suit the man whom she secretly adores. Violetta performs the most radical form of masquerading since she dons the clothes of the male page Fidelio to join D’Elmont on his return to France. With her masculine disguise she translates her almost masculine qualities of perseverance and autonomy, as well as her passion for the Count. She appeals for the inclusion for women in men’s greater freedom of action by dressing up as one. Ballaster proposes that the convention of masquerade “functions as a site in which gender inversion and amatory activity is licensed under the sanction of organized ‘secrecy’” (179). The female characters demonstrate the power of female agency, in disguise or in their letters, but also point to the need for a physical distance to be able to exercise their will. As corresponding women, their letters bridge the distance with their lovers, but by disguising, their dress creates an artificial and deluding distance with their beloved without revealing their identity and undergoing possibly negative judgments as themselves. This distance offers them a unique opportunity to express their genuine feelings and to even take control over the situation by unmasking and masking. Thus, “female modesty, far from being an essentialized trait, is merely a restrictive social and linguistic convention” but it is a necessary aspect of feminine behaviour, since “the traditional rhetoric of love tends to betray the women who employ it” (Gargano 522).
Nevertheless, as a novelist, Haywood relies heavily on verbal language, but she plies it in a parodic way. As Prescott notes, the narrator frequently uses military terms to describe the mutual and equal forces of seduction in the love game between D’Elmont and Melliora. Haywood obscures gender differences as the same language is evoked for both sexes. Consequently, she questions the traditional roles of the sexes in love with a male conquering a yielding maid. The Count remains “a male version of the cruel mistress” until he meets Melliora, whose eyes begin a “conquest” to which his heart “surrendered” (Oakleaf 12; *Love in Excess* 70). This recurrent metaphor of conquest implies that his heart is conquered by the idealised Melliora, so she becomes an active subject. Usually, this ‘love-is-a-conquest’ metaphor represents the male party as the active conqueror, whereas the woman becomes a victim to his charms. Words like “victory,” “trophy,” “artillery of love” and “sacrifice to love” all belong to the realm of war, booty and conquest, common metaphors for love that are also exploited in Behn’s *The Rover* (49, 45, 70, 114). This imagery culminates in the expression that D’Elmont would “wander, knight-errand like, over the whole world ‘till he had found [Melliora]” (emphasis added; 237). However, this imagery is also applied to evoke the dangers for women’s reputation as Melliora calls D’Elmont a “dangerous enemy to her honour” (129). In this phrase, Melliora signals the risk of rape and focuses on D’Elmont’s dangerous desire. As such, Haywood “condone[s] the representation of female desire by a subtle deflection of attention away from the woman’s desire to the force and deception of the male” (Prescott 433). Moreover, Haywood counteracts the “male subject/female object” dichotomy by proposing a female perspective. The Count forms a dangerously attractive object in the female gaze, since for Alovysa he becomes “the object of her wishes” and Ciamara “d[ies] ... if [she does] not possess him” (emphasis added; 77, 176).

The incorporation of a female active stance into language of war implies a claim for a female agency in the game of love. For Melliora, D’Elmont is “not an object to be safely
gazed at,” but they are both touched by each other’s charms and “when her eyes met his, the
god of love seemed there to have united all his lightnings for one effectual blaze ... [but] it
was hard to say whose passion was the strongest ... [and] they were exchanging glances, as if
each vyed with the other who should dart the fiercest rays” (86-87). Gargano points out that
Haywood follows the tradition in which the male has “the start in love ... [but] the softness of
[Melliora’s] soul, made up for that little loss of time” (529; Love in Excess 86). Both parties
enter “a battle of fierce glances” (530). Melliora receives masculine traits as a “warrior in a
battle of glances” whereas D’Elmont signals his feminised sensibility as his eyes “convey a
bewitching softness” (Gargano 531; Love in Excess 56). Consequently, Haywood “use[s] and
abuse[s]” this tradition of war metaphors (Hutcheon 180)\(^{39}\).

*Love in Excess* provides a unique insight into the sexual politics of early eighteenth
century England. It foregrounds the nature of female desire by exploring the interior struggle
between natural sexual needs and women’s duty to conform to their imposed gender role,
especially in the character of Melliora. Bowers argues that this young maiden personifies the
coexistence of virtue and sexuality through the “paradox that we might call ‘collusive
resistance’” (58). Melliora admits her passion for D’Elmont, and thus opposes patriarchal
demands concerning female expression, but she maintains her resistance to the Count’s sexual
advances. As such, she still embodies female virtue. Her resistance “colludes” with desire,
and her desire becomes fully compatible with, or even part of her virtue. Haywood’s
conception of femininity suggests that “female virtue and sexual agency ... are not mutually
exclusive options” (Bowers 57). However, she challenges the culturally prevalent definition
of female virtue that implies that women abstain from erotic feelings and are considered

\(^{39}\) Even though Linda Hutcheon applies her theory of parody to postmodernist fiction, I believe that her
definition of parody is applicable to Haywood’s use of military language. What Hutcheon “means by “parody”
here is not the ridiculing imitation of the standard theories and definitions that are rooted in eighteenth-century
theories of wit. The collective weight of parodic practice suggests a redefinition of parody as *repetition with
critical distance that allows ironic signaling of difference at the very heart of similarity* which consists of the
“use and abuse” of literary conventions (emphasis added; 185).
asexual beings as opposed to men. Haywood voices their muted sexuality and redefines women’s virtue to include sexual agency. Therefore, it is not the lack of desire that assures female honour, or the silencing of female eroticism, but the manner in which desire is communicated (Bowers 49). For Haywood, this implies that her female characters have to express their passion in accordance with patriarchal notions of femininity. The rebellion against ideological restrictions is sometimes necessary, but must remain within certain bounds. Melliora is rewarded with her possession of the Count at the end of the novel, since she was able to preserve her virginity and thus her virtue, but Camilla lost it to Frankville even before they were married. When Ciamara feigned to be Camilla in the Count’s presence, Frankville starts to believe that she is not faithful to him and he scorns her. Camilla thinks that “his fancy [has thrown] a glittering burnish o’re [her], which free possession has worn off” (emphasis added; 221). She is aware of the risk of intercourse before marriage and considers it a “guilty folly of believing that, in [his] sex, ardors could survive enjoyment” (sic; 221). Camilla gets a foretaste of the possible consequences of pre-marital sex. She is devastated by Frankville’s rejection, but in the end she is still rewarded with a marriage to her lover. Her virtue stands its ground, even after the loss of her virginity.

Less fortunate women handle their desire less cautiously. Melantha longs for an illicit sexual encounter with D’Elmont and tells him he “ought to be better acquainted with the temper of our sex, and know that a woman, where she says she loves, expects a thousand fine things in return” (126). He poetically replies her forwardness by stating that “[a]ll naturally fly, what does pursue / ‘Tis fit men should be coy, when women woe” (126). Ciamara personifies the stereotype of the lecherous widow. She loses all the Count’s esteem when she still wants to indulge her passion for him, even when he has declared to have feelings for another woman. She wonders if he is “that dull, cold Platonist, which can prefer the visionary pleasures of an absent mistress, to the warm transports of the substantial present?” (224).
Apparently, Ciamara’s desire does not spring from elevated love, since she “wished no farther than to possess his lovely person, his mind was the least of her thoughts” (225). This passage echoes the Baron’s declaration to Alovysa that, “if he could not have her heart, nothing but the full possession of her person should extort the secret from him” (emphasises added; 154). Many characters harbour libertine desires, but only Melantha and Ciamara are denounced for it. The Baron’s intentions remain unsanctioned, while Ciamara is considered “a common courtizan” by D’Elmont (225). Nevertheless, D’Elmont is “warmed with her fires, and, perhaps, more moved by curiosity, her behaviour having extinguished all his respect, he gave his hands and eyes a full enjoyment of all [her] charms” (225). Still, her aggressive behaviour leaves her unrewarded and even drags her into misery and death. Haywood thus cautions against showing a too great sexual forwardness (Bowers 50). Potter asserts that Haywood employs the language of libertinism while recognising its paradoxical function in that “this discourse that silences and wounds so many women is equally one whose consistent cultural disruptiveness opens doors for a small number of privileged women to move into masculinised realms of sexuality, power and subversion” (176). As such, Haywood also blurs the distinction between stereotypically masculine “lust” and feminine “love” as opposing desires reserved for men or women (174). Ballaster argues that male desire is often depicted as “short-lived and end-directed” whereas female desire is “masochistic, self-destructive and hysterical” (175). The first definition is embodied by the Baron, who craves for one night of erotic pleasure with Alovysa, whereas this woman represents the miserable, hysterical wife whose mad desire leads to her death. Ciamara’s desire rather mingles both masculine and feminine interpretations of desire, since she commits suicide, but equally desires to give rein to her libertine desires, even if it is merely a once-only experience with the Count.

Melliora, on the contrary, protects her virginity while subordinating herself to patriarchal power; she attempts to preserve her honour by urging the Count to “think” and act
accordingly (109). She tells him to “prove your self the heroe, subdue your self, as you have conquered me, be satisfied with vanquishing my soul, fix there your throne, but leave my honour free!” (sic; 123-4). However, the Baron encourages him to rape her, since “[w]omen are taught by custom to deny what most they covet, and to seem angry when they are best pleased” so it was decided that “Melliora should fall a sacrifice to love” (113-4). Here, the Baron seems to acknowledge a female eroticism, but he simultaneously undermines his statement by denying Melliora a confirmation of sexual consent. Drury notes that Haywood presents her characters as “machines” that cannot be subjected to moral norms, since passion is an absolute “controller of the will” (Drury 211; Love in Excess 185). Nevertheless, Haywood explores the “formation of a deliberating female consciousness” in Melliora, whose internal struggle “is not to be understood as between a true or immaterial self and physical desire, or between the mind and the body, but between contending passions of equal authenticity: love and the fear of punishment” (Drury 218, 213-4). In the subconscious world of dreams, however, Melliora’s desires are given free play, resulting in a climactic, orgasmic scene that the Count witnesses (Ballaster 171). She cries out “Oh D’elmont, cease, cease, cease to charm, to such a height – Life cannot bear these raptures. – O! too, too lovely Count – extatick ruiner!” (sic; 116). D’Elmont acknowledges that Melliora is a “sweet resister,” but he is determined to “this night, be master of [his] wishes” (117). The conflict arising for him is not moral or internal, but consists of external obstacles like locked doors or Melliora’s resisting body (Drury 223). He desires to assert his masculinity in her rape, since “[h]ow justly would [she] scorn [his] easie tameness; [his] dullness, unworthy of the name of lover, or even of man” (117). As in The Rover, sexual potency is inextricably linked with masculinity in Haywood’s narrative as it is regarded a measure for manliness.

When Melliora is exposed to rape, only a knock on the door or another intervention has prevented its execution. Therefore, Haywood’s purpose in her fiction is to provide an
insight in the experiences and perils of female characters to teach the female reader valuable lessons for their own lives. The separation of the spheres is one of the causes of women’s inadequate education. Lubey notes that the “idleness” associated with women of the upper-(middle) classes results from their lack of participation in the diversity of public life, so that they spend more time reflecting on and idealising a limited number of subjects, such as love (313). Haywood’s instructive function of her fiction is echoed in the narrative itself; the narrator relates how Melliora finds consolation and education in books. She reads Fontenelle’s *Discourse concerning the Plurality of Worlds* (1686), presenting astronomic science in conversations with a noblewoman (Backscheider 29; *Love in Excess* 100). When D’Elmont catches Melliora with Ovid’s *Epistles* in her hand, she refutes his accusation of using them as “preparatives to love ... melt[ing] the soul, and ma[king] it fit for amorous impressions” (108). The correct reading method of these poems according to Melliora consists of focusing on the “misfortunes” that proceed from passion and “if all readers of romances took this method, the votaries of Cupid would be fewer, and the dominion of reason more extensive” (108). Backscheider discerns the firmness of her determination in her conduct towards the Count, whose defence of love she “coldly” rejects (29; *Love in Excess* 110). Ballaster agrees that the intended reading experience does not “encourag[e] her readers to move from the fictional to the real ‘romance’”, in her opinion, “her novels seek to substitute the fictional for the real” (195). As such, female readers can indulge their passions in their imagination, without proceeding to romance in real life and hazard their reputation. Haywood thus attempts to sketch the perils of passion to her female readers as an alternative, valuable education to “Affliction, ... the only useful School that Women are ever put to” (Astell 29).
4.4 Conclusion

Eliza Haywood demonstrates the variability of (marital) heterosexual relationships in her best-seller *Love in Excess*. She adduces examples in which women actively engage in dynamic relationships between sexes, but they will often be sanctioned for their disobedience to patriarchal rules concerning their sex, such as Alovysa, Melantha, Ciamara and Violetta. By illustrating the misery proceeding from a mercenary marriage, Haywood supports the rise of more affectionate marriages in her contemporary society. She extols requited love as the noblest guest in marriage and, rather than condemning it, she explains the fatal consequences of acting by this passion only. Moreover, she warns women that they make a husband their master in marriage and must sacrifice their power after having taken the vows. If women oppose this duty, they are punished for it. However, Melliora and Camilla demonstrate that retaining some of the power is necessary in heterosexual relationships to enable their future happiness, possible even (and perhaps only) within the patriarchal framework. Using the trope of a nunnery, the author signals practices of confinement within forced or unlucky marriages so that the monastic life offers a refuge for culturally imposed obligations on women.

Furthermore, Haywood destabilises female and male gender roles to denounce the double standard which creates inequalities between the sexes. Masculinity and femininity are reshaped in her depictions of powerful women asserting their sexual agency and of men softened by their love. Men’s and women’s greater authority in the domain of, respectively, “judgment” and “fancy” are challenged, as well as the gendered dichotomies of private/public and sexuality/emotionality. Both a female and male gaze are incorporated in the novel, so that both sexes occupy subject and object positions, even where military language is applied to depict the struggle for power in seductive interactions. Haywood parodies the exclusively masculine connotations to the realm of war to account for a female agency. Moreover, the
language of the eyes allows for a “genderless” confrontation between lovers, where patriarchal restrictions concerning female silence are counteracted. Still, verbal language is applied in letters by women to express their desires, so that, even when physical, criminal conversation is impossible, a conversation in letters can convey their sexual identity. Masquerade as a legacy from Restoration drama is a trope used to challenge gender boundaries and it allows for the female characters’ expression of their personal wishes and desires. These women are restricted in their actions by the patriarchal definition of virtue and honour, interpreted differently for the sexes due to the double standard. Whereas sexuality and masculinity reinforce one another, femininity is associated with a repudiation of the female sexual nature. Yet, Haywood reconciles female virtue and sexual agency in her main female character, Melliora. She maintains her virtue while acknowledging her passions, but resists indulging in these desires. Melliora’s reading method of amatory poems reflects Haywood’s own proposal for reading her novels in that her “amatory aesthetic” ought to function as an admonitory example of giving way to passion (Lubey 321). To be rewarded with a loving marriage, women must restrain their natural desires, maintain their virtue (a social rather than moral notion), but also employ their agency to secure their reputation and future happiness. Melliora’s and the Count’s marriage is a union between two characters of a soft disposition, equal determination and beauty who belong to the same social rank. Therefore, I believe that Haywood considered an idealised marriage between two loving, similar persons as a union between two hermaphrodite souls. By their mutual attraction, “both their souls [will] take wing together, and [leave] their bodies motionless, as unworthy to bear a part in their more elevated bliss” (Love in Excess 124).
My aim with this thesis consisted of an analysis of the themes of gender and marriage in two literary works by one late seventeenth-century author, Aphra Behn, and one early eighteenth-century writer, Eliza Haywood. It is no coincidence that I chose two female English writers; during their lives, professional female writers and actresses were frequently associated with prostitution, as they ventured in public and their body was metaphorically extended into their texts produced for consummation on the literary market or on the stage. However, this outsider position enabled these authors to shed a different light on literary productions and to represent a repressed female voice in their patriarchal society. They adduced particularly themes touching on women’s domains of repression, such as marriage and power relationships between the sexes, shaped by traditionally established gender roles.

Both Behn and Haywood address unequal positions before and after concluding marriage, but their female characters are rather rebellious than compliant so as to demonstrate the socio-cultural forces encroaching on their lives. In Behn’s two-part play *The Rover*, the procedures of marriage are frequently compared with the mercenary commerce of the female body in prostitution. In both cases, women were commodified and their body was exchanged on the marriage or prostitution market. However, a bride’s dowry accompanies the exchange of her body, whereas a prostitute receives money for placing her body at the disposal of customers. In the case of marriage, Hellena, Florinda, Ariadne and the two Jewish sisters are denied any choice in their future life as wives, since patriarchal authority embodied by their father or brother selects their spouse. Behn applies the language of money and commerce to define both practices so as to denounce female objectification by men and their rejection of women’s participation in stipulating their own lives. Since virgins and whores are frequently
confounded, Behn evokes the trope of the doppelganger in that prostitutes like Angellica and La Nuche function as the alter ego of marriageable women like Hellena, Florinda and Ariadne. Their sexual identity as a whore is extrapolated into the identity of ladies of rank who voice their repressed desires. As demonstrated by Florinda, *The Rover* presents women as miserable and utterly powerless if they follow the paths laid down by their father or brother. Even though Don Vincentio offers Florinda luxurious and wealthy prospects, she does not believe in finding her happiness in the arms of this decrepit old man. Haywood’s Camilla also opposed the scheme of matching her with the hideous, tyrannical Cittolini. She would rather end up in a monastery, as Hellena would “rather see her [i.e., Florinda] in the *Hôtel de Dieu*, to waste her youth there in vows, and be a handmaid to lazars and cripples, than to lose it in such a marriage” (1.1.126-8). As such, a nunnery becomes instead of a place of confinement, a resort where patriarchal pressures can be evaded, but which neither offers these women the fulfilment of their personal wishes, since Camilla states that “a monastick life was what she had no inclination to, yet she would fly to that shelter, to avoid his bed” (sic; 192).

In their potential escape to a nunnery, Camilla, Florinda and Hellena could maintain some authority over their own body, since it would not be exchanged in matrimony. Haywood reinforces this idea by having her characters write letters to their beloved D’Elmont which express their desires, silenced by patriarchal customs of decorum. As such, they assert a female agency which is denied to them in marriage. This gender restriction is criticised by Behn’s blurring boundaries between traditionally male and female qualities. She illustrates that gender is a social construction. Especially her female characters Hellena and Ariadne display male characteristics like articulating libertine desires, by which they oppose their imposed silence about female sexuality. Paradoxically, they enfranchise themselves by subverting the ideology of the dominant male group. The lust/love dichotomy distinguishing
masculinity from femininity is disrupted in *The Rover* as well as in *Love in Excess* so that the works make a claim for female sexual agency.

Another strategy to unsettle conventional definitions of femininity and masculinity consists of applying the imagery of military language to depict the love game between both sexes. Haywood’s and Behn’s characters expose that definitions and customs in language collude with the gender ideology of the dominant group. This is not only demonstrated in these metaphors, but also by Behn’s and Haywood’s challenging traditional interpretations of female virtue. For these writers, female honour should incorporate a female sexual agency. However, as La Nuche’s eyes cannot conceal her true feelings for Willmore, Melliora and D’Elmont revel in this language of the eyes by which they communicate as androgynous equals caught in a battle of glances. Thus, Haywood creates an alternative language for lovers so that they can evade gender restrictions and norms associated with verbal language.

As female sexuality is disregarded, so is the potential of women’s education and authority in literary circles. Behn and Haywood transgress the borders of propriety as they publicly assert themselves in their texts or on stage. Their female characters mirror the authors’ claim on public functions for women, since their disruptive actions of masquerade, letter writing and verbal expressions of their desires challenge the public/private binary for the sexes that confines women to the domestic sphere and to “idleness”. Instead of working their object of love into the ground in their imagination, they endeavour to step out and learn valuable lessons from personal experience. Hellena and Ariadne apply their male guise to “perform” the male gender role and, as such, disclose the performative nature of gender in their interaction with men. Hellena and Florinda exhibit/cultivate their “wit,” as they cunningly lay plans to meet their lovers by intelligent devices like masquerade and Hellena’s eloquence emulates Willmore’s. Haywood’s characters also use the Restoration stock trope of masquerade to gain information about and from their desired D’Elmont, Frankville or the
Marques. As such, these female writers make a case for the acknowledgement of women’s capacity to reason like men do and for a necessary education for women, so that they can recognise dangers for their reputation, which is ineluctable in a patriarchal society where female chastity is equated with marriageability. Astell expands on this lack of female education in the ways of life, since their only tutor is “Affliction,” by which they gain experience in life when it is already too late for their honour to be saved (29). Moreover, these authors destabilise the reason/sense binary with only representatives of, respectively, the male and female sex. Even male characters unfold conventionally feminine characteristics like softness and platonic love, even though physical desires still tempt men to “making love” since their sexual potency measures their masculinity. Willmore, Blunt and D’Elmont articulate this importance of sexual conquests for their masculine identity.

*The Rover* and *Love in Excess* not only address conventional themes like marriage and gender, but also love, and especially idealised love is adduced. The androgynous similarities are highlighted between Hellena and Willmore as libertines, Florinda and Belvile as elevated souls, La Nuche and Willmore as mercenary negotiators and D’Elmont and Melliora, both driven by love instead of ambition and competing in terms of determination, beauty and softness in their disposition. Therefore, in love, two equal minds are united in one flesh, as husband and wife are united before God with the male as head. Especially Behn struggles with the idea that love and marriage are compatible; Hellena and Willmore are married, but she is killed off in the long run, whereas Florinda and Belvile are still married in the sequel. This author focuses on denouncing arranged marriages like Florinda’s with Don Vincentio, or Ariadne’s with Beaumond. Haywood, however, guides her reader along the reformation of the ambitious gallant D’Elmont and miserable examples of unrequited love, also in marriage. She leaves open the possibility of a happy marriage, though, in the novel’s final moment of bliss as three voluntary marriages take place. The women involved have resisted passion and
fought against patriarchal restrictions to secure a marriage to their loved ones. As such, Haywood signals that true happiness is only possible within patriarchal boundaries, thus within marriage, when it is motivated by love; other women neglecting this necessary condition cannot partake in this marital bliss. Therefore, women must exploit their female agency to procure the husband whom they desire, but must voluntarily surrender to their husband’s authority to secure their reputation and happiness.

This glorification of love, especially in *Love in Excess*, plays on the rise of companionate marriages in this period. Behn rather envisages companionate love relationships outside of wedlock, such as La Nuche’s with Willmore, whereas Haywood glorifies passion within marriage, so that it becomes a potential reality in the minds of her readers. However, mutual affection and equal states of mind are a prerequisite for happy marriages, so that the “marital relationship of co-dependency” becomes not only financial or practical, but also emotional (Bailey 81).
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