

Heroic Disobedience

The Forced Marriage Plot and
the British Novel, 1747-1880

Leah Grisham

Series in Literary Studies



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For my own heroically disobedient daughter.

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A Note on the Text

This project began its life as my doctoral dissertation at George Washington University, from where my Doctor of Philosophy in English literature was conferred in 2020 in the early months of the Covid-19 pandemic. Restricted physical access to libraries (and the additional fact that many of the primary texts included in this monograph have been out of print for centuries) meant I relied heavily on digitized copies of primary texts. Whenever possible, I have used first editions; when these were not accessible, I have used editions regularly available to the public.

The one key exception is *Clarissa*. Most editions of the novel available from twenty-first-century publishers are derived from the first edition of the novel, which Richardson published in 1748. I, however, used the third edition of the novel (published in 1750). This volume is significantly longer than the first two editions and includes much new material that Richardson added in response to readers' unhappiness with the ending: many readers wanted to see Clarissa marry Lovelace and "reform" him, just as Pamela does to Mr. B in Richardson's earlier novel *Pamela; or, Virtue Rewarded*. In the third edition – which Richardson considered the authoritative version of the novel – Lovelace's villainy is emphasized, as are the novel's critiques of the Harlowe family.

Irregular spelling, capitalization, and italics are profuse in many of these archival materials; I have included the original form as often as possible. All italics in *Heroic Disobedience: The Forced Marriage Plot and the British Novel, 1748-1880*, are original to the texts from which they come.

Introduction

"[W]e young ladies in the world, when we are exhibiting, ought to have little green tickets pinned on our backs, with 'Sold' written on them; it would prevent trouble and any future haggling, you know. Then at the end of the season the owner would come to carry us home"¹

In William Thackeray's *The Newcomes*, which was serialized from 1854 to 1855, high-spirited Ethel Newcome compares the Victorian marriage market to an art show in which young women, like paintings, are mere possessions. Ethel later wears one of the little green tickets – essentially a “sold” sign – to dinner, again hinting at the objectification she faces as a young woman of marriageable age. Ethel's stunt is meant to get a reaction from her parents, but it also indicates her sharp – if perhaps darkly humorous – awareness of the state of the marriage market in Victorian England, where women are treated as exchangeable objects. Mimicking Ethel's crass attitude toward this dynamic, the narrator goes on to claim: “as women sell themselves for what you call an establishment every day; to the applause of themselves, their parents, and the world, why on earth should a man ape at originality and pretend to pity them?”² Dripping with sarcasm, the narrator continues the analogy raised by Ethel's little green ticket observation, noting how common – and celebrated – it is for women to sell themselves in marriage. Instead of feeling sorry for these women, the narrator suggests, “let us pity Lady Iphigenia's father when that venerable chief is obliged to offer up his darling child...Her ladyship's sacrifice is performed, and the less said about it the better.”³ The narrator extends a semblance of sympathy to a father who must sell – or, in the case of Iphigenia, sacrifice his daughter – but the young women who are exchanged are best ignored. On the surface, the narrator seems to suggest that this is because their sacrifices are expected, but Ethel's bold statement suggests that it is because of the injustice of the marriage system that makes people want to ignore the humanity of women being exchanged for marriage. In wearing a little green ticket, Ethel shines a light on the financial, objectifying underpinnings of marriage.

The socio-economic reality at the heart of Ethel Newcome's sharp insights is at the heart of this project, which examines the ways in which the rise of

¹ William Makepeace Thackeray, *The Newcomes*:(London: 1904, 1854), 273.

² *Ibid.*, 275.

³ *Ibid.*, 275.

capitalism in eighteenth- and nineteenth-century British society played a significant role in shifting family dynamics and marriage practices. More specifically, it looks at the ways in which certain novelists from this period understood the socio-economic imperative behind marriage practices and the troubling ways in which this could lead to the commodification of young women. These novelists use what I've termed forced marriage plot novels to explore this dynamic, showing how women are used and abused within this system and – importantly – the ways in which women can work around existing patriarchal power structures to reclaim autonomy.

The forced marriage novels discussed in the following chapters share several key features; the most basic of which is a general plot arc that focuses on a tyrannical father figure who attempts to force his daughter into a marriage that she finds repulsive but would be materially advantageous to the men involved. As I explain in more detail in chapter one, in these forced marriages, the bride-to-be is treated as nothing more than a chattel exchanged between men, who view her as a conduit for wealth transfer. These female characters, who are depicted as the heroines of their respective novels, are dismayed by the contracted marriages and thus reject the union. As will become clear, however, the men involved in the forced marriage do not care whether the heroines consent or not, forcing the intended marriages forward. Despite the prominence of Enlightenment ideas of individual subjectivity, forced marriage plot novels make it clear that their respective socio-economic climates depend on the ability of men to exchange women, a process that – the novels show – strips them of their personhood. “Because man equals self-consciousness, his alienated, objective essence, or *thinghood*, equals *alienated self-consciousness*,” writes Karl Marx in his critique of the Hegelian dialectic, “and *thinghood* is thus established through his alienation.”⁴ That is, a man without self-consciousness, or what we might call a conscious awareness of his individuality as a thinking, feeling, human individual, is nothing more than a mere vessel able to be used and abused by those who exert power over him. Or, as our novelists at hand would point out, over her.

To this end, another important feature shared by forced marriage plot novels is that the heroines, many of whom have been obedient, rule-following daughters up until the point of their forced marriages, come to recognize the social and economic motives spurring their fathers to force them into marriage. Forced marriage plot novels, then, dramatize what Rita Felski has called the

⁴ Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844 and the Communist Manifesto*, trans. Martin Milligan (Prometheus Books, 1988), 152-3. Italics in original.

“discovery of female self,” a process in which heroines come to see themselves as thinking, reasoning, individuals who deserve autonomy despite the oppressive, corrupt circumstances in which they live.⁵ To borrow Marx’s terminology, forced marriage plot novels depict the un-thinghood-ification, if you will, of the female consciousness; their patriarch’s capitalistic drive may have alienated women’s awareness of their own consciousness, but forced marriage plot novels show women reclaiming their subjective consciousness. The heroines of forced marriage plot novels, then, bring this reclamation to fruition through their heroic disobedience. That is, these novels push beyond exposing the tyrannical, unjust commodification of women and show how these female characters fight against these forces to successfully assert their own autonomy. Samuel Richardson’s *Clarissa* (1748), Charlotte Lennox’s *The Female Quixote* (1752), Mary Robinson’s *Angelina; A Novel* (1796), Charlotte Smith’s *Letters of a Solitary Wanderer* (1800-02), Jane Austen’s *Pride and Prejudice* (1813), *Mansfield Park* (1814, 1816), and *Sanditon* (1817 – unfinished at the author’s death that year), Charles Dickens’ *Nicholas Nickleby* (1838-39) and *Dombey and Son* (1846-48), Elizabeth Stone’s *William Langshawe, Cotton Lord* (1842), and Anthony Trollope’s *The Way We Live Now* (1874-75) all feature some variation of this plot, aligning fathers with mercenary attitudes toward money and their daughters with both an awareness of the injustice they face and – as this monograph’s title indicates – a desire to fight back against it.

The importance of plot

Focusing on the plot, or, in this case, a particular plot type, is a critical lens that has historically been overlooked. As Peter Brooks puts it, “[p]lot is so basic to our experience of reading, and indeed to our very articulation of experience in general, that criticism has often passed it over in silence, as too obvious to bear discussion.”⁶ Calling on Aristotle’s argument that *mythos* is the most important aspect of a narrative, Brooks encourages critics to see the plot as a vehicle for meaning within text. Scholars like Lois Bueler, Katherine Binhammer, and Maia McAleavey have taken up this call; while they each take a slightly different approach to examining the plot, they all agree that focusing on the plot can expand our understanding of the novel as an ideological artifact imbued with specific cultural meanings.⁷ Bueler explains that “mature plot structures,” plots

⁵ Rita Felski, *Beyond Feminist Aesthetics: Feminist Literature and Social Change* (Harvard University Press, 1989), 142-3.

⁶ Peter Brooks, *Reading for the Plot: Design and Intention in Narrative* (Harvard UP, 1992), xi.

⁷ See Maia McAleavey, *The Bigamy Plot: Sensation and Convention in the Victorian Novel* (Cambridge University Press, 2011). McAleavey connects Victorian novels to seemingly disparate genres like ballads, arguing that: “focusing on plot illuminates unexpected

that are repeated across time by different authors, are “intricately patterned from an interlocking, richly motivated, and staggeringly large set of components, [and] they are found in certain cultural habitats and do specific kinds of ideological work.”⁸ This is, studying a “mature” plot across time reveals useful information about both the individual novels that employ specific plots and about what those plot structures as a whole say about the historical periods out of which they emerged. Over time, certain ideological meanings become attached to a specific plot structure: it takes on an existence of its own that transcends the specificities of each novel in which it appears. For instance, Binhammer analyzes what she calls the “seduction plot” that appears in British novels in the second half of the eighteenth century (in which a relatively innocent young woman is seduced by a man who just wants sex), concluding: “[c]ulture’s obsessive retelling of the plot of seduction reflects the search for answers to the questions that became askable for the first time: Who is the female capable of choosing her own desire? How does she speak her will? How does she recognize her heart’s truth?”⁹ Novels that depict seduction plots, then, can be read within a specific set of historical shifts in British culture that grappling – in some cases advocating for, in other cases reacting against – developing awareness of women’s inner desires.

In both Binhammer’s and Bueler’s analysis of plot types, Samuel Richardson’s 1747 *Clarissa; or, the History of a Young Lady* is an important touchstone, just as it is in this project. Binhammer begins her genealogy of the seduction plot with an analysis of *Clarissa*, in which, she claims, rakish Lovelace seduces Clarissa. Though my understanding of *Clarissa* differs from Binhammer’s (as chapter one explores), I strongly agree with her view that *Clarissa*, told from the perspective of the feisty young heroine, is an important steppingstone in the development of the novel, especially when it comes to how women are portrayed. According to Binhammer, “[t]he popularity of Richardson’s novel and the plurality of responses it invoked reflect how profoundly it spoke to a

relationships between canonical and popular texts, allowing us to imagine new literary-historical genealogies” (13). Katherine Binhammer elaborates on this dynamic: “[t]he repetition of a story at a particular moment in time...prompts at least two different interpretations of how history relates to narrative. The same story might be repeatedly told in order to popularize and naturalize a new historical idea, foregrounding a relation of similitude and emphasizing a mimetic or didactic function of narrative” (1).

⁸ Lois Bueler, *The Tested Woman Plot: Women’s Choices, Men’s Judgments, and the Shaping of Stories* (Ohio State UP, 2001), 1.

⁹ Katherine Binhammer, *The Seduction Narrative in Britain, 1747-1800* (Cambridge UP, 2009), 9.

cultural awareness of, and interest in, the new inner world of women.”¹⁰ Bueler argues along a similar vein, noting: “Richardson is writing a pioneering bildungsroman, and Clarissa is a young person in the process of making her self.”¹¹ Both echo Ian Watt’s claims in *The Rise of the Novel* that *Clarissa* is pivotal in the development of the novel as a form of narrative. In *Clarissa*, Watt argues, “Richardson resolved the main formal problems which still confronted the novel by creating a literary structure in which narrative mode, plot, characters, and moral theme are organized into a unified whole.”¹² What is even more relevant to my reading of the forced marriage plot is the emphasis that Watt – along with Binhammer, Bueler, and many other critics, such as Nancy Armstrong – places on the novel’s detailed, empathetic portrayal of the heroine’s inner (intellectual and emotional) complexity. The “primary criterion” of early novels such as *Clarissa* “was truth to individual experience which is always unique,” according to Watt, who notes that Richardson gave his characters deep “subjective and inward direction” to a degree that was unprecedented.¹³ Individuality and subjectivity – the degree to which Clarissa defines her own will and identity in opposition to those around her – define Clarissa’s characterization. Armstrong expands on this idea, describing Richardson’s female characters as possessing “a female self who exists outside and prior to the relationships under the male’s control.”¹⁴ The heroines of Richardson’s novels, that is, have “subjective qualities” that render them individual, reasoning, political beings, not just submissive drones.¹⁵

On autonomy

An emphasis on the heroines’ individuality and subjectivity is an important component of the forced marriage plot, helping to ensure readers feel empathy toward the disobedient heroines instead of shock, chagrin, or judgment (these are the reactions, in fact, that some of their peers have within the respective novels: attitudes that are shown to assist the tyrannical fathers). There is an undercurrent of Enlightenment ideology running through forced marriage plot novels, in which an individual’s subjectivity is defined along Lockean lines.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 21.

¹¹ Bueler, *The Tested Woman Plot*, 172.

¹² Ian Watt, *The Rise of the Novel: Studies in Defoe, Richardson, and Fielding* (University of California Press, 1957), 208.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 18, 13.

¹⁴ Nancy Armstrong, *Desire and Domestic Fiction: A Political History of the Novel* (Oxford University Press, 1987), 121.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 121.

“Men being, as has been said, by nature all free, equal, and independent, no one can be put out of his estate and subjected to the political power of another without his own consent,” according to Locke.¹⁶ These configurations of individual agency and community are rooted in the balance of self-determination and mutually beneficial social structures that allow men the freedom to make decisions about their own lives while living in a prosperous community. The issue that writers like Richardson, Smith, Stone, and Trollope (just to name a few) make clear through their forced marriage plots is that women are not only excluded from enjoying these same freedoms, despite their innate ability to reason just as well as men but that there are specific socio-economic reasons underlying this exclusion that men in positions of power used to their advantage.

Throughout the book, I use terms like “autonomy,” “self-determination,” and “agency” to describe the outcomes for which forced marriage plot authors and their characters fight. Though it may seem obvious, it is pertinent to note that female autonomy looked different in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries than it does today, where equality and equity are often defined in terms of having the same socio-economic freedoms, legal rights, and employment opportunities (just to name a few factors) across the gender spectrum. To think that female-identifying people have reached a point of perfect equity with men is laughable (and is even worse for women of color and those in poor or LGBTQ+ communities), but many women today possess the legal right to vote, have better education opportunities than women in previous centuries, can have their own bank accounts and property in their name, and have made some progress in shirking the expectation that mother and home-maker is the only acceptable occupation for women. These were not necessarily the objectives of women’s rights advocates in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. As will be explored in the following chapters, self-determination, agency, and autonomy meant being recognized as a rational, reasoning, feeling individual – not a commodity – who deserves to have a degree of control over her own path through life. Locke may have claimed that “Men being, as has been said, by nature all free, equal, and independent, no one can be put out of his estate and subjected to the political power of another without his own consent,” but the novelists examined in *Heroic Disobedience* understood that such Enlightenment-era understandings of subjectivity and autonomy were only extended to wealthy white men while women were conditioned to acquiesce to patriarchal control.¹⁷ The fact that forced marriage plot heroines

¹⁶ John Locke, *Second Treatise of Government*, 1689, Early Modern Texts Online, ed. Jonathan Bennett (2008), 54.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 54.

do not necessarily gain independence or liberation as we understand it according to twenty-first-century metrics does not detract from the radical political stance that these novels take on gender and the socio-economic domain. For characters like Richardson's Clarissa Harlowe and Trollope's Marie Melmotte – the two heroines that serve as the bookends of this project – autonomy means having a semblance of power and control over her life, especially when it comes to a major life event such as marrying. Forced marriage plot novels place the interiority and subjectivity of their heroines at the forefront of the novel, privileging their thoughts, emotions, and decision-making processes in a way that puts readers in the positions of their allies.

Forced marriages in eighteenth- and nineteenth-century British society

The authors of forced marriage novels, it is relevant to note, did not invent the idea of forced marriage for use in their plots but drew from a long history of real women being used as pawns for the socio-economic ambitions of men. Claude Lévi-Strauss famously observed this dynamic in what he – problematically – terms primitive cultures, concluding in *The Elementary Structures of Kinship*: “it is exchange, always exchange, that emerges as the fundamental and common basis for all modalities of the institution of marriage...Exchange...has in itself a social value. It provides the means of binding men together.”¹⁸ That is, marriage is not about the connection between the two partners involved in the marriage but about exchanging a woman – a daughter or sister – for the benefit of the men who control her. Economic in nature, the marriage exchange encompasses many possible advantages, “such as power, influence, sympathy, status, and emotion; and the skillful game of exchange,” which “consists in a complex totality of conscious or unconscious maneuvers in order to gain security and to guard oneself against the risks brought about by alliances and rivalries.”¹⁹ Marriage is simply a tool for men to navigate their own place within their societies.

One can't help but wonder if eighteenth- and nineteenth-century British novelists would be surprised that Lévi-Strauss finds these marriage practices only among “primitive” cultures, as he condescendingly terms the indigenous communities he observed, given the profuse evidence that forced marriage for patriarchal gain was commonplace within post-Enlightenment Western society. While my argument in *Heroic Disobedience* is less focused on the forced marriage plot as a representative (or proof) of real-life forced marriage – the authors at hand are more invested in using forced marriage as a fictional device

¹⁸ Claude Lévi-Strauss, *The Elementary Structures of Kinship* (Beacon Press, 1969), 479-80.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 54.

that represents the gendered, mercenary repression of their contemporary socio-economic climates – it is important to remember that marriage as an economic tool was absolutely a manifestation of the power structures the novelists write against. In a 1710 *Tatler* article, for instance, Richard Steele commented: “the best of our peers have often joined themselves to the daughters of very ordinary tradesmen,” because of “valuable considerations.”²⁰ Similarly, Lawrence Stone and Jeanne C. Fawtier Stone quote “an indignant pamphleteer” who in 1733 “complained bitterly about the rise of ‘a set of brocaded tradesmen, clothed in purple and fine linen, and faring sumptuously every day, raising themselves to immense wealth, so as to marry their daughters to the first rank, and leave their sons such estates as to enable them to live to the same degree.’”²¹ James Nelson’s 1763 *An essay on the government of children* claims: “[t]he Man of Trade marries the Daughter of the Gentleman; the Gentleman the Tradesman's Daughter: and again, the Gentleman makes his Son (the younger at least) a Man of Trade.”²² As late as 1884, Friedrich Engels characterized all bourgeois marriages as to some degree coerced by parents for financial or social capital, since “[i]n the countries with English law, where parental consent to a marriage is not legally required, the parents on their side have full freedom in the testamentary disposal of their property and can disinherit their children at their pleasure,” which leads to coerced and forced marriages: “in spite and precisely because of this fact, freedom of marriage among the classes with something to inherit is in reality not a whit greater in England and America than it is in France and Germany.”²³ Examples such as these cause Stone and Stone to declare that “judicious marriages with heiresses” were a common mechanism for socio-economic elevation.²⁴

Steele, Engels, Stone and Stone, and Levi-Strauss recognize the economic role women were forced into, but what is missing from their texts is any sort of in-depth acknowledgment of the trauma this caused women or even any empathy with young brides exchanged for wealth and status. In the passages from *The*

²⁰ Richard Steele, *The Tatler and the Guardian, complete in one volume* (Edinburgh, 1880), 410.

²¹ Lawrence Stone and Jeanne C. Fawtier Stone, *An Open Elite? England, 1540-1880* (Clarendon Press, 1984), 19.

²² James Nelson, *An Essay on the Government of Children* (London, 1763), 317.

²³ Friedrich Engels, *The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State* (1884; Chicago, 1902), 88; See also Pierre Bourdieu, “The Forms of Capital,” in *Handbook of Theory and Research for the Sociology of Education*, ed. J. Richardson (Greenwood Press, 1986), 241-258. Bourdieu makes a similar claim about modern society: that parents use indirect, coercive means to dictate their children’s marriages by controlling who their children meet.

²⁴ Stone and Stone, *An Open Elite?*, 10.

Newcomes quoted at the beginning of this Introduction, in fact, the narrator cheekily urges readers to ignore women exchanged for a lucrative marriage settlement and just pity the fathers who arranged the marriages. While it is obvious that the narrator says this sarcastically, it is my contention that forced marriage plot authors give voice to the women in those economic transactions. This monograph, then, shows how the novel – specifically the forced marriage plot novel – is the ideal conduit for exploring the costs women pay when living in societies that see them as exchangeable commodities and not autonomous beings. Richardson, Lennox, Smith, Robinson, Austen, Stone, Dickens, Stone, and Trollope narrativize this conflict, privileging the perspectives of the women victimized by these economic practices; empathizing with their struggles against being defined by their exchangeability and celebrating the heroines' rebellion against the role prescribed by their respective societies.

Money and the novel

Before turning to my analysis of the novels, a brief overview of the intersections between the novel and finance will be useful in differentiating my argument from existing perspectives. Reading novels alongside economic contexts is not a new line of inquiry; as Patrick Brantlinger puts it, “from Defoe forward, realistic fiction, at least, is always in some sense about money.”²⁵ This is a nutshell version of Franco Moretti’s argument in *The Bourgeois: Between History and Literature*, in which he claims the rise of the novel is inseparable from the emergence of the bourgeoisie, reading “aesthetic forms as structured responses to social contradictions.”²⁶ In another vein, “A Friend to Mammon: Speculation in Victorian Literature,” by John Reed, is one of the first essays to posit that British novelists used the figure of the speculator as “a topos for what many English people feared as the chief economic disease of their time,” a theme more recently and extensively taken up by Tamara Wagner in *Financial Speculation in Victorian Fiction: Plotting Money and the Novel Genre, 1815–1901*, where she traces manifestations of a character type she calls the “stock market villain” – a figure I’ll address in more detail in chapter five.²⁷ Francis O’Gorman focuses specifically on Trollope’s and Dickens’ critiques of capitalism in his essay “Financial Markets and the Banking System” and his Introduction to Penguin’s 2016 edition of *The Way We Live Now*. Many of these

²⁵ Patrick Brantlinger, *Fictions of State: Culture and Credit in Britain, 1694-1994* (Cornell University Press, 1996), 144.

²⁶ Franco Moretti, *The Bourgeois: Between History and Literature* (Verso, 2013), 14.

²⁷ Reed, “A Friend to Mammon,”; Tamara Wagner, *Financial Speculation in Victorian Fiction: Plotting Money and the Novel Genre, 1815-1901* (Ohio State University Press, 2010), 165.

scholars argue in the vein of Jonathan Rose's claim that "[l]iterary criticism apparently cannot help but read capitalism suspiciously," in large part, as this project will show, due to the critical ways in which eighteenth- and nineteenth-century novelists depicted the insidious capitalist ethos.²⁸

Studying literature through its intersections with capitalism, however, often loses sight of the specific ways in which capitalism impacted women – a critical gap this project undertakes to fulfill. There are, of course, some notable exceptions to the void. For example, Lana L. Dalley and Jill Rappoport's *Economic Women: Essays on Desire and Dispossession in Nineteenth-Century British Culture* is a collection of essays that explores instances in which "Economic Man" was, in fact, "Economic Woman," showing that women found ways to engage with capitalist markets within the prescribed limitations.²⁹ Mona Scheuermann's *Her Bread to Earn: Women, Money, and Society from Defoe to Austen*, which zooms in on novels that depict women as active financial agents, has been especially helpful to my own project. "This emphasis on money [in eighteenth-century novels] suggests an orientation in the novels that place women in the real world, functioning within and dealing with practical daily problems," she writes.³⁰ Her project, like mine, traces connections between fictional worlds and the contemporary moments in which they were created, making the case that authors like Samuel Richardson meant for *Clarissa* in particular – and the novel more broadly – to be in conversation with his original readers' own lives.

Women and money, or, more specifically, women with money, are the subject of Elsie B. Michie's *The Vulgar Question of Money: Heiresses, Materialism, and the Novel of Manners From Jane Austen to Henry James*, in which she argues that heiresses "posed a social problem. If those rich women were exchanged outside of the group to which they belonged, the group's property would go with

²⁸ Jonathan Rose, "Was Capitalism Good for Victorian Literature?" *Victorian Studies* 46, no. 3 (2004): 490.

²⁹ *Economic Women*, Lana A. Dalley and Jill Rappoport, eds., *Economic Women: Essays on Desire and Dispossession in Nineteenth-Century British Culture* (Ohio State UP, 2013), 1. Historian Amy M. Froide discusses similar examples in *Silent Partners: Women as Public Investors During Britain's Financial Revolution, 1690-1750*, as do Davidoff and Hall in *Family Fortunes: Men and Women of the English Middle Class, 1780-1850*. While these examples include some discussions of literature, they are more accurately categorized as historical or cultural studies, which suggests to me that literary scholars are behind historians in addressing women and capitalism in the British novel.

³⁰ Mona Scheuermann, *Her Bread to Earn: Women, Money, and Society from Defoe to Austen* (University Press of Kentucky, 1993), 30.

them.”³¹ She quotes Engels, who wrote in *The Origins of the Family, Private Property, and the State*: “the girl was not only permitted but ordered to marry within the gens, in order that her property [be] retained for the gens.”³² Though Engels is discussing the ancient Greek family system, the characteristics of their culture that lead to forced marriages – a shift from material power to paternal authority and accumulation of wealth – apply to the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, as well. Michie and I examine a similar subject matter, the marriages of wealthy women, but our conclusions diverge. In the nineteenth-century marriage plot, according to Michie, the “hero is positioned between a rich and a poor woman and his choice of the poor woman is represented as enabling him to prove himself free from the crassness, vulgarity, and improper pride that taint the novel’s wealthy women.”³³ Echoing the configuration of anti-aristocratic femininity that Nancy Armstrong discusses in *Desire and Domestic Fiction: A Political History of the Novel*, Michie posits that in Victorian novels the heiress is “[o]ften older and potentially infertile, she is engrossed by and identified with her wealth,” and that it is in Trollope’s novels that “for the first time, the rich woman is a character that is not only appealing but that represents what the novelist represents as positive values.”³⁴ According to Armstrong and Michie, eighteenth- and nineteenth-century British novels portrayed wealth-possessing women negatively: the converse of ideal domesticity.

This project, however, resists such categorizations, focusing instead on the extent to which masculine desire for wealth victimized women across socio-economic boundaries through overt (threats, violence, legal restrictions) and covert methods (coercion, social norms) that actively denied women basic rights over their own lives. The women portrayed here are, with a few exceptions, the inheritors of immense wealth; rather than villainizing them for this wealth, novelists like Samuel Richardson, Charlotte Lennox, Charlotte Smith, Mary Robinson, Jane Austen, Charles Dickens, Elizabeth Stone, and Anthony Trollope depict the problems this wealth causes. For instance, in Anthony Trollope’s novel *Sir Harry Hotspur of Humblethwaite* (discussed in chapter five), Emily Hotspur balks at her father’s demand that she marry dull Lord Alfred instead of her second cousin George (whom she passionately loves), and “suffered under a terrible feeling of ill-usage. Why was she, because she was a girl and an heiress, to be debarred from her own happiness?”³⁵ A

³¹ Elsie B. Michie, *The Vulgar Question of Money: Heiresses, Materialism, and the Novel of Manners From Jane Austen to Henry James* (Johns Hopkins University Press, 2011), 10.

³² Engels, Quoted in *The Vulgar Question*, 10.

³³ Michie, *The Vulgar Question*, 4.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 16, 103.

³⁵ Anthony Trollope, *Sir Harry Hotspur of Humblethwaite* (1870; London, 1882), 205.

simple question but a resoundingly profound one asked by nearly all the heroically disobedient characters in the following chapters. Recognizing the socio-economic factors that are impacting her life – restricting her ability to determine her own path in life – Emily Hotspur concludes:

[h]er father would fain treat her like a beast of burden kept in the stables for a purpose; or like a dog whose obedience and affections might be transferred from one master to another for a price...She would be dutiful and obedient as a daughter, according to her idea of duty and of principle; but she would let them know that she had an identity of her own, and that she was not to be moulded like a piece of clay.³⁶

Fully awake to the injustice of her situation, Emily resolves to live by her own code. Recognizing her father's authority as *paterfamilias*, the narrator emphasizes that Emily will live "according to her idea of duty and principle" – her own system of values rooted in her independent formation of an "identity of her own," rather than blindly accepting the submissive role her father expects. This is a pattern that is repeated throughout forced marriage plot novels of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries: the heroic disobedience of these characters recognizes the injustices they face and their moral right to stand up for themselves. In each of these examples, the forced marriage plot tells of a woman's fight for and triumph in autonomy.

Chapter overview

As I examine in detail in chapter one, Clarissa was certainly not the first narrative to contain a father who sees his daughter's marriage as a *quid pro quo* economic exchange, but Richardson used this plotline, reminiscent of Euripides' tragedy *Iphigenia in Aulis* and Aphra Behn's play *The Forc'd Marriage, or, the Jealous Bridegroom* (1670), to reveal insights into his own specific historical moment when large-scale wealth acquisition and upward mobility were obtainable to a larger class of people. Clarissa Harlowe's character dramatizes these changes in terms reaching allegory; the empathy with which she is portrayed, the sound reason she possesses, and adherence to her own set of moral values (that contradict the mercenary ones of her family) obviously align Clarissa with good, while her greedy father, cruel brother, and despicable suitor, Solmes, are clearly bad. Clarissa's steadfastness in refusing her forced marriage marks her as disobedient by the moral code of her society, but this disobedience is framed as morally superior to the mercenary attitudes of her family.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 205-6.

Chapter one also includes a discussion of Charlotte Lennox's novel *The Female Quixote*, from which this book's title is taken. While *Clarissa* obviously endorses its heroine's right to refuse the forced marriage with Solmes, her death at the end of the novel seems to indicate that her society makes it impossible for her to thrive and live by her own personal moral system. However, *The Female Quixote* contains its own forced marriage plot that, though obviously connected to *Clarissa*, diverges from it in a few key aspects. Most important is the fact that Lennox's heroine, Arabella, boldly rejects marrying her cousin Glanville simply on the basis that it is forced. My understanding of Arabella diverges from the standard critical interpretation – that she is a silly, irrational girl who needs patriarchal figures to take away her silly French romance novels and mold her into a proper lady. Instead, I look at the ways in which the strong female characters in those novels inspire what she calls her “heroic disobedience” to her father's demands.

Chapter two examines two turn-of-the-century novels that situate the forced marriage plot and heroic disobedience in another specific economy: the transatlantic slave trade. Mary Robinson's *Angelina; A Novel* and Charlotte Smith's novella “The Story of Henrietta” combine the despotic, marriage-forcing fathers with the figure of the slave owner, exposing material connections between the plights of the enslaved and white British women. These novels go beyond the metaphorical link between slavery and women's oppression Susan Meyer writes of in *Imperialism at Home: Race and Victorian Women's Fiction*, instead illuminating the cause-and-effect relationship between the two through the all-encompassing power money provides to the slave owner.³⁷ Aligning the rebellion of enslaved people with the heroic disobedience of women, these radical novels go so far as to suggest retributive violence against the patriarch is the solution to tyranny.

Chapter three, which focuses on forced marriage in Jane Austen's later novels *Pride and Prejudice*, *Mansfield Park*, and (briefly) *Sanditon*, follows roughly the same pattern as Smith and Robinson's forced marriage plots (in fact, an earlier version of this project included *Mansfield Park* in the same chapter as *Angelina*;

³⁷ See Susan Meyer, *Imperialism at Home: Race and Victorian Women's Fiction* (Cornell University Press, 1996). She argues: “The yoking of the two terms of the recurrent metaphor, the ‘white woman’ and ‘dark race,’ produces some suggestion in the text of the exploited or vulnerable situation of the people in the race invoked” (142). That is, when white European authors described the circumstances of white women as “slavery” they inherently acknowledge the plight of enslaved Africans and suggest a kindred connection between the two groups. As I discuss more fully in chapter two, this is a fallacy that fails to acknowledge the differences between oppressed white women and actual chattel slavery.

A Novel and “The Story of Henrietta”), with an emphasis on the complex ways in which the slave trade impacted the commodification of women in the metropole. Austen’s Regency England was teetering on the edge of industrialization; as capitalist practices ramped up, class structure in England became ever more shifting and complex, which is in turn reflected in Austen’s forced marriage plots, especially as they depict the struggles faced by financially insecure women in this period. Austen’s forced marriage plots show that rich heiresses were not the only women impacted by the capitalist fracture of the British family, but this was a very pressing issue for women like Charlotte Lucas and Fanny Price, who lacked the means to support themselves.

Novels by Charles Dickens (*Nicholas Nickleby* and *Dombey and Son*) and the little-studied Elizabeth Stone (*William Langshawe, the Cotton Lord*) move chapter four into post-industrial England amidst the rise of stock-market speculation and precarious social attitudes about the morality of capitalism. Specifically, both Dickens and Stone are invested in exploring the impacts of this economy on women, who are depicted within the novels as largely excluded from the male-dominated world of finance and left with limited opportunities. Chapter four includes a discussion of the ways in which working-class and poor women, like Kate Nickleby and Edith Granger, are also forced into marriages, as youth and beauty are shown to be commodifiable qualities upon which women with few other options can rely. The writings of Dickens’ and Stone’s contemporary Karl Marx help provide the framework for this chapter, especially in terms of the extreme sexualization of women under capitalism: marriage, in these novels, is shown to be little more than sex work.

The fifth and final chapter extends the dissertation’s discussion of speculative finance into the later Victorian period via Anthony Trollope’s *The Way We Live Now* with brief forays into *The Three Clerks* (1857), *Sir Harry Hotspur of Humblethwaite* (1870), *The Prime Minister* (1876), and *The Duke’s Children* (1880), which variously attend to the deep impact social and economic capital retained over marriage practices. Trollope is an author who utilized the forced-marriage plot often throughout his *oeuvre* and who – uncoincidentally – also had sharp words for Richardson and his late-Victorian publisher Eneas Sweetland Dallas, whose 1868 abridged edition of *Clarissa* claimed that Victorian women enjoyed more autonomy than eighteenth-century women. Trollope’s novels, which closely engage with contemporary financial habits, prove this claim categorically untrue as they reveal the many ways in which, despite the period’s self-styled progress, women faced the same oppression Clarissa Harlowe did in the 1740s.

These novels are certainly not the only forced marriage plot novels written in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. For instance, Miss Melvyn of Sarah Scott’s *A Description of Millenium Hall* [sic] (1762) faces a forced marriage, as

does Jane West's heroine Sophia in *The Infidel Father* (1802). Mary Wollstonecraft wrote a forced marriage novella, *Mary: A Fiction* (1788), the advertisement to which states that the heroine "is neither a Clarissa, a Lady G -, nor a Sophie," distinctly invoking Richardson's heroines.³⁸ Laura Fairlie in Wilkie Collins' *The Woman in White* (1859) is told by her father on his deathbed that he wants her to marry Percival Glyde, which Laura takes as a binding command, forcing her to marry Glyde. The marriage between John Harmon and Bella Wilfer in *Our Mutual Friend* (1864-5) is forced, given that Old Harmon stipulates his son must marry Bella or lose his fortune. Additionally, in *Daniel Deronda* (1876), both Gwendolyn Harleth and Princess Halm-Eberstein are forced into unwanted marriages.

While, of course, some level of culling for the sake of brevity is necessary for any book, the novels I decided to include share several through-lines that make them especially productive for analysis. First, the novels included for discussion follow the basic structure of the forced marriage plot as written by Richardson and Lennox. These include a father figure who seeks to use his daughter's marriage as a *quid pro quo* business exchange wherein he will gain capital, strategic alliance, and/or security for his own fortune; a clear disrespect of his daughter's rejection of the marriage (and not seeking her consent before contracting the betrothal); an active scheme – whether through force or gentler measures of coercion – to force the daughter into this marriage; a clear and persistent rejection of both the forced marriage and the larger mercenary values it represents; and, a brave act of heroic disobedience that signals the heroine's commitment to reclaiming a sense of identity and autonomy. The plots of these novels are fundamentally concerned with raising awareness of the diverse ways in which the socio-economic climate of capitalism did not just cause but was predicated on keeping women powerless, both within their homes and in the *polis*. There are, of course, some variations from text to text (mothers, for instance, play important roles in some of the forced marriage novels discussed in chapters three and four), but as I will explain, these are all strategically done to expand understandings of capitalist-based oppression of women and the specific ways in which its agents actively prevented women from gaining the same personal freedoms and financial opportunities available to white British men.

The second most important factor in selecting the novels I have is simply that the forced marriage is a major component of each novel's plot in a way that centers the action around the perspective of the young woman faced with the forced marriage. In *Clarissa*, for instance, Clarissa's interiority – her thoughts,

³⁸ Mary Wollstonecraft, *Mary and The Wrongs of Women* (1798), ed. Gary Kelley (Oxford World Classics, 2007), 3.

feelings, stream-of-consciousness, et cetera – are provided in the first-person by Clarissa Harlowe herself, which centers the entire novel on her subjectivity and lets readers see the actions of the novel through the eyes of the heroine. All the subsequent forced marriage plot novels discussed in this project share this same feature. That is, the forced marriage plot is a – if not the most – important plot line in the novel and is told in a way that lets readers into the mind of the heroine. This grants the disobedient heroine a complex subjectivity while also encouraging readers to view her and the difficult, sometimes taboo, decisions she must make with empathy and understanding. Like Ethel Newcome in *The Newcomes*, these authors want readers to see and understand the sacrifices that were expected from women in their contemporary moments. Unable to look away, readers are made to confront these injustices and see the heroism in fighting against them.

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