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Educating Amoranda : the logic of witchcraft and female transgression in Mary Davys's *The reformed coquet; or, the memoirs of Amoranda*

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Educating Amoranda: The Logic of Witchcraft and Female Transgression
in Mary Davys's *The Reformed Coquet; or, The Memoirs of Amoranda*

by

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Abstract

Educating Amoranda: The Logic of Witchcraft and Female Transgression in Mary Davys's *The Reformed Coquet; or, The Memoirs of Amoranda*

In the early eighteenth century, children began to have greater autonomy in choosing marriage partners, resulting in a high degree of anxiety on the part of young women, since their lifelong subordination to their future husband required that their choice be made prudently. Many modern critics view Mary Davys's *The Reformed Coquet; or, The Memoirs of Amoranda* as an instructive and moralizing novel that offers its female readership a model of the ideal marriageable woman who makes wise marriage choices. The female heroine Amoranda transforms from a "Coquet" to a modest and rational woman who is capable of making an intelligent marriage choice. But is coquetry, in fact, the central problem that the text sets out to resolve? Or might the text itself foreground the problem of (or as) coquetry in order to mask another issue?

In this paper I argue that early eighteenth-century gender politics produce an underlying but unstated logic that drives the way in which Davys's novel corrects unacceptable behavior in its female protagonist. Substituting for the witchcraft discourse of the previous century is an alternative discourse that ensures the continued subordination of transgressive women. The "Coquet" replaces the "witch" as the latest threatening female role onto which early eighteenth-century culture can project its own anxieties. While it is Amoranda's economically autonomous status and the freedom from male control that it enables (exhibited in her desire to 'play' with men instead of choose a husband) that challenge traditional male dominance and power, the text "misrecognizes" her threatening behavior as

“Coquetry.” The text, therefore, sets out to resolve the cultural “crisis” of female transgression through the patriarchal figure of Formator, who reforms Amoranda into the ideal marriageable woman. Consequently, at the end of the novel, Amoranda, at the cost of her own agency and wisdom, resumes her proper subordinate position in the ideological construct of early eighteenth-century Britain.

Upon the arrival of "Formator," her uncle's newly appointed guardian, the heroine of *The Reformed Coquet; or, The Memoirs of Amoranda* (hereafter *The Reformed Coquet*) replies, "I find, Sir, I am no longer my own Mistress, but am now to live under your Restrictions," and thus begins the "Project" of Amoranda's reformation. Through the course of the novel, Form/ator will work to re/form Amoranda of her coquetry, molding her into the ideal marriageable woman. But, is coquetry, in fact, the central problem that Mary Davys's hero-in-disguise sets out to resolve? Or, might the text itself foreground the problem of (or as) coquetry in order to mask another issue? I will argue that the text does indeed work to redirect its readers from the real "crisis" at hand: female financial independence and the freedom from male control that it makes possible.

Many critics, however, read *The Reformed Coquet* as a 'coming-of-age' story, in which, to succinctly state it, the female heroine transforms from fickle flirt to faithful frau. Marilyn L. Williamson claims that Amoranda "develops from a vain and heedless girl into one much wiser by the end of the action," embodying the "virtuous amatory fiction" of the period (242). Later Williamson again emphasizes that "[Amoranda's] own history is a reform from the vain coquette, deeply affected by male flattery, to a woman of sense, who can value and understand a similar male [i.e. Formator/Alanthus]" (243). Thus, Williamson positions Formator/Alanthus as the paradigm of rationality toward which Amoranda must strive. Furthermore, coquetry is equated with naiveté, irrationality, and vanity, since she is "reformed" into a wise, rational, and modest woman.

Williamson positions Davys as one of several early eighteenth-century writers whose amatory fiction “used the libertine paradigm without allowing immorality to prosper” and whose focus was on the “heroine’s education in finding heart’s desire” (239-40). Davys’s “instructional” themes on “choosing wisely” in marriage demonstrate women’s “high degree of anxiety about making marriage choices as a result of the growing autonomy they could exercise” (Williamson 34). Williamson is quick to point out, however, that this cultural “anxiety” did not negate the fact that Davys and her contemporaries believed that “children and not parents should make their marriages” (210). Simply stated, Davys supported a young person’s choice of mate; yet, her didactic fictions stress discretion and prudence on the part of the female, because the woman is the one who acquires a “monarch for life” (Williamson 32).

Many modern critics tend to agree with Williamson’s interpretation of *The Reformed Coquet* and regard the novel as instructive and moralizing. Josephine Donovan’s (*Women and the Rise of the Novel, 1405-1726*) asserts that *The Reformed Coquet* is “designed to show the moral education of a young woman, Amoranda . . . [and that it] follows in the female bildungsroman tradition” (94). Making a similar claim in the “Introduction” to their anthology are Paula R. Backscheider and John J. Richetti, who state that “Amoranda . . . matures (albeit abruptly under the stress of the surprisingly violent and graphic incidents that make up the plot) and comes to value good sense as she falls in love with the man who delivers her from two sets of kidnappers” (xxii-xxiii). Also presenting a comparable reading of *The Reformed Coquet* is Ros Ballaster (“Women and the rise of the novel: sexual prescripts”) who argues that Davys offers her reader a “moral realist novel” in which Formator “seeks to ‘reform’

the heroine into a more modest and rational frame of mind. Formator acts to prevent her abduction by her two foolish suitors who plan to force her into choosing one as husband" (203-205)¹. Like Williamson, these critics view the story as a "female bildungsroman," and they construct Formator as Amoranda's sole deliverer from ruin.

In contrast to these interpretations of *The Reformed Coquet*, which simply reproduce and so remain within the terms that the novel establishes as a female *bildungsroman*, I will argue that the action of the story represents a *reverse* female *bildungsroman*, in that Amoranda's development is *regressive*; she transforms from a wise and rational woman to a naïve, emotional, and dependent one. Moreover, rather than educating women on how to "choose wisely" in marriage (which, as stated above, critics claim to be Davys's goal), the text instead divests its female protagonist of the very agency and wisdom that its author supposedly insists is so important. The text, therefore, emphasizes a different kind of cultural labor that is, in many ways, incompatible with what most critics claim is the overall goal of its author.

In order to account for this discord between what is claimed to be the author's goals and what the text is actually doing, I would like to suggest that early eighteenth-century gender politics produce an underlying logic that drives the way in which Davys's novel corrects unacceptable behavior in women. Substituting for the witchcraft discourse of the previous century is an alternative discourse that ensures the continued subordination of transgressive women. The "Coquet" replaces the "witch" as the latest threatening female role onto which the culture can project its own anxieties. Certain

¹ Backscheider and Richetti and Ballaster overlook the fact that it was Amoranda who contrived the "Plot" against Froth and Callid and therefore, she (not Formator, who seeks permission to help carry out Amoranda's plan) acts to prevent her own abduction.

witchcraft historians have argued that female economic independence was at the basis of many witchcraft accusations of the previous century. For example, in "The Economic Basis of Witchcraft," Carol F. Karlsen argues that "anxieties about inheritance lay at the heart of most witchcraft accusations" in colonial New England (341). She further states that "women [heiresses] who stood to benefit economically also assumed a position of unusual vulnerability . . . and . . . became prime targets for witchcraft accusations." These "witches" were often fully "dispossessed" of their property by male authorities, since their financial security was a direct threat to patriarchal inheritance customs ("Economic Basis" 341). Stated another way, economically autonomous women challenged traditional male dominance and control. It could be argued, therefore, that the culturally "misrecognized" logic of Davys's text constructs the female protagonist as a "Coquet" in order to account for, and deal with, the social aberration of a financially independent woman.

At the basis of Mary Davys's *The Reformed Coquet* lies this same "anxiety about inheritance." Amoranda, similar to the female heiresses of seventeenth-century Salem, poses a threat to the clearly defined cultural and gender boundaries of early eighteenth-century England. Women are no longer accused of witchcraft, but a woman's subordinated role is still maintained by western society; the only thing that has changed is the ideological discourse that accomplishes this subordination.

An alternative ideological discourse that ensures the continued subordination of women suggests an unconscious strategizing on the part of the "dominant class" of society to maintain certain practices. According to French anthropologist Pierre Bourdieu, all class societies, to varying degrees, participate in both "individual and

collective . . . misrecognition” (5-6). He explains that groups or individuals of a particular culture do *not* deliberately set out to dominate or oppress other groups or individuals (in this case, to subjugate women), but rather as members of a particular “habitus,” they are vulnerable to certain socially inculcated “dispositions” as a natural consequence of experiencing the same “material conditions of existence” (72). Simply stated, “if the system is to work” or “*doxa*” is to be maintained (i.e. the “natural and social world [are to continue to] appear as self-evident”) as Bourdieu claims, a culture must necessarily be blind to its own practices (6, 164). Thus, according to Bourdieu, it may be a mistake to ascribe misogynistic motivations to early eighteenth-century English society or to Salem’s citizens of the previous century. The former may have truly believed that coquetry would harm a woman’s chance to make a good match and make a female vulnerable to conniving men, while the latter may have believed that they were ridding their society of the Devil’s handiwork.

Just as Bourdieu argues that it is an error to attribute misogyny as the underlying rationale of early eighteenth-century behavior, it would also be incorrect to assume that Amoranda’s coquettishness is premeditated; fortuitous circumstances – the death of her father, then her mother, and her unexpected inheritance – simply provide her with an opportunity to improvise within the boundaries of her culture’s customs (“habitus”). Consequently, this orphaned young female heiress is economically independent and therefore free from male control. Not surprisingly then, Amoranda’s atypical and powerful position in society produces a “crisis” in the culture. In other words, her coquettish behavior, in this text represented as the desire to keep “playing” rather than choose a husband, threatens the “integrity of *doxa*” or the typically “undisputed

universe of the undiscussed” as Bourdieu labels it (168-9). Stated another way, Amoranda does not depend upon a man for money, therefore, she can and does extend the period of courtship, but in so doing, she risks “exposing the arbitrariness” of *doxa* – in particular, that female subordination is a constructed ideology (Bourdieu 169). Amoranda’s independence (economic and social) is “misrecognized” as coquetry because the “social world” of early eighteenth-century England is, in fact, “unaware of the very question of [the] legitimacy” of female subordination as a “natural phenomenon” as Bourdieu contends (168).

In the context of late seventeenth and early eighteenth-century culture, a young woman whose inclination is to “play” with men rather than choose a husband during courtship is typically presented as a ‘problem’ that the text sets out to resolve. Often, the story tends to “diagnose” this problem as “coquetry” or “vanity,” and in so doing, seems to resist acknowledging or validating “the one stage of a woman’s restricted life when she is accorded total power and sway” (Ballaster “Preparatives” 60). For a young maiden, the courtship phase represents a liminal space in which she neither entirely belongs to her father nor does she yet belong to any husband. As the reader would expect, a young woman’s “moment of power ends once the men have accepted her marriage” (Sinfield 45). Simply stated, courting allows her a brief and “fragile power” in which “she has a claim to property in herself” (Montrose 37).

Even though a young woman’s “power and sway” is tolerated to some extent by the patriarchy during courtship, if the courtship itself is prolonged beyond socially predetermined and acceptable standards, the woman is automatically labeled a “coquet” or “vain” (or both) because she undermines the stability of male authority. This is

especially true if the female is financially well off and does not have to rely on a husband to support her, as in the case of Amoranda.

Because Amoranda's wealth enables her to postpone choosing a husband beyond what society considers a reasonable period of time, she takes full advantage of the courtship ritual to "play" with her suitors. Tiffany Potter aptly describes Amoranda's behavior, stating that "she toys just enough to give [her suitors] hope, but rejects any serious involvement, refusing to privilege any single man over her own autonomy" (67)². Indeed, Amoranda, as she herself states it, has "a mind for a little variety of courtship" (Davys 262). Amoranda further reveals her pleasure in postponement by saying to Froth, "how can you believe I shall be so silly, as to think of marrying while I have so fresh a Bloom upon my Cheeks" (Davys 262). Besides Amoranda herself, the narrator also informs readers of Amoranda's desire for "a little variety of courtship." She tells readers that Amoranda's "Levee was daily crowded with almost all sorts, and (she pleased to be admired) though she loved none, was complaisant to all" (Davys 258). The narrator's parenthetical – "(she pleased to be admired)" – reveals her implied critique of Amoranda's behavior. Furthermore, the narrator tells her audience that "[h]er Heart was like a great Inn, which finds room for all that come, and [Amoranda] could not but think it very foolish to be beloved by five hundred, and return it only to one" (261). Amoranda clearly enjoys the authoritative

² Although Tiffany Potter – "Decorous Disruption: The Cultural Voice of Mary Davys" (2001) – agrees with me that Amoranda revels in her courtship phase, Potter's basic argument about *The Reformed Coquet* is quite different than mine in that she claims that Davys consciously uses her "position of moral privilege" (that of "the acquiescent, decorous, patriarchally complicit woman writer of morally didactic fiction . . .") to "tacitly" criticize the conservative agenda of the novel. She ultimately claims that Amoranda's reform is of her public persona only, while her private persona remains spirited and autonomous.

position that she holds over her three favorite suitors (Lord Lofty, Froth, and Callid), each deferring to her wishes in order to win her hand (i.e. her fortune). Finally, Formator blatantly accuses Amoranda of being a “Monopolizer [who] engross[es] the whole Male world to herself” (Davys 268). He even likens her to a predatory animal who widens its territory in order “to catch all Mankind” (Davys 268). The text does not recognize Amoranda’s behavior as independence then, but instead identifies it as a problem (i.e. coquetry) that needs to be resolved.

Other female heroines of the period also engage in anti-marriage practices, exploiting the courtship ritual. In Alexander Pope’s *The Rape of the Lock*, for example, Belinda exhibits this same transgressive behavior. Belinda’s enjoyment and anticipation of the card game (*Ombre*) allegorically represents her pleasure and excitement in ‘playing’ with men:

Belinda, now, whom, Thirst of Fame invites,
Burns to encounter two adventurous knights,
At *Ombre* singly to decide their Doom;
And swells her Breast with Conquests yet to come. (Pope III.25-8)

Even as Belinda decides her present opponents’ (suitors’) fate, she looks forward to future “Conquests.” Similar to *The Reformed Coquet*, however, the text of *The Rape of the Lock* “misrecognizes” Belinda’s refusal to marry as vanity. The text ensures that the reader also perceives the problem as Belinda’s vanity by dedicating twenty-seven lines early in the poem to recounting her painstaking daily “Toilet” (Pope I.121-148). Claiming the minimal agency Belinda has during the courtship period, however, is her “Guardian Sylph,” whose role it is to protect Belinda’s “Purity.” Indeed, the text proves that a masculine force (the Guardian Sylph) is behind Belinda’s continued virginal

status, because his abandonment of her makes her immediately vulnerable to the dangerous plot of the Baron. Also, while the Sylph's rejection of her seems to be motivated by jealousy (he senses "An Earthly Lover lurking at her Heart"), his rejection of her could also be interpreted as a punishment for her deception; in other words, her female "Art" disguises her love for "An Earthly Lover": "Sudden he [the Sylph] view'd, in spite of all her Art" (Pope III.143-44). It could be argued, then, that both the Guardian Sylph and the Baron (both representing masculine power) act to bring Belinda into her proper subordinate position. Essentially, in his abandonment of her, the Sylph hands her over to the Baron to be ravished. And, the Baron, by ravishing Belinda's lock – a primary symbol of both her vanity and virginity – not only resolves the problem of her vanity, but he also ends her man-manipulating behavior by robbing her of her virginity. In this poem, marriage itself isn't used to resolve the "crisis" of the text, rather, making Belinda unmarriageable does, since the loss of her chastity ensures that her brief "moment of power" is permanently 'checked.'

Another text in which the female heroine engages in anti-marriage practices is Aphra Behn's *The Fair Jilt*. The narrator makes it clear at the beginning of the story that Miranda has been orphaned and has taken the short-term vows of the Beguine nun. Readers are also told that once a "devote's" contract expires, the young woman can either renew her contract or marry. Because of their assured chastity and protected lifestyle, "galloping nuns" (as they are nicknamed) are very attractive to "men of the best quality" (Behn 78). Besides her chastity and reclusive way of life, Miranda's beauty and her "considerable fortune" contribute significantly to her appeal. Furthermore, Miranda's position as a Beguine nun places her in a liminal space that

parallels the courtship phase. In other words, she is neither wholly committed clerically (to the convent) nor wholly committed secularly (to the public). As a “galloping nun,” therefore, Miranda is located in a place where she does not have to answer to God (as patriarchal power) or to any secular masculine authority. Therefore, like Amoranda and Belinda, Miranda takes full advantage of her “moment of power.”

Comparable to *The Reformed Coquet* and *The Rape of the Lock*, *The Fair Jilt* accounts for Miranda’s unchecked power by “misrecognizing” her behavior as vanity:

[Miranda’s] youth and beauty, her shape and majesty of mien and air of greatness, charmed all her beholders, and thousands of people were dying by her eyes, while she was vain enough to glory in her conquest, and make it her business to wound. She loved nothing so much as to behold sighing slaves at her fee of the greatest quality, and treated ’em all with an affability that gave ’em hope. (Behn 80)

Limiting this female power, according to the story, is Cupid, an “angry god” whose “power” is absolute over Miranda: “He struck it [an arrow] home and deep, with all the malice of an angry god” (Behn 80). Love itself, portrayed as masculine power, both “checks” and punishes Miranda’s behavior by causing her to fall in love with the inaccessible “young friar” Henrick.

Unexpectedly, Miranda’s marriage to Tarquin does not end her transgressive behavior. After her marriage she attempts to seduce Henrick, and in her failed attempt, accuses him of rape. Later, she flirts with Van Brune in order to get him to murder her sister. Nevertheless, at the end of the story, Miranda is returned to her proper subordinate position. Miranda’s “confession” of her guilt is made public, representing her submission to patriarchal power. She:

... confessed all her life, all the lewdness of her practices with several princes and great men, besides her lusts with people that served her and

others in mean capacity, and lastly, the whole truth of the young friar, and how she had drawn the page and the prince her husband to this designed murder of her sister. (Behn 113).

Miranda's so-called 'guilt' lies in her willingness to manipulate men. Additionally, her public confession parallels the witch trial in which the accused is often coerced into pleading guilty. The narrator relates that after "the fathers attack her *anew*," she "at last confessed all her life," clearly indicating that the fathers' previously attempted to get her to admit guilt (Behn 113 emphasis mine). Her signed confession is forwarded to the magistrates. Undeniably, Miranda's symbolic submission to masculine power is both clerical (the priests) and secular (the magistrates). Her secular submission is implicit as well in the 'happily-ever-after' ending, in which Miranda becomes the ideal obedient wife to Tarquin. The text also equates Miranda's submission with true female "happiness":

They say Miranda has been very penitent for her life past, and gives Heaven the glory for having given her these afflictions that have reclaimed her and brought her to as perfect a state of happiness as this troublesome world can afford. (119)

If Miranda had any power at all, she is clearly stripped of it in these final lines. The word "Heaven" infers that God was the originator of her "afflictions," and so, like a typical father, he was simply disciplining his child for her own good. Miranda cannot even claim to be the creator of her own misery.

In the same way that Belinda's and Miranda's power is 'checked' by masculine authorities, so too is Amoranda's transgressive conduct quickly 'checked' by her uncle's arrangement for a male guardian (the disguised Alanthus), who in this text represents the ideological voice of "orthodoxy." Formator's role, therefore, is to restore

the “integrity of *doxa*” by “straightening” out Amoranda; he ‘educates’ her as to her proper role – that of “modest passive femininity” (Potter 68). Therefore, as Natasha Saje so accurately assesses Formator’s agenda, while the text wants its readers to believe that Formator is actually “imparting knowledge and skill,” his ‘education’ really involves “tak[ing] away knowledge and skill” (170)³. Thus, by the end of the story, Formator resolves the “crisis” by divesting Amoranda of both her economic independence and the little power over males that she wields during the courtship phase (Bourdieu 169). Similar to the witchcraft logic of the past, Amoranda is a “Coquet” who must be taught by ‘trials’ (her mistakes) as well as Formator’s ‘educating’ discourse on the dangers of vanity that will eventually compel her to ‘confess’ her guilt (recall Miranda’s confession): she must first admit and then denounce her coquetry and accept that it is in her own self-interest to marry and, thus, submit to male authority.

In the face of Formator’s “Project” to “reform” her of her coquettish behavior, the spirited Amoranda naturally resists his influence. Early on in the story, Amoranda’s language demonstrates her indomitable disposition, first exemplified in her response to Formator’s ‘sermon’ on youth and the pitfalls of “Pleasure”: “O Lud! . . . I believe you are to be the Chaplain too, if you talk thus much longer, you’ll argue me out of my Senses; I told you I could not come into your grave Measures of a sudden” (Davys 268).

Amoranda’s language reveals a masculine assertiveness, since it is she who interrupts

³ Natasha Saje’s argument, however, differs from mine on several levels. She sees Formator “as an ironic construct” because he does not please Davys’s readers, which Davys herself claims she will do in her preface. Thus Saje argues that Davys has consciously created a “subtext,” in which “the romance elements” – such as disguise and co-incidence – “undermine the realistic reform plot,” thus revealing Davys’s project to expose as a sham the patriarchal project to reform a female of coquetry. The major difference between our two arguments is, of course, that Saje sees Davys as having explicit agency in the construction of her text, and she also infers that a female audience would have easily seen into the masculine project of reform. I, on the other hand, argue that Davys and her readership are participants in cultural “misrecognition” and are therefore unable to even question the legitimacy of female passivity.

Formator and quickly establishes limits on his behavior. Most importantly, Amoranda's language demonstrates both reasoning power and worldly wisdom in her conversation with Lord Lofty and later, with Formator. After Lord Lofty implies that to marry a woman is "to have so little love" for her, Amoranda responds with the following:

. . . one thing I have often observed, when once a Woman's married, nobody cares for her but her Husband; and if your Lordship's Remark's be true, not he neither: so that, my Lord, I think we must live single in our own defence. (Davys 264)

Amoranda undoubtedly shows her ability to reason by deduction, and it further reveals her awareness of Lord Lofty's "designs;" thus, she is able to match him at his own game. The heiress shows that she is far from being ensnared by Lord Lofty's wicked plans. Indeed, Amoranda's sharp reason exposes Formator's own flawed reasoning in response to his accusation that she is "engross[ing] the whole Male world to herself":

Nay, . . . there never was any such thing in nature, as one Woman engrossing the whole contrary Sex; believe me, sir, you all love Variety too well for that, and your Affections, like your Money, circulates all the Nation over; so that it is only who can keep their Lovers longest we strive for, not who can keep them always, for that we none of us expect. (Davys 268)

Amoranda's clever response again reveals her ability to discern between fact and exaggeration. It therefore proves her rational mind, while it simultaneously divulges Formator's unsound reasoning.

It is not only the "young Lady's" language that displays her initial power and agency, but it is also manifested in her unwillingness to be a victim to male manipulation. Amoranda does not hesitate to orchestrate a "Counter-Plot" against Froth and Callid, after being informed by the housekeeper about their plot to kidnap her. Even Formator defers to Amoranda's plan, *asking her permission* to pose as the disguised

Amoranda: "Madam, said he, give me leave to personate you in the Summer-house tomorrow night" (Davys 269). She even goes so far as to suggest that they "invert" conventional gender customs by offering to "come and rescue" Formator if he "happen[s] to be worsted" by participating in her revenge plot. Amoranda's assertive and resolute personality presents itself again after Lord Lofty's duplicity (his intentions to marry another woman) is partially revealed. Upon discovering Lord Lofty's incriminating silver box, Amoranda's first instinct is to take the matter into her own hands. Again she reveals her independence when she declares to her maid Jenny: "Give me my Clothes . . . I'll be revenged of him or lose my Life in the Attempt" (Davys 269). Amoranda refuses to be outmaneuvered by any man and opts instead to take action rather than remain passive or silent.

The narrator and the story continually work to identify Amoranda's problem as "Vanity," even though it is Amoranda's wealth that makes possible her independence and freedom from male control. Thus, lest her 'students' not take her 'lesson' to heart, the narrator repeatedly points out (either in her own voice or via Formator's) that "Vanity" or "Flattery" is women's "greatest Foible" (she states this twice, on pages 257 and 291) as well as a woman's most unattractive trait (291). Furthermore, to make certain she drives home the moral of the story, she equates vanity and flattery with "Weakness" (272), "Folly and Madness" (316), and "Disease" (257). Moreover, the accusation of "Vanity" is a predictable corollary to Amoranda's coquetry, because the culture takes it for granted that the sole purpose of the coquette's "flirting" or "playing" is simply to gain the flattery of her suitors. By consistently drawing our attention to Amoranda's vanity, the text epitomizes Bourdieu's concept of "misrecognition" in that

the author (and the culture in which she is embedded) seems unable to perceive the protagonist's coquetry as an anti-marriage practice that prolongs Amoranda's independence.

Moreover, even though Amoranda undoubtedly proves herself a reasonable young woman, the narrator accuses Amoranda of having no "Reason" and positions her as "prey" all on account of her desire for flattery:

What an unhappy Creature is a beautiful young Girl left to her own Management, who is so fond of Adoration that Reason and Prudence are thrust out to make way for it; 'till she becomes a prey to every designing Rascal, and her own ridiculous Qualities are her greatest Enemies. (Davys 264)

Since it has been shown that Amoranda possesses "Reason" and is certainly not at risk in becoming Lord Lofty's "prey," it is apparent that the narrator is blind to her own internalized ideology, and so she automatically projects her own anxiety (of females overstepping the prescribed limits of their power) onto the constructed feminine flaw of vanity. As a "product" of the material conditions of her own culture, the narrator herself interprets Amoranda's behavior as vanity. Even the narrator's sex (which is female) does not matter, because males and females are bounded by, as well as improvise within, the same "habitus."

Even more interesting, however, is that while the narrator incessantly tries to convince the reader of Amoranda's naiveté, she simultaneously emphasizes Formator's rationality. Thus, later on it is not at all surprising that the narrator constructs Amoranda as unreasonable for *not* suspecting the motivations of Arentia and Berintha, as if it is reasonable for her to believe that every person she meets has ulterior motives (as Formator believes). Yet, rather than label Formator paranoid, the text instead endorses

the view that he is the consummate model of rationality, while Amoranda is repeatedly punished for rational behavior and choices. The text, it could be argued, persecutes Amoranda, coercing her to admit that her “Vanity” is the source of her woes.

Another instance of the text’s misrecognition of Amoranda’s agency occurs after Amoranda decides to avenge herself on Lord Lofty. Most notable in this particular scene is that Amoranda neither informs Formator of Lord Lofty’s deceit nor does she make Formator privy to her revenge plan. As a result, her skillful manipulation of Lord Lofty at breakfast appears as flattery-seeking flirtation to the spying Formator. Not surprisingly, Formator does not, or, more accurately stated, he *cannot* recognize Amoranda’s power as a manifestation of her intelligence or her ability to defend herself against a conniving man; he simply ‘reads’ her power as a female weakness, and so he asks Lord Lofty to leave.

Indeed, under the constant influence of Formator, Amoranda slowly gives up her status as an independent and rational woman for the more subjugated status of a dependent and emotional one, even though the text would like readers to believe that her transformation is one from that of a “Coquet” to that of a woman of “Virtue, Modesty, and innate Love to Honour” (Davys 272). In fact, after Formator asks Lord Lofty to leave, Amoranda responds by adamantly refusing Formator the ability to “dismiss” her guests; however, out of respect for her absent Uncle, she allows Formator to choose her visitors, telling him “I have, to oblige you, sent my Lord away, and do here faithfully promise you, I will never come into his Company more, without your Approbation” (Davys 271). Formator then takes this opportunity to ‘educate’ Amoranda on the dangers of her “greedy Desire for Flattery,” which, in his mind, has attracted “a

heap of Vermin about" her. Her subsequent "Tears" illustrate the extent of the influence he has had upon her up until this point.

A more radical sign of Amoranda's compliance to Formator's wishes is evident in her counter-plot against Lord Lofty to avenge the nearly "ruined" Altimira. Again, Amoranda shows ingenuity in constructing a plan to save Altimira's reputation; however, in contrast to the prior incident, she does not act without Formator's approval:

Formator, . . . I have this poor Creature's Wrongs so much at heart, that I shall never rest till I recover her Quiet; but you must give me leave, because I have promised never to see Lord Lofty more unless I have your Consent for it, and without seeing him nothing can be done. (Davys 284)

Amoranda is only able to proceed with her design after receiving Formator's "leave" and "Consent." Thus, as the story progresses, readers see Amoranda turn to Formator more frequently for his counsel.

The most dramatic changes in Amoranda occur in the latter half of the story. I would argue that the text purposely heightens its persecution of the young heiress by depicting Amoranda as resistant to Formator's influence and thus licensing more violent means by which to 'educate' her (with such threats as kidnapping and rape). In the weeks following the foiled kidnapping attempt (of Amoranda) by two masked men, in which Amoranda is recuperating from the trauma of nearly being raped, Formator takes advantage of Amoranda's mentally weak condition to plead his case regarding the "despicable" nature of her vanity, while he simultaneously attempts to instill proper female virtues. In fact, the narrator relates:

Three Weeks were now passed since they left Lord Lofty's in which time, Formator had by a daily application endeavoured to form Amoranda's mind to his own liking; he tried to bring her to a true taste of that

Behaviour which makes every Woman agreeable to every Man of Sense.
(Davys 291)

In this passage, Formator's "daily application . . . to form Amoranda's mind" is strikingly (and disturbingly) similar in meaning to "brainwashing." It calls attention to Formator's role as the voice of "orthodoxy" and his purpose to attempt a restoration of the "primal state of innocence of doxa" (Bourdieu 169). The goal of the text, the reader is reminded, is to get Amoranda to see the error of her ways and "confess" her "Vanity."

Formator's "daily application" serves the same function as a witch trial, in which the accused witch is repeatedly coerced into confessing – which, in turn, represents the relinquishment of her power to patriarchal authority. Symbolically speaking, Amoranda does 'confess' on the very next page when she says to Formator, "I am resolved I will never think it [Vanity] a pleasure again, because you dislike it in me" (Davys 292). And, just a few pages later, she reiterates her 'confession' with a conviction that makes the reader aware she believes the truth of her own discourse: "I have now brought myself to an utter Contempt for all that part of our Species and shall for the future, not only despise Flattery but abhor the mouth it comes from" (Davys 303). Similar to the witch, Amoranda's admission of her so-called flaw is as good as surrendering her power to Formator.

In addition to 'confessing' her vanity, Amoranda eventually comes to distrust her own perceptions and instincts and begins to rely fully on Formator for the construction of her own reality. To illustrate, upon the arrival of an unidentified "Lady on a *Spanish* Gennet," Amoranda is afraid to invite the stranger into her house. Her

recent experience with Arentia and the disguised Berintha (who planned to rape her) has made her question her own ability to judge people, even though her decision at the time (to go boating alone with them) was entirely reasonable. Then, after Formator suggests that two of her traitorous servants be jailed, she says, "Then do what you will . . . I leave it wholly to you," clearly dismissing her own instinct to "pay them their Wages and turn them off" (Davys 303). Amoranda allows Formator to decide for her what a just and reasonable punishment is for these men. Essentially, she has surrendered her own sense of morality to Formator.

One mark of the extent to which Amoranda has relinquished her power and succumbed to a man's influence is her newly acquired interest in marriage and children. She tells her maid, "I should make a pretty good wife, [and] if ever I have a Child, I will not think it a trouble to nurse it, 'tis a Work Nature requires of us [women]" (Davys 306). Indeed Amoranda's reference to the "natural" role of a woman as wife and mother certainly displays her reintegration into the gender ideology of early eighteenth century culture.

Finally, Amoranda's acceptance of Formator's/Alanthus's offer of marriage completes her psychological transformation. So now the "crisis" of the text is resolved, since Amoranda (comparable to the witches discussed in Karlsen's essay) will be, upon marriage, both "dispossessed" of her property, divested of the freedom from male control that her wealth permitted, and silenced, too, since as Natasha Saje claims, she will be also relinquishing "her will and self-expression" (166). Noteworthy, too, is that Alanthus denies Amoranda a courtship phase: "[he] hoped a few Visits more would make her forget the Ceremony and Formality of a tedious Courtship" (Davys 309), and

so the text clearly ensures that Amoranda is afforded no opportunity for any power (however short) over him.

Indeed the heroine's situation in Davys's *The Reformed Coquet* clearly parallels the female inheritor that Karlsen describes who must be punished by means of witchcraft accusations so that the patriarchy can once again re-establish its own position of dominance. Amoranda is accused of "coquetry" and must be "reformed" in order to return her to her proper submissive position in the societal hierarchy. As a female heiress, Amoranda presents an ideological crisis that the patriarchy must resolve. The text, therefore, situates Formator into the liminal space that affords Amoranda some power, however brief, before she marries and must answer to her husband. As far as the patriarchy is concerned, marriage is the ideal panacea to the crisis at hand, because matrimonial vows aim to ensure a woman's complete surrender to a man. Of course, the "crisis" she creates exposes the instability of, and the strategies employed by, the dominant class (the patriarchy) to naturalize certain practices.

In retrospect, it is not surprising that Amoranda falls in love with her elderly guardian, in light of the fact that a husband's role is that of "patriarch"; she is simply resuming her proper place as a female in the ideological construct of early eighteenth century Britain. As a consequence of her marriage, the patriarchy successfully "dispossesses" Amoranda of her property, since her husband is now the rightful owner. If, as some critics say, it was the narrator's intention to 'educate' Amoranda on "marrying wisely" because the present society allows for a young person's choice of mate, then the logic of the text compels its readers to ask whether or not Amoranda actually had any real choice. As Ellen Pollak so aptly states it, "For women, in short, the

illusion of free choice is used to justify [in this case, patriarchal and] domestic tyranny” (36). Ideologically, Amoranda never had one; Form/ator form/ed her to the liking of the “dominant class” and therefore Amoranda believes (since the text gives no indication that she does not believe this) that she freely chose Alanthus.

As a final point, it is interesting that *The Reformed Coquet* both begins and ends with the transference of property – Amoranda’s Uncle makes her an heiress, and, at the end of the story, society, through marriage, gives Alanthus the body, mind, and money of Amoranda. The text certainly begs the question: is it giving up her vanity or giving up her property that enables the reader to see Amoranda as the ideal subservient woman? It is no wonder, then, that Lord Lofty discovers a resemblance between Amoranda and the figure of Helen represented in the painting the *Rape of Helen* (Davys 258-9), since Amoranda, like Helen, is plundered (raped) of her inheritance by the “design” of a male-dominated world.

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