

## Doctrine of Quiet Rebellion: Articulated Defiance in Eliza Haywood's *The Female Spectator*

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### ABSTRACT

Eliza Haywood is an author who has been given scant academic attention although she was immensely popular in the 1720s. Like other later feminist writers such as Sarah Fielding, Elizabeth Inchbald and most notably Jane Austen, she engaged in the technique of double writing. While on the surface she wrote amorous fiction, she covertly critiqued male fiction, thereby strategically masking her feminist resistance. From being a licentious writer in the private realm, she ventured into the public domain of essays, periodicals and moralizing novels in an effort to escape from the closet of femininity in favour of rebellion and autonomy. In this paper, I propose to deal with her non-fictional works, chiefly, *The Female Spectator* that has received scant attention.

**Keywords:** Eighteenth century feminist fiction, amorous fiction, didacticism, feminist resistance, critique of male fiction

### INTRODUCTION

A prominent figure in English literary history, Eliza Haywood (1693-1756) won popular acclaim with the publication of her *Love in Excess* in 1719. In spite of the fact that Richardson and Fielding are recognized as the canonical male masters of the novel, having established the great tradition of the modern novel for centuries to come, this is not the whole truth. According to Paula Backscheider and J. Richetti (1996), "Eliza Haywood's *Love in Excess* (1719) was one of the four best-selling books of the first half of the eighteenth century: only Daniel Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe* (1719), Swift's *Gulliver's Travels* (1726), and Richardson's *Pamela* (1741) equalled it. Haywood, Aubin, and Defoe absolutely dominated

prose fiction in the decade of the 1720s". Jane Spencer also confirms Haywood's popularity in the first half of the 18th century, and it was this popularity Spencer argues, that propelled Haywood, a "prolific and versatile" writer, to make a living by writing (Spencer, 1987, p. 9).

At the time, novels were "one of the few places where women could speak for themselves, could represent women's experiences, could express their needs, their nightmares, and their utopian hopes and escape the masculine myth of the female" (Backsheider & Richetti, 1996). It is also how 18th century women novelists helped to define modern categories of gender. In her novels, Haywood incisively critiques male tyranny and presents the despair of British women, who were at the mercy of a patriarchal society that believed in and practised double standards. Though Haywood is more renowned for her fictional work, in this paper, I propose to deal with her non-fictional work, chiefly, *The Female Spectator*. I will present the argument that *The Female Spectator* can be judged as a satisfactory venture by Haywood in the realm of journalism, one in which she combines didacticism along with her invective on the injustices that women suffer at the hands of the patriarchy.

### **BIOGRAPHICAL DETAILS**

Frustratingly negligible information is available to us as far as the biographical details of Eliza Haywood are concerned. Hence, I have referred to the much-alluded to biography of Eliza Haywood by George Frisbie Whicher, and another biography by Christine Blouch, that are included in the *Selected Works of Eliza Haywood I., Vol. I.*

At loggerheads with the wishes of her family, Eliza Fowler left home, not nurturing matrimonial plans, but to make a career on the stage (Blouch, 1998, p. 9). When acting did not duly reward her with fame and money, she looked for an alternative vocation and took to writing. "As Haywood put the case in 1720, 'the Stage not answering my Expectation, and the Averseness of my Relations to it, has made me turn my genius another way'" (Haywood, 1998). True to the spirit of the age, Eliza Haywood was condemned as an unchaste writer. With the resounding success of *Love in Excess* in 1719, Eliza Haywood became an acclaimed writer of fiction.

The publisher of her first novel William Chetwood, who had known her from the days when she had been an actress at Smock Alley, went on to advertise five novels that would appear from 1722 to 1724. This fact highlights how prolific and versatile Haywood was as a writer in the 18th century, even when women's publication was a rare phenomenon. The five novels that were advertised include

*The British Recluse, The Injur'd Husband, Lasselia, Idalia and The Rash Resolve*. “Four titles would follow in 1723 and seven in 1724, a pace that Haywood sustained throughout much of the decade” (Blouch, 1998).

Next, Haywood devoted her energy towards compiling one of the pioneering periodicals written by a woman. The maiden issue of *The Female Spectator* was published in the 1730s. In 1744, the publication of *The Female Spectator* commenced in earnest. It was a periodical composed by a woman exclusively for women readers, though not the first of its kind contrary to what Joyce Horner (1973) asserts. The credit for the original women's periodical probably goes to the *Female Tatler* (1709) by Delariviere Manley. In her biography of Haywood, Blouch provides us with some interesting statistics regarding *The Female Spectator*: “Issued in at least eight English editions over the next ten years, *The Female Spectator* was published as *La Nouvelle Spectatrice* in France in 1751, and reissued in English as late as 1771” (Blouch, 1998). It dealt with feminine concerns, chiefly with extending the opportunities for self-improvement that lead to the greatest possible autonomy for women. In 1743, Thomas Gardner published Haywood's *A Present for a Servant-Maid*, that became an immensely popular read. Prior to the publication of *The Female Spectator*, Haywood wrote *A Present*, that was a manual containing advice for maid-servants on how to behave. Perhaps “Haywood wanted servants to have something other than *Pamela* to read” (Blouch, 1998). It also included sections on cookery and shopping. Haywood's other didactic works include *The Parrot* (1746), *Epistles for the Ladies* (1749-1750), and *The Wife* (1755). Designed to be a “Compendium of the times”, *The Parrot* consisted of two parts: moralizings on life and manners by a miraculous parrot, and a digest of whatever happenings the author could scrape together” (Schofield, 1985). In addition, *The Parrot* also addressed burning political issues of the time such as the 1745 rebellion and the cause of the Young Pretender, for which Haywood became a suspect. In *Epistles for the Ladies*, Haywood relates the cause of lack of education in women to marital dilemmas. *The Wife* considers marital problems that a wife has to encounter; it also contains advice for married women on how to behave in the best possible manner, in case of a nuptial crisis.

Eliza Haywood co-authored with Daniel Defoe to bring out *Secret Memoirs of the Late Mr. Duncan Campbell*, that was published in 1732. However, success came to her in 1733, when her play *The Opera of Operas* was staged. Haywood is also said to have authored a dictionary of theatre that ran into seven editions, the authorship of which remains disputed to this very day (Blouch, 1998). She continued acting and writing simultaneously until she embarked on the moral phase of her career with *The History of Miss Betsy Thoughtless*. Her works of

fiction in this period include *Dalinda* and *The Virtuous Orphan*. Haywood also carried on a profitable publishing trade during this time and opened a bookseller's shop called The Sign of Fame in Covent Garden in 1741. Although she was arrested for composing inflammatory political pamphlets, she managed to avoid prosecution owing to her supposed ill-health. It is believed that Haywood died in 1756.

I have examined Haywood's biography in detail to highlight how aggressive a literary individual she had been. Though she is predominantly viewed as a writer of amatory fiction, yet being an astute and crafty judge of the tastes of the reading public, she switched to didactic fiction in the latter part of her career. That the male canon largely ignores her contribution to the realm of English fiction in particular, is due to the sheer envy of her overwhelming popularity amongst contemporary readers. She was swift to reinvent herself as a writer of instructive tales once bourgeois morality became the cornerstone for women's fiction. The daringly unconventional life that she led helps to prove the kind of radical opinions that she nurtured. Her values, which were inconsistent with the prevalent notions of morality, lay elsewhere. Haywood firmly believed that to remain virtuous was to remain inactive and passive. She struggled to maintain control over her life as she lived life on her own terms.

### NON-FICTIONAL INVECTIVE

We do not know whether Eliza Haywood had ever penned down her personal and private thoughts in an epistolary format, and even if she had written letters, direct access to them seems virtually impossible. It is therefore from her non-fictional works, namely her periodicals, that we get to know her private thoughts that she was fearless enough to publish. In the days preceding the Restoration, a large number of women writers ventured into the realm of writing and publishing either for professional or commercial reasons; "...these women had written with a strong sense of vocation, which had enabled them to overcome their fears about entering into print" (Turner, 1994).

With her enormous and prolific output, Eliza Haywood experimented with all forms of imaginative writing that include a scandalous and licentious novel and a novel of domestic sentiment. Haywood was bold enough to "openly articulate her doctrine of quiet rebellion as she defines woman's role of seeming compliance but actual revolt" in *The Female Spectator* (Schofield, 1985). When Eliza Haywood titled her journal *The Female Spectator*, she was not merely trying to imitate the journals of Addison and Steele. Very consciously, she was articulating a strategy for women, marginalized, as they were, so that they could enjoy the power that

observation accrues, thus endowing them with discursive authority. In this way, Haywood undermined the conventional perception of the masculine viewer and the female object (to be viewed). Additionally, a serious moral purpose underlies the tone of *The Female Spectator* as Haywood repeatedly urges women to develop themselves as intellectual and moral creatures as best as they can. There is no definite genre followed in *The Female Spectator* as such. Though some essays develop a single theme, there are a variety of themes that hinge on the strands of the numerous stories. Each story illustrates a theme that serves as tales of warning or caution for young ladies. Additionally, they encourage women to bypass the norms of society to achieve female empowerment. This theme is evident not only in *The Female Spectator*, but also in the essays from the *Epistles for the Ladies*, *The Wife* and *The Young Lady*. Most of the essays offer counsel to gullible, young women advising them to choose the right partners in marriage and not be misled by empty professions of romance. In Book I of *The Female Spectator*, Haywood bewails:

How fatal, how pernicious to a young and unexperienced Mind must be such Maxims, especially when dressed up in all the Pomp of Words! The Beauty of the Expression steals upon the Senses, and every Mischief, every Woe that Love occasions, appears a Charm. (*The Female Spectator*; p. 12)

Haywood felt distraught that such romantic notions should propel a young lady to become a prey to a fortune-hunter. When a young lady only thought of outsmarting her friends, she was sure to land in deep trouble: “How easy were it now for a designing Fortune-Hunter to make a prey of this Bib-and-Apron Heroine!” (Haywood, 1999, p.13). Marriage was another common theme of discussion in *The Female Spectator* where Haywood laid down certain conditions for a perfect marriage. She also discussed marriages gone sour such as that of Lady Bloometta and old Pompilius, of Aristobulus and Celinda, and of Dalinda and Macro. Clearly, Haywood felt wary about Dalinda’s ill-starred marriage: “Tremble Mariana, lest your father’s clerk should prove another Macro, and rather endure the short- liv’d Pangs of combating an unhappy inclination, than by yielding to it, run the Hazard of our Miseries which death alone can put a Period to” (*The Female Spectator*; p. 34). In fact, *The Female Spectator* can be considered to be an exclusive commentary on the thorns that accompany matrimony. There were inescapable feminist overtones in *The Female Spectator*, especially in Book VIII, where Haywood looked at marriage as “a kind of precipice, which, when once leap’d, there is no Possibility of reclimbing...” (p. 97). Evidently, she did not nurture profound trust in the bonds of marriage as her own marriage came to an abrupt end (Saxton & Bocchicchio, 2000).

Haywood also depicted concern for young ladies who rush into hasty marriages in *The Female Spectator*. In Book VIII of *The Female Spectator*, a young lady named Bellamonte is confronted with three suitors, and thus confused, she turns to *The Female Spectator* for advice. *The Female Spectator* counsels her on who to choose as her lifelong companion so that she can enjoy sheer nuptial bliss (p. 90-98). In her other non-fictional works such as *Epistles for the Ladies*, *The Wife* and *The Young Lady*, Haywood (2000) metes out doses of radical suggestions for women with abusive husbands. In an epistle, Lucilla advises Calista when the latter's husband takes recourse to adultery:

She now in all Respects supplies your Place, does the Honours of his Table, has the entire Command of all the Servants, and so great an Ascendant over him, that he declares publickly he will make her his Wife, if Fortune should ever put it in his Power; - a civil Way, you will say, of wishing you out of the World; but that can have little Effect either on your Health, or Peace of Mind; on the contrary, the Insult gives you a fair Pretence of living separate from a Husband who has now proved himself unworthy of you [...] (*Epistles for the Ladies*, pp. 224-225)

Haywood's open defiance of double standards practised by patriarchy is unusual for her time. She exhorts women to refrain from indulging in the crime of tolerating the infidelity of their husbands. Her insistence that women should free themselves from the prison of silence imposed by patriarchy is enormously iconoclastic indeed in the contemporary male-dominated world of printing and publishing.

Book X of *The Female Spectator* warns women of the pitfalls of stunted learning:

Yet, I think, it would be cruel to charge the Ladies with all the Errors they commit; it is most commonly the Fault of a wrong Education, which makes them frequently do amiss, while they think they not only act innocently but uprightly; - it is therefore only the Men, and the Men of Understanding too, who, in effect, merit the Blame of this, and are answerable for all the Misconduct we are guilty of... (*The Female Spectator*, p. 123)

Haywood puts the blame for the meagre education of women squarely on men and goes on to say that men intentionally made sure that women were not well educated so that women could be confined to the domestic sphere while men would dominate both the public and the private worlds. In an age when women had barely started to write, not only did Haywood bitterly resent gender inequality, but made it evident through her works that women should be given equal opportunities with men in matters of education. A glance at certain lines of Book X of *The Female Spectator* will confirm this notion: "Those men are certainly

guilty of a great deal of Injustice who think, that all the Learning becoming in a Woman is confined to the Management of her Family” (*The Female Spectator*, p. 125). It is startling to note that almost half a century later, Mary Wollstonecraft (2004) begins her *Vindication* with a similar note of complaint. She opens Chapter II of *A Vindication* with:

If then women are not a swarm of ephemeron triflers, why should they be kept in ignorance under the specious name of innocence? Men complain, and with reason, of the follies and caprices of our sex, when they do not keenly satirize our headstrong our headstrong passions and grovelling vices. Behold, I should answer, the natural effect of ignorance! (*A Vindication*, p. 28)

Female education was an issue that appears to have haunted Haywood. She lost no time in estimating that women could overcome their limitations and acquire an ideal character once they gained knowledge and experience in the ways of the world. In this way, Haywood argues, one can enjoy old age once the flurry of youth has eluded one’s grasp. In *Epistle LXXIX*, Clio confides to Hillaria: “The only Way therefore to ward off the Sights old Age is liable to receive, is to lay up in Youth a Stock of Knowledge wherewith to entertain ourselves when no Body else will think it worth their while to entertain us” (*Epistles for the Ladies*, p. 252).

Haywood believed passionately that the intellect of a woman should be enriched as far as possible. Learning about the natural sciences would help them to understand that women need not necessarily remain inferior to men in terms of abilities and intellect. Whether the science of Philosophy improved the qualities of the mind of a woman, Haywood had this to say:

Philosophy is, therefore, the Toil which can never tire the Person engag’d in it; - all its Ways are strewed with Roses, and the farther you go, the more enchanting Objects appear before you, and invite you on.

That this Science is not too abstruse for our Sex to arrive at a great Perfection in, none can presume to deny; because many known Examples, both in ancient and modern Times, prove the Certainty of it. (*The Female Spectator*, p. 131)

Haywood adds to the list of subjects that she thinks the minds of the ladies are equipped to study:

Some branches of the Mathematicks are also very agreeable and improving Amusements for young Ladies, particular *Geography*, in which they may travel the World over, be acquainted with all its Parts, and find new Matter to adore the Infinite Wisdom....



History must not be omitted, as it cannot fail engaging the Mind to Attention, and affording the strongest Precept by Example...

These are what I would have the serious Employments of a young Lady's Mind:—Music, Dancing, and the Reading of Poetry and Novels may sometimes come in by way of Relaxation, but ought not to be too much indulg'd. (*The Female Spectator*, p. 132)

Curiously enough, Haywood does not ascertain supreme value to accomplishments in contradistinction to many of her contemporaries, as for example, Hester Chapone. Haywood's stance is echoed by Jane Austen when the latter undermines the notion of accomplishments by making the shallow women in her novels speak approvingly of them. Haywood solemnly affirms the utility of that education which makes women wise, rather than an empty one that consists of nothing but accomplishments:

Were that time which is taken up in instructing us in Accomplishments, which, however taking us in first sight, conduce little to our Happiness, employ'd in studying the Rules of Wisdom, in well informing us what we are, and what we ought to be" (*The Female Spectator*, p. 127).

Haywood feels sceptical about convention that limits the opportunities for women as she uses subversive techniques to express her voice of dissent against patriarchy. This is how Haywood contributes to the tradition of non-fictional feminist prose.

That Haywood uses the concept of gaze or "seeing" to establish gendered dichotomies was analysed by Juliette Merritt (2004) in *Eliza Haywood's Female Spectators*. She explores the relationship between vision and power; according to Merritt, Haywood allows the individual to "see" and thus assert power (Merritt, 2004, p. 16). That individual being a woman brings to the forefront Haywood's challenge to patriarchy as she theoretically allows a woman to assume power. Merritt contemplates: "A presiding issue is whether women can, from their position as objects, as spectacles rather than spectators, exert some control over their destiny. Or, conversely, can they successfully become spectators, and acquire the authority conferred by that role?" (Merritt, 2004, p. 16). While Merritt emphasizes Haywood's combative instincts, Kathryn Shevelow (1989) celebrates Haywood's pioneering spirit. According to Shevelow, Haywood recognizes in her periodical that women were barred entry in the public domain, and simultaneously urges them to forge an entry:

The *Female Spectator*, an essay-periodical, illustrates the terms upon which the first (acknowledged) woman editor began to participate in the



‘feminized’ discourse of the periodical, on the one hand extending the tendencies contained in the periodical from the beginning, but, on the other, recasting the way in which the essay-periodical persona represented her authority to address her audience. (Shevelov, 1989, p. 167)

Thus Haywood emerges as a radical writer when she urges women to recognize the merits and advantages of cultivating an ideal education. Through her periodical, she inverts the position of power that traditionally belonged to men. With women usurping the role of spectators, Haywood accrued power to them, depriving men the advantage of making women the objects of their gaze. Her text thus issues a bold challenge to women to configure their own destiny.

### CONCLUSION

Eliza Haywood’s pioneering role in the realm of fiction and non-fiction writing emerged at a time when women were tentatively making their presence felt in the literary world. Her undaunted voice of protest against the patriarchal world becomes evident when she sought to reveal the injustice that women suffered with regard to education and matrimony. In her non-fictional works such as *The Female Spectator*, *Epistles for the Ladies*, *The Wife* and *the Young Lady*, she offered new alternatives to women to improve themselves intellectually and morally:

In urging women to be reflective and self-controlled, to regulate their responses and conduct, and to guard against the confusion of desire with reality, Haywood was not only consistent with all of her writings but also engaged in admonishing women to be independent and self-controlled, one of the most consistent enterprises of women writers of the entire century.” (Backscheider & Richetti, 1996, p. 6).

She discarded the traditional notions of femininity in her non-fictional writings and constructed the image of an ideal woman on clearly feminist lines. Time and again, she asserted that women should work for their ultimate personal growth. Simultaneously, she argued that overt sheltering would make young women vulnerable to predatory males. Thus, Haywood established the utility of a practical kind of education for women that would instruct them on how to preserve their chastity; for once virtue was lost, they would be irretrievably ruined. It is this kind of utilitarian lesson that Haywood wanted to drive home, thus motivating women to strive for their own empowerment.

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