

The Hidden Lives of Furniture:
Rethinking the Subject/Object Dichotomy
in Eighteenth-Century Novels

by

Megan Sajewski

The Hidden Lives of Furniture:
Rethinking the Subject/Object Dichotomy
in Eighteenth-Century Novels

by
Megan Sajewski

A thesis presented for the B.A. degree
with Honors in
The Department of English
University of Michigan
Spring 2012

© March 2012

Megan Elizabeth Sajewski

For my dearest Bubbie,
the smartest, sharpest, and strongest woman
I have ever had the pleasure of knowing.

Acknowledgements

This thesis was born two years ago from my first and last computer project of my undergraduate career—a wiki on furniture for Tina Lupton’s English 451: *Love, Marriage, and the Rise of the Novel*. Despite my closet stance as a neo-Luddite, this computer project resulted in the seeds of a nascent thesis topic. I became invested in trying to understand how and why eighteenth-century couches, beds, and chairs seem to perform roles greater than what we typically think possible of objects. For making me face my fear of technology and her continuous support of my project, I want to thank Tina Lupton more than anyone else. Not only has Tina gone above and beyond her duties as an honors advisor, but she has also been a great friend and mentor for the last three years. Tina has been incredibly patient with me during the numerous drafts of this project and magically pointed out and helped me find perfect solutions for every problem in my thesis that I couldn’t quite put my finger on. To put it simply, Tina is the most brilliant person I have ever met and this thesis would not exist without her.

I also want to thank Honors Director Jennifer Wenzel and the 2012 Honors English Thesis Cohort. I am indebted to Jennifer for her meticulous and helpful readings of my drafts this year and her squirrel anecdote that brightened the otherwise dreary final days of first semester. Without the Cohort’s support, I’m not sure I would’ve survived this thesis in one piece. I will forever treasure the camaraderie that we fostered through social media and bonding nights on South University. I owe gratitude especially to Meredith Perry, Jordan Schroder, and Melissa Gansler for their unceasing intellectual and emotional support. I wish you all boundless success and prosperity in anything and everything you choose to do.

From the bottom of my heart, I want to thank my parents, Stephen and Tia Sajewski. You inspire me to not only work my hardest at everything I do but to never give up on my dreams.

Your love, support, and sacrifices for my education have not gone unnoticed or unappreciated. Thank you for helping me through this process in all the little ways: the late night Zingerman's pies, delicious Sunday Pancho's visits, and my eternally messy room. Thank you for always believing in me even when I seem to lose faith in myself.

I also want to thank my best friend and boyfriend Mike Kaminski for his undying support of my writing and academic pursuits. He has been the only one to witness the trauma of late night thesis writing and the only person who was able to cheer me up throughout this process. He has been my anchor during this whole process and I am so grateful to him.

Lastly, I must thank those who have inspired me and led me on this academic path and continue to shape the way I think about and understand literature. I want to thank Lucy Hartley for introducing me to literary theory and John Whittier-Ferguson for helping me to perfect my writing style. And finally, I owe many, many thanks to my first high school Honors English teacher, Mrs. Okon. Her guidance as a mentor and high expectations for her students has made me the writer I am today. I hope to one day inspire students with the same energy and passion for the written word as she did for me eight years ago.

Abstract

Something curious was happening with subjects and objects in the literary world of eighteenth-century England. As the novel began to take shape and come into its own, distinctions between characters and the things around them were not as rigid as we are inclined to believe. One could even say that this dichotomy was configured in a very different way than it is of subjects and objects now. This reordering of the boundary between these two categories is especially evident in the fictional interactions between female characters and furniture objects.

In eighteenth-century novels, women are doing peculiar things with furniture that affect their own beings, their interactions with male characters, and lastly their relationships with us the readers. This thesis sets out to explore how furniture objects behave in these novels when women utilize them in order to understand the nature of the subject/object dichotomy in eighteenth-century fiction. Exploring a sampling of novels including but not limited to Haywood's blockbusters *Love in Excess* (1719-20) and *Betsy Thoughtless* (1751), Samuel Richardson's *Pamela* (1741), Charlotte Lennox's *The Female Quixote* (1752), and Daniel Defoe's *Moll Flanders* (1721) for interactions between female characters and beds, couches, and chairs will ultimately further our comprehension of the development of the novel and the ways in which women are imagined in its positivist trajectory.

The introduction will first unpack the idea of the subject/object dichotomy, opening up its significations and meanings for both our understanding of it today as readers of eighteenth-century texts as well as for the eighteenth-century readers. Moreover, it will situate this thesis within a specific theoretical framework to then introduce the influence of thing theory and sociologist Bruno Latour's take on social space for imagining subject/object relations in eighteenth-century novels. From here, I will provide an explanation for the questions: *why* furniture? *Why* choose these novels? And finally *why* female characters' interactions with them?

Following the introduction is a chapter exploring beds and how they are both liberating and limiting devices. In their double role, beds appear to cause anxiety or some kind of danger for the women who use them but ultimately transmit a sense of materiality to them, which then in turn, liberates the women and allows them to express an interiority of character previously unseen before their interactions with the bed. A chapter dedicated to couches follows the meditations on the function of beds in eighteenth-century novels and attempts to understand couches as a halfway point between beds and chairs in both design and function. Lastly, a chapter focused on chairs concludes the body of the thesis. Taking both a historical and theoretical approach to understanding the eighteenth-century chair, this chapter explores the many uses and significations of the word and object "chair." In this final chapter, I ultimately posit that it is the chair that is the furniture piece that remains with the novel into the nineteenth-century—the object whose specificity and longevity is the clearest indicator of the evolution and rearrangement of subject/object dichotomy in the eighteenth-century novel.

CONTENTS

Figures.....	i
Introduction.....	1
Chapter I.	
Eighteenth-Century Beds: Explorations of Soporific Activities and Other Various Behaviors	
The Theoretical Bed.....	12
The Bed of Love?.....	14
Night Terrors & <i>Pamela</i>	17
The Bed as Transmitter.....	22
Chapter II.	
What does a couch have to do with it?: Lust, Love and Seduction in Eighteenth Century Novels	
The Couch: Forgotten Child of the Union between Bed and Chair.....	25
The Haywoodian Couch.....	27
Objects and Interiority: The Act of and Space for Reading.....	30
The Couch's Role in the Gender Divide.....	34
The Couch Revisited, Female Agency, and the Act of Reading.....	38
Chapter III.	
Chairs and their Fictional Occupants: Musings on Objects, the Imagination, and Space in Eighteenth-Century Novels	
Minor Collisions with the Elbow Chair.....	41
The Solitary Object: Chairs, Solidity, and Positionality.....	44
The Social Chair.....	53
Movement, Stasis & The Sedan Chair.....	55
Conclusion.....	63
Works Consulted.....	66

Figures

Figure 1. Page 1. Eighteenth Century English Dummy Board.

Michael Liptich Fine Antiques and Consultants.

<<http://www.english-furniture.net/antiquefurniture/details.asp?stockID=111>>

Figure 2. Page 1. Eighteenth Century English Dummy Board.

Michael Liptich Fine Antiques and Consultants.

<<http://www.english-furniture.net/antiquefurniture/details.asp?stockID=111>>

Figure 3. Page 44. Illustration of an Elbow Chair. Robert Manwaring's *The Chair-Maker's*

Guide from 1766. (See Works Consulted for full bibliographic information)

<[http://find.galegroup.com/ecco/infomark.do?&source=gale&prodId=ECCO&userGroup](http://find.galegroup.com/ecco/infomark.do?&source=gale&prodId=ECCO&userGroupName=umuser&tabID=T001&docId=CB3326806240&type=multipage&contentSet=EC)

[Name=umuser&tabID=T001&docId=CB3326806240&type=multipage&contentSet=EC](http://find.galegroup.com/ecco/infomark.do?&source=gale&prodId=ECCO&userGroupName=umuser&tabID=T001&docId=CB3326806240&type=multipage&contentSet=EC)

[COArticles&version=1.0&docLevel=FACSIMILE](http://find.galegroup.com/ecco/infomark.do?&source=gale&prodId=ECCO&userGroupName=umuser&tabID=T001&docId=CB3326806240&type=multipage&contentSet=EC)>

Figure 4. Page 58. Private Sedan Chair from Furniture Catalog.

<<http://www.georgianindex.net/transportationLondon/chairmen.html>>

Figure 5. Page 58. Sedan Chair Illustration.

<<http://www.georgianindex.net/transportationLondon/chairmen.html>>

Introduction

How does one begin to tell the story of people and things in eighteenth-century England? Was there something happening in this period with relationships between the two that makes such a conversation relevant, and even significant? Answering these questions might begin with looking to dummy boards (See Figures 1 and 2).



Figure 1



Figure 2

These curious objects were invented in seventeenth-century Holland by Dutch painters and began to be produced in England at the beginning of the eighteenth-century, continuing to maintain popularity throughout the century. In her book *Dummy Boards and Chimney Boards*, Clare Graham states that dummy boards are “life-sized wooden cut-out figures of soldiers, serving maids, children, and animals” that were “made to stand in dark corners...of country houses, often creating a disturbingly lifelike impression for the casual viewer” (34). These

dummy boards were painted in the *trompe l'oeil* style and were meant to fool the eye into believing that they were real live servants waiting to serve the owner and guests of the home. Their purpose was to trick the viewer—to make her think that she was looking at a human when she was actually encountering only a painting of a human (albeit one that packed a big illusionistic punch). Not only were these paintings cut out of their frames to resemble actual people as closely as possible, but they also were considered furniture pieces and placed in homes next to couches, chairs, cabinets, and tables. How does the fact these objects were considered furniture pieces yet conspicuously featured convincing paintings of humans speak to a particular confusion of the subject/object dichotomy in the eighteenth-century?

These curious objects raise a central question for this thesis: what do we mean by the phrase subject/object dichotomy? Subjects are what we tend to consider ourselves—unique individuals living with consciousness in our world. And we map this identity onto the characters we read about in novels, too. We think of subjects as living, breathing beings, animate just like us, composed of both mind and body. On the flip side of this coin are objects. We tend to think of objects as *other*, as anything and everything not living as ourselves. In other words, objects are inanimate and we tend to think of ourselves as superior to them. I use this basic gloss on these oppositional constructs, however, in order to then propose an alternate way of thinking about them in eighteenth-century novels. Specifically, I want to assert that this subject/object dichotomy was not structured in the same way in eighteenth-century it is in our minds today.

With this key opposition proposed, let us return Figures 1 and 2—both examples of eighteenth century dummy boards—to understand how the arrangement of the subject/object dichotomy in the eighteenth-century was not as stable as we might assume. In Figure 1, we are confronted with a woman, who by her dress and broom in hand, appears to be a servant, yet is

interestingly placed next to a large cabinet. And in Figure 2, we see a young boy sitting on a chair with a dog leaping into his lap. What is quite intriguing about these dummy boards is that they both involve other furniture objects, chair and cabinet. These dummy boards represent human figures but reveal their material qualities—their flatness and thinness pushes against the convincingness of the *trompe l'oeil*. Yet there is something uncanny in the way they change the distinctions between typical definitions of subjects and objects. It is odd that paintings of people are placed in the same category as furniture pieces, and with these pieces we see the confusion between subjects and objects brought into the home, into the eighteenth-century domestic space.

In the example of these dummy boards, the distinction between subject and object is fuzzy at best. In other words, the painted figures are objects (paint on wood) and the boards themselves are objects as well. Yet, the painted figures strive to be read as subjects at the same time that they cannot be anything but objects, and it is in this desire that the boundaries become blurry between where the “subjecthood” of the figures begins and their “objecthood” ends. Importantly, this confusion of the borders between people and things did not only occur in pictorial representations, but also in novels. When we begin to think about how furniture behaves in novels, we enter into a realm that is not our own reality but instead interacts with it. In the fictional realm, furniture pieces (objects) and characters (subjects) both find their shape within our minds as readers. Yet they behave in ways similar to dummy boards, challenging any easy boundaries between subject and object, character and furniture object. Born through readers’ imaginative capabilities, subjects and objects take shape and interact with each other in eighteenth-century novels in ways that complicate the way we understand the subject/object dichotomy more broadly.

Before introducing “thing theory” and other such theoretical frameworks, I want to take a moment to explain the significance of studying furniture in eighteenth-century novels. First, the confusion of the subject/object relations is not specific to eighteenth-century novels; rather, as the novel was taking shape in the eighteenth-century, interesting things were happening with fictional space, character development, and most importantly with actual eighteenth-century furniture itself. As historian Deena Goodman asserts in the “Introduction” to *Furnishing the Eighteenth-Century* asserts, furniture mattered to the “subjects” of the eighteenth-century—“it marked their social status (real or invented), projected their identity, determined how they entertained, and constituted a substantial portion of their property” (1). Moreover, the eighteenth-century is known as being the “golden age” for furniture. Goodman states that “the period witnessed the publication of the first books devoted to furniture” specifically “In England, cabinetmaker Thomas Chippendale published a compilation of fashionable furniture designs that served simultaneously as a pattern book for craftsmen and a connoisseur’s guide for their clients” (2). Other furniture designers including Hepplewhite and Sheraton continued the tradition and printed such catalogs also (2). We see that in the long eighteenth century people were concerned with the things that filled their living spaces. These objects had the power to “signify” in the eighteenth-century and by examining the print culture of the eighteenth-century, specifically novels in this study, “we can come to understand how eighteenth-century people understood their desks, tables, and chairs, and what meaning they gave to them” (2).

Moreover, furniture shaped the daily domestic lives of the eighteenth-century people who encountered it. Goodman notes that “modern notions and practices of privacy developed spatially, as public and private zones were more clearly demarcated within houses, and particular rooms were designated for specific practices of sociability and intimacy” (4). And in the realist

novel that was developing at the same time, we see scenes mimicking real life, and thus, furniture plays a leading role in descriptions of social space. The role of furniture in the private sphere as well as the notions of “domesticity and polite sociability have long been associated with women” and “while public buildings (theaters, churches, and government buildings) do contain furniture, and while men as well as women sit on chairs, sleep in beds, and dine at tables, we tend to think of interior decoration as feminine art and the purchase of home furnishings as women’s work” (4). The study of furniture is valuable in Goodman’s terms in that it provides a “lens through which to examine how gender operated in the past and how our own gendered understanding of furniture has developed” (4). The following analysis of how furniture behaves in novels will aid to this understanding of the gendering of space and objects in the eighteenth-century and ultimately reveal how pieces of furniture have lives beyond their material forms. In other words, there is something about the interactions between women and furniture in fiction that reveals the mechanistic positioning of the female character in eighteenth-century novels that this thesis hopes to explore further and understand more clearly.

But what makes furniture different and more peculiar than such things as clothing or spaces defined by architecture? Goodman provides the most succinct logic for studying furniture: Furniture’s relationship with human beings and their bodies is both less intimate than that of clothing and more immediate and flexible than that of architecture, more subject to change and control by those who use it. Furniture can be the most sociable of inanimate agents, as when it brings people together around a tea table; it can also create intimacy by bringing bodies into contact on a sofa or a bed. Furniture such as wingback chairs and writing desks can also create privacy and promote introspection, especially if placed in a nook or corner. Furniture can even keep secrets (4-5).

Furniture acts as the locus where subjects meet objects in an intimate yet sociable matter.

Keeping in mind this understanding of furniture and its feminine associations, we can turn to its depiction in novels especially in scenes involving women's bodies where the blurriness of the eighteenth-century subject/object dichotomy is performed.

Examining the behavior of furniture the encounters female characters have with it involves an exploration into an alternate realm—into the fictional world of novels—that is a part of yet distinct from actual eighteenth-century reality. In this way, I will be concentrating on how pieces of furniture are described in text and how we can imagine them as constructing fictional interiors, shaping characters' actions and appearances in meaningful ways. In other words, texts exaggerate the position of the woman in eighteenth-century society, because within fictional worlds, characters occupy the spaces that are depicted and delimited by the text of the novel. It is almost as if in novels we are provided with a slice of reality magnified in a scientific "Petri" dish. Under these heightened and pressured circumstances, we are able to look at how fictional women verge on and seem to collapse into objects. This narrowed view also helps to reveal something about women's positions in the eighteenth-century.

At the same time that these texts put stress on women's positions within eighteenth-century English society, suggesting ways in which women were indeed thought of as objects at this time. One only needs to begin to picture the elaborate costumes women had to wear on a daily basis to understand how this could be true. With fake hair piled as high on their heads, cage-like frames under their skirts, and actual animal bones for corsets, women were more object-like than ever before—at least on the surface. Moving around—not to mention trying to sit down—was a laborious process when one's body with covered with unnatural objects. It is in this context that most eighteenth-century English novels feature women as their central

protagonists. This thesis will explore the ways female characters behave and interact with the objects in the fictional spaces they inhabit to understand how these protagonists were imagined as both the same and yet distinct from the objects that surround them.

To begin this inquiry into the boundaries between fictional women and furniture, I want to acknowledge and define “thing theory” as literary critics have begun to think more critically about the subject/object dichotomy. Begun in the late 1990s and early 2000s extending to today, this body of theory describes a phase in literary criticism where scholars placed a new importance on objects. Scholars in this vein argue that objects indeed possess “lives” of their own and some quality referred to as “thing-ness” that is apart from the object itself but is in fact generated by it. In the “Introduction” to *Thing Theory*, Bill Brown states that “the story of objects asserting themselves as things, then, is the story of a changed relation to the human subject and thus the story of how the thing really names less an object than a particular subject-object relationship” (4). Brown argues for a new sensitivity in studying objects, which would alert us to the illusive force that makes us think about them precisely when they stop working neatly as just objects and rather as in conjunction with relations to humans. These “things” are the “concrete yet ambiguous within the everyday” (4). The “thingness” within objects is a certain power created through their material interactions with “subjects,” which Brown considers us to be. It is not “whether things are but what work they perform—questions, in fact, not about things themselves but about the subject—object relation in particular temporal and spatial contexts” (7). Brown suggests that we follow Baudrillard and resurrect the status of the object away from something “shamed, obscene, passive” and instead look at subjects and objects on the same plane yet still keep the categories of the dichotomy in place. With Brown, we are directed to look at particular interactions between subjects and objects, in order to “read from things” (11).

It is this subject/object relationship (between female characters and furniture) that I will explore and untangle the knots of but not in the same manner as Brown and other related thing theorists. Using Bruno Latour's sociological theories about subject/object relations to aid my understanding of the interactions between furniture objects and female characters, I will examine subjects and objects as more fluid categories where much slippage and overlap occurs between the two especially in eighteenth-century England when the novel as we know it began to take shape. Brown hints at Latour's consideration of objects at the end of this "Introduction" to *Thing Theory* saying, "accepting the otherness of things is the condition for accepting otherness as such" (12). The "otherness" that Brown refers to is the location of the boundary between subjects and objects—one that Latour is concerned with and works to refigure. Yet the ultimate difference between Latour and Brown's theories depends on *framing*—precisely how we understand human social interactions as they happen in spatial and temporal boundaries. This notion of framing is the concept that allows us to deal with the frontier between subjects and objects as something other than a rigid line.

Arguing that we simply cannot understand how subjects behave in space without including objects in the discussion, Latour states that objects locally frame every human social interaction—these "things" "are the *means* of constructing the social world" (Latour, "On Interobjectivity" 240). This local framing means that our social realms are separated into certain spaces, and each space is marked appropriate for certain activities, and inappropriate for others. For example, a bedroom is framed for private activities including sleep by its objects and partitions—the bed, walls, closeable door, etc. When humans enter such a space, private activities are deemed appropriate. Latour notes, "The very existence of an interaction presupposes a reduction, a prior portioning" (230). Humans need this "isolating [of space] frame

by frame [so that] the agent can interact with another agent, face to face, leaving out the rest of their history as well as their other partners” (230). We *need* objects in order to have an infinite range of different kinds of social interactions with other humans; they are the actors that make these variations possible.

Still in the sociological framework, Latour asserts that all other primates besides humans live globally—there is no separation between public and private lives. They eat, groom, and procreate in the same social setting in front of each other. Every action in the non-human primate world happens in the same social sphere; they do not have to relocate to a different space to eat and then move to a private space to groom. Latour goes on to argue that “At each point, our social life [as humans] appears always less complex than that of a baboon, but is always more complicated” (233)—cluttered with objects and the partitioning of spaces by these objects. Overall, Latour’s argument provides a frame for understanding objects as not only necessary for human social interactions to exist, but also as being just as important as the human subjects that utilize them. So instead of having a totalizing system where human subjects are superior to the objects around them, the social world becomes rather a network of different objects interacting with each other on the same plane. For Latour, there simply is no hard line separating the boundary between subjects and objects—all actors in any given social scenario, whether animate or inanimate, possess equal social value. He insists that “Social life, at least in its human form, must depend on something other than the social world” (233) and on it being objects that accomplish this work. Bringing Latour’s notions of space and bodies to bear on literature, I want to raise the following question: what does the equalizing of objects and subjects mean for an exploration of furniture and female bodies in eighteenth-century novels?

Ultimately, Latour's notions of a new understanding between subjects and objects leads to a way of thinking about objects themselves, not merely as props that assume secondary roles in comparison to the fictional bodies that utilize them; rather, they become primary actors in every scene of social interaction. For Latour, there is a difference between "subjects" and "objects," but for him these categories are mutable since both entities participate in and depend on each other's presence to exist socially. This leveling of subject and object allows for distinctions within other realms. Without the objects that surround us, not only would private and public spheres not be differentiated, but also men and women's roles would not be as highly distinct. For this reason, it is truly objects and the partitioning of space that allows for the differentiating of space and gender roles—the designation of certain places for certain activities between specific actors. It is not that objects of furniture puppeteer the fictional bodies that they hold and support rather furniture and bodies work together in scenes to mutually define each other. In other words, furniture sets the stage for social situations and then plays a primary role in their unfolding.

With this theoretical framework in place, I want to explore specifically the interactions between furniture—beds, couches, and chairs—and female bodies in the following novels: Eliza Haywood's *Love in Excess* (1719-20) and *Betsy Thoughtless* (1751), Samuel Richardson's *Pamela* (1741), Charlotte Lennox's *The Female Quixote; or, The Adventures of Arabella* (1752), and Daniel Defoe's *Moll Flanders* (1721) as well as a sampling of other eighteenth-century novels as supporting examples. In realist novels as Ian Watt describes them in *The Rise of the Novel*, the spaces depicted in these literary works begin to resemble our own world, and as the eighteenth century progresses, the description of these spaces become more and more detailed. Objects of furniture are the first objects that define the space that characters can inhabit in these

fictional realms depicted in these realist novels. What is most interesting about the furniture objects featured in these novels (beds, couches, and chairs) is that they are objects of rest and stasis. One sits in a chair, lounges on a couch, or lies in a bed; when one utilizes these objects, they completely halt one's movement. The chapter progression of this thesis mimics the changing structure of furniture: flat, horizontal, non-restrictive surfaces of beds lead to the semi-structured, both freeing and constraining form of the couch. The chair naturally follows this sequence; chairs are the most structured and by that extent, the most constrictive in the positioning of the sitters who utilizes them.

While maintaining this narrow focus on the specific scenes that showcase furniture and women, I will also draw attention to the materiality of novels themselves as something that frames our reading experiences. This dual way of examining interactions between characters in the world of the text and our interactions with the object of the book will provide a structure to my analysis that will alternate between zooming-in to look at a scene through close reading and then shifting to more of a bird's eye view of the novels and our reading experience of them. This double movement of moving between the specific and general is mirrored in the behavior of the furniture objects themselves and provides a structure in which to understand their interactions with female characters in any given scene. Furthermore, just as all the events, characters, and objects in a novel are ultimately collapsed in one physical object, the book, the same is true for the subject/object dichotomy—it is collapsible and able to be reformatted. Through their physicality as texts and attention to the nascent female protagonist, these novels display complicated relationships between what we previously considered “subjects” and “objects” that cause us to rethink the very stability of these categories—and to ultimately then redefine them.

Chapter I

Eighteenth-Century Beds: Explorations of Soporific Activities and Other Various Behaviors

The Theoretical Bed

Beds have a convoluted relationship with female characters in the following eighteenth-century novels: Eliza Haywood's *Love in Excess* (1719-20), *The History of Miss Betsy Thoughtless* (1751), Charlotte Lennox's *The Female Quixote* (1752), and Samuel Richardson's *Pamela* (1752). In each novel, we see the female protagonists encounter beds during scenes of sex and seduction. Perhaps unsurprisingly, in every scene that involves a bed, we witness male characters attempting to act on their lustful desires in ways that make the threat of rape very real for the female protagonists. Importantly, each of these encounters with beds occurs in a bedroom space—rooms that were becoming more and more private through the eighteenth-century—and in each, the woman sits, lies, or grasps onto some part of the bed itself. The following interactions between beds and women suggest that something is happening between objects (beds) and subjects (female characters) that challenge a way of thinking about objects as secondary to human actions. By examining particular scenes from each of these three novels, I will illuminate and clarify the nuances of the exact terms of the relationship between beds and women in these moments of seduction.

Before moving into close readings, I need to establish that I will be exclusively looking at *fictional* situations—narrative events that are separate from reality—but also keeping in mind human behavior in our sense of reality. The realism of these novels allows for a blurring between the lines of fiction and reality, giving leeway in discussing similarities between the two without

specific qualification. However, I want to argue that the way space is framed in Haywood and Richardson's novels allows for objects to possess the roles that they do. Latour qualifies this *framing*: the way we set up our environment creates spaces for certain kinds of social interactions. Arguing that we simply cannot understand how subjects behave in space without including objects in the discussion, Latour goes on to state how fiction is like reality, even that it is more real than reality itself. He also notes that in "novels, plays, and films from classical tragedy to comics provide a vast playground to rehearse accounts of what makes us act. For this reason, once the difference between actant and agency is understood, various sentences 'moved by your own interest'...become fully comparable" (*Reassembling the Social* 54). In other words, looking to fictional worlds helps us understand the real world. The way we can examine and explain cause and effect in fictive scenarios is the most useful tool for understanding our world and how we act within it.

Yet because of the fixed temporality of novels, relationships between cause and effect in social spaces are even more closely tied in fiction. Each action's reaction is found within the pages of the novel not anywhere outside of the marks on the page. As a result, there is no guesswork when it comes to understanding the relationships between objects and characters in novels. Unlike in our everyday realities where any number of unrelated factors can shape any single social interaction, the cause of any given situation in a novel located in the material pages of the book itself. This closed relationship symptomatic of the form of the novel allows for the instability subject/object dichotomy and thus to a new, reformulated logic for considering the function of objects in novels. Latour's social theory helps us here. According to him, objects never act as merely props that assume secondary roles in comparison to the fictional bodies that utilize them; rather, they become primary actors in every social interaction. Novels—especially

the first iterations of what we know them to be—are the ideal setting for examining how objects function socially. It is in these fictional playgrounds objects have the spotlight and reveal themselves as more than just inanimate things.

The Bed of Love?

Before investigating scenes of where the threat of rape is malicious and dangerous for the female characters, I want to take a close look at Eliza Haywood's *Love in Excess*, a novel of amorous passion, to observe a typical rape scene that commonly occurs eighteenth-century novels. After understanding the dynamics of the rape scene, we can then introduces the bed and see the basic tenets of how paying attention to the furniture piece in the scene complicates a reading of it. Near the beginning of the novel, the male protagonist Count D'Elmont sneaks into Melliora's room: "He beheld the lovely Melliora in her bed...her head was reclined on one of her arms, a pillow softer and whiter far than it leaned on; the other was stretched out, and with its extension had thrust down the bed-cloths so far, that all the beauties of her neck and breast appeared to view" (116). Here the bed allows Count D'Elmont to gaze lustfully upon Melliora's body without her knowledge. The bed provides a stage upon which Melliora rests her tired body and mind, supporting her sleeping body. Since we know that Melliora is in love with Count D'Elmont and desires to be with him, we can be certain that the bed is not acting maliciously when it allows for a sensual presentation of female flesh to the male viewer. The bed provides a space for D'Elmont to look at Melliora and consume her with his gaze. By surrendering her consciousness to the bed when falling asleep on it, Melliora surrenders herself and becomes object-like. So far, in this scene we see woman as object and man as the aggressor invading her private space.

What happens when we add the bed into the typical rape scene? First, let us think of the bed as third actor in the scene. As D'Elmont continues to enter the room, his desires increase as he "stoop[s] towards the bed, and gently [lays] his face close to hers: ...that action concurring at that instant, with her dream, made [Melliora] throw her arm (still slumbering) about his neck, and in a soft and languishing voice, cry out to [D'Elmont], ...and then again embrace him closer" (Haywood, *Love In Excess* 116). Although we have three characters in this scene: Melliora, the bed, and D'Elmont, it seems that Melliora and the bed mesh into one. Adding the bed to the scene allows us to examine the gendered position of the characters in the scene and how they interact in the fictional space with the bed acting as the framing device. The bed allows Melliora a space to rest her body and mind and most importantly makes her still and in this way, object-like. The bed makes obvious Melliora's objecthood in that she is static while it is precisely the man who moves around in the scene, not the woman.

The bed frames the scene. It is the only indicator of her positionality in the room. D'Elmont's focus is on Melliora's corpus, not her mind, and it is this state of body as object that the bed facilitates, and it is not a malicious action on behalf of the bed, rather its designated role. It does not offer protection to Melliora but conveys a physical presence to her body that brings D'Elmont closer to her, and this physicality is how we know her character. We understand her through her body, not her mind, for throughout the novel, as demonstrated by this scene with the bed, we are offered more descriptions of her limbs and bodily positions than her personality (which we actually never get). This tangibility that the bed gives to Melliora gives her a real shape in the reader's imagination; we know her by her flesh, not her mind—all thanks to the bed. In this tangle of bodies on top of the bed, Melliora gains some agency through the objecthood from the bed and takes control of the fate of her body and by that regard, her mind as well.

Similarly, in Charlotte Lennox's *The Female Quixote*, the female protagonist Arabella endures the same kind of scenario where she is rendered static by the bed she sleeps on while men move around and gaze upon her. Mourning the death of her father, Arabella is overcome by her grief and is described by her servant Lucy as being in a "delirium" (60). When her suitor and cousin Mr. Glanville and his father attempt to visit her in her chamber, Lucy lets them in assuring them that Arabella desired their presence. The narrator then proceeds to tell us that once they heard that they were allowed in:

they followed her into Arabella's Chamber, who was lying negligently upon her Bed. Her deep Mourning, and the black Gawfe, which covered Part of her fair Face, was so advantageous to her Shape and Complexion, that Sir Charles, who had not seen her since she grew up, was struck with an extreme Surprize by her Beauty, while his Son was gazing on her so passionately, that he never thought of introducing to her, who contemplated her with as much Admiration as his Son, though with less Passion (60).

Here Arabella has become an object for the visual consumption of Mr. Glanville and his father Sir Charles. Bringing the bed into the equation, we see that it is the object that allows for the presentation of Arabella's body, especially her face and neck, to the men. It allows her to lay "negligently" (60) upon it and remain still while the men are upright and gaze upon her from a mobile position. The bed acts a frame for the scene—Arabella's clothes would not be splayed in the manner that they are to reveal the sensuous, alluring qualities of her skin if she was standing vis a vis with the men. We see that the bed reveals the gendering of space where women are relegated to static positions in these novels where men have the choice to move around. And

most importantly, it is the men who look down at the women on the beds. This inequality in social positioning is made possible by the bed's presence in the private scene.

In both of these fictional examples, the bed frames the scene and makes its presence known as both an intimate and sociable device. Without the bed, Melliora and Arabella would not be in the horizontal positions that seem to serve them up as beautiful objects for men to consume with their gazes. Paying attention to the furniture—the bed in this case—reveals the nuances of how women were considered in novels, which thus leads to a more sophisticated understanding of the spaces women occupied in actual eighteenth-century life. We see them in these scenes as static and unmoving, appreciated for their physical beauty, and contained within the private realm where it is the men who move from space to space freely casting their gaze on whatever and whomever they choose. And it is the bed that allows us to notice the structure of the fictional social space and the limited positions that women could occupy.

Night Terrors & Pamela

Returning to a scene where the male gaze is more dangerous to the female character to understand more fully the role of beds in eighteenth-century novels, we can turn to both Richardson's *Pamela* and Haywood's later novel *The History of Miss Betsy Thoughtless*. In *Pamela*, a novel composed of a succession of potential rape scenes, we see Pamela become successively more and more afraid of sleeping in her bed. Early in the novel, the Master, Mr. B, sneaks into Pamela's bedroom and attempts to rape her, but Mrs. Jervis saves her from harm. As the threat of Mr. B's reappearance and triumph persists, Pamela becomes afraid of the bed itself. No longer a safe place for rest, the bed seems to contain Pamela's anxieties about rape, becoming a place where she fears that Mr. B will take her advantage of her if she allows herself to lay on it

and fall asleep. She repeatedly protests Mrs. Jewkes' demands to get ready for bed: "I will not go to-bed this Night, that's certain!," "I cannot come to bed," and finally, "it will do you no harm to let me sit all Night in the great Chair" (Richardson 202). The only way Pamela is able to fall asleep at this point in the novel is to wear "two Coats," "hold two keys; for there are two Locks, there being a Double door" (203). She can only protect her unconscious body by doubly covering it and keeping the private room extra secure. Since her consciousness is inactive during sleep and body becomes quite object-like, Pamela is afraid that she will lose control of her actions and ability to ward off seduction if she undresses and places herself in. When one sleeps on a bed, one loses control one's body and what happens to it; beds are objects that if one falls asleep upon leaves one unprotected against physical abuse by making the body object-like as consciousness slips away during sleep.

Pamela's anxieties about the bed are not unfounded. Only a few pages after she expresses them, Mr. B once again attempts to rape her—this time, almost successfully. He sneaks into her bedroom disguised as her maid Miss Ann dressed in a "Gown and Petticoat of [Mrs. Jewkes] and her Apron over his Face and Shoulders" (202). As soon as Mrs. Jewkes herself enters the bed, the "guilty Wretch [Mr. B] took [Pamela's] Left-arm and laid it under his neck, as the vile Procuress held [her] Right; and then he clasp'd [her] round [her] waist!" (203). Pinned down, Pamela cannot protect herself against Mr. B's advances and although she verbally protests, he forces kisses upon her and fondles her. As the abuse overwhelms her, Pamela faints, sinking into the bed, causing Mr. B and Mrs. Jewkes to retreat. Here, becoming an object—losing her consciousness—makes Pamela as inanimate as the bed and no longer desirable to Mr. B. Yet, it is in this scene where we see the bed itself possess an ambiguous role—does it ultimately protect

Pamela from rape while performing its initial role of providing a space for unwanted seduction? What would it mean to think of it as a character in this scene?

If we look to how the object of the bed is invoked within the private space of the bedroom, we can begin to answer these questions. Cynthia Wall notes the importance of objects in constructing the space of a scene in a novel: “things seem all the more striking because they live and move and have their being in otherwise apparently empty space” (*The Prose of Things* 96). Wall’s argument that the invocation of things help to define space connects to Latour’s notion of how objects frame spaces, making them appropriate for certain human social interactions. Combining these two threads of thought, we could say that Richardson’s deliberate use of the bed sets the narrative stage for a scene of seduction, an idea bolstered by the fact that the whole novel is based around Mr. B’s potential rape of Pamela in his own house. As a physical object—one that readers of the novel could more easily visualize than the fictional characters themselves—the bed performs as an object in the pages of the novel and simultaneously as a space for the reader to take rest and imagine the scene as it unfolds.

It is not that the bed necessarily takes control over Pamela, or even that it protects her from rape; rather, it is an integral part of the potential rape scene because it not only delineates a specific place for the seduction to occur in the narrative, but it also provides a space for the reader to visualize the rape scene. As the rest of the room is not described, the bed serves as an anchor, holding the scene together—unifying and containing the characters’ actions within the indeterminate, undefined space of the bedroom. It is as if the characters and bed are necessary for the action of the scene to take place—all are integral and dependent on each other. This reaffirms Latour’s argument that in human social interactions, people and objects are equally important—humans need objects to be able to interact with each other. Also, the idea that the bed in this

scene makes the characters more imaginable to the readers resonates with Latour's insistence in *Reassembling the Social* that fictional settings in novels allow us to creatively visualize real world cause and effect relationships. Within the temporality of the novel, cause and effect are more closely tied yet lead to a more fruitful reading of reality. Latour's argument provides a non-literary way to read the beds in these scenes—as indicative in a more imaginative sense of social interactions and the possibility for cause and effect to be where objects affect subjects. So, returning to *Pamela*, how does the bed play into cause and effect relationships in the novel? If the bed is deleted from the scene in *Pamela*, could the scene still take place? And how could the reader anchor the scene in space and time within their imagination if the seduction did not take place on an object like the bed?

If we can visualize the bed as a physical anchor that acts as the main framing device in the seduction scene, Wall's claim begins to make sense: "Pamela's spaces tend to form around her...she takes advantage of what comes narratively to hand and makes it visual" (*The Prose of Things* 142). Richardson depicts both the bed and Pamela, and each affect each other in many various ways. So when we are shown Pamela's anxiety about the bed and sleeping in it, we could say that it is her interactions with this object that define the space for the reader's imagination. It is not that the bed acts through Pamela, but rather, it acts in conjunction with Pamela, forming around her and when in contact with her body, anchors her in the scene, allowing for the framing of the scene as one of seduction. The combination of bed and body, meshing together at the point that the boundaries between them become blurred, allow for the scene of seduction to occur. The bed's neutrality provides a physical space for Pamela's body to rest but at the same time it is the place where Mr. B keeps attempting to rape her. Furthermore, the idea of rape and seduction in *Pamela* is dependent on the central placement of and reference to the object of the

bed for its presence defines the private bedroom space and ultimately provides the reader with an identifiable and imaginable object—one that is easier to mentally picture than the characters themselves whose physical appearance alter in each individual reader's imagination. The bed acquires a role as a primary actor by framing potential rape scenes in *Pamela*, a quality made possible precisely, and somewhat contradictorily, by its status as an object.

Objects surrounded readers of the eighteenth-century novel and the idea of personal ownership of objects and keepsakes was beginning to develop as consumer capitalism was on the rise (Deidre Lynch, "Personal Effects and Sentimental Fictions," *The Secret Life of Things*, 63). Furniture objects, specifically beds in scenes of potential rape, root the fictional characters in a sphere that closely mirrors reality. The bed does not allow nor prevent Pamela from getting raped. Instead, it acts in this the scene along with Mrs. Jewkes, Pamela, and Mr. B, neither maliciously nor benevolently, as a force in tying Pamela down in the bedroom space, giving a physical presence to the fictional human bodies.

In other words, the real material presence of beds in the reading public's reality lends a sense of physicality to the characters—especially to Pamela, for it is her body that is most intimately connected to the bed itself. It is Pamela's body that is pushed into the bed, the same object that catches her when he falls into a faint from Mr. B's abuse. The bed anchors Pamela, locating her in the fictional scene, yet this object hood makes her more vulnerable to Mr. B's desires. It provides a space for Pamela to become the ultimate object (just a body available for Mr. B's wants), but it importantly does not facilitate the rape. Although the lines between subject and object blur here as Pamela's body is pinned down on the bed's surface, Pamela's consciousness and subjectivity are maintained until she faints. Even if she ultimately wants to have sex with Mr. B, Pamela resists his grasp, struggling until she collapses into a faint on the

bed. By consolidating and trapping Pamela in the fictional realm through contact with her in the reader's imagination, the bed helps Pamela hold onto some of her subjectivity, making her a bit more imaginable as a character. This is played out as, on following pages, we see evidence of Pamela as writer rather than object. Immediately after the attempted rape scene, Pamela as narrator pulls away from her retelling and acknowledges her parents. But although we see that she has regained her subjectivity, this is not automatic. Rather, she was "so weak all Day on Monday, that [she] lay[ed] a-bed" (205). In this scene, becoming object-like and sentient in the bed through rest allows one to recover and regain control of one's mental faculties. It as though becoming more object-like is desirable, something that actually helps female characters gain interiority as thinking characters in these fictional worlds—a strength that would not be present in reality.

The Bed as a Fictional Transmitter

Haywood's *The History of Miss Betsy Thoughtless* also involves beds as primary actors that help anchor action and lend physicality to characters. In this novel, the main protagonist, Betsy Thoughtless, is careless and naïve, as her surname explicitly reveals, and always gets into sticky moral situations where her virtue is placed in jeopardy. About half way through the novel, Betsy is duped into marrying one of the many rogues that chase after her, a character by the name of Sir Frederick Fineer. In this particular scene, Sir Frederick fakes a grave illness in order to lure Betsy to come and visit him as he receives his Last Rites. Not suspecting that she will be taken advantage of, Betsy agrees to pay Sir Frederick a visit in his bedroom and finds him lying in the bed supposedly dying. Once in the bedroom, Betsy is pressured into marrying Sir Frederick so he can have his way with her by dismissing rape as lawful consummation of the act of marriage.

When he tries to force sex on Betsy, she leaps off the bed and “catch[es] hold of one of the posts at the bed’s foot, cl[inging] so fast round it, that all his endeavors to remove her thence were ineffectual for some moments, though the rough means he made use of for that purpose, were very near breaking both her arms” (Haywood 425). Here we see Betsy using the bed to thwart the attacks of her pursuer. I would argue that in this scene, although the bedpost (not the surface of the bed) is invoked, the purpose of the object is closely related to the bed’s role in *Pamela*. As an integral part of the whole bed, the bedpost confers a degree of physicality to Betsy, holding her to it and conveying a sense of location to the scene within the bedroom space.

The bed—through the post—anchors Betsy in the space of the bedroom. She latches onto the bedpost, and while refusing to let go, almost meshes with it. As in *Pamela*, the bed lends its materiality to Betsy, making her object-like—unable to be moved by Sir Frederick Fineer. The bed does not protect her, but rather provides her with a sturdiness and strength that she otherwise does not possess. In this way, she attempts to save herself from rape. Assuming objecthood becomes a good thing in these scenes. This objectness conferred through contact with the bed seemingly gives Betsy strength, possibly definable as a sense of subjectivity. As primary actors in these scenes, the beds’ objecthood carries along with it some degree of physicality that is transferable to the female protagonists who seem to lack agency and depth as characters at this point. When in contact with these female bodies, the beds seem to provide a sense of strength to these characters. It is though these objects—acting more as subjects in these scenes—stir up a hidden subjectivity within the female protagonists through objectifying them.

Again, this transference of physicality—the way beds objectify the women that interact with them—is a good thing. The beds’ solidity has this tangible quality as actual pieces of furniture that somehow has a positive effect on these female characters by awakening a sense of

their own agency. In the “Conclusion” of *Reassembling the Social*, Latour goes so far as to argue that we *should* indeed reify humans. He boldly requests that we: “Please treat humans as things” because “To be ‘treated like things,’ as we understand it now, is not to be ‘reduced’ to mere matters of fact, but allowed to live a life as multifarious as that of matters of concern” (255). In theory, humans should not be treated like empty scientific facts but rather be allowed to exist as more inclusive entities where boundaries do not exist so rigidly between objects and things. To treat humans as anything other than the objects, the things, that they really are, is to do them an injustice. Does this hold true for literary characters as well? According to Latour, the answer is yes, because from literature, we can understand a more creative, holistic sense of social interactions that cannot be derived from studying hard facts of reality itself. So, in the end, beds are characters that are just as vital to these scenes in Haywood and Richardson as the true ‘characters’ themselves. The beds frame social scenes, provide support for female characters’ bodies, and most importantly, confer their materiality to them through contact. This physicality objectifies the women, but in way that actually elevates them; rather than flat, uninteresting types, these female characters begin to assume a sense of their own selfhood. This newly acquired selfhood is made possible only through their encounters with objects, in this case beds, that confer to them this objecthood.

Chapter II

What does a couch have to do with it?:

Lust, Love, and Seduction in Eighteenth-Century Novels

The Couch: Forgotten Child of the Union between Bed and Chair

I turn now to that curious hybrid form that combines the best attributes of both beds and chairs—the couch. Looking at the images collected in furniture historian Percy MacQuoid's *History of English Furniture* reveals that couches—sometimes referred to as *settees* in the eighteenth-century—were cushioned with supportive backs during this period. Yet because of their fixed arms, they limited the number of people that could utilize them at any one time. This physical attribute of the couch distinguishes it from the bed, and importantly, couches mainly support vertical rest, but they can be used in the format more of a *chaise lounge*¹ if the sitter so desires. With this image of an eighteenth-century couch in mind, it is important to remember its double opportunities for use: both its freeing dynamic (the choice between sitting vertically or horizontally) and its constricting component (its form limits the number of sitters it can contain). Interestingly, the function of couches in the fictional realm of eighteenth-century novels mimics this formal structure; in conjunction with the bodies of the female protagonists, these couches perform the dual role of providing a liberating space for women while simultaneously limiting their movements.

Before moving into a close reading of a peculiar encounter between couches and women, I want to add another layer of clarification to the theoretical lens I am assuming to understand the

¹ A French style piece of furniture that is a hybrid between a bed and couch. It looks as though a chair and ottoman were connected. In other words, you sit vertically but stretch your feet straight out in front of you.

behavior of furniture objects in novels. Namely, I want to expand a bit upon Bruno Latour's bold statement from *Reassembling the Social* that we should "Please treat humans as things!" (255).

In order to understand Latour's exclamation, let's hear him out in his own words:

Things, chairs, cats, mats, and black holes never behave like matters of fact; humans sometimes do, for political reasons, to resist enquiries. So it's absurd to resist 'treating humans like objects'. At worst, it would simply put humans on par with other matters of concern in physics, biology, computer science, etc. Complexity will simply be added to complexity. Far from being 'lowered down', 'objectified humans' will instead be elevated to the level of ants, chimps, chips, and particles! To be 'treated like things', as we understand it now, is not to be 'reduced' to mere matters of fact, but allowed to lived a life as multifarious as that of matters of concern (255)

In this section, Latour explains his argument against reification as a negative process. Treating humans as objects is actually giving them more consideration because acting as a "matter of fact," as a subject is actually unnatural and an "example of *anthromorphism*" (255). Again, we see Latour advocating for equality between subjects and objects—going so far as to state that the two are interchangeable and social analyses need to depend on an equality of all the actors (from humans to couches and back again). Treating humans as things is *good* because being named a subject is what is limiting and one-faceted; according to Latour, objects lead more complex, complicated lives rather than humans when considered as 'subjects'. For Latour, treating humans "as well as whales in zoology" for example would lead to the following situation: "Their complex metaphysics would at least be respect, their recalcitrance recognized, their objectness deployed, their multiplicity accepted" (255). It is important to note that Latour is not the only

theorist who thinks along these lines. In “Towards a New Feminist Morphology,” Sandra MacPherson asks: “Why does objectification—the “reduction” of woman to a bodily morphology evacuated of interiority and agency—remain a *bad* object for feminist criticism?”

(1). By questioning the status of a woman’s body in terms of the subject/object dichotomy, MacPherson, following Latour, does not ask us to think of objects as superior to subjects, but rather to consider them on an equal footing in the social realm, and by this count, in the literary world of fictional subjects and objects as well.

The Haywoodian Couch

This theoretical framework is helpful in examining a passage from Eliza Haywood’s *Love In Excess* that features an encounter between couches and female bodies. One particular scene in *Love In Excess* features couches, and it is an encounter between D’Elmont and Melliora—this time involving a couch rather than a bed. During a rare moment where Alovysa (D’Elmont’s wife) leaves the home (it is in her house that all this action happens), D’Elmont decides to find Melliora (the woman who he is in love with). When he enters her room he interrupts Melliora in the act of reading, finding her “lying on a Couch in a most charming *dissabilée*; she had just come from bathing, and her hair unbraided, hung down upon her shoulders with a negligence more beautiful than all the aids of art could form in the most exact decorum of dress” (107-8). We see Melliora in her most private quarters in her most intimate dress—a *dissabilée* signifies a sheer night gown-like garment. Before D’Elmont entered the scene, the interaction was simply between the couch, Melliora, and her book—each playing an equal role in setting up the scene that D’Elmont intrudes upon. Once D’Elmont enters the room, the dynamics between couch and woman alter.

Before D'Elmont's entrance, we see Melliora lounge on the couch and her pose is not seductive—she is alone in her bedroom engaged in the private act of reading. In this position, the couch provides a liberating space for Melliora and seems to allow her to relax and feel comfortable in a way that she would not be able to do in public around men. In this way, the couch's function is similar to that of beds in the previous chapter: through their contract with the body to provide safe rest, beds anchor female protagonists in narrative space, and also by their very physical presence in these novels, they lend a degree of this physicality to the females' fictional bodies that ultimately provides them strength to combat men's seductive advances. In the moments before D'Elmont enters the scene, Melliora is safe—the couch supports her body, providing a space for her private desires and interactions with the novel she reads: “A book lay open by her on which she reclined her head, as if been tired with reading” (107). Because it is not a bed, by that virtue not inherently a place for sleep and seduction, Melliora's relaxed position on it cannot be immediately read as seductive—she did not mean for others to see her lounging. Rather, the couch allows her to enjoy a moment of reverie with her novel, letting go of the concerns of daily life and at the same time solidifies her body in the readers' minds. We can only understand her pose as seductive through D'Elmont's eyes and perspective.

However when D'Elmont intrudes upon Melliora, the couch becomes evident as a furniture piece that both frees and limits. In the moments just before D'Elmont enters Melliora's room the couch has been a liberating object, but with his entrance, we as readers—as voyeurs along with D'Elmont—witness the shift in the couch's double role, and see it become a loose cage, if you will. Unlike a bed, which is a flat, open surface that does not put any constrictions on how a body can lie upon it, a couch puts some limitations on the body's interactions with it. This “cage-like” property of the couch is informed by its structural qualities: its arms and

cushioned back that enforce a seating limit as well as suggest a fixed number of ways that one can position oneself upon it. It is in this loose cage that Melliora unknowingly displays her hardly clothed body for D'Elmont's greedy eyes. It is through D'Elmont's eyes that Melliora's body is made into an "object" ready for his lustful consumption. Yet this objectification of Melliora's body is *not* a bad thing; Melliora resists D'Elmont's advances (as an object). As Latour and MacPherson agree, considering bodies as objects might actually be a good thing. It makes them more complex rather than simplified, and is potentially a more accurate and powerful way of understanding a women's relation to the social world and relations to men. Therefore, instead of merely retracing the well-rehearsed argument that Melliora is a female sex object about to be taken advantage of by D'Elmont, let us instead think of the couch as complicating Melliora's physical body, solidifying it in the fictional world but making it harder to penetrate—both narratively and analytically.

With this said, the reading of beds as loose cages is more complicated by Melliora's reaction and subsequent actions when she realizes D'Elmont is present. When Melliora notices D'Elmont's, she "blushed...and rose from off the couch with a confusion which gave new lustre to her charms, but he, not permitting her to stir from the place she was in, sat down by her" and begins to question the appropriateness of her reading material, which happens to be Ovid's *Epistles* (107-8). But now the arms of the couch trap Melliora in the space of the couch—she is stuck sitting on the same surface as D'Elmont in an upright position enforced by the couch's shape. The physical shape of the couch forces Melliora to deal with D'Elmont's advances, yet renders her motionless. In this scene, like in the seductive bed scene in the previous chapter, D'Elmont has the freedom to move around; he approaches Melliora and almost traps her the couch by sitting down next to her. This "entrapment" enhances the physical presence of both

characters in this scene—but more so for Melliora. We are able to imagine D’Elmont because we have been aligned with his perspective throughout this scene. For example, we are asked to consider Melliora’s dress as incredibly charming and her body in full “lustre” just as D’Elmont does. With these entreaties, we are lead into the room where Melliora lies with D’Elmont. We do not see Melliora’s body in motion, as separate from the couch, until D’Elmont enters the scene; it is then that Melliora shifts position, sitting upright to ward off D’Elmont’s longing for embraces. This slight movement on the couch seems to give Melliora a bodily presence apart from D’Elmont’s view of her. By becoming more object-like, she assumes a new interiority—one the couch provides that D’Elmont cannot penetrate.

Objects and Interiority: The Act of and Space for Reading

We see this new interiority of Melliora’s character through her dialogue with D’Elmont, which immediately follows her movement to an upright position on the couch. Haywood provides us with four full pages of continuous dialogue between these two characters, and it is not mindless, frivolous small talk. Rather, D’Elmont and Melliora begin a polite argument—a discourse on the appropriateness of Melliora’s reading material, Ovid’s *Epistles*. The following is an example of the beginning of their discussion:

“How madam,” cried [D’Elmont], not a little pleased with the discovery, “dare you who the other day so warmly inveighed against writings of this nature, trust your self so suddenly come over to our party?” “Indeed my lord,” answered she, growing more disordered, “it was chance rather than choice, that directed this book in my hands, I am yet far from approving subjects of this kind, and believe I shall be ever so. Not that I can perceive any danger in it, as to myself; the retirement I have always lived in, and the little

propensity I find to entertain a thought of that uneasy passion, has hitherto secured me from any prepossession, without which, Ovid's art is in vain" (108).

In this passage, Melliora defends her choice of reading material, and, for the first time in the novel, displays an interiority of her character: she can argue, defend her points, and make logical statements. She even proposes a theory of reading! Melliora confirms her ability to separate fiction from reality; she knows to avoid modeling her actions after literary characters. Here, we see a physical object allow Melliora the opportunity to discuss her opinions (a sign that her character possess depth). She also makes the distinction between the book and her body—they are separate entities, yet as we have seen, both are objects. But how does the very materiality of the book complicate the reading of the role of the couch in this scene? How do the objects in this scene, primarily the couch and book, set Melliora's body and mind against D'Elmont's?

First, Melliora's connection with the book is more intimate than her relation to the couch: reading engages her mind, but the act would not be complete without the couch. In eighteenth-century novels, characters are never depicted reading while standing. We either see them sitting at a table, lounging in bed, or laying on a couch. In an anonymous novel from 1750 entitled *The History of Charlotte Summers, the fortunate parish girl*, the main female protagonist, Charlotte, asks her servant to bring her a book to "lull [her] to rest" (67). She says: "Pray step down to the Parlour, and bring me up the first Volume of the *Parish Girl* I was reading in the Afternoon" (67). She takes the book while lying in bed and begins to "thumb through the pages" to find the spot where she left off at (68). In this novel, the bed itself provides a space for the act of reading. Charlotte lies in bed and interacts with yet another object—the novel. She conjures up the image of the book's materiality by her mention of its pages. Like a book, Charlotte—and Melliora, too—emerges through reading as having both surface and depth. Just as a book is both words

bound within a certain number of pages, it possesses depth when utilized. It becomes more than just a sentient object when a reader interacts it, when the words transform into mental images (pictures of bodies moving in spaces) in her mind. Is there something we can learn from the way we interact with books to then understand the particular relations between furniture and female characters in eighteenth-century novels?

This change from a state of shallow surface to one with imaginative depth happens for the female protagonists of eighteenth century novels as well books; they appear as surfaces, but through their interactions with the objects that surround them, they accrue subjectivity. So, these characters are all objects, on par with books and couches and beds, and their encounters with these objects lend them a tangible presence—a newfound solidity within their fictional worlds. By their nature, novels operate in the same way and possess both a physical identity (ink printed on a group papers) and immaterial quality (ability to invoke imaginative scenarios) that defines the form. They remain empty objects until readers imaginatively encounter them. Similarly, female bodies gain subjectivity when they place themselves on these furniture pieces—a depth to their personalities that can be attributed to their interactions with the objects that surround them. In other words, the way we act on books is congruent to the way furniture acts on fictional women in these novels. The surrounding objects in fictional realms frame the space around characters, adding three-dimensionality to the fictional space as imagined in the reader's mind as well as to the female bodies themselves. We can use this analogy to the way readers interact with books to help picture the way furniture behaves when it encounters women's bodies, providing them a depth of character that is evident in readers' imaginations and the words on the page.

Couches—and beds, too—had a very material presence in eighteenth-century life: the furniture industry was on the brink of change from being a trade of very skilled artisans where

each piece was hand made to a system of commercial capitalism where the mass production of uniform furniture pieces was on the rise. It is precisely in this period where Chippendale's guide for furniture production is published, which was a guide for non-professionals wanting to make their own furniture as well as for the mass production of furniture (Goodman 1-5). Such guides were crucial in ensuring that pieces of furniture became regulated and uniform for the most part. So, it is logical to assume that most of the readers of these novels would have had a clear idea of what a couch looked like. If they didn't have such an idea, Haywood throughout her oeuvre provides detailed descriptions how the furniture piece she invokes should be imagined. For example, in her novel *Idalia, or the unfortunate mistress*, she provides the following image for her readers to visualize: "it was the charming Bellraizia, Mistress of Abdomar, who rising from a Couch of Crimson Taffety embroier'd with Gold and Pearl, step'd forward to meet and congratulate her Lover on his Victory" (108). Here, we are offered a very specific couch: an elaborate piece of furniture made of very exquisite materials. Bellrazia is just as beautiful as the object from which she rises. From her once still position on the couch, she gets up to confront Abdomar—to speak to him, revealing a sense of interiority. But sitting still upon the couch has given her a physical presence that she expresses through speech.

Along these lines, it is important to continue to acknowledge the physical qualities of pieces of furniture that allow them to have such intimate connections to bodies. Objects of furniture seem to soak up the bodies and give them weight; when one gets up from a bed or couch, one leaves an imprint—a mark that confirms that an actual physical body was once there. The primary purpose of furniture is to provide places for bodies to rest and/or be still. And when not in use, they were made to be aesthetically pleasing and beautiful decorations of a home. Couches, beds, and chairs provide support for the physical body, and in some ways mold to its

shape. This is especially true for beds, and to a lesser degree, couches. When one lays one a bed, the imprint of the whole body is cast upon it; when one rises, one can see the imprint of one's head on the pillow, the sheets wrinkled from the weight of the body, and a depression on the surface of the bed where the body rested. For a couch, since it is more structured, it directs a more loosely how the body can maneuver while utilizing it. It has a vertical back, cushions on the seat and back, and two arms that frame the sides, giving its tighter, more restrictive shape. Couches, more so than beds, are meant to contain and structure one's position upon it. Chairs, which I discuss in the next chapter, are the most severe version of this behavior.

The Couch's Role in the Gender Divide

With this description of how bodies interact in reality with furniture, we can now understand more clearly how they function within fictional realms. Specifically, we can now return to unpacking the nuances between the couch's effect on Melliora and the consequences of D'Elmont's gaze on her while she is laying on it. If we can understand the couch as transferring a sense of physicality to Melliora's body—giving it both a weightiness and solidity that allows her to express her interiority as a character—how do we imagine D'Elmont's gaze upon her body? In other words, what effect does it have upon the woman/couch relationship? First, I want to take a moment to address the sexualizing gaze that D'Elmont seems to possess in relation to the argument that Melliora's objectification (by her interaction with the couch) is a good thing. Although we are aligned with D'Elmont's point of view, his gaze does not objectify Melliora in a negative sense; he admires her physical beauty, but is so in love with her, that he is not thinking of rape, rather he wants her to feel as passionate about him as he does about her. The narrator reveals that “indeed there is no greater proof of a vast and elegant passion, than being

incapable of expressing it” (101)—a situation we find D’Elmont stuck in quite often throughout the novel. So, actually it is not D’Elmont’s gaze that objectifies or sexualizes Melliora, for when he looks upon her, it is with undying passion and most affectionate tenderness. Instead, it is the opening of the private space of Melliora’s bedroom into a public space that D’Elmont and us as readers enter into that causes this change, a space not necessarily meant for public viewing, especially not in this case.

In this scene, the act of reading is the most private of all acts depicted in this novel besides sexual embraces. It is primarily the couch that supports the freedom allowed within this private space. Before and during D’Elmont’s entrance into the room, Melliora lays languorously in what would be considered her undergarments, taking a break from reading; she is mentally disconnected from the space because in the “privacy” of her room, she does not have to abide by the standards maintained by society, especially those denoted in conduct books. She can sprawl out on the couch or “lie carelessly” on it again once D’Elmont leaves (109). It is the change in the frame of the space that makes Melliora’s posture sexual, or at least sensual, not the couch.

The couch, instead, provides tangibility to Melliora’s body, giving her fictional body a weight and more imaginable presence in the reader’s mind. Again, we see the couch’s double role both freeing and limiting Melliora. When in the safety of a private space, the bed can be utilized for many different bodily configurations, but when the space is disrupted as a solely private one, the couch is constraining according to decorum. From a conduct book published in 1745, we can see how a woman sat on a couch or chair was a concern: “She sits down if it be upon a couch, or Squab, tho’ the Couch or Squab be five Yards long, her Hoop takes up every

Inch of it from one end to the other” (AWF 11).² A woman and her petticoats seem to occupy the entire couch and it remains a concern that women sit properly on these furniture pieces as to not appear seductive. When another person, especially a man, enters into one’s private sanctum, the couch begins to limit movement for eighteenth century etiquette calls for proper posture and bodily placement in order to appear virtuous as an unmarried woman. Although limiting by providing structure to Melliora’s body and keeping her upright and still, the couch, by the same token, helps her maintain her virtue by doing so. The couch provides structure to Melliora’s newly acquired fictional solidity (as transferred to her by the couch) as she begins to engage D’Elmont in an argumentative discourse. She becomes firm and anchored to the couch, which is mirrored in her motivation and ability to maintain conversation with D’Elmont (and even challenge him).

Although the couch helps Melliora maintain her virtue in *Love in Excess*, the couch can act as a slightly different “loose cage” as evidenced in John Cleland’s *Fanny Hill, or, memoirs of a woman of pleasure* from 1749. In this erotic novel, which was widely popular at the time, we constantly find women on couches, yet their interactions with these furniture pieces are quite different from, but still maintain some similarities to, Melliora’s interactions with the couch. Given the popularity of Cleland’s novel, the interactions between women and couches in *Fanny Hill* though different from those in *Love in Excess* would have been in the minds of many readers after 1749. Near the middle of the novel we witness a very amorous interaction between Guido and Phoebe involving a couch: “he had immediately, on stripping off his shirt, gently push’d her down on the couch, with stood conveniently to break her willing fall” (81). On the next page, in

² Taken from *The enormous abomination of the hoop-petticoat, as The Fashion Now is, And has been For about these Two Years Fully Display'd: In some Reflexions upon it, Humbly offer'd to the Consideration of Both Sexes; especially the Female.* By A. W. Esq; page 11, 1745.

the midst of their sexual embrace, “the young gentleman had changed her posture from lying breadth to length-wise on the couch” (82). In this small scene (similar ones are reproduced throughout the novel), we are offered a potential version for the encounter between Melliora and D’Elmont, if Melliora was not virtuous and D’Elmont was not in love with her. Yet, we see the same idea of the “loose cage” in this moment in *Fanny Hill*; the sexual embrace needs to happen somewhere and the couch’s form provides a perfect space for it. By gently pushing the willing Phoebe down on the couch, Guido helps to create the “cage”—he is the one directing Phoebe’s movement while the couch supports her from the opposite side. The cage that is thus created is “loose” because Phoebe wants to have sex with Guido—she offers her body up to him by spreading her legs once she lands on the couch.

We can also understand the descriptor of “loose” in two ways: it denotes how the couch is being utilized (as a containing device) and the moral character of Phoebe (she is a “loose” woman). The example of Phoebe and Guido from *Fanny Hill* reinforces the fact that it is not the couch itself that sexualizes any woman who encounters it; rather, the couch provides choice in movement from the woman that encounters it, even though such movement is indeed quite limited. Both Melliora and Phoebe represent the choice in its double role. On the one hand, Melliora chooses to be virtuous—using the structure of the couch to give her solidity that reveals her interiority of character. On the other, Phoebe uses the couch as a freeing device—it allows her to express her sexuality and, as a result, engage in sexual relations upon it. Interestingly, Phoebe uses the couch in both the ways it offers for bodily posture through its structure: she has sex with Guido both sitting and lying on the couch. The materiality that the couch transfers to her enhances her sensuality, giving her “spread thighs” a more fleshy character and making “the mark of her sex” very real and physically present in the scene (81-2). When used to liberate a

female character, the couch makes her bodily presence even more pronounced; the interiority that Phoebe exhibits is not a sense of a deeper personality, rather we see a part of her that would never be exposed, especially not in public (the novel form makes this scene public). We are made to confront Phoebe's vagina—a space that is never meant for public viewing. It is given a very material presence because Phoebe's limited freedom of movement on the couch which supports her body, providing her with a space to display her bodily interiority to Guido and us.

So, when used as a liberating device, the couch exposes the sheer materiality and objecthood of the female body: Phoebe wants to be an object ready to be consumed and pleased by Guido. We never see Phoebe's mental interiority. Just as the couch by its structure allows for double posturing, so it offers fictional women two options for objectivity. Female characters can choose mental or bodily objectification depending on their desires on how they want to utilize the furniture piece, whether for virtue (reveals mental interiority) or pleasure (enhances bodily interiority). Either way, the couch transfers solidity to these female protagonists that is tangible for the readers and for the characters themselves. Although it limits the full extent of their movement, the couch lets female characters exist as more than just surfaces. By contact with solid, material objects, these women gain depth, either mentally or physically (or perhaps both).

The Couch Revisited, Female Agency, and the Act of Reading

As we explored earlier, the way female characters acquire materiality through their contact with couches mimics the act of reading, when words on a page in the novel become more than just ink blots on paper. In *Dreaming by the Book*, Elaine Scarry explores this process—the perceptual and imaginative mechanics of reading. According to her, the “verbal act, especially narrative, is almost bereft of any sensuous content. Its visual features, as has often been observed, consist of

monotonous small black marks on a white page. It has *no* acoustical features. Its tactile features are limited to the weight of its pages, their smooth surfaces, and exquisitely thin pages” (5).

What is interesting about our act of reading is that we take the material ink blots on the page and turn them into perceptual images in our imaginations distinct from those in the visible world from the guidance of authorial direction. Moreover, when we read we are still—we sit still and engage the object of the book with our minds, turning physical objects into mental images that have a mimetic quality. Scarry describes this phenomenon as the “miracle [through which] a writer is able to incite us to bring forth mental images that resemble in their quality not our own daydreaming but our own (much more freely practiced) perceptual acts” (7). In other words, the images we conjure up when reading are more vivid than what we could produce through our own unguided reveries. But how exactly does our relationship to the text of the novel relate to female characters and their interactions with couches?

The answer lies in the amount of imaginative work that the act of reading requires. As Scarry notes, “Reading entails an immense labor of imaginative construction” (37). Both Melliora and Charlotte Summers lay on couches involved in the act of reading, and Melliora even shows the sign of the work of reading—she becomes exhausted and is sleeping with book in hand when D’Elmont walks into the room. So it is by laying on these couches—the perfect spaces for reading—that these female characters undertake the work of reading. And like us they engage in acts that are more creative than mere daydreaming and this creative burst is fostered by the authorial direction that gives the women a sense of subjectivity—we see their minds at work. But it is not the book alone that gives the female characters solidity. Rather, it is the combination of the book, woman, and couch. The couch is the framing device for this activity of reading. It allows for the stillness of the body required for reading, for the labor of imaginative construction

(the expression of the creative mind). Providing a space for the female characters to interact with other objects (words on the page) to transform them into imaginative constructions, the couch provides these characters with a setting to express their interiority, their consciousness by becoming object-like similar to the couch itself. In the end, the couch provides the female character with a limited agency: it frames her social and imaginative interactions, giving her solidity as still object yet in this stillness. She can read and talk, pushing the bounds of the freedom the couch allows her, and thus expresses subjectivity from her status as an object of equal stature to the couch.

Chapter III

Chairs and their Fictional Occupants:

Musings on Objects, the Imagination, and Space in Eighteenth-Century Novels

Minor Collisions with The Elbow Chair

Eighteenth-century chairs are multi-faceted objects, and unlike beds and couches, they have both literal and figurative meanings. At this time in Britain, the word chair did not simply signify a piece of furniture with legs, back, and a seat meant to contain one person; rather, it already possessed a much larger set of implied meanings. In his 1752 edition of the *Dictionary*, Samuel Johnson gives the first definition for the word “chair” as “a moveable seat,” the second, “a seat of justice, or of authority,” and finally, “a vehicle born by men, a sedan” (351-2). The first definition is the one that describes a piece of furniture, but we observe a curious emphasis on the object’s mobility rather than its form. In the second definition, we confront the metaphorical meaning of “chair,” as a marker of authority embedded in the object itself. And lastly, at this time, chairs were also means of transportation, portable seats carried by two men through the narrow streets of London. In the novels I will be examining, the “chair” is a marker of position, used to define and designate the position of the female body acting both a static object and one that facilitates movement. With this double role and the implicit undercurrents of authority weaved into its definition, the fictional chair produces the most palpable effects upon the female characters that utilize it. In other words, its role as an actor alongside female characters in various scenes is pronounced more heavily as a result of its structure and form.

Invoking the eighteenth-century definition of chairs confirms that our conception of what a chair is today is not what it meant to the eighteenth-century imaginary, and thus to the authors

who utilize these particular objects in their novels. By keeping a historically specific lens on how to imagine a chair to be both literally and metaphorically active, we can approach the way chairs behave in novels when in conjunction with female bodies in a more nuanced and comprehensive way. In this chapter, I argue that chairs, despite their various meanings and roles, cohere in the way they outline the sitting form of a body, whether real or imaginary. A chair implies, in other words, a sitter, and the metaphorical position of a “chair” implies a body as well as an object. For example, referring to the chair of the decoration committee would imply in the title a person, a position, and perhaps an object (where the person would sit at meetings). This second meaning can be thought to be in the consciousness of eighteenth-century people, specifically readers. Moreover, the object of a chair, even in its empty form, implies a human presence, which is seen in the way the term was used to point to authority roles and the positions of a human body. It designates a position for the location of a body in a particular and structured way.

One 1732 poem dedicated to the topic of chairs makes this consistent confusion between the first two definitions of the word “chair,” furniture object and position of authority, obvious. The title of *A hymn to the chair: or lubrications, serious and comical, on the uses of chairs, Benches, Forms, Joint-Stools, and Ducking Stools*, offers a comprehensive and explicit outline of the poem’s intended purpose. In this collection of verses, the chair is given agency and acts upon a Chairman: “The Chair did not expel him thence/ But check’d him./ The Zealous in another Affair,/ In which, he Sits himself in a Chair,/ Took this advantage, but none there/ Defect him” (6). We can see the double role of chair performed in these lines—the literal chair is acting upon the metaphorical one, the authority figure that actually sits on the furniture piece. In these lines, the chair is an actor that possesses agency and simultaneously marks location. It provides a space for the Chairman to occupy and confers a sense of authority to him. By sitting in the chair, the

Chairman accrues power, and from this position, is able to make decisions and give directions. Moreover, this examples provides historical evidence that furniture pieces—especially chairs—had some sort of changing significance in the eighteenth-century in terms of how they were viewed as located somewhere between actor and prop, not quite either one. Some kind of implicit current of authority runs through every scene of eighteenth-century fiction involving a chair as a result of the double meaning associated with the object.

An eighteenth-century chair maker's guide offers an illustration of an actual chair. In Figure 3, below, we see an example of an "Elbow chair" from the cabinet-maker Robert Manwaring's *The Chair-Maker's Guide* published in 1766. The following illustration in Figure 3 from the catalog contains "upwards of two hundred new designs, both decorative and plain, or all the most approved patterns for Gothic, Chinese, Ribbon, and other Chairs; Couches, Setees, Burjairs, French, Dressing, and Corner Stools, adapted for Halls, Lobbies, Dining, Drawing, and Dressing Rooms, Parlours, Bed-Chambers, Summer Houses, Seats for Gardens, Parks, Woods, & c." (1). The purpose of such an illustrative guide was twofold: first, to inform the public on possible decorative options to use to furnish their home, and second, to inform amateur or quasi-professional furniture makers on trendy options for creating new fashionable furniture. In today's terms, this catalog would act like a look-book for home design.

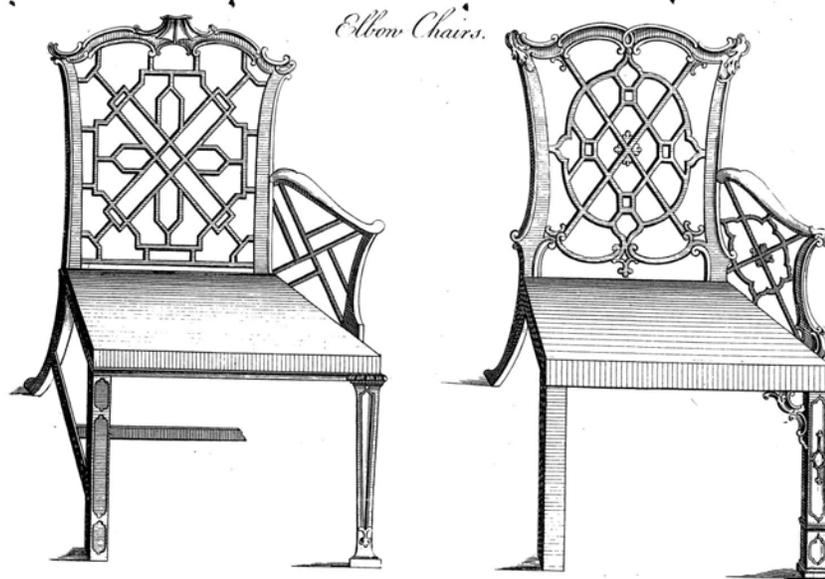


Figure 3

In both of these illustrations of the elbow chair, the design is quite intricate, suggesting that, the eighteenth-century chair was as much a decorative object as it was a place marker of position for a human body. The chair is delicate and has character—it is not made for functional purposes alone. Moreover, the patterns that hollow out the back make the chair seem fragile, an object more to be looked at than utilized. But we know that these chairs like the ones in Figure 3 were made and used because this catalog is indeed a practical guide to furniture construction rather than a fantastical meditation on the ideal chair or the chair of the future, for example. So what does a chair like this with elbows and intricate patterns tell us about how chairs behave and function? And more specifically, how does their form play into our conceptions of them in fictional settings while keeping in mind their tri-pronged definition?

The Solitary Object: Chairs, Solidity, and the Positionality

In a chapter entitled “On Solidity” from *Dreaming by the Book*, Elaine Scarry notes, “It is impossible to create imaginary persons if one has not created a space for them” (14). In

eighteenth-century novels, the chair is the necessary element that creates the space for the characters to exist as wholly articulated character in the reader's imagination. For example, in Daniel Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe* (1719), Crusoe requires a chair and table to not only write but also more importantly to be a man: "And now I began to apply myself to make such necessary things as I found I most wanted, particularly a chair and a table; for without these I was not able to enjoy the few comforts I had in the world; I could not write or eat, or do several things, with so much pleasure without a table: so I went to work" (78). The chair allows Crusoe to enter and act on the island—he can do nothing without it. It is an object that gives Crusoe space to act not only physically but also psychologically; it is certainly a pre-requisite for writing as well. Importantly, in Defoe's other seminal work *Moll Flanders* (1722), Moll has many interesting interactions with chairs. As the female protagonist who conquers London alone, Moll is an analog to Crusoe but her interactions with chairs differ from Crusoe's because of her position as a woman at this time. In fact, as we shall see shortly, her encounters with chairs resemble those of other eighteenth-century female protagonists. By examining *Moll Flanders*, Charlotte Lennox's *The Female Quixote* (1752), Elizabeth Haywood's *Love in Excess* (1722), and Elizabeth Inchbald's *A Simple Story* (1791), we can come to understand chair's role as the necessary object for the characters to exist in ways that make them knowable and imaginable to us. Similar to Crusoe, these female protagonists from eighteenth-century novels are defined by their encounters with chairs, but unlike him, they do not possess the complete freedom of mobility within their worlds. In other words, their sense of agency within these novels is limited and the chair reveals the boundaries of this constriction.

Furthermore, doubly structuring space, the chair defines both the character's movement and inhabitable terrain, and by utilizing the object they are able to understand themselves as

subjects. First of all, the chair creates a space for all these characters to exist as living breathing beings in our imaginations and to also act and move within it. In other words, it “creat[es] for the reader of fiction’s *vertical floor* that, by promising to stop our inward fall, permits us to enter capaciously into the projective space without fear and therefore with the lifting of inhibitions on vivacity” (Scarry 14). Scarry’s points are similar to Wall’s in that they suggest how solitary objects, like the chair, stand apart and call attention to themselves in eighteenth-century novels; they define and describe the scene because they are the only objects depicted. The reader imaginatively latches onto these objects to enter into the fabric of the narrative more fully.

Yet, it is importantly not only the readers who latch onto these chairs for support and guidance into the narrative. The female protagonists of many eighteenth-century novels use chairs as support for when the weight of their emotions and they become overwhelmed by certain situations. For example, when Moll Flanders finds out that one of her many lovers is leaving, she reacts to his words with “a look full of horror, and turning pale as death, and was the very point of sinking down out of the chair [she] sat in” (Defoe 40). Moll sinks into the chair she is sitting in—her emotions are so overwhelming that she cannot move anywhere except deeper into the object of the chair. It is as though Moll finds the idea of being still and inanimate like the chair appealing or at the very least, her only option, to “recover [her] senses” for while in the chair, she was “not able to speak for several minutes more” (40). There is some comfort in becoming objectified like the chair, a sense that the only way to overcome the intense swell of emotion is to extract herself from her mind and instead let her body disappear into the chair. Detaching herself from her consciousness, Moll seems to become indistinguishable from the chair for a moment when she loses control of her senses and cannot even speak.

Moll Flanders is not the only eighteenth-century female protagonist to seemingly disappear into the chair when struck with overwhelming information. Idealistic Arabella of Lennox's *The Female Quixote* finds herself overcome by an excess of emotion as a result of her naïveté and willingness both take all that she hears literally and to believe all stories that are told to her. At the beginning of one of her many adventures, Arabella sees one of her suitors outside her closet window talking to one of the servants of the house and “Her Surprize at this Sight was so great, that she had not Power to observe them any longer; but, seating herself in her Chair, she had just Spirits enough to call *Lucy* to her assistance” (Lennox 92). And later finding out that another suitor, Mr. Selvin, “did not need any Consolation,” Arabella cried “Oh Heavens!” and “throwing herself into a Chair as pale as Death—He is dead—...Oh! How unhappy am I! cry'd she, bursting into Tears” (315). Like Moll Flanders, Arabella needs a “little Pause” to resume speaking once she begins to cry and sink into the chair that supports her. In other words, sinking down and throwing herself into these chairs allows her to cry and feel overwhelmed, finding solace in the firmly planted, rigidly structured chair that both contains and supports her body.

Similar Arabella and Moll, both Haywood's Alovysa of *Love in Excess* and Incbald's Miss Woodley of *A Simple Story* encounter chairs in moments of excess emotion. These two further examples of women encountering and falling into chairs in times of emotional distress illustrate the point that this trend was not contained within the early years of the eighteenth century, but rather pervades the entire century. In one particular scene in *Love in Excess*, Alovysa has just discovered that D'Elmont, her new husband, is actually in love with Melliora, and reacts to this unwelcome news, by “throwing herself down into an elbow chair that stood there, and gave loose to the tempest in her soul” (Haywood 132). For a while she could not speak and instead thrashes about within the chair. The chair stands out especially in this scene for it is

the lone framing device that allows us to visualize a fictional setting for Alovysa to inhabit. Cynthia Wall argues, “In reading, one enters the spare visual space immediately, through the door of a thing, a small vivid detail” (96). The chair is the object that allows us to enter the space of the scene—we proceed into the fictional realm through the *object* rather than the characters. Not only does the chair make the woman object-like, but also it is precisely the thing that imaginatively holds us in the scene rather than the character.

Yet, this chair belongs to a set of objects “in disconnection, objects without background” (Wall 96). Wall goes on to state, “those things [like the chair] seem all the more striking because they live and move and have their being in otherwise apparently empty space. ...the things stand forth in a sort of glory, surrounded metaphorically by a white page” (96-7). In this example, we see the female character contained by the chair—its structured form limits the extent of Alovysa’s movements and causes her to be still and like itself. Here, it is not that Alovysa disappears into the chair but she must remain seated to express her rage; in other words, in order for us to visualize Alovysa as a body full of emotion, she has to be static in the chair and only then can she express her verbal turmoil in this confined position.

Similarly, Inchbald’s Miss Woodley is so overcome by Miss Milner’s proclamation of love for Dorriforth that she had to sit down and “it was on a chair that was close to her—her feet could not have taken her to any other.—She trembled—she was white as ashes, and deprived of speech” (Inchbald 181). Here, again, we see that when overwhelmed with startling information, the female character chooses to sit in a chair and slip away from full consciousness and instead become silent and rigid, just like the chair itself and the form it dictates of the body. Also, Miss Woodley even loses her otherwise healthy complexion, instead assuming a look of death—a state that epitomizes objectivity for humans. Woman and chair become one—the chair soaks up the

woman's body, fusing with her body, absorbing her emotions, and then transferring its solidity and objectivity to her. And this object state is one that these female character's welcome to cope with the shock of the information they receive. If we are to imagine these female protagonists as fusing with the chair that they sink down into, how are we to visualize the chair in the first place as having some kind of tangible presence that provides a space for them to imaginatively exist?

In the literary world, objects have a greater quality of solidity than their character counterparts. Wall argues that, "the [eighteenth-century] literary world was also investigating and populating its spaces, if not with a direct visual correspondence, then with an experiential one" (96). When it is utilized in this context, the chair gains value and acts as the initial entry point for the reader to enter the space in the scene. In this way, the chair plays a key role in constructing the very space needed for these female protagonists to have imaginative presence, and at the same time creates a contract with the reader. So, returning again back to Scarry, these female protagonists acquire an imaginative existence when they encounter the chair. Without the chair, the reader would not only have a sense of space for characters like Moll, Arabella, and Alovysa to statically exist within, but would also be unable to fully imaginatively commit to visualizing the characters with any degree of acuity. The chair ultimately acts as an instruction to the reader to think in a certain way. Before the collision with the chair, the female characters are merely ideas, figments, names made of ink on paper. In other words, the chair is itself a visual code made up of text with a real mimetic counterpart in reality and provides an anchor in the narrative world and a passageway for the reader's imagination into that world, an entrance that promises to accomplish more than mere daydreaming can do. The power of the fictional chair—beds and couches, too—lies in its ability to bring the reader into a more vivid imaginative

experience where she can visualize the characters with a sense of perceptual keenness that is not possible in everyday daydreaming, but rather only possesses an equivalent in the visible world.

These novels are not the only fictional example that displays the power of the chair; Haywood's later novel *Betsy Thoughtless* and Richardson's *Pamela* both contain scenes where the chair's influence in creating the vivacity of the female characters is clearly revealed. In *Betsy Thoughtless*, we find an expression uncontrollable emotion similar to Alovysa in Haywood's much earlier and different work. Towards the end of the novel, of the narrator describes Betsy's mental state as she sits alone in her chamber thinking about her unfortunate decisions about men and even are privy to Betsy's thoughts. Yet, these thoughts remain thoughts unconnected to a body until the narrator reveals "she was sitting near a window, leaning her arm upon the slab, very deep in contemplation" (420). Finally, imagining Betsy's body sitting in a chair allows us to visualize Betsy's body leaning forward looking out the window. We can imagine her thoughts having a place in her mind as we are able to picture her mind having a space in her body, and this is exactly what the chair is able to do. The combination of the "object" and "subject," where in the imagination both are objects of equal value, animates the female character. In essence, without the invocation of the "object" (the chair), the "subject" (Betsy) would not be a "subject"—it is the combination of the two that provides Betsy her life as a character. Interestingly in this scene, it is not Betsy who unleashes emotion into the chair, but rather Mrs. Modely who before relaying that Sir Frederick Fineer, one of Betsy's many quasi-suitors, is gravely injured, "throw[s] herself into a chair" (421). Mrs. Modely is only able to tell Betsy the news about Sir Frederick once she is seated. Even though Betsy sees Mrs. Modely walk into the room, she is not fully available to us to imagine vividly until she comes in contact with an object, and her thrust into the chair provides the space for this much needed definition.

Similarly in Richardson's seminal work, Pamela reveals that she had to sit down in order to process her emotions after Mr. B forces her into marrying him. As soon as Mrs. Jewkes, the minister, and Mr. B leave Pamela alone in her room, Pamela confesses, "I sat down in the Chair again, and fanned myself; I am sick at heart. ...And I got up, but my Knees beat so against one, I was forced to sit down again" (344). In this moment, we see the chair performing four of its many roles: it animates Pamela in our imagination, provides a space of rest for her, absorbs her emotions, and finally helps give her strength to deal with entering the chapel. Unlike the other chairs we have seen, this one is method of transportation, carried by men to move women from place to place. But in this scene, the sedan chair is only used as a static object. From these examples, it is clear that chairs provide a sense of vivacity to the female bodies they encounter, but what about materiality?

To sort out and solve this problem, I want to return to Scarry on her description of the conditions needed for characters to acquire density and weight in our imaginations. She argues, "by the peculiar gravitational rules of the imagination, two or more images that are independently weightless can nevertheless confer weight on one another; just as by the geometry of the imagination two or more images, each independently two-dimensional, can nevertheless confer three-dimensionality upon one another" (16). If we follow Scarry's points through, we find that Alovysa, Betsy, Pamela, Arabella, and Moll and the chairs they encounter fit exactly the description of two weightless objects that when in contact with one another acquire through mutual transmittance a solidity in the reader's imagination. For us this literary equation assures that indeed chair and woman mutually interact as equals in this novel, each affects the other in measurable ways. Moreover, we can think of this accruing of three-dimensionality as adding sense of interiority to each object as well. Our female subjects, object-characters, gain a

materiality—she expands in our imaginations and through this growth, can express emotions that are depend on the possession of a palpable body. In other words, how could Alovysa cry and scream without tangible, three-dimensional eyes and a mouth? Or connect Betsy’s floating thoughts to her body? When the respective chairs and female characters are interlocked in a symbiotic, mutually dependent relationship, one that gives the other in equal ways a sense of much needed density, a solidity that consequently confers a sense of believability to us the readers, engaging us in the vivid, imaginative experience of what Scarry calls “dreaming by the book.” The combination of both chair and woman as depicted in the words of the novel allows us to create three-dimensional objects in our imaginations that do not exist in reality.

As with beds and couches, women and furniture are objects of equal regard in eighteenth-century novels. Adding Scarry’s cognitive theory to Latour’s arguments regarding the construction of social space, I want to bring this point into the realm of imagination, building off the idea that two objects when described in conjunction together in the words of a text, in other words, given to us through authorial directions, can connote three-dimensionality to each other. Scarry asserts that this change is possible in that “for us, all fictionally asserted objects are equally airy: the bedroom wall, considered in isolation, is no more solid, no more something that will bear our weight or impeded our actual movement, than is the spectral Golo [a character from Proust]” (25). Now exchange “bedroom wall” with “elbow chair” and “spectral Golo” with “Alovysa” so we now have a further explanation of how characters and things in novels are equal to each other—neither is more solid than the other in our imaginations. Until they are combined “either by verbal report or by the tactile brush of one image across the surface of the other” neither of these objects, chair nor woman, have a material presence in our minds, both are weightless and fuzzy (Scarry 28). Furthermore, in reference to Thomas Hardy’s *Tess of the*

D'Urbervilles, Scarry describes the interaction between Tess and an object that confers three-dimensionality to both: “this light brush of image upon image helps to materialize both woman and ring in our imaginations” (28). In this scene, the contact made between two objects, Tess and her ring equally connote physicality to both, and the same is true for eighteenth-century novels where interactions between furniture and characters, especially female protagonists, occur.

The Social Chair

In each of these novels, from Haywood to Inchbald, chairs occupy the foreground of the action and perform as actors and at the same time confer a sense of authority and solidity to the female characters that interact with them. But in each moment, the chair has remained in a static position as a grounded seat that transfers a certain solidity and materiality to the female protagonists who sit on and throw themselves into them. Moreover, each of these novels presents a fictional analog to how women’s inhabitable space was imagined in the eighteenth-century by providing a sense of the incomplete freedom to that female protagonists have in the world with which they interact. So the question becomes: what happens to the female protagonist when she is moved around in a chair or forbidden to move because of a chair? To answer this question, I will examine situations where women’s conversations with men are both limited and freed by their position in chairs and then explore the curious phenomenon associated with the third definition of an eighteenth-century chair—a method of transportation for women carried by men.

In eighteenth-century and early nineteenth-century novels, we see that it is the male characters that position themselves to converse with women rather than the other way around. These men either walk over towards the women and then sit in a chair already positioned in a *vis-à-vis* position or actually drag a chair near these women to engage them in dialogue. Again,

we see Latourian social theory defining this kind of arrangement—it is the objects, especially the chairs that define the nature of the conversations between men and women at this time. In other words, chairs are tools of social positioning, and thus define the positions that women can occupy. For example, in Defoe's *Moll Flanders*, Moll is at the home of three siblings two of which are brothers and is engaged in conversation with the sister who tells Moll that her brother Robin desired to speak with her. Moll says "I would have got up out of my chair, but was so weak I could not for a good while; and he saw it, and his sister too, and she said, 'Come, do not strive to stand; my brother desires no ceremony, especially now that you are so weak.' No, no, Mrs. Betty, pray, sit still," says he, and so sits himself down in a chair over against me, and appeared as if he was mighty marry" (52). Robin chooses to sit *vis-à-vis* to Moll; he moves a chair over to her and lowers himself to her level while she remains still, firmly seated in the chair. Staying seated while Robin moves to her provides Moll with the seat of power, yet conversely, it is Robin who has the strength and freedom to move around the room, not Moll.

What is most interesting about the role of chairs in the construction of polite discourse between men and women is the chair's changing role as the century progresses as evidenced in what is considered the culmination of the rise of the novel, the novels of Jane Austen. In these novels, furniture is arranged in sitting rooms for the purpose of staging conversations according to the rules of social decorum and the characters become pawns that vie for the prime seat in the room in order to have access to the optimal seat for conversing with the desired suitor. In Austen's novels, we see the chair at its ultimate role as the key tool used for social configurations. In *Emma*, Mr. Knightley engages Emma in polite conversation: "My dear Emma," said he, moving from his chair into one close by her, 'you are not going to tell me, I hope, that you had not a pleasant evening'" (Austen 220). And similarly in *Sense and Sensibility*,

The Colonel seeing Elinor at the tea table, “shortly there afterwards drew a chair close to hers, and with a look which perfectly assured her of his good information, inquired after her sister” (37). Later in the same novel, Edward enters Elinor’s room for the first time after his engagement, and “Whether he had asked her pardon for his intrusion on first coming into the room, he could not recollect; but determining to be on the safe side, he made his apology in form, as soon as he could say anything, after taking a chair” (164). In each of these examples, the men move into chairs to position themselves across from the women they wish to converse with while the women remain seated. The men have to lower themselves to the women’s level and this seemingly provides the women with a position of power. In Austen, chairs are primarily devices used for framing social scenarios and reveal the limited movement given to fictional women at this time. Without the chairs, these conversations would not be possible.

Movement, Stasis & the Sedan Chair

Although chairs seem to provide female characters with social and conversational power in the aforementioned textual examples, the last type of chair—the traveling sedan—reveals another one of the chair’s double roles in both limiting and freeing the movement of the female characters. In Haywood’s *The History of Miss Betsy Thoughtless*, Betsy is constantly on the move, whether visiting friends or unintentionally getting into carriages with harmful suitors, and it is her movement throughout the novel that is interesting in contrast to the moments of stasis when she either throws herself or sits steadfastly into chairs. What is most peculiar about how Betsy gets around London is her chair, the “cushioned seat carried by men to transport women.” (117). These chairs for transportation basically resembled an elbow chair carried by men so that the women would be perched above at an almost bird’s eye view of the streets and city. There

are multiple times within the novel where both men and women call chairs for Betsy, and in each moment, Betsy's possibility for leaving one place to travel to another is in the control of someone besides herself. For example, after spending time with Miss Forward and Mr. Truworth, Betsy "desired Miss Forward to send somebody for a chair" (238) but it is actually Truworth who calls the vehicle. In the narrative, Betsy's thoughts are not exclaimed and are curiously interrupted by Mr. Truworth; as soon as we see that Betsy wants to leave, Mr. Truworth jumps in and demands, "A chair, madam," that gentleman, who, of the two, had been the most particular in his addresses to her, "you cannot imagine we should suffer you to go home alone at this late hour?" (238). It appears that Betsy lacks complete control over her movement within the public sphere. Only when she is seated on a chair and moved around town by men can she move outside the domestic quarters of her home or the homes of all the friends and ill-intending suitors she visits.

Betsy moves freely within the domestic sphere, and when she is alone in her chamber, she is able to "start from her chair, measure how many paces there were in the room—look at one picture, then on another—then on her own resemblance in the great glass; —but all this would not do" (275). And in another scene, Betsy is upset about her relationship with Miss Forward, "was offended beyond all measure; —she frowned,—rose hastily from her chair,—walked about the room in a disordered fashion" (233). Although these chairs that Betsy springs herself from are ones used for transport, there exists an important continuity between Betsy's movements within the domestic sphere and those outside of it. She possesses control of her body in the private realm and is able to get up with conviction, move around, and think while moving within her space. In both of these scenes, it is the chair that initially grounds the scene, acting as an anchor to connect the reader to the fictional world and confer a solidity to Betsy that makes

her able to visualized with acute precision in the reader’s imagination. As objects that denote position and location, the chair in these scenes marks Betsy’s accepted role within the home, the place where she can freely move, and by contrast, her inability to move around fictional London without a chair not only carried by men, but one where she must remain still in order to kept the chair balanced.



Figure 4. Private chairs from furniture catalog

Figure 5. Sedan Chair Illustration

Both Figures 4 and Figure 5 are examples of traveling chairs, more commonly referred to now as the “sedan chair” and were composed of a small box with an actual moveable chair within it. Poles attached on each side of the box allowed the sedan chairmen to carry the box around, transporting the woman inside from place to place on the streets of London as well as through the getaway towns like Bath. According to Trevor Fawett in “Chair Transport in Bath: The Sedan Era” from the second volume of *Bath History*:

The chairs themselves doubtless resembled metropolitan models, painted black externally and upholstered within. Windows were fitted on three sides, though the front poleman

necessarily obstructed the passenger's view ahead when the chair was travelling. The poles were longer than those of bath chairs and springy enough to impart a slight bounce to the main body of the sedan, where they threaded through metal staples and from which they could be quickly removed when the chair was not in use (12-13).

Sedan chairs were made by furniture makers and palpably reveal the limiting and freeing qualities of furniture in the eighteenth century—the woman riding in the sedan chair was actually boxed in and moved around by men with no control over her transport through the city. By entering the chair, she relies on the trustworthiness of the sedan chairman to transport her where she desires to go.

We see the importance of this method of transportation in the literary world when Betsy is trapped in an uncomfortable situation with Truworth and desires to escape, but “neither a coach nor a chair was to be got” (157). This scene pivots around Betsy's inability to leave for “she had sent away the chair which brought her...she knew not how difficult it was to procure such a vehicle in Westminster, especially on a Sunday” (156-7). Without a chair or carriage, Betsy cannot leave her current location, for venturing out alone into the city is unimaginable. So, here, the chair, or the absence there of, denotes a lack of both positionality and authority, and causes Betsy to be stuck. Although caged within the sedan, the luxuriousness of the vehicle and the fact that it is raised above others on an elevated perspective connotes an air of authority to the chair. In other words, within the painted and decorated sedan chair, women were meant to be seen and noticed, but without the chairs they could not freely move around their environments.

But does the object of the sedan chair rather than its social position have any effect on the extent of available movement from place to place for the female protagonist? Scarry asserts that it is easier to imagine a character move when some kind of surface underneath him is present,

“even if the figure is seated in a chair, he can be moved about with startling ease” (Scarry 21). So in *The History of Miss Betsy Thoughtless*, Betsy’s movements are further restricted by the reader’s imaginative properties. Without the sedan chair, the reader would have an incredibly difficult imagining her movements over vast distances. But once we can picture Betsy in the chair, although carried by men, she becomes easier to move around imaginatively as well as in terms of the narrative. This simultaneous freeing and limiting tendencies of chairs in these novels is mirrored in the imaginative realm: even when Betsy rises out of her chair within her bedchamber, it is the combined image of Betsy and the chair that “arrives in the mind as though it ha[d] been flung there” (Scarry 104). It appears that we are meant to imagine the woman in the chair before we can imagine the women moving around in the space; we have to visualize imagine Betsy grounded in the chair in order for her to acquire solidity, density as a body, in order to then move around her space within any kind of believability. Scarry asserts, “...the verbal arts continually engage us in moving images about, brushing one image across the surface of a second image, rotating the figure perhaps from an upright posture to the ground” (35). Through authorial direction we are encouraged to imagine Betsy Thoughtless in her fictional world in terms of surfaces brushing up against other surfaces. In the public sphere, imagining Betsy brushing up against the chair within the sedan is the only way for us to visualize her moving through the streets of London from one destination to another.

Although female characters appear to have free reign of movement within their respective private spaces, a chair remains an authoritative device that can assert agency and control over a private space. Returning to the first two definition of a chair from Samuel Johnson’s dictionary reveals that the ability for a chair to affect a female character’s movement is not restricted to only sedan chairs, but rather to all chairs depicted in eighteenth century novels. Richardson’s

Pamela provides an example of the power dynamics between a chair and woman when the main female protagonist is not depicted in conjunction with the chair itself. When Mr. B's aunt, Lady Davers, comes to visit the manor, she becomes furious at Pamela and corners her into a bedchamber. As Pamela starts to escape, Lady Davers "rose, and gave me a Push, and pull'd a Chair, and setting the Back against the door, sat down in it" (Richardson 382). And when Pamela tries to retreat to the other side of the room, Lady Davers, "arose, and took me by the Hand, and led me to her Chair, and then sat down" (383). In this scene, we see Pamela caged into the room with no escape; she is blocked in by the solid mass of Lady Davers anchored in the chair that blocks the entrance. Lady Davers utilizes all of the authority the chair provides her, dragging Pamela to stand near her while she sits sturdily stopping Pamela's release. The chair clearly suppresses Pamela's movement within this domestic sphere, but does not fully contain her for she begins to defend herself.

As Lady Davers continues to sit in front of the door, Pamela breaks free of her clutch and takes up a seat across from her near the window. As Pamela sits down across from her, Lady Davers continuously commands her to "stand up" (387) and Pamela refuses to listen and says, "I still kept my Seat, and said nothing" (387). Pamela remains seated while Lady Davers chastises her, and when she tries to escape one of Lady Davers' kinsmen "ran and set his back against the door" so she decided to return and "s[i]t down in the window seat" (389). In this scene, Pamela's seat is in direct opposition to the authority conferred to Lady Davers by the chair in its position as both a furniture object and signifier of power. Lady Davers sits in a large, cushioned elbow chair while Pamela sits on a window seat, not even a chair per se. Although her seat is humble, Pamela acts beyond the confines of her seat and finally displays conviction and stubbornness rather than submission. In this standoff against her master's aunt, Pamela uses the window seat

as an anti-chair, taking advantage of the authority of merely being seated to challenge Lady Davers' control over her ability to move around her space. It is though Pamela tries to accrue the same power that Lady Davers does from her chair, but it is the latter that is in control in this scene. This example from Richardson's *Pamela* reveals that the female character's ability to move around her environment can even be constricted within the private space of the home. Allowed to move only within the confines of the room that Lady Davers steadfastly guards, Pamela attempts to gain power from sitting, but she doesn't have a chair to utilize. It is Lady Davers who possess the authority, as a chair-woman of the bedchamber, dictating Pamela's movements and the only way for Pamela to resist is to sit opposite her and endure the constant back and forth from Davers' chair to the window as Davers incessantly beckons her to the chair to interrogate and reprimand her. Even in a position of stasis, the chair acts as a seat of authority for the sitter and this scene from *Pamela* proves that such authority can be wielded to restrict the movement of female characters even within their own private, domestic spheres.

Furthermore, these examinations into the nature of chairs reveal the multiple roles of chairs in eighteenth-century fiction as reflected by the society surrounding these narratives, a society concerned with the position and movement of women. Haywood's *Love in Excess*, *The History of Miss Betsy Thoughtless*, Richardson's *Pamela*, Lennox's *The Female Quixote*, Defoe's *Moll Flanders*, as well as sampling of Austen novels serve as examples of the multifarious definition of chairs in eighteenth-century London: as moveable pieces of furniture, positions of authority, and finally, a traveling sedan made for the transport of women. When depicted in conjunction with fictional female bodies, chairs confer materiality and solidity to these characters through their interactions with them, but what is most interesting about chairs in these novels is how they describe positions. They provide spaces for female characters to speak,

to express their emotions, and on the other hand, they both free and limit the movement of these women within both their private and the larger public environments. Overall, chairs have the most palpable effect on these female protagonists and their effects upon their bodies and minds are the most dramatic in comparison to that of beds and couches. By tracking the chairs in eighteenth-century narratives, one can track the movement of the female characters and gain a better understanding of women's position as objects at this time, both as objects to be transported by men and as objects of the imaginary. We come to know about the fictional woman through the chair she sits in, from her position and posture within it because of how the novel wants us to imagine her relationship to it, not the other way around. Chairs are actors, and we could argue, central actors in these novels. Looking to things reveals more about the conventional "subjects" that utilize them simply analyzing character interaction can accomplish on its own.

Conclusion

In eighteenth-century novels pieces of furniture are integral to the fictional lives of the characters that encounter them, especially the female characters that are both freed and limited by their encounters with these objects. Objects of furniture frame social interactions between characters and are the primary anchors for readers to enter into the text of the novel. Imagining the furniture female characters interact with helps us as readers to envision their mental activity. Moreover, they provide these fictional women's bodies with materiality that then allows them to possess interiority to their characters. Novels give beds, couches and chairs lives of their own that are not obvious at first glance. Studying encounters between women and furniture reveals the position of these women in the eighteenth-century fictional imaginary as both restricted and free in their bodily movements within the fictional realms in which they inhabit.

To conclude my investigations into the hidden behaviors of furniture, I want to examine one last textual example from Jane Austen's *Pride & Prejudice* (1813), a novel that offers us the epitome of the fully round and psychologically complex female protagonist, Elizabeth Bennet. This novel represents the pinnacle of the development of realism during the period where the novel forms, matures, and finally comes into its most sophisticated shape. In this novel, ball scenes are prevalent as they serve as neutral meeting grounds for the bourgeois and aristocratic men and women to mingle, socialize, and dance.

During one of the first dances depicted in the novel, we see that Elizabeth is "obliged by the scarcity of gentlemen, to sit down for two dances; and during part of that time, Mr. Darcy had been standing near enough for her to overhear a conversation between him and Mr. Bingley, who came from the dance for a few minutes, to press his friend to join it" (8). At this point, Mr. Darcy has refused to dance with her after eyeing her up and commenting that she was not

“handsome enough to tempt [him]” (8). As we saw in other Austen novels, chairs are social tools used for framing very specific social situations made to maximize the interactions between eligible men and women. In these ball scenes, the women are confined to sitting in the chairs that line the perimeter of the dance floor if there are no men for them to dance with. In other words, this dance scene reveals how female characters were limited by their inability to move around on their own without the accompaniment of men. In this scene from *Pride & Prejudice*, even the boisterous and spunky Elizabeth is rendered static and must remain still in a chair on the periphery without the presence of a man at her side. Here, chairs act as the resting places for women when not in use by men. The women like Elizabeth are made equivalent to the furniture items they sit on and although they have the power to charm and tempt me, they ultimately depend on the men to move and enjoy the ball.

At this point in the development of the novel and the depth of the female protagonist, chairs become the only important social framing devices. Only in earlier novels like Haywood amatory fictions and Richardson’s epistolary novels do we see scenes with beds and couches. These novels feature scenes of women sleeping in beds, lounging on couches, and sinking into chairs rather than left on the edge of the dance floor waiting for men to arrive. Instead, these earlier female protagonists depend on the furniture objects for their interiority as characters and even their tangible existence in our minds as readers. In these earlier novels of the eighteenth-century, furniture objects are the readers’ main anchors and entrance into the fictional space that the characters exist within and it is through these objects’ presence and encounters with female characters that we can actually mentally visualize these women as seemingly realistic fictional beings. Yet, as we have now seen, furniture both structures and frees and free the female characters that encounter it, ultimately revealing through these interactions that the female

protagonists of these novels are basically as object-like as the furniture pieces themselves. Any notion of subjectivity that they seem to acquire comes directly from their interactions with the furniture—the fictional beds, couches, and chairs.

In the end, this thesis has offered a new understanding of the behavior of what can be considered the subject/object dichotomy. By using Latour's social theory to collapse the binary and then the work of Cynthia Wall, Elaine Scarry, Deidre Lynch and Sandra MacPherson, I rearranged this binary to propose that subjects and objects exist in a symbiotic relationship where they effect each other in very tangible ways within the pages of the nascent eighteenth-century novel. Furthermore, at any time, subjects can act like objects and vice versa. When female protagonists encounter objects of furniture, they depend on them for support and rest, and at the same time face the reality of becoming object-like, of losing grip on their consciousnesses. Whether it is Pamela who is anxious of the bed and the object state of sleep, Melliora who finds herself trapped within the confines of the couch with D'Elmont, or Arabella who becomes pale as death when she sinks into the chair that supports her body, each female character interacts with furniture in ways that make us rethink which entity is the subject which is the object. Each of these interactions reveal how porous and malleable the boundary is between what we think of as the subjects and objects, when in eighteenth-century fiction, these distinctions were not nearly as fleshed out or clear by any means. Examining encounters with furniture reveals how subjects are objects and objects are subjects in novels, each fully a part of and dependent on the other for full existence within the literary imaginary. Although the lives of pieces of furniture may be hidden and tricky to understand at first, they are the only way to get imaginatively and narratively closer to the female characters that the novels revolve around. Ultimately, the path to character is precisely through the object.

Works Consulted

Austen, Jane. *Emma*. New York: Crowell, 1955. Hathi Digital Trust. University of Michigan.

March 2012. <<http://babel.hathitrust.org/cgi/pt?id=uc1.b102364>>

—and James Kinsley. *Pride and Prejudice*. Oxford and New York: Oxford

University Press, 2003. Print.

—. *Sense and Sensibility*. Boston : Little, Brown, 1903, c1892. Hathi Digital Trust.

University of Michigan. March 2012.

<<http://babel.hathitrust.org/cgi/pt?id=inu.30000008561247>>

A. W., Esq. *The enormous abomination of the hoop-petticoat, as The Fashion Now is, And has been For about these Two Years Fully Display'd: In some Reflexions upon it, Humbly offer'd to the Consideration of Both Sexes; especially the Female*. By A. W. Esq;. London,

M.DCC.XLV. [1745]. *Eighteenth Century Collections Online*. Gale. University of Michigan. 14 Dec. 2011.

<<http://find.galegroup.com.proxy.lib.umich.edu/ecco/infomark.do?&source=gale&prodId=ECCO&userGroupName=umuser&tabID=T001&docId=CW125273910&type=multipage&contentSet=ECCOArticles&version=1.0&docLevel=FASCIMILE>>.

Blackwell, Mark. *The Secret Life of Things: Animals, Objects, and It-Narratives in Eighteenth-*

Century England. Lewisburg: Bucknell University Press, 2007. Print.

Brown, Bill. "Introduction." *Things*. Chicago: University Of Chicago, 2004. Print.

Cleland, John, and Gary Gautier. *Fanny Hill, or, Memoirs of a Woman of Pleasure*. New York:

The Modern Library, 2001. Print.

Defoe, Daniel. *The fortunes and misfortunes of the famous Moll Flanders, &c. Who was born in*

Newgate, ... Written from her own memorandums: London: printed for, and sold by W.

Chetwood; and T. Edling, MDDCXXI [1722]. Eighteenth-Century Collections Online. University of Michigan. March 2012.

<<http://name.umdl.umich.edu/004845034.0001.000>>

—. *The life and strange surprizing adventures of Robinson*

Crusoe: of York, mariner: who lived eight and twenty years, all alone in an un-inhabited Island on the coast of America, near the mouth of the great river of Oroonoque; ...

Written by himself. London: printed for W. Taylor, 1719. *Eighteenth Century Collections Online.* Gale. University of Michigan. March 2012.

<<http://name.umdl.umich.edu/004845034.0001.000>>

Fawcett, Trevor and Stephen Bird. "Chair Transport in Bath: The Sedan Era." *Bath: History and Guide.* London: Sutton Pub Ltd, 1994. Online Transcript.

<<http://condor.depaul.edu/cchaden/bath/chairtransport.html>>

Goodman, Deena and Kathryn Norberg, Eds. "Introduction." *Furnishing the Eighteenth-Century: What Furniture Can Tell Us about the European and American Past.* New York and London: Routledge, 2007. Print.

Graham, Clare. *Dummy Boards and Chimney Boards.* Aylesbury: Shire Ltd., 1988. Print.

Haywood, Eliza Fowler. *Idalia: or, the unfortunate mistress. A novel. Part II. and III. Written by Mrs. Eliza Haywood.* London, M.DCC.XXIII. [1723]. *Eighteenth Century Collections Online.* Gale. University of Michigan. 14 Dec. 2011.

<<http://find.galegroup.com.proxy.lib.umich.edu/ecco/infomark.do?&source=gale&prodId=ECCO&userGroupName=umuser&tabID=T001&docId=CW116557840&type=multipage&contentSet=ECCOArticles&version=1.0&docLevel=FASCIMILE>>.

—. and David Oakleaf. *Love in Excess, Or, The Fatal Enquiry.*

Peterborough, Ont.: Broadview, 2000. Print.

—. and Christine Oakleaf. *The History of Miss Betsy Thoughtless*.

Peterborough, Ont.: Broadview, 1998. Print.

Johnson, Samuel. "Chair." *A Dictionary of the English Language: A Digital Edition of the 1755 Classic By Samuel Johnson*.

<<http://johnsonsdictionaryonline.com/>>

Inchbald, Elizabeth, and Anna Lott. *A Simple Story*. Orchard Park, NY: Broadview, 2007. Print.

Latour, Bruno. "On Interobjectivity." *Mind, Culture, and Activity* 3.4 (1996): 228-45. Print.

—. *Reassembling the Social: An Introduction to Actor-Network Theory*. Oxford: Oxford UP, 2007. Print.

Lubey, Kathleen. "Eliza Haywood's Amatory Aesthetic." *Eighteenth Century Studies*, vol. 39, no. 3 (2006) Pp. 309-322. Project Muse. University of Michigan. September 2011.

<http://muse.jhu.edu.proxy.lib.umich.edu/journals/eighteenth-century_studies/v039/39.3lubey.html>

MacPherson, Sandra. "Toward a New Feminist Morphology." Draft, Forthcoming 2012. Print.

Macquoid, Percy. *A History of English Furniture*. New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1905. Print.

Manwaring, Robert. *The Chair Maker's Guide: Being upwards of two hundred new and genteel designs, both decorative and plain, of all the most approved patterns, for gothic, Chinese, ribbon, and other chairs, couches, settees, burjairs, French, dressing and corner stools, adapted for halls, lobbies, dining, drawing and dressing rooms, parlours, bed-chambers, summer-houses, seats for gardens, parks, woods, & c. Many of the rural kind may be executed with rude branches, or limbs of trees, & c. By Robert Manwaring, cabinet-maker, and others, The whole neatly engraved on seventy-five copper plates*. London,

MDCCLXVI. [1766]. *Eighteenth Century Collections Online*. Gale. University of Michigan. 27 January 2012.

<<http://find.galegroup.com/ecco/infomark.do?&source=gale&prodId=ECCO&userGroupName=umuser&tabID=T001&docId=CB3326806240&type=multipage&contentSet=ECCOArticles&version=1.0&docLevel=FACSIMILE>>

McKeon, Michael. *The Secret History of Domesticity: Public, Private, and the Division of Knowledge*. Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins UP, 2006. Print.

Plotz, John. *Portable Property: Victorian Culture on the Move*. Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2008. Print.

Richardson, Samuel, Tom Keymer, and Alice Wakely. *Pamela, Or, Virtue Rewarded*. Oxford: Oxford UP, 2001. Print.

Saxton, Kristen T. and Rebecca P. Bocchicchio. *The Passionate Fictions of Eliza Haywood: Essays on Her Life and Work*. Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2000.

Scarry, Elaine. *Dreaming By the Book*. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1999. Print.

Schofield, Mary Anne. *Eliza Haywood*. Ed. Bertram Davis. Boston: Twayne, 1985. Print.

The Dictionary of English Furniture: From the Middle Ages to the late Georgian Period. Eds. Ralph Edwards and Percy Macquoid. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1924-7.

The history of Charlotte Summers, the fortunate parish girl. In two volumes. ... Vol. Volume

1. London, [1750]. *Eighteenth Century Collections Online*. Gale. University of Michigan. 14 Dec. 2011.

<<http://find.galegroup.com.proxy.lib.umich.edu/ecco/infomark.do?&source=gale&prodId=ECCO&userGroupName=umuser&tabID=T001&docId=CW109131731&type=multipage&contentSet=ECCOArticles&version=1.0&docLevel=FASCIMILE>>.

Wall, Cynthia. *The Prose of Things: Transformations of Description in the Eighteenth Century*.

Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 2006. Print.

Watt, Ian. *The Rise of the Novel: Studies in Defoe, Richardson, and Fielding*. Berkley and Los

Angeles: University of California Press, 1962. Print.