



How Eighteenth-Century Women Fended-Off Sexual Violence by Writing and Talking: A Study of Four British Novels by Delarivier Manley, Jane Barker, Eliza Haywood, and Samuel Richardson

Jan M. Stahl

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Finally, an integrated and comprehensive study of the ways that female characters in early eighteenth-century novels used letter writing and verbal narration as a strategy for coping with sexual violence. The novels studied are groundbreaking works in the history of feminist literature. This study was undertaken to determine what constitutes effective coping strategies for women experiencing male violence in early eighteenth century novels. The method employed in this study is a careful reading of the following four novels: *The New Atlantis*, by Delarivier Manley, *Exilius* by Jane Baker, *Love in Excess* by Eliza Haywood, and *Pamela* by Samuel Richardson. In each of these novels a primary female protagonist responds to and copes with violence through communicative means such as writing letters or telling her story. In these books a female protagonist who has been subjected to violence or threatened with violence presents a persuasive discussion and convinces and influences men in their lives that they are worthy of empathy, support, respect and dignity. This study considers communication that is effective and communication that is ineffective. The protagonists who find effective means of using language to cope with violence exert agency, become the architects of their destinies, and show that talking and writing can be stronger and more powerful than brute force or nefarious, malicious actions.

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