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WRITTEN ON THE BODY: 'SOMATIC ELOQUENCE' AND THE (DE)CONSTRUCTION OF GENDER IN ELIZA HAYWOOD'S *LOVE IN EXCESS*

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ABSTRACT. ***Written on the Body: 'Somatic Eloquence' and the (De)Construction of Gender in Eliza Haywood's* Love in Excess.** This paper aims to position Haywood's first novel in relation to its socio-cultural background and its place in the history of emotions. Haywood's writing is characteristic of the eighteenth-century fascination with emotional expression through bodily signs. Insisting on the impossibility of encoding emotion in language, Haywood focuses on its somatic manifestations, forcing readers to fill the gaps from their own emotional experience. Implementing cognitive approaches to literature and cultural studies, my paper analyses the textual mechanisms that encourage reader involvement and engender sympathy, and shows how, in turn, these strategies elicit bodily displays of feeling in the audience and serve to interrogate and (de)construct established and emerging gender boundaries.

Keywords: *Eliza Haywood;* Love in Excess*, body language, emotion, gender, cognitive poetics, sensibility*

REZUMAT. ***Scris pe trup: 'elocvența somatică' și (de)construirea genului în* Love in Excess *de Eliza Haywood*.** Lucrarea de față își propune să poziționeze primul roman de Haywood în raport cu contextul socio-cultural și cu locul pe care îl ocupă în istoria trăirilor interioare. Scriitura Elizei Haywood este reprezentativă pentru fascinația pe care secolul optsprezece o manifestă pentru exprimarea trăirilor interioare prin semne corporale. Insistând pe imposibilitatea codificării emoțiilor în limbaj, Haywood se concentrează pe manifestările somatice ale acestora, obligându-și cititorii să compenseze lacunele cu propria lor experiență emoțională. Prin implementarea abordărilor cognitive în literatură și studii culturale, lucrarea mea analizează mecanismele textuale care încurajează implicarea cititorului și insuflă empatie, demonstrând, în același timp, cum, la rândul lor,

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aceste strategii stârnesc manifestări corporale ale emoțiilor în rândul cititorilor și servesc la interogarea și (de)construirea diferențelor de gen prestabilite și emergente.

Cuvinte cheie: *Eliza Haywood;* Love in Excess, *limbajul trupului, emoție, gen, poetică cognitivă, sensibilitate*

1. Introduction: rediscovering *Love in Excess*

The first of three instalments of Eliza Haywood's first novel, *Love in Excess*, was published to enormous popular acclaim in 1719, the same year as Daniel Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe* – a work with which it shares the distinction of being one of the best-selling English novels before Samuel Richardson's *Pamela* (1740).[2] Praised by her contemporaries, not least because of its power to emotionally engage her readers,[3] Haywood's work quickly faded from memory until scholarly interest in her reawakened during the last decades of the twentieth century.

In her article "Alloisa and Melliora", April Alliston presents an exhaustive list of reasons for the "canonical amnesia" (525) that has for a long time characterised Haywood's reception – or lack thereof – which she sees in the novel's divergence in certain key points from the now 'canonised' texts of her male contemporaries, most notably *Robinson Crusoe* and *Gulliver's Travels* (1726). Not only presenting a scale of values on which love outranked the "quintessentially Enlightenment passion of curiosity" (Alliston, 526) and eschewing the form of the travelogue chosen by her male colleagues, Haywood also doomed herself to critical oblivion by aligning herself with the 'feminine' French tradition of romance that soon was to give way to a nationalized and masculinised genealogy of the English novel.[4]

While critics have, for more than two hundred years, been fairly unanimous in excluding Haywood from the canon of eighteenth-century literature, reasons for the rejection of her oeuvre have changed considerably. Subscribing to an ideal of chaste and asexual femininity, critical antagonism during the later eighteenth and nineteenth century tended to target the 'indecent' subject matter of Haywood's writing. When critics like John Richetti have reacted with horrified

[2] Cf. e.g. Richetti, *Popular Fiction*, 179; Oakleaf, "Introduction", 7; Rosenthal, §8.

[3] In a prefatory poem to *Love in Excess*, James Sterling praises that "We glow with Zeal, we melt in soft Desires!/ Thro' the dire Labyrint [sic] of Ills we share/ The kindred Sorrows of the gen'rous Pair;/ [...] You sit like Heav'n's bright Minister on High,/ Command the throbbing Breast and watry Eye, [...]" (cited in Richetti, *Popular Fiction*, 180–1).

[4] Cf. Alliston, 526f.; for a similar catalogue, cf. Black, 209f.; Warner, 88f.

incredulity to the "appalling fact" (*Popular Fiction*, 179) of her outstanding popular success,[5] however, they have done so not because of her depiction of love and desire – indeed, this forms the primary focus in many scholarly articles, especially in relation to her female characters – but because of her distinctive prose style, disparaged as "hysterical romantic fustian" which is "clearly unreadable" (262). It must be remembered, however, that what strikes the twenty-first century reader as overblown and clichéd – and, indeed, would come to be regarded as such by the mid-eighteenth century – was, at the time of Haywood's writing, still a viable and vital means of depicting emotion in literature.[6]

In recent decades, Eliza Haywood's work has experienced something of a scholarly renaissance, with a number of articles devoted exclusively to *Love in Excess*. In particular, the ways in which the author explores the articulation and enactment of female desire and female sexual agency feature in almost every discussion of the novel. In addition, Haywood's construction of the male protagonist as the largely passive object of the female gaze has also attracted widespread critical attention,[7] as has her use of language to subvert established gender roles.[8] Moreover, the socio-historical context of its publication has also been given some consideration: critics like Joseph Drury and Jonathan Brody Kramnik have sought to locate the work in the wider context of eighteenth-century debates about moral agency, whereas Scott Black turns to the subplot between Alovysa and D'espernay in order to analyse formal aspects of Haywood's novel, and Kathlyn R. King discovers "New Contexts for Early Novels by Women" in "The Case of Eliza Haywood, Aaron Hill, and the Hillarians." In response to earlier criticism, which tended to regard Haywood's first novel as largely apolitical,[9] Toni Bowers in "Collusive Resistance" and Ros Ballaster in "A Gender of Opposition" have both demonstrated how Haywood, a staunch Tory, through *Love in Excess* contributed to ongoing political debates. This paper aims both at entering into a dialogue with existing work on Haywood's novel, and on locating the text within a framework that draws on cognitive and socio-cultural approaches in order to shed light on Haywood's use of body language as a means of triggering readerly involvement, and of commenting on contemporary debates on shifting gender boundaries.

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[5] Cf. Richetti, *Popular Fiction*, 179: "It is one of the more appalling and therefore interesting facts of literary history that the three most popular works of fiction before *Pamela* were *Gulliver's Travels*, *Robinson Crusoe*, and Mrs. Haywood's first novel, *Love in Excess; or The Fatal Enquiry* (1719)."

[6] Cf. Gargano, 518.

[7] Cf. for the reversal of gendered subject/object relations and the female gaze in Haywood's oeuvre in general, cf. Merritt, 12ff.; for D'elmont as an object of female desire, cf. Alliston, 518 and Domsch, "Eighteenth-Century Man as Sex Object."

[8] Cf. particularly work by Gargano and Harrow.

[9] Cf. Warner, 111ff.; Ballaster, *Amatory Fiction*, 153ff.

2. The love of performance and the performance of love

The performative nature of emotion in Haywood's text, and the extent to which it seems to invite readerly participation, has been noted much earlier by one of Eliza Haywood's more famous detractors. In his essay "What Ann Lang Read", Edmund Gosse depicts what he believes to be the stereotypical reader of eighteenth-century amatory fiction: Ann Lang, a lowly servant girl or milliner's apprentice, of limited education and intellectual powers, lacking in literary taste and discernment, whom he imagines "practis[ing a] series of attitudes in the solitude of her garret" (Gosse, 165). Recent critics, most notably Christine Blouch and Kathryn R. King, have been careful to distance themselves from the female reader "of diminished cognitive ability" (King, 261) that appears to have become the critical paradigm for many Haywood scholars.[10] Drawing on overwhelming bibliographical evidence, King and Blouch demonstrate that *Love in Excess* was targeted at a comparatively affluent audience, and was by contemporary critics regarded as one of Haywood's more 'elegant' literary offerings.[11] This claim appears to be substantiated by the poems written in praise of Haywood's novel, which stress the elegance of her writing and the 'refined delicacy' of her characters.[12] Incidentally, the collection of poetical praise collected by Oakleaf also reveals that her readership was by no means exclusively female, and that a number of men – such as the anonymous author of the verses "Writ on a Blank Leaf of a Lady's *Love in Excess*" – either enjoyed the novel, or at least found it politic to pretend that they had done so.[13]

Attempts at distancing themselves from Gosse's Ann Lang and her critical equivalents, however, has apparently led most Haywood scholars to throw out the baby with the bathwater, overlooking the validity of Gosse's observation of the implicit encouragement for performative imitation that Haywood's novels offer to the reader.[14] While it has been shown that Gosse's disparaging portrait is oversimplified and somewhat inaccurate, it nevertheless contains a small grain of truth that may serve as the starting point of an examination of Haywood's literary debut in the context of the cultural moment of its production, and most notably its position within the project of elocutionary discourse.

[10] Cf. King, 261; Blouch, 300ff.

[11] Cf. King, 263; Blouch, 306f.; also Oakleaf, "Introduction", 7.

[12] For a selection of such poems, cf. Oakleaf, "Appendix", 267ff.

[13] For Haywood's mixed audiences, cf. Oakleaf, "Introduction", 23f.; Warner, 91. While it is certainly true that some of the praise for *Love in Excess* came from men who were part of Haywood's intimate circle (such as the poet Richard Savage, for instance) and might have praised the work for personal motives rather than from a conviction of its literary merit, this does not apply to all the verses cited in the second modern edition of *Love in Excess* (cf. Oakleaf, "Appendix", 267).

[14] "I am positive that Ann Lang practised this series of attitudes in the solitude of her garret." (Gosse, 165).

2.1 Elocutionary discourse

The notion of 'elocutionary discourse' was formulated by Paul Goring in *The Rhetoric of Sensibility in Eighteenth-Century Culture* (2005). Goring collects evidence for the "preoccupation in British culture of this period with the human body as an eloquent object, whose eloquence arises from the performance of an inscribed system of gestures and expressions" (5). 'Elocutionary discourse', in this context, denotes "the general enterprise of eighteenth-century thinking and writing about bodies as expressive, eloquent objects" (6). As Goring goes on to point out, the period's concern with "shaping and directing" (5) bodily expression is testified through the enormous number of works dedicated to the teaching and rehearsal of appropriate bodily expression of emotional states.[15] Ostensibly addressed at actors and orators, these manuals were, in fact, directed at a far wider reading public, and bear evidence to the need that (male) eighteenth-century readers felt for guidance on this subject.[16] If bodily expression was fast becoming a topic of interest for men, however, it was considered an even more crucial aspect of women's lives, as contemporary commentators both warned them against giving away their feelings through somatic signs, and advised them on how to use their bodies to convey meanings whose verbal expression was deemed socially unacceptable.[17]

This overweening interest in bodily expression must be seen in conjunction with the emergent culture of sensibility and the notion of 'politeness' in the first decades of the eighteenth century. As numerous scholars have demonstrated, the eighteenth century was remarkable for the social and moral value that was accorded to emotional susceptibility, and "possession of an easily moved character became from the early years of the century a powerful sign of individual moral worth and, as such, a sign for civility" (Goring, 24). As moments of emotional overload tended to reduce those gifted (or afflicted) with sensibility to speechlessness, proof of this status-conferring emotionality could be found primarily in its bodily manifestations, such as trembling, weeping, or fainting. Initially regarded as an attribute of aristocratic elite and conceived as the capacity to experience strong feelings of love for another person, the notion of sensibility gradually broadened to include sympathy with the feelings of others on a more general level, becoming democratized as the emerging bourgeoisie began to lay claim to this valued attribute.[18] The emerging 'cult of sensibility', with its twin associations of moral superiority and nervous disease, showing itself in typically 'feminine' somatic

[15] Cf. also Zunshine, 130.
[16] Cf. Goring, 7.
[17] Cf. Perry, 147ff.; Luhning, 157.
[18] Cf. Ahern, 18.

reactions like weeping or fainting, quickly caused it to become primarily associated with 'the sex'.[19]

However, men too could – and did – lay claim to sensibility: Goring cites a correspondence between Samuel Richardson and Aaron Hill, in which the former describes the effects which the perusal of Hill's *The Art of Acting* (1746) had on him.[20] Involuntarily following the instructions given by the author and assuming the physical postures and expressions described, Richardson found himself experiencing the emotions these attitudes were meant to represent. He describes in some detail the harrowing effect of this experience, to which he nevertheless gives a positive evaluation as it testifies both to the merits of his friend's poem and his own delicacy of feeling.[21] The crucial importance of attempting to influence others to perceive one's body as a marker of sensibility becomes evident also from a correspondence between Lady Louisa Stuart and Sir Walter Scott, in which the former reminisces about the popularity of *The Man of Feeling* and her youthful fears of "not cry[ing] enough to gain the credit of proper sensibility" (cited in Ahern, 11) upon reading it. Like Richardson's letter to Hill, it is a passage that reveals both the value that was placed on texts which elicited emotional responses in their readers, and on the bodily expression of these emotions as a means of gaining social cachet. As will be outlined at greater length below, Haywood's fiction bears witness to this concern: "indeed there is no greater proof of a vast and elegant passion, than the being uncapable of expressing it" (Haywood, 101).[22] In order for an emotion to be truly "vast and elegant", it must remain not only unspoken, but unspeakable; a tenet that is in accordance both with the discourse of sensibility and with the genre conventions of amatory fiction.[23]

The establishment of a language of bodily signs of emotional states was of particular importance in a cultural context in which verbalization of emotional experience was well-nigh impossible, ruled out not only by social constraints, but by the very cult of sensibility that had in the first instance placed so high a value on its expression: not only because they rendered the individual incapable of speech, but also because strong emotions were associated with a primal, pre-rational state which lay outside the bounds of reason and hence linguistic expression.[24] As the narrator of *Love in Excess* points out, a character may find her/himself "either prevented [i.e. from speaking] by the rising passions in his soul, or because it was not in the power of language to express the greatness of his meaning" (Haywood, 184).

[19] Cf. Barker-Benfield, 2ff.; Ahern, 40.
[20] Cf. Goring, 1ff.; also Luhning, 155.
[21] Cf. Goring, 2.
[22] Cf. Alliston, 524; Ahern, 87.
[23] For the latter, cf. Ahern, 39.
[24] Cf. Ahern, 40.

In addition, John Locke in his *Essay Concerning Human Understanding* (1690) – one of the cornerstones of the notion of sensibility – had already emphasized the deceptiveness of spoken discourse. The idea of a more authentic 'visual discourse' consisting of bodily signs and gestures goes back to the late seventeenth century, when Locke's thoughts on the subject were taken up by his contemporaries. Several writers began to envision an alternative, unspoken language of somatic signs and expressions which, it was claimed, provided a 'natural' and near universal mode of communication between human beings regardless of their origin.[25]

As will become apparent in my discussion of *Love in Excess*, Haywood's writing is characteristic of its cultural moment, addressing the paradox that underlies the eighteenth-century approach to emotion: in order for a feeling to qualify as "elegant", it must remain verbally inexpressible; in order to be perceived as authentic, it must avoid the deceptive medium of language; in order to convey social status on the feeling subject, however, it must be expressed, and its expression must be registered in a social context. As outlined above, the body consequently achieved paramount importance as a signifier for 'politeness' and hence social status, as bodily shows of emotion became valued as proof of emotional susceptibility.

Several scholars have noted the importance of literary texts in the project of elocutionary discourse, and have remarked on the fact that novels, like actors' manuals, "urged readers to rehearse a language of gesture" and taught the "somatic practice" necessary for the "performance" of feeling (Goring, 14).[26] This 'didactic' project of eighteenth-century literature is commonly ascribed almost exclusively to the novels of sentiment that came to characterize the literary landscape from the 1740s onwards, in which "can be witnessed the construction of a sentimental somatic eloquence which is analogous to the 'body projects' of elocutionists; such novels were not only sites for the literary staging of sentimental somatic eloquence but sought actively to produce such eloquence among the reading public; it is apparent, furthermore, that there grew up around sentimental novels a culture in which bodily responses were widely lauded as signs of moral status" (Goring, 142). As Holly Luhning shows in her discussion of the novel, however, the crucial importance of body language in *Love in Excess* argues for an extension of the commonly accepted time span, as well as to point out the individual and highly subversive use Haywood makes of somatic expressiveness as a means of inviting emotional involvement and of addressing contemporary concerns about shifting gender boundaries: "[Haywood's] texts reflected, anticipated, and developed perceptions about the body that were relevant to readers in the context of social and cultural discourse" (Luhning, 153).[27]

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[25] Cf. Gargano, 519; on the perceived 'authenticity' of somatic signs, also Luhning, 155.

[26] Cf. also Ahern, 11ff.; Korte, 142ff.

[27]Cf. Luhning, 153ff. A similar claim is advanced by Stephen Ahern, who locates the onset of sensibility in the late seventeenth century with the writings of Aphra Behn (cf. 15ff.). For Haywood as a precursor of sentimental fiction, cf. also e.g. Alliston, 530f.; Ahern, 74.

2.2 Writing the unspeakable

While Haywood's writing is remarkable for its close attention to the bodily manifestations of strong emotions, not all feelings are accorded equal attention: the focus of *Love in Excess* is clearly indicated by the title, and all other emotions are treated as worthy of consideration only as far as they result from the inevitable complications that attend her lovers' fates – complications which, in turn, often arise from the inexpressibility of love. This inexpressibility is a central tenet of *Love in Excess*:

> There is nothing more certain than that love, tho' it fills the mind with a thousand charming ideas, which those untouched by that passion, are not capable of conceiving, yet it entirely takes away the power of utterance, and the deeper impression it had made on the soul, the less we are able to express it, when willing to indulge and give a loose to thought; what language can furnish us with words sufficient, all are too poor, all wanting both in sublimity, and softness, and only fancy! a lover's fancy! can reach the exalted soaring of a lover's meaning! (Haywood, 122–3)

Haywood makes it clear that the impossibility of verbalizing love hinges not only on the nature of love itself, but is – and this is crucial for the plot of the novel – a social constraint that operates, most of all, on women, as the novel centres on the various (and often unsuccessful) attempts of the female characters to find ways of expressing their love for the novel's male protagonist, Count D'elmont.[28]

When the Baron D'espernay (not otherwise notable for his insights into the feminine psyche) points out to D'elmont in regard to Melliora that "she has looked on you with a tenderness, like that of love, […] she has blushed at your sight, and trembled at your touch […] what indeed can she do more, in modesty to prove that her heart is yours?" (Haywood, 113) he addresses a dilemma faced not only by the women in *Love in Excess*, but also by many real-world readers of the novel, who feel attracted to a man whom "that custom which forbids women to make a declaration of their thoughts" (Haywood, 37) prevents them from addressing directly.[29] While verbal language is shown to be restrictive, confining women to accepted social barriers and effectively acting as a bar to – rather than a means of – communication, body language "offers a realm of female agency masked as an instinctual bodily response" (Gargano, 514). Body language, in Haywood, is therefore much more than a means of claiming the status associated with "proper sensibility" – it becomes a crucial means of communication especially (but, as shall be argued, not exclusively) for her female characters. In a setting in which the simple declaration 'I love you' is forbidden,

[28] Cf. Merritt, 32; for a detailed discussion of this aspect, cf. Luhning, 156ff.

[29] On the parallels between this aspect of the novel and the real-world experience of its female readers, cf. e.g. Oakleaf, "Introduction", 14f.

the characters resort to a language of looks and gestures that is comprehensible only to lover and beloved, thus creating a special bond between them that allows them to communicate that which social constraints prevent them from saying.[30]

In *Love in Excess*, communication by means of body language is caught in a complex web of social, philosophical and moral considerations underlying the trope of the verbal inexpressibility of passion that has frequently been noted as characteristic of Haywood's style: firstly, characters' inability to express their feelings hinges on a social constraint, which can be overcome by the strategic use of body language – a strategy that implies, indeed demands, conscious control over somatic expression. Secondly, however, the text also draws on the well-established genre convention mentioned above, according to which speechlessness proves the authenticity of a lover's passion.[31] As a third and related point, the text subscribes to an aesthetics of sensibility which privileges states of impassioned speechlessness; characters who lose control over their bodies in moments of emotional overload thereby give evidence of their superiority over less susceptible individuals (the "insipids" [Haywood, 186] disparaged by Haywood's narrator).[32] Moreover, Haywood repeatedly stresses the often involuntary nature of emotional expression, which in itself precludes the possibility of deliberate deception.[33] Indeed, as Haywood's characters struggle to conceal their feelings, which nonetheless show themselves in uncontrollable sighings, tremblings and blushings, the amount of (wasted) effort expended to conceal its somatic signs becomes proof of the sincerity of the emotion, as when we encounter D'elmont "letting fall some tears which he could not restrain" (Haywood, 88–9) on Melliora's hand. Haywood, in particular, belonged to the literary circle of the Hillarians and has been shown to have been strongly influenced by Aaron Hill's version of the Longinian sublime and an "aesthetic that courts excited states of mind in deliberate disruptions of neoclassical poise" (King, 264),[34] revealing itself in lavish displays of somatic eloquence. Haywood's commitment to the Hillarian aesthetic becomes evident also in the title of her novel: 'excess', in its eighteenth-century usage, denotes also "an extravagant or rapturous feeling" (*OED*) or a kind of ecstasy,[35] and thus a state particularly conducive to the "disruptions of neoclassical poise" valued by the Hillarians.

It is also worth noting that, in accordance with eighteenth-century usage, Haywood's novel promises the reader an ecstasy of love, rather than a surfeit. Indeed, the concept of ecstasy, describing "a state of cognitive and physical

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[30] Cf. Ahern, 87; Luhning, 156f.; for the importance of body language – especially the language of the eyes – in *Love in Excess*, cf. also Merritt, 32f.; Gargano, 513ff.

[31] Cf. Ahern, 39; 86f.

[32] Cf. Drury, 212.

[33] Cf. Luhing, 155.

[34] Cf. also Ahern, 80; Rosenthal, §19.

[35] Cf. Gargano, 530.

paralysis" (Ahern, 40) that occurs in moments of emotional excess, during which characters swoon or maintain a frozen physical attitude, is firmly embedded in the discourse of romance fiction from the seventeenth century onwards. In the eighteenth century, it quickly becomes associated with the concept of sensibility.[36] In *Love in Excess*, these moments of ecstasy occur frequently, usually associated with the sight of a beloved object. When Amena observes D'elmont from her room, she becomes "incapable of retiring from the window", where "she remain[s] in a languishing and immoveable posture" (Haywood, 56). Although such moments of ecstatic paralysis are usually associated with (young) women in eighteenth-century discourse,[37] in *Love in Excess* they are experienced by characters of both sexes. Frankville describes his first sight of Camilla in fairly similar terms: "I was, methought, all spirit, – I beheld her with raptures, such as we imagine souls enjoy when freed from earth, [...] t'was heaven to gaze upon her. [...] I was so buried in thought, that I never so much as stirred a step" (Haywood, 191).

Both of the latter points preclude conscious control over bodily expressiveness. Nonetheless, Haywood's writing is notable for the space she devotes to the bodily symptoms of intense emotion. It is important to note that these descriptions serve a double function. On the one hand, they allow Haywood to maintain the trope of inexpressibility that is central to her – and her society's – conception of passionate feeling. The impossibility of verbally communicating strong emotion is expressed on two levels within the novel: on the one hand, the characters frequently find themselves speechless in moments of emotional stress; on the other hand, the narrator also frequently confesses herself "imperfectly" (Haywood, 106) able to put her characters' feelings into words.[38] Fully aware of the range of feeling which cannot be verbalized – because feelings exceed the range of linguistic possibility, because emotional stress takes away the power of speech, and because of the social taboo placed upon the verbalization of certain emotions – Haywood's characters read each other's bodies: "A thousand times have you *read* my rising wishes, sparkling in my eyes, and glowing on my cheeks, as often seen my virtue strugling [sic] in silent tremblings," (111; my italics) D'elmont reminds Melliora. Successful communication, however, depends on a deep empathy that exists only between lovers. This is emphasized through the frequent misinterpretations of body language when this common ground is absent[39] and becomes evident, for example, when both Alovysa and Ciamara mistake D'elmont's sympathetic concern for love. Haywood's novel is remarkable for the way in which it constructs the body simultaneously as the sole source of information about characters' feelings, and at the same time hints at the

[36] Cf. Ahern, 39ff.
[37] Cf. Ahern, 40.
[38] Cf. Richetti, "Voice and Gender", 266.
[39] Cf. Gargano, 526f.

unreliability of that information; a paradox that Lisa Zunshine has shown to be central to all human interaction, and which features with particular prominence in the novel of sentiment.[40] In this regard, Eliza Haywood's *Love in Excess* bridges the gap between amatory fiction and later eighteenth-century literature, with which it shares a deep-seated interest in the effects of intense emotion on mind and body.[41]

In a context in which loss of physical control is regarded as proof of status-conferring emotional susceptibility, the capacity to control body language becomes marked as a sign of moral corruption,[42] or, at best, of emotional indifference.[43] Characters who, like Alovysa at the beginning of the novel, deliberately employ somatic signs for strategic reasons, are evaluated negatively by the narrator and become immediately suspect; another feature that *Love in Excess* shares with the sentimental novels of later decades.[44] While the characters within the text may be misled, the narrator takes good care to ensure that the reader is not: we are told that the "trouble in her countenance" with which Alovysa greets Melliora's father is "feigned" (Haywood, 63), just as we watch her 'trying on' different expressions when she prepares to meet D'elmont early in the novel. After deciding on her clothing and jewellery, "she consulted her glass after what manner she should dress her eyes, the gay, the languishing, the sedate, the commanding, the beseeching air were put on, a thousand times, and, as often rejected" (40). In another scene, the "real sighs that flew from [D'elmont's] breast uncalled" (89) are implicitly contrasted with the deliberate pretence employed earlier to seduce Amena, and his distress at hearing about Melliora's disappearance is "too natural to be suspected for counterfeit" (184) – the latter quote remarkable in the way in which it hints at the possibility of feigning emotion while at the same time dismissing it.

While Haywood admits the possibility of faking body language, and even the occasional necessity of doing so,[45] the emphasis in *Love in Excess* is placed squarely on the reliability of the body as a source of information,[46] to the extent that Gargano speaks of the contrast between "a deceptive and limiting verbal language" (513) and the "privileged realm of supposedly authentic communication" (525) through looks, signs and gestures within the text.[47] The dialectic relationship

[40] Cf. Zunshine, 123; 119; 121ff.
[41] Cf. Ahern, 73.
[42] Cf. Korte, 150; Goring, 150f.
[43] Cf. Drury, 220f.
[44] Cf. Korte, 149f.; for the preoccupation of sensibility narratives with characters who fake sensibility for selfish ends, cf. also Ahern, 14; for this topic in *Pamela* in particular, Goring, 150f.
[45] For example, the narrator pities Amena for being "little versed in the art of dissimulation, so necessary to her sex" (Haywood, 46).
[46] Cf. Zunshine, 123.
[47] Cf. also Gargano, 523; Richetti, "Voice and Gender", 267.

between misleading words and reliable bodily expression is a typical feature of the novels of amorous intrigue popular during the late seventeenth and early eighteenth century.[48] "From a cognitive point of view, these novels create one specific context in which the body *can* have a reliably recognizable vocabulary" (Zunshine, 122) – this context being, of course, love, the central concern of all amatory fiction. It is perhaps worth noting that the belief amatory fiction evinced in the authenticity of body language did not go unnoticed by contemporary critics, who claimed that the genre was dangerous not only because of its corrupting influence and its capacity to arouse sexual desire in its readers:[49] one of its main dangers, it was argued, was that it taught women to believe in the authenticity of bodily signs of emotion, while at the same time providing rakes with a catalogue of gestures and expressions by which to fake them. Haywood addresses the paradox that underlies the supposedly authentic non-verbal discourse of her novel, and counters it by having her narrator comment on "those little delicacies, those trembling aking transports, which [...] so *visibly* distinguishes [sic] a real passion from a counterfeit" (Haywood, 75–6; my italics).[50] By looking closely, it is implied, one can avoid being duped.

The sympathetic bond that facilitates non-verbal communication between lovers in the novel finds its parallel in that which Haywood aims to establish between reader and narrator.[51] Like the characters, the narrator is prevented from spelling out the full range of the characters' feelings by a double obstacle – the social taboo that was operative at the time, and a belief in the intrinsic verbal inexpressibility of emotion. As a consequence, the narrator is forced to resort to the strategy of using the body language of the characters to convey her meaning to the reader.[52] On every level of the text, emotion thus entails and is expressed through performance. This not only serves to uphold the trope of inexpressibility of intense emotion that is crucial to Haywood's project – any verbal description of the characters' emotions would detract from the sublimity of their love and pull it down into the mundane realm of language –, but also interpellates the reader into the complimentary position that the text has created for her/him. Insisting that only those who have felt the same emotions as her characters are capable of understanding them, Haywood positions her ideal reader high on the value scale of the text and thereby provides a strong incentive for accepting these values.[53] Those, on the other hand, who feel that her descriptions are overblown

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[48] Cf. Zunshine, 123ff.

[49] Cf. Barker-Benfield, 331ff.; for the allegedly corrupting influence of amatory fiction, cf. Drury, 207f.; also Barker-Benfield, 327ff.; Perry, 154ff.

[50] Cf. also Ahern, 84.

[51] For the role of sympathy in the text, cf. e.g. Alliston, 524ff.; Ahern, 87f.

[52] For a discussion of this strategy in the light of the Gricean maxim of cooperativeness, cf. Kukkonen, 207ff.

[53] Cf. Ahern, 86; Drury, 212.

and her characters' love excessive in every sense of the word, are classed with the "insipids" whose lack of natural delicacy makes them unable to appreciate the "elegance" of the passions she describes. Ostensibly aiming at "the construction and consolidation of an elite coterie of passion" (Drury, 212),[54] Haywood's text is remarkable for its creation of a cognitive framework which ensures that this "elite" position is open to a vast majority of readers. Moreover, it also provides the somatic repertoire through which readers can communicate their in-group status; focusing on the performance of emotion, it invites and elicits similar performances from its audience.

2.3 Contagious emotions: affective mimicry and emotional simulation

A number of critics have remarked briefly on the way in which the gaps, ellipses and omissions of Haywood's text elicit readerly sympathy and participation; a remarkable strategy which shows Haywood's insight into the complex interrelationship between psychological and physiological states, and which deserves to be given wider consideration.

In order to understand the workings of Haywood's novel, it is useful to turn back to Samuel Richardson's letter to Aaron Hill. Moreover, it is worth reiterating that the description serves a double function, that of highlighting the Richardson's delicacy of feeling, and the ability of Hill's poem to involve the reader to an exceptionally high degree.[55] Indeed, involuntary somatic displays of emotion as a sign of involvement appear to have held a particular fascination for eighteenth- and early-nineteenth-century writers: Zunshine quotes the example of Henry Siddons, who reported that watching the expressions of various emotions evoked by the play on the face of young and inexperienced members of the audience afforded him more amusement than the play itself.[56] Awareness of this phenomenon known as 'affective mimicry' can be found already in the eighteenth century, most notably in Adam Smith's *Theory of Moral Sentiments* (1759), but also in various treatises on oratory, which comment on the 'contagious' nature of bodily shows of emotion.[57] Drawing on the work of Theodor Lipps, Murray Smith outlines the concept of mimicry in relation to our responses to fictional characters within the framework of modern cognitive science, thus opening up further perspectives on the workings of Haywood's aesthetic.

At the most simple level, mimicry may consist only of motor mimicry, which leads the observer – especially when s/he is emotionally involved in

[54] Cf. also Richetti, *Popular Fiction*, 180; 200f.; Oakleaf, "Introduction", 17.
[55] Cf. Goring, 5ff.
[56] Cf. Zunshine, 129.
[57] Cf. Smith, 99; Goring, 41.

events, either real or fictional – to partially simulate the physical action that s/he is observing in imitation of the characters involved. As a further stage, this purely physical process may become connected to affective mimicry. It has been demonstrated that certain 'basic' affects – such as happiness, sadness, surprise, fear, disgust or anger – are cross-culturally associated with certain expressions, helping the observer to recognise these affects irrespective of the cultural context in which they occur; a theory that substantiates the assumptions of eighteenth-century followers of Locke. More importantly, however, motor mimicry facilitates or even triggers affective mimicry: "if we mimic a facial expression apposite to a basic affect, we do not merely see and categorize a certain expression and hence affect, we experience it, albeit in weaker form" (Smith, 100).[58] It is this insight that explains Richardson's experience while reading Hill's poem – a sense of emotional involvement produced exclusively by the enactment of the appropriate body language. Haywood shows herself aware of this insight when she describes how D'elmont, "by making a shew of tenderness [...] he began to fancy himself really touched with a passion he only designed to represent" (46).

It is worth noting that this re-enactment of observed emotions occurs involuntarily; in *Love in Excess*, for instance, Melliora's tears have "a magnetick influence to draw the same from every beholder" (88). D'elmont, however, "who knew that this was not the way to comfort her, dried his as soon as possible" (88). The scene emphasises also the extent to which affective mimicry is subject to voluntary control – realising the inappropriateness of his behaviour, D'elmont quickly stops crying. I would contest that the extent to which we give way to this involuntary urge to mirror the expressions and emotions we observe may well be dependent not only on the specific situation, but also on socio-historical context and the value that is accorded within that framework to the opposite poles of self-restraint and emotionality. As Margarete Rubik notes, even universal human experiences like pain and desire are "culturally contingent in [their] public display and subjective interpretation" (257). "A particular body thus can be viewed only as a time- and place-specific cultural construction – that is, as an attempt to influence others into perceiving it in a certain way" (Zunshine, 120–1); in the context of sensibility, the body acts as a mirror of the emotional susceptibility that confers social and moral status, and whose value depends on being observed in the act of experiencing states of intense emotion. The scene also bears witness to the link Haywood establishes between empathy, personal emotional experience and affective mimicry: strongly attracted to Melliora and himself affected by Monsieur Frankville's death, he more readily mimics her body language, and, in doing so, probably heightens his own emotional experience.

[58] Cf. For a discussion of affective mimicry, cf. Smith, 98ff.; also Rubik, 256.

Haywood's texts do not only portray the mechanism of affective mimicry on the part of the characters, however, they also rely on it in order to emotionally impact the reader. As has repeatedly been noted, Haywood consistently employs a distinctive strategy in order to encourage readerly involvement: whenever the narrator finds herself at a loss for words to describe the precise quality of the characters' emotions, she gives instead an extensive catalogue of their somatic manifestations. When D'elmont has forgiven Alovysa for destroying his letter to Amena, we are told that "['t]is impossible to represent the transport of Alovysa at this kind expression, she hung upon his neck, kissed the dear mouth which had pronounced her pardon with raptures of unspeakable delight, she sighed with pleasure, as before she had done with pain, she wept, she even died with joy!" (Haywood, 105). Another typical scene occurs when Alovysa notices D'elmont's pronounced attentions to Amena at a ball: "the most lively description would come far short of what she felt; she raved, she tore her hair and face, and in the extremity of her anguish was ready to lay violent hands on her own life" (43); observing and involuntarily responding to the body language of the characters, we gain a deeper understanding of their emotional states.[59]

However, Haywood does more than enumerate these symptoms in order to trigger affective mimicry. Refusing to describe the interior states of her characters, her narrator repeatedly exhorts readers to fill the gaps from their own emotional experience[60] – how Alovysa feels "none but those, who like her, have burned in hopeless fires can guess" (43) –,[61] thus encouraging also another cognitive mechanism which induces empathy with fictional characters, that of emotional simulation. Unlike affective mimicry, emotional simulation functions voluntarily: by "imaginatively project[ing] ourselves into [the character's] situation" (Smith, 97), we establish a link between the gestures and body language displayed by a character and her/his emotional state;[62] an imaginative leap that very often, as Smith shows, goes hand in hand with a reproduction of the body language apposite to the feeling in question.[63] Feeling with – and, in every sense, for – the characters, the reader is encouraged to enact the feelings that the text invokes, and is in turn able to draw on the somatic repertoire provided for their invocation and their expression. Haywood's strategy of 'writing on the body' thus serves a double function: eliciting the very emotions she describes in her

[59] It is important to note, as Margarete Rubik has done, that "emotional simulation can also be generated in a heterodiegetic perspective or one with little concrete reference to the qualia of the pain or love referenced" (256).

[60] Cf. Black, 212 n. 16.; Alliston, 523.

[61] For the importance of personal experience and memory in eliciting emotional responses to literature, cf. Hogan, 157ff., 181ff.; also Rubik, 255f.

[62] Cf. Smith, 96ff.; also Rubik, 256.

[63] Cf. Smith, 96. Smith cites the example of a deaf character who flinches as he observes another character being tortured by having loud music played close to his ear.

audience, and at the same time encouraging it to rehearse a range of somatic signs by means of which to express their feelings for the benefit of those around them, enabling them to advance their claim to 'sensibility'.

3. Learning to love and be wise: curiosity and Haywood's didactic eroticism

Several critics have noted that it is not love but curiosity which drives the plot of *Love in Excess*; a fact that is spelled out for the reader in the subtitle of Haywood's work. All three parts of the novel focus on what Haywood terms a "fatal enquiry" – fatal both in the modern sense of 'deadly', and in the eighteenth-century sense of 'fateful' or 'decreed by fate'.[64] Haywood gestures towards the latter meaning of 'fatal' in her choice of epitaph, which states that " – In vain from Fate we fly,/ For first or last, as all must die/ So 'tis as much decreed above,/ That first or last, we all must love."[65] A brief synopsis of the novel emphasises the complex interplay between the governing 'fatal' passions that agitate Haywood's characters.

In the first part of *Love in Excess*, Count D'elmont is courted in a series of anonymous letters by the rich and unusually independent Alovysa (named after Heloise, who likewise broke several social taboos by verbalising her love for Abelard in a series of letters even after they had both taken religious orders).[66] It is D'elmont's curiosity about the writer that sets events in motion. Although Alovysa's scheme initially miscarries, sparking off a brief affair between D'elmont and Amena ("lovely"), she succeeds in winning D'elmont for herself and having her rival banished to a monastery. D'elmont is as yet not "touched with a passion" that he disdains it as a sign of weakness "below the dignity of a man of sense" (Haywood, 42); nonetheless, he is happy to marry the rich heiress Alovysa to gratify his ambition. The first part of the novel closes with their marriage and the promise of a second one in part two, as D'elmont's brother after a series of mishaps succeeds in winning the hand of Alovysa's sister, Ansellina ("little maid"). Their union is presented as the antithesis of D'elmont and Alovysa's, being founded on true love.

The second part proves that D'elmont's enquiry has 'fatal' consequences not only for Amena, who decides to "bid an everlasting adieu" (Haywood, 91) to the world and takes the veil, but also a fateful impact on his own life. This section opens on the death of D'elmont's former guardian, Monsieur Frankville.

[64] For a lengthy discussion of the role of curiosity in the text, cf. Alliston, 518ff.; Black, 219ff.; Merritt, 25ff.; Warner, 113. For the meaning of 'fatal' in eighteenth-century usage, cf. Alliston, 519.

[65] Cf. Ahern, 79.

[66] Cf. Alliston, 517; Drury, 224. Drury also suggests a second possible source for the name, Chorier's legendary prostitute Aloisa Sigea.

On his deathbed, Frankville entrusts his only daughter, Melliora (“superior”) to D’elmont, who falls in love with her at first sight. The attraction is mutual, and Melliora, who has initially believed that her father had chosen D’elmont as her husband (a subtle justification advanced in the text for her strong attraction to the Count), is in despair when she discovers her mistake. Persuaded by D’elmont, she nonetheless moves into his household after Frankville’s death. Egged on by his friend, the Baron D’espernay, D’elmont repeatedly attempts to seduce Melliora, who retreats from his advances, begging him to spare her honour while at the same time confessing her love for him. Alovysa, who has sensed that her husband has lost interest in her, grows increasingly jealous, and sets in motion the second ‘fatal enquiry’ of the novel as she attempts to discover the name of her husband’s mistress. D’espernay, who is strongly attracted to D’elmont’s wife, promises to satisfy her curiosity, setting up a complex manoeuvre designed to let Alovysa catch her husband in flagranti with Melliora. However, the plan miscarries when D’espernay’s coquettish sister, Melantha (who not only in name resembles Melantha in Dryden’s *Marriage à la Mode*)[67] exchanges beds with Melliora and manages to have sex with D’elmont, who initially fails to notice the deception. In a desperate attempt to force the secret from D’espernay, Alovysa promises to sleep with him in exchange for information. As Brillian attempts to save his brother’s wife’s honour, a fight ensues in which D’espernay is killed, and Alovysa accidentally dies on her husband’s sword.

The third and longest part of the novel sees D’elmont travelling through France and Italy and corresponding in a series of letters with Melliora, who has retreated to a monastery after the ‘fatal’ outcome of Alovysa’s enquiry. Blind to the attractions of all other women, he nonetheless attracts the notice of the proud Italian beauty Ciamara, who attempts to seduce him, finally taking poison when he fails to respond. On his travels, D’elmont meets Melliora’s brother, young Frankville, whom he seconds in an unequal three-to-one sword fight, and who reveals to him that Melliora has disappeared from the monastery. Aided by Violetta, whom her father Cittolini intends to give in marriage to Frankville, the Count helps his friend win the hand of Cittolini’s fiancée, Camilla. This accomplished, he and his entourage, now consisting not only of the happy couple but of a young retainer named Fidelio, set out to find Melliora. As it turns out, she has been abducted by the Marquess De Saguiller, who, visiting his fiancée Charlotta at the monastery, has fallen victim to Melliora’s superior charms and transferred his affections. The third enquiry in the novel – D’elmont’s search for his beloved – likewise proves ‘fatal’ in a double sense: leading up to the fateful encounter at De Sanguiller’s house which reunites D’elmont and Melliora, and Charlotta and De Sanguiller, and culminating in a triple wedding and

[67] Her name – from the Greek word for ‘black’ – also evokes Melantho, the serving maid who betrayed her mistress and granted favours to the suitors in the Odyssey.

the narratorial assurance that the characters live on to a ripe old age. However, it also, once again, proves fatal to one of the women who love D'elmont, as Fidelio turns out to be Violetta in disguise, slowly dying of unrequited love and the shame of having confessed her feelings to D'elmont.

Love in Excess is a text which, however, not only sets out to satisfy readers' curiosity through a series of 'enquiries', but one which also embarks on a course of instruction: following D'elmont's development from a man motivated only by curiosity and ambition[68] into a true lover, the reader likewise has to come to an understanding of the ideal of love outlined in the text.[69] Just as D'elmont only begins to sympathise with Amena after he himself has been initiated into the experience of love, the reader, Haywood contends, can only feel with the characters once s/he has experienced the meaning of true love: "if you are yet insensible of the wonderful effects of love," Brillian tells his brother, "you will not be able to imagine what I felt" (Haywood, 71).

Alliston's otherwise compelling and perceptive analysis fails to register the paradox that underlies her reading of *Love in Excess* as an 'instructive' text: on the one hand, the reader is to learn, along with the protagonist, what it means to experience true love, and through this realisation arrive at a sympathetic understanding of the characters' love-induced woes;[70] on the other hand, however, Haywood consistently appeals to an in-group of readers who already approach the text with the requisite antecedent knowledge.[71] True love, she argues, can only be understood by those who have already experienced its "wonderful effects"; a recurring claim that serves to justify the accompanying trope of the inexpressibility of love. Insisting on the futility of verbal description – those who have experienced love will know without words, while those who have not will fail to understand even the most detailed account – she creates an in-group of knowing readers and exonerates her narrator for her inability to find the appropriate expressions.

In view of this paradox, it is helpful to examine the different approaches to reading amatory fiction outlined in the novel:[72] in a discussion at D'espernay's house, Melliora describes amatory writings as "preparatives to love, [which] by their softening influence melted the soul, and made it fit for amorous impressions." When D'elmont surprises her reading Ovid's love poetry, however, she declares herself immune to literary influence because of her secluded lifestyle and "the little propensity [she] find[s] to entertain a thought of that uneasie passion" (108).

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68 It is perhaps worth noting, as Alliston (following Barbara Benedict) has done, that these two passions were closely related in eighteenth-century discourse (cf. Alliston, 519).

69 Cf. Alliston, 524f.

70 Cf. Alliston, 524f.

71 Cf. Ahern, 86; Richetti, *Popular Fiction*, 180.

72 Cf. Backscheider, 29; Warner, 115ff.

Melliora claims that she reads amatory fiction merely as a caution against giving in to love, alleging that she will “endeavour to retain in memory, more of the misfortunes that attended the passion of Sappho, than the tender, tho’ never so elegant expressions it produced” and recommends “this method” to “all readers of romances” (108). Melliora’s reading may be taken as Haywood’s attempt to silence contemporary critics of amatory fiction, who advanced precisely the same argument against novels like *Love in Excess*;[73] in addition, it provides justification for her claim to the ‘moral’ message which she attributed to her work and which situates her in a tradition of popular romances which aimed at satisfying their readers’ moral expectations along with their voyeuristic desires.[74] Nonetheless, the scene has something of a tongue-in-cheek quality, as both the reader and D’elmont know at this point that Melliora is by no means immune to love, and has, as the Count is quick to point out, no need of the “auxiliary forces” of literature because her “fancy is fixed on a real object” (Haywood, 108). The description of Melliora reading thus furnishes Haywood with an opportunity to highlight the extent to which reading encourages emotional involvement; although love, it is suggested, is best learnt with a “real object” in mind, the “auxiliary forces” of amatory fiction may serve as a substitute through which to effect the reader’s initiation.

Of what kind, however, is the “love” that Haywood’ characters experience “in excess” and with which the reader must come to identify? Through her convoluted narrative, Haywood explores various kinds of ‘love’, establishing a firm hierarchy between that kind which unites spiritual passion and bodily attraction, and that which consists of mere lust:

> [...] tho’ all those kinds of Desire, which the difference of sex creates, bear in general the name of Love, yet they are as vastly wide, as Heaven and Hell; that Passion which aims chiefly at Enjoyment, in Enjoyment ends; the fleeting Pleasure is no more remembred [sic], but all the Stings of Guilt and Shame remain; but that, where the interior Beauties are consulted, and *Souls* are Devotees, is truly noble; Love there is a *Divinity* indeed, because he is immortal and unchangeable; <u>and if our earthy part partake the Bliss, and craving Nature is in all obey’d; Possession thus</u>

[73] Cf. Stone, 283; Barker-Benfield, 326ff.; Lubey, 310. Stone also notes that contemporary critics saw a direct correlation between the increasing number of love matches and the popularity of novel reading during the eighteenth century.

[74] Cf. Ballaster, *Amatory Fiction*, 17. For a reading that enlarges on Melliora’s theme of the instructive effect of amatory fiction, cf. Lubey, 309ff.; Drury, 209 and Harrow, 286. Following Kathleen Lubey, Drury argues that Haywood exposes the reader to the experience of the very temptations they have to resist in real life. Unlike Lubey, however, Drury claims that the texts offer a combination of both sexual pleasure and moral instruction as punishment is meted out to transgressive characters (cf. also Warner, 114).

> desir'd, and thus obtain'd, is far from satiating; *Reason* is not there debased to *Sense*, but *Sense* elevates itself to *Reason*, the different Powers unite, and become pure alike. (Haywood, 250; italics in original, underlining mine).

It is crucial to stress that Haywood at no point indicates – as Sebastian Domsch has suggested – a "preference for the romance idea of spiritual love as opposed to sexual desire" (Domsch, 415). Whereas the passage quoted above roundly condemns the kind of 'love' that objectifies the beloved and consists purely of lustful feelings, she contrasts this with a model which unites spiritual affinity and sexual attraction.[75] Her argument is interesting because it reveals the importance of sexual desire in the text: the former kind of love is disparaged because "that Passion which aims chiefly at Enjoyment, in Enjoyment ends" – after its consummation, desire is replaced by shame and guilt. The second kind of love, however, ensures the continuance of desire, as "Possession thus desir'd, and thus obtain'd, is far from satiating" – spiritual love, in Haywood's novel, becomes the guarantee for a satisfying sex life. The theoretical claim advanced by the narrator in this passage is illustrated by the numerous sub-plots: Melantha, Ciamara and D'espernay are roundly condemned for their single-minded pursuit of sexual gratification, which fails to take into account the feelings of its object. Frankville and Camilla, on the other hand, exemplify Haywood's ideal. Even after he has "snatched a lucking moment, and obtained from the dear melting charmer, all that my fondest, and most eager wishes could aspire to" (in other words, had sex with Camilla), Frankville stresses that he is far from losing interest in her: "I truely [sic] protest to your lordship, that what in others, palls desire, added fresh force to mine; the more I knew, the more I was inflamed" (Haywood, 197) – continued sexual attraction, in this case, is advanced as proof of true love.

As becomes apparent from Haywood's conception of ideal love, sexual desire in *Love in Excess* is identified as a central element of female experience. In this context, it is important to call to mind the model of femininity which was current at the time of writing, especially as regards the issue of women's capacity to experience sexual feelings. Haywood was still drawing on a notion of 'female character' that was, in later decades, to become superseded by the ideal of asexual female chastity made popular by the sentimental novels of the 1740s and reinforced during the nineteenth century. According to the earlier model, however, women were not only assumed to be subject to sexual urges similar to those experienced by men, but were moreover thought to be more susceptible to their influence, allegedly having weaker powers of reason and less strength of mind to combat them.[76] Count D'elmont's reflections bear witness

[75] Cf. Ahern, 87f.; Luhning, 163.
[76] Cf. Alliston, 516; Harrow, 283; also Barker-Benfield, 365ff.

to this conviction: "But when he considered how much he had struggled, and how far he had been from being able to repel desire, he began to wonder that it could ever enter into his thoughts that there was even a possibility for woman, so much stronger in fancy, and weaker in her judgement, to suppress the influence of that powerful passion; against which, no laws, no rules, no force of reason, or philosophy, are sufficient guards" (Haywood, 177).

Whereas female desire was accepted as a given, its expression – as Haywood reminds her readers – was a social taboo, and for a woman to actively court the man of her choice was largely unthinkable. However, the amount of punishment Haywood metes out to women who assume sexual agency is by no means consistent, nor is there a direct correlation between the precise quality of their desire and its consequences.[77] Ciamara's death may be regarded as punishment for her 'objectifying' sexual desire for D'elmont (she "wishe[s] no farther than to possess his lovely *person*, his *mind* was the least of her thoughts" [Haywood, 225]); a reading that appears not unlikely in view of the fact that she finds her male counterpart in the Baron D'espernay, who likewise wants to have sex with Alovysa regardless of her feelings, and is similarly punished. This does not apply to the other two victims of excessive passion, Alovysa and Violetta, both of whom genuinely love D'elmont, and whose punishment differs from that of Ciamara only in that they are allowed to die in his presence: Alovysa is killed when she accidentally impales herself on D'elmont's sword in a parody of penetration whose Freudian overtones have not gone unnoticed,[78] and Violetta in a strangely blissful, sexualized deathbed scene which attracts even the narrator's envy as Violetta breathes her last in D'elmont's arms.[79] In comparison, Melantha – another woman who pursues D'elmont out of all the wrong motives – is even accorded something of a reward: "Melantha who was not of a humour to take anything to heart, was married in a short time, and had the good fortune not to be suspected by her husband, though she brought him a child in seven months after her wedding" (Haywood, 159). A similarly happy fate is accorded to Charlotta, who disguises herself as a serving maid in order to follow her errant lover De Saguiller to his house, where she persuades him to take her back. Even women who yield to their lover's overtures rather than actively pursuing them are treated differently: while Amena languishes in a monastery for almost losing her virginity to D'elmont, Camilla, who actually does lose hers, gets off scot-free and is rewarded with marriage to her beloved Frankville.

[77] Cf. Backscheider, 23. In contrast, Drury (209f.) argues that there exists a consistent system of rewards and punishments in the novel which underscores its moral massage.
[78] Cf. e.g. Harrow, 297; Merritt, 42.
[79] Cf. Gargano, 533; Richetti, *Popular Fiction*, 207.

Not surprisingly, interpretations of Haywood's attitude towards female sexual agency are diverse, and have tended to focus on the main love interest between D'elmont and Melliora.[80] Despite her avowed love for him, she manages consistently to remain pursued by D'elmont, rather than pursuing him, even presenting her marriage to D'elmont as an act of submission to patriarchal authority.[81] Ballaster maintains that Haywood provides readers with escapist fantasies of female sexual agency which can be enjoyed in the knowledge that transgressions against patriarchal norms will be securely punished; alternatively, she exculpates her heroines by allowing them the freedom to express their desire in dreams or dream-like states which render them irresponsible for their actions and therefore exempt from moral judgement (as, for instance, Melliora in the oft-quoted scene in which D'elmont enters her bedroom just as she is having an erotic dream); where all else fails, she exonerates them by pointing towards the irresistibility of passion.[82] *Love in Excess* appears to substantiate this last claim: "When love once becomes in our power, it ceases to be worthy of that name; no man really possest with it, *can* be master of his actions; and whatever effects it may enforce, are no more to be condemned, than poverty, sickness, deformity, or any other misfortune incident to humane nature" (Haywood, 185–6; italics in original). Simultaneously, however, it also uses the example of Melliora to affirm the opposite, arguing for a new self-restraint that was linked to the emergence of bourgeois values, and showing that love can and ought to be resisted.[83] Given this inherent contradiction, which finds its expression most obviously through the conflicting moral 'messages' implicit in the subplots, it is hardly surprising that the novel has been read both as a subversive text privileging female sexual agency, and as a confirmation of patriarchal norms masquerading as a feminist text.

Ballaster's contention that Haywood seeks to engender a mixture of sympathy and erotic pleasure in her readers has been taken up by a number of critics. As Kathleen Lubey, focusing on Haywood's *Lasselia* (1725), has convincingly argued, Haywood must be credited with creating an 'amatory aesthetic' that aims at moral instruction through erotic entertainment. Lubey's reading both invokes and rejects Melliora's argument about the instructive capacity of amatory fiction: readers learn not by "retain[ing] in mind" the just punishments meted out to

[80] One of the few counter-examples is provided by Scott Black's analysis of the relationship between D'espernay and Alovysa in "Trading Sex for Secrets".
[81] This aspect of the novel has been noted by several critics; for an in-depth discussion, cf. e.g. Bowers, 57ff.
[82] Cf. Ballaster, *Amatory Fiction*, 170; for the amatory convention of dream-like seduction scenes, cf. Ballaster, *Amatory Fiction*, 34; for the irresistibility of passion in Haywood's texts, cf. Drury, 203; for the merging of enjoyment and instruction in Haywood's fiction, cf. Drury, 209 and Lubey, 310.
[83] Cf. Ahern, 83; Drury, 203ff.; 226ff.

transgressive characters, but through exposure to the sensual feelings that they have to learn to resist in real life.[84] In such a project, "the reader's capacity for identification" becomes "[c]rucial to optimal comprehension" (Lubey, 316), while her/his curiosity is depended on to prevent her/him from putting down the book and indulging in erotic fantasies.[85] Curiosity is thus revealed not only as one of the driving forces behind Haywood's plot, but also as a key ingredient in her "erotics of sympathy" (Ahern, 73) which aims at moral instruction through emotional involvement.

4. Writing bodies: the language of letters

Repeatedly and in accordance with the conventions of the amatory genre, Haywood's protagonists find themselves barred from communicating by means of the somatic rhetoric that *Love in Excess* postulates as the most appropriate way of expressing emotion; locked away in monasteries or locked into bedrooms, or denied access to the objects of their passion by high walls, locked doors and vigilant guardians, her characters have to negotiate the paradox of inexpressible passion in letters to their respective beloveds. Letters are, of course, an important fictional element and plot device in amatory novels:[86] encoding both seductive overtures and lovers' complaints, their exchange, loss, discovery or theft also serves to advance the plot. In amatory fiction, the letter substitutes for the woman's body:[87] entering into written communication is both the first step towards[88] and the substitute for sexual intercourse,[89] breaking open a letter is an act of "mind-rape" (Perry, 130; Ballaster, *Amatory Fiction*, 62).

The notion of the letter as substitute for the female body is worth exploring in connection with the way gender is constructed in Haywood's novel. At the beginning of the text, it is a woman's letter – Alovysa's – that initially miscarries, directing D'elmont's interest towards Amena rather than herself. Later, it falls into the hands of her rival; opened in her presence, the letter reveals the identity of his unknown admirer to D'elmont, who – having misread the letter – cannot fail to correctly read Alovysa's body language: "the blushes and confusion which he observed in that ladies face, as soon as ever she saw it opened, put an end to the mystery, and one less quick of apprehension then D'elmont, would have made no difficulty in finding his unknown admirer in the person of Alovisa" (Haywood,

[84] Cf. Lubey, 320.
[85] Cf. Lubey, 320.
[86] Cf. Perry, 129; Ballaster, *Amatory Fiction*, 61.
[87] Cf. also Harrow, 295.
[88] Cf. Ballaster, *Amatory Fiction*, 62; Harrow 297; Perry, 132.
[89] Cf. Harrow, 299; Perry, 123.

67). Though initially without success, Alovysa's stratagem succeeds through its apparent failure; D'elmont accidental exposure of Alovysa serves to expose her to himself.

Variously interpreted as a privileged space in which women can give voice to their forbidden desires,[90] and as evidence of "a more extreme case of a generally restrictive and disempowering verbal language" that "entrap[s] their female writers into revelations that might be used against them" and is thus "among the most destructive forms of communication in the novel" (Gargano, 524), the letters written by Haywood's female characters have received a fair share of scholarly attention. It is important to stress, however, that *Love in Excess* overturns generic conventions as well as gender norms, as men's, rather than women's letter are destroyed, miscarry, or fail to achieve their goals of seduction: when D'elmont writes to Amena, the letter is intercepted, broken open and finally destroyed by his jealous wife; later, she finds and reads a letter intended for Melliora. In part three, Frankville's letter to Camilla is accidentally delivered to Ciamara, who tosses it aside. Following Ballaster's interpretation, it must be noted that letter-writing, in *Love in Excess*, serves to highlight the power which women in the novel temporarily exert over men, and underscores the assumption of 'masculine' sexual agency by Alovysa and Ciamara.

Most letters in the novel, however, do reach their intended goals, indeed serving as an important substitute for body language as a means of communicating lovers' meanings to each other. As she faces the challenge of conveying the bodily effects of intense emotion across distance, Haywood is able to draw on the tradition of the French amatory novel, and most notably on the famous *Lettres Portugaises* published in 1669 and translated into English in 1678, which establish the letter as "the privileged site of passionate expression" (Ballaster, *Amatory Fiction*, 64): even though female desire cannot be explicitly verbalised, it can nonetheless be expressed through linguistic signs.[91] The 'disorder' that the writers find themselves in manifests itself in syntactic disorder on the page, as the writers gasp, sob and sigh in dashes, swoon in ellipses and broken-off sentences, and mark silent cries with numerous exclamation marks.92 An extract from Amena's letter to D'elmont may serve to exemplify what Potter calls the "language of feminised sexuality" (169):

> All my confessions are so many sins, and the same breath which tells my ghostly father I abjure your memory, speaks your dear name with transport. Yes – cruel! Ungrateful! – faithless as you are, I still do love

[90] Cf. Harrow, 281ff.

[91] For the importance of the *Lettres Portugaises*, cf. Harrow, 288; Ballaster, *Amatory Fiction*, 60ff.; for letters as expressions of subversive female desire, cf. also Harrow, 286f.; Perry, 134f.

[92] Cf. Ballaster, *Amatory Fiction,* 62f.; Harrow, 280; for the syntactic expression of desire, cf. also Rubik, 257.

> you – love you to that infinite degree, that now, methinks fired with thy charms (repenting all I've said) I could wish even to renew those moments of my ruin! – Pity me D'elmont, if thou hast humanity. (Haywood, 91)

The exclamatory, elliptic style which marks not only the letters but the narratorial voice of *Love in Excess* has been interpreted variously as evidence of Haywood's emphasis on emotional content rather than stylistic expression,[93] and as a subversive way of articulating female desire by creating a "continuum between desire and language" (Harrow, 281) which allows women to subvert patriarchal authority by writing that which they are not allowed to speak. More clearly perhaps than in any other part of the novel, it becomes apparent that what Richetti terms the "defining, essentially female moment" ("Voice and Gender", 267) of Haywood's fiction is, in fact, part of the "standard inexpressibility topos that belongs to the discourse of love" (Black, 212); a topos that, like Haywood's use of body language, questions rather than defines gender boundaries. Consider these two passages, both of which are taken from letters written by male characters:

> Tho' I could wish you'd give me leave sometimes to gaze upon you, and draw some hoped presages of future fortune from the benignity of your influence. – Yes Amena, I would sigh out my repentance at your feet, and try at least to obtain a pardon for my infidelity. – For, 'tis true, what you have heard, - I am married – But oh, Amena! Happiness is not always an attendant on Himen. – However, I yet may call you friend – I yet may love you... (Haywood, 95)

> [...] and prove Camilla, like heaven, can never be too much reverenced! be too much loved! – But, Oh! How poor is language to express what 'tis to think, thus raptured with thy idea, thou best, thou brightest – thou most perfect – thou something more than excellence itself – thou far surpassing all that words can speak, or heart, unknowing thee, conceive;... (Haywood, 204)

The passages above exemplify a feature of *Love in Excess* that has not gone entirely unnoticed in Haywood criticism, and which Tiffany Potter has identified as one of the "generically disruptive qualities that mark her work" (169): moving that what had hitherto been considered private (and thus feminine) into the public (and therefore masculine) sphere, she "illuminates and challenges the lack of a public space for discourses considered inappropriate for public demonstration in a specifically gendered linguistic division" (Potter, 171).[94] The

[93] Cf. Harrow, 280f.; Richetti, "Voice and Gender", 267.

[94] In *Fantomina*, too, Beauplaisir's (in)sincerety is revealed through the contrast between two letters written to his former and his present lover – the first full of compliments in flawlessly elegant prose, the second a rambling collection of broken and elliptical sentences which are taken to prove the honesty of his declarations.

fact that men are speechless more often than women in Haywood's novel bears witness to an instance of gender inequality that, for once, privileges women: while for them, the domain of the linguistically forbidden encompasses only desire, for men the expression of any kind of powerful emotion appears off-limits.[95] This also becomes evident in the first of the letter extracts quoted above, where the syntactic conventions of the language of female desire resurface in a letter written to express remorse and unhappiness bordering on despair, not sexual attraction.

Especially when they are read aloud (as novels frequently were at the time of Haywood's writing), these letters also serve to trigger the mechanism of emotional simulation discussed above: forcing readers to adapt their breathing and elocution to the disjointed, elliptical style of the letters, they may well have been productive of the same breathless, emotional states that they sought to represent.

5. Androgynous desire: (de)constructions of gender in *Love in Excess*

Just as amatory fiction has often been regarded as written (almost) exclusively by women for women,[96] the amount of critical attention that has been accorded to *Love in Excess* has fallen squarely on the side of its female characters. In particular, Haywood has been credited with inventing, or at the very least significantly contributing to, a language of feminized desire that subverts and overthrows patriarchal norms and restrictions.[97] While this feminocentric approach has contributed significantly in (re-)establishing Haywood in the consciousness of literary scholars, it has also tended to marginalise her as part of a female literary tradition regarded as complementary to, but clearly distinct from, male writing in its treatment of femininity and the role of women in society.[98] In particular, her distinctive use of mimetic description to convey emotion has been interpreted as a radical counter-example to eighteenth-century male writing, in which "female bodily authority" replaces "male literary authority", thereby establishing the "epistemological authority of the female body and mind" (Harrow, 291) and "identify[ing] the heights of emotional inexpressibility as the defining,

[95] For men's inability to express emotion in *Love in Excess*, cf. Potter, 171. Potter notes that women are reduced to speechlessness eight times in the novel, as opposed to thirteen times for the men.

[96] This view has, however, been challenged by several critics, cf. Oakleaf, "Introduction", 23f.; Warner, 91.

[97] Cf. Harrow, 281ff.; Oakleaf, "Introduction", 12.

[98] Cf. e.g. Merritt, 22; Schofield, 10ff.; Prescott, 427ff.; Warner, 89ff.; for this tendency in regard to amatory fiction in general, cf. Ballaster, *Amatory Fiction*, 19ff.

essentially female, moment not just for the women it represents but for the female narrator herself as the originating and certifying imaginative experience behind her writing" (Richetti, "Voice and Gender", 267).

It is tempting to locate Haywood in a (proto-)feminist tradition that privileges female experience and displays a keen interest in empowering female characters by overturning established gender norms. *Love in Excess* is replete with such subversive scenes, beginning at the point early in the novel when Alovysa, "armed with all her lightnings" (Haywood, 41) embarks on her campaign to conquer D'elmont, subverting the metaphorical conception of love which casts men as pursuers and women as pursued. It is important to note, however, that such a blatant reversal is doomed to fail, as are Melantha's and Ciamara's attempts to win D'elmont by taking the initiative. "All naturally fly, what does pursue/ 'Tis fit men should be coy, when women woe" (126),[99] D'elmont reminds Melantha. The social inappropriateness of Alovysa's, Melantha's and Ciamara's sexually aggressive behaviour is underscored through Haywood's use of conventional metaphors, which are primarily drawn from the 'masculine' source domains of war and hunting, serving to underline the inappropriateness of their behaviour in the eyes of the contemporary reader.

However, this reading fails to take into account what Elizabeth Gargano has so aptly labelled "the androgynizing force of desire" (Gargano, 532) in *Love in Excess*, by which Melliora is not only accorded 'masculine' attributes "in a battle of glances" (531), but which causes D'elmont to display signs of 'feminine' weakness, weeping, trembling and nearly fainting. Upon first sight of Melliora, he experiences "a discomposure he had never felt before, he sympathized in all her sorrows, and was ready to joyn his tears with hers" (Haywood, 86); a little later, the narrator finds it "impossible to represent the agony's [sic] which filled the heart of D'elmont" when he sees that Melliora has fainted from grief, which are expressed through "a wildness in his countenance, a trembling horror shaking all his fabrick" (87). In *Love in Excess*, love simultaneously thrives on and does away with the gender divide.

Potter reads Haywood's extension of feminine traits onto male characters as a rejection of culturally constructed binary oppositions which confirms "[t]he gender neutrality of both the passionate voice and the novel as form" (173). It is important to acknowledge, however, that Haywood's novel also partakes in an ongoing debate that was firmly anchored to the cultural moment of its publication.[100] The author of *Love in Excess* was clearly not only, as Potter claims, aware of

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[99] These hitherto unidentified lines, which have on occasion been attributed to Haywood herself (cf. e.g. Domsch, 421), are in fact a quotation from William Congreve's *The Old Bachelor* (1693), Act IV, Scene V.

[100] cf. Luhning, 159f.

"shifting constructs of femininity in the eighteenth century" (170), but also of the reinterpretation of masculinity that had been triggered by the emergent discourse of sensibility. Caught between an obsolescent model of heroic masculinity that had also informed the earlier romances of the French tradition, and the emergent ideal of sensibility that, taken to extremes, laid men open to charges of effeminacy, eighteenth-century society was facing the challenge of arriving at a new definition of what it meant to be male.[101] Nor was Haywood alone in her preoccupation with masculinity: "This tension between the high evalutation of refinement in men and the wish to square it with manliness permeated the eighteenth-century novel, whatever the sex of the writer" (Barker-Benfield, 141).

The male protagonist of *Love in Excess*, Count D'elmont, exists precisely between the opposing poles indicated above.[102] At the beginning of the novel, he is depicted as a returning war hero; later on, we are witness to his prowess when he single-handedly beats off three attackers after young Frankville has been disarmed by his opponents. Even when Alovysa's letter has awakened his interest in the opposite sex, ambition and curiosity, not love, remain the ruling passions of his soul. He resolves to take a mistress only because he considers it "an agreeable, as well as a fashionable amusement", and has a clear sense that he is conferring a favour on the female half of humanity by doing so: "the joy which naturally rises from the knowledge 'tis in ones power to give it, gave him notions which till then he was a stranger to; […] and he resolved not to be cruel" (Haywood, 40). Like Haywood's choice of metaphors, Alovysa's letter draws a parallel between love and warfare. She exhorts D'elmont to model his behaviour in the former on his conduct in the latter, being "sure that the Court cannot inspire less generous sentiments than the field" (39). The substitution of love for warfare is typical of what Ahern, following Peter Hughes' study on seventeenth-century drama, calls the "ethos of 'erotic heroism'" (Ahern, 82), marking a shift in "the qualities promoted by an aristocratic ideal of masculinity away from those of the courtier" (82–3).

Essentially a man's man, he despises love as a sickness that afflicts only the weak, and is firmly convinced that it ought never to interfere with male friendships – a notion which Haywood takes care to contradict in the two subplots involving Brillian and young Frankville, who both win the love of women courted by their (admittedly unattractive and therefore arguably undeserving) friends. Just as Haywood replaces heroism in war with the ethos of 'erotic heroism', so the related concept of honour – central to the aristocratic ideal of masculinity[103] – is shown to be subservient to love: when Frankville thinks about taking Camilla

[101] Cf. Barker-Benfield, 104–53, "The Question of Effeminacy"; esp. 139ff.
[102] Cf. Ahern, 75f.; Luhning, 160ff.
[103] Cf. Barker-Benfield, 85.

away from Cittolini, his "thoughts [are] at strife" for a moment, "but love at length [gets] the victory" (Haywood, 192) over honour. Earlier in the novel, Brillian follows the same course with regard to Bellpine. Shortly afterwards, he gives in to Ansellina's entreaties not to challenge his rival to a duel. When challenged by him, however, he has to fight in order to remain worthy of Camilla; a minute distinction that shows the unstable balance that the novel strikes between love and honour.

While honour is considered an essential prerequisite to love, making a man worthy of a woman's affection, it is also an obstacle, as Brillian is separated from the woman he loves after fighting Bellpine in order to maintain his honour. Just as love is presented as a metaphorical substitute of the masculine sphere of warfare throughout the novel, so is honour in war equated with and substituted for honour in love. The metaphorical connection established by Alovysa's letter holds true: even though the word "honour" is not mentioned in the letter, the implicit message is clear, though unintended by the writer. Already "in everything but love, a man of honour" (Richetti, *Popular Fiction*, 192), D'elmont has to learn in the course of the novel to observe, above all, honour in love, to respect the value of a woman's honour (in the guise of her virginity) and to acknowledge the importance of honourable intentions (i.e. marriage) in his relations with women. This preoccupation is indicative of a further transformation that the concept of 'erotic heroism' undergoes in *Love in Excess*, marking it as an important forerunner of later sentimental fiction also in this respect. As Ahern convincingly argues, Haywood's novel "draws on this powerful cultural discourse [i.e. erotic heroism] and at the same time participates in a further cultural shift", advocating "bourgeois values of self-control, moral earnestness, and a democratizing emphasis on universal benevolence" (83).[104] This becomes apparent when Melliora urges D'elmont to relinquish his pursuit of her, emphasising that self-restraint, not sexual conquest, is the way to "prove yourself the heroe" (Haywood, 123).[105]

D'elmont finally is transformed from rake into faithful lover when he falls in love with his ward Melliora; a transformation that is, however, a gradual one. At the beginning of their acquaintance, he fully agrees with his friend D'espernay, who convinces him to seduce Melliora, depicting this as the only 'masculine' course of action: "'What', said he, 'a man of wit, and pleasure like D'elmont, a man who knows the sex so well, could let slip so favourable an opportunity with the finest woman in the world; one for whose enjoyment he would die, – […] you do not only injure the dignity of our sex in general, but your own merits in particular, and perhaps even Melliora's secret inclinations, by this

[104] For the modification undergone by the aristocratic concept of honour, cf. also Barker-Benfield, 288–9.
[105] Cf. also Bowers, 57.

unavailing distant carriage, and causeless despair" (Haywood, 113).[106] D'elmont takes up the theme after he has broken into Melliora's bedroom, refusing "to desist, and leave [her]" when her erotic dream has laid open her passion for him: "'I cannot – I must not,' answered he, '[…] What could'st thou think if I should leave thee? How justly would'st thou scorn my easy tameness; my dullness, unworthy of the name of lover, even of man! […]'" (117). Melliora, on the other hand, has no illusions about her guardian and knows that he is driven by sexual desire rather than real love. After Melantha's interruption has frustrated the Count's design of forcing sex from Melliora, she resolves to accompany her into the garden, being, as the narrator suggests, "not over willing to venture her [i.e. Melantha] with the Count alone, at that time of night, and in the humour she knew he was" (120).

After Alovysa's death, however, D'elmont gradually grows to understand the Haywoodian ideal of love which unites spiritual affinity with sexual attraction. Forced into a period of waiting for Melliora, who has retreated into a convent, he grows almost oblivious to the charms of the other women who court him. However, Haywood takes care to ensure that his failure to respond to the overtures of his female admirers, while providing evidence of the depth of his affection for Melliora, does not reflect on his masculinity: when Ciamara attempts to seduce him, we are assured that "[t]ho' it was impossible for any soul to be capable of a greater, or more constant passion than his felt for Melliora, […] yet, he was still a *man*! and 'tis not to be thought strange, if to the force of such united temptations, nature and modesty a little yielded" (Haywood, 225; italics in original). In fact, the narrator suggests that, "urged […] with all the arts she was mistress of, to more" by Ciamara, D'elmont might have "entirely forgot himself" (225) but for one of the novel's timely interruptions.

D'elmont's status as a war hero and rakish seducer coexists uneasily with Haywood's description of him as "a bland, perfect object of heterosexual desire" (Alliston, 518).[107] He is "not an object safely to be gazed at" (Haywood, 86; my italics) as "[t]he beauty of his person, the gaiety of his air, and the unequalled charms of his conversation" (37) cause him to be pursued by a number of love-struck women. Haywood's description of a man as the object of female desire is a reversal of gender roles found in Greek romances as well as in Haywood's own later works, which not infrequently feature a female protagonist whose fatal beauty causes her to unwillingly conquer the hearts of all the men.[108] The notion of "eighteenth-century man as sex object", however, is perhaps not as "unthinkable" as Sebastian Domsch (414) suggests. When Bellpine, who "fanc[ies] himself happy

[106] Cf. also Potter, 173; Luhning, 160f.
[107] Cf. also Merrit, 39f.
[108] For this topos in the Greek romance, cf. Alliston, 518; for Haywood's own work, cf. e.g. Lubey, 316.

in the esteem of the fair sex, was desirous [Brillian] should be witness to the favours they bestowed on him" (Haywood, 69), this claim is not presented as unthinkable in itself, but merely inappropriate in this particular case.

Nonetheless, the uneasy mixture of heroic-warrior-turned-rake-cum-sex-object-turned-man-of-feeling that is D'elmont bears testimony to the gender instability that prevailed at the time of the book's publication. It is tempting, as Ahern and Schofield have done, to read D'elmont as little more than an incompatible mixture of male stereotypes;[109] to do so, however, fails to take into account that at the time of the book's publication, the 'man of feeling' popularised by the sentimental novel of the second half of the century was still a novelty. It is also worth noting that D'elmont is not merely presented as the female characters' ideal of masculinity: his remarkable physical beauty and charming manner "made him the admiration of *both* sexes" (Haywood, 37; my italics).[110] D'elmont, the novel clearly indicates, is conceived as a role model for men as much as an object of sexual desire for women; an ideal man who nonetheless serves Haywood for an investigation of the conflicts and limitations that society imposed on men as much as on women.

Most tellingly, the contradictions inherent in the emerging ideal of a man gifted with sensibility become apparent not in the character of D'elmont, but in the figure of Violetta/Fidelio. Even before she assumes her masculine identity, Violetta is presented as an ideal of masculinity: being "free from the usual affectations and vanities of [her] sex" (Haywood 239), she is credited by D'elmont with possessing "more than *manly* virtues" (238; italics in original). Once she has turned herself into Fidelio, these come to be observed to even greater effect, so that D'elmont regards her/him "as a blessing sent from heaven to lessen his misfortunes, and make his woes sit easy" (244).

While enabling her to stay close to D'elmont, however, Violetta's disguise places her in a curiously powerless position when it comes to communicating her feelings. Displaying all the bodily signs through which a woman may "in modesty" declare her passion, these signs are misread by the other characters as signs of sickness. Because it utilises a repertoire of somatic expression culturally defined as inappropriate and therefore unavailable to men, the language of Fidelio's body remains unnoticed and misunderstood.[111] The passage highlights the peculiarly empowering function elocutionary discourse has for women in the novel, and its limited applicability to men, who, caught between shifting gender roles, are bereft of legitimate means of expressing emotion. In the end, Violetta's

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[109] Cf. also Luhning, 161f.
[110] Cf. Also Haywood, 181, where we learn that D'elmont's "inexpressible sweetness of deportment" is "equally charming to both sexes".
[111] Cf. Zunshine, 123.

attempt to break through this tangle of social prohibitions proves fatal: unable to declare her feelings through 'female' body language, she resorts to the 'male' prerogative of speech, thus placing herself outside the pale of modest femininity which alone, according to the value scale of Haywood's text, would have made her worthy of D'elmont's love.[112] In the end, Violetta has to die because she embodies a mixture of male and female traits that is ideal but socially not viable, offending as it does against too many unassailable conventions. Like D'elmont, Violetta "moves fluidly between behaviours and demeanours constructed as masculine and feminine" (Potter, 173); unlike D'elmont, however, she finds that she cannot do so with impunity. In this sense, the ending of *Love in Excess* can be read as a piece of insightful social criticism at a moment in cultural history which pushed accepted standards of behaviour for both genders into the realm of the traditionally 'feminine', but prevented women from encroaching into the 'masculine' sphere. Presented as an ideal man in a woman's body, Violetta/Fidelio remains trapped in the silent sphere between two modes of expression. Nonetheless, her final silencing is presented as a moment of orgasmic bliss, as she breathes her last sigh in D'elmont's arms. Denied the traditional happy ending that the text holds in store for its ideal of feminine perfection, Melliora, Violetta envisages another kind of union with the man she loves: "I could wish, methinks, to know no other paradise than you, to be permitted to hover round you, to form your dreams, to sit upon your lip all day, to mingle with your breath, and glide in unfelt air into your bosom" (Haywood, 265–6).

6. Conclusion

Indicative of a cultural moment in which men were learning to conform to a somatic code of expression that was hitherto gendered exclusively feminine, Haywood explores the limits of the resultant blurring of gender boundaries, revealing that the border can only be traversed in one direction. Denied the possibility of 'crossing over' into the 'masculine' realm of language, Violetta can find expression only when her soul enters a masculine body: significantly, she wants to "sit upon [D'elmont's] lip" and "mingle with [his] breath", thus gaining access to the masculine world of spoken discourse that her culture has denied her. At the same time, however, Haywood also points up the limits elocutionary

[112] For a related argument, cf. Bowers, 61. It is important to note, however, that Bowers analyses Violetta's death as the punishment for her assumption of sexual agency (not for the verbalisation of sexual desire), which acts as a counterpart to Melliora's final submission to patriarchal authority and thus mitigates the transgressive impact of Haywood's text. It is worth noting, however, that Haywood makes explicit the connection between Violettta's death and the act of *speaking* her love: Violetta claims that she cannot live "after this shameful declaration" (265).

discourse placed on male expression, showing that women had access to a wider range of bodily signs through which to convey strong emotions. Recognising the need that the emergent cult of sensibility, with its insistence on the unspeakability of emotion, had created in her audience, she develops a strategy that allows her readers to rehearse the bodily rhetoric that was fast becoming a social necessity for men and women alike. Keenly alive to the possibilities presented by the concepts of (involuntary) affective mimicry and (voluntary) emotional simulation, Haywood remains within the paradoxical framework that also characterises eighteenth-century manuals on acting and oratory; works which, like *Love in Excess*, "celebrate a language which is theorised as both 'natural' and unconscious, but then also set out instructions for its application" (Goring, 43). In regard to both genders, Haywood shows herself finely attuned to the social imperatives of her day: recognising the need in which women stood of a means of expressing *and* concealing their emotions, she caters for both of these demands, even while she ostensibly condemns the second. In her description of D'elmont and Fidelio, she also addresses the unspoken concern of many of her contemporaries, exploring the borderline between a much-desired 'refinement' of male behaviour and the ever-present threat of effeminacy.

Involved in a project of establishing a repertoire of socially accepted gestures and stabilizing somatic meaning, Haywood's text thus filled a need that was firmly anchored to the historical moment of its production,[113] addressing contemporary anxieties about the interrelationship between gender and somatic expressiveness before the emergence of the sentimental 'man of feeling' – a fact that may have contributed significantly to the enormous popularity of Haywood's work, and its rapid disappearance from the literary landscape of the second half of the eighteenth century. It is in this aspect of *Love in Excess* that one may find an answer to two questions that have agitated the minds of many Haywood scholars: how to account for the popularity of the text, and how to account for the fact that despite this initial popularity, it remained well-nigh forgotten for well over two centuries.

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[113] For the relatively short lifespan of all attempts at stabilizing somatic meaning, cf. Zunshine, 122.

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