

The Myth of Rape in Eighteenth-Century Literature

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Received: October 21, 2022

Accepted: November 21, 2022

Online Published: November 24, 2022

doi:10.5430/wjel.v13n1p77

URL: <https://doi.org/10.5430/wjel.v13n1p77>

Abstract

Rape as propaganda is the main focus of this study. Feminist scholars and activists have investigated rape in English history and discussed how this term was used by men to dominate women and spread fear amongst them. The patriarchal society of the early eighteenth-century England used rape in order to limit the freedom of female movement. Women were led to believe that their state of safety lies within their willingness to trade submission to a man for protection from all other men. This study investigates attitudes of rape and near rape attempts which were used in three seventeenth and eighteenth-century texts; Aphra Behn's *The Rover* (1677), Eliza Haywood's *The History of Miss Betsy Thoughtless* (1751), and Frances Burney's novel *Evelina* (1778). These attitudes were presented in order to portray different ideas such as a critique of the patriarchal society, to warn women of the dangers they might face out of the domestic sphere and perks of abiding by the social conduct, and also to encourage women to follow the mandates expected of women of quality. These three text are evidence that rape was commonly discussed as a method to warn women to keep out of public space prior to the nineteenth century.

Keywords: eighteenth-century, freedom, public sphere, rape, subjugation

1. Introduction

Rape or sexual harassment is a terrifying thought which goes through the minds of many women as they walk alone in dark allies or dangerous neighborhoods. The #MeToo campaign confirms the ongoing struggle of women up to recent days. Feminist scholars and activists such as Susan Brownmiller and Anna Clark have investigated rape in Western history in general and English in specific and discussed how this term was used by men to dominate women and spread fear amongst them. Anna Clark (1987) claims in *Women's Silence, Men's Violence: Sexual Assault in England 1770-1845*, that the patriarchal society of the early nineteenth century England used rape in order to limit the freedom of female movement (Clark, 1987). Rape became somewhat of a scarecrow used against women to keep them under the control of patriarchy. Women were given the impression, that the consequences of being an independent female might be rape or some sort of sexual harassment. They were led to believe that their state of safety lies within their willingness to trade submission to a man for protection from all other men. However, through statistical records from a number of sources including the Old Bailey and North-east Assize cases, Clark proves that this widely believed claim was not true. Clark presents statistical results showing that rape in England 1770-1845 occurred in domestic space just as much as it did in public space and committed by assailants known to victims more than by strangers.

Clark's argument uses Susan Brownmiller's (1975) groundbreaking book *Against Our Will: Men, Women, and Rape* as a theoretical framework for her research. Brownmiller explores the history of rape and discusses violence against women. By providing a sociological analysis of rape in Western culture, Brownmiller claims that rape is not just about lust, but about male control and power over their victims. Her claim that rape is a crime of violence, not sex, is constantly stressed in this book. Brownmiller (1975) asserts that

once we accept as basic truth that rape is not a crime of irrational, impulsive, uncontrollable lust, but is a deliberate, hostile, violent act of degradation and possession on the part of a would-be conqueror, designed to intimidate and inspire fear, we must look toward those elements in our culture that promote and propagandize these attitudes. (p. 391)

Elements that promote and propagandize rape are items in question here in this study. In the discussions section for example, I noticed that these attitudes are used in three seventeenth and eighteenth-century texts to portray different ideas. In Aphra Behn's *The Rover* (1677), near rape scenes are presented as one source of humor which can serve as a critique of the patriarchal society. Eliza Haywood's *The History of Miss Betsy Thoughtless* (1751), discusses near rape attempts on women to warn them of the dangers they might face out of the domestic sphere if they do not follow the social conduct. Finally, Frances Burney's novel *Evelina* (1778), presents the masculine values in the patriarchal society and how oppressive they can be, however, it also encourages women to follow the mandates expected of women. Moreover, Brownmiller argues that from rape stemmed the "historic burden of [female] protection" (1975, pp. 16-17) by her relatives who viewed her as a commodity to be protected rather than a human being.

By using Brownmiller's analysis and study of rape, Clark believes that during the early nineteenth century, there was great focus on the issue of rape and greater concentration on its causes and hence *the myth of rape* was created to restrict female mobility. "Myth" here does

not mean that rape was not real, but that its use in this context was not real. In order to illustrate the meaning of “myth” and “real” for our case, Clark’s quote explains saying that “the danger of sexual assault in the public places was real...However, the myth of rape as warning implied that women would be safe in the domestic sphere, protected by patriarchal men” (1987, p. 127). Surely rape occurs, but the cause of this rape has nothing to do with female movement in public space and independence.

Referring to women, Clark argues that “the fear of rape imposes a curfew on our movements; a fact that if we stay at home we will be safe, but if we venture out alone we face the strange rapist in the dark alley” (1987, p. 1). Acknowledging the reality of rape, Clark questions the development of these fears from rape. Important questions which Clark believes should be asked are questions such as when did women fear going outside because of rape? What is the origin of this fear? And did these fears stem from common-sense only? Discussing women, Clark states that “by limiting our own freedom, we obey the dictates of a myth – a myth which covertly warns us that rapists punish women who stray from the proper place” (1987, p. 1). Clark affirms that rape itself is true, but the myth here is the warnings.

Building on Clark’s claim that *the myth of rape* was an early nineteenth century English invention, I argue that the myth of rape was evidently prominent in English literary works which have participated in the discussion of this myth since the late seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Whereas Clark did not so much analyze literary texts for her study in *Women’s Silence, Men’s Violence*, for the most part she examined pamphlets, court records, and newspapers to find these warnings for women to stay out of public space. Thus, by examining near rape attempts and sexual harassments in literature and analyzing the results, we can find that the “myth of rape as warning” was evident as early as the seventeenth century in English literature and continued to be produced and reproduced through time. I seek to prove this by the fact that these issues were being discussed in different forms as early as *The Rover* in 1677.

The three works in this research included numerous near rape attempts which sometimes send to readers a message of “rape as a warning” to keep women restricted from freedom of spatial as well as temporal movements. In other instances, the message seems to be a critique of the fact that these ideas were being circulated in society. This restriction of mobility meant that women were restricted from moving at certain places and certain times. As will be discussed in the discussion section, the motives for these warnings differs from author to author suggesting reasons such as virtue, family honor, reputation, or in order to get married.

In order to show how patriarchy used the “myth of rape” as a form of subjugation to control female mobility and independence, this research examines *The Rover*, *The History of Miss Betsy Thoughtless*, and *Evelina*. This article is divided into three parts. The subject of the first part is to give a contextualization of the literary texts. It also addresses how these texts are related to each other and in return how they are all related to the “myth of rape,” and how they can contribute to the building of rape as a myth. The second part will be an attempt to better understand the definition of rape in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, and in this process the history of rape will be closely studied. The remainder of the paper will be devoted to the analysis of the three texts.

2. Material Studied

There are other texts which discuss sexual assaults, near rape, or even rape in literature during and before the nineteenth century, but I have chosen to discuss these three literary texts in particular for a number of reasons. First of all, I made sure that the literary texts which discuss the issue of near rape attempts were written before the nineteenth century in order to show that rape was used in English literature as a warning for women prior to Clark’s (1987) claim that it began in the nineteenth century. According to Clark, “the protection racket of rape only became prevalent in the early nineteenth century, when sexual danger increasingly became the excuse to restrict women’s freedom” (1987, p. 2). However, by exploring literature from a span of over a hundred years prior to the suggested date frame by Clark, I argue that the myth of rape was present earlier.

Another choice I have made about the texts to analyze here is the status and class of the heroines. Samuel Richardson wrote *Pamela* (1740), which had numerous near rape attempt scenes by Mr. B on the virtue of Pamela. *Pamela* would be a great work to include here in this paper, but I chose to be consistent with the status and class of the heroines because in the case of Pamela, she is from a lower class working as a maidservant and the near rape attempts are made by her master Mr. B. This is different from the cases of Florinda, Betsy, and Evelina who are all women with wealth and in no need for work. Moreover, most of the time, what gets these women in near rape attempts is their search for independence and leaving the domestic space. This is different from the near rape attempts which Pamela encounters because of her work and weak position as a maidservant.

Lastly, the scenes I employ in my examples from all three texts are not scenes of rape, but of near rape attempts or sexual harassments in the case of Evelina. One of the texts which I wanted to include in this study was Richardson’s *Clarissa* (1748), which falls into the categories I had for this study; being written prior to the nineteenth century and the heroin being from a high-middle or upper class female. However, what is different here is that Clarissa does actually end up being raped and this is different from what I want to explore in the three texts I have chosen. The fact that none of the three heroines actually gets raped complicates the reading of “rape as a myth” or “rape as a warning”.

In one anecdote Clark notes from a headstone mark on one grave: “As a warning to female virtue, and an humble monument to female chastity, this Stone marks the grave of Mary Ashford, who in the 20th year of her age, having incautiously repaired to a scene of amusement, without proper protection, was brutally violated and murdered on 27th May, 1817” (1987, p. 110). One can imagine this gravestone being used by fathers, brothers and husbands as a warning for their daughters, sisters, or wives. Unless women would stay under their watch and only move by their permission, their fate would not be much different than the fate of Mary Ashford. The lesson which all women should understand from this incident is that “women who take their freedom for granted will be punished by rape, while

women who stay at home will be safe” (Clark 1987, p. 110). The difference between this example which Clark presents and the ones found in all three texts I chose to analyze is that Mary Ashford was actually raped and her case was being used as a warning.

On the other hand, Florinda, Betsy, and Evelina are only put in near rape attempts before they are saved from actual rape. These three texts warn about rape by presenting the characters in near rape attempts because real rape would ruin the characters. Looking at the case of Mary Ashford and Clarissa’s case in Richardson’s novel, we are told that after they are raped they both ended up dead. It is an intriguing question to think about; does a raped woman mean she was ruined forever and the best thing for her would be death? Women were prone to think of themselves as locked in a binary situation; an either/or dichotomies. Either get married and live under a man’s control, or become forced to have sex by rape or prostitution and having a soon death. Characters who were only in near rape attempts, such as Florinda, Betsy, Evelina, and even Pamela, managed to continue their lives and get married. However, the alternative seems to be prostitution or rape and then brutal death. Hence, the rape as warning here in the three texts is a progressive warning showing the perks of not being raped and maybe seen as “near rape as a warning” rather than “rape as a warning” by showing characters being on the edge of total destruction and the better alternative.

3. Method

The History and definition of rape within the timeframe of these literary works is important to understand in order to have a productive analysis. Rape jokes have been used in Anglophone literature for many centuries, and unfortunately, is still being joked about with a slightly different level. However, the repercussions of rape jokes are still the same: confinement of female independence. While some audience of current day comedians might not be aware of the effects of normalizing these jokes, Sharon Lockyer and Heather Savigny (2020) argue that “Rape jokes exist in everyday, micro-level, interactions, and assist in the production and maintenance of inequalities at the macro-level, for example, in education, employment, law and politics, which contributes to the creation of ideological frameworks” (Lockyer & Savigny, p. 8). Nevertheless, one of the problems with the definition of rape for our purpose in the seventeenth and eighteenth century was the fact that rape was an unclear term. According to Simon Dickie (2014) in his book *Cruelty and Laughter: Forgotten Comic Literature and the Unsentimental Eighteenth Century*, the meaning of rape was ambiguous or an “empty signifier”. He continues to say that rape could hold multiple meaning to different people during that time and that rape

meant that a woman had been caught in bed with someone and was crying out to protect her reputation. To some, the word signified modesty, while others insisted that any woman who used it must already be unchaste. It meant that a lower-class woman was trying to extort money out of a social superior—sometimes this was wicked, but often it was a hugely satisfying joke... It referred to something that was impossible and that happened all the time. These semantic ambiguities produced unending humor. (2014, p. 210)

Because of the uncertainty in the meaning of rape, its haziness complicates the purpose of the different near rape scenes in the three texts in this paper. The meaning of rape could hold different meanings for different texts depending on the intentions of the authors whom surely differ ranging from what seems to be satiric intentions in Behn’s *The Rover* to a more serious discussion of near rape in Burney’s *Evelina*.

When analyzing texts from the seventeenth and eighteenth century, the perception of rape must be understood during those times in advance to the analysis. According to Dickie, “types of violence that would now count as rape were almost mainstream sexual behaviors” (2014, p. 1). Therefore, rape wasn’t as big of an offense as it is in this century; it was normal for men to be aggressive and forceful as it was normal for them to ignore women’s refusal. Yet, not all rape was perceived this way, Clark asserts that despite the fact that “sexual violence committed by men on adult women tended to be seen as an extension of natural, everyday relations between the sexes...the rape of children by men was widely abhorred” (1987, p. 42). Thus, it was normal that seventeenth and eighteenth century audiences laughed at near rape scenes in *The Rover* because they were all scenes of adults.

In her article “Rape and the Female Subject in Aphra Behn’s *The Rover*” (1998), Anita Pacheco discusses the development of the legal understanding of rape in the Early Modern era. Pacheco says that

The history of Early Modern rape law reveals a similarly uncertain transition from patriarchal to liberal attitudes towards women. While medieval rape law perceived rape as a crime against male-owned property, the legal focus shifted in the late sixteenth century from property to person. It was the female victim rather than her male relations who was the injured party in a case of rape, and the crime itself came to be seen not as a property violation but as the ravishment of a woman against her will. (1998, p. 324)

It is important to understand from this quote that the period of the three texts being discussed in this paper was a period of gradual transformation. The age of Enlightenment was the time when these laws started to change from a medieval perception of women as a commodity belonging to a male into some newer legal definition of rape similar to the modern definition in this era. However, it is vital to remember that culture is not easily changed, but needs time to be utterly erased. In fact, present day stand-up comedy has demonstrated that joking about rape was still continuing: “rape jokes have continued to be prominent in Anglosphere cultural practices” (Lockyer & Savigny, 2020, p. 7). Therefore, when laws saw rape as a crime against a woman herself, the people might still hold within them different ideologies. These ideologies are carried by Folktales, poems, plays, jokes, riddles, and many other forms of verbal or written interchange of ideas.

4. Discussion

This section includes an analysis of *The Rover*, *The History of Miss Betsy Thoughtless*, and *Evelina* respectively. Each section will be started with an attempt to understand the author's intentions for writing their literary work. This will be done in the light of the historical context of the text. Afterwards, a short summary of the near rape attempt scene will be outlined and each summary of a scene will be followed by an elaborate analysis.

4.1 *The Rover*

After re-reading *The Rover*, it became observable how Behn's intentions were neither a description of the sexual aggressions which women faced, nor were her intentions a propaganda to warn women about sexual assaults and keep them safe. I strongly believe that Behn's intentions were a parody of common ideological thinking or writing in the West about sexual assaults and rape as well as serving as a critique of the patriarchal society. This play discussed what seems to us today as a serious topic in a very comical way which made the meanings complicated for contemporary readers. In the near rape attempts in this play, it will be evident how each example can be read as a satirical scene which was intended to entertain and at the same time attempt to change and improve the society to transcend its patriarchal frame of thought.

We can find three incidents of near rape attempts in *The Rover* which all happen to Florinda. The first and third near rape attempts are similar in the theme; which is the issue of mistaken identity. Despite the fact that there are some differences between the two scenes, what concerns me in both of them is how the mistaken identity in both scenes got Florinda almost raped. Because of the similarity found in the first and third near rape scenes in terms of my discussion here, I will only focus on the first scene. This near rape attempt begins when Florinda makes arrangements to meet with Belville in the garden. Florinda wears a nightgown and waits for him in the dark garden late at night, however, rather than meeting Belville, the drunk Willmore enters the garden and exclaims: "I'm a dog if it be not a very wench!" (3.5.16). He tries to persuade her to lie down with him, but she refuses to do so. Florinda threatens Willmore if he does not let her go, she will "cry murder, rape, or anything if [he does] not instantly let [her] go" (3.5.50). The drunk Willmore does not give into Florinda's threats, he says:

A rape! Come, come, you lie, you baggage, you lie. What, I'll warrant you would fain have the world believe now that you are not so forward as I. No, not you. Why, at this time of night, was your cobweb door set open, dear spider – but to catch flies? Hah – come – or I shall be damnably angry. Why, what a coil is here. (3.5.51–55)

Then Florinda continues to struggle with him, and it appears that she would have been raped by Willmore if it was not for the fortunate appearance of Belville and Frederick moments before the rape.

In order to analyze this incident or any other incident in the play, first, we have to keep in mind the intentions of Behn. As mentioned earlier, Behn is most likely critiquing a common social understanding about these circumstances which women fall into. This critique of society is done in a satirical manner which audiences would have laughed at. So, Behn gives us the signs of what the society defines as wicked and vile attitudes, starting with Florinda sneaking out of her house without her guardian's permission which is her brother Don Pedro. So she is taking the liberty to move as she likes without a male protector to know about her movements. According to the "myth of rape," this would be her first mistake. Women should not be out alone without a father, brother or husband to make sure they are safe. In fact, the main problem was that Florinda left the house in the first place. If she had not left the house, she would have been safe, but her foolishness, and the fact that she did not adhere to the rules of the house, almost got her raped.

One of the important factors which must be kept in consideration is the fact that this is a comedy, and audiences attending this play know that it is a comedy. So when in the quote earlier Willmore says "Why, at this time of night, was your cobweb door set open, dear spider – but to catch flies?" Audiences know Florinda very well and know why she is out and therefore they are aware that Willmore's assumptions about Florinda are false. This satirical scene becomes a critique of society's ridiculous perceptions of women, and by laughing at this scene, audiences become engaged in a reflexive moment critiquing the mistakes of their own society. Hence, Behn's intention here becomes to show the absurdness of the patriarchal society's judgmental assumptions about women.

Pacheco (1998) says that when Willmore encounters Florinda in this scene, he instantly "sees sexual availability written all over this woman. This is a view of Florinda that no amount of resistance on her part is able to dislodge. Instead, Willmore reads her resistance in ways compatible with her appearance and conduct" (p. 327). Therefore, no matter what she tells him, and however she tries to get out of his hands, Willmore (or the patriarchal society) will see that she really wants to have sex. As Pacheco understands this scene, Willmore thinks that Florinda is actually open to sex with him, but maybe concerned to preserve her reputation (Pacheco, 1998) and therefore he says: "I'll be very secret. I'll not boast who 'twas obliged me, not I-for hang me if I know thy name" (3.5.29-30). Willmore judged Florinda based on her appearance which is, according to him, an appearance of a wench and therefore it would be acceptable to rape such a woman. Pacheco (1998) asserts, "for Willmore, then, sexual signs coupled with apparent disinclination make this encounter a seduction; while this wench may require a little coaxing, she is open to persuasion, for at bottom her 'No' really means 'Yes.'" (p. 327). When audiences of the seventeenth century and possibly the eighteenth century watched this play and laughed at this scene, Behn was able to convey the irrational male perception of women's behavior. Because the audiences have a dual insight to both sides of the story, knowing what Florinda is really like, and understanding Willmore's train of thought, this becomes a funny satire.

This particular scene uses the ambiguity of the term 'rape' and confusion of identity to present audiences with a comic joke that is also

critical of patriarchal norms at the same time. For the audience, Florinda's way of dress and the time she is out gives them a way to understand Willmore's behavior. Is this rape? Or is it merely seduction because in Willmore's eyes, he seems to honestly believe Florinda is a wench. The ambiguity of this situation can be something to laugh at for seventeenth century audiences. Secondly, Behn is making a joke about how easily one's identity could be mistaken from being a member of the noblest families, to being mistaken for a wench. And this mistake is based on small changes such as being out late at night, or dressing in a certain manner. Pacheco seems to have chosen this particular analysis of the scene declaring that

the audience, knowing considerably more about Florinda and her motives than Willmore does, has a double perspective on the action; it understands both that this is an attempted rape because the woman refuses her consent, and that in Willmore's eyes, Florinda, defined not by what she says but by her conduct and appearance, cannot be other than consenting. (1998, p. 328)

This means that if her appearance and behavior do not follow the status quo of the patriarchal society, her identity can be under doubt.

A final note to add about this specific scene is that in early modern stage comedy, audience seeing rape or near rape scenes "simply cannot believe her refusal... the very possibility of such humor rested on darker assumptions that most women could stop an attacker if they really wanted to" (Dickie, 2014, p. 207). In fact, the several times in which Willmore tries to rape Florinda were seen funny and Willmore charmed the town. The fact that this was seen as a funny struggle reinforces the claim that this is a satirical critique of the patriarchal treatment of women and the spatial and temporal restriction put on them.

The next example of near rape in *The Rover* is different from the one previously discussed, while the first one focused on mistaken identity, this one adds another level to the mistaken identity by looking at rape as a method to subjugate and control women. Such women are not in the right place, and therefore could be punished. This near rape incident occurs when Florinda, disguised in a costume, runs away from Willmore, who is sexually harassing her, and randomly enters a house which Blunt was staying at. Horrified, Florinda sees Blunt and asks him for help, but Blunt now hates women because of all the pain that Lucetta caused him. He sees this moment as an opportunity to payback the pain he got from Lucetta by raping Florinda and taking his revenge on all women by this action.

Of course, revenge on Lucetta should have nothing to do with wanting to rape Florinda, yet, Blunt in this scene is a misogynist who intends to take revenge on all women for the crime of one. He was saddened by the fact that he was not able to be in control of the relationship with Lucetta, as she was the one in control and took what she wanted from him. To him, raping Florinda would be an act of retaliation on all women who try to take control. When Florinda appears to be confused and unable to believe Blunt's intentions, he shows how firm he is declaring:

I will kiss and beat thee all over; kiss, and see thee all over; thou shalt lie with me too, not that I care for the enjoyment, but to let you see I have ta'en deliberated malice to thee, and will be revenged on one whore for the sins of another; I will smile and deceive thee, flatter thee, and beat thee, kiss and swear, and lye to thee, embrace thee and rob thee, as she did me, fawn on thee, and strip thee stark naked, then hang thee out at my window by the heels, with a paper of scurvy verses fastened to thy breast, in praise of damnable women—come, come along. (4.5.49–57)

In this particular scene I focus on a number of words and phrases which interest me such as: "I will kiss and beat thee", "not that I care for the enjoyment", and "revenged on one whore for the sins of another". These remarks from Blunt show that rape for him is not just about sexual pleasure, but intends to utilize rape as a form of violence to subjugate and control women. This scene can be better understood if set against an earlier discussion in this paper of Brownmiller's claim that rape is a "violent act of degradation and possession on the part of a would-be conqueror, designed to intimidate and inspire fear" (1975, p. 391). Rape allows men to dominate women, and this lust for domination stems from an eagerness to humiliate women. Because Blunt was not able to control Lucetta, he feels the need to rape Florinda as a means of retribution to gain control over women. As Dickie asserts, "Blunt has no real desire but wants to take revenge on the entire female sex" (2014, p. 218). Accordingly, Blunt himself is not trying to rape Florinda to teach her a lesson about her choice of freedom and decisions to go out without a male protector, but it is his method of taking revenge on women who cannot be controlled. Behn's intentions here might be to parody common understandings or maybe even other literature which have suggested such a tragedy for maidens of quality who choose their freedom over conforming to patriarchal authority.

Reading this scene once, twice, or even three times would still not seem funny for some contemporary readers, however, this play is a comedy. According to Dickie, "from here one finds rape being used for any number of other different functions... Getting there first is a glorious joke on a rival lover. Raping an enemy's wife or daughter is one of the sweetest forms of revenge" (2014, p. 218). Dickie's quotes can help contemporary readers better understand how and why early modern audiences perceived rape scenes being funny. In fact, near rape scenes would be just as funny because they show how silly would-be rapists are for being unable to accomplish the deed. The Blunt and Florinda scene speaks to Dickie's claim that "villains who huff and puff but can't blow the house down... 'are silly villains who do no real harm'" (2014, p. 199). Behn has brilliantly utilized near rape attempts in her play to critique the patriarchal society in an entertaining way, relying on the fact that rape scenes can be funny in the early modern comedy stage. Contemporary readers must be savvy and vigilant as they read *The Rover* to keep in mind that rape did not mean back then what it means now. Finally, Pacheco (1998) affirms that "before the obligatory happy ending, Florinda faces three attempted rapes that are called not rape, but seduction, retaliation, or 'ruffling a harlot'; in presuming to make her own sexual choices, she enters a world where the word 'rape' has no meaning" (p. 323). Behn's comedy in this play heavily depends on the fact that rape has a vague meaning to carry out her parody and critique.

4.2 The History of Miss Betsy Thoughtless

The title of Eliza Haywood's novel *The History of Miss Betsy Thoughtless* gives readers some suggestions about what the heroine, Betsy, is like; she is thoughtless. Seemingly, the intentions of the author were to give women of the eighteenth century educational lessons. But these lessons are not concerning virtue as evident in Richardson's *Pamela* and *Clarissa*, this novel is more concerned with reputation. Although this novel can be humorous at many instances, it does not stand out as a parody or satire text, but one that intends to propagandize rape as a warning for women. The near rape attempt scenes which will be discussed here tend to present women without male protectors as vulnerable targets for sexual predators. The instances of near rape which Betsy Thoughtless encounters show how reputation of an English woman is very important to keep. The novel tells readers that Betsy's brother, Thomas Thoughtless, "considered, that the honour of a family depended greatly on the female part of it, and therefore resolved to omit nothing in his power to prevent Miss Betsy from being caught by any snares that might be laid to entrap her innocence" (Haywood, 1998, p. 337). This reputation is not just for the woman herself, but for her family as well. If a woman's reputation is ruined, so is her family's reputation, and eventually, it will have a negative effect on the chances of her finding a husband.

The three near rape attempts which Miss Betsy encounters fall under two categories; either she is almost raped because of mistaken identity or the assailant knows her identity but takes advantage of her being alone without male protection. A fourth near rape attempt, also last one, is different and does not fit under these two categories because it was not a real attempt but a staged one for corrective reasons. Dickie (2014) claims that in different literary genres "one finds sexual violence easily remedied by marriage or actively engineered as a means of steering the heroine toward the right husband" (pp. 220-1). Miss Betsy's independent personality annoyed the patriarchal society and her brothers in particular who engineered this near rape with an imposter in order to get her married to Mr. Munden. Additionally, I noticed some similarities between this scene and scenes from Restoration comedies. Dickie (2014) states that "patterns are more darkly represented in Restoration comedies... where rape or attempted rape is a sharp corrective for women who assert their independence" (p. 221). Haywood might have been influenced by Restoration comedies in this scene in which Miss Betsy is pushed into marriage by an engineered near rape attempt.

The example for the first category; near rape for being in the public sphere without male protection, can be found in the chapter which discussed the first near rape attempt with the gentleman-commoner and the young Oxford student. During their visit to Oxford, Miss Betsy and Flora go out and there they encountered a gentleman-commoner and a young student who they have seen in previous entertainments. During their walks, the gentleman-commoner forces a few kisses on Miss Betsy but she pushes him away. So the men invite the two ladies to come to their house. In the house, the gentleman-commoner held Miss Betsy tight in his arms and forced his lips against hers while she struggled to get loose and called for help, but no one was able to hear her. With all her strength, she was able to free herself from his arms and went towards the door, but he refused to let her out and seized her roughly this time crying, "no more resistance, you see you are in my power" (Haywood, p. 71). Miss Betsy would have been raped if it were not for her brother knocking on the door and coming to her rescue.

This scene seems to be saying two things at once: First, women such as Miss Betsy are portrayed as thoughtless. Second, presenting the idea that women alone in public space are vulnerable to rape. When the gentleman-commoner kissed Miss Betsy several times on the lips without her consent, she did not realize the danger she was in. In fact, she continued her walk with this man, quickly pardoned him for this sin, and went with him to his house. These kisses would have been a good warning for any sane lady to understand that men such as the gentleman-commoner are dangerous. However, Miss Betsy does not see this clear warning. She is portrayed as a foolish coquet who cannot see clear signs of danger when they come at her. Women who do not use their intellect to think about the repercussions of their actions, "thoughtless", might get raped.

Moreover, it is extremely important to focus on the public and domestic spaces which women are allowed to move within. The domestic space is the one approved for women to be mobile in freely, however, the public space has many restrictions. This scene serves as a warning for women about the ramifications of breaking this social conduct and moving in public space freely. Women who venture out alone, and especially in dark and shady places such as the garden, or enclosed places such as the student's house, without male protection, might be raped such as the case of near rape with Miss Betsy. This warning message appears to be referring to strangers who might encounter women in public spaces and this warning is one item in common with the next example to be discussed from the category of mistaken identity. The near rape which Miss Betsy encounters due to mistaken identity is also because of being freely mobile in public space and interacting with strangers. Oddly, Miss Betsy's response to this incident was not fear of going out in public spaces or meeting strangers, but only frustration.

Therefore, we see Miss Betsy quickly encountering another near rape but this time under a different category other than emphasizing the importance of male protection. This category is near rape because of mistaken identity which will be examined through the example of the night out with Miss Forward. The scene can be summarized beginning with the night Miss Betsy went with Miss Forward to see a play and after the play two men proposed to guard them safely to their homes which the two ladies agreed to. When they reached Miss Forward's home, she invited them all in and they all had an entertaining conversation until midnight. Miss Betsy tells them she will leave in a coach because it is late, and then one man insists that he must accompany her until she reaches safely. Ironically, this man is the one who makes attempts on her virtue and tries to rape her. When the gentleman reiterates his attempt to rape her, she pushes him with all her strength and tries to jump out of the moving coach. Only then does the gentleman stop trying to rape her and seems puzzled by her attempt to jump in order to guard her virtue.

It is crucial to pay attention to three items in this scene: the company of characters of ill reputation, freedom of spatial and temporal movements, and the dangers of meeting strangers. In this scene, Haywood suggests to her readers to pay attention to these items in order to preserve their good reputation. Despite the fact that Miss Betsy had been warned about her behavior and instructed to follow the best behavior which will keep up her good reputation, she disregards all these warnings and only looks for her own pleasure. She is with two strange men, staying up late to midnight, out of her domestic place, and in the company of the ill-reputed Miss Forward who was “a woman whose character was suspected” (Haywood, p. 238).

These three items put together result in a mistaken identity. The gentleman who accompanies Miss Betsy and tries to rape her mistakes her for a prostitute. To him, Miss Betsy behaves like and appears to be a prostitute and hence, he offers her six guineas a week. Miss Betsy broke the spatial and temporal rules concerning the mobility of respectable women. He asks Miss Betsy in disbelief: “is it possible...that you are virtuous?” (p. 240). According to the gentleman, he made those advances because he saw her with Miss Forward who was a woman of the night and thought that because she accompanied her, she was one too. Moreover, “her too great freedom in conversation, gave him no cause to alter his opinion” (p. 240). A restriction of speech and conversation was important as it was regarded as a sign of virtuous behavior which Miss Betsy lacked.

One of the amusing ironies is that the assailant here is the one who gives the advice to Miss Betsy to be a virtuous woman and uphold her reputation. His advice is that Miss Betsy should not be an acquaintance with a woman such as Miss Forward because someone like her would affect her reputation. Additionally, one of the items which the assailant critiques Miss Betsy’s behavior for is her “great freedom in conversation,” which to him does not seem to be proper for a respectable woman of quality. Haywood shows these things happening to Miss Betsy in these specific details about the time, place, and the company she is with because she intends to educate women about elements of the social norms which can ruin the reputation. Of course, this reputation can be a woman’s reputation herself or her family’s reputation as well. Finally, we learn that Miss Betsy’s reaction to this is blaming herself for the unfortunate incident. She realizes the trouble she is in and thinks “that it was by her own indiscretion alone, this mischief had fallen on her” (Haywood, p. 240). Haywood gives her female readers a testimony here from the coquet herself that her behavior was the origin of the problem, and that if she had adhered to the social norms acceptable for women, none of this would have happened.

These two categories are the main ones which the near rape attempts in Haywood’s novel go under. Haywood presents many different adventures which seem exciting and terrifying for readers at the same time. This is because Haywood presents readers with elements of pleasure which Miss Betsy aims for, and duty which she neglects but realizes at the end. In *Private Interests: Women, Portraiture, and the Visual Culture of the English Novel, 1709-1791* (2001), the author, Alison Conway, believes that the question that Haywood’s novel rises, “beyond fulfilling a social mandate,” (p. 124) is why must Miss Betsy change. By the end, it seems that the patriarchal society was successful in breaking Miss Betsy’s strength and independence with the different near rape attempts she encountered as Conway (2001) declares, “Betsy’s response to the attempted rape instigates the first instance of her voluntary withdrawal from the public realm” (p. 125). In fact, Miss Betsy finally learned the lesson enforced violently by the males via near rape and she understood that her place is within the domestic sphere. The narrator says that Miss Betsy “wished for nothing but to be unseen, unregarded, and utterly forgotten, by all that had ever known her” (Haywood, p. 441).

4.3 *Evelina*

Similar to Haywood’s novel *The History of Miss Betsy Thoughtless*, Frances Burney’s *Evelina* was a novel of manners intended for young female audiences. The scenes which will be analyzed here are not particularly rape scenes, but instances of sexual harassments which might have led to rape if the heroin was not lucky enough to escape these difficult situations. In reference to these scenes, the intentions of Burney seem to be more on the descriptive side of these instances rather than being a propaganda or a critique of the myth of rape. These cases which present to readers the difficulties faced by women in the eighteenth century are more realistic than they are mythic. What is mythic here is not the sexual harassments themselves, but the reasoning which the author seems to be suggesting about them. In Burney’s descriptive narrative of these incidents, the reasons revolve around female temporal and spatial mobility. The major incidents in which *Evelina* is sexually harassed usually take place when it is dark, she is alone without male protection, and mostly performed by strangers who have mistaken her identity for a prostitute. If these were the reasons which Burney suggested for the sexual harassments encountered by *Evelina*, then accordingly, the solution would be to avoid whatever reasons led to these harassments. In the end, this would be somewhat of a propaganda for the myth of rape as warning for women in order restrict their spatial and temporal movement.

This novel is also similar to Haywood’s novel in that the warning about rape here is not about virtue such as it is in Richardson’s novels, but mostly concerning reputation. As Mr. Villars wrote to *Evelina*, “Remember, my dear *Evelina*, nothing is so delicate as the reputation of a woman: it is, at once, the most beautiful and most brittle of all human things” (Burney, p. 279). It is extremely important for a young woman to keep a good reputation in order to get married. In “*Evelina; or, Female Difficulties*,” Susan Staves (1976) claims that “the slightest breach of decorum subjects *Evelina* to being thought a lost woman; men’s liberties with her will be justified, she will be in greater danger of rape, and, of course, no Lord Orvilles or Edgar Mandelberts will want to marry her” (p. 375). This decorum is subject to the identification of the patriarchal society that classifies female independence and freedom of mobility as a breach of its conduct. Therefore, *Evelina* can serve as a warning for women to stay under the rule of the status quo if they want to keep their virtue and get married, otherwise, they are in danger of rape.

The first incident of sexual assault to discuss from *Evelina* is when the two Miss Branghtons encouraged Miss *Evelina* to go with them

into the dark walks without the rest of the party (Burney, pp. 316-18). Evelina followed the two sisters into the long dark alleys when a large party of gentlemen appeared suddenly and encircled the three girls. The gentlemen harassed the girls and one of them seized Miss Evelina which terrified her as she struggled and managed to break free of him. She says "I flew rather than ran up the walk, hoping to secure my safety by returning to the lights and the company we had so foolishly left" (p. 317). In that same incident, Evelina did not completely escape the danger as she stumbled into another party of men who took hold of her. Finally, Sir Clement Willoughby came to her rescue and explained to the men that they were mistaken in her identity, as she was no actress and saved her.

In the description of these incidents, Burney focuses on a number of elements. The first one is the "dark" walks which Evelina is situated when these harassments happen. Burney also focuses on the fact that Evelina is out there without male protection, either being with other young women or alone by herself. The third element she stresses is the mistaken identity of Evelina where she is not thought of as a woman of quality but a prostitute. The latter element is actually a result of the first two elements because women who venture out into dark places without male protection might be perceived as prostitutes. And as a consequence, it is normal behavior to sexually harass a prostitute and possibly rape her. Clark's claim, which was mentioned here earlier, that "sexual violence committed by men on adult women tended to be seen as an extension of natural, everyday relations between the sexes" (1987, p. 42), supports this understanding of these behaviors. Hence, in order for women to be safe, they should remain in the domestic sphere, however, once they move into the public sphere, they should take different precautions which restrict their movement. For example, the "dark walks" are off limits for a woman, and if she does move into dark places, she should not do so without male protection because the result would be an attempt on her virtue and a ruin to her reputation.

Burney's description here is a realistic description of what could happen to a woman in such occasions. Yet, the problem remains that the solutions she seems to suggest were to restrict women from such freedom in mobility. So, rather than focusing on a real solution which blames the assailant, her suggestions seem to blame the victims for moving into public space at such times and without male protection as Evelina stresses the fact that she "so foolishly left" her party. It seems that instead of focusing on how the assailants should be disciplined for such actions, the focus turned to women and how they can be careful. Thus, we return to Clark's argument that rape was used as a warning to restrict female independence.

Additionally, Burney described how society perceived a woman who broke these norms suggesting that her identity would be mistaken for a prostitute. When Evelina screams in the hands of the men assaulting her, one man says "Heaven and earth! What voice is that?—" and a gentleman from his party answers him: "The voice of the prettiest little actress I have seen this age" (p. 317). According to the footnotes, "Evelina is mistaken for an actress/prostitute since she is in the disreputable 'dark walks' of Vauxhall" (p. 317). These men harass Evelina because they assume only a prostitute would walk here without male protection. It is no myth that the patriarchal society identifies women in Evelina's situation in the dark walks this way, but it can be seen how this description can serve as a warning for respectable ladies about being fully independent in their mobility. By focusing on the "mistakes" which Evelina committed, rather than discussing the assailants' criminal doing, this narrative turns into a warning for women if they want to keep a good reputation, otherwise, they might face rape.

Another incident of sexual assault on Miss Evelina to be examined is when she went with Madame Duval and all the Branghtons to see the fireworks at the Marybone-gardens (pp. 357-59). The danger occurs when the men left the company of the ladies to accommodate themselves better. One of the fireworks was very loud that the ladies jumped and moved from their places in fear of the sparks of fire reaching them, when Evelina opened her eyes, she did not find her companions. According to Evelina, she was awakened from her thinking "by a stranger's addressing [her] with, 'Come along with me, my dear, and I'll take care of you'" (p. 359). She seemed lost with no company and then a young officer came close to her and said "You are a sweet pretty creature, and I enlist you in my service;" (p. 359) and then sized her hand and pulled her forcibly with him. With all her might she pulled her hand away from him and ran in the direction of two prostitutes and asked for their protection until she found her party.

Readers notice here that in this event at the Marybone-gardens, all women were in the company of male protectors, some men were walking alone, but no women walked by themselves other than the two prostitutes. So in describing her patriarchal society, Burney acknowledges that fact that this society perceived young women walking alone as prostitutes and therefore exposing themselves to rape or, in Evelina's case, sexual harassment at the very least. Women who the society viewed as respectable ladies were always in the company of other male protectors to keep them safe from the dangers of sexual harassment. Moreover, these events of sexual harassment in the novel often occurred in public space and committed by strangers. This part of Burney's novel might be said to be mythic because according to Clark's (1987) research, between 1770 and 1845 in England, rape occurred in domestic space just as much as it did in public space and committed by assailants known to their victims more than by strangers.

The reason I see this as being somewhat of a propaganda to warn women off public space using fear of rape is that when thinking about all these incidents together, it is vital to think of what lessons the readers can get from them. The lessons are certainly not a warning for the assailants about the punishments which they might encounter if they raped or sexually harassed a woman. To the contrary, these lessons suggest that women who want to keep a good reputation and virtue should be careful about their behavior and are discouraged to take their independence and freedom of mobility. Men are not to be blamed for their actions, as they are rarely convicted of rape, because they could not help it if they thought this woman was a prostitute due to her actions.

5. Conclusion

Clark discussed the idea of showing a difference between women of quality and other women; that women of quality would not be walking alone at night, because it was not what respectable women did. According to Clark (1987), in the early nineteenth century, “sexual danger became the focus of intensified attention on the place of woman in public spaces.” She adds that “Magistrates, judges, and journalists dealing with rape cases began to introduce the idea that rape imperilled women’s safety in evening streets; while men could travel freely, ‘respectable’ women would be safe only at home” (p. 3). In the investigated texts here, it is evident that the identity of a woman plays a huge factor in the near rapes or sexual harassments. Assailants have no idea that these women could be respectable, because women of quality would not be in such places at such times.

These three text are evidence that rape was commonly discussed as a method to warn women to keep out of public space prior to the nineteenth century. None of the heroines in the texts were raped, but they were all on the verge of being raped and were miraculously saved. *The Rover* was a critique of this warning and an encouragement to challenge them and seek female independence from male domination. *The History of Miss Betsy Thoughtless* and *Evelina* were novels that directed their attention to give educational lessons of manners and to show what could happen when these manners were not followed. Both authors seem to suggest that it is very important for women to keep a good reputation in order to honor themselves and their families. Women here are warned that once they are raped, they would be ruined and lose their value. The three texts show how men’s liberties with women can be justified based on their mistaken identity which is a consequence of coquettish behavior. Moreover, it is propagandized that women without male protection become vulnerable targets for rapists. These ideas presented in these three texts, regardless of author intentions, show that the idea of rape as warning was commonly discussed to restrict female mobility. By adhering to the rules of the patriarchal society, men seek domination over women and gain control of their mobility and independence. The three texts discussed ideas which implied that women were in greater danger in the public sphere because they would not have male protection. Clark’s argument was that this assumption was a mythical warning created in the nineteenth century. However, as we have seen in the three literary texts here, this time frame is not accurate as traces of discussion of these warnings have been evident since 1677.

Acknowledgements

Researcher would like to thank the Deanship of Scientific Research, Qassim University for funding publication of this project.

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