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My Worldy Goods Do Thee Endow: Widowhood, Economic Conservatism, and the Mid- and Late Eighteenth-Century Novel

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Title: My worldly goods do thee endow: economic conservatism, widowhood, and the mid- and late eighteenth-century novel
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The figure of the widow in eighteenth-century novels can be understood as a cipher for the age's anxieties about emerging capitalism. As the social networks of England began to reorganize under an increasingly volatile generation and distribution of wealth, English society limited capitalism's potential for destabilizing the social network by limiting women's participation in capitalist enterprise. As part of this effort, eighteenth-century thinkers reconceptualized gender to promote this separation of male and female endeavors and to continue to legitimize the unfettered exploitative potential of the emerging system. The novel participated in such efforts, notably through characterizations of widows, women who, historically, had rights and privileges associated with men. The mid- and late-century novel used this figure to delineate the proper female as a selfless, non-commercially-oriented being even when possessed of the tights and privileges conferred by widowhood. The affluent widow was especially effective for defining virtuous femininity as femininity removed from commercial endeavor and its values, because she was a woman who possessed the education, social power, and economic means to be autonomous and maintain that independence. Affluent widows appear throughout eighteenth-century novels, and serve as central characters in works including Sarah Scott's Millenium Hall (1762), Frances Burney's Evelina (1778), Clara Reeve's School for Widows (1791), and Ann Radcliffe's The Mysteries of Udolpho (1794). These characters show how the mid- and late-century novel located itself within an emerging ideology and economy, as well as how it conservatively constructed femininity, specifically femininity in the economic realm.

The widows of Millenium Hall, Evelina, School for Widows, and The Mysteries of Udolpho demonstrate two significant characterizations that define proper and improper female interaction with social, personal, and especially economic power. Virtuous widows such as Scott's Mrs. Morgan and Reeve's Mrs. Darnford and Mrs. Strickland model exemplary female behavior by refusing to use their economic autonomy except for benevolent purposes. They act to preserve or maintain the status quo, they operate in a rural, agrarian-oriented context, and their interests lie primarily with the welfare of their family or local community. Through them, the novel limits the disruptive potential of widowhood by allowing virtuous women to act only for others, not for themselves, and only to preserve, not to improve. Conversely, wicked widows such as Burney's Madame Duval or Radcliffe's Madame Cheron act with only their own interests in mind, interests that are not simply urban, social, and economic, but also aggressively sexual. The eighteenth-century novel employs wicked widows to limit the disruptive potential of such women's engagement in capitalism by punishing them for doing so, and by translating the values and behavior of capitalist endeavors by women into villainy.

Mid- and late-century novels use these recurring characterizations to limit the potential for women to engage in the same capitalist explosion making so many opportunities available to men. Both types also allow the novel to endorse or reject capitalism, either by showing how wealth, often generated by male economic endeavor, can be used by female benevolence to better others, or by showing how commercial activity is selfish and exploitative at its core. While mercantile capitalism's effect on the sociopolitical sphere was itself sufficiently problematic to generate a new discourse about systems of wealth, power, and morality, its effect was compounded when it entered into the realm of gender, exacerbating earlier anxieties about female socioeconomic autonomy. As scholars such as Laura Brown, Gillian Skinner, and Liz Bellamy have demonstrated, capitalist ideology and literature used gender to establish and justify the passivity of women in capitalism, and scholars such as Felicity Nussbaum and Toni Bowers have explained how specific gender definitions, especially motherhood, developed to support these ideological developments. My reading of the virtuous and villainous widow across mid- and late-eighteenth-century novels not only shows how the novel worked with the age's reaction to capitalism to define femininity in relation to the economic, but also explains how the emerging novel found a niche for itself in the economic situation by offering an ideology designed to address the changing economy and the tensions and anxieties it generated.

Simply by virtue of her identity, the widow generates tremendous social anxiety. Historically, she has been a problematic figure. Marjo Buitelaar describes a number of areas in which, by making widowhood an...
anomalous state, societies have had to grapple with the power inherent in that state. The word widow, Buitelaar points out, derives from the Latin vidua, which is related to a root meaning "to place apart," and patriarchal societies, and/or those emphasizing marriage, have little room for a woman who has been married but is no longer (1). A widow is also frightening, according to Buitelaar, because she has outlived her husband, demonstrating a disconcerting robustness or at least a provocative independence (10). In addition, there is her command over what used to fall under male control, especially since, depending on the legal situation, a widow might maintain control of the property she inherited on the death of her first husband even if she remarries. In that case, she would be still more anomalous in societies where women, especially married women, do not have their own estates. Lastly, widows, unlike never-married women, are sexually experienced but not contained within the bounds of marriage. Their appreciation of sex and their own sexuality, as well as their independence, including their right to dispose of their own bodies as they desire, creates another set of anxieties about a woman's sexuality that often becomes mythologized as a voracious sexual appetite (Buitelaar 8-10). In essence, then, as Buitelaar notes, most societies see widows as marginal figures, unbound by the rules of sexuality, possession, and control that govern traditional notions of femininity.

Certainly the widow did not fit the eighteenth-century British image of what a woman should be, and the period's responses to the widow match the anxieties about survival, independence, control, and sexuality identified by Buitelaar. Until 1833, widows had what Leonore Davidoff and Catherine Hall call an "absolute right to inherit," meaning that a widow was guaranteed one-third of the husband's estate (209). (1) Marriage contracts could include jointures, which the widow disposed of as she saw fit. Once she inherited, in theory, the widow controlled her inheritance and the family finances. This status and power trumped the traditional and sanctioned methods for transferring capital, that is, transactions between men or families, often using women to exchange goods or land through the marriage of daughters. Widows could halt this transmission of capital if they wished, and they frequently did. Gentlemen's widows inherited money, goods, and property and were also less likely to remarry than widows from other classes (Todd 71; Cope 192; Wiesner 59), thereby blocking the traditional circulation of capital through marriage. In addition, with the right to make contracts and therefore go into business for themselves, widows could also change their status on their own (Bacon 435; Brophy 38). This ability meant that, as Barbara Todd notes, "Even if she was poor, she was her own woman and could run her life as she saw fit" (55). So beyond financial matters, widowhood offered a woman "rare personal liberty" and the "freedom to order all the details of her life as best suited her needs and responsibilities" (Todd 81). As a result, she personified an economic and sexual test of traditional roles, particularly since her goods included her sexually experienced body. A woman's right to control property as well as herself to this extent challenged conventions for constructing womanhood; as Todd puts it, "The woman heading her own household contradicted patriarchal theory; the ungoverned woman was a threat to the social order" (55).

The widow's status was not the only factor causing a conflict between herself and her culture. The culture itself was in flux, as a result of the eighteenth century's tremendous economic and social instability. This claim, that the century was undergoing great and distinctive change, has been disputed by scholars such as Amanda Vickery in her excellent book, The Gentleman's Daughter: Women's Lives in Georgian England. Vickery argues that the economic system that eventually became the recognizably capitalistic, commercial society in place by the mid-nineteenth century was the product of gradual development from the fifteenth century, and that the number of women engaged in traditional female trade forms, such as "petty retail, food and drink, and textiles" remained static from the seventeenth to the mid-nineteenth century (4-5). Women's inability to enter into new business opportunities and their gradual exclusion from others over the course of this period suggest that rather than doing fine during the economic boom of the long eighteenth century, women were actually doing badly. A more persuasive assessment of the economic situation, especially that of women, during the eighteenth century is represented by scholars such as Geoffrey Holmes and Daniel Szechi, Neil McKendrick, Davidoff and Hall, and Maxine Berg, who demonstrate that by mid-century, trade had been changing England for some time, and its effects were felt throughout society. Holmes and Szechi see the middle of the century, when England was not only steadily at war but also steadily commercializing and industrializing, as the heart of this transformative process (133), a process that McKendrick calls a "consumer revolution" that changed the behaviors not simply of individuals, but also of classes and their interactions (1-3, 5). The developing consumer economy increasingly exposed title, estate, education, and manners as commodities, as they became available on the basis of money rather than inheritance and breeding. Class's previous correlation with birth became less predictable; class itself
became less stable. Such changes generated considerable interest and often anxiety in those experiencing them. Liz Bellamy notes that economic theory changed as the economy changed, shifting from one discourse--civic humanism, which linked agrarian economics and morality--to several discourses struggling to understand and reconcile economic developments with the ethical and moral developments that they catalyzed (Bellamy 3). These developments affected gender roles, which had always involved forms of wealth and their routes of circulation, and which included the role of the widow.

In a rapidly developing economy with rapidly changing class structures, women's traditional role in transmitting wealth could also make women the agents of economic and social instability. Susan Staves points out that although in more specific circumstances, attitudes towards marriage could vary, overall, the social or "official public discourse" around marriage presented it as a "fundamentally stable, satisfactory institution" and crucial to the well-being of society (132, 130). (2) Until and continuing through the eighteenth century, marriage was women's primary occupation, as Janice Farrar Thaddeus puts it (114), and also one crucial mechanism in the circulation of goods and property. Women carried estates, plate, cash, and other forms of wealth between families when they married out of one and into another. As Lawrence Stone suggests, "After inheritance, marriage was probably the single most important method for the transmission of property" (18). This role for marriage remained fairly constant in the circulation of capital during the eighteenth century, and the institution's role as a significant economic event did not change, although scholars report various signs that the goods transferred in marriage did. According to Olwen Hufton, dowries grew during the period, indicating that money became a larger factor in the process (127), which would be consistent with a society increasingly influenced by trade and the fluidity and amount of wealth it engendered. Kathryn Kirkpatrick demonstrates that with the rise of the middle class, marriage portions were less frequently land and more frequently portable property, such as cash, furniture, or jewels. While legal mechanisms could be employed to protect a women's control of land, nothing of the sort existed to protect her control over the cash she was transmitting (Kirkpatrick 204). Legal arrangements around marriage remained of primary importance, regardless of how much sentiment might have been creeping into the arrangements. Contracts ensured women some part, in the form of allowances or pin money, of the wealth they brought to a family, and jointures offered them some financial resources in case of widowhood, keeping the women solvent and enabling them to avoid demanding funds from the family they married out of or into. A bride's family might also try to protect the land that they were supposedly transferring by keeping it under the supervision of a guardian in case a woman were widowed.

A multiplicity of eighteenth-century discourses acknowledged that, while the system of piggybacking wealth onto a woman did not in and of itself constitute a radical challenge to the status quo, it could be used to facilitate class change and therefore class instability. The rising merchant class intermarried with landed families, exchanging commercially-gained wealth and inherited bloodlines. According to John Gillis, even with increasing industrialization during the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, the family remained the primary economic unit in all classes, and marriage was consequently one of the primary ways that wealth was generated and transferred. As a result, Gillis notes, the "control of courtship, particularly that of heirs and heiresses, remained essential" despite other economic changes taking place during the period (135). This effort to control marriage appears most clearly in Lord Hardwicke's 1753 Clandestine Marriage Act, which was designed to "prevent clandestine marriages and to curtail youthful elopements." Seemingly, the Hardwicke Act worked to protect young heirs from fortune hunters or foolish choices made in the heat and inexperience of youth. The act's language only poorly covered its other intent, however: to reduce the opportunities for anyone, not just fortune hunters, to rise through marriage. As such, it was perceived by some as a form of class suppression (Hay and Rogers 37; Brooks 20). Literature also responded to the perceived danger of class instability through marriage. Scholars such as Laura Brown and Jill Campbell have demonstrated that women, particularly women's bodies, became the site for expressing opinions about England's "increasing absorption in world trade," regardless of what those opinions are (Campbell 65). (3) Although Brown and Campbell refer to writers from the first half of the century, this strategy turns up throughout the period and in a number of discourses. Kirkpatrick describes how conduct books promoted the idea that correct gender and class behavior were inextricably linked and equally untransgressable. Although conduct books recognized that "propriety" was a commodity, they also restricted the ways that women could use their propriety, and in so doing, restricted ways in which women could acceptably envision class change for themselves. Clearly, the century was aware how even traditional elements such as women's roles in the transmission of wealth could have more radical effects as a destabilizing force, and consequently needed oversight by social and legislative authorities to maintain its
conservative function.

The eighteenth-century novel offered its own exploration of and solution for these tensions in emerging capitalism and gender. Ruth E Thomas has examined the connection between the historical situation of widows and their representation in the eighteenth-century French novel. In France during this period, 60% of bereaved women in their twenties remarried, while 80% of men in the same situation did so. Older women were still less likely to remarry---20% of widows in their fortieths remarried, while 52% of widowers of the same age did (Buitelaar 4-5). Buitelaar demonstrates the impracticability of arguments that there were fewer men to go around, indicating that there must be other reasons for this discrepancy in the remarriage rate. She suggests that conventions about the propriety of remarriage---it was acceptable for men but not for women---might play a role in this difference, as well as the "different kinds of dependencies that result from the sexual division of labour": that is, men need a woman for the domestic aspects of their lives, but women do not need a man. As a result, remarriage for women might have more to do with preference than need (Buitelaar 4-5). This relative autonomy appears in a negative light in the French novel, however. In her study of five widows from eighteenth-century French literature, each a "test case of a totally free woman," Thomas observes, "For all [widows], however, freedom is illusory. Their choices do not emancipate but bind them more closely to the modes and values of a male dominated society" (434). In French literature, Thomas concludes, "The portrait of the widow then refutes the notion of women's independence in the eighteenth century and reinforces the familiar stereotypes of the woman as a more weak and dependent creature, with second-class status" (449).

The eighteenth-century English novel also recast the historical reality of widows in novelistic conventions designed to establish and reinforce an ideology that limited women's commercial endeavor. As Bellamy and Gillian Skinner both observe, the novel in general and especially its sentimental versions played a significant role in the negotiation of virtue and economy towards the development of a new, capitalist and commercial subjectivity:

Ironically, it is in the sentimental novel, with
its emphasis on private and affective modes of behaviour,
that some of the most thorough and explicit
analyses of the economic system can be found.
Sentimental writers drew attention to the gap
between the private values they sought to celebrate,
and the very different ethos and aspirations which
they represented as characteristics of society as
a whole. (Bellamy 8)

This split between public and private virtues and values created a difficulty in forming identity, whether fictional or actual, for readers and writers alike. It also, however, created an opportunity for fiction, especially sentimental fiction, not only to establish an ethics but also to establish a role for itself as a mediator of ethics in the new culture produced by the new economics. As Bellamy argues, by highlighting the difference between private virtues and social mores, "The sentimental novel simultaneously rejected the idea of literature as having a simple mimetic function, and highlighted the marginal role for fiction within a commercial society" (8).

Gillian Skinner adds to this understanding of the connection between the novel and the changing economy by analyzing the connection between sensibility and economic behavior. Where Bellamy shows that sentimental fiction explores the "gap between the private values they sought to celebrate, and the very different ethos and aspirations which they represented as characteristics of society as a whole" (8), Skinner demonstrates that specific behaviors such as economic benevolence or household management are simultaneously political statements about economic behavior and fundamental aspects of sensibility. How characters dispose of their money, for example, defines correct sentimental behavior at the same time that it defines class differences and financial values. While sensibility and the sentimental novel are crucial aspects of mid- and late-eighteenth-century English society, the connection of the novel and economic thought are not bound solely to this ideology and its manifestations. Defoe's novels, which predate sensibility, and the Gothic novel also exemplify ways in which economic thought and extended narrative fiction merge during the eighteenth century. Nevertheless, sensibility's link to the novel and to women makes it a particularly useful site for exploring the connection among the novel, economic developments, and the effect of both of them on constructions of gender during the period. As Skinner points out,
discourses of sensibility were instrumental
during the eighteenth century in
building up the moral ascendancy of women.
They asserted women's superiority
in matters of finer feeling and discrimination
and established their role as a benign reforming
influence. Just as, however, virtuous sensibility
harbored the dangerous possibility of "excessive"
behavior, so the creation
of the morally ascendant virtuous woman had as its
own corollary the
vicious woman who, by refusing this role, necessarily
pollutes her associates.
Thus the power afforded to women by the marrying
of discourses of
sensibility and virtuous femininity is of an admittedly
limited kind; nevertheless,
it has great importance. (10)

Sensibility created a set of values for defining and conventions for describing good and bad women that
often had much to do with how those women behaved economically. The novel's representation of the
widow therefore takes on considerable significance when the novel's role in the economic developments
and in the discourse of those developments is understood in conjunction with the anxiety that the widow,
even in the most stable of times, provoked.

In the novel, particularly the sentimental novel, the conflation of wealth and widowhood creates a picture of
positive wealth as benevolent, non-profit-oriented behavior, particularly as charitable and therefore selfless
activity. In Clara Reeve's School for Widows, the primary characters, Mrs. Darnford and her childhood
friend, Mrs. Strictland, are well-educated women from genteel families who have or who ought to have
considerable financial resources. According to novelistic conventions, by virtue of their birth, their
marriages, or both, they are entitled to practice benevolence. The narrative opens with Mrs. Strictland's
determined and compassionate search for Mrs. Darnford in an attempt to re-forge old emotional
connections. Once Mrs. Strictland has opened their correspondence, the novel turns to Mrs. Darnford and
her remarkable acts of charity to family and friends. Although impoverished by her late profligate and
landed husband, Mrs. Darnford has helped a still poorer widow with four children to become economically
self-sufficient. First, she takes Mrs. Martin's two daughters as assistants at Mrs. Darnford's school for girls
(I, 16-17), and then she helps the other widow, Mrs. Martin, to go into business for herself. Mrs. Darnford
provides the idea, training, and capital for her protege to start her own local business: "You have very bad
pins, needles and threads in your little town," she observes to Mrs. Martin. "You have a shop, you need
only have some shelves put into it; I will be at half the expense in fitting it up, and I think you will run very
little hazard" (I, 19). She continues,

I will write, in your name, to an eminent
haberdasher in London. I will
 desire him to send the best goods of every kind.
I will write your letters,
and shew you how to keep your book. One day-book
will be sufficient for
you, for you must sell for ready money only.
You must be very punctual in
your remittances of payment, which will induce your
dealer to serve you
well for your own sake. I shall be a customer to you,
so will my scholars;
and if your goods are of the best kinds,
there is little doubt, that many people
will come to the shop of a person so well known and
respected as you
are in this place. (I, 20)

Mrs. Darnford demonstrates economic disinterest rather than commercial self-interest. In placing all the
orders under her own name, she risks her own reputation and credit. She offers to give Mrs. Martin all the
skills which she, Mrs. Darnford, already possesses and could use herself to make money. Then she
promises to spend money at the store in which she has invested and created to benefit someone else. Mrs.
Darnford uses her considerable energies and education, both connected to her class, to help another
woman, a poorer widow in fact, achieve self-sufficiency. Ultimately, she decides to make Mrs. Martin "full
partner in school.... [And] If I like my situation, and if the school succeeds with you, I will quit it entirely to

you" (I, 30). At no time does Mrs. Darnford work for her own benefit or economic gain, but rather for other women.

Mrs. Darnford's friend, Mrs. Strictland, is the widow of one of the neighborhood's most prominent farmers. In her capacity as one of the area's leading ladies, she exercises the power of action as well as purse. She looks after men and women, giving money and good advice to anyone who needs it. Eventually, although she has her own children to look after, she also adopts the grandson of a ruined tradesman, restoring his family's respectability and thereby repairing the social damage done by their fall from their proper class (II, 44-45). She installs the ruined man, Mr. Balderson, in one of the cottages she builds for poor tenants, who include a pair of sisters, one of whom is a widow (II, 92; II, 96-97). These cottages are an important symbol of not just the nurturing, but the constancy of the nurturing performed by benevolent widows. When a virtuous merchant wishes to buy the cottages from Mrs. Strictland, she refuses to sell them: "They are consecrated to the service of the deserving and the unfortunate--they shall never be alienated from this purpose--I will secure them to it," she declares (II, 268). Like Mrs. Darnford with Mrs. Martin, her behavior not only advances one individual, but also benefits the community. This duality characterizes the benevolence of wealthy widows: these women help particular figures in their narratives, and in so doing, also help the community at large.

As Mrs. Strictland's approved rejection of virtuous James Balderson indicates, the goodness of a widow frequently is established by her asexuality, demonstrated by an unwillingness to remarry, provided her motives are appropriately self-effacing. As a statement of economic and sexual autonomy, refusing to remarry generates social anxieties about the widow, anxieties assuaged when the reasons for this refusal reinforce notions of maternal, communal, benevolent behavior in the service of economic and social stability. When Mr. Strictland dies, he leaves Mrs. Strictland executrix of the estate with two men and "residuary legatee," entitling her to the "whole rents and income of his fortune during the minority of his children" to be used to look after them, but only so long as she does not remarry. Upon her remarriage, "the children are to be taken from her, and put under the care of the other guardians, who are to be accountable for the rents till his son comes of age." The novel heartily approves of this kind of will and even encourages the "Legislature" to dictate how long widowhood should last and to impose an upper age limit for remarriage, to keep "widows from squandering their fortunes, and buying themselves husbands" (Reeve II, 85-87). None of the widows in Millenium Hall want to remarry either. In approving widows who do not remarry and who therefore keep the family property for their children, especially their sons, the eighteenth-century novel links positive, maternal instinct to selflessness and benevolence, especially in the realm of the preservation of property and its continued transmission through traditional means such as inheritance and family arrangements rather than through autonomous, self-interested contracts.

The lack of sexual desire implicit in refusing a second husband, or the conversion of sexual desire into the desire to help others, are crucial aspects of the virtuous widow. Women's asexuality was of particular importance in the construction of motherhood and maternal instincts taking place from midcentury. Ruth Perry observes that "in the eighteenth century, maternity came to be imagined as a counter to sexual feeling, opposing alike individual expression, desire, and agency in favor of a mother-self at the service of the family and the state" ("Colonizing the Breast" 188) and Felicity Nussbaum points out that while the redefinition of female sexuality as an asexual maternal identity offers women "power to shape the public realm, particularly the nation, through procreation and education," it also means that the absence of this instinct results in an "'unnatural mother' [who] refuses these duties and is instead capable of heinous acts that threaten lineage and even civilization itself. This perverse mother is a center of energy and violence, rather than allnurturing" (165-66). Nussbaum and Perry link the period's construction of maternal identity with an attempt to regulate women's participation in England's growing capitalist, imperialist economy. Both argue that women were colonized much as other peoples were colonized, and that the control of women's fertility during this period was consistent with the capitalist effort to control other nations' productivity and the new agricultural practices that extended these efforts to farming and breeding (Perry, "Colonizing the Breast," 185-87; Nussbaum 165). By century's end, appropriate maternal identity was about producing heirs--to specific families, to the army for the maintenance of the empire, to England's empire itself, and so on--and not at all about desire of any kind in the mother, except to take care of her offspring.

When virtuous widows do look beyond the family, it is not simply charity in action; it is also the reification of class divisions, sometimes to reinforce them, other times to restore them when they are disrupted. The
servants at Millenium Hall, from laborers to musicians, are all "under some natural disadvantage": the
housekeeper cannot use one hand, "the cook cannot walk without crutches, the kitchen maid has but one
eye, the dairy maid is almost stone deaf, and the housemaid has but one hand." Why hire these people?
Because "gratitude, and a conviction that this is the only house into which we can be received, makes us
exert ourselves to the utmost" in serving the ladies of the Hall, as the housekeeper attests (Scott 120-21).
By employing the disfigured, the ladies can be sure that their servants are always motivated by gratitude
and the sense of inferiority that gratitude involves. The ladies of the Hall also restate those who have
been displaced by poverty, such as a clergyman's widow for whom the "ladies of Millenium Hall immediately
raised her drooping spirits, settled an income upon her, took [a] house, furnished it and lent her some of
their girls to assist in making up the furniture, and decorating it, according to the good woman's taste"
(149). The conversion of sexual desire into the desire to help others that defines virtuous widowhood is
therefore not only the removal of the widow's agency as a sexual being, but also the conservative reification
of class divisions.

The recipient of aid is also a conservative figure, refusing to exercise her rights to participate in economic
activity, even when her survival without affluent widows' benevolence depends on it. The clergyman's
widow grows flowers, not vegetables, in her garden: without the income provided by the women of
Millenium Hall, she would starve once again. The support she receives is designed to reinforce her class
status, not render her industriously self-sufficient. When a genteel widow uses her garden to grow
vegetables to feed her household, like Mrs. Batson in School for Widows, she becomes the object of ridicule
rather than the object of approval (Reeve I, 219-20). Even Reeve's Mrs. Martin is never entirely self-
sufficient, since after she has been educated by Mrs. Darnford, she still is unable to innovate on her own
and sticks to the plans and systems laid out by her mentor. The ladies of Millenium Hall establish an entire
village of poor widows, who do work for which they are paid properly (Scott 12-15). These poor widows,
who had not enough to eat and no ability to earn a living before the ladies of Millenium Hall arrived, now
perform a domestic economy of spinning, candle-making, and child care, fashioned into a seemingly self-
sufficient community based on the wages paid by the ladies of the Hall (13). Significantly, however, the
elderly spinners of Millenium Hall do not sell the products of their labor themselves, but bring it to the
ladies for commercial distribution: without the women of Millenium Hall, however productive these widows
might be, they too would starve once again.

All of these women could go into business for themselves; like Mrs. Darnford, they have the right and the
industry. The real-life correspondence of Rachel Welby, for example, demonstrates how a widow could raise
herself to self-sufficiency. Although Welby began her widowhood depending on male bounty for
subsistence, repeatedly begging Thomas Birch, a family friend, for financial help, she ultimately worked
herself out of dependence by opening and running a boarding house (Knapp 783,786). Elizabeth Bergen
Brophy also records several instances of successful, independent widows, such as Elizabeth Phelps, who
restored the family estates and raised the family's income; Frances Hamilton, who was a brilliant farmer
and businesswoman; and Ursula Venner, whose talent with finances was so great that she managed her
own, her father's, and her brother's (Brophy 227-28). Doing work and engaging with the economy are
carefully distinguished by the eighteenth-century novel, however. Poor widows' work manifests their
dependence, rather than their independence or self-sufficiency. In these narratives class definitions allow
only rich women any degree of proactive behavior, and then only to act for others' good, or to maintain
their own class. When they appear in the novel, poor widows generally are both nameless less and
dependent on these richer women, possessing not an individual identity but a group identity: widow.
Positive rich widowhood means the dispersal or maintenance of wealth, not its accumulation, in the
preservation of class, and positive poor widowhood means dependent, not independent industry. Neither
type of widow uses her resources or rights to be capitalist creatures, especially to change her economic
situation. Instead, everyone has a place, everyone knows what that place is, and everyone is grateful for it.

Positive widowhood is consequently widowhood that rejects its possibilities for autonomous, commercial
endeavor and the gender and social instability it would otherwise usher in. Community stability, and
therefore a conservative order, is the goal. The ladies of Scott's Millenium Hall, like those in Reeve's School
for Widows, spread a network of communities throughout their area, knitting disparate aspects of the social
and economic order of the neighborhood into a cohesive and orderly whole. Some of their work involves
the same physical building that appears in Mrs. Strictland's efforts. On their own estate, they create an
enclave for "poor creatures who are rendered miserable from some natural deficiency or redundancy" and

create a mutually respectful relationship between themselves and the physically challenged people behind the hedge (Scott 19). They establish schools for girls and boys and create a system of patronage, where employers from the area consult the ladies of the Hall when seeking apprentices and servants (150-51). They also encourage marriage among the peasants and "lower rank of people," providing couples with the wedding service and supervising young brides until the newlyweds are comfortable running their own establishment and maintaining their own marriages (115, 119-20). As Ruth Perry observes, Millenium Hall is an economy designed to promote "the sharing of resources" rather than "growth and expansion" and as such, "intervenes in both the labor market and the marriage market" to accomplish its ends and pursue its ideals ("Bluestockings" 162, 163). In essence, then, the affluent, benevolent widow such as Reeve's Mrs. Darnford and Mrs. Strictland or Scott's Mrs. Morgan functions to create a network of people pie working together, and as such, stands opposed to the values and practices of emerging capitalism, with their acceptance of the individualistic self-interest of merchants and other tradespeople. (4)

The wicked widow is the opposite of this selfless, benevolent, community-oriented, asexual, maternal virtue. She embodies the behaviors and values of emerging capitalism, demonstrating either that the convergence of femininity and capitalism perverts female identity, or even that capitalism itself corrupts. In short, she is capitalism performed by the female body, and consequently she is villainous if not downright monstrous. Maintaining one's class or rising to take care of one's children is acceptable--Reeve's Mrs. Martin achieves much, but with Mrs. Darnford's help, and only to launch her son and marry off her daughters (Reeve I, 13). In contrast, Frances Burney's Madame Duval's rapacity for money, control, and self-gratification catalyzes the action of the novel, and her ongoing interference provides a continuous stream of crises for the sentimental heroine. As if killing one sentimental favorite--her daughter, Evelina's mother, Caroline Evelyn Belmont--were not enough, she seems determined to undo a second, Evelina. Madame Duval desires to control Evelina's life, which Evelina's guardian, Mr. Villars, points out that she is unfit to do. "The violence and vulgarity of this woman, her total ignorance of propriety, the family to which she is related, and the company she is likely to keep, are objections so forcible to her having the charge of this dear child," he laments (Burney 148-49). Similarly, Ann Radcliffe's Madame Cheron (later Montoni) from The Mysteries of Udolpho drags the newly orphaned Emily from Emily's country home and all its happy associations to a city house where Emily knows few people and has no freedom Our heroine "wished only to remain at La Vail& in the scenes of her early happiness, now rendered infinitely dear to her," and when she is compelled to leave, she is unable to perform even the essentials of obedience, such as making conversation as her aunt desires (Radcliffe 98, 116).

After Madame Cheron's remarriage, the older woman repeatedly endangers her niece, breaking off Emily's engagement to the sentimental hero, Valancourt, and allowing Emily to be "rendered miserable by the assiduities" of Count Morano (144,215). It is despite her efforts rather than because of them that Emily's inheritance is preserved and the young heroine is finally married to the partner endorsed by herself and the text. This use of money and influence for selfish ends such as personal gratification and conspicuous consumption epitomizes the wicked widow.

Madame Cheron and Madame Duval also reveal the eighteenth century's anxieties about the connection between widowhood and the family. The positive widow had to be carefully asexual to convert refusing to remarry into a virtue, since the autonomy involved in this decision and her ongoing widowed state could be understood as a threat to social roles. Choosing to remarry, however, was also a frightening decision. Socially, money was the only acceptable reason for remarriage, and then only if the widow had insufficient finances to maintain herself and more importantly, her family. Remarriage to satisfy social or economic ambition was equally frowned upon (Brophy 229). Where resources were sufficient, a widow was only respected as long as she "remained piously faithful to the dead," as Brophy puts it (230-31). Madame Duval's giving up her weeds after three months (Burney 42) demonstrates how the widow's worst transgression, in many ways, is out-living her husband and replacing him in her heart with a second husband. Madame Cheron not only remarries, but also chooses the villain of the book, Montoni, for her second husband (Radcliffe 144). Thus, in remarrying not out of necessity but out of desire and conceit, Burney's Madame Duval and Radcliffe's Madame Cheron exemplify vanity, lust, and greed, for each is quite wealthy enough to live on her own terms for the rest of her life, and demonstrate those qualities' cataclysmic consequences for English families.

If a woman can be so driven by desire and vanity as to abandon piety, spouse, and children, then her sexuality must be both culpable and terrifying. The widow is, after all, unmarried but sexually aware and experienced; who knows what a woman in that condition might do? The eighteenth century's association of
sexual desire with masculinity rendered remarriage for women a sign of idiocy, of "gross sensuality," or of both (Brophy 27, 228). Compounding her sexual transgressions, the novel's wicked widow explicitly rejects the period's developing concept of motherhood, especially its asexuality; part of the wicked widow's threat is therefore greediness for sexual gratification. She appears in the maternal role only to demonstrate how self-interest, especially sexual self-interest, can overwhelm maternal feeling to the detriment of sentimental heroines and all that they represent. The eighteenth-century novel's wicked widows recreate the man-chasing lecherous widows of the Restoration stage, but in the novel, these women present a more sinister image of the effect of predatory and inappropriate sexuality. As Ros Ballaster points out about de Scudery's novels, the "representation of evil in women" has its source in the "rejection of heroic femininity for a debased identity with the aggression and brutality of the 'masculine' world" (46). The same phenomenon manifests itself in English novels. Madame Duval, for example, determinedly and acquisitively chases Monsieur Du Bois, reversing traditional male-female roles by rushing to his rescue when she is told that he has been captured by a hostile mob (Burney 127-28). Like Madame Duval, Madame Cheron shocks her youthful relative by chasing men and marrying Montoni at her "advanced age": "That Madame Cheron at her years should elect a second husband was ridiculous, though her vanity made it not impossible" (Radcliffe 133). As a result of this vanity, Madame Cheron hounds Emily who, the book argues, is far more entitled by right of age and beauty to be worried about men than her aunt. Madame Cheron goes so far as to steal Emily's wedding, using the decorations originally planned for Emily and Valancourt's ceremony for her own marriage feast: "'I shall now celebrate my marriage with some splendour,' continued Madame Montoni, 'and to save time I shall avail myself of the preparation that has been made for yours'" (Radcliffe 142). This sexual aggression is presented as the flip side of maternal instinct, since widows such as Madame Duval or Madame Cheron abdicate their responsibility for dependents and cannot locate themselves properly within society. Women's sexuality and the individual gratification of sexual desire thus stand in opposition to the communal benefits of community- and family-building.

This attempt by widows to control girls and men also sexualizes anxieties about the widow's control of property. Barbara M. Benedict connects Madame Cheron's sexuality with her materialism, for example, arguing that Madame Cheron's "lust for power [is] an unnatural appetite fed by her possession of her own estates" (175). Unlike the positive widows of Millenium Hall, Madame Cheron uses property to control others. She removes Emily further and further from the mountains and valleys that the girl loves, a landscape celebrated by sentimental, Gothic, and Romantic authors for inspiring the best in human nature. These removes also distance Emily from control of her inheritance and her identity, leaving the properties in the wrong hands and leaving Emily at the mercy of her aunt and step-uncle, the villain Montoni. It is notable that in fulfilling her sexually transgressive urges by marrying Montoni, Madame Cheron places Emily in his power, making it possible for him literally to sell her to the highest bidder, a commodification of which the book clearly disapproves. Madame Duval's interest in Evelina also consists of attempts to marry the girl off, as well as attempts to extract a dowry from Evelina's estranged father, Sir John Belmont. When Evelina resists her grandmother's efforts to take her to France to sell her, although less overtly than Montoni attempts to sell Emily, to the most affluent suitor, it is to property, not family affection, that Madame Dural resorts, threatening that unless she is obeyed by Evelina and, significantly, by Mr. Villars, a man, "she would instantly make a will, in which she would leave all her fortune to strangers, though, otherwise, she intended her grand-daughter for her sole heiress" (Burney 148). This response demonstrates how the wicked widow represents the perceived danger that a commercial society will equate material possession with affection, as if obedience through greed and obedience through duty or affection can be conflated or their differences obscured.

As part of their critique of commercial society and its values, these novels depict the difference between negative and positive widowhood as a split between commerce and agriculture, and the city and the country: between urbanity and depravity on the one hand, and nature and morality on the other. At the beginning of the century, Daniel Defoe linked the city and widowhood with commerce in his most famous widow, Moll Flanders. Moll's industry (a word with several senses) is notorious, of course, but it does not render her the object of Defoe's scorn or criticism. Robinson Crusoe also features a positive, urban, capitalistic widow: the "good ancient widow" who preserves Crusoe's capital for him while he is a slave with the Moors. When Crusoe returns from his island a rich man, he needs someone with honesty and financial genius to look after his affairs in England. He turns again to "my old Friend the Widow, who I knew was honest, and would be just to me," calling her "my faithful Steward and Instructor" and praising her "unspotted Integrity" (Defoe 206). Later in the century and in the hands of authors less sanguine about
trade, money and widowhood have a more negative relationship. Kate Ferguson Ellis points out that Ann Radcliffe's villains "see the possibility of capitalism for making money out of money, and chafe at the 'slow diligence' that smacks of the old order of agricultural accumulation, with its dependence on nature" (100). For Radcliffe, "What matters is not how much wealth you have, but whether or not you want more, and what you do to get it" (Ellis 122). Such a formulation applies to the sentimental novel that predates and co-exists with the Radcliffian Gothic as well, since it too engages with such anxieties. Sentiment's villains, disrupting society as much as they can, delight in the pursuit and possession of material goods, while its heroes and heroines, reaffirming social structures, use their wealth for the good of others. Based on its encouragement of vices, vanities, and desires, Millenium Hall's Miss Mancel likens "the world" to "that state of war, which Hobbes supposes the first condition of mankind." The world's greatest evil is its social mixing, according to Scott's Miss Trentham, where members of different classes overstep their bounds by trying to emulate their betters (Scott 61, 116). Miss Trentham articulates philosophically what the Hardwicke Act articulates legislatively: that social instability is social evil, and instability arises from the mixing of classes. This mixing takes place, as Miss Trentham points out, in the city, where the classes have easiest access to each other. As the site of both social mixing and economic opportunity, the city is the heart of social and economic instability.

Unsurprisingly, wicked widows tend to live in the city. Trouble begins in Evelina when the young heroine is taken to London, where she encounters Madame Duval, who is an urban creation. Furthermore, it is back to London that Madame Duval takes her to conduct the mercenary, self-interested business of extracting money from Evelina's father, Sir John Belmont, or marrying Evelina off to a rich man. And of course, in London Evelina must endure the very middle-class Branghtons, a family that epitomizes the grasping crassness of commerce. The same may be said for The Mysteries of Udolpho: Emily's most difficult times begin when she enters the city. The city itself has nothing to recommend it; its inhabitants are neither accomplished nor knowledgeable, simply adept at pretending to be so, and their "immoderate and feverish animation, usually exhibited in large parties, results partly from an insensibility to the cares, which benevolence must sometimes derive from the sufferings of others, and partly from a desire to display the appearance of that prosperity, which they know will command submission and attention to themselves" (Radcliffe 122-23). Cities are also the site where Emily's assorted guardians offer her on the marriage market, "not because [they] desired to see her in possession of the happiness, which rank and wealth are usually believed to bestow, but because [they] desired to partake of the importance, which such an alliance would give" (Radcliffe 139). Paris ruins Valancourt, and London is the "place, of all others, most likely to spoil young people; to pervert their good principles, and give them bad ones instead of them" (Radcliffe 505-07, 585; Reeve II, 99).

Equally unsurprisingly, then, good widows five in the country. In School for Widows, Mrs. Darnford tries being a dependent--a governess--to London families before giving it up for the seemingly financially risky attempt to found a school in the country (Reeve I, 230-31). Her success at rural schoolmarm ing far outstrips her success at urban governessing, however, associating growth and virtue: in the country, character, education, and financial stability are grown naturally, with time and effort; in the city, life is a matter of instant gratification, speculation, the demand of desire. Reinforcing this association, Mrs. Darnford gives the school to Mrs. Martin even when it is not simply financially sound, but a booming business. It is not money but virtue that Mrs. Darnford values, and she turns her considerable energies to tending a deranged widow in even further removal from society. The association between benevolent widows and the country underscores the withdrawal of goodness from the urban and the commercial to the rural and agrarian. Evelina's kind and elegant Lady Howard lives in the country; Millenium Hall is not only in the country, but also set well away from the road amidst a profusion of gardens and landscapes. Naturally, the economic activity performed by widows in such places is Goldsmithian, a landowner's activity rather than a banker's. When School for Widows' Mrs. Strickland takes control of the family estate, she maintains that "consolidating farms, and destroying cottages, was a cruel and wicked policy, and had a tendency to depopulate the villages, and destroy the prosperity of the land. I therefore declared myself the protector and patroness of this most useful order of men" (Reeve II, 92). Her speech sounds not unlike "The Deser ted Village," which complains, "The man of wealth and pride/Takes up a space that many poor supplied" (Goldsmith 275-76). His "seat, where solitary sports are seen,/Indignant spurns the cottage from the green" while the "sounds of population fail" (281-82, 125). Goldsmith's vision of happy, dancing peasants appears again in Scott's hay-makers' "cleanliness and neatness" and "happy amiable innocence" and Radcliffe's stable, loving, and happy Voisin family, all of whom are supported and encouraged by...
benevolent landowners, such as the ladies of Millenium Hall and the St. Auberts in The Mysteries of Udolpho (Scott 5; Radcliffe 89-90).

This connection to Goldsmithian views about the country is not just a question of country good, city bad, but also a question of how the country is managed. Although the young gentlemen of Evelina are landed money as well as tided money, as the famous race between elderly women to settle a wager indicates, simply being associated with the country is not a sufficient sign of virtue (Burney 293-94). Lord Merton, Lady Louisa's fiance, is as selfish and cruel as Mr. Lovel, the city fop. Affluent, landed widows must manage their estates in a nurturing way in order to achieve virtue. This position directly opposes what Beth Fowkes Tobin calls the "New Economic Man," whose emergence can be dated to the 1767 publication of Arthur Young's The Farmer's Letters to the People of England and who was defined by a "discourse on agriculture" that arose around the same time (Tobin 179-80). The New Economic Man was a professional farmer, a man who managed the estate to maximize profit rather than the man whose family had owned the estate for generations. This figure came from the middle-class values of profit-making and efficient management, and it emphasized rational and methodical business practices rather than the haphazard benevolence and paternalism of the aristocratic code that had controlled the land to that point. The New Economic Man stood in opposition to the young men like those in Evelina (excepting, of course, Lord Orville), who were self-indulgent and entirely appetitive. Enclosure, which had been on the rise from mid-century, expanded rapidly under the discourse of agriculture as its tracts and treatises argued that the "engrossment of small farms, and the consolidation of scattered holdings" would centralize power and therefore increase efficiency and profits (Tobin 184). (5) This reorganization of land and ideology shattered the old rural hierarchy which, because of its careful ordering of relationships and obligations among classes, was also a network holding the agrarian society together. As Tobin puts it, the "reconceptualization of land erases all signs of the web of social and economic relations that permeated the land and enmeshed it in moral obligation and social customs" (186). For the novel's positive landed widows, the behavior and attitudes of the new discourse on agriculture and the New Economic Man who participated in it were unthinkable. Although Reeve's Mrs. Strickland does consolidate several pieces of the estate and asserts her opposition to breaking up estates, she does so to protect her tenants and to reward loyal, lifelong servants. In these novels land, people, their labor, and the attributes of farming such as cattle or equipment are not commodities to be manipulated but aspects of a community with its mores, responsibilities, and culture, all of which are to be preserved. It is not enough to live in the country if one lives in the country selfishly and profitably. That would be tantamount to city living. Good behavior by women who have the means and the right to engage in autonomous, economic activity takes place in the country, but must also occur within a framework of nurturing, of dispersal, and of benevolence. Bad economic behavior is associated with the city, accumulation, and self-interest.

The eighteenth-century novel's representation of the widow, a woman who was entitled to the status, rights, and privileges traditionally accorded to men in a patriarchal society, reveals ways in which the novel contributed to the period's understanding of itself during capitalism's development. Representing virtuous widowhood as a benevolent, community-oriented state associated with the stability of agrarianism, the novel established and enforced notions that women should not engage in capitalistic endeavors, unless those endeavors are for the benefit of others. Conversely, the novel associated self-centered, individualistic, profit-oriented behavior arising from the instability of commerce with transgressive and therefore wicked widowhood. Through the transgressive widow, the novel reinforced ideas to exclude women from the commercial sphere, and also sometimes commented critically on the commercial sphere itself. The emerging novel's characterizations contributed to and reflected historical reality, in which women's status changed for the worse between the early eighteenth and mid-nineteenth centuries. Leonore Davidoff and Catherine Hall point out that the period is rife with developments, small and large, social and legal, that restricted women's access to property and to money, particularly as the legal methods for transferring and protecting estates changed and women lost much of the control of their inheritances and their ability to contribute, especially recognizably, to the circulation of wealth. (6) Mid- and late-eighteenth-century novels such as Clara Reeve's School for Widows, Frances Burney's Epelina, Sarah Scott's Millenium Hall, and Ann Radcliffe's Mysteries of Udolpho reveal how the novel used representations of widows to contribute to a discourse to contain the economic potential embodied by such women, in an effort to restrict the perceived chaos triggered by economic changes in English society and sensibility.

Notes
(1.) In Clara Reeve's School for Widows, Mrs. Darnfurd's friend Mr. M--threatens James Darnfurd, the heir
to the Darnford estate, with a lawsuit to claim Mrs. Darnford's one-third unless young Darnford settles
[pounds sterling] 150 in cash on her immediately. The young man and his attorney agree to the terms and
she is paid cash, which she needs, right away, relinquishing what Mr. M--calls "the plate, linen, &c. the
farming stock, and utensils; and the crops now upon the ground" (I, 186-87).

(2.) There is some disagreement among scholars about the social developments that occurred around the
institution of marriage during the eighteenth century. Lawrence Stone argues that among the middle and
upper classes, love became an increasingly important factor in conjugal union, and as it did, financial
arrangements "became the last step instead of the first" in marriage negotiations (11). Olwen Hufton, on
the other hand, contends that although love became more important in making marriages, "Pounds and
shillings remained primary considerations in the marriage market" (126-27).

(3.) See also Brown, Ends of Empire: Women and Ideology in Early Eighteenth-Century English Literature.

(4.) The activity of the ladies of Scott's Millenium Hall is anticipated by the Bilson family in Sarah Fielding's
History of the Countess of Dstellwyn (1759). When Lady Dendy, who is never identified as a widow but who
very probably is, leaves and Mrs. Bilson her estate worth [punds sterling] 4000 per year, the Bilsons
undertake a charitable crusade of considerable scope, including tbrming "seminaries for yotmg people";
taking care of orphans and children whom families cannot at'furd to keep; building "almshouses for [the
aged], where Age could find no Evils but the Infirmities incident to it, and all the Relief for them that Care
and Competence could give"; furnishing the houses of young couples; looking after ill people in poverty;
establishing charities where "the Old spun and knitted for the Young; and those who were not decr eped
[sic] served fbr Nurses to the Sick"; and hiring "a large House as a Receptacle for Gentlewomen, who either
had no Fortune, or so little that it would not support them" (205-07). Many if not all of these activities
appear in Scott's novel, but in the latter, they are undertaken by unattached women. In Fielding's novel, it
is a married couple who looks after all the groups and classes of their rural neighborhood using wealth
acquired by the death and subsequent narrative disappearance of a woman who might be a widow. In The
History of the Countess of Dstellwyn, even positive widowhood is nearly erased, and widowhood is reduced
to a set of ambiguous codes: relation without a shared last name, a woman of advanced age, no mention
of a husband but she controls considerable wealth, and so on. Here the widow's activities belong to a
middle-class married pair, and have been acquired on the basis of Mrs. Bilson's scrupulously behaving like a
married woman, attentive to her husband's needs and cares. The Countess of Dstellwyn thus offers evidence
of how marginal a widow and her wealth can be made to he, since Fielding reassigns to the much more
mainstream, married unit even the activities that might make the widow acceptable.

(5.) See also Kirkpatrick, 201-02, and Holmes and Szeczi, 136.

(6.) If in the beginning there was what Davidoff and Hall call a "contradiction between women's perceived
and actual relation to the economy," that gap only widened over time as conventions for the representation
of class and gender solidified, resulting in a "growing feeling that genteel women, particularly the young
and unmarried, should be removed from contact with such a workforce" (273, 274). They suggest that the
"concerted attack on any display of female sexual independence may have much to do with fears about
new opportunities for their economic activity" (275; original emphasis), and their research indicates that
over time, women's ability to use their property as they chose, including to increase it, decreased as
definitions of femininity narrowed.

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