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“MY APOLOGIES FOR THIS INCONVENIENT ABDUCTION”

Rakish Reformation in Sarah Fielding’s History of Ophelia

Mary Ann Rooks

A Rake is a man always to be pitied; and if he lives, is one day certainly reclaimed; for his faults proceed not from choice or inclination, but from strong passions and appetites, which are in youth too violent for the curb of reason, good sense, good manners, and good-nature. . . . He is a poor unwieldy wretch that commits faults out of the redundance of his good qualities. —Sir Richard Steele

I never saw any Thing but Repentance succeed a Marriage with a Rake.—
Sarah Fielding

Sarah Fielding, self-styled moralist and philosopher poet, frequently explores constructions of femininity and their cultural implications her novels. *The Cry* (1754), *The Lives of Cleopatra and Octavia* (1757), *The History of the Countess of Dellwyn* (1759), and *The History of Ophelia* (1760), for example, all tell tales of women's adventures (or misadventures) that complexly engage questions of the role and status of women, particularly women with little or no male protection, carving out identities in patriarchal cultures. Again and again, she thrusts female characters into a world of powerful social, institutional, and other forces where they struggle to discover or maintain an autonomous sense of self and purpose. *The Cry's* Cylanda and *The Countess's* Charlotte are both raised (motherless) by fathers whose influence encourages desires and ambitions detrimental to their "success" as exemplars of feminine behavior. Cleopatra—also fatherless at the start of her narrative—performs spectacles of femininity that are meticulously calculated masks responding to male desire and patriarchal conceptions of normative femininity in order to maintain her autonomy and agency in a world dominated by military conquest. Ophelia, an orphan raised in country isolation by her aunt, is initiated into adulthood by abduction and forced to construct her self-in-society with only her male captor and his cohorts as her guides. In each of these cases, the heroine repeatedly confronts "corrections" of her own desires or sense of self in the face of powerful social norms, particularly constructions of "weaker-sex" womanhood. What makes the case of *Ophelia* interesting is that, rather than condemning the forces constricting the titular character's autonomy and threatening her development of agency, the novel excuses them; it proffers a defense of abduction, confinement, and meticulously orchestrated deceit perpetrated by a rake based on the fanciful assumption that the influence of a "perfect" woman is the missing link between a rake's vicious and virtuous propensities.

Though I am feminist critic and fan of Sarah Fielding, I must admit that on several levels *Ophelia* is frustrating and disappointing. In Fielding's eighth and final novel, following novels with heroines whose plights expose the catastrophic potentialities of eighteenth-century social constructions of femininity and constrictions on women, wishful thinking led me to expect (especially in an abduction narrative) a strong repudiation of the vulnerable positions of women in patriarchal society, perhaps a powerful

articulation of the evils of libertinism, and possibly even (dare one wish?) a demonstration of resistive strength rooted in the heroine's intelligence and desire for agency. Overtly, at least, *Ophelia* does none of this. On the contrary—feminine vulnerability, ignorant "simplicity," and submission are seemingly endorsed as Ophelia falls into what modern psychology identifies as Stockholm syndrome; patriarchal hegemony is reinforced through the (re)enactment of social normalization, as Ophelia is safely tucked away in marital bliss at the end of the narrative; and Fielding embraces the view of the rake (in stark contrast to Richardson's in *Clarissa*) as a misunderstood, boyish aristocrat whose honest nature simply needs the opportunity and motivation to repent and reform. Though there are arguments to be made on behalf of Fielding as a forward-thinking critic of gender and social norms in this as in her other novels, my interest in the following analysis of *Ophelia* focuses on her use of the naive ingénue as corrective medicine for the misunderstood rake.

Both Peter Sabor and Nancy Paul call attention to the fact that *Ophelia* reformulates the story of Samuel Richardson's libertine in *Clarissa*. It is well known that Fielding had a close relationship with Samuel Richardson (who was both a mentor and occasional publisher of her works) and that, as is evidenced by her *Remarks on Clarissa*, she admired his work. In his introduction to the *Ophelia*, Sabor notes that Fielding's use of the epistolary form allows her to "write to the moment" (in the method of Richardson), that Ophelia's entrance into "society as a quasi-primitive figure, bewildered by the regulations governing English social life" enables a critique of social folly and vice, and that the "contrast between Wales and England allows Fielding to explore issues of nature versus nurture, of friendship versus courtship, and of morals versus manners."¹ Paul's "Is Sex Necessary? Criminal Conversation and Complicity in Sarah Fielding's *Ophelia*" calls similar attention to Ophelia's Gulliver-like perspective, through which "society and its affectations are critiqued, and the assumption that women were incapable of reason is challenged."² Calling the novel a kind of "writing back" to *Clarissa*, Paul contends that Ophelia, in her naiveté, "represses her sexuality but learns to recover it in language; she substitutes verbal

¹ Peter Sabor, introduction, Sarah Fielding, *The History of Ophelia*, (Peterborough: Broadview Press, 2004), 18, 26.

² Nancy Paul, "Is Sex Necessary? Criminal Conversation and Complicity in Sarah Fielding's *Ophelia*," *Lumen* 16 (1997): 114.

intercourse for sexual.”³ In this reading, Ophelia becomes complicit in her own captivity, preferring to “remain in a dangerous situation rather than attempt escape” because she is learning to express sexual desire through language.⁴ Both of these approaches call important attention to the strengths of the narrative, particularly the ways it might be read as socially transgressive.

In “Site/Sight and Sensibility: The Socializing Function of the Gaze in Sarah Fielding’s *The History of Ophelia*” Susan McNeill-Bindon identifies Ophelia as her abductor’s (Lord Dorchester’s) “colonial subject” in London, noting that she is “marked as ‘Other’ by her dress, her actions, and her overall appearance.” Focusing on the importance of “the gaze/gazer dialectic,” McNeill-Bindon, too, highlights the centrality of Fielding’s use of the perspective of innocent observer to critique fashionable manners and London society.⁵ She contends that Ophelia’s self-consciousness and discomfort with being stared at “drive her desire to change and assimilate” (60).⁶ Similarly, Anna Atkinson, in “Sarah Fielding’s *The History of Ophelia*: ‘Liberty of Thought’ and the Problem with Paradise,” identifies the novel as resistive because each of the forms of community offered by the novel—“patroness/humble companion, marriage, and even female separatism”—relies on the silence of their less empowered or disenfranchised members.⁷ Concluding that Ophelia’s relationships and ultimate marriage highlight her lack of subjectivity and voice, Atkinson finds the ending morally ambiguous, at least partly due to what she identifies as the “bitterly ironic subtext of [Ophelia’s] acceptance of Dorchester’s marriage proposal.”⁸

Finally, noting that though Fielding’s last two novels “seem, on first consideration, to be much more conventional than her earlier works,” Linda Bree sees in *The Countess of Dellwyn* and *Ophelia* a “realistically depicted, recognizably contemporary social world—an urban society based

³ Paul, “Is Sex Necessary?” 114.

⁴ Paul, “Is Sex Necessary?” 121.

⁵ Susan McNeill-Bindon, “Site/Sight and Sensibility: The Socializing Function of the Gaze in Sarah Fielding’s *The History of Ophelia*,” in ed., Marianna Dezio, *Literary and Cultural Intersections During the Long Eighteenth Century* (Newcastle Upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2008), 68.

⁶ McNeill-Bindon, “Site/Sight and Sensibility,” 60.

⁷ Anna Atkinson, “Sarah Fielding’s *The History of Ophelia*: ‘Liberty of Thought’ and the Problem with Paradise,” *Eighteenth-Century Women: Studies in their Lives, Work, and Culture* 4 (2006): 106.

⁸ Atkinson, “Liberty of Thought,” 126.

on materialism and personal indulgence; with a very real capacity to corrupt innocent young women who stray unwarily into its orbit."⁹ Dismissing monetary motives for Fielding's conventionality (because economic necessity was a constant throughout Fielding's life), Bree argues compellingly that this newfound realism facilitates an identification with the heroines of these novels which complicates what might otherwise be deemed unsatisfying "moral judgments."¹⁰ She examines what is undeniably one of the most admirable qualities of Ophelia—a strength in the face of daunting social challenges and domineering threats to physical and expressive freedoms that anticipates Elizabeth Bennett's courage rising "with every attempt to intimidate." Bree rightly notes that Ophelia is surprisingly courageous in her resistance to the lures and luxuries of London fashionable society, and in her reaction to not one, but three potentially terrifying abductions. But Ophelia is no Elizabeth Bennett, wise in the ways of the world and wary of the machinations of men and society; no, she is a primitive, "fair savage," unable to resent insults or threats to her virtue because she does not understand them. Though the core narrative—of abduction rewarded—is morally objectionable (as Henry Fielding's and others' responses to *Pamela* illustrate), Ophelia's story is additionally complicated by the fact that she is not protected by any great sense of her own virtue, or her strength, or her resistance, but merely by her ignorant innocence and the generosity of her abductor. By making ignorance and dependence her heroine's primary defenses, does Fielding participate in the very subjugation and oppression that she elsewhere seems to decry? Her abducted heroine, in some ways more like Pamela than Clarissa, happily manages to avoid rape and death, but does the fact that she is unable to conceive of the threat of rape make her situation any less dangerous or abhorrent? Does the eventual reformation of the rake excuse his actions and make the marriage resolution somehow more palatable?

One need only call to mind Gay's charismatic Macheath, Haywood's vain D'Elmont, or Richardson's calculating Lovelace to understand why the rake is both a popular and a controversial staple of eighteenth-century fiction. The character of the rake introduces many narrative opportunities—for introducing tension and adventure, exposing assumptions about class

⁹ Linda Bree, *Sarah Fielding*, Twayne's English Authors Series (New York: Simon & Shuster Macmillan, 1996), 123.

¹⁰ Bree, *Sarah Fielding*, 124.

hierarchies and gender norms, and exploring both moral truth and the locus of moral authority, to name a few. Is the rake a social parasite whose machinations, reflective of a dying age of aristocratic privilege, undermine the moral authority of the elite and wreak havoc on the lives of young women? Or is he, as Addison describes, a misunderstood youth, victimized by his own passions, who needs to be pitied rather than reviled in order to mend his self-destructive ways? The many gradations along the continuum from vicious parasite to errant, but good-hearted youth provide a rich field of possibilities for authors of the age. Choices regarding the representation of the rake can speak to a plethora of social, political, and cultural tensions as well as an author's perception of the form and function of literature. (In an effort to amuse and instruct, which function takes priority? Is instruction best communicated through Samuel Johnson's unmixed characters, with evildoers satisfactorily punished and exemplars duly rewarded, or through the entertaining but morally ambiguous Tom Jones's of the fictional world?) In the case of Fielding's *Ophelia*, the "hero" is a far cry from the infamously licentious libertines of, say, Restoration comedy, but Dorchester's crimes, vicious machinations, and anti-social philosophies certainly qualify him as a rake. His cruel abduction and manipulations of Ophelia are rooted in his sense of aristocratic entitlement, male superiority, and moral imperiousness. Even he acknowledges some culpability for his actions, telling Lord Larbourogh, "I cannot forbear calling myself a Villain," but he follows this with a shockingly unapologetic description of his strategy for Ophelia's corruption:

A short Acquaintance with her Principles, shewed me the Necessity of preserving her from all Suspicion of my Design. The only Method was to keep her in Ignorance of the Ways of Men in this enlightened Corner of the World. From the dull Simplicity and Innocence in which she was bred...I was convinced her Prejudices in Favour of lawful Unions must be great. This excited my Invention, and I considered all Ways of keeping the Difference of our Manners from her Knowledge. I instructed her Servant, but without imparting my Reasons to her; and as I furnished her with Books, I have carefully excluded all by which she could form a Notion of any Customs, that might raise Suspensions in her Mind.¹¹

¹¹ Sarah Fielding, *The History of Ophelia*, ed. Peter Sabor (Peterborough: Broadview Press, 2004), 233, 235.

While his conscious, meticulous orchestration of all of Ophelia's experiences remind one of the predatory nature of Lovelace, his seemingly sincere love for his captive and eventual reform bring to mind Tom Jones. Wherever one places Dorchester on the scale from parasitic predator to misguided youth, however, his "successes"—silencing Ophelia, "educating" her, creating unquestioning dependence, inspiring her love, and eventually marrying her—suggest that the novel endorses, at least to some degree, a "boys will be boys" attitude toward the rake. Though Dorchester does not manage to make Ophelia his mistress, that his only punishment for abducting her, abusing her, and holding her captive is reformation and marriage apologizes for rakish behavior in ways surprisingly uncharacteristic of Fielding's works.

The rake often relies on the fact that his female victim, because of her lack of experience in the world, is unprepared to see through his machinations and pretended motives—and Dorchester's prey is unusually vulnerable in this regard. Raised in country isolation (in Wales) by an aunt who has removed herself from all society because she was tricked into marrying and moving to the American colonies with a man she soon learned was already married, Ophelia has had none of the advantages of even a Pamela or a Clarissa when it comes to recognizing the rakish tendencies of licentious men. Ophelia has no older brother or father to serve as a role model and protector, or to warn her to be on her guard. She has witnessed no social events, wherein she might observe interactions between the sexes; heard no church sermons, which might have familiarized her with the transgressions of biblical whores; and read no books with any material that would inform her "of the existence of Vices, which a pure Imagination, untaught by Observation and Experiences, cannot represent to itself" (Fielding 44). Her embittered aunt, in other words, has in no way prepared her for any encounter with male sexual desire, let alone a sustained assault on her virtue; indeed, unlike her counterparts in Richardson's novels, she has no sense of what female "virtue" is, and therefore cannot know what kind of danger she confronts or how to begin to protect herself. From their first meeting, Dorchester recognizes and begins to play upon her ignorant simplicity. His strategy for seducing her, for making her his mistress, is to keep her blind to the danger she faces long enough to inspire a devotion that will lead to her ruin.

Like most rakes, Dorchester is an attractive, elegant, well-spoken

nobleman proficient in the visual and verbal arts of seduction. Building on the desiderata of narratives of romance and adventure, Fielding introduces him as a mysterious, handsome stranger who, lost in his countryside ramblings, stumbles upon an idyllic cottage complete with an innocent young maiden ripe for "rescue." Ophelia's reflective narration of her first encounter with Dorchester provides a striking contrast between her and her aunt's reaction to the event. Ophelia recalls being "accosted by a young Gentleman whose Cloaths outshone the gentle Lustre of the Moon, at least to Eyes so unaccustomed as mine to any but the plainest Dress" and notes her open admiration of "the Stranger's Countenance," with its blend of "elegant Proportion," "Delicacy," and "Dignity" (45). She is moved by his flattering description of "the rural Beauties which had captivated his Fancy," but says she did not "understand [herself] to be the Treasure he meant, though his Eyes . . . told his Admiration" (46). She is, in sum, shocked but delighted, confused but intrigued, impressed but slightly cautious. Her aunt, in contrast, is suspicious, guarded, and openly hostile. Her aunt responds to Dorchester's request for hospitality with a rebuke: "fye, Sir, said she, can you expect hospitality from us, when you, with more than savage Cruelty endeavour to pervert with pernicious Flattery, a Mind hitherto Educated in Purity and Truth?" (46). Given Dorchester's worldly experience, his hubris and sense of male aristocratic entitlement, and his solipsistic philosophy of love and marriage, it is difficult to believe that he did not immediately recognize both an opportunity and a challenge in this initial encounter with aunt and fair dependent. As his visit continues, his flatteries become more and more aggressive and almost nauseatingly excessive: he is nearly incapacitated by his admiration of the "rural Beauties" he encounters, including, according to Ophelia, "the Embroidery of the Chairs, Curtains, Bed, &c," the "Salads, Milk, and Eggs" that are their simple sustenance, and even "the Whiteness of [their] Wooden Bowls" (47-48). Ophelia describes him at one point as being "so susceptible of Wonder, or surprized at the Sight of a pretty Woman" that he is "sincerely Astonished at entering a little Hovel, and finding in it neat Rooms, furnished with the greatest Elegance" (47). Ophelia is describing a man who, in a very short time, will have abducted her and who will repeatedly excuse himself from culpability for the abduction by claiming that he has rescued her from an intolerably dull, rustic life. She will, he repeatedly claims, be much happier with him than in, as he later says, "the

dull Solitude from whence I have brought you, to introduce you into a Variety of lively and enchanting Pleasures" (53). Given such statements, it is hard to sustain a belief that Dorchester was ever sincerely impressed by the whiteness of wooden bowls. It is easier to imagine that Ophelia's remembrance of the encounter fails to recognize Dorchester's deliberate attempts at manipulation. Undoubtedly, Ophelia's innocent vulnerability and mutability caught his attention and added to his attraction. He flatters and cajoles his way into staying one night in the cottage, but finds his strenuous efforts to continue his stay fall on deaf ears. Dorchester's true motivation for abducting Ophelia is unknowable—perhaps it is rooted in an intense desire for his target, in a romantic penchant for adventure, in a perceived insult against his lordly prerogative caused by Ophelia's aunt's rejection, or a combination of all three. Whatever Dorchester's motives, to Ophelia's aunt's discredit, there is no doubt that she has poorly prepared her niece for life outside their rural environs, let alone for defense against a threat (an assault on her virtue) she cannot even name.

Given Ophelia's isolated upbringing and lack of experience with love, sexual desire, and the ways of the world, it is not surprising that her abduction and captivity lead to her dependence on and eventual adoration of her captor. Dorchester, well aware of her innocent simplicity, spares no opportunity to take advantage of her fright and ignorance. He is adept at turning her naiveté and embarrassment into a means of gaining ground in his quest for her trust and regard and, thereby, into the means of her seduction. Unfortunately, Ophelia does not have the understanding or language to object, in the ways Pamela does, to Dorchester's inappropriate encounters, comments, or actions; in fact, she tends to identify what in *Pamela* would be deemed inappropriate or offensive as a mark of Dorchester's affection or sincere concern for her wellbeing. When, shortly after her arrival at Dorchester's estate, Ophelia catches him silently observing her as she is trying on her new attire and admiring herself in the mirror, she finds no offense and raises no objection. On the contrary, when she notices him, she marks with appreciation his compliments and tenderness: "He lavished every Expression that could shew me how much he was delighted with my Person. My Complexion, my Eyes, my Hair, every Feature, received new Praises; my Air and Shape, were not passed over in silence. He kissed my Hands a thousand Times, and would not part with them out of is. Surely no Eyes ever expressed such a mixture of Tenderness

and Admiration . . ." (62). Far from daunted by such transgressive attention, she is flattered by his subsequent awkwardness at breakfast (he spills his tea and scalds himself) and the fact he will not let her change clothes:

It was almost Dinner Time before I could prevail on my Lord to leave me, to put on Cloaths more proper for common wear, which at last he did, I dare say not a little pleased at finding that what he must have designed for captivating a childish Fancy, and corrupting by glaring Follies a Mind bred in Simplicity and Reason, had succeeded so well. (63)

Such moments cause Ophelia to be embarrassed and confused, but not angry or on her guard. On the contrary, she learns to become pleased by and grateful for Dorchester's kind indulgences. When he takes her to church and exposes her to gawking parishioners, he allays her anxiety by attributing their stares to her captivating beauty, not to her odd and sudden appearance. When he sends her out into the community with money, and she blunders in her choice of objects of benevolence, he kindly excuses her "Errors," gives her more money, and schools her in the proper dispensation of charity. When he takes on the project of educating her and opening her mind, he both impresses upon her a sense of her own childishness and ignorance and positions himself as wise, caring mentor. She labels his educational efforts "a Task for which nothing but great Affection for me, cou'd render tolerable to one of an Understanding so far superior," and gratefully adds, "I could not but be delighted, when I observed how gracefully he would, by letting down his own Understanding, endeavour to raise mine, more to a Level with it" (76). These and numerous other examples demonstrate what Dorchester later admits is a conscious strategy of repeatedly fostering, then allaying, his captive's fears and self-consciousness as the best path toward breaking down her distrust and generating a sense of gratitude and affection.

The effectiveness and impact of Dorchester's strategies for gaining control over his captive are disturbing: Ophelia quickly learns to depend on and feel affection for him, to refrain from making remarks or acting in ways that might arouse his anger, and even to blame herself for her own misgivings and his vicious outbursts. In fact, her growing regard for Dorchester shares striking similarities to what is now defined as Stockholm syndrome, "a paradoxical psychological phenomenon wherein

a positive bond between hostage and captor occurs that appears irrational in light of the frightening ordeal endured by the victims."¹² According to a 2007 analysis titled "Understanding Stockholm Syndrome," in captivity situations of "long duration . . . [with] continued contact between the perpetrator and hostage, and a high level of emotion," a strong emotional bond can develop if "the captor has stripped nearly all forms of independence and gained control of the victim's life, as well as basic needs for survival."¹³ This syndrome often witnesses the victim's return to "a state of infancy," while "the perpetrator serves as a mother figure protecting her child from a threatening outside world"; indeed, in many cases "victims seem more concerned about the perpetrator's feelings than their own. [They] are encouraged to develop psychological characteristics pleasing to hostage takers, such as dependency; lack of initiative; and an inability to act, decide, or think."¹⁴ Of course, Ophelia, though a captive, is not in a hostage situation—she is not entirely isolated from communication with society; she is under little fear of death, and there are no authorities negotiating demands for her release. That said, there are interesting similarities here: her long captivity does expose her to continuous and emotionally charged contact with a captor who has stripped her of "nearly all forms of independence" and upon whom she relies for the necessities of life; she has been presented with the possibility of release (Dorchester tells her he will release her in one year if, at that point, she still wants to leave); and she is, though she does not know it, under physical threat (as *Clarissa* records, admiration and adoration are no protection against rape). Keeping these similarities in mind serves to highlight the fact that Dorchester—despite his "tender attentions" and desire to "educate" his victim—is a criminal. He is an abductor and would-be seducer, a kidnapper and captor, a lordly scoffer at the inconvenient vows of marriage, and a potential rapist. He is, in short, a villain.

That Dorchester is not punished as a villain, that he suffers no substantive consequences for his crimes, testifies to the era's mixed feelings concerning what Erin Mackie identifies as the "status of the much-in-

¹² Nathalie De Fabrique, et. al., "Understanding Stockholm Syndrome," *FBI Law Enforcement Bulletin* 76.7 (July, 2007): 12.

¹³ De Fabrique, "Understanding Stockholm Syndrome," 11, 13.

¹⁴ De Fabrique, "Understanding Stockholm Syndrome," 13, 14.

dulged rake.”¹⁵ Addison’s famous defense of the rake as a man to be pitied and taught the error of his ways is, of course, only one of countless commentaries on the subject, commentaries that range from humorous poetic celebration to vehement religious condemnation of the rake’s extra-societal, often extra-lawful exuberance. Mackie attributes the eighteenth-century fascination with rakes, along with highwaymen and pirates, to an uncomfortable shifting about of concepts of masculinity and waning aristocratic power rooted in the Restoration. “Because of anti-aristocratic cultural traditions confirmed by the settlement of 1689,” Mackie contends, “gendered sexual license registered socially as aristocratic. More exclusively than any other character, the rake embodies this elite license and the politics of nostalgia in which it is embedded.”¹⁶ Defenses of the rake, intertwined with discomfort regarding the vulnerability of time-honored concepts of authority, status, and male privilege, take three forms:

First, there is the celebratory defense of the rake inspired by his stylistic, that is, aesthetic and performative, mastery. Then there are apologies for his misconduct based on appeals to the irresistible pressures of his innate character, as with Steele’s sentimentally noble rake. Finally, there are excuses made for him that appeal to the *merely* performative and thus ultimately inconsequential status of this behavior.¹⁷

In *Ophelia*, all three of these defenses are employed. I have already pointed to Dorchester’s mastery of language, particularly flattery, and his ability to use performance to control the feelings, speech, and actions of his captor. Let me add one more example. In one of many demonstrations of his stylistic and performative skills, after he has completed a tour of Ophelia’s aunt’s house in Wales, walking through it as though at the height reverence (as though he were walking through a shrine), he works on her aunt by complimenting her “good Sense and Reason,” declaring that “the Admiration her way of Life had excited” his interest in living the same way, and adding, “with a Smile, that if she would excuse him, he must just

¹⁵ Erin Mackie, *Rakes, Highwaymen, and Pirates: The Making of the Modern Gentleman in the Eighteenth Century* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2009), 9.

¹⁶ Mackie, *Rakes, Highwaymen, and Pirates*, 11.

¹⁷ Mackie, *Rakes, Highwaymen, and Pirates*, 35.

observe that she had abated his Astonishment, at finding such a heavenly Form in that Place, since he now understood her Niece to be no more than one might expect" from such a life as her aunt has designed (47-48). Here as elsewhere, Dorchester's mastery of the "stylistics" of the rake is undeniable. In passages that detail Ophelia's reactions to the machinations of her captor and in Dorchester's and others' explanatory defenses of his pursuit of Ophelia, one also finds "apologies" for rakish conduct rooted in Mackie's notions that the rake's good nature has simply been led astray by misguided sentiments and that his actions are not terribly serious, let alone criminal, because their consequences are not grave.

Ophelia's conduct clearly participates, as I've noted Paul points out, in the continuance of her own captivity. Though she raises strong objections to her abduction early in the text, she quickly learns the skill of altering her speech and behavior to suit Dorchester's whims and desires. Stockholm syndrome is helpful in understanding what might otherwise be seen as Fielding's construction of a heroine whose weakness, ignorance, docility, and gullibility are necessary partners to her purity and goodness as the celebrated means of rescuing an errant young gentleman from his own, and others' destruction. Though Ophelia is (by modern standards) a child on the eve of her abduction, she clearly begins a new state of "child-like dependency" during her captivity and quickly learns to become more concerned about her captor's feelings than her own. Exposed violently and abruptly to a world wholly unknown to her (witnessed by the fact that the first time she sees a carriage she believes it is a small, mobile house), she cannot help but depend upon her persecutor as her protector and guide. Dorchester deprives her of her mother figure, then shrewdly substitutes himself as father figure, protecting his child from what he has constructed as a "threatening outside world." His fascination with dressing her, his orchestrated "protections" of her from the gaze of outsiders, and his desire to educate her in ways that will make her a good companion (without exposing her to any ideas that will make her suspicious of his designs) are all evidence of his orchestrated villainy. If Ophelia's quick and growing love of Dorchester seems baffling and unpalatable, it is at least partly explained by the psychology of captivity. Complicating this psychological explanation, however, is the fact that Ophelia's reflections and reactions reinforce what Mackie identifies as key concepts supporting perceptions the rake as a goodhearted but misguided young lord whose crimes are not "criminal"

because his behavior is "merely performative" (apparently having no serious consequences). Ophelia develops the characteristics of Stockholm syndrome, "such as dependency; lack of initiative; and an inability to act, decide, or think." But to what degree are these consequences presented as objectionable? One can easily imagine that in an eighteenth-century woman (or novel) these are far from offensive traits; on the contrary, Ophelia's education at the hands of Dorchester helps her to conform to normative femininity and reinforces aristocratic and patriarchal privilege.

During their time in London and visit to Tunbridge Wells, Dorchester has ample opportunity to continue his "education" of Ophelia as worthy mistress. In order to make her a better "companion," he introduces her to fashionable society—conversation, cards, theater, and opera—and impresses her with his command of culture, customs, and people. In the fashion of Lovelace, he tightly controls her exposure and experiences at all times and in all places. Ophelia explains his strategy for avoiding suspicion and keeping her silent in London:

The Day before we left [for London] Lord *Dorchester* told me, that "It would be advisable for me to be silent as to my Birth and former Way of Life, as well as to the Means by which I was taken from it; for the Oddness of the Event, would make People curious to see me, and so attentive in observing me, as would greatly Pain my natural Bashfulness; and that if they perceived my Ignorance of the Customs of the World it would subject me to Ridicule." He therefore advised me "to give Way only to silent Wonder, if any thing surprized me, except when he only was present." (80-81)

Playing again on what McNeill-Bindon identifies as Ophelia's paralyzing fear of the gaze, he cleverly imposes on her the dangers of speaking in order to both make her more dependent and to avoid any slips of the tongue that might expose their true relationship. These ends are further served by his tight control over her friendships. He discourages, for example, a developing friendship with the honest Lady Baden, but encourages a friendship with the very useful Lady Palestine, to whom he has openly related his desires:

Lord *Dorchester* had been one of [Lady Palestine's] Train; more from Fashion and Indolence, than from Inclination; and as he

knew Money had no more Charms for her than Love, he made little Scruple of acquainting her with his Passion for me, and of the Means he intended to pursue. He wished to have me introduced into the World, as he thought it might both improve and amuse me; ...he did not chuse that any Person should have Reason to think ill of me, but himself. (110)

Lady Palestine is a useful tool because she subscribes to the view of the rake as a gentleman entitled to dalliances that release his natural energies and because, understanding affairs with country maidens are of little consequence, she will not be tempted to reveal Dorchester's secrets. She initially offers an argument against Dorchester's plans, but it is only to suggest that his seduction of Ophelia might be achieved more effectively through Ophelia's quick and dirty introduction to the baser impulses of humankind. Expose her to lust and jealousy, greed and vanity, and the many pleasures of immoral behavior, and she will soon be corrupted enough for an easy seduction.¹⁸ Dorchester dismisses the "quick and dirty" method, but only because he thinks he can have his cake and eat it too—if he is successful, he will maintain Ophelia's innocence and naive adoration even while he "ruins" her; she will sacrifice her virtue because she "loves" him, and no condemnation will fall upon him because her "choice" to become his mistress will not be debased by her corruption at the hands of fashionable society.

Unfortunately, Dorchester's methods are quite effective. Though Ophelia's growing affection is clear from early in the novel, when she is forced to spend long periods of time alone in London, she begins to recognize the depth and desperation of her love. On their first day apart, she complains: "I knew not how very dear his Company was to me, till taught by being a whole Day without it. I immediately thought I penetrated his Design in this whimsical Adventure; imagining that he certainly had contrived it as a Punishment for my Desire of leaving him; and to prevent my re-urging that Request, by making me better acquainted with my own Heart, which could never be able to bear his Absence" (86).

¹⁸ It is interesting to note that this approach is remarkably successful in Fielding's *The History of the Countess of Dellwyn*, wherein the innocent heroine is corrupted by the vices of fashionable society and seduced into marrying a count she abhors, then drawn by those same vices into committing adultery.

Here we find a reiteration of an old lesson: do not ask to be taken to your aunt's house and do not complain about your confinement. Ophelia increasingly blames herself for both perceived and actual slights by her persecutor. When he is distant, it must be her fault; when he is short with her, it indicates that she has made some blunder; when he deserts her, it is because she has not accommodated his wishes for her undivided and devout attention. This last is best demonstrated by Ophelia's first lesson on jealousy. At one of Lady Palestine's parties, always awkward for our poor ingénue, Charles Lisdale notices Ophelia's discomfort and begins to converse with her. Comforted by the fact that someone is paying her kind (rather than gawking) attention, she enjoys his conversation and appreciates his attentions. Not unexpectedly, Dorchester's observation of Ophelia's behavior makes him furious. While Dorchester is stewing in his jealousy, the company at the party decides to go to the theater. Near the end of the play, Dorchester, behaving like a petulant child, abandons Ophelia, forcing her to accept Lisdale's company home. Though Ophelia is confused by Dorchester's behavior, especially because he punishes her by ignoring her (leaving her in utter isolation) for several days after the play, she in no way becomes angry with him. Instead, she blames herself for his inattention:

[One] Evening a Thought arose, that perhaps this great Change in a Disposition, which used to be unclouded, equally serene, and pleasing, might proceed from Distemper. The Possibility of this no sooner struck me, than I began to take myself to Task for complaining of him, when I ought rather to pity, nurse, and attend him. I now arraigned my own Heart more bitterly than I had yet done his, and looking on my present situation...was miserable. (121)

This self-admonition becomes Ophelia's standard reaction to the suffering to which she is continually subjected as a consequence of Dorchester's cruel manipulations. When Ophelia is abducted by one of Dorchester's ex-girlfriends, he blames her and she blames herself; when she receives the attentions of an unnamed man at a ball, Dorchester not only blames her, but also convinces her of the seriousness of her actions by making her feel responsible for his duel with the offender; when Dorchester's friend, Lord Larborough, begins to hint at the truth about Dorchester's attentions, Dorchester turns her doubts into a guilty sense of ingratitude. In all of

these cases, Ophelia blames herself and attempts to "correct" her offensive behavior. Though Ophelia's self-corrections do eventually come to an end when she secretly overhears Dorchester confessing his plot and describing his disdainful view of marriage to Larborough, it is remarkable that even the discovery of Dorchester's conscious viciousness alters her adoration so little that she is eventually convinced to return to and marry him.

Dorchester's "confession" and the responses to it by those who work to excuse his behavior and convince Ophelia to marry him reveal a great deal about the novel's attitude toward the rake. While Ophelia is secretly listening, Dorchester brags to Larborough about the clever effectiveness of his plan: "I cannot help but thinking," he says,

I have made a considerable Step towards Success. I have gained her Heart, my Lord, and I take that to be the sure Road to her Person, It is impossible a Woman should always resist both her Love and her Lover; they must prevail in Time, how great soever her Prudence may be, or I shall never believe Woman was made out of the Rib of a Man. . . . I already begin to suspect that Miss *Lenox* sprung from another Creation, and was made out of some more icy Composition than the rest of Woman-Kind. But yet, trust me, however cold she may naturally be, her Tenderness for me...with that Innocence which takes from her all Suspicion, consequently all Fear of having the Object of her Affections watching for a complying Moment, must, in Time, yield me the Reward for my long Services and Disappointments. (233)

Dorchester is unable to conceive of the fact that his treatment of, and plans for Ophelia are criminal and cruel. Womankind is weak and subject to emotion; Ophelia, though pure and virtuous, will find that her heart and goodness are the very tools of her destruction. Gloating over his lordly, masculine mastery over his tender, innocent prey, he explains to Larborough that this entire endeavor is really in Ophelia's best interest. He has rescued her from country simplicity and isolation and molded her, through a series of meticulously orchestrated "lessons," into his perfect companion. Though she will be ruined, unprotected, and an outcast, Dorchester will have done her a favor. Marriage, he contends, is a union of fools. Only by making Ophelia his mistress can he insure that she is with him because of her complete, utter devotion. (He ignores the fact that she will have little choice but to stay with him.)

Perhaps more frustrating than Dorchester's admiration of his own skills of seduction, and presumptive assumption that he is beguiling his captive into a better life, is the fact that even the "good" characters in the novel come to his defense. Ophelia is convinced to marry her persecutor based on the reasoning Mackie identifies as typical of eighteenth-century apologies for the rake (the rake cannot be held accountable for his offenses because he is acting under the pressure of his innate character, and his actions are of little notable consequence)—but these apologies come from surprising sources. Lady Baden, an honest and upright woman Dorchester has carefully prevented from befriending Ophelia, visits Ophelia shortly after her flight from him to explain away Dorchester's offenses. Ophelia recounts Baden telling her,

I ought not to expect consummate Virtue among a degenerate People; that it was scarcely possible to find a Man who had any Scruples in regard to his Behaviour to Women. She gave me a thousand Instances wherein the Men of the best Characters had failed; telling me, they esteemed Matrimony as so entirely a political Institution, that though each might approve of it in Society, many did not like it for themselves. That they looked on the life of a Woman who lived with them without being married, as generally most happy. That my Lord, in the Care he had taken of my Reputation, had shewn a Delicacy and an Affection for me, of which few men were capable, that, in every other Virtue, he was as nearly perfect as a human Creature could be. She told me, how much I ought to allow for the Force of Custom and Education; these had both tended to make him look on Chastity as a very small Virtue. (261)

Is there a better defense of Addison's misunderstood rake? That a woman like Baden, unquestioningly presented as a moral exemplar, speaks in defense of Dorchester's *vulnerability* to custom and society, *misunderstanding* of matrimony, and *generosity* in the treatment of a woman he has abducted and held captive for weeks, speaks volumes. At the very least, Baden's arguments on behalf of Dorchester indicate an attitude toward rakish behavior that complies with Mackie's identification of the era's apologetics for the rake. Men of Dorchester's caliber and upbringing are to be admired for their seductive prowess, not to be held accountable for

beliefs, behaviors, or actions resulting from the pursuit of their ungoverned desires. Men are not expected to have "scruples"; it is in their nature to take advantage of women and to define their conquests as "favors" to the women they have pursued. Women who fall prey to men who are not careful of their reputation have only themselves to blame. Women in Ophelia's situation should be grateful for the Dorchester's of the world—in few men will a woman find kindness in abduction, education in captivity, and careful attention to reputation in orchestrated seduction. Even Baden, in short, apologizes for Dorchester's crimes and suggests that the perpetrator be excused.

To Ophelia's credit, Baden's speech moves her, but does not quite convince her to return to her captivity; unfortunately, there is a bigger gun on the way. Dorchester visits Ophelia's aunt and convinces her to travel to London to make a plea on his behalf. Like Baden, Ophelia's aunt comes to believe and argue that Dorchester's good nature has been corrupted and that he has "suffered so much he deserve[s] to be forgiven" (274). Apparently, Dorchester's "suffering," the heartbreak he feels at the loss of Ophelia, outweighs or somehow excuses Ophelia's experience of abduction, captivity, threats, isolation, repeated humiliations, and the manipulation of all of her worldly affairs. Disappointingly, though she voices objections and is overwhelmed by emotions, Ophelia eventually admits that she is happy to find herself in compliance with Dorchester's long-held desires. Her description of her change of heart reveals both her aunt's influence and her own inclinations:

My Aunt's Arguments were much the same with Miss *Baden's*, and would not have proved more efficacious, had it not been easier to influence my Heart, than to convince my Reason. Her Opinion gave a Sanction for my yielding; I could call my Weakness obedient; an Opportunity of so agreeably deceiving myself, staggered my Resolution, and I began to listen with Pleasure to the Apology my Aunt made for him. (274)

Though it is not surprising, given her history of captivity, to read Ophelia's happy welcome of an excuse to embrace her persecutor, this is a frustrating turn of events for any reader who wishes to see a fair heroine resist and resent kidnapping and captivity as a road to romance. Readers expecting serious consequences (in line with Lovelace's suffering and death) for a

rake's predatory behavior, are met instead with excuses, apologies, and a happy ending. Ophelia's aunt, instead of endorsing anger or punishment, sanctions Ophelia's continued captivity based on the tenuous belief that her captor has been merely misbehaving.

Though much can be said, and has been said, on behalf of *Ophelia's* use of the ingénue as a means of critiquing the hypocrisies and moral shortcomings of fashionable eighteenth-century English society, there is also much to be learned from the novel's excuses for its rakish hero. After convincing Ophelia to marry him, Ophelia's aunt says to Dorchester,

I never saw any Thing but Repentance succeed a Marriage with a Rake, and yet Compassion for you, and, indeed, for my Niece, whose Fondness for you is but too visible...has make me plead your Cause, and prevail in it. *** I pitied you for having a worthy Mind so corrupted. Can you do less, my Lord, than reward *Ophelia's* Love and my Compassion, by preserving the Principles you now profess, and by keeping the strictest guard over yourself, lest you should again deviate from the Path of Virtue? I know you are not absolutely a Rake, and therein I place my Hopes. (275)

The rake, in this light, is a man worthy of compassion because he has earned the dependence and adoration of his hostage; he is a man whose offenses are to be excused because he has "protected" his prey from condemnation for offenses he created; and he is a man who is rewarded, ultimately, because his newly professed principles outweigh the moral and social import of his crimes.

It is noteworthy that Ophelia's devotion to Dorchester, carefully cultivated through an orchestrated series of "lessons" of humiliation and rescue, is a key component in Ophelia's aunt's reasoning on Dorchester's behalf. Ophelia's affection for Dorchester is, as I have demonstrated, based on dubious foundations. As a captive, she is under the absolute control of a captor upon whom she depends for the basic necessities of life. Her captor has used the promise of freedom and threatening behavior to "modify" her behavior and has established a pattern of rewarding any "corrections" she makes (if they move her toward becoming his ideal mistress) by refraining from punishments ranging from verbal reprimands to abandonment in friendless, alien environments. Dorchester has very expertly schooled Ophelia to depend on him, to feel affection for him,

and to blame herself for every offense he constructs against her. That her aunt excuses his offenses speaks to the strength of the mythos of the rake as poor, misunderstood (but highly privileged) wretch in need of reclamation. That Ophelia forgives and marries her persecutor, and reflectively informs readers that this was a wise move, speaks to Fielding's unsettling defense of the rake.

Thus far, scholarly responses to *Ophelia* have focused primarily on the ways the novel is critical of the customs and values of fashionable society in the eighteenth century. I recognize the value of these studies—the novel does, indeed, expose aristocratic hypocrisies and the dangers to which unprotected young women are exposed in London and like environs. But it is important not to ignore the less savory aspects of the text. The novel depends on the heroine's ignorance of social customs and sexual desires not only to push forward the plot, but also to defend and excuse the behavior of the "hero." Unlike Pamela or Clarissa, with their astute and stubborn sense of virtue, Ophelia has no understanding of the danger she is in; she is at the mercy of Dorchester's "good nature." Dorchester, though charming and charismatic, is just as often cruel as he is kind, and in his smug superiority he sincerely believes he will be doing Ophelia a favor by making her his mistress. That he is so often and so thoroughly excused for his offenses—to the extent that Ophelia usually blames herself for them—supports a view of the rake as misguided youth, in need of pity and perhaps rehabilitation. Stockholm syndrome may go some way toward excusing the weakness and malleability of Ophelia's character, but what excuse mollifies the behavior of Dorchester? "Rakish behavior," though it may be criminal, is reformed, and is not taken seriously in this novel. Instead, silenced, malleable, "weaker-sex" womanhood is celebrated as a means of reforming the rake and blissful marriage is proffered as his reward.