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Recrafting the Model of the Portuguese Nun in England: Aphra Behn and Delarivier Manley´s Letter Fictions

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ABSTRACT

The first English translation of *Lettres portugaises* was published in 1678 as *Five Love-Letters from a Nun to a Cavalier*. Capitalising on its literary success, the nun's letters were extended and revised in two sequels. Their influence on women's autochthonous fiction was strong in the years that followed. I will first focus on the history of the English reception of these French works to concentrate afterwards on two texts: Aphra Behn's *Love-Letters between a Nobleman and His Sister* (1684-85) and Delarivier Manley's *Letters* (1696). Whereas the former questions the veracity of the love letter by exploring the artificiality of love discourses and their dangerous effects on women's lives, the latter recrafts the tradition of the female complaint by choosing a protagonist who voices her lament on the run. The reproducibility of the nun's model makes us read *Portuguese Letters* not merely as the expression of unbidden emotion, but as a letter manual that could be revised and adapted.

KEYWORDS: *Portuguese Letters*; Love Letters; Stories of Nuns; Female Complaint; Passion and Excess; Aphra Behn; Delarivier Manley; Women's Fiction; Seventeenth Century.

1. THE ORIGINS AND PERVASIVENESS OF THE *PORTUGUESE LETTERS*[i]

The polemical origin of *Portuguese Letters* has always fascinated critics. There has been ample discussion about the authorship of the letters, pointing to Mariana de Alcoforado, sister and later Abbess of the Convento Nossa Senhora de Conceiçâo in Beja (Portugal), who had an affair with the French officer Noël Bouton, Marquis de Chamilly. Scholarship has speculated

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about who wrote them, and also about whether they were merely a French translation from the Portuguese, or an example of fiction under the cover of verisimilitude (Gonçalvez Rodrigues, 1943; Kern, 1961; Würzbach, 1969; Chupeau, 1969; Klobucka, 2006)[ii]. Those supporting their fictional status have established the connections with former epistolary works, particularly Ovid's *Heroides* and Heloise's letters to Abelard. In this light, Charles Lefcourt has read *Portuguese Letters* as "the first example of a new genre, the epistolary romance" (1976: 494), and H. P. Abbott (1980) has labelled the text a case of "letters to the self," written by a cloistered writer, a category within which he includes very different authors like Goethe, Tennyson and the author(s) of the *Portuguese Letters*[iii]. In England, the nun's letters were soon followed in translation by two sequels: *Seven Portuguese Letters*, written by "a Woman in the world, whose style is very different from that of a Cloystered Nun," ("Advertisement," A2r)[iv], and *Five Love-Letters Written by a Cavalier*, allegedly containing the French officer's responses to Marianne. The reproducibility of the model of the nun's complaint in letters helps us to read not only these texts, but also later ones inspired by them as letter manuals and fully fictional exploits rather than as exemplars of spontaneous emotion, along the lines of what Toni Bowers has described as "the outlines of a formulaic plot of seduction and betrayal" (1999: 135), present in the narrative of Tory writers like Aphra Behn and Delarivier Manley[v]. Following the impulse of the nun's letters, Behn and Manley's epistolary fictions accommodate the prevailing theory of the emotions which contemporaries like René Descartes in *The Passions of the Soul* (1650) and after him Walter Charleton in *Natural History of the Passions* (1674), proposed, as will be later exposed, but they also anticipate the trend of "contention between thought and feeling" that will be fully developed in the eighteenth century (Hultquist, 2017: 273).

Portuguese Letters have two identifiable sources: Ovid's *Heroides* and Heloise's letters to Abelard. Ovid's twenty-one passionate fictional letters are penned by mythical women to their lovers in absence. His experience of banishment from Rome gave shape to the first batch of letters. Following the example of *Heroides*, Marianne's conventual exile and her disordered mind are the necessary conditions for the writing of letters, which also resemble Heloise's to Abelard. Most interestingly, Heloise's story has been often associated with translation and transportation –of letters and bodies across time, from the twelfth to the nineteenth centuries, as Peggy Kamuf has claimed (1982: xi-xiii). As Kamuf has also argued, Heloise's letters created an "interstitial space," as she gained a voice outside the grate through the material presence of her letters and, unlike *Five Love-Letters from a Nun to a Cavalier*, is rewarded by Abelard's answers (1982: 44-45). In the image of Heloise's letters, Marianne's occupy a liminal space, though in her case her departure is aborted by the cavalier's unresponsiveness (62-63). Therefore, Marianne's helplessness represents a "movement into the no man's land between feminine closure and masculine mobility" (Kamuf, 1982: 45).

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In France, the publication of *Lettres portugaises* became a literary uproar, and invited other sequels to follow[vi]. Despite being allegedly written by a woman in love, *Five Love-Letters from a Nun to a Cavalier* and *Seven Portuguese Letters*, inaugurated a narrative tradition of male ventriloquism in which a male writer adopted the voice of a lovesick woman and imagined the effects of an intense passion on her distressed mind. This trend of male impersonation of a female voice will be pervasive in English letters in the years that followed, Defoe's Moll Flanders or Richardson's Pamela Andrews being two well-known examples. The popularity of the letters pervaded other genres, too, and the term 'Portugaise' became associated with a kind of letter exchange in which "passion was laid bare" (Abbott, 1980: 35). In earlier English revisions and adaptations of the late seventeenth century, like Behn's *Love-Letters between a Nobleman and His Sister* (1684-7) and Manley's *Letters Writen by Mrs. Manley*, young women who are usually bound by the confinement of religious enclosure, or in general by the social constraints imposed on femininity, are seduced by more experienced men, often losing their virtue and risking their honour, only to be abandoned by their male lovers, and thus offering a very complex picture of femininity under stress and in distress.

The heroine of *Five Love-Letters from a Nun to a Cavalier* suffered the consequences of falling prey to her desires, moving from self-restraint to victimhood, whereas the protagonists of the two sequels proposed freer libertine female types. In Behn's and Manley's texts, though, the interest lies not only in the fact that they choose female voices to give free rein to their desires, but also in that they transform radically the story of seduction and dejection narrated in *Portuguese Letters*. Their experiments with the motif of the woman's complaint also differ from Marianne's original letters in the twists that they add to their works: Silvia's progressive descent into marginality, adopting Philander's sexual politics, and Manley's exploration of the exilic female self in her "mobile" letters, constitute their original recrafting of the form. Behn's view of the freedom Silvia acquires in the novel is an ambiguous one; her heroine gradually evolves, thanks to the self-knowledge she acquires, into a skilful letter writer, manipulating others through the narrative potential love letters offer, but in so doing, she falls prey to the temptations of the city, finally transforming herself into a jilt. In contrast, Manley's *Letters* begin with a young lady on the run, whose mobility can be accounted as positive to a certain extent, as she uses a male prerogative, that of travelling by herself, to interact in almost equal terms with men in the public world.

2. THE *LETTRES PORTUGAISES* IN ENGLISH

The study of the literary fortunes of *Lettres portugaises* in England helps us to trace the direction that a particular type of narrative –the story of love and seduction in letters– was taking from the late 1670s onwards and, above all, the impact it had on the development of the novel genre, attracting primarily the attention of booksellers who found a very profitable business in publishing women's works, or in works allegedly by women. The first translation

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of *Five Love-Letters from a Nun to a Cavalier* by Roger L'Estrange, printed for Henry Brome, ran into several editions and reprints after 1678. After Brome's success, Richard Bentley contributed to the popularisation of the Portuguese letters by ordering in 1680 another edition of L'Estrange's translation. He specialised in the publication of French novels, as well as in their translations into English[vii]. New editions and reprints by Richard Wellington –who had inherited Bentley's copies at his death–, in partnership with Edward Rumball, followed (Plomer, 1922: 259)[viii]. The sequels of *Five Love-Letters*, however, did not attract the same attention. Only an edition of *Seven Portuguese Letters* is listed in ESTC, published in 1681 by Brome, and a first edition of *Five Love-Letters Written by a Cavalier* was also printed for Bentley and Mary Magnes in 1683, later reprinted by Bentley alone in 1694, and published in 1700 by Wellington.

The style of *Five Love-Letters from a Nun to a Cavalier* highly surpasses its two sequels, what justifies its popularity over the texts that followed. It is a highly rhetorical epistolary narrative which deploys the spontaneous expression of desire by dramatizing the nun's complaint. In the epistle to the reader, the French translator refers to the language of the text, charged with its association with the emotional states portrayed in the French *nouvelle*, which had some precedents in Marie de Lafayette's *Princesse de Montpensier* and *La princesse de Clèves*. Like them, *Five Love-Letters* portrays a woman's love plights (Green, 1927: 290-291). This highly affective environment is created by the only language, the translator claims, that can express the topic of an *amour* "without affectation," thus strengthening the association of French romances with *galanterie*, at the heart of the tradition of late seventeenth-century English amatory fiction (1678: n.p.)[ix]. Behn and Manley's experiments that followed were influenced by French romances, and above all by *Portuguese Letters*, as Ros Ballaster has claimed (1992: 42). Along those lines, Margaret Rubik has also cogently argued that Behn shows "consummate artifice" in offering vivid pictures of lack of passion control (2020: 377), and that she reflects on the excesses of libertine love, related to the expression of sentiment (Ahern, 2007: 12-ff). In both cases, moreover, *Love-Letters and Letters* managed to create a psychological intensity which replaced the convent cell for the *escritoire*.

Portuguese letters offer a detailed picture of bodily symptoms that Descartes, and Charleton after him, associated with the passions of love and desire, or cupidity: the gestures of the eyes and the face, the changing of colour, the trembling, languishing, swooning, and sighing (Descartes, 1650: 89-ff; Charleton, 1674: 113-14), will be also later described in Behn and Manley's texts, connecting body and soul as Descartes argued in his theory of the passions, as they "incite, and dispose their souls to will the things for which they prepare their bodies" (1650: 33). Since antiquity, however, the passion of love has been neatly represented by means of classic love *topoi* and *signa amoris* on which *Five Love-Letters* draws: the disquietudes provoked by the lover's absence (*absentia*); the tortures of love (*tormenta amoris*); the heartbreak or disenchantment (*nunc te cognovit*); the dying for love (*laus in amore mori*); and

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above all, the lover's complaint (*querellae*)[x]. In *A Lover's Discourse,* Roland Barthes updated some of these topics, referring to the meaning of the lover's absence, the function of the love letter, and the significance of silence, among some of them. He associated the discourse of absence with femininity, with the "rhythms of travel" and with the notion of waiting (1978: 14-15), all of which represents closely not only the experience of the Portuguese nun, but also those of Behn and Manley's heroines.

Yet, the Portuguese letters are not merely accounts of passion, but also of incipient emotion, a new turn that Ahern has also attributed to the development of empiricist thinking from the second half of the seventeenth century onwards, and which led to experimentation with forms of cognition, consciousness and subjectivity (2017: 283). This is hinted at in the use of narrative voice, at the service of verisimilitude, that is found in this corpus, though is more clearly represented in the English sequels that followed. The nun's letters often stress their own artificiality; they are described as linguistic artefacts, easily malleable and endowed with an ability to manipulate others, as the dejected nun contends in her second letter by distinguishing between words and deeds, when she claims "[t]here is so great a difference betwixt the Love I write, and That which I feel" (*Five Love-Letters,* 1669: 15), or in the third one, between words and real sentiment, as in "[b]ut my heart Contradicts my Pen" (46). The cavalier's ghostly presence in the letters also point to the power behind words; in this case, the lack of response gives rise to the letters and to the overflow of Marianne's emotions.

Five Love-Letters intersperses the sorrows and joys of love through realistic detail, as some remarkable episodes make clear, like the six months that the nun has been waiting for a letter from her lover (18), the storm that had dragged the cavalier's ship towards the coast of the Algarve (49), the year that has elapsed since she yielded to him (79), or the reference to the *balcone* that looks toward Mertola where he first saw her (65-67). The letters often use rhetorical formulae –especially the profusion of parallel and chiasmatic structures, as well as the device of the cumulative effect– to represent the evolution of Marianne's psychological state, and what is more, to represent love's anatomy, as in "[i]t was the Assiduity of your Conversation that refin'd me; your Passion that inflam'd me; Your good humour that Charm'd me; your Oaths, and Vows that confirm'd me; but 'twas my own precipitate Inclination that seduc'd me; and what's the Issue of these fair, and promising Beginnings, but Sighs, Tears, Disquiets, nay, and the worst of Deaths too, without either Hope, or Remedy" (53). Or else she construes the anxieties and contradictions of those in love, as in "[a]nd why is it that by a Conspiracy of Blind Affection, and Inexorable fate, we are still condemn'd to Love where we are Despis'd, and to hate where we are Belov'd?" (98).

The text also reflects on the status of letters as material objects, both in their presence and their absence. The nun complains because her officer has abandoned her, but even more touchingly because he doesn't answer her letters, or because when he does, they are vacuous and "impertinent." Letters, like his portrait that she has "perpetually" before her (30), are counterfeits of the addressee's presence that would continue feeding her love and her hopes.

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She explains, for example, that they would "keep me alive in the hopes of Seeing you again" (34), and occasionally she laments his coldness and apathy, the unmistakable symptoms of his dishonesty: "your Letters are so cold; so stuffed with Repetitions; the Paper not half full, and your Constraint so grosly disguis'd, that one may see with half an Eye the pain you are in till they are over" (65). In Marianne's case, however, letters are accessories to love, vehicles of complaint but also keys to the lover's heart, and in their artificiality evidence of Chamilly's false intentions; she confesses: "It is not Love alone that begets Love; there must be Skill, and Address; for it is Artifice, and not Passion, that creates Affection" (109). As Ballaster has explained in her study on amatory fiction, letters are also material in another sense: in association with the woman's body, more erotic because they are concealed (1992: 62-63). *Portuguese Letters* expose and inscribe bodies on the page, indulging the reader into a detailed account of bodily parts and bodily symptoms which passion raises. So does specifically Behn in *Love-Letters*, minutely describing bodily reactions to the heightened emotion driven by the letters. What this reaction makes clear is the distance between feeling and the expression or discourse of feelings through letters, which her narrative manifests.

The sequels capitalized on the success of the first text, though in their revision of the model, they undermined the original function of the nun's letters, misrepresenting her voice and character, and turning tragedy into farce (Ballaster, 1992: 104). In *Seven Portuguese Letters*, we find a less ideal and a more down-to-earth female voice, not a nun but "a Woman of the World", as the bookseller's advertisement declares (A2r). The text also renounces to the poignancy and the rhetorical depth of *Five Love-Letters* in favour of a more acute realism, characterized by a quick succession of local details and by an ambitious, vindictive, and even flirtatious and arrogant figure, which reminds us of the gaiety of Manley's social sketches in *Letters*. We see the protagonist, for example, "whispering one silly thing or other" in the Duke of Almeyda's ear in answer to his civility (36), though she recognises later to the cavalier, "it was only of you I whisper'd, when I inclined to the Duke, and laid my head last night so close to his" (39). There is ample evidence of the cavalier's answers, though not explicitly included, since the narrative voice refers constantly to them. Ironically, the cavalier, due to his bombastic and hollow rhetoric, is depicted as feminine–"'Tis not anything which is without you that I am so taken with; no curious lovely face, soft skin, delicate eyes, pretty hands, fine shape, just mein, janteé air and the more powerful insinuations of alluring Rhetorick," (65)– while she argues that her love is not weak or merely rhetorical, representing herself as manly in her steadfast conduct and her choice of discourse: "I am for the Strong and Masculine Sentiments of the Soul" (65). Whereas Marianne in *Five Love-Letters* did not step outside her femininity, in keeping with the limits imposed to a nun in cloister, the protagonist of *Seven Portuguese Letters* reveals herself as a very different kind of woman, who even metaphorically "crossdresses" in the act of writing letters.

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A companionate text to the first *Five Love-Letters* was *Five Love-Letters Written by a Cavalier*. Even more clearly than in the former epistolaries, the cavalier's missives address the status of letters as physical objects which might change the course of their doomed love story. Chamilly allegedly explains, making up for his apparent silence in the original text: "[do not] mind my last Letter, but rather think of this I have now sent you" (8), and "I am never better pleas'd than when I think of you, and take Pen in hand to write to you, nor more dissatisfyed than when I lay it aside" (27), or in the course of his third letter, "What a rack and torture it is to me to be unhappy to this degree that my Letters never come to you" (31). In the end, the cavalier's letters produce the opposite effect of what they meant; instead of confirming his love for Marianne, they reveal the writer's inconstancy, at times explicit in his convoluted and empty style and, at other times, more belatedly in his insistence in blaming Marianne for the insanity of her extravagant love, thus reinforcing the association of femininity with emotional excess: "My Letters are not so cool and indifferent as you take them to be; 'tis because your mind is preposses'd with excess of Love, that you imagine so" (56). Finally, at one point he even fears that his letters had been lost and that her friends and abbess have produced "counterfeit Letters" (80) to hinder their love. Of the texts so far described, this is perhaps the less consistent of the three, since its purpose seems to be to diminish the effects of the nun's complaint by giving logical answers to most of her inordinate concerns, presenting her as the prototype of the hysterical woman (Kamuf, 1982: 45-ff).

The popular nun's letters were soon overtaken by other, more elaborate epistolary narratives. But before that, editors and booksellers saw the profit behind endless versions of the *Portuguese Letters*, and women writers like Behn and Manley also recognised the narrative potential of the nun's complaints. Either they believed in the reliability of the original letters, allegedly written by a woman in love, or even they were probably aware of their fictionality, coming from French originals, and so consciously imitated and other times adapted the commonplaces found in Marianne's passionate discourse to their own works, problematising issues like the association of women with emotion and the responsibility of love discourses in perpetuating this role.

3. SPEAKING THE FEMININE: GENDER DISCURSIVE MODELS AT WORK

The influence of the *Portuguese Letters* on late seventeenth-century English fiction can be traced in a few texts that contained the troubles of passionate nuns, or young heroines whose virtue was put to test, and who kept correspondence or wrote occasional letters to their lovers, complaining about being abandoned or slighted by them. Aphra Behn's first foray into fiction, her scandalous chronicle *Love-Letters between a Nobleman and His Sister* (1684-1687), clearly benefits from the model of the Portuguese[xi]. A few years later, Delarivier Manley's *Letters* was published in 1696 and was posthumously edited as *A Stage-Coach Journey to Exeter, to which is added The Force of Love: or, the Nun's Complaint by the Hon. Colonel*

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Pack in 1724. Her book not only mirrored Marianne's plaintive voice, but also included a letter in imitation of the Portuguese nun's, showing the pervasiveness of the model and its capacity to generate fictional discourses. It will be my purpose to analyse the impact of the French text in their fiction, especially by analysing how they reproduce what they take as an artificial discourse that can be easily replicated and even transformed to their own purposes. In so doing, I argue that they made their contribution to the narrative rendering of the female love complaint, starting from the myth of the complaining nun in letters to develop the figure of the seduced or the "forsaken maiden" that will be so productive years ahead, as critics like Warren Chernaik (1998: 13) and Toni Bowers (1999) have also contended[xii].

3.1. The artificiality of love discourse in Aphra Behn's *Love-Letters Between a Nobleman and His Sister*

After a successful career on the stage, Behn published the three-volume work *Love-Letters Between a Nobleman and His Sister*, whose major influences are the secret history[xiii] and the novel in letters (Salzman, 2002: 309)[xiv]. Its structure and form from volume one to volume three changed gradually. Volume one is fully epistolary, and represents the letter exchanges between two protagonists, Philander and Silvia, brother- and sister-in-law. Silvia's love grows by learning the commonplaces of amatory discourse that Philander employs in his letters, and which finally drive her to elope with him. After the fulfilment of their love, however, Silvia's life becomes far from ideal and very different from what she had foreseen, and especially from what Philander's inflamed amatory discourse predicted. In volume two he abandoned her, leaving her sick and feverish to Octavio's care, a young Dutch nobleman, while he goes after a new beauty, Calista, Octavio's married sister. This second volume, which is only partly epistolary, shows Silvia's gradual transformation into the type of the dejected woman, by including her letters of complaint. It is also the volume that receives a greater impact from *Portuguese Letters*, especially since traits from the three fictional sources mentioned above can be traced. Silvia's *querellae* unfolded when Philander's letters became scarce, and when she realised that they had been written in haste and without paying much attention to the rhetoric of love that had enamoured her. Volume three is mainly narrated in the third person, and portrays Silvia's gradual transformation into a jilt, as she forges letters and uses them to manipulate other men, sleeping again with Philander, or forging a new relationship with the libertine Alonzo[xv].

The nature of the real episode that Behn fictionalises also determines our interpretation of her recrafting of the nun's letters. Behn writes a narrative of deception about another deception. Lord Ford Grey eloped with his sister-in-law, Lady Henrietta Berkeley, after seducing her, and both moved to Holland to escape detection. At the same time, Grey was a supporter of the Duke of Monmouth –Cesario in Behn's text– married into a Tory family,

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seducing a Tory heiress, and thus, according to the author's royalist ethics, a traitor and a liar[xvi]. The fact that their scandalous episode was chosen by Behn to practice the motif of the complaint in letters gives us a new insight about what she considered as the artificiality of the letter form, and hence its ductility and malleability.

Probably for this reason, Behn veers from letter to narrative account in volume two, where Silvia moves from her complaints about Philander's progressively shorter and disenchanted letters to a description of her psychological development. Not only that, in this volume Octavio also gradually learns the function of letters as carriers of love intrigue and uses Philander's silences in his own benefit. As Chernaik has observed, Silvia's progression proves that "absence is a necessary condition to love" (1998: 22), thus implying that passion –and the vehicle of letters that transmits and amplifies it– begins with the lovers' separation. Finally, volume three confirms Silvia's degradation, leaving Marianne's model behind, and foreshadowing later heroines like Defoe's Moll Flanders, as she learns to put money in her purse (Skinner, 2001). Mirroring Philander's masculine model, Silvia can only find pleasure in novelty, thus "assum[ing] the role and the instincts of the rake, the inconstant betrayer of hearts" (Chernaik, 1998: 28). Silvia's looseness has developed along the lines of Philander's libertinism, and her transformation is a result of his whiggish allegiances, which leads them both to treason and the breaking of their personal and political vows.

Philander's duplicitous use of amatory stereotypes, once her love for Silvia has waned, brings him close to Marianne's French officer in *Five Love-Letters Written by a Cavalier*. In his first letter to Silvia once his passion is over, he declares: "Believe me, Lovely *Silvia,* I have felt all your pains, I have burnt with your feaver, and sigh'd with your oppressions; Say, has my pain abated yours?" (139). However, his hasty words –this short letter contrasts with the lengthier previous ones– do not please her, as she is now versed in the language of love and expects much more than empty commonplaces. After reading Philander's letters, and seized by emotion, she intones her own version of *ubi sunt*, referring to her doomed love:

> Short and cold as a dead Winters day. It chill'd my blood, it shiver'd every vein. Where, oh where has thou lavish'd out all those soft words so natural to thy Soul with which thou us'd to charm; so tun'd to the dear musick of thy voice? What is become of all the tender things, which, as I us'd to read, made little nimble pantings in my heart, my blushes rise, and tremblings in my bloud, adding new fire to the poor burning Victim! Oh where are all thy pretty flatteries of Love, that made me fond, and vain, and set a value on this trifling Beauty? (144)

Silvia is left in Octavio's company in Holland, ill and isolated from the world outside, unable to speak the language. All this contributes to evoke an image of seclusion and dejection which reminds us of the Portuguese nun's experience in cloister. Silvia also compares herself with Ariadne, evoking Ovid's *Heroides X*. Behn's fiction recalls the occasion when she was first rescued by Theseus from the Minotaur's labyrinth, to be abandoned to her own devices at

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Naxos, in close reference to her elopement with Philander, and left behind by him when he goes after a new beauty: "Oh my *Philander,* oh my charming Fugitive! Wast not enough, you left me like false *Theseus* on the shore, on the forsaken shore, departed from my fond my clasping Arms?" (144)[xvii]. She accuses him of wanting love and calls him to no avail: "Oh if *Philander* lov'd he wou'd have thought that cruelty enough, without the sad addition of a growing coldness: I wak'd, I mist thee, and I call'd aloud, *Philander!* my *Philander*! But no *Philander* heard […]" (144). Between "hope and fear" (145), Silvia gradually learns about Philander's waning passion, very similarly to Marianne in *Five Love-Letters from a Nun to a Cavalier*, when she realises that the object of her love is unworthy (Chernaik, 1998: 16), and begins to mourn her lost passion, complaining about everything she has risked for her lover. However, Behn introduces a novelty in Silvia's psychological portrait when she starts thinking about how to use with a new lover the knowledge she has acquired during her fleeting relationship with Philander. This is the reason why she accepts Octavio's bracelets and attentions (161), despite still being in love with him. Also at this point, the narrator's comments about the veracity of a lover's discourse become more acute and critical: "for true love is all unthinking artless speaking, incorrect disorder, and without Method, as 'tis without bounds or rules" (188). Unconsciously, Silvia agrees with this idea in her following letter to Philander, when she demands, "But oh –give me the impertinence of love!" (189), asking him to use the "dear Eloquence" of former times (189). Not only that, but she even rewrites her letter several times before sending it to Philander, to prevent sounding too demanding, accommodating words not to emotions but to opportunity and convenience.

Once Silvia is convinced of the impossibility of regaining Philander's love, she begins to entertain Octavio's love requests more openly, exploiting the ductility of the love letter to complete his seduction. To do so, she presents herself as the poor victim of his lover's falsehood: "if [Philander] unlink the Chain I am at perfect liberty" (201). In her view, this new course will also procure her a means of revenge the fickle Philander, whom she imagines in a jealous fit when hearing about this new turning of their love plot. In the meantime, she is inclined to play her tricks on Octavio, practising the art of feigning by carefully presenting herself as a careless and tempting Venus to a young and absent-minded Adonis, who is not yet acquainted with her contrived manners (202). From now on, the reader witnesses Silvia's gradual and unstoppable degradation, which could be considered Behn's humanization of the model of the abandoned nun. In her descent to hell, Silvia learns from an accomplished master, as Behn reshapes the role of the dejected woman in love and adapts it to her own political context. The relationship of Philander and Silvia in volume one is rather conventional, an imaginary recreation of a scandalous affair with strong political overtones, whereas Silvia's evolution in the last two volumes departs from the traditional model of the seduced heroine and, even though at that stage the story still retains a political critique –Silvia's decadence is the logical corollary of her former association with treacherous Philander–, she takes a life of

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her own, first performing the type of the female victim and then playing the role of the aggressive and spoiled jilt, inaugurating a new model of an ambiguous female agency which Behn will continue developing in works like *The Fair Jilt* and "The History of the Nun."

3.2. Exile and female complaint in Delarivier Manley's *Letters*

A few years after the publication of Behn's *Love-Letters*, Manley explicitly imitated the style of the Portuguese. In *Letters* she allegedly portrayed her experiences of travelling on stagecoach through Exeter between June 1694 and March 1695, leaving London behind (Carnell, 2016: 83; Choi, 2019: 145), an episode that she will later fictionalise in her biographical fiction, *The Adventures of Rivella* (1714)[xviii]. Bridging the gap between fact and fiction, and no doubt experimenting with the *roman à clef*, by intertwining seemingly biographical details and fictional episodes[xix], the motif of the stagecoach journey has a double function: on the one hand, the protagonist's detailed description of incident and social manners offers a picture of social interaction, demystifying women's travelling practices (Choi, 2019); on the other hand, the journey illustrates Manley's real, but also allegorical exile from London, where she claims to have left a close friend or a lover. The geographical distance that she is imposed on marks the beginning of a discourse on the emotions, favoured by the intimate tone of her diary in letters.

Two different styles converge in her work, coming from two contemporary French sources: Madame d'Aulnoy's *The Ingenious and Diverting Letters of the Lady --- Travels into Spain* (1691), a popular fictional travelogue, which is even mentioned in Manley's text (29), and *Portuguese Letters*. Manley's clever blending of the diary and the letter forms unifies both trends[xx]. Therefore, in *Letters* the lively mood of the traveller mixes up with the intimate tone of her self-reflections—her desires and her rationality—, which bring her close to Marianne's introspective model in two ways: firstly, by presenting Manley's literary persona as a suffering victim who misses London and her friend; secondly, by adding an appendage to her travelogue, consisting in a letter in imitation of those written by the Portuguese nun, "*A Second Letter from a supposed Nun in* Portugal*, to a Gentleman in* France", closing the narrative. In this way, the narrator's haphazard expression of emotion in the preceding letters constitutes a natural transition leading to her tribute to the Portuguese, which ultimately reinforces her meaning. In her revision of the model—a letter that she claims to be Colonel Richardson Pack's doing[xxi]—Manley reproduces most commonplaces found in *Five Love-Letters from a Nun to a Cavalier*, while the spirited description of the traveller's account resembles the worldliness of the protagonist of *Seven Portuguese Letters.*

The eight letters which compose Manley's text introduce the discourse of the passions that we have mentioned above, especially letters I and VIII. The former sets the mood of the epistolary by reproducing part of an unpublished poem by George Granville, "An Imitation of the Second Chorus in The Second Act of Seneca's *Thyestes*", which closely resembles her

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exile in the country, as the poetic persona embraces his solitary retreat: "*Place me, ye Gods, in some obscure Retreat:/ Oh! keep me innocent: Make others Great:/ In quiet Shades, content with Rural Sports,/ Give me a Life, remote from guilty Court: Where free from Hopes and Fears, at humble Ease,/ Unheard of, I may live and die in Peace.*" (3)[xxii]. The description of the nun's passion at the very end of the text replicates the voice and emotions of the Portuguese nun in the French original. In Cartesian terms, Manley's nun distinguishes between her body—left behind by her French officer—and her soul—stolen and gone with him to France (54-55). She also rebels against her lover's inconstancy and criticises his empty discourse, for example, when he asks about the weather in Portugal instead of speaking about the proper stuff of a love letter (56-57). As in *Five Love-Letters*, the nun in Manley's *Letters* also accuses her lover of having fallen prey to the lures of a French lady, preferring the "sourness" of that country before the "sweets" of Portugal (58).

As for the images evoked, the love symptoms that the nun expresses—like the fire that burns with an immaterial ardour (52), closely resemble Marianne's in *Portuguese Letters* and Silvia's in volume two of Behn's *Love-Letters*. This ardour is manifested in the violence of her desire (81), and in her inability to decide who is to blame for their doomed love: "You too easily perceiv'd how earnestly I was wont to watch your Eyes, that they look'd not on others; as if mine took it unkindly they were not gazed on altogether. How perverse are our fates! Why else was it not contriv'd that you might be as happy in me, as it was possible for me to be in you? Say what you will, you was to blame" (53). As in the original *Portuguese Letters*, the nun in this second letter feels more a prisoner than if she were living in cloister (54), and in Ovidian fashion, she gloats over the suffering for his absence more than over the pleasure passion grants: "Upon the whole, I think verily I love you because you make me miserable" (84). As in the original Portuguese letters and in Behn's text, the discourse of absence in the travelogue is led by a woman's voice, Manley's literary persona, who, against the former models, is a mobile subject while his London male friend remains in London. Although in Barthes's view, "the man who waits […] is miraculously feminized" (1978: 14), it is hard to see Manley's traveller playing a partial masculine role, since, despite her mobility, her use of the epistolary discourse represents her as helpless, feminine and, thus, passive. Forced by circumstances, Manley's persona is the leading voice in the narrative; she appears as the kind companion and the keen observer of the travelogue, selecting for her addressee those scenes that she thinks he would enjoy the most. The narrative of her adventure constitutes a frame which runs between letters II and VII, and which holds the stories of her fellow travellers, particularly the *Beaux*, Mrs Stanhope, and the Gentleman, whose stories show that women can be as deceitful and strategic as men when using their powers of seduction (Mounsey, 2017: 175).

Classical references to love are also ubiquitous in "*Second Letter*", the most pervasive of which is the topic of love as a burning flame (or *flamma amoris*), deemed responsible for

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the nun's melancholy state; her distracted mind is also described as a raging tempest, or a barren garden –"productive of nothing but the most bitter, sowr, and unpleasant Fruits imaginable" (60)– . Fire alone, she argues, does not kindle or renew her lover's passion, and thus, more than ever life in the cloister looks like imprisonment to her (54), motifs that recur in *Five Love-Letters*. Her lover's absence (or *absentia*) plunges the nun in a melancholic state, very similar to mourning and constant death (*laus in amore mori*): "I die a Thousand Deaths every Hour, and still revive, to die them o'er again" (85)[xxii]. Besides, the nun's unhappy state feeds her sick love: "upon the whole, I think verily I love you because you make me miserable" (84), and she confesses that she is helpless to control the extremes love thrusts her to. The reasons for Manley's ostracizing are taken for granted in the text, though the physical and geographical distance it imposes on the lover provides the ideal environment to intone the love complaint. Furthermore, Manley's inclusion of a letter in imitation of the Portuguese allegedly written by Colonel Pack—ironically, as Guilleragues had written Mariana Alcoforado's letters—comes to reinforce the traditional representation of a woman in love, and also "how men thought women ought to behave when abandoned", as Chris Mounsey has aptly argued (2017: 175). Proof of this is that she claims to write "in Disorder" and describes herself as "distracted" (51), an image that recurs in her letter.

The difference between these two voices—Manley's protagonist's and the nun's—lies in the agency of the former versus the helplessness of the latter. The second letter in imitation of the Portuguese style relies on the mobility and the absence of the lover to operate, while Manley's traveller, though forced to go on exile, is free to move and entertain herself, learning from others' example in her wanderings through Exeter countryside. Like *Portuguese Letters* and Behn's *Love-Letters*, Manley's *Letters* are open-ended; the writer doubts her uncertain future but at least she has hopes of being restored to social intercourse, wishing and fearing "the Vanities and Vertues" of London (50).

4. CONCLUSIONS

The textual history of *Five Love-Letters from a Nun to a Cavalier* and the sequels which followed, gives us a sense of the pervasiveness of the nun's plot in late seventeenth-century fiction. Booksellers also realised the potential of the nun's passionate complaints and were willing to participate in the craze for the publication of her letters. At the time in which Behn and Manley published their works, the authority of *Portuguese Letters* was not a matter of concern. Most probably, they felt inspired not so much by the figure of the suffering victim, but by the natural expression of female desire that the nun's letters represented. They realised that their rhetorical formulae could be easily adapted to their convenience, by exploiting those motifs in their texts.

Behn's *Love-Letters from a Nobleman to His Sister* was inspired by the model of a new amatory discourse from French *nouvelles* of former decades, its language and expression, but

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also following closely the model of the *Portuguese Letters* and benefitting from them, in line with classical precedents like Ovid's *Heroides*. Silvia's naivety is especially pressing in the first volume, as she believes in the unconditional love that Philander vents in his letters. However, volume two depicts the heroine's disenchantment, particularly when she realises that her lover's letters were empty of real emotion, and that passion was heightened by absence and a convoluted rhetorical exercise. This self-realisation, together with her own gradual manipulation of the letter form grant her final transformation into a self-willed jilt along volume three. While Behn chooses to make ridicule of Philander's vacuous epistolary style, Silvia's appropriation of the narrative function of the amatory letter is more complex; she replicates the nun's plight, though far from being a nun herself, she manages to leave her enclosure by entering the world a different sort of woman.

In her epistolary diary, Manley also experiments with the creative potential that Marianne's letters provide, though adding a new element: the vibrant description of people and manners expected in a travelogue. By means of this generic hybridisation, and similarly to Behn, Manley introduces another woman of the world, her literary persona, though her enjoyment of her surroundings does not conflict with the venting of her intimate voice and the discourse of the female complaint. It is in this convergence that Manley's narrative results in a more constructive proposal for the feminine subject. Her depiction of the woman traveller and the female types she is exposed to during her stagecoach journey offer the reader a demystifying view of women's agency and mobility, spurred by the precedent of Aulnoy's *Travels*, but which also preclude other examples of women's travel fiction as Penelope Aubin's *The Noble Slaves; or, the Lives and Adventures of Two Lords and Two Ladies* (1722) and *The Life and Amorous Adventures of Lucinda, an English Lady* (1739) or Eliza Haywood's *The Adventures of Eovaai* (1736), demonstrate.

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NOTES

[i] We will employ the label Portuguese Letters to refer to the phenomenon of the Portuguese nun's letters of complaint to the French cavalier and use individual titles to designate a particular text.

[ii] In her book, Maribel Paradinha contends that, prior to Claude Barbin's first edition of *Lettres portugaises*, published in Paris in 1669, a former text had been published in Grenoble three years earlier by R. Philippes (2006, 18-19). A few years later, Charles Lefcourt read this text as "the first example of a new genre, the epistolary romance" (1976: 494).

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[iii] Among these "cloistered" writers, Abbott includes Goethe's *The Sorrows of Young Werther* and Tennyson's *In Memoriam*.

[iv] In *Tender Geographies*, Joan DeJean raises an interesting debate about women's authorship and authorial signature by means of which we could understand the fact that for a long time *Lettres portugaises* and its sequels were considered a woman's work, being published at the heyday of women's early fiction (1991: 5).

[v] The influence of *Lettres portugaises* can also be traced in a story included by Jane Barker as part of *The Lining of the Patch Work Screen* (1726), one of her Galesia narrations, namely "The Story of the Portugueze Nun." As the rest of the story in the collection, it is no more than a short narrative scene—or one of her "patches" with which she decorates the screen of her writing—. Following closely the story of *Five Love-Letters*, it is significant, as in a more narrative and descriptive way, how Barker experiments with sentimentality and the expression of emotions. See Carol Shiner Wilson's introduction to Barker's collected fiction (1997: xxxiii-xxxiv).

[vi] To the first instalment, published by Claude Barbin in Paris, 1669, followed *Lettres portugaises. Second partie*, published the same year also by Barbin and including seven new letters, and *Réponses aux lettres portugaises, traduites en François*, published in Paris by I.B. Loyson, also appearing in 1669.

[vii] In the early 1690s, Bentley assembled many of these titles in the first serial collection of these French and English novels, *Modern Novels*, in 12 volumes.

[viii] In 1702, a bilingual edition in English and French of the same text, printed for both of them, was also published, no doubt another example of the transnationality of the Portuguese letters, and of the way in which the book market was gradually accommodating the needs of a more intellectual and high-brow audience.

[ix] Precisely, *Love without Affectation* is the title of one of the verse collections on the famous French letters, published in 1709. The general note in ESTC refers to its attribution to Monsieur de Vervac.

[x] All the love motifs mentioned here can be traced in Moreno-Soldevila (2011).

[xi] The figure of the passionate nun is also a matter of concern in Behn's stories "The History of the Nun" (1689), and "The Nun, or the Perjured Beauty" (1698), though the epistolary motif is lost in them.

[xii] Bower refers to narratives about "seduced maidens" and chooses *Five Love-Letters* as a paradigmatic example that will be widely imitated and adapted in the early decades of the eighteenth century (136).

[xiii] Secret histories become a popular form of its own in the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries, which offered the promise of revealing the private life of characters of historical resonance, constituting a revisionist mode of historiography. See Rebecca Bullard's introduction to *The Politics of Disclosure, 1674-1725: Secret History Narratives* (2009), 1-25.

[xiv] Volumes I and II had the same title (1684 and 1685), but volume III was entitled *The Amours of Philander and Silvia* (1687). Todd's 1993 edition that we are using chooses *Love-Letters Between a Nobleman and His Sister* as the general title for the three parts.

[xv] Ballaster describes Sylvia's evolution into the role of the rake, what she achieves thanks to her own understanding of the ductility of the letter form (1992: 109).

[xvi] As in the real episode, Philander/Grey's duplicity goes unscathed, but Behn subjects him to public ridicule in her fiction.

[xvii] Behn had also evoked another Ovidian epistle, *Heroides V* from Oenone to Paris in her poem "A Paraphrase on Ovid's Epistle of Oenone to Paris" (1684), in which Oenone's love complaint reproduces many of the symptoms of passionate excess mentioned above.

[xviii] Like Behn's text, Manley's epistolary collection borders the line between the real and the fictional, reproducing the occasion on which she left London for the country, once her affair with Charles Fitzroy, the son of Barbara de Villiers, Duchess of Cleveland, was detected. Manley had become her companion at court around 1693 (Hodgson-Wright, 2006, ix; Villegas-López, 2014: 187), or else the time she took to escape her debts (Carnell, 2016: 83). Other critical readings of Manley's text have also focused on the autobiographical links of the story, wondering about the identity behind the initials J.H. (Herman, 2003: 18-19; Carnell, 2016: 88, 93).

[xix] Revising Herman and Carnell's biographies of Manley, Chris Mounsey claims that her *Letters*, together with her two 1696 plays, are not of an experimental nature, but a Varronian satire which anticipates the politics of her later work. However, we argue that, as narrative conventions are concerned and as an early example of letter fiction, the author plays with different elements, especially

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concerning the hybridity between passion and rationality, which makes of *Letters* a truly experimental text.

[xx] Herman defines *Letters* as an "epistolary diary" (2003: 12).

[xxi] Richardson Pack (1682-1728) was an English soldier and writer, whose work was published during the last nine years of his life. The notorious bookseller Edmund Curll, who had also printed Manley's work, collaborated with him. The attribution of this letter by the Portuguese nun—avowedly one out of three written in imitation of the French text—, included in Manley's *Letters* (1696), is very improbable. See his entry in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*.

[xxii] George Granville, *Poems upon Several Occasions* (1712: 105).

[xxiii] This association was very productive in the period, as the publication of treatises on the topic demonstrates. In this respect, see James Ferrand's *Erotomania* (1640), especially chapters V and VI.

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