

# “She is a Jade”: A Georgian Gaming Woman Re-imagined in Georgette Heyer’s *Faro’s Daughter*

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## Abstract

This essay aims to study the images of a modern Faro lady in Georgette Heyer’s historical romance *Faro’s Daughter*. It is divided into three parts. The first part examines Faro ladies in the history and literature of Georgian England, and it compares Heyer’s heroine Deborah Grantham to them. The second talks about how Deborah embodies female virtues that are not appreciated by eighteenth-century gender law but are celebrated by feminist thinking such as Mary Wollstonecraft’s. The third shows that Deborah in Heyer’s work reflects the first-wave feminist thinking but does not follow all the trends of criticism and literary taste. The study juxtaposes Heyer’s heroine with one of the notorious Georgian female gamer Lady Albinia Hobart and argues that Deborah is a reformed Faro lady. The study also examines Deborah in *Faro’s Daughter* as a combination and rejection of eighteenth- and twentieth-century feminists such as Mary Wollstonecraft and Simone de Beauvoir, showing that Heyer finds her own path of feminist criticism. If historical romance is a sub-genre that revises history, Heyer’s heroine, as the essay tries to point out, represents a revision of feminist discourse.

**Keywords:** Georgette Heyer, gaming, eighteenth-century England, feminism

## Georgian Gaming and Faro Ladies

Gambling was called gaming in eighteenth-century England, and it almost became a national amusement. The historian Roy Porter writes about the obsession of Georgian gaming: “England was gripped by gaming fever. Men bet on political events, births and deaths – any future happening” (255). The obsessed gaming was intolerable to moralists, as John Gregory called gaming “a ruinous and incurable vice” (26), and John Moir referred to gaming as “the worst species of diversion” (207). If men’s gaming is deplorable, women’s gaming draws more criticism and is more controversial. John Essex wrote in *The Young Ladies Conduct* that “a Woman who has once given herself up to Gaming has taken leave of all Moral Virtues, and consequently lies expos’d to all Vices” (37). Charles Allen warned that any woman who games too much “might produce a habit of avarice, the most base and sordid passion that can enter into the breast of a young lady” (120). By the end of the eighteenth century, John Bennet in *Letters to a Young Lady* denounced gaming women with harsh words, for gaming “has a tendency to eradicate every religious and moral disposition, every social duty, every laudable and virtuous affection” (29). The opinions of these moralists and critics point to one fact: women’s gaming is immoral, condemnable, and should be banned.

The concern of eighteenth-century British moralists towards female gaming arose from a group of middle or upper-class female gamers, or “Faro Ladies,” who were so called because of the Faro card game they often played. Faro ladies hosted their Faro card tables at their own houses, and the act that broke gender, law, and moral boundaries were usually targets of moralists and public opinion. In eighteenth-century dramas, satirical illustrations, and literature, Faro ladies were often characterized negatively. They were presented as greedy, wanton, swollen, sensual and vulgar women with heavy makeup. Some illustrations, for example, James Gillray’s, even presented Faro

ladies as cuffed and taunted. In literature, Faro ladies have a similar and unfavorable representation. Mrs. Berlinton in Fanny Burney's *Camilla* neglects all her domestic duties and seeks comfort at Faro tables, "and the company which Faro and Fashion brought together, she soon grew ambitious to collect by motives of more appropriate flattery" (809-10). In Mary Robinson's comedy *Nobody, a Comedy in Two Acts* (1794), the heroine Lady Languid is a rich widow with gaming addiction. She knows that gaming is harmful but cannot stop playing: "Play! destructive Play! perpetual Losses, & no rest have destroy'd me!" (32). The anonymous mock-epic *The Rape of the Faro Bank* published in 1800 also denounced and parodied Faro cards and the sumptuousness of the upper class in London. In this work, Faro is called the "fatal Cards" (Canto the Second, 18), and the goddess Themis determines to eradicate Faro playing: "She, as so mighty on her Throne she sate, / Regarded Faro with eternal Hate" (Canto the Third, 27). Mrs. Berlinton, Lady Languid, and the Faro ladies in *The Rape of the Faro Bank* are all targets of eighteenth-century authors, and to contemporary readers, they function as moral lessons and cautions.

*The Rape of the Faro Bank* is inspired by the theft in the gaming house of Lady Albinia Hobart, one of the most representative Faro ladies in British history. Before marriage, Lady Albinia Hobart was Albinia Bertie, a young, beautiful, and lively maiden, as well as a rich heiress. Her husband George Hobart assumed the title of the Third Earl of Buckinghamshire in 1793, making Albinia the Countess. Lady Buckinghamshire was deeply attracted by the fashionable and social life of London, and even after several years of economic crisis and debts, the Lady returned to her townhouse in St. James Square and ran her gaming house. In this fashionable townhouse, Lady Albinia Hobart was known for her hospitality, and she even treated her guests with drama and musical performances. But what went on inside these fashionable town houses were usually law-forbidden and morally corrupted. As Jennifer Kloester puts it,

The elegant surroundings of the gambling hells of St James's and Pall Mall were often a cover for the ruthless play and unfair practices of the houses, which were frequented not only by the rich and fashionable, the clergy and the nobility, but also by cheats and swindlers known as 'black-legs', 'Captain Sharps' or 'ivory-turners.' (132)

Lady Albinia Hobart indeed had a bad reputation and dared to play deep; it was not until 1797 that she was fined for hosting a private, illegal gaming house.

However, modern scholars do not judge Faro ladies in a moral way, and the gaming table that welcomes both men and women do not represent chaos and obscenity. Gillian Russell believes that the gaming of Faro ladies has a feminist consciousness and that their gaming overthrows eighteenth-century gender ideology. Russell points out that although Faro ladies violate their duty as wives and mothers, and even make their bodies the gaming bet, the "most disturbing aspects of the activities of the Faro ladies was that they were not obviously the victims of a gambling addiction, as the Duchess of Devonshire seemed to be, but were in control of the table and actually making an income from it" (487). As the result, "[b]y using 'private' entertainments as a pretext for gambling, they undermined the status of genteel sociability as an index of taste and refinement" (Russell 487). Faro ladies interfere in the male-centered political activities, sponsorships, negotiations, and even marriage settlements by facing male gamers. What they overthrow, as Laura Brace sees it, is "the norms of genteel sociability" and "social distinctions," as "the men who played with anyone as long as they had the money" (117). Faro ladies governing their own gaming houses challenge both eighteenth-century moral principles and patriarchal culture. Clare Walcot carefully studies

Lady Albinia Hobart's "career" and eighteenth-century London upper social circles, pointing out that gaming tables are often described as battlefields, in which high bets are symbols of honor and class. In the war-like gaming, Walcott suggests that a Faro table offers women an opportunity and space to rival men: "female players would have been in direct competition with, and in danger of succeeding against, their male counterparts" (466). Feminist criticism sees Faro ladies' gaming tables as battlefields where women fight against men, and gaming as women's challenge to male discourse and hierarchy. Based on this premise, Faro ladies may be seen as practitioners of eighteenth-century feminism. They ignore the regulations and orders set by men, putting female consciousness into effect and breaking gender boundaries with Faro cards and gaming.

In this hierarchical regulation and domination, Faro ladies deserve sympathy. Beth Kowaleski Wallace studies earlier eighteenth-century plays, *The Basset-Table* (1706), *The Lady's Last Stake, or The Wife's Resentment* (1721), and *The Provoked Husband* (1728), and asserts that in these plays the heroines are all "objects of a voyeuristic gaze" (22). To modern critics, Faro ladies are no longer troublemakers or criminals but defenders of female power and sovereignty. This justification of female gaming also appears in Georgette Heyer's historical romance *Faro's Daughter*, which redresses the foul reputation of gaming women, rectifying the label by which they have been demonized. Published in 1941, *Faro's Daughter* is a romance set in London in 1795. The young nobility Adrian Mablethorpe vows to marry Deborah Grantham, a Faro hostess. Lady Mablethorpe asks the rich Max Ravenscar to investigate and stop her son's love affair. Ravenscar plans to buy Deborah off, and Deborah determines to avenge the insult and humiliation. Deborah later saves young Phoebe Laxton from an improper marriage by sheltering her in the gaming house. Meanwhile, Ravenscar threatens Deborah with all the bills and mortgages of the gaming house he claims at a card table. The furious Deborah has Ravenscar kidnapped and kept in the basement of her gaming house. Ravenscar escapes and sends back all the creditor's rights to Deborah, but he believes that Deborah has already married Mablethorpe. The two have a quarrel before they clarify all the misunderstandings, confess their feelings, and end with the two making marital promises to each other.

Deborah's character is influenced by Lady Albinia Hobart, whose name also appears in the novel (15). The fact that the fictional Deborah and the real Lady Albinia Hobart appear in the same story adds a sense of historical reality to Heyer's novel. Both Deborah and Lady Albinia Hobart are hostesses to Faro tables, and both of their gaming houses attract guests with luxury and hospitality. Walcott points out that in order to run a gaming house in the fashionable London, Lady Albinia Hobart paid a great price, but still a "town house was seen by some to be an expensive liability, not a wise investment but an unproductive drain on finances, with the risk of overexpenditure in keeping it far exceeding the potential rewards it would likely bring" (462). Like Lady Albinia Hobart, Lady Bellingham, Deborah's aunt and the real owner of the gaming house, also complains to Deborah about the high expense of her gaming house:

Where is that odious bill for coals? Forty-four shillings the ton we are paying, Deb, and that not the best coal! Then there's the bill from the coachmakers – here it is! No, that's not it – Seventy pounds for green peas; it doesn't seem *right*, does it, my love? I daresay we are being robbed, but what is one to do? What's this? Candles, fifty pounds, and that's only for six months! (47)

In order to attract and keep her guests, Lady Bellingham even rents a box in the opera house (for four hundred pounds), just as Lady Hobart did for her guests' entertainment. However, there are still differences between Deborah and Lady Albinia Hobart. Deborah's aunt runs the gaming house for a living: "Of course, I do see that it puts us in an awkward position, but how in the

world was I to manage? And my card parties were always so well-liked – indeed, I was positively renowned for them! – that it seemed such a sensible thing to do!” (49) However, unlike her aunt, Deborah does not host the gaming table for her gaming addiction. Instead, she sits at the card table only to help and repay Lady Bellingham for raising her.

Deborah is also the justification of feminine images represented by real Faro ladies. Although she has many suitors, she still values female virtue and chastity. Lord Mablethorpe defends Deborah: “It is not Deb’s fault that she is obliged to be friendly towards men like Filey, and Ormskirk: she cannot help herself!” (41). Deborah understands that she does not deserve marriage, as eighteenth-century moral standards look down on gaming women. In *Faro’s Daughter*, Deborah is called a “hussy” or “Cyprian,” names for fallen women. Knowing that her son has fallen in love with a Faro lady, Lady Mablethorpe responds angrily that “One does not marry women out of gaming houses” (5). But it is this unorthodox woman who justifies the female subjectivity and the feminism that Faro ladies embody.

### **Improper Femininity and Eighteenth-century Feminism**

By eighteenth-century British society definition, both Lady Albinia Hobart and Deborah are unfeminine women. Lady Albinia Hobart, a mother to eight children, spent almost all of her time at the Faro table. The problematic maternal role to the conservative Georgian people is a great shock, for Faro ladies, or any female gamers, are usually connected with sexual transgressions such as prostitution or adultery. Jessica Richard points out that when at the gaming table, a woman’s body is equivalent to the gaming stake or debt, and in religious works or literature, “the female gambler displays a passion for play that is physically disfiguring, her absorption in play supplants her attention to lover, husband, or children, and her play inevitably leads her to pay her play debts with sexual favors” (112). This also explains the characters’ concern for Deborah in *Faro’s Daughter*. Knowing that her son has fallen in love with Deborah, Lady Mablethorpe shows her great anger:

Nothing would induce me to speak to such a woman! Only fancy, Max! she presides over the tables in that horrid house! You may imagine what a bold, vulgar piece she is! Sally says that all the worst rakes in town go there, and she bestows her favours on such men as that dreadful Lord Ormskirk. He is for ever at her side. I dare say she is more to him than my deluded boy dreams of. (9)

The implication is clear that Deborah has a career that goes beyond being just a Faro hostess. Lady Mablethorpe continues to call Deborah a “honey-pot” (10) and suggests that a woman from a gaming house is not suitable to be a wife. Lady Mablethorpe’s imagination gives the readers an impression that Deborah is not a “natural” woman. Ravenscar, clear-minded, believes that even the dreadful Lord Ormskirk “would not look for his new bride in a gaming-house” (20) because what men seek at a Faro table is a plaything. Even Deborah herself accepts her fate and realizes that she could not escape spinsterhood. Talking about Mablethorpe, Deborah admits her inferiority in the marriage market: “I am his calf-love. He won’t marry a woman out of a gaming-house” (49). Deborah continues to persuade her aunt that marriage for a Faro lady is impractical: “I wish you will not think so much about my marriage. I doubt I was born to wear the willow” (50). However, a Faro lady’s female charm that Deborah denies is what Heyer wishes to justify, and through romance, Heyer represents an improper femininity that challenges the eighteenth-century gender norm but is welcomed by radical feminists.

In a romance, though, the hero and the heroine’s effort is to find a companion. Under this rule, Deborah, although a gamer, is not without female sexual attraction. Deborah’s appearance fits in the standard of mainstream beauty and leaves a good first impression on Ravenscar:

The lady’s eyes were the most expressive and brilliant he had ever seen. Their effect upon an impressionable youth would, he thought, be most destructive. As a connoisseur of female charms, he could not but approve of the picture Miss Grantham presented. She was built on queenly lines, carried her head well, and possessed a pretty wrist, and a neatly turned ankle. She looked to have a good deal of humour, and her voice, when she spoke, was low-pitched and pleasing. (16)

Being tall and young, Deborah is desirable to men. Deborah as a Faro’s daughter is unlike the images of gaming women presented in eighteenth-century satirical caricatures. Not only Deborah’s beauty but also her career is a model. Knowing what Deborah does in a gaming-house, Phoebe

asked a great many questions about the house, and said wistfully that she wished that she too could preside over an E.O. table. Nothing of that nature, she explained, had ever come in her way. She had had a very dull life, sharing a horridly strict governess with her sisters, and being bullied by Mama. She thought she might do very well in a gaming-saloon, for she was excessively fond of cards, and had very often played at lottery or quadrille for hours together. It was true that she knew nothing of Faro, but she thought (hopefully) that she would soon learn. (106)

The passage is an important turning-point of how the public’s opinions of Faro ladies can be justified. Instead of following the arguments of eighteenth-century critics that a Faro hostess is nothing but a criminal, Heyer makes it a desirable job. To Phoebe, being a Faro lady means liberation from female confinement. In Phoebe’s eyes, a Faro lady is a woman who has control over her own life, and the skill in cards suggests the ability for women to gain independence. By elevating carding skill to knowledge, Phoebe’s speculation justifies gaming and echoes early feminist arguments. Mary Astell in *A Serious Proposal to the Ladies* argued that ignorance is women’s enemy: “A being content with Ignorance is really but a Pretence, for the frame of our nature is such that it is impossible we shoul’d be so, even those very Pretenders value themselves for some Knowledge or other, tho it be a trifling or mistaken one” (287). What Phoebe implies, though in a comic way, is the importance of the necessary skills for women to make their own living.

*A Vindication of the Rights of Women*, Mary Wollstonecraft’s vehement, even radical, work criticizes the treatment of women as incomplete individuals, subordinate beings, and even as not being a part of the human species (Wollstonecraft 7-8). To Wollstonecraft, education is important to women’s elevation in the society, and it is also through education that women can become rational beings. “Men and women must be educated, in a great degree,” writes Wollstonecraft, “by the opinions and manners of the society they live in” (21). The best education in Wollstonecraft’s opinion is “such an exercise of the understanding as is best calculated to strengthen the body and form the heart” (21). Wollstonecraft also opposes female accomplishments, dismissing them as frivolities:

It is acknowledged that they spend many of the first years of their lives in acquiring a smattering of accomplishments; meanwhile strength of body and mind are sacrificed to libertine notions of beauty, to the desire of establishing themselves, the only way women can rise in the world, by marriage. (10)

In *Faro’s Daughter*, Deborah and Ravenscar’s discussion regarding the former’s accomplishments echoes Wollstonecraft’s comments. Ravenscar sarcastically says that Deborah is an accomplished woman because she knows how to game. Deborah responds angrily: “It is my business to know those things. I have no accomplishments. I do not sing, or play upon the pianoforte, or paint in water-colours. *Those* are accomplishments” (23). Ravenscar is impressed by these words: “You were wise to waste no time on such fripperies: you are already perfect for your setting, ma’am”

(23). Through Ravenscar's comments, Heyer again reminds the readers of Wollstonecraft, who in *Thoughts on the Education of Daughters* writes that female accomplishments are "at best but trifles, and the foolish, indiscriminate praises which are bestowed on them only produce vanity" (26). Although not without irony, Deborah's gaming skill is to be considered professionalism.

However, it is not Deborah's choice but her incapability of making choices that makes her a Faro's daughter. The right to make choices is also Wollstonecraft's concern. In *Faro's Daughter*, both Deborah and Phoebe are women who cannot choose either their way of living or partner. Deborah protests the idea that she and her aunt become hostesses in the gaming house out of willingness. When Lucius, the friend of Deborah's late father, says that Deborah chooses to play cards because "twas in your blood," Deborah disagrees and claims that "it's tedious beyond anything I ever dreamed of! I think I will have a cottage in the country one day, and keep hens" (58). Deborah even blames her young brother who despises the aunt's gaming house: "You cannot suppose that she keeps a gaming-house from her own choice" (149). In the society that left women no choices to make a living and deprives women of the chance of proper education, Faro ladies may be a unique phenomenon that speaks of women's awkward situation. Deborah is incapable of embracing the life she desires while other female characters are denied the right to pick their own husbands. Marriage without love, as Wollstonecraft criticizes, is the consequence of women's limited intellectual independence and liberty:

With the same view she represents an accomplished young woman, as ready to marry anybody that her mama pleased to recommend; and, as actually marrying the young man of her own choice, without feeling any emotions of passion, because that a well-educated girl had not time to be in love. Is it possible to have much respect for a system of education that thus insults reason and nature? (105)

Deborah gives a similar opinion in *Faro's Daughter* when she tries to comfort Phoebe who is forced to marry the vulgar Sir James: "No one can make you marry against your will," Miss Grantham assured her. "You have only to be firm, my dear!" (103). Even Ravenscar's half-sister Arabella complains about the marriage arrangement that her entire family makes for her: "but you have no idea how tiresome it is to have people making such schemes for one!" (137). Heyer's characterization of these women is in debt to eighteenth-century feminists, and her heroine is, if not an eighteenth-century feminist, at least an unusual woman who is contrary to the hierarchical ideology.

### Heyer and Twentieth-century Feminism

In addition to representing eighteenth-century feminists, the main argument of *Faro's Daughter*, a historical romance, follows the trend of first-wave feminism, although some deviations exist. Historical romance is itself a very female-centered genre and is mostly written by women for women. The genre offers women a place to engage, even challenge, hierarchical discourses, especially in history. Diana Wallace has asserted the very special connection among female writers, readers, and the historical romance:

The historical novel attracted women writers as a genre which they could use to explore, and indeed recover, their past as a 'prehistory of the present'. Moreover, it is in historical fiction, even in the 'popular' kind, that some of the most radical ideas are to be found during a decade which was in many ways retreating into conservatism where gender was concerned. (80)

Heyer's work, as Wallace continues to argue, "initiates a new, third phase of historical novels aimed predominately at a female audience and using 'history' to explore the restrictions and injustices,

past and present, of women's lives (82). In *Faro's Daughter*, it is more than clear that Heyer does not intend to create a heroine who subjugates herself to the norm of eighteenth-century gender ideology, and the heroine does not hesitate to show her physical strength. Confronting Ravenscar, Deborah claims that "I mean to fight him to the last ditch!" (128). She gives the speech that almost no eighteenth-century heroine would dare to: "Do you think I will give in as tamely as that? You do not know what language he used towards me! He insulted me, and now he dares to threaten me, and nothing – *nothing!* – would induce me to yield to him!" (131). Deborah even faces Ravenscar directly and boldly when the latter calls her a cyprian: "If you dare to call me by that name I will hit you!" (156). Deborah's physical power culminates in Ravenscar's confinement in the basement of the gaming house, and although Ravenscar escapes because Deborah shows compassion for him, she is still a daring heroine who would surprise an eighteenth-century audience but satisfies twentieth-century female readers' appetite.

If Heyer's novels are celebrated for their historical accuracy, her heroines are not historically accurate. Heyer's heroine is not the meek type like Samuel Richardson's Pamela; hers is more familiar to twentieth-century readers, who seek economic independence and freedom in love and marriage. As previously suggested, Deborah's "job" and "career" is what distinguish her from eighteenth-century heroines and bring her closer to a modern woman. Simone de Beauvoir strongly celebrates women's work, and in "The Independent Woman" in *The Second Sex*, Beauvoir wrote that work guarantees women's freedom: "It is through work that woman has been able, to a large extent, to close the gap separating her from the male; work alone can guarantee her concrete freedom" (813). Although Beauvoir continues to criticize the exploitation women face in their work, a job still bespeaks a woman's independence and achievement. In *Faro's Daughter*, Deborah is not afraid of Ravenscar because of her economic freedom, and this makes her a modern, twentieth-century heroine in an eighteenth-century context.

Pamela Regis also sums up three aspects of Heyer's heroines that betray eighteenth-century femininity:

First, the typical unmarried Regency girl of good family would have been far more swayed by confining societal strictures on her behavior than the affective individuals. Second, she would not have possessed money or marketable skills or have the opportunity to learn or practice such skills. Finally, unmarried Regency girls of good family would be as likely to follow the advice of their parents in choosing a mate as they would in assuming the twentieth-century ideal of companionate marriage that Heyer invests them with. (127)

None of the above characteristics describe Deborah, who ignores social strictures, has the skill of cards, and pays no mind to her aunt's opinion on marriage. Accordingly, Heyer's historical romance serves not only as a utopia that aims to escape the past but also the mirror that reflects the present. Heyer knows and gives what her readers want, and history to her is more than just a background; it is the target of her criticism. However, Deborah is not a traditional eighteenth-century heroine, and neither is she the victimized female character that is common in first-wave feminism literature. Deborah does not have to move to other cities or places to hide her true self, for she already has the gaming-house. Nor does she have to learn a new skill to prove that she can make a living without men. What she needs is an equally powerful and worthy partner. Maureen Honey suggests that, "the New Woman character transforms what she finds into a humane system, creates a community of women to replace the one that confined her, and persuade a man who

admires her that a relationship of equality will enhance his life” (32). An equal partnership is also Beauvoir’s concern, and to Beauvoir, men should also learn this relationship: “When he has an attitude of benevolence and partnership to ward a woman, he applies the principle of abstract equality; and he does not *posit* the concrete inequality he recognizes” (34). In *Faro’s Daughter*, what Deborah asks is Ravenscar’s equal treatment of her, and a partnership based on respect. Ravenscar certainly understands this by the end of the novel. Instead of trying to overthrow the entire male-centered society, feminism or literary heroines in the twentieth century aim to refine civilization and human relationship by proposing what women need.

Heyer’s feminism, therefore, is closer to Hannah More’s, which is less radical than Wollstonecraft’s, but still approves the development of the full character of women. As an Evangelical, Hannah More encourages a female education system based on moral reform, charity, and philanthropy. Upper-class women are important for More, for they are the beginning of the nation’s moral reform, and an upper-class woman’s study “enable[s] her to regulate her own mind, and to be useful to others” (2, vol. 2). More also recognizes differences between the sexes, but she further holds that women can educate men, for a woman

is not merely a creature who can paint, and play, and dress, and dance; it is a being who can comfort and counsel [her husband]; one who can reason, and reflect, and feel, and judge, and act, and discourse, and discriminate; one who can assist [the husband] in his affairs, lighten his cares, sooth his sorrows, purify his joy, strengthen his principles, and educate his children. (106-7, vol. 1)

A woman’s role to More is the moral support first in the domestic realm and then the nation. In *Faro’s Daughter*, Deborah always keeps her virtue and integrity, and has never shown the intention to exceed men. Money does not buy Deborah, who confronts Ravenscar: “You thought you had only to dangle your money-bags before my eyes, and I should be dazzled! Well, I was not dazzled, and I would not touch one penny of your money!” (161). However, she does express the longing for marriage, “that to have someone to protect her was every woman’s dream” (185). Deborah, therefore, owns qualities of both eighteenth-century and twentieth-century heroines. Diana Wallace in “Difficulties, Discontinuities and Differences: Reading Women’s Historical Fiction” again holds that a historical romance “will allow us to make connections both within and across historical periods, and within and across the categories of ‘literary’ and ‘popular’ fiction, on a much wider scale than has happened as yet” (217). In Deborah, one reads Wollstonecraft’s criticism on female achievement and women’s lack of choice as well as Beauvoir’s celebration of partnership and women’s right to work. The heroine combines female courage and virtue, and one can further tell that Heyer’s attitude towards gender is closer to More’s but at the same time sums up criticism from the two centuries. This also explains how Heyer’s feminist thoughts deviate from feminism in both the eighteenth and the twentieth century but find its own path in the historical romance.

### Conclusion

Deborah belongs to what Wollstonecraft in *A Vindication to the Rights of Women* calls the “masculine women,” the ones who embody “the imitation of manly virtues, or, more properly speaking, the attainment of those talents and virtues, the exercise of which ennobles the human character, and which raise females in the scale of animal being, when they are comprehensively termed mankind” (8). Throughout the novel, one sees that Deborah is masculine but not because of the image of “a frustrated spinster or a harridan” as twentieth-century feminists are sometimes described (Walters 90). Deborah is masculine in the way that she manages to outwit Ravenscar and strives to

fight against the marriage that is unfair to women. However, Deborah still maintains her feminine quality by longing for marriage. Deborah’s virtue, courage, and determination make Ravenscar call her “a jade” (172) and praise her as “a remarkable woman” (178). If Deborah yields to Ravenscar’s fortune and power of influence, there will never be the hero’s confession that “I shall marry a wench out of a gaming-house with as much pomp and ceremony as I can contrive” (258). The hero and the heroine find in each other respect, important to Wollstonecraft, and the equal match, celebrated by the first-wave feminists.

Although *Faro’s Daughter* may be easily labeled a feminist novel, Georgette Heyer herself may not be that strong a believer in feminism. Most of Heyer’s novels end up with marriages, and her heroes and heroines marry according to their social layers. The feminist element of *Faro’s Daughter* lies partly in the happy ending which, according to Melissa Schlub, is “probably the least believable” (68) one. To Heyer, there still exist differences in rank between men and women. Jane Aiken Hodge, Heyer’s biographer, notes that Heyer prefers men to women in the aspect of gender. Heyer’s works, as Hodge puts it, is based on the idea that “man is logical, woman intuitive. Man therefore tends to be more interesting than woman” (13). Jennifer Kloester also stresses that Heyer, who lived in the time when England still had class consciousness, was not a feminist in ideology but by temperament: “a strong woman who never questioned her ability or her right to succeed in a patriarchal world – a modern woman in an Edwardian shell” (134-5). One cannot help but ask how a romance author can be so “unfeminist”? How can an author who writes romance, a female-centered genre, show more interest in men than women? The answers may lie in Heyer’s own idea about writing. Like Jane Austen, Heyer “disliked pretentiousness in any form, and excess of any kind. She disliked bores and suffragettes; bluestockings and baby-worshippers” (Hodge 12-3). In the time when attitudes toward gender were undergoing dramatic changes, both Austen and Heyer remained conservative, observing the world’s changes but being sensitive enough to the inappropriate novelties to them. It is also true that in *Faro’s Daughter*, although Deborah and Ravenscar break gender rules, they never show ill intentions to each other. In Heyer’s world, “manners and morals were almost the same thing, and equally important. In these days of compulsory sex in the novel, one turns with relief to the manners and morals of Georgette Heyer’s private world” (Hodge 41). The “escape literature” that Heyer describes her own work as not only enables her readers to flee from the horrors of war but also liberates the readers from the oppression of the gender ideology that still needed amendment.

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