

**The Ladies Advocate: or, Wit and Beauty a Match for Treachery and Inconstancy. Containing a Series of Gallantries, Intrigues, and Amours, Fortunate and Sinister; Quarrels and Reconciliations, between Lovers: Conjugal Plagues and Comforts, Vexations and Endearments; with many Remarkable Incidents and Adventures, the Effects of Love and Jealousy, Fidelity and Inconstancy.**

*The Ladies Advocate: or, Wit and Beauty a Match for Treachery and Inconstancy*<sup>1</sup>, was anonymously published in London, in 1749, at the end of fifty years' worth of 'artistically depraved and morally shallow'<sup>2</sup> fiction, into a literary marketplace under attack from a multifaceted discourse. At first glance, *The Ladies Advocate* appears to present itself as a romance, with the narratives of two women, Philippa and Pilkmena, told alongside each other, detailing the minutiae of their marital and extra-marital dealings, and the subsequent consequences incurred. Even at this arguably simplistic level, when examined, the book affords multiple considerations when viewed within a contemporary eighteenth-century literary context. However, one only needs to investigate a little further to discover the origins of the book, as classified in the Bodleian catalogue, as a 'romance novel based upon the lives of Mrs Laetitia Pilkington and Teresia Constantia Phillips'<sup>3</sup>; *The Ladies Advocate* is a close retelling of the memoirs of these women. So where then, can this retelling of two published works charting the lives of the aforementioned 'scandalous memoirists'<sup>4</sup>, be situated within the eighteenth-century marketplace?

***The Ladies Advocate: or, Wit and Beauty a Match for Treachery and Inconstancy***

In its simplest form, *The Ladies Advocate* is comprised of two separate stories; the 'History of Philippa' and the 'History of Pilkmena', which are interwoven and are said, in the Preface, to narrate the women's 'Faults and Foibles'<sup>5</sup> which have allowed them to fall victim to the 'artful Stratagems'<sup>6</sup> of the men, or the 'treacherous and designing Villains'<sup>7</sup>, in their lives.

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<sup>1</sup> Anonymous, *The Ladies Advocate: or, Wit and Beauty a Match for Treachery and Inconstancy* (London, 1749)

<sup>2</sup> Jerry C. Beasley, *Novels of the 1740s* (Athens: The University of Georgia Press, 1982) p. 2

<sup>3</sup> WorldCat (via Bodleian catalogue) <<http://www.worldcat.org/title/ladies-advocate-or-wit-and-beauty-a-match-for-treachery-and-inconstancy/oclc/317919025>> [accessed 15/12/2010]

<sup>4</sup> Lynda Thompson, *The 'Scandalous Memoirists': Constantia Phillips, Laetitia Pilkington and the shame of 'public fame'* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2000)

<sup>5</sup> *The Ladies Advocate*, p. vi

<sup>6</sup> *The Ladies Advocate*, p. viii

<sup>7</sup> *The Ladies Advocate*, p. vii

The 'History of Philippa' commences when, at the age of thirteen, she naively places her trust in Grimaldo, a young noble, who rapes her, ruining her reputation and virtue. Despite this, she marries Batavus, who although aware of her past, ultimately succumbs to family pressures against Philippa and intends to divorce her. The majority of the history revolves around the heated divorce battle, in which each party goes to great lengths to discredit the other, interspersed, meanwhile, with episodes which deal with her relations with a long line of men, taking on an almost anecdotal quality.

The 'History of Pilkmena' begins with her childhood, during which it is revealed that the Irish Pilkmena possesses a natural aptitude for 'letters'. At age 15, she marries Pilkmenon, a reverend, whom gains the support and friendship of Doctor Swift, who in turn encourages Pilkmena's fondness for writing and poetry. Following Pilkmenon's move to London to take up a chaplaincy, the marriage deteriorates, with each reported to have been unfaithful, and ultimately Pilkmenon leaves Pilkmena destitute and publicly shamed. Henceforth, Pilkmena is forced to support herself, profiting from her wit and talent for writing, and gaining the good opinion of high-profile men such as Colley Cibber. The distinguishing feature of Pilkmena's story is poetry; her verses are scattered throughout the story.

Throughout the book, the narratives bear no relation to each other, although the reader may well expect or even hope them to. The author draws comparisons and aligns the two stories in the preface, 'The two Ladies, whom we have made the Heroines of our Novel'<sup>8</sup>, and once again to conclude the book, 'Were we to make a Comparison between these two incomparable Ladies'<sup>9</sup>. The inclusion of both stories could be questionable to the reader, as indeed the authors themselves state, in saying that there 'is no great Similitude'<sup>10</sup> between the two women portrayed; each story does nothing to support the other, and the only obvious function for this pairing is to give more weight to the didactic and instructive purposes the author attaches to the text.

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<sup>8</sup> *The Ladies Advocate*, p. vi

<sup>9</sup> *The Ladies Advocate*, p. 302

<sup>10</sup> *The Ladies Advocate*, p. 302

The pursuit of two separate narratives within one text is arguably somewhat unusual for novels of the time, and so this distinctive stylistic device serves to place the novel as something alternative within the literary marketplace. However, this was an interesting decision, given that the stories were not original creations of the author; the use of dual narratives prevented production of a direct retelling, perhaps in an attempt to prevent leaving the book open to criticism on the grounds of a lack of originality. Use of the two stories allowed the author to create suspense; in a similar way to Pamela's dramatic suspension of her writing at critical points<sup>11</sup>, the switching between histories, adds drama to the narratives, departing from one at critical and involved moments.

The relationship of *The Ladies Advocate* to *An Apology for the Conduct of Mrs T. C Phillips*<sup>12</sup> and *The Memoirs of Mrs Laetitia Pilkington*<sup>13</sup> is more than obvious, and at the most basic level can be seen in the concealment of their names as Philippa and Pilkmena. One only needs to read a brief biography of either woman in order to trace the stories, let alone read the memoirs themselves. But, if you were to do that, the similarities would become even more striking. The author apparently seemed loath to produce any large quantity of original material, and instead, resorted to direct borrowing. *Memoirs* was written from Pilkington's perspective, in the first person; the author of *The Ladies Advocate* maintains much of her original words, directly borrows phrases and structures and omits certain details which are unrelated to the main story, for example:

*The Ladies Advocate*: 'This Restraint, however, made Pilkmena the more eager in Pursuit of what she imagined would yield her the greatest Pleasure'<sup>14</sup>

*Memoirs*: 'This Restraint, as it generally happens, made me but more earnest in the Pursuit of, what I imagin'd, must be so delightful'<sup>15</sup>

The main difference is the change from a first person to third person perspective. The author also makes use of Pilkington's poetry, including poems such as, 'An Ode' (p. 102) and 'To the Rev. Dr. Swift, on his Birth-Day' (p. 51), all of which are unattributed to their true

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<sup>11</sup> Samuel Richardson, *Pamela* (1740), ed. Thomas Keymer and Alice Wakely, (New York: Oxford World Classics, 2001)

<sup>12</sup> Teresia Constantia Phillips, *An Apology for the Conduct of Mrs T. C Phillips* (London, 1748)

<sup>13</sup> Laetitia Pilkington, *The Memoirs of Mrs Laetitia Pilkington* (Dublin, 1748)

<sup>14</sup> *The Ladies Advocate*, p. 42

<sup>15</sup> Pilkington, p. 11

author. For some reason, the author relies less heavily upon the original text of *An Apology*, which was written from the point of view of a man who had ‘known Mrs Muilman about these twenty Years’<sup>16</sup>. Although the content remains identical, the author has sometimes embellished the narrative; on page 8, additional historical details are added. One reason for the lesser borrowing from this work, could be to enable a similar tone and style to be maintained between the two histories, allowing a consistent narrative voice.

### **The ‘Scandalous Memoirists’<sup>17</sup>; Laetitia Pilkington and Constantia Phillips**

It is fair to say that *The Ladies Advocate* cannot truly be examined without serious consideration of Laetitia Pilkington and Constantia Phillips and their works, to who the existence of *The Ladies Advocate* is owed. Laetitia Pilkington, known as both poet and autobiographer<sup>18</sup>, first published her work *The Memoirs of Mrs Laetitia Pilkington* in Dublin; the first two volumes appeared in 1748, and the third, unfinished at the time of her death in 1750, was published posthumously by her son in 1754<sup>19</sup>. *Memoirs*, described as ‘autobiographical, personal satire, lampoon and social history...peppered with short pieces of poetry’<sup>20</sup> was written in an attempt to vindicate herself from the reputation she has accrued, and to blame others<sup>21</sup>.

Constantia Phillips (or Teresia Constantia Phillips), was famous as a ‘courtesan memoirist’<sup>22</sup>; her memoirs, *An apology for the conduct of Mrs T. C Phillips* were published in 1748, by instalment. Phillips’ primary motive for publication was blackmail, of her husband and former lovers<sup>23</sup>, but Thompson feels that ultimately it became ‘an attack on contemporary sexual politics, the double standard and women’s inequality’<sup>24</sup>. At the time, Pilkington was

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<sup>16</sup> Phillips, p. 13

<sup>17</sup> Thompson

<sup>18</sup> Oxford Dictionary of National Biography <<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/22270>> [accessed 15/12/2010]

<sup>19</sup> Orlando Project, ‘Laetitia Pilkington’

<[http://orlando.cambridge.org/protected/svPeople?formname=r&people\\_tab=2&person\\_id=pilkla&heading=h](http://orlando.cambridge.org/protected/svPeople?formname=r&people_tab=2&person_id=pilkla&heading=h)> [accessed 15/12/2010]

<sup>20</sup> Orlando Project, ‘Laetitia Pilkington’

<sup>21</sup> Norma Clarke, *Queen of the Wits* (London: Faber and Faber, 2008) p. xviii

<sup>22</sup> Orlando Project, ‘Teresia Constantia Phillips’

<[http://orlando.cambridge.org/protected/svPeople?formname=r&people\\_tab=2&person\\_id=philde&heading=h](http://orlando.cambridge.org/protected/svPeople?formname=r&people_tab=2&person_id=philde&heading=h)> [accessed 15/12/2010]

<sup>23</sup> Orlando Project, ‘Teresia Constantia Phillips’

<sup>24</sup> Thompson, p. 22

acknowledged as a writer; she included her own verses in *Memoirs*, but controversy surrounds Phillips' work; there is debate as to whether she wrote *An Apology* herself, and also as to its truthfulness. It has been suggested that Paul Whitehead, a hack writer and former lover of Phillips, wrote her memoirs<sup>25</sup>, and it is known that certain details in letters included in the memoirs have been altered, thus leading to questions about the veracity of aspects of the remainder of the text.

*Memoirs* and *An Apology* received a mixed reception upon their entrance into the marketplace; a consequence of the literary quality, as well as the authors' reputations. Contemporary readers of Phillips' memoirs appeared 'simultaneously attracted and horrified'<sup>26</sup>, yet research by Wiles states that her work commonly featured in 'many a gentleman's library, as they did in many a scholar's research'<sup>27</sup>, where they were 'devoured, used and discredited'<sup>28</sup>. Similarly, Pilkington's writing 'scandalised her contemporaries', yet her claims were treated with 'credibility', and upon publication, her memoirs were greeted by huge public demand<sup>29</sup>. Both public and scholarly opinion seemed divided; feelings of scandal, juxtaposed with not empathy, but certainly some degree of understanding. Much literary discussion was provoked: *The Parallel: Or Pilkington and Philips Compared* by 'An Oxford Scholar'<sup>30</sup>, and *Remarks on Mrs Muilman's Letter to the Right Honourable the Earl of Chesterfield*<sup>31</sup> by 'a Lady', to name but a few. A further consideration with regards to the contemporary response is, of course, the fact that they were both female authors, and writing, previously a predominantly male domain, was somewhat controversially becoming an 'established employment' for women<sup>32</sup>. Phillips and Pilkington took the autobiographical genre and gave it an original twist. They did not write, as other female memoirists had previously done, as victims, but instead portrayed themselves as 'independent, strident,

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<sup>25</sup> Thompson, p. 28

<sup>26</sup> Thompson, p. 70

<sup>27</sup> R. M Wiles in *The 'Scandalous Memoirists': Constantia Phillips, Laetitia Pilkington and the shame of 'publick fame'* by Lynda Thompson (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2000), p. 70

<sup>28</sup> Thompson, p. 70-71

<sup>29</sup> Thompson, p. 95 and p. 116

<sup>30</sup> Anonymous, *The Parallel: Or Pilkington and Philips Compared* (London, 1748)

<sup>31</sup> Anonymous, *Mrs Muilman's Letter to the Right Honourable the Earl of Chesterfield* (London, 1750)

<sup>32</sup> Cheryl Turner, *Living by the Pen* (Routledge, 1992) p. 78

witty, ready to attack, yet willing to admit their own flaws', adding a further attraction to their works in the eighteenth-century marketplace<sup>33</sup>.

### **Publication and reception**

When investigating the history and origins of the book, relatively little information is available as to its publication, in comparison to other eighteenth-century texts. The English Short Title Catalogue<sup>34</sup> shows just one edition of *The Ladies Advocate*: the original, published in 1749, and printed by a C. Long, near St. Paul's<sup>35</sup>. An advertisement for the work is found in the *London Gazetteer* of Tuesday 25<sup>th</sup> April 1749, announcing its publication on the following Saturday<sup>36</sup>, which allows us precisely to pinpoint Saturday 29<sup>th</sup> April 1749 as the day upon which *The Ladies Advocate* was published. The advertisement further states that the book, 'neatly printed in a Pocket Volume'<sup>37</sup>, was priced at 3 shillings for a bound copy of the work. The only later reference to the book found in eighteenth-century newspapers is an advertisement for a second edition by instalment. The advertisement, featured in issues of both the *Penny London Post* and *The Morning Advertiser*, spanning from February 19<sup>th</sup> 1750 to February 26<sup>th</sup> 1750, sets out the following conditions:

*I: That this book shall be compriz'd in 13 Numbers, beautifully printed on a fine Paper and entire new Letter, at Two-pence each.*

*II: That each Number shall contain 24 pages, stitch'd up in blue Covers to keep them clean.*

*III. That the Numbers shall be delivered every Saturday at the Houses of those Gentlemen and Ladies who please to order them, on speaking to any of the Persons who sell News-Papers or Subscription-Books'*<sup>38</sup>

Wiles notes that publication by instalment previous to 1750 was considered 'respectable and impressive'; despite representing a very small portion of the literary market, it was found to be successful, as members of the public not usually interested in reading were attracted by works published by instalment<sup>39</sup>. In the case of *The Ladies Advocate*, it could be

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<sup>33</sup> Thompson p. x

<sup>34</sup> English Short Title Catalogue <<http://estc.bl.uk>> [accessed 15/12/2010]

<sup>35</sup> *The Ladies Advocate*

<sup>36</sup> *The London Gazetteer*, Issue 122, Tuesday 25<sup>th</sup> April 1749

<sup>37</sup> *The London Gazetteer*

<sup>38</sup> *Penny London Post* or *The Morning Advertiser*, Issue 1227, February 19<sup>th</sup> – 21<sup>st</sup> 1750

<sup>39</sup> R. M Wiles, *Serial Publication in England Before 1750* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1957), p. 4 and p.5

taken to denote a certain level of popularity and interest in the text; the demand may have been high enough to justify a second mode of publication. Alternatively, it could demonstrate a low level of interest, and be seen as an attempt to attract a wider audience. However, the wording of the advertisement would seem to limit the text to a certain type of person: those not only with money, but also, educated 'Gentlemen and Ladies' who had their newspapers delivered.

Unfortunately, the same is true with regards to eighteenth-century reception of the book: little evidence can be found which indicates either reception or response from the literary marketplace or reading public. At the time of publication, literary reviews were just beginning to be used, most notably in the form of *The Monthly Review*, first produced in April 1749. Searches of the British Periodical Database have sadly proved fruitless, and it would appear that no reviews either were published, or are now available. By unhappy chance, *The Ladies Advocate* seems to have been passed by, as part of the 'characteristic response...of silent neglect,'<sup>40</sup> towards fiction of the 1740s. As useful as access to contemporary opinion on this work would have been in affording a modern-day reader greater understanding and insight into the text, a variety of suggestions and observations can still be made, drawing from the numerous resources now available.

One such source is a physical copy of the book itself, viewed at Chawton House Library<sup>41</sup>. Through viewing and analysing the copy, in conjunction with digitalised information available through the library's archives, some information can be gleaned. The duodecimo copy has the original, contemporary full-sheep binding, typical of the era, yet the plain, unembellished binding suggests that this would have been a standard trade binding, completed by the printer upon printing. It was common practice, at the time, for wealthy people to commission and select bindings according to their own tastes, or to match the rest of their literary collections; had this copy had a binding of this kind, it would clearly have indicated that someone once gave importance to the book, and thus attach a degree of literary value. The print used is somewhat smaller than was normally found in works printed at a similar time; it appears that effort was made so as to avoid the book spilling

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<sup>40</sup> Beasley, p. 3

<sup>41</sup> Chawton House Library <<http://www.chawton.org/>> [accessed 15/12/2010]

over into a second volume. This decision taken by the publisher must suggest something; possibly that they were unsure of reception as to warrant two volumes of the text, or the wish to increase accessibility and so commodify the work to some extent. So what does tell us? That we should view *The Ladies Advocate* as a less important eighteenth-century work? It could be said that the owner of this copy did not greatly value the work, but should this be taken as representative of reception as a whole? The point must be made that the book at Chawton House Library is merely one remaining copy of the book, and thus should not, and cannot, be taken as an indicator of all contemporary reception, or its contribution to the literary marketplace.

Another consideration to take into account is that of the aforementioned advertisement for publication in instalments. In the absence of statistics or evidence relating to a positive reception of the text, what can be said about the second publication? True, this was not in response to the usual general public demand which resulted in a second edition, but instead was available in response to a specific demand should it arise. And although there is no evidence of uptake to these instalments, the existence of this advertisement must give some degree of indication as to further demand for the work, following the original publication in 1749.

### **Anonymity**

The anonymity of this text is an important characteristic which should certainly not be ignored. Statistics from James Raven reveal that from 1770 until 1800, 70% of novels were published anonymously, and 40% remain unattributed to this day<sup>42</sup>. Although relating to a later period, these statistics demonstrate that anonymity was nothing unusual during the eighteenth-century, in fact it was 'at least as much a norm as signed authorship'<sup>43</sup>. Reasons behind anonymity vary from author to author, and so from text to text, providing interesting reflections in terms of authorial intention; this book is no exception. Given the previously-mentioned controversy surrounding Pilkington and Phillips, it is easy to see that the author

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<sup>42</sup> Statistics of James Raven - Robert J. Griffin, 'Anonymity and Authorship', *New Literary History*, 30:4 (1999), 877-895 (p.883)

<sup>43</sup> Griffin, p. 882

may have shied away from publicly linking their name to these women of 'publick fame'<sup>44</sup>. The title's use of the word 'advocate' testifies to a perceived opposition to the author's purpose and standpoint, through which the author positions him or herself against common public opinion, and thus anonymity may therefore be attributable to concern over reactions towards this. In terms of the type of work under consideration, the lack of originality demonstrated may also have resulted in some kind of public backlash, but more than this, how was it possible for someone to attribute two unoriginal stories as their own work, simply through combining them as one literary entity?

It is hard to draw conclusions as to the identity of the author. One idea which could be hazarded is that the writer was not a well-known or famous author of the time; the book's borrowings required little original thought or production on the part of the author, and so would a well-regarded author have stooped to this level of imitation, and in doing so risk their credible reputation? Conversely, a well-known author could have done precisely this, and thus present another pressing reason for anonymity. Neither is it easy to hypothesise with regards to gender; the narrative voice appears neither overtly masculine nor feminine. At a superficial level, one may take *The Ladies Advocate* to indicate a man, for surely a woman need not put herself forward as an advocate for the remainder of her sex. Yet, Pilkington and Phillips were no ordinary women, and so perhaps the title should be taken as pertaining specifically to these two ladies, and so a female 'advocate' could well have a place. Within the text, few specific passages relate directly to gender, but one can be found in the opening paragraph, in which the narrator hopes to be guided 'to the inmost Recesses of a Female Heart'<sup>45</sup>. Although it is fair to say that a male author would be more likely to write such a phrase, one should also bear in mind the self-depreciatory nature of woman's writing common of the time, in which women excused their work and female nature<sup>46</sup>.

Yet the author's anonymity functions slightly differently in this book; the title *The Ladies Advocate* attaches an authorial voice to the novel, and the narrative voice clearly takes on the role of an advocate for ladies. Despite the aforementioned borrowings from the original

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<sup>44</sup> Thompson

<sup>45</sup> *The Ladies Advocate*, p. 2

<sup>46</sup> As demonstrated in; Mary Davys, 'The Refom'd Coquet', from Backschelder, Paula M. and Richetti, John J. (eds.) *Popular fiction by women 1600-1730: An anthology* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1996), pp.250-320 (p. 253)

works, the author manages to manipulate and adapt the unoriginal stories to suit each other, enabling a clear authorial voice to be sustained throughout the text, and so in spite of the anonymity, an authorial presence can still be strongly identified. But what does this tell us about the author's intention – what did the author want from the writing and publication of the work? Although neither woman is directly referenced or mentioned in the text, it can be assumed that the blatant inferences left the contemporary audience in no doubt as to the identities of the two protagonists. Was it the author's intention to attempt to liberate the women from their reputations, and if so, were they successful? As we have seen, no reviews appear to survive, and so this question cannot be easily answered. Furthermore, if the author was genuinely in favour of Pilkington and Phillips, why then did they choose to remain anonymous – surely an overt stand in their favour, would have done their cause more good? Or, from a more cynical perspective, it would be fair to say that the most likely explanation may be that the author simply sought to profit from the attention and hype attracted by the previous memoirs, and in publishing *The Ladies Advocate*, so to speak, jumped on the bandwagon.

### **Place in the literary marketplace**

From the moment we open the cover, the book is clearly situated within a contemporary literary setting; the title page is littered with references to issues under frequent discussion amongst literary scholars of the time. As a whole, this could be viewed as an attempt to subscribe to the demands of the market place, or to the 'tastes of a heterogeneous popular audience'<sup>47</sup>.

Literary discourse of the eighteenth-century frequently revolved around the importance of reality, in opposition to the increasingly popular romance novels. *The Ladies Advocate* instantly subscribes to this mode of discourse, stating on the title page that the work is 'strictly true'<sup>48</sup>. Truth claims were a common feature of eighteenth-century literature, with authors hoping to attract the literary public with a promise of veracity, yet undoubtedly a large part of these were in fact false, take the first edition of *Pamela* for instance. It seems a shame that this work is held up beside a multitude of other works claiming to be true; there

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<sup>47</sup> Beasley, p. 2-3

<sup>48</sup> *The Ladies Advocate*, title page

is nothing that clearly distinguishes and sets this aside as 'truth', or at least, insofar as we can take the original memoirs to be truthful. What is interesting is that this is the only instance in the book in which a strict truth claim is made, and the author attributes any part of the work to anything other than their own imagination.

Whilst the claim to truth of *The Ladies Advocate* seems obvious and clear-cut, questions and considerations regarding the genre of the novel remain. There are clues and indications to a number of possible genres, but narrowing it down to one finite genre proves problematic. The book treads a fine line between fiction and memoirs; Spacks is of the opinion that 'the line between autobiographical and fictional belief becomes more difficult to draw'<sup>49</sup> when considering Pilkington, thus when considering an amalgamation of Pilkington and Phillips, the line becomes even more blurred. Should we see *The Ladies Advocate* and the tales recounted as biographical or a work of fiction? What undoubtedly began as autobiographical constructions, despite some arguing that fictional liberties were taken by Pilkington who 'shapes her mid-century memoir like a romance'<sup>50</sup>, were taken by the author and used for fictional purposes, but did they truly become fiction? It cannot be presumed that the contemporary audience knew the origins of *The Ladies Advocate*, and so it is interesting to consider whether the conflict between fiction and memoir affected the eighteenth-century reception.

Tastes for literature of the time had begun to move away from the earlier domination of romances, more importance and emphasis was placed upon realism, most specifically in the novel form, as explained by Watt<sup>51</sup>; Watt views the novels of Defoe, Richardson and Fielding as the precursors of a new literary pervasion of realism. Although their 'novels' were published prior to *The Ladies Advocate*, we can see traces of this with the work; part of the title page reads:

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<sup>49</sup> Patricia Meyer Spacks, *Imagining a Self: Autobiography and Novel in Eighteenth-Century England* (London: Harvard University Press, 1976) p. 17

<sup>50</sup> Spacks, p. 1-2

<sup>51</sup> Ian Watt, *The Rise of the Novel* (Harmondsworth : Penguin, 1963)

*'Exhibiting Such a surprizing Variety of Scenes in the Amatorial Commerce between the two Sexes, as, though strictly true, are scarce to be paralleled in the most inventive Romance.'*<sup>52</sup>

The author acknowledges that the series of events depicted throughout the book may seem somewhat far-fetched, the almost incessant string of events which occur throughout the two narratives at times appear almost farcical, and the reader begins to wonder if anything good or normal will ever happen! Yet the juxtaposition of the romance reference with the strict truth claim, works to diminish the risk of the work being viewed as a Romance. The act of disguising real names within the text, further subscribes to features of romance; many characters possess Romantic names, for example, 'Pilkmena' and 'Pilkmenon', 'Grimaldo' and 'Batavus', to name but a few. It is interesting to draw these parallels between the realism and romantic inclinations demonstrated within the book; it is possible to see that each seems to hide behind the other, although whether this was a conscious authorial decision, we cannot say.

Despite the fact that the popularity of the novel was on the rise and the amount of printed matter that was novelistic rose from 1.1% to 4% from 1729 to 1770<sup>53</sup>, the novel came under much criticism. Anti-novel discourse from literary scholars and critics was prevalent, principally for moral reasons, and so in order for novels to prove successful, they had to comply with moral views of the time<sup>54</sup>. The title page of *The Ladies Advocate* states the story will be 'Digested in the Manner of a Novel'<sup>55</sup>; likening it, but not calling it a 'novel'. The huge success of *Pamela* earlier in the decade paved the way for a higher profile to be given to novels, and so it is curious that the author did not attempt fully to appeal to the trend and rising popularity of novels, through labelling the book as an actual novel. On the other hand, due to the anti-novel discourse, one may also understand why the author did not; for fear of dismissal or attack due to the view that stories were lies<sup>56</sup>.

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<sup>52</sup> *The Ladies Advocate*, title page

<sup>53</sup> Helen Cole: ENGL3041 lecture, 15/11/2010 - James Raven, *A Chronological Check-list of Prose Fiction printed in Britain and Ireland* (New Haven: University of Delaware Press, 1987), 10.

<sup>54</sup> Cole: ENGL3041 lecture

<sup>55</sup> *The Ladies Advocate*, title page

<sup>56</sup> William Warner, *Licensing Entertainment: The Elevation of Novel Reading in Britain, 1684-1750* (University of California Press, 1998), p. 9

One common way through which authors attached value to their work was in ensuring a didactic quality; 'fiction writers were usually even more preoccupied in their prefaces with defending the ethical utility of their production'<sup>57</sup>, which certainly rings true in *The Ladies Advocate*. The reading of novels was said to 'introduce[s] false ideas into the mind, vitiate[s] the taste, and [have] a tendency to corrupt the heart'<sup>58</sup>, with young and inexperienced readers becoming too drawn in by the stories, copying the characters or becoming disillusioned with real life. Thus novels and fiction had to be presented as educational or useful. The preface proudly states that:

*'a judicious Reader is never more profitably entertained, than when he sees Life and Nature exemplified in the Actions and Passions of Mankind. He learns from the Indiscretion and Misconduct of others, to prevent and rectify Mistakes in his own Behaviour, and by observing the Source of their Misfortunes, is the better enabled to secure himself against the like sinister Events.'*<sup>59</sup>

And that the stories 'will afford abundant Instruction'<sup>60</sup>; immediately giving the book a use, and therefore value within the marketplace. Similar sentiments are reiterated in the concluding pages of the book, through comments of an 'Oxford Critick'<sup>61</sup> and analysis on the part of the author, repeating the provision of 'abundant Instruction'<sup>62</sup>. One of the more curious aspects of the work is to consider the fact that the author was in fact attaching didactic claims to the lives of Pilkington and Phillips, using their memoirs to champion them as examples of how not to behave.

The heavy borrowings of the author – not only in terms of the two memoirs, but also the critique of them by the Oxford scholar – throw into question the issues of originality and imitation. As previously mentioned, large sections have simply been copied into *The Ladies Advocate*; phrasing and tone is maintained, and the included verse of Pilkington remain

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<sup>57</sup> Beasley, p. 7

<sup>58</sup> Cheryl Nixon, *Novel definitions : an anthology of commentary on the novel 1688-1815* (Ontario : Broadview Press, 2008) p. 252

<sup>59</sup> *The Ladies Advocate*, p. v 'The Preface'

<sup>60</sup> *The Ladies Advocate*, p. viii

<sup>61</sup> The observations and comments quoted from pages 295 to 302 have been lifted directly from *The Parallel: Or Pilkington and Philips Compared*, an article written by an 'Oxford Scholar', and printed in 1748, shortly after the publication of *An Apology and Memoirs*, in which the author defends the women's decision to publish their memoirs, both as a means to support themselves and so as to defend and attempt to repair their public reputations. He sets them aside from other contemporary works, especially those with false truth claims or full of the 'ill Qualities of Romances' (p. 13).

<sup>62</sup> *The Ladies Advocate*, p. 303

apparently unattributed to anyone other than the author. Literary originality was valued, as discussed by Young a few years later, saying that 'Originals, are, and ought to be great Favourites', whilst 'Imitations are often a sort of Manufacture wrought up by those Mechanics'<sup>63</sup>. *The Ladies Advocate* takes imitation to the extreme; there is little original writing or thought within the work, so how would an eighteenth-century audience have responded to this? It could be possible that the lack of originality demonstrated in the book did not work to the author's advantage, and that it wasn't received well at the time, thus pointing towards a possible reason behind the lack of reprints or evidence of a positive reception.

### **What is *The Ladies Advocate*?**

One comment that can certainly be made with regards to this work is that it is no ordinary work of fiction; instead it is a curious and multidimensional book. When analysing the book, it is hard to know what to make of it; can it be read as a fiction or a memoir? A romance or a 'novel'? An original or unoriginal production? The way in which the author composed the novel as two paralleled retellings makes the text distinctive, providing us, as modern day readers with much discussion, but it may not have had the same effect upon an eighteenth-century reader. In fact, what may have been of higher importance to such a reader, is the subject matter; the lives of Laetitia Pilkington and Constantia Phillips, who were notorious within eighteenth-century society.

It is unfortunate, but sadly not unusual, that there has been little left behind to help a modern day reader make sense of and understand the work from an eighteenth-century perspective. This shortage could be attributable to a number of issues; perhaps, the previously mentioned unoriginality of the work, the distinctive dual narrative style, or maybe even its anonymity? With further research, such questions could perhaps begin to be answered, but for now, modern day readers can only guess.

An overriding issue which arises from a number of the discussions of this paper, is that of authorial intention; something made all the more difficult, given the anonymity of the text.

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<sup>63</sup> Edward Young, 'Conjectures on Original Composition' in *Novel definitions : an anthology of commentary on the novel 1688-1815* ed. Cheryl Nixon (Ontario : Broadview Press, 2008) pp. 190-192 (p. 190)

It could be said that the author invested relatively little in the work as they were simply interested in financial gains; happy to profiteer from the public interest and controversy surrounding Pilkington and Phillips. With regards to this, it is true to say that the author appears to have very much crafted the paratext and the narrative so as to strongly appeal to literary tastes of the time, principally demonstrated through its direct appeal to didactic purposes and its romantic leanings. But then again, perhaps this is too cynical an approach to take, and the author did truly intend to make a stand of their behalf, and to come out in their defence as 'the Ladies Advocate'.

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