

'Self-Conscious Literary Change: Engaging the Audience in the Emerging Novel'  
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For the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, "raging women" and "crying men," on stage and within prose narratives, illustrate how gender affects an audience's willingness to accept emotional performances. While *male* rage and *female* despair were widely acceptable, changing the gender of these emotions was a dangerous proposition: angry women and grieving men were viewed as equally monstrous because of their disruption of contemporary gender roles. Women's rage was a sign of women's supposedly "uncontrollable" emotion, whereas men's despair was often despised, and those who cried for the wrong reasons or to an excessive degree were called "unmanly" and often had their sexual identity and/or sexual ability denigrated. Both of these taboo gendered emotions were more likely to be viewed as acceptable by theatrical rather than reading audiences: the fact that such excessive emotion, well outside the bounds of what was acceptable to express publicly, was tolerated on stage, meant that when these emotions appeared in prose works, they were tainted by their association with actors and acting.

If, as numerous critics following Ian Watt have argued, the development of the early novel suggested "progress" in terms of characterization—and particularly the ability of writers to delve more deeply into their motivations and feelings—what do we make of the fact that excessive gendered emotions are often depicted as suspect within these early prose works? Because both female rage and male despair threaten contemporary social and religious hierarchies, they are equally taboo in a society that is undergoing enormous change. Thus, I believe that the emerging novel genre, connected as it is to other genres that share the goal of teaching correct behavior—such as conduct books, newspapers, letter-writing manuals, etc.—is less able to allow even the *display* of the taboo gendered emotions of female rage and male despair.