

**THE POLITICS OF DESIRE: ENGLISH WOMEN PLAYWRIGHTS, PARTISANSHIP,  
AND THE STAGING OF FEMALE SEXUALITY, 1660-1737**

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*The Politics of Desire* argues that late seventeenth- and early eighteenth-century women playwrights make key interventions into period politics through comedic representations of sexualized female characters. During the Restoration and the early eighteenth century in England, partisan goings-on were repeatedly refracted through the prism of female sexuality. Charles II asserted his right to the throne by hanging portraits of his courtesans at Whitehall, while Whigs avoided blame for the volatility of the early eighteenth-century stock market by foisting fault for financial instability onto female gamblers. The discourses of sexuality and politics were imbricated in the texts of this period; however, scholars have not fully appreciated how female dramatists' treatment of desiring female characters reflects their partisan investments. In fact, critical estimations of plays written by women have been more apt to focus on how well these playwrights' works accord with modern feminist understandings of female desire than on how women dramatists' texts complicate and corroborate the political discourse of the day. This dissertation treats late seventeenth- and early eighteenth-century sexual and partisan discourse as inextricably intertwined. Reconstructing the tumultuous political context in which Restoration and early eighteenth-century women wrote, *The Politics of Desire* shows that these playwrights' comedies make important—and heretofore unrecognized—interventions into the political landscape of the day. In chapters that focus on courtesans and bawds, cheating wives, female gamblers, and pandered wives, this dissertation examines the ways that Aphra

Behn, Mary Pix, Susanna Centlivre, and Eliza Haywood reframe partisan discourse about particular types of sexualized women. Ultimately, *The Politics of Desire* enriches the critical conversation about women playwrights' comedies, giving these plays the kind of precise, carefully contextualized attention they deserve.

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## 1.0 INTRODUCTION

In much of her *oeuvre*, Delarivier Manley treats sexualized female characters sympathetically. In her tragedy *The Royal Mischief* (1696), Manley justifies the romantic affairs of the protagonist, Homais, by framing them as a natural outgrowth of the confines that Homais's elderly husband has placed on her (early in the play, Homais proclaims, "I'm a Woman, made/Passionate by want of Liberty").<sup>1</sup> In her autobiographical novel, *The Adventures of Rivella* (1714), Manley celebrates the romantic liaisons of her avatar, Rivella, describing her as "the only person of her sex that knows how to *live*."<sup>2</sup> Manley's sole comedy, however, frames its 'fallen' woman character ambivalently. At certain points in *The Lost Lover* (1696), Belira does serve as a normative voice (when three women discuss the rakish Sir Amorous Courtall, Belira is the only one who describes Courtall accurately, deeming him "the most outcast Fop in Nature").<sup>3</sup> In its concluding moments, though, *The Lost Lover* characterizes Belira as a crazed woman whose brief romance with the rakish Wilmore has set her on a quest for vengeance. In the penultimate scene of Manley's only comedy, when Belira's plot against Wilmore has been exposed and the rake stands poised to marry another woman, Belira becomes unhinged: she tells Wilmore that

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<sup>1</sup> Delarivier Manley, *The Royal Mischief*, in *Eighteenth-Century Women Playwrights*, Vol. 1, eds. Margarete Rubik and Eva Mueller-Zettelmann, (London: Pickering & Chatto, 2001), 44-103, on 61.

<sup>2</sup> Delarivier Manley, *The Adventures of Rivella* (Peterborough, Ontario: Broadview Press, 1999), 114.

<sup>3</sup> Delarivier Manley, *The Lost Lover*, in *Eighteenth-Century Women Playwrights*, Vol. 1, 2-41, on 17 (hereafter cited in text).

she hopes he suffers “some Wretched Death unknown” and makes an attempt on the life of his new romantic interest (37).

What accounts for the fate that Belira suffers? Why does Manley employ a trope in *The Lost Lover* that she rejects elsewhere in her body of work—that of the sexualized woman driven mad by lust?<sup>4</sup> An exchange midway through the play helps account for these anomalies. Explaining to Wilmore why she has schemed against him, Belira reminds the rake of the vows he had previously made to her:

BELIRA: . . . how often hast thou told, thou cou’d’st for ever Love me?

WILMORE: I told you that I cou’d, not that I wou’d.

BELIRA: Poor Caviller, those who can jest with Oaths, can play with Words (29)

Belira would seem to make a justified claim against Wilmore in this exchange, highlighting the rake’s double-dealing and calling him out for “play[ing] with words.” In the late seventeenth century, though, such a conversation would have had political implications that would have complicated any sympathy that Belira’s words might have generated. For a long time, England had been the site of an ongoing public debate about oaths.<sup>5</sup> In the late seventeenth century, such discussions centered on the question of whether it was ethical, or even legal, for the English to shift their loyalty from James II to William and Mary. These debates came to a head when, in 1689, William and Mary required all political and religious officeholders to sign an oath of allegiance swearing loyalty to the sitting monarchs. Most English public servants took the oath;

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<sup>4</sup> For more on the trope of the lust-crazed former lover, see Candace Brook Katz, “The Deserted Mistress Motif in Mrs. Manley’s *Lost Lover*, 1696,” *Restoration and Eighteenth-Century Theatre Research* 16 (1977), 27-39. Katz’s work on the deserted-mistress motif itself is helpful, as are her readings of certain of the early scenes of *The Lost Lover*, but her interpretation of the Belira character is ultimately too rosy and provides an unsatisfactory account of the latter portions of the play.

<sup>5</sup> For a survey of public conversations about oaths in the seventeenth century, see Caroline Robbins, “Selden’s Pills: State Oaths in England 1558-1714,” *Huntington Library Quarterly* 35 (1972), 303-21.

however, a handful of conservatives who remained loyal to James II did not.<sup>6</sup> Known as Jacobites or non-jurors, those who refused to take the oath of allegiance set off a war of words in the English public press, with writers debating political loyalty and the legal basis of the Glorious Revolution.<sup>7</sup> In his work on the political pamphlets published during this crisis, which was known as the Allegiance Controversy, Mark Goldie estimates that between 1688 and 1694 “two and a half million words . . . flooded forth arguing theories of obligation.”<sup>8</sup>

Manley herself was a political conservative (later in her career, she wrote Tory propaganda); as such, we might expect her to sympathize with Belira’s suggestion that vows should be binding. At the moment *The Lost Lover* was written, though, a commitment to the binding nature of vows had come to seem problematically—even dangerously—rigid. In February of 1696, a month before *The Lost Lover* was first staged, a Jacobite assassination plot against William III had been exposed.<sup>9</sup> Designed to restore James II to the throne, this plot did not end up serving its intended function, but instead helped to solidify public perception of the Jacobites as political extremists and shore up public support for William. Immediately following the revelation of the plot, the House of Commons drew up the Association of 1696, a document

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<sup>6</sup> For an overview of how Tory ideology evolved to accommodate the accession of William III and, in so doing, became distinct from Jacobite thought, see H. T. Dickinson, “The Tories and the Ideology of Order,” chap. 1 of *Liberty and Property: Political Ideology in Eighteenth-Century Britain* (New York: Holmes and Meier, 1977).

<sup>7</sup> For more on non-juror politics, see C. D. A. Leighton, “The Non-Jurors and Their History,” *Journal of Religious History* 29 (2005), 241-57.

<sup>8</sup> Mark Goldie, “The Revolution of 1689 and the Structure of Political Argument: An Essay and an Annotated Bibliography of Pamphlets on the Allegiance Controversy,” *Bulletin of Research in the Humanities* 83:4 (1980), 473-563, on 477.

<sup>9</sup> Jane Garrett, *The Triumphs of Providence: The Assassination Plot, 1696* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980).

that declared William “rightful and lawful king.”<sup>10</sup> The Association began as a test of loyalty for members of Parliament, but it came to circulate much more widely than its writers had originally expected, and it ended up serving as a way for Englishmen of varied classes to signal their support for Williamite rule. During the early years of William and Mary’s reign, the Oranges’ right to rule had been in question, as Tories had continued to grapple with the reality of their party’s having been disloyal to James II. In the wake of the revelation of the assassination plot, however, only the furthest-right Englishmen and -women continued to resist William’s rule.<sup>11</sup>

In such a context, Belira’s frustration with Wilmore comes to read less like the sympathetic pleadings of a spurned lover and more like the ravings of a too-faithful Jacobite.<sup>12</sup> During the former lovers’ confrontation, Belira repeatedly highlights Wilmore’s dishonesty, calling out the rake-hero for his “perjur’d” (28) and “perfidious Heart” (29) and explaining to him that, “Truth ... has Charms thou never knewest” (30). Such accusations may ring true in the context of a lovers’ quarrel, but the latter moments of *The Lost Lover* make clear that the fixed notion of oaths to which Belira subscribes is not one that Manley’s comedy supports: Wilmore

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<sup>10</sup> For more on the Association, see David Cressy, “Binding the Nation: the Bonds of Association, 1584 and 1696,” in *Tudor Rule and Revolution*, eds. Delloyd J. Guth and John W. McKenna (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982), 217-34.

<sup>11</sup> Pincus, “Assassination, Association, and the Consolidation of Revolution.”

<sup>12</sup> Ruth Herman also highlights the political resonance of Belira’s and Wilmore’s conversation about oaths. While Herman reads Manley as sympathetic to the Jacobite echoes of Belira’s words, I interpret *The Lost Lover* as undermining the Jacobitism to which Belira gives voice. The key difference between Herman’s reading and mine is that her chapter does not address the Association of 1696. As Steve Pincus has recently demonstrated, the Association played a key role in helping to consolidate English opposition to the Jacobites and shore up support for William III. In such a political context, it seems unlikely that a savvy partisan like Manley would have taken the radical step of supporting Jacobitism. Ruth Herman, ““Pride of our Sex, and glory of the Stage’: Manley’s Plays,” chap. 7 of *The Business of a Woman: The Political Writings of Delarivier Manley* (Newark, DE: University of Delaware Press, 2003); Steve Pincus, “Assassination, Association, and the Consolidation of Revolution,” chap. 14 of *1688: The First Modern Revolution* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009).

concludes *The Lost Lover* having secured an engagement to his new lover, Marina, his previous commitment to Belira posing no obstacle to his vow to devote his “whole Life [to] one constant Study to deserve . . . *Marina’s Kindness*” (40). Licensing the free movement between loyalties that Wilmore exemplifies, *The Lost Lover* stigmatizes Belira’s obsession with fidelity, maligning her rhetoric of loyalty at the same moment that similarly fixed, Jacobite notions of allegiance had been exposed as a threat to England’s political stability.

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The period in which Manley wrote was one of the most politically tumultuous in English history. In the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries, England saw the return of one Stuart king from exile, the deposition of another Stuart king, and the installation of two different sets of foreign leaders as rulers. Such shifts in monarchical power were paralleled by other, equally significant changes in the realms of partisan politics, including the expansion of parliamentary power and the emergence of two opposing political parties.<sup>13</sup>

As is the case in any period, Restoration and early eighteenth-century dramatic literature takes up the political concerns of its moment, from the thematization of monarchical overthrow in Nathaniel Lee’s *Lucius Junius Brutus* (1681) to the satire of Robert Walpole’s tenure as Prime Minister in Peter Gay’s *The Beggar’s Opera* (1728). In the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries, however, the plays that staged the period’s political turmoil were marked by a key difference from the dramatic performances staged in previous eras: the plays performed publicly in this period had been written by men *and* women. For the first time in English theatrical

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<sup>13</sup> Two helpful overviews of party politics in this period are Tim Harris, *Politics Under the Later Stuarts: Party Conflict in a Divided Society, 1660-1715* (New York: Longman, 1993) and Brian Hill, *The Early Parties and Politics in Britain, 1688-1832* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1996).

history, dramatic works written by women began to be performed on stage in the late seventeenth century. In fact, between 1660, when the theatres were restored in the wake of the Civil War, and 1737, when the Licensing Act imposed stringent restrictions on the drama, six women had multiple plays staged in English public theatres: Aphra Behn, Mary Pix, Delarivier Manley, Catherine Trotter, Susannah Centlivre, and Eliza Haywood.<sup>14</sup>

Some of these women's plays tackle political issues explicitly. Manley's tragedy *Lucius, The First King of Britain* (1717), for instance, dramatizes the question of rightful kingship as the transition from Stuart to Hanoverian rule was unfolding. And Haywood's *Frederick, Duke of Brunswick-Lunenburgh* (1729) responds to Tories' hopes for a Hanoverian heir that would save them from Walpole's rule by tempering those hopes, offering a skeptical characterization of its eponymous subject.<sup>15</sup> Even when plays written by women unfold in a less overtly political realm, however, these texts engage the hot-button issues of the day. As Michael Austin has demonstrated, Pix's characterization of the younger brother in *The Beau Defeated* (1700) offers implicit support to the Whig cause of primogeniture reform; and, as Misty Anderson has shown, Centlivre's amusing representation of a Scottish character in *The Wonder! A Woman Keeps a Secret* (1714) celebrates the 1707 passage of the Act of Union, which had united England and Scotland as one nation.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> In addition to these six playwrights, several other women had only one play staged between 1660 and 1737, or wrote 'closet' drama during these years. The best reference work about female dramatists in the Restoration and eighteenth century is David D. Mann and Susan Garland Mann, *Women Playwrights in England, Ireland, and Scotland, 1660-1823* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1996).

<sup>15</sup> Earla A. Wilputte, "Eliza Haywood's *Frederick, Duke of Brunswick-Lunenburgh*," *Studies in English Literature, 1500-1900* 41 (2001), 499-514.

<sup>16</sup> Michael Austin, "Aphra Behn, Mary Pix, and the Sexual Politics of Primogeniture," *Restoration and Eighteenth-Century Theatre Research* 16 (2001), 13-22; Misty Anderson, "The

This dissertation examines the partisan implications of late seventeenth- and early eighteenth-century women playwrights' comedic representations of sexualized female characters. In the partisan texts of this era, political events repeatedly get refracted through the prism of female sexuality. From Charles II asserting power by hanging portraits of his courtesans at Whitehall to Whigs avoiding blame for the volatility of the early eighteenth-century stock market by foisting fault for financial instability onto female investors, desiring women play a key role in late seventeenth- and early eighteenth-century political discourse.<sup>17</sup> Even while the rhetoric of sexuality and the rhetoric of partisanship are imbricated in this period, however, little of the scholarship that has been done on women playwrights has understood these dramatists' treatment of desiring female characters as partisan gestures. In fact, critical estimations of plays written by women have been more apt to focus on how well these works accord with modern feminist understandings of women's desire than on how these plays fit with the political discourse of the day.<sup>18</sup>

*The Politics of Desire* treats sexual and political discourse as inextricably intertwined. Examining female dramatists' plays in their partisan context, I show that women playwrights'

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*Wonder: Centlivre, Garrick, and Passionate Nationalism*" (paper presented at the annual meeting of the American Society of Eighteenth-Century Studies, Vancouver, BC, 17 March 2011).

<sup>17</sup> For more on representations of Charles II's mistresses, see *Politics, Transgression, and Representation at the Court of Charles II*, eds. Julia Marciari Alexander and Catherine MacLeod (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2007). For more on Whig attacks on women in finance, see Catherine Ingrassia, "Women, Credit, and the South Sea Bubble," chap. 1 of *Authorship, Commerce, and Gender in Early Eighteenth-Century England: A Culture of Paper Credit* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998).

<sup>18</sup> For instance, many twentieth-century critics celebrated Aphra Behn for representing characters like the courtesan Angellica Bianca sympathetically while criticizing Mary Pix for condemning sexualized women to spectacular on-stage deaths. For more on the critical work that has celebrated Behn's treatment of Angellica, see p. 40, n. 1. For more on the critical misfortune to which Pix was long subjected, see Jean Marsden, "Mary Pix's *Ibrahim*: The Woman Writer as Commercial Playwright," *Studies in the Literary Imagination* 32 (1999), 33-44.

comedies make important—and heretofore unrecognized—interventions into the political landscape of the day. Sometimes reframing partisan discourse about a particular type of woman and sometimes toeing a party line about her, these dramatists characterize desiring female characters in conflicting and complex ways. This dissertation teases out those conflicts and complexities and, in so doing, seeks to enrich the critical conversation about women playwrights' comedies and give these plays the kind of precise, carefully contextualized attention they deserve.

### 1.1 SEXUAL AND PARTISAN RHETORIC, 1660-1737

The late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries were a time of unprecedented partisanship in England; indeed, this was the moment when England's political parties were born. In the years leading up to and during the Civil War, the nation had, of course, been riven by political divisions, but by the time Charles II was restored to the throne, public opinion had united behind Stuart rule.<sup>19</sup> Such a spirit of goodwill began to wane in the later 1660s and 1670s, however, and during the Exclusion Crisis of 1679-1681, the nation's political divisions crystallized, as the King and Parliament faced off over a variety of issues, including whether Charles's openly Catholic brother, James, would be allowed to succeed him on the throne.<sup>20</sup> By

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<sup>19</sup> David Underdown, *Revel, Riot, and Rebellion: Popular Politics and Culture in England, 1603-1660* (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1985).

<sup>20</sup> For more on early criticisms of Charles, see Tim Harris, "'There is None that Loves Him but Drunk Whores and Whoremongers': Popular Criticisms of the Restoration Court," in Alexander and MacLeod, *Politics, Transgression, and Representation at the Court of Charles II*, 35-60. For the definitive account of the Exclusion Crisis, see Mark Knights, *Politics and Opinion in Crisis, 1678-1681* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994).

the time the crisis subsided, the terms ‘Tory’ and ‘Whig’ had come into common parlance, describing, respectively, those who favored and those who opposed James’s rule.<sup>21</sup> Over the course of James II’s reign, the new Tory and Whig parties were relatively united, sharing disappointment in his rule; however, during the reign of William and Mary, Whigs’ and Tories’ opposition to one another increased, as the parties’ positions on issues such as religious freedom and foreign policy began to congeal into distinct ideologies.<sup>22</sup> By the time Anne acceded to the throne, the Whigs’ and Tories’ adversarial relationship had cemented, with Whigs representing the interests of new-monied city dwellers and Tories bearing the standard for the landed, country elite.<sup>23</sup> In the early years of the Hanoverian era, such partisan animosity only deepened, when George I proscribed the Tories from power and the Whigs secured their majority position in Parliament by using gerrymandering and other modern political techniques.<sup>24</sup>

Concomitant with the increase in partisanship during the Restoration and the early eighteenth century came an increase in public engagement with politics. In Jurgen Habermas’s now axiomatic formulation, the early eighteenth century was the moment in England when the bourgeois public sphere emerged, the time when a “sphere of private people c[a]me together as a

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<sup>21</sup> Robert Willman, “The Origins of ‘Whig’ and ‘Tory’ in English Political Language,” *The Historical Journal* 17 (1974), 247-64.

<sup>22</sup> Historians have long debated whether the Glorious Revolution was a triumph of Whig principles or a collaborative deal struck between Whigs and Tories. Regardless of the interpretation one favors, the Tories’ disenchantment with James II is clear. For more on the religious roots of the Tories’ rejection of James, see Mark Goldie “The Political Thought of the Anglican Revolution,” in *The Revolutions of 1688*, ed. Robert Beddard (Oxford: Clarendon, 1991).

<sup>23</sup> By the early eighteenth century, the Whigs and the Tories were so opposed that Geoffrey Holmes has asserted that “the existence and conflict of two major parties” was the “life-blood” of English politics in this period. Geoffrey Holmes, *British Politics in the Age of Anne* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1967), 6.

<sup>24</sup> For more on Tory politics during Hanoverian rule, see Linda Colley, *In Defiance of Oligarchy: The Tory Party, 1714–60* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1982).

public” in coffee houses and other public spaces to discuss topics—particularly political topics—that had not previously been understood as up for civic debate.<sup>25</sup> In the years since *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere* was published, Habermas’s theory about the emergence of the public sphere has been challenged and retheorized.<sup>26</sup> No matter when one understands the public sphere to have emerged or how liberatory one views the effects of the public sphere to have been, however, it is historical fact that more English people engaged with politics during the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries than had ever done so before. The electorate grew significantly during this period; indeed, in his survey of the expansion of the franchise between 1600 and 1715, historian J. H. Plumb remarks that “The size of the electorate [was] astonishing” in the early eighteenth century, reporting that in one English county “the electorate had nearly doubled” between 1640 and 1710.<sup>27</sup> And voting is only one of the ways that English people demonstrated their increased political engagement in this period. Remarking on how many more people signed their names to the Association of 1696 than had signed similar oaths during the reign of Elizabeth I, Steve Pincus writes:

Generally Elizabethan association rolls contained tens or at most hundreds of names. Williamite subscriptions numbered in the thousands and tens of thousands. In most cases

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<sup>25</sup> Jürgen Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society*, trans. Thomas Burger with Frederick Lawrence (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1989), 27.

<sup>26</sup> Several scholars, including Steve Pincus, have argued that the public sphere emerged before the 1688 date that Habermas suggests. Habermas’s vision of the public sphere has also been critiqued for being too optimistic, with scholars such as Paula McDowell pointing out that the public sphere Habermas describes serves a regulatory function that Habermas does not adequately acknowledge. Steve Pincus, “‘Coffee Politicians Does Create’: Coffeehouses and Restoration Political Culture,” *The Journal of Modern History* 67 (1995), 807-34; Paula McDowell, *The Women of Grub Street: Press, Politics, and Gender in the London Literary Marketplace, 1678-1730* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998).

<sup>27</sup> J. H. Plumb, “The Growth of the Electorate in England from 1600 to 1715,” *Past & Present* 45 (1969), 90-116, on 111.

Elizabethan subscriptions were restricted ‘to officeholders and gentlemen.’ . . . In the 1690s, the political nation was far wider than the county elite.<sup>28</sup>

During the Restoration and early eighteenth century, English people engaged in acts of partisanship in unprecedented numbers. In Pincus’s words, the England of this period was “a transformed and vastly expanded political nation.”<sup>29</sup>

As a number of scholars have demonstrated, the growth in political engagement in the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries was not limited to men. Highlighting the influence of court women, Rachel Weil shows that figures like Charles’s mistresses and Anne’s friends Abigail Masham and Sarah Churchill exerted a powerful sway on rulers in this period, shaping monarchs’ choices about foreign and domestic policy.<sup>30</sup> And female participation in politics extended beyond the aristocracy. In *The Women of Grub Street*, Paula McDowell highlights the contributions that women of various class positions and professions—including authors, publishers, hawkers, and ballad-singers—made to the day’s political propaganda. Deeming the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries a moment of “unprecedented female political involvement through print,” McDowell demonstrates that “women were central to the development and institutionalization of a critical political press in Britain.”<sup>31</sup>

During these decades of fierce partisanship and unprecedented political involvement, the rhetoric of politics and the rhetoric of sexuality were bound up with one another. As Kevin Sharpe has demonstrated, Charles II participated actively in the sexualization of his reign, “experimenting . . . with a new monarchy founded not on the old assumptions of patriarchy and

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<sup>28</sup> Pincus, “Assassination, Association, and the Consolidation of Revolution,” 465.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid., 438.

<sup>30</sup> Rachel Weil, “The Female Politician in the Late Stuart Age,” in Alexander and MacLeod, *Politics, Transgression, and Representation at the Court of Charles II*, 177-92.

<sup>31</sup> McDowell, *The Women of Grub Street*, 5, 9.

love, but on calculation, interest, and desire.”<sup>32</sup> Not long after Charles acceded to the throne, those opposed to Stuart rule seized on crown partisans’ way of blending of sexuality and partisanship and began forwarding their political ideas by condemning Charles’s sexual reputation. In perhaps the best-known satire of Charles’s reign, Andrew Marvell’s *Last Instructions to a Painter* (1667), the poem’s ostensible focus on the administration’s mismanagement of the Anglo-Dutch Wars is repeatedly disrupted by its criticisms of the debauched Stuart Court. Indeed, the *Last Instructions*’ closing stanzas end not with an image of English ships failing to receive the support they needed from the King, but rather with a lascivious description of Charles being seduced by a virginal apparition who visits him in bed, “Naked as born.”<sup>33</sup> In the wake of Charles’s early assertions of sexual prowess, opponents of Stuart rule came to use the language of sexuality to launch their critiques, framing the escapades of the King and his court as evidence of royal negligence.

The link between the rhetoric of sexuality and the rhetoric of monarchy that Charles II forged remained important to English rulers throughout the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries. Seeking to define themselves in opposition to the Stuarts, William and Mary purposefully emphasized virtue in their self-representation, working to promote a cult of purity around Mary and to frame William as having “cleared the court of sin, and . . . made the royal household an appropriately virtuous engine of reform.”<sup>34</sup> And Anne, too, used sexuality in her campaign to win subjects’ affection. The last Stuart in the line of succession, Anne had

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<sup>32</sup> Kevin Sharpe, “‘Thy Longing Country’s Darling and Desire’: Aesthetics, Sex, and Politics in the England of Charles II,” in Alexander and MacLeod, *Politics, Transgression, and Representation at the Court of Charles II*, 1-32, on 22.

<sup>33</sup> Andrew Marvell, “The Last Instructions to a Painter,” in *The Poems of Andrew Marvell*, ed. Nigel Smith (New York: Pearson Longman, 2007), 362-96, on 394.

<sup>34</sup> Tony Claydon, “The Propagation of Courtly Reformation,” chap. 3 of *William III and the Godly Revolution* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 90.

difficulty becoming pregnant, carrying pregnancies to term, and keeping her young children alive.<sup>35</sup> Such struggles were of great interest to the English people, and Anne used the public's curiosity about her fertility to her advantage. In the lead-up to the Glorious Revolution, for example, Anne avoided going into public by claiming that she was pregnant; doing so allowed her to circumvent the side-taking that a civic appearance would have necessitated.<sup>36</sup>

The discourse that surrounded late seventeenth- and early eighteenth-century English monarchs evinces the interconnection between sexual and political rhetoric in this period. Ultimately, though, the figure that best embodies the imbricated nature of these discourses is not a king or queen, but rather the libertine. From the scandalous poetry of John Wilmot, Earl of Rochester, to the sexually-driven eunuch-mimicry of William Wycherley's Horner in *The Country Wife* (1675), louche men appear throughout the literary and political texts of the late seventeenth century, making their sexual desires explicit and, in many cases, having those desires be satisfied.<sup>37</sup> Linked to the Stuart court, libertines were often used as a stand-in for Charles II himself, and writers' treatment of these figures was shaped by their political

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<sup>35</sup> Anne's fertility woes were legion: she was pregnant at least seventeen times over the course of her life and she also experienced one psychosomatic pregnancy, but she carried only five of her pregnancies to term. Of the five live children Anne birthed, only one survived past age two, and that child, Prince William, Duke of Gloucester, died before she acceded to the throne. Anne Somerset, *Queen Anne: The Politics of Passion* (New York: Knopf, 2013).

<sup>36</sup> Somerset, *Queen Anne*, 97-9.

<sup>37</sup> Critics have debated the political function of the libertine movement. James Turner has argued that libertinism served a conservative function, co-opting carnivalesque rituals from the working class and channeling them into support for the Stuarts. Jeremy Webster, by contrast, has contended that libertinism was both politically and sexually radical. James Grantham Turner, *Libertines and Radicals in Early Modern London: Sexuality, Politics, and Literary Culture, 1630-1685* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2002); Jeremy Webster, *Performing Libertinism in Charles II's Court: Politics, Drama, Sexuality* (New York: Palgrave, 2005).

persuasions. In *Absalom and Achitophel* (1681), for instance, royalist John Dryden offered support to Charles II by praising the philandering King David:

Then Israel's monarch after heaven's own heart,  
His vigorous warmth did variously impart  
To wives and slaves; and, wide as his command,  
Scattered his maker's image through the land.<sup>38</sup>

Unlike Dryden, opposition writers often gave libertinism a dark cast. In his tragedy *The Libertine* (1675), the proto-Whig Thomas Shadwell turned Don John into a murderer and an atheist: linking the main character's licentiousness to his immorality, Shadwell killed off the protagonist in over-the-top fashion at the end of the play, having Don John sink below stage accompanied by devils in "a cloud of fire."<sup>39</sup> Ultimately, the libertine's fate on the English stage paralleled that of the Stuart monarchy in English polity: as Richard Braverman has shown, libertines appeared frequently in plays written in the 1670s, but they were featured in fewer and fewer dramas in the 1680s and 1690s, and by the early eighteenth century, they had largely fallen out of theatrical favor.<sup>40</sup>

While no single female figure embodies the imbrication of partisan and sexual discourses in the way that the libertine does for men, a number of different types of sexualized women did appear in Restoration and early eighteenth-century texts, and the representations of these figures were just as invested with political significance as the portrayals of their libertine counterparts were. Courtesans, for instance, were frequent subjects of late seventeenth-century partisan

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<sup>38</sup> John Dryden, *Absalom and Achitophel*, in *The Major Works*, ed. Keith Walker (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003), 177-204, on 179.

<sup>39</sup> Thomas Shadwell, *The Libertine*, in Gillian Manning, ed., *Libertine Plays of the Restoration* (London: Everyman Library, 2001), 103-205, on 202.

<sup>40</sup> Richard Braverman, "The Rake's Progress Revisited: Politics and Comedy in the Restoration," in *Cultural Readings of Restoration and Eighteenth-Century English Theatre*, eds. Douglas J. Canfield and Deborah Payne Fisk (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1995), 141-68.

propaganda. As I discuss further in my chapter on Aphra Behn's *The Rover*, Part II (1681), courtesans played a central role in Charles II's self-representation and went on to become the subject of much opposition denigration. The unknown author of "A Ballad Called the Haymarket Hectors" (1671), for instance, blames Nell Gwyn, rather than the King, for an attack that Charles made on Sir John Coventry (a Member of Parliament):

Our good King Charles the Second,  
Too flippant of treasure and moisture,  
Stoop'd from the Queen infecund  
To a wench of orange and oyster.  
Consulting his cazzo, he found it expedient  
To engender Don Johns on Nell the comedian.

The lecherous vainglory  
Of being lim'd with majesty  
Mounts up to such a story  
This Bitchington travesty,  
That to equal her lover, the baggage must dare  
To be Helen the Second and cause of a war.<sup>41</sup>

Highlighting Nell and Charles's inequitable pairing, this poem suggests that the actress's desire for social legitimacy was so powerful that it could be assuaged only by being the "cause of a war." In the latter years of Charles's reign, court mistresses like Gwyn became the target of much opposition satire. Texts repeatedly characterized these women as lustful and greedy, and their authors often blamed the courtesans' failings for the monarchical mistakes they highlighted.

It is perhaps to be expected that representations of Nell Gwyn and other court mistresses would evince the imbrication of partisan and sexual discourse in this period—after all, these women were linked romantically to the men at the center of English politics. Representations of sexualized women who were not closely connected to late seventeenth- and early eighteenth-

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<sup>41</sup> "A Ballad Called the Haymarket Hectors," in *Poems on Affairs of State, Augustan Satirical Verse, 1660-1714*, Vol. 1, ed. George deForest Lord (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1963), 169-71.

century politics were also invested with partisan significance, however. In addition to examining period representations of courtesans, the chapter on Behn also looks at late seventeenth-century satires of bawds. Not directly linked to partisan activity, bawds nevertheless took on political import in period discourse, the profit they derived from the sex trade leading them to become targets for economic attack. In the best-known late seventeenth-century bawd satire, *The Whore's Rhetorick* (1683), the famed London procuress Mother Creswell is presented as a greedy Whig who tricks a royalist's innocent daughter into prostitution. Melissa Mowry has argued convincingly that such a representation offers support to the Tory cause: in Mowry's reading, *The Whore's Rhetorick* suggests that economic reform could cause men to lose their rightful hold over their wives and daughters and, in so doing, issues a warning to its readers about the dangers of undoing aristocratic privilege.<sup>42</sup> Other representations of bawds, by contrast, served Whiggish ends. Laura Mandell has interpreted Bernard Mandeville's *A Modest Defence of Public STEWS* (1724), for instance, as setting up an implicit contrast between the actions of male merchants and those of female bawds, "pretend[ing] that only bawds are merchants driven by passion."<sup>43</sup> Ultimately, Mandell reads this contrast as Mandeville's way of distancing emergent capitalism from its problematic characteristics, "scapegoat[ing] the figure of woman for morally repugnant aspects of capitalist pursuits."<sup>44</sup> Bawds were not directly linked to politics in the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries, but they were nevertheless given a partisan cast in much period discourse, from conservatives' framing of these women as threats to

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<sup>42</sup> Melissa Mowry, "Monstrous Mothers: Property and the Common Law," chap. 4 in *The Bawdy Politic in Stuart England, 1660-1714* (Burlington: Ashgate, 2004), 94-7.

<sup>43</sup> Laura Mandell, "Bawds and Merchants: Engendering Capitalist Desires," *English Literary History* 59 (1992), 107-23, on 115.

<sup>44</sup> Mandell, "Bawds and Merchants," 107.

aristocratic privilege to economic reformers' suggestions that bawds were to blame for some of the unsavory aspects of capitalism.

The rhetoric that surrounded women who worked—or even participated—in commerce during the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries was also bound up with politics. A good deal of the discourse about women who worked in the commercial sector in this period frames them as desiring, setting up the financial exchanges in which these women participated as occasions for the sale of their own bodies. In one of the issues of the late seventeenth- and early eighteenth-century periodical *The London Spy*, for instance, Edward Ward characterizes the shopgirls at the New Exchange as a “seraglio of fair ladies,” suggesting that these women “had dressed themselves up for sale to the best advantage, as well as the fopperies and toys they dealt in.”<sup>45</sup> In my chapter on Susanna Centlivre’s *The Basset Table* (1705), I discuss the partisan nature of these sexualized depictions of commercial women, focusing specifically on the Whig implications of period representations of female stockjobbers and gamblers. At a moment when the stock market and the gaming table involved similar elements of risk, women stockjobbers and gamblers were blamed for the allegedly irrational approaches they took to finance, the pleasure they derived from money often characterized in sexual terms.<sup>46</sup> In his comedy *The Stock-Jobbers, or The Humours of Exchange-alley* (1720), William Rufus Chetwood portrays female investors as foolish dabblers who derive sexual pleasure from their economic experiments. One stock-jobber, Lady Pawn-Locket, deems investing “the most agreeable

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<sup>45</sup> Edward Ward, *The London Spy*, Part 9, in Erin Mackie, ed., *The Commerce of Everyday Life: Selections from The Tatler and The Spectator* (Boston: Bedford/St. Martins, 1998), 256-7.

<sup>46</sup> For more on the links between eighteenth-century capitalism and gambling, as well as evidence of the sexual discourse that surrounded women gamblers in this period, see Jessica Richard, *The Romance of Gambling in the Eighteenth-Century British Novel* (New York: Palgrave, 2011).

Amusement in Nature”; another, Lady Love-Pickett, decries men’s attempts to “monopolize the Pleasure of Business to themselves”; and a third, Mrs. Figg, analogizes stockjobbing to the archetypal lovers’ activity in the period—“Oh! this Stock-jobbing, ’tis better than a Turn to the Park in Hackney-Coach.”<sup>47</sup> As Catherine Ingrassia has pointed out, many of the texts that satirize female stockjobbers, including Chetwood’s, were published in the years surrounding the bursting of the South Sea Bubble.<sup>48</sup> Ultimately, Ingrassia shows, period depictions of female gamblers and stockjobbers serve to legitimize economic risk at a moment of peak financial anxiety, distancing the market from the accusations of irrationality that had been leveled at it and instead foisting those accusations onto women investors. Like Restoration and early eighteenth-century representations of courtesans and bawds, so period portrayals of commercial women served partisan ends, playing up these women’s sexuality and framing their lust as responsible for all manner of political and economic ills.

In the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries, the rhetoric of sexuality and the rhetoric of partisanship were decidedly intertwined. In the era when English political parties emerged, and when citizens’ political engagement increased dramatically, writers’ representations of sexuality are inflected by their partisan inclinations. As we will see in the chapters that follow, period representations of sexualized women are often bound up with the period’s political crises, and playwrights’ portrayals of female characters sometimes signal and sometimes complicate those dramatists’ political engagements.

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<sup>47</sup> William Rufus Chetwood, *The Stock-Jobbers, or The Humours of Exchange-alley* (London: 1720), *Eighteenth-Century Collections Online* (accessed July 25, 2014), 20.

<sup>48</sup> Ingrassia, “Women, Credit, and the South Sea Bubble.”

## 1.2 HISTORICIZING DESIRE

More women were involved with the theatre in the Restoration and early eighteenth century than had ever previously been. In addition to female playwrights, whose works began to be staged in the 1670s, the late seventeenth century also saw the rise of the first woman theatrical manager, Lady Mary Davenant, who took over the Lincoln's Inn Fields playhouse after her husband's death in 1668; the first women shareholders in a theatre, who helped to found the actor-run troupe that broke away from the United Company in 1695; and the first English actresses, who made their initial appearance on stage in the same year that Charles II was restored to the throne.<sup>49</sup>

Much of the discourse that surrounded the women who participated in the theatre in this period was sexualized. As scholars have pointed out, the attention that late seventeenth-century texts devoted to actresses' sexuality was obsessive.<sup>50</sup> From Robert Gould's suggestion that actresses' aim was "*To glide into some keeping Cully's heart,/ Who neither sense nor Manhood*

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<sup>49</sup> For more on Lady Davenant, see Gilli Bush-Bailey, *Treading the Bawds: Actresses and Playwrights on the Late-Stuart Stage* (New York: Manchester University Press, 2006), 28-9. For more on the actor-run company at the Lincoln's Inn Fields Theatre, see Judith Milhous, *Thomas Betterton and the Management of Lincoln's Inn Fields, 1695-1708* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1979). For the most comprehensive overview of Restoration actresses, see Elizabeth Howe, *The First English Actresses: Women and Drama, 1660-1700* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992).

<sup>50</sup> Katharine Eisaman Maus highlights the sexualized way that Restoration texts discuss period actresses. Laura Rosenthal casts useful doubt on the veracity of texts' allegations about these women's sexual character, arguing that the discourse that surrounded these women may have served to maintain class distinctions rather than to relay fact: "Operating in plays that often advocated the choice to marry for love over the necessity of marrying to maintain familial status or wealth, the actress-as-whore identification performs the cultural work of attempting to maintain shifting and unstable distinctions between marriageable and unmarried women for the class of men who dominated the theater audience." Katharine Eisaman Maus, "'Playhouse Flesh and Blood': Sexual Ideology and the Restoration Actress," *English Literary History* 46 (1979), 595-617; Laura Rosenthal, "'Counterfeit Scrubbado': Women Actors in the Restoration," *The Eighteenth Century: Theory and Interpretation* 54 (1993), 3-22, on 4.

*understands,/And jilt him of his Patrimonial Lands*” to Thomas Shadwell’s invitation in *The Libertine*’s epilogue for audience members to come “behind our scenes” and experience the “free Ingress and Egress” that “Some of our Women” would offer, many texts of this period characterized women actors as all-too willing to channel their theatrical success into lucrative sexual relationships.<sup>51</sup> Female audience members were also the subjects of sexual speculation in the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries. Full-face vizard masks were in fashion during the Restoration, and much public discourse implied that by obscuring the wearer’s identity, these masks permitted female spectators a sexual license that they would not otherwise have had.<sup>52</sup> When one of the characters in *The Country Wife* suggests that Mrs. Pinchwife wear a mask to the theatre, for instance, Mr. Pinchwife scoffs at the proposal: “Pshaw! A mask makes people but the more inquisitive. . . . No, I’ll not use her to a mask, ’tis dangerous; for masks have made more cuckolds than the best faces that ever were known.”<sup>53</sup> Discussions of female playwrights also highlighted their sexuality. In a now-famous formulation, Robert Gould contended that women’s writing and prostitution went hand in hand: “For *Punk* and *Poesie* agree so pat,/ You cannot well be *this* and not be *that*.”<sup>54</sup> And women writers sometimes engaged such

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<sup>51</sup> Robert Gould, “A Satyr against the Playhouse,” in *Poems, Chiefly Consisting of Satyrs and Satyrical Epistles* (London: 1689), *Early English Books Online* (accessed January 29, 2015), 161-94, on 183; Thomas Shadwell, *The Libertine*, 205.

<sup>52</sup> For more on the sexual spectacle of female audience members, see Will Pritchard, “The Playhouse,” chap. 3 in *Outward Appearances: The Female Exterior in Restoration London* (Lewisburg: Bucknell University Press, 2008) and Laura Rosenthal, “Reading Masks: The Actress and the Spectatrix in Restoration Shakespeare,” in *Broken Boundaries: Women and Feminism in Restoration Drama*, ed. Katherine Quinsey (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1996), 201-18.

<sup>53</sup> William Wycherley, *The Country Wife*, in *Restoration and Eighteenth-Century Comedy*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., ed. Scott McMillan (New York: Norton, 1997), 3-85, on 31.

<sup>54</sup> Gould’s suggestion has been quoted in a number of different places, most famously in Catherine Gallagher, “Who Was That Masked Woman?: The Prostitute and the Playwright in the Comedies of Aphra Behn,” *Women’s Studies* 15 (1988), 23-42, on 27. Derek Hughes has

sentiments: in the prologue to her first play, *The Forced Marriage* (1671), Aphra Behn made the tongue-in-cheek suggestion that women had turned to writing because “Beauty alone goes now at too cheap rates” and women thus needed to “Court a new power” in order to “*maintain* the right they have in [men].”<sup>55</sup>

The sexualized discourse that surrounded theatrical women in the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries contributed to the *frisson* of sexuality that circulated around the stage in this period. The structure of the theatres encouraged this *frisson*. In his survey of the conditions of the drama in the late seventeenth and early eighteenth century, Edward Langhans characterizes the dramatic experience in this period as an ‘intimate’ one: playhouses were small and plays’ action was often performed on the forestage, meaning that Restoration and early eighteenth-century actors and actresses performed alongside, rather than in front of, spectators.<sup>56</sup> (Some audience members even sat in box seats on the stage itself.) This set-up meant that the border between stage and audience was a porous one: the spectators being entertained by sex comedies were sitting next to the men and women who were performing those comedies; audience members were watching up close as libertines schemed and women flirted. The border between front- and backstage was similarly porous. In a period when audience members were allowed to visit actors’ dressing rooms before and after performances, spectators sometimes saw actors in stages of undress. In reporting on a visit to Nell Gwyn’s dressing room during one of

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productively challenged Gallagher’s argument that Behn embraced the author-whore persona and has instead characterized Behn as “a woman who had no hesitation in claiming the forms and roles offered by the shared literary culture of her time.” Derek Hughes, “The Masked Woman Revealed; or the Prostitute and the Playwright in Aphra Behn Criticism,” *Women’s Writing* 7 (2000), 149-64 on 149.

<sup>55</sup> Aphra Behn, *The Forced Marriage* (London: James Knapton, 1688), *Early English Books Online* (accessed January 31, 2015), A2.

<sup>56</sup> Edward A. Langhans, “The Theatres,” in *The London Theatre World, 1660-1800*, ed. Robert D. Hume (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1980), 35-65, on 42.

his many trips to the theatre, Samuel Pepys remarked on what it was like to see Gwyn not wearing her stage makeup: “[an actress named Elizabeth Knepp] took us up into the tiring-rooms: and to the women’s shift, where Nell was dressing herself, and was all unready.”<sup>57</sup>

For many reasons, then, the Restoration and early eighteenth-century playhouse is a ripe environment for thinking about sexuality and desire. Complicated networks of desire like the ones seen in this period’s theatres are often examined through the lens of psychoanalysis—after all, psychoanalysis is an analytical framework that is designed to think through experiences of sexuality and desire. For psychoanalytic thinkers, the concepts of sexuality and desire are fundamentally linked to one’s experience of gender. Sigmund Freud, of course, positioned the Oedipus Complex at the center of his notion of sexuality, setting up children’s experiences of gender as organizing the sexual impulses they feel as adults.<sup>58</sup> Freud held that young people’s ability to manage the desire they feel for their opposite-sex parent determined the shape of their sexual experiences as they aged. Jacques Lacan also understood desire to grow out of one’s gendered experience. In defending Freud’s understanding of the origins of sexuality, Lacan extended the notion of the Oedipus Complex into the realm of the symbolic, asserting that people’s experiences of desire are structured by their early negotiations with the phallus (by

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<sup>57</sup> Samuel Pepys “October 5, 1667,” in *The Diary of Samuel Pepys*, ed. Richard Le Gallienne (New York: Modern Library, 2003), 232.

<sup>58</sup> Freud asserts the importance of the Oedipus Complex particularly clearly in a footnote that he appended to the 1920 edition of *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality*:

It has justly been said that the Oedipus complex is the nuclear complex of the neuroses, and constitutes the essential part of their content. It represents the peak of infantile sexuality, which, through its after-effects, exercises a decisive influence on the sexuality of adults. Every new arrival on this planet is faced by the task of mastering the Oedipus complex; anyone who fails to do so falls a victim to neurosis.

Sigmund Freud, *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality*, in *The Freud Reader*, ed. Peter Gay (New York: Norton, 1989), 239-91, on 290n9.

which Lacan meant not male genitalia *per se*, but rather the masculine realm of logic and law).<sup>59</sup> Ultimately, Lacan came to view desire, which he defined as “a relation of being to lack,” as constitutive of the male subject, and he characterized men’s identities as being determined by their constant wish for the unattainable.<sup>60</sup> In the late twentieth century, feminist thinkers reframed psychoanalytic conceptions of the nature of desire, seeking to make room for women as desiring subjects. Luce Irigaray, for instance, disputed Lacan’s phallogentric understanding of desire by asserting, first, that women experience desire and, second, that female desire operates independently of the male signifier.<sup>61</sup> Challenging the masculinist impulses that had underlain previous iterations of psychoanalysis, Irigaray and other feminists revalued the place of women in psychoanalytic conceptions of desire, but these thinkers left in place the fundamental link that previous psychoanalysts had established between desire and gender, not disputing the idea that one’s experience of desire grew directly out of one’s gendered life as a man or woman.

Like psychoanalytic conceptions of desire, so existing scholarship on Restoration and early eighteenth-century representations of sexuality has primarily applied the lens of gender to these characterizations. Elin Diamond and Jean Marsden, for example, have drawn on Laura Mulvey’s Lacanian analysis of male film spectators in their theorizations of male audience members’ responses to female actresses’ appearance on the late seventeenth-century stage.<sup>62</sup>

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<sup>59</sup> Jacques Lacan, “The Signification of the Phallus,” in *The Norton Anthology of Theory and Criticism*, eds. Vincent B. Leitch et. al. (New York: Norton, 2001), 1302-1310.

<sup>60</sup> Jacques Lacan, “Desire, Life, and Death,” *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan, Book II: The Ego in Freud’s Theory and in the Technique of Psychoanalysis, 1954-1955*, ed. Jacques-Alain Miller (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 223.

<sup>61</sup> Luce Irigaray, “This Sex Which is Not One,” in *This Sex Which is Not One*, trans. Catherine Porter (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1985), 23-33.

<sup>62</sup> Elin Diamond, “*Gestus* and Signature in Aphra Behn’s *The Rover*,” *English Literary History* 56 (1989), 519-41; Jean Marsden, *Fatal Desire: Women, Sexuality, and the English Stage, 1660-1720* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2006).

Also taking a psychoanalytic approach, Ros Ballaster has examined late seventeenth- and early eighteenth-century amatory fiction written by women through a gendered lens, arguing that psychoanalysis “provide[s] a more sophisticated model of the workings of desire in language and, specifically, the role of fantasy in popular narrative, than the central texts of eighteenth-century novel criticism have hitherto offered.”<sup>63</sup> Even when critical work on desire in the Restoration and early eighteenth century has not drawn directly on psychoanalysis, scholarship has nevertheless treated gender as shaping period representations of sexuality. Warren Chernaik understands the figure of the libertine to be so thoroughly defined by his relationship to masculinity and patriarchy that Chernaik views the notion of a female libertine—a sexualized woman who would assert her desires confidently on stage—as “to some extent self-contradictory.”<sup>64</sup> And Pat Gill also grounds her analysis of desiring female characters in gender, arguing that Restoration comedies place female characters in a double bind in which they must both remain chaste and possess the sexual knowledge necessary to engage in witty banter with their rake counterparts.<sup>65</sup>

Much of the scholarship on late seventeenth- and early eighteenth-century representations of desire, then, has viewed these depictions through the lens of gender. At the same time, though, scholars of this period have repeatedly demonstrated that desire and gender are themselves historically contingent categories. In *The History of Sexuality, Vol. 1*, Michel Foucault showed that when scholars refuse the broad dictates of the ‘repressive hypothesis’ (the

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<sup>63</sup> Ros Ballaster, *Seductive Forms: Women’s Amatory Fiction from 1684 to 1740* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992), 26.

<sup>64</sup> Warren Chernaik, *Sexual Freedom in Restoration Literature* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1995), 20.

<sup>65</sup> Pat Gill, *Interpreting Ladies: Women, Wit, and Morality in the Restoration Comedy of Manners* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1994), 18.

idea that discourse about sexuality has always been repressed), they are able to bring to light the particularities of sexual rhetoric from different periods, exposing the differences between previous generations' understandings of sexuality and our own.<sup>66</sup> Since *The History of Sexuality* was published, many scholars of the late seventeenth and early eighteenth century have applied Foucault's insights to this period and, in so doing, have underscored the incommensurable nature of early modern and modern categories of analysis. Examining early modern discourse about the body, Thomas Laqueur has argued that sixteenth- and seventeenth-century texts reveal an understanding of sexual difference that is fundamentally different from our own: early modern conceptions, Laqueur argues, situate the cultural category of gender—and not the biological category of sex—as the 'real' source of sexual difference.<sup>67</sup> And Michael McKeon has argued that discourses of class and gender in this period were so imbricated that it makes no analytical sense to apply the purportedly ahistorical category of patriarchy to studies of the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries.<sup>68</sup> Kristina Straub, meanwhile, has demonstrated that the various permutations of sexuality and desire that were circulating in the eighteenth-century playhouse make it anachronistic to apply a binary conception of gender to our analysis of the stage in this period: "[G]ender itself is not a neat, binary structure of difference. Sexuality crosses the category of gender, rendering it the site of more complex distinctions than the binary opposition

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<sup>66</sup> Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality, Vol. I: An Introduction*, trans. Robert Hurley (New York: Vintage, 1990).

<sup>67</sup> "[I]n these pre-Enlightenment texts, and even some later ones, *sex*, or the body, must be understood as the epiphenomenon, while *gender*, what we would take to be a cultural category, was primary or 'real.'" Thomas Laqueur, *Making Sex: Body and Gender from the Greeks to Freud* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1990), 8.

<sup>68</sup> Michael McKeon, "Historicizing Patriarchy: The Emergence of Gender Difference in England, 1660-1760," *Eighteenth-Century Studies* 28 (1995), 295-322.

of masculine and feminine.”<sup>69</sup> Over the past thirty years, scholars of the Restoration and the early eighteenth century have teased out the complex ways that gender, sexuality, and other categories intersected in this period. In so doing, these researchers have underscored the importance of critics’ historicizing our categories of analysis and of not letting modern conceptions of gender and desire interfere with our interpretations of the past.

Taking these scholars’ work into account, recent research on representations of sexualized women in this period has moved away from understanding female desire exclusively as an expression of gender and, instead, has brought multiple lenses to bear on this topic. In *The Protestant Whore: Courtesan Narrative and Religious Controversy in England, 1680-1750*, Alison Conway analyzes religious discourses about femininity alongside literary representations of desiring women. Examining the ways that late seventeenth- and early eighteenth-century texts grapple simultaneously with anxieties about female sexuality and concerns about religion, Conway argues that “the controversies surrounding Protestantism and debates about women’s authority intersect in important and compelling ways.”<sup>70</sup> From reading Aphra Behn’s *Love-Letters between a Nobleman and his Sister* (1684) as a critique of Protestant individualism to framing Daniel Defoe’s *Roxana* (1724) as a reworking of public anxieties about Protestantism, sexuality, and English national identity (concerns exemplified by Nell Gwyn’s potentially apocryphal public declaration that she was Charles II’s “Protestant whore”), Conway’s book demonstrates the value of using lenses beyond gender to think through desire, evincing the analytical purchase that can be gained when scholars examine this period’s representations of

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<sup>69</sup> Kristina Straub, *Sexual Suspects: Eighteenth-Century Players and Sexual Ideology* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992), 16.

<sup>70</sup> Alison Conway, *The Protestant Whore: Courtesan Narrative and Religious Controversy in England, 1680-1750* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2010), 13.

sexuality and religion simultaneously. In *Force or Fraud: British Seduction Stories and the Problem of Resistance, 1660-1760*, Toni Bowers takes an approach that is similar to the one I use here, exploring female sexuality through the lens of partisanship. Bowers, though, focuses specifically on one of the problems that the Tory party confronted in this period: how to articulate a theory of resistance that would mesh with the party's long-time valuation of authority. Seeking to account for the rape plots that appear so frequently in early eighteenth-century novels, Bowers argues that the dilemma of resistance that sexual violence stages (What should a woman do when a rightful holder of authority—a man—pressures her to engage in a sexual act that moral or religious authority forbids?) provided a way for Tory writers to ruminate on the problem of resistance. Ultimately, Bowers views these novels as helping Tories to work out one of the central conundrums of their political ideology in this period, allowing writers to articulate a “model [of] ‘collusive resistance’—a paradoxical exercise of *resistance through submission*.”<sup>71</sup>

Like Conway's and Bowers's work, so this dissertation examines desiring female characters through multiple lenses. Such an approach differs from the analytical methods used by previous monographs and essay collections that have focused on Restoration and early eighteenth-century women playwrights.<sup>72</sup> Some existing articles have examined the intersection

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<sup>71</sup> Toni Bowers, *Force or Fraud: British Seduction Stories and the Problem of Resistance, 1660–1760* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 14.

<sup>72</sup> Existing monographs and essay collections on women playwrights tend to fall into one of three camps: biographical treatments that relay these women's personal and theatrical histories, books that evaluate women playwrights' works through the lens of modern feminism, and scholarship that looks at women dramatists' perspectives on a single issue related to gender. Examples of the first camp include Nancy Cotton, *Women Playwrights in England, c. 1363-1750* (Lewisburg: Bucknell University Press, 1980); Constance Clark, *Three Augustan Women Playwrights* (New York: Peter Lang, 1986); and Margarete Rubik, *Early Women Dramatists, 1550-1800* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1998). Instances of the second type are Jacqueline

of female dramatists' partisan and gender politics; those pieces, though, have tended to focus on which of these writers' allegiances 'wins' in a given moment, examining the way that a female dramatist's partisan investment either supported, or was in tension with, her sexual politics.<sup>73</sup> This dissertation seeks not to pit female dramatists' ideological investments against each other, but rather to shed light on the ways that those investments shaped one another. Treating women playwrights' representations of desiring women as multiply determined, I apply a carefully historicized understanding of desire to female dramatists' texts from the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries, accounting for the mutual imbrication of partisan and sexual discourse in this period.<sup>74</sup>

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Pearson, *The Prostituted Muse: Images of Women and Women Dramatists, 1642-1737* (New York: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1988); Mary Anne Schofield and Cecilia Macheski, eds. *Curtain Calls: British and American Women and the Theater, 1660-1820* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 1991); and Katherine M. Quinsey, ed. *Broken Boundaries*. The three twenty-first century books about women playwrights all fall into the third camp: Misty Anderson, *Female Playwrights and Eighteenth-Century Comedy: Negotiating Marriage on the London Stage* (New York: Palgrave, 2002); Nancy Copeland, *Staging Gender in Behn and Centlivre: Women's Comedy and the Theatre* (Burlington: Ashgate, 2004); and Pilar Cuder-Dominguez, *Stuart Women Playwrights, 1613-1713* (Burlington: Ashgate, 2010).

<sup>73</sup> In making this claim, I am thinking mostly of Susan Owen's work on Aphra Behn. Owen's pieces help to position Behn in her historicopolitical context, but they do so by oversimplifying the relationship between Behn's sexual and partisan politics, framing Behn's 'feminism' and her Toryism as opposing investments between which Behn stood poised. (Of Behn's comedies written between 1678 and 1683, for instance, Owen concludes that "the moments at which it becomes most urgent to give ideological affirmation to Toryism produce the plays in which there is least space for feminism.") Susan Owen, "Sexual Politics and Party Politics in Behn's Drama, 1678-83," in *Aphra Behn Studies*, ed. Janet Todd (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 15-29, on 27. Owen makes a similar argument about Behn in "Behn's Dramatic Response to Restoration Politics," in *The Cambridge Companion to Aphra Behn*, eds. Derek Hughes and Janet Todd (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 68-82.

<sup>74</sup> As the language of 'multiple determination' suggests, my thinking about women playwrights' ideological investments has been shaped by intersectionality theory. The pioneering essay in this area is Kimberle Crenshaw, "Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex: A Black Feminist Critique of Antidiscrimination Doctrine, Feminist Theory and Antiracist Politics," *University of Chicago Legal Forum* 139 (1989), 139-67.

### 1.3 SEX COMEDY: GENRE, DESIRE, POLITICS

The plays that this dissertation examines are comedies. There are three reasons for this focus. The first is that there is a rich scholarly tradition of investigating the ways that late seventeenth- and early eighteenth-century comedies treat sexuality, and one of the goals of my work is to place women playwrights' works within this tradition. The second is that the comedic genre allows playwrights greater latitude in their treatment of desiring female characters than the tragic genre does, and I am curious about the political implications of the diverse fates to which sexualized female characters are subjected in comedic texts. And the third reason that this dissertation centers on comedies is that it is interested in the kind of political commentary that ostensibly apolitical topics, such as courtship and marriage, allow women playwrights to forward.

The best-known Restoration comedies treat desire frankly.<sup>75</sup> *Marriage a la Mode* (1671), for example, opens with its married female protagonist, Doralice, singing a song that authorizes extramarital affairs:

Why should a foolish marriage vow,  
Which long ago was made,  
Oblige us to each other now  
When Passion is decay'd?<sup>76</sup>

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<sup>75</sup> As Robert Hume has pointed out, the number of Restoration comedies that license their characters' promiscuous behavior is actually quite small—essentially, the only plays that do so are a handful of texts written during the 1670s. Hume's point is well taken, and it is indeed important not to equate the sex comedy with late seventeenth-century drama more broadly. Nevertheless, the sex comedies of the 1670s remain the most studied dramatic works of the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries (with the notable addition of *The Way of the World*, which—although its sensibility differs from that of the libertine comedies—is often lumped in with those earlier works). Robert Hume, *The Development of English Drama in the Late Seventeenth Century* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1976).

*The Country Wife* takes a similarly relaxed approach to marital infidelity. Both the play and most of its characters treat the repeated attempts of its central rake, Horner, to undermine women's chastity as amusing rather than threatening. Indeed, when Horner jokes early in the text that "a marriage vow is like a penitent gamester's oath," his friends Dorilant and Harcourt agree with him, chiming in to say that "a gamester will be a gamester whilst his money lasts, and a whoremaster whilst his vigor."<sup>77</sup> In the end, the primary figure in *The Country Wife* who expresses concern about cuckoldry, Mr. Pinchwife, earns much of the play's ire. Not only does Mr. Pinchwife end the play a cuckold, he also becomes the butt of many of the characters' jokes, his uptightness leading one sophisticated city rake to deem him a "stingy country Coxcomb."<sup>78</sup>

The permissive approach to sexuality seen in the sex comedies of the 1670s has long attracted the interest of commentators. At least since Charles Lamb defended what he deemed "the Utopia of gallantry" in "On the Artificial Comedy of the Last Century" (1822), critical work on late seventeenth- and early eighteenth-century drama has investigated sex comedies' loucheness, highlighting the candid way that these plays treat sexuality and investigating the significance of their candor.<sup>79</sup> Some of this scholarship has been strictly condemnatory: in one infamous essay, L. C. Knights argued that Restoration comedies' only function was to entertain a sex-crazed audience and that the plays of Dryden, Etherege, Vanbrugh, and Congreve were

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<sup>76</sup> John Dryden, *Marriage a la Mode*, in *The Broadview Anthology of Restoration and Early Eighteenth-Century Drama*, ed. J. Douglas Canfield (Peterborough: Broadview, 2001), 330-378, on 331.

<sup>77</sup> Wycherley, *The Country Wife*, 14.

<sup>78</sup> *Ibid.*, 64.

<sup>79</sup> Charles Lamb, "On the Artificial Comedy of the Last Century," in *Restoration and Eighteenth-Century Comedy*, 567-72, on 568.

“trivial, gross, and dull.”<sup>80</sup> Over the last fifty years, however, much of the notable scholarship on sexuality in the humorous plays of this period has instead taken a more neutral approach, examining these texts’ treatment of desire as a way of gaining insight into the social and political milieu in which they were written. In “Margery Pinchwife’s ‘London Disease,’” Max Novak charts the political roots of “the Libertine Offensive of the 1670s,” arguing that the spate of sex comedies that premiered during the 1670s were one element of a deliberate attempt made by Charles II to shore up support for the promiscuous, urban lifestyle that he preferred.<sup>81</sup> In *The Restoration Rake-Hero*, Harold Weber points out the important difference between Renaissance and Restoration representations of sexuality, highlighting the secular way that late seventeenth-century plays characterize desire.<sup>82</sup> And in *Performing Libertinism in Charles II’s Court*, Jeremy Webster complicates existing interpretations of the politics of sex comedies, arguing that these texts do not always function as straightforward mouthpieces for Stuart hegemony, but rather that some of them issue radical critiques of the regime in power.

The critical conversation about sexuality in late seventeenth- and early eighteenth-century comedies has routinely taken up one play written by a woman: Aphra Behn’s *The Rover*, Part I (1677). In fact, at this point, Behn’s *Rover* has been the subject of more scholarly attention than

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<sup>80</sup> L. C. Knights, “Restoration Comedy: The Reality and the Myth,” in *Restoration and Eighteenth-Century Comedy*, 572-82, on 582. For more on the tradition of censorious responses to the comedy of this period, see Andrew Bear, “Restoration Comedy and the Provok’d Critic,” in *Restoration Literature: Critical Approaches*, ed. Harold Love (London: Methuen, 1972), 1-26.

<sup>81</sup> Maximillian E. Novak, “Margery Pinchwife’s ‘London Disease’: Restoration Comedy and the Libertine Offensive of the 1670’s,” *Studies in the Literary Imagination* 10 (1977), 1-23.

<sup>82</sup> Harold Weber, *The Restoration Rake-Hero: Transformations in Sexual Understanding in Seventeenth-Century England* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1986).

*The Country Wife*, *The Man of Mode*, or *The Way of the World* (1700).<sup>83</sup> Ultimately, though, the critical curiosity about *The Rover* has not extended to other plays written by women. Susanna Centlivre's *The Wonder*, for instance, was one of the most frequently staged plays of the eighteenth century, but it yields only two hits when run as a "Primary Search Work" on the MLA International Bibliography.<sup>84</sup> One of the reasons that this dissertation centers on comedies, then, is that it seeks to develop the scholarship about female-authored plays other than *The Rover*. Focusing on comedic plays allows me to draw on the insights that other scholars have gained, but helps me to steer the existing conversation about sexuality and comedy toward less-studied plays, permitting *The Politics of Desire* to situate women playwrights' texts in an already robust scholarly discussion.

Even while the preponderance of scholarship on late seventeenth- and early eighteenth-century drama has focused on comedies, in recent years, critical work on tragedies has increased. While the tragic genre had previously been the subject of critical lambasting (one scholar went so far as to contend that it "is evident to all readers" that the serious drama of this period "is poor theater"), all three of the major late twentieth-century surveys of late seventeenth- and early eighteenth-century drama—Robert Hume's *The Development of English Drama in the Late Seventeenth Century*, Laura Brown's *English Dramatic Form, 1660-1700*, and Derek Hughes's *English Drama, 1660-1700*—emphasized tragedy's importance to the development of English

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<sup>83</sup> A search for *The Rover* as a "Primary Search Work" on the MLA International Bibliography yields a list of 64 scholarly pieces. The same search yields 46 pieces for *The Country Wife*, 48 pieces for *The Man of Mode*, and 36 for *The Way of the World*.

<sup>84</sup> For more on *The Wonder*'s remarkable popularity, see John O'Brien, introduction to Susanna Centlivre, *The Wonder! A Woman Keeps a Secret*, ed. John O'Brien (Peterborough: Broadview Press, 2004), 9-28.

theatre in this period.<sup>85</sup> Since those studies' publication, scholars have invested significant resources in studying this period's tragic plays. In *Heroes and States*, J. Douglas Canfield examines the ways that Restoration tragedy "attempt[s] after the English Civil War to reinscribe feudal, aristocratic, monarchical ideology."<sup>86</sup> In *Stuart Women Playwrights*, Pilar Cuder-Dominguez looks at the ways that seventeenth-century women playwrights employed and shaped the conventions of the tragic genre.<sup>87</sup> And in a recent article published in *PMLA*, Felicity Nussbaum insists upon the literary value of eighteenth-century tragedy, asserting that the serious plays of this period are "the unlikely harbingers of drama's future explorations of the human condition."<sup>88</sup>

Even while the body of scholarly work on Restoration and early eighteenth-century tragedy is becoming richer, these plays' treatment of desiring female characters is not as varied as comedies' is. As Laura Brown has noted, the late seventeenth century saw the dominant form of serious drama shift from heroic tragedies that focused on the downfalls of members of the aristocracy to affective tragedies that centered on the "unfortunate and undeserved" dilemmas of the middle class.<sup>89</sup> One effect of this transition was the emergence and rise to prominence of the she-tragedy. A subgenre that "played upon the suffering of female characters, especially those women who had been tainted by some sort of a sexual sin, usually committed unwittingly," the

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<sup>85</sup> Eugene Hnatko, "The Failure of Eighteenth-Century Tragedy," *Studies in English Literature, 1500-1900* 11 (1971), 459-68, on 459; Laura Brown, *English Dramatic Form, 1660-1760: An Essay in Generic History* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1981); Derek Hughes, *English Drama, 1660-1700* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996).

<sup>86</sup> J. Douglas Canfield, *Heroes and States: On the Ideology of Restoration Tragedy* (Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 2000), 1.

<sup>87</sup> Cuder-Dominguez, *Stuart Women Playwrights*.

<sup>88</sup> Felicity Nussbaum, "The Unaccountable Pleasure of Eighteenth-Century Tragedy," *PMLA* 129 (2014), 688-707, on 704.

<sup>89</sup> Brown, *English Dramatic Form*, 69.

she-tragedy was wildly popular in the decades on which this dissertation focuses, particularly in the 1690s and the early 1700s.<sup>90</sup> She-tragedies were penned by a diverse array of playwrights, but these plays all subject their sexualized female characters to the same eventual fate: as Jean Marsden pronounces clearly in the title of her study of the she-tragedy genre, these women eventually become the victims of *Fatal Desire*. Some she-tragedies do manage to portray their sexualized female characters sympathetically: in *The Royal Mischief*, as referenced above, Delarivier Manley encourages the audience's sympathy for the princesses Homais and Bassima by making it clear that these women's promiscuity stems from the doomed marriages to which they were subjected (Homais to a much older man and Bassima to a man she did not love).<sup>91</sup> But regardless of how women are treated in the early portions of she-tragedies, they always die in the end: even Manley has Homais and Bassima perish in the final moments of her play. In comedic dramas of this period, by contrast, sexualized female characters are not only allowed to *live* but occasionally even to *flourish*. At the end of Aphra Behn's *The Rover*, Part II (1681), for instance, the courtesan La Nuche agrees to a long-term, non-marital relationship with the rake-hero Willmore. And in the concluding moments of *The Basset Table* (1705), Susanna Centlivre leaves the door open for one of that play's female gamblers, Lady Reveller, to continue playing cards after the play has concluded. The greater diversity of endings that comedy's generic parameters allow sexualized female characters made humorous plays interesting to me; in *The Politics of Desire*, I tease out the partisan implications of those diverse endings.

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<sup>90</sup> Marsden, "Mary Pix's *Ibrahim*," 34.

<sup>91</sup> Some pieces have interpreted *The Royal Mischief*'s treatment of Homais and Bassima as a proto-feminist critique of the male gaze, including Cynthia Lowenthal, "Portraits and Spectators in the Late Restoration Playhouse: Delariviere Manley's *Royal Mischief*," *The Eighteenth Century: Theory and Interpretation* 35 (1994), 119-34; and Julie Anderson, "Spectacular Spectators: Regendering the Male Gaze in Delariviere Manley's *The Royal Mischief* and Joanna Baillie's *Orra*," *Enculturation* 3 (2001).

A dissertation centered on politics might seem likely to focus on serious drama—after all, in the Restoration and early eighteenth century, it is tragedies, not comedies, that thematize politics directly. In the drama of this period, it is only serious plays that feature monarchs and other dignitaries as characters, and only tragedies that stage issues of political authority and rebellion directly; comedies, on the other hand, center on matters of the heart—flirtation, romance, marriage.<sup>92</sup> As Freud theorizes in *Jokes and their Relation to the Unconscious*, though, comedy’s distance from the ostensibly serious world is precisely what helps jokes to get real work done. Analogizing jokes to dream-work, Freud argues that both humor and dreams are spaces that involve “the formation of a substitute.”<sup>93</sup> For Freud, substitute formation is exactly what allows important processing to get done—it is precisely because as-yet unresolved concerns can be played out on different terrain, he surmises, that humor helps subjects to work out issues in productive ways. In *The Politics of Desire*, I am interested in what women playwrights can do when they displace the serious work of politics onto the purportedly less serious realm of romance. What political commentary can Mary Pix make when writing in a genre that allows her to have one wife run off with a former lover while reprimanding another wife for considering a similar dalliance, as happens in *The Spanish Wives* (1696)? And what message about political obedience can Eliza Haywood forward when reuniting a virtuous wife with her money-grubbing husband, as she does in the final moments of *A Wife to Be Lett*? These questions—and others like them—animate *The Politics of Desire*, motivating its analysis of comedies’ gender and

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<sup>92</sup> The exception to these rules is the tragicomedy, which features political characters who are involved in romantic plots (e.g. *Marriage a la Mode*). For more on the tragicomedy of this period, see Nancy Klein Maguire, *Regicide and Restoration: English Tragicomedy, 1660-1671* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992).

<sup>93</sup> Sigmund Freud, *Jokes and their Relation to the Unconscious* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1960), *passim*.

partisan politics. Understanding comedy to offer women writers a unique space to make political interventions, this dissertation is interested in the partisan possibilities that this seemingly apolitical genre affords and it seeks to tease out the political implications of women writers' moves in this realm.

## 1.4 CHAPTER SUMMARIES

Each chapter of *The Politics of Desire* focuses on a particular group of women who were sexualized in Restoration and early eighteenth-century discourse: sex workers, cheating wives, female gamblers, and pandered wives.<sup>94</sup> After reconstructing the contemporary discourse that surrounded that type of character, the chapter examines a female playwright's representation of the figure, reading the dramatist's approach to the woman through the lens of period politics.

Chapter One looks at the sex-worker characters in Aphra Behn's *The Rover*, Part II—the courtesan, La Nuche, and the bawd, Petronella. As I have already mentioned, courtesans and bawds were the subject of much politically charged conversation in the late seventeenth century. *The Second Part of the Rover* engages the partisan discourses surrounding these types of sexualized female figures, lionizing La Nuche at the same time that it attacks Petronella. Ultimately, I argue that *The Rover*, Part II's divergent characterization of its courtesan and its bawd served to drum up support for the embattled Stuart monarchy during the Exclusion Crisis. Examining *The Rover*, Part II through the lens of period political propaganda, I show that this

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<sup>94</sup> The concept of 'sex work' is, of course, anachronistic to the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries. Nevertheless, as I discuss further on p. 40, n. 2, I find this phrase to be a useful heuristic for thinking about courtesan and bawd labor in this period.

play's conflicting portrayals of female desire allow Behn to redirect opposition attacks on Charles's mistresses at the same time that she participates in the royalist defamation of bawds. In the end, I argue that this play's bifurcated representation of female sexuality allows it to stake a unique claim for Stuart rule.

Chapter Two focuses on cheating wives in Mary Pix's *The Spanish Wives*. For a long time, secondary work on cuckoldry in English drama has viewed plays' thematization of wifely infidelity as an outgrowth of period anxieties about gender.<sup>95</sup> In Pix's first comedy, I argue, cheating wives serve an important partisan-political, rather than gender-political, function. Highlighting the shifting partisan implications of late seventeenth- and early eighteenth-century dramatic representations of cuckoldry, as well as the political undercurrents of antitheatrical discourses about vision, I argue that *The Spanish Wives*' representation of cuckoldry and visual power is bound up with Whigs' conflicting attitudes toward political authority in the wake of the Glorious Revolution. Written at a moment when Whigs sought both to secure the gains in parliamentary power that they had made in 1688 and to legitimize Williamite rule, Pix's comedy sends contradictory messages about power, setting contractual limits on the authoritarianism displayed by one of its husbands even as it supports its other husband's effort to exert more power over his wife. Ultimately, I read *The Spanish Wives* as evincing some of the key tensions that underlay Whig ideologies of authority in the 1690s.

Chapter Three looks at the female gambler in Susanna Centlivre's *The Basset Table*. As noted above, some Whig writers responded to the economic uncertainty of the early eighteenth century by targeting female gamblers and stockjobbers, faulting these women's alleged illogic—

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<sup>95</sup> See, for instance, Katharine Eisaman Maus, "Horns of Dilemma: Jealousy, Gender, and Spectatorship in English Renaissance Drama," *English Literary History* 54 (1987), 561-583.

rather than the inherent instability of the new economy—for the period’s financial tumult. Even while Centlivre’s Whig loyalties are clear throughout her *oeuvre*, she displays a more nuanced attitude toward women and money in *The Basset Table* than the one displayed by many of her Whig peers. Written immediately after the success of Centlivre’s first gambling play, *The Gamester* (1704), *The Basset Table* licenses the pleasure that its card-playing protagonist takes in gambling, rather than censuring her participation in commerce. In the end, this chapter reads *The Basset Table* as legitimizing women’s involvement in finance, understanding this play as one that explores the possibilities that England’s market economy might offer women.

Chapter Four focuses on the pandered wife in Eliza Haywood’s *A Wife to Be Lett* (1723). Wife pandering, or the attempt to rent one’s spouse to another man, appears in a handful of literary and legal texts from the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries. The wives in these texts often have little to do with their own pandering, but many of the pieces blame the rented wives for the fates they suffer, with many texts framing husbands’ decisions to pander their spouses as outgrowths of the women’s excessive sexuality. In *A Wife to Be Lett*, however, the pandered wife is set up as virtuous: throughout the play, Haywood lionizes Mrs. Graspall and praises her refusal of her husband’s attempt to pander her. Previous work on *A Wife to Be Lett* has interpreted this play as an outgrowth of Haywood’s gender politics, interpreting Haywood’s favorable characterization of Mrs. Graspall as indicative of the playwright’s “feminist purpose.”<sup>96</sup> As I point out, however, such a reading cannot account for the repeated emphasis that *A Wife to Be Lett* places on Mrs. Graspall’s obedience—again and again, this play highlights the “virtuous” way that Mrs. Graspall responds to her husband, and Mrs. Graspall herself

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<sup>96</sup> Earla A. Wilputte, “Wife Pandering in Three Eighteenth-Century Plays,” *Studies in English Literature, 1500–1900* 38 (1998), 447–64, on 454.

declares her intention to obey her husband “with a ready Compliance.”<sup>97</sup> Inspired by Toni Bowers’s work on the seduction narrative and Tory politics, this chapter reads *A Wife to Be Lett* as Haywood’s effort to sketch out a Tory model of heroism. Interpreting Mrs. Graspall’s actions not as an expression of a proto-feminist ethos of ‘resistance’ but rather as an embodiment of the doctrine of passive obedience, I link *A Wife to Be Lett* to one of the key Tory concepts of the late seventeenth century, connecting this play’s portrayal of wife pandering to the period’s larger political conversations about resistance and authority.

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<sup>97</sup> Eliza Haywood, *A Wife to Be Lett*, in *Eighteenth-Century Women Playwrights, Vol. I: Delarivier Manley and Eliza Haywood*, eds. Margarete Rubik and Eva Mueller-Zettelmann (London: Pickering and Chatto, 2001), 165-214, on 170, 190.

## 2.0 COURTESANS, BAWDS, AND ROYALISM IN *THE ROVER*, PART II

Aphra Behn's treatment of female sexuality in *The Second Part of The Rover* (1681) is puzzling. *The First Part of The Rover* (1677) has long been read as a celebration of desiring women, its sympathetic portrayal of the courtesan Angellica Bianca evidence of Behn's proto-feminism and its favorable characterization of the lusty aristocrat Hellena a sign of the play's support for female sexuality.<sup>1</sup> *The Rover*, Part II, though, represents women's sexuality more ambivalently. Behn's second *Rover* does lionize its courtesan character, La Nuche; however, the play derides its other sex worker, the aged bawd Petronella.<sup>2</sup> Portrayed throughout *The Rover*, Part II as desperate, Petronella is ridiculed for her appearance and her wish to remain young. By the end of the play, Petronella has become *The Rover*, Part II's antagonist.

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<sup>1</sup> Critical pieces that read *The Rover*, Part I as celebrating female sexuality include Nancy Copeland, "'Once a whore and ever'? Whore and Virgin in *The Rover* and Its Antecedents," *Restoration* 16 (1992), 20-7; Jones DeRitter, "The Gypsy, *The Rover*, and the Wanderer: Aphra Behn's Revision of Thomas Killigrew," *Restoration* 10 (1986), 82-92; Pat Gill, "Aphra Behn: Desiring Women II," chap. 4 in *Interpreting Ladies*; and Heidi Hutner, "Revisioning the Female Body: Aphra Behn's *The Rover*, Parts I and II," in *Rereading Aphra Behn: History, Theory, and Criticism*, ed. Heidi Hutner (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1993), 102-120.

<sup>2</sup> I use the anachronistic term 'sex worker' to emphasize the similarity between La Nuche's and Petronella's labor—a similarity that is obscured by the term 'courtesan' (with its genteel associations) and the term 'bawd' (with its avaricious ones). In *The Protestant Whore*, Alison Conway provides a thoughtful explanation of her decision to apply the notion of 'sex work' to courtesan labor, a decision that inspired my own terminological choices; Conway, *The Protestant Whore*, 12 and 192n41.

As James Turner has shown, much late seventeenth-century political discourse centered on sex and, in particular, on sexualized women.<sup>3</sup> Courtesans and bawds feature prominently in this discourse. Even while courtesans and bawds shared key traits (both were women who worked in the sex trade, and both were sexualized in the literature and periodicals of the day), partisan writers treated these women differently. Opposition political writers attacked courtesans, turning them into symbols of the excesses of libertine rule and blaming Charles II's mistresses for his missteps. Royalists, by contrast, tended not to inveigh against courtesans, but they did attack bawds, whose sale of prostitutes they vilified as economically and socially disruptive.<sup>4</sup>

Accounting for the partisan ways that sexualized women were represented in period discourse, I argue that *The Rover*, Part II's ambivalent treatment of female sexuality is bound up with its partisan politics. Little critical work has been done on *The Second Part of the Rover*, but this text marks an important transition in Behn's career as a playwright.<sup>5</sup> During her first decade as a writer, Behn was left out of the system of patronage at work in Charles II's court. In early 1680, though, *The Rover*, Part I and *The Feigned Courtesans* were staged at court, and *The*

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<sup>3</sup> Turner, *Libertines and Radicals*.

<sup>4</sup> Crown-partisan attacks on Stuart courtesans were not widespread, but some loyalists did make them: Pepys, for instance, expressed concerns about Castlemaine, and Dryden has been read as denouncing both Castlemaine and K  roualle in *Marriage A-la-Mode*. For more on Pepys and Castlemaine, see Turner, *Libertines and Radicals*, 166-8; for more on *Marriage A-la-Mode*, see Laura Linker, "Lady Lucretius," chap. 1 of *Dangerous Women, Libertine Epicures, and the Rise of Sensibility, 1670-1730* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2011).

<sup>5</sup> There are three extant published arguments about *The Rover*, Part II: Heidi Hutner and Robert Markley make sustained claims about the play; and Susan Owen gives the same, brief reading of the text in her two articles on Behn's politics, both of which argue that *The Rover*, Part II critiques libertine sexuality. Hutner, "Revisioning the Female Body"; Robert Markley, "'Be Impudent, Be Saucy, Forward, Bold, Touzing, and Leud': The Politics of Masculine Sexuality and Feminine Desire in Behn's Tory Comedies," in Canfield and Fisk, *Cultural Readings*, 114-40; Owen, "Sexual Politics and Party Politics in Behn's Drama, 1678-83"; Owen, "Behn's Dramatic Response to Restoration Politics."

*Rover*, Part II was the first play Behn wrote after these performances.<sup>6</sup> From its dedication's praise of the controversial Duke of York (who would go on to become James II) to its epilogue's denunciation of audience members who "Rail for the Cause against the government," *The Rover*, Part II trumpets Behn's loyalty to the Stuarts.<sup>7</sup> In the past fifteen years, much scholarship has focused on Behn's royalism, with such work bringing to light the complicated interrelationship between her partisan and sexual politics.<sup>8</sup> Reading *The Rover*, Part II alongside late seventeenth- and early eighteenth-century courtesan and bawd satires, I tease out the links between this play's support for the Stuart cause and its bifurcated treatment of sexualized women. Ultimately, I contend that *The Rover*, Part II does not celebrate desiring women more generally, as previous critics have suggested, but rather that this play lionizes a particular, politically expedient version of female desire.

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<sup>6</sup> For more on these performances' impact on Behn's work, see Deborah C. Payne, "'And Poets Shall by Patron-Princes Live': Aphra Behn and Patronage," in Schofield and Macheski, *Curtain Calls: British and American Women and the Theater, 1660-1820*, 105-119.

<sup>7</sup> Aphra Behn, *The Second Part of The Rover*, in *The Works of Aphra Behn*, Vol. 6, ed. Janet Todd (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1996), 223-98, on 298 (hereafter cited in text).

<sup>8</sup> Melinda Zook helped to inaugurate interest in Behn's politics; Adam Beach and Anita Pacheco are fine, more recent examples of such work. Critics who have sought to tease out the relationship between Behn's partisan and sexual politics include Susan Owen and Ellen Pollak. Melinda Zook, "Contextualizing Aphra Behn: Plays, Politics, and Party, 1679-1689," in *Women Writers and the Early Modern British Political Tradition*, ed. Hilda L. Smith (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 75-94; Adam Beach, "Carnival Politics, Generous Satire, and Nationalist Spectacle in Behn's *The Rover*," *Eighteenth-Century Life* 28 (2004), 1-19; Anita Pacheco, "Reading Toryism in Aphra Behn's Cit-Cuckolding Comedies," *Review of English Studies* 55 (2004), 690-708; Owen, "Sexual Politics and Party Politics in Behn's Drama, 1678-83" and "Behn's Dramatic Response to Restoration Politics"; Ellen Pollak, "Beyond Incest: Gender and the Politics of Transgression in Aphra Behn's *Love-Letters between a Nobleman and his Sister*," chap. 3 in *Incest and the English Novel, 1684-1714* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2003).

## 2.1 COURTESAN AVARICE AND PARTISAN DISCOURSE

At the end of *The Rover*, Part II, Behn rewards La Nuche with the play's rake-hero, Willmore, having the courtesan win the affections of the titular rover over the efforts of her chief rival, the aristocrat Ariadne. Such a conclusion means that *The Rover*, Part II is even more generous to La Nuche than *The Rover*, Part I is to Angellica, and scholarship on *The Second Part of the Rover* has interpreted such favorable treatment as evidence of the second play's celebration of female sexuality. In "Revisioning the Female Body: Aphra Behn's *The Rover*, Parts I and II," Heidi Hutner contends that "Behn's resistance to repressive strategies of control is evident in the two parts of *The Rover* in the move from the prostitute as outsider to the prostitute as heroine."<sup>9</sup> And in "'Be Impudent, Be Saucy, Forward, Bold, Touzing, and Leud': The Politics of Masculine Sexuality and Feminine Desire in Behn's Tory Comedies," Robert Markley argues that three of Behn's plays from the early 1680s (including *The Rover*, Part II) make clear her opposition to "the masculinizing of desire—the creation of women as other and as object—that is crucial to a sexual ideology that insists on the indivisibility of feminine chastity and feminine identity."<sup>10</sup> These readings emphasize the gender dimension of courtesanship, but they overlook courtesans' political significance. Particularly in the latter years of Charles II's rule, Stuart mistresses became targets of Whig ire, satirized as avarice-filled prostitutes who corrupted the king and left

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<sup>9</sup> Hutner, "Revisioning the Female Body," 103.

<sup>10</sup> Markley, "'Be Impudent,'" 116. Like my chapter, so Markley's article focuses on the relationship between Behn's treatment of female desire and her dedication to Tory politics. The emphases of our pieces are different, however: whereas Markley is interested in Behn's support for the general principles of Tory rule and the golden age of sexuality, I look at the particular ways that Behn intervenes in contemporary political debates about sexualized women. Our pieces also differ in the conclusions we draw about female sexuality: Markley sees *The Rover*, Part II as displaying an exclusively positive take on desiring women, while I read this play's treatment of female sexuality as vexed.

him unfit to govern. Behn's portrayal of La Nuche offers a rebuke to such representations: La Nuche begins *The Second Part of the Rover* motivated by money, but by the end of the play she has become a hopeless romantic, forsaking her financial pursuits in order to be with the poverty-stricken rake she loves. With this characterization, Behn offers support to Charles II, bolstering Stuart rule during the Exclusion Crisis, the most politically fraught moment of Charles's reign.

Charles II's lasciviousness is legendary. Known for bringing courtesans to Whitehall and spending lavishly on them, the 'Merrie Monarch' has long been understood as England's most debauched ruler. Charles's louche reputation was at least partly a reflection of his rapacious appetites, but scholars have also come to view his sexuality as an intentional act of posturing, one designed to encourage public support for the Stuart political program. Kevin Sharpe has contended that Charles's hedonism was part of "a new politics of pleasure" that the king instituted in a deliberate effort to distinguish his regime from Cromwell's.<sup>11</sup> And Robert L. Woods, Jr. has argued that Charles purposefully used sex and scandal as a way of diverting attention from the political crises of the early years of his reign, asserting that "the notoriety of [Charles's] and his court's sexual behavior became a rhetorical weapon in politics, making sexual and media politics a major asset in defusing the smoldering extremes of English political society which threatened to explode."<sup>12</sup>

Particularly in the period immediately following the Restoration, Charles's "politics of pleasure" seems to have been effective: in the early 1660s, opposition to the Stuart king was rare. Over time, however, resistance to Charles and his court increased. In the wake of the plague and

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<sup>11</sup> Kevin Sharpe, "'Thy Longing Country's Darling and Desire'," 18.

<sup>12</sup> Robert Woods, "Charles II and the Politics of Sex and Scandal," in *State, Sovereigns and Society in Early Modern England*, eds. C. H. Carlton, Mary L. Robertson, and Joseph S. Block (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1998), 119-36, on 121-2.

the great fire of 1666, many Englishmen and -women blamed the court for the two catastrophes, suggesting that these disasters represented God's way of punishing England for its ruler's licentiousness.<sup>13</sup> As Charles's reign progressed, public concerns about his sexual reputation mounted. In 1678, rumors of a Catholic assassination plot against the king led to a contentious series of parliamentary debates about his successor. Charles had fathered children only out of wedlock, and as such, his openly Catholic brother, the Duke of York, stood poised to accede to the throne. This succession scenario stoked English national anxieties about religion and sexuality, and the Exclusion Crisis, as the debates surrounding James II's succession came to be known, was the most politically divisive event in England since the Civil War. From 1679, when the bill excluding James from power was introduced, until late 1681, when the Exclusion Bill was finally voted down in the House of Lords, England was plunged into a vexed national conversation about Protestantism, identity, and the king's failure to produce an heir.

Centering as it did on issues of paternity and power, the Exclusion Crisis deepened the rhetorical overlap between the realms of sexuality and politics, and many of the attacks on Charles that date from the late 1670s and early 1680s blend these concerns.<sup>14</sup> Court women stood at the center of such attacks. Charles's lovers had long played a central role in the king's self-representation; as discussed in the previous chapter, during the early years of Charles's

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<sup>13</sup> Tim Harris and Steven Zwicker both discuss the opposition to Charles's rule that emerged in the mid-to-late 1660s. Harris, "There is None that Loves Him but Drunk Whores and Whoremongers"; Steven Zwicker, "Virgins and Whores: The Politics of Sexual Misconduct in the 1660s," in *The Political Identity of Andrew Marvell*, eds. Conal Condren, A. D. Cousins. (Aldershot: Scolar, 1990), 85-110.

<sup>14</sup> In her work on the political propaganda of the Exclusion Crisis, Rachel Weil shows that "Charles's potential for tyranny was often represented in terms of his sexual excess." Weil, "Sometimes a Scepter is Only a Scepter: Pornography and Politics in Restoration England," in *The Invention of Pornography*, ed. Lynn Hunt (Cambridge, MA: Zone Books, 1996), 124-53, on 142.

reign, the king had commissioned portraits of his semi-clad mistresses to be hung at Whitehall, the women's beauty intended to signal his sexual prowess. When attitudes toward Charles began to sour, the Stuart courtesans became the target of public scrutiny. In *Last Instructions to a Painter*, the best-known poetic satire of Stuart rule, Andrew Marvell maligned Charles's then-favorite mistress, Barbara Villiers, Countess of Castlemaine. Drawing on Villiers's reputation for promiscuity, Marvell described a class-crossing affair between the countess and her footman, relaying in lascivious detail Castlemaine's washing of her servant's feet:

Stripped to her skin, see how she stooping stands,  
Nor scorns to rub him down with those fair hands,  
And washing (lest the scent her crime disclose)  
His sweaty hooves, tickles him 'twixt the toes.<sup>15</sup>

The ostensible target of Marvell's poem is Charles's mismanagement of the Second Dutch War; *Last Instructions*, though, devotes an entire verse paragraph to its defamation of Castlemaine. Used as a symbol of Charles's failings as a leader, Castlemaine comes to embody the frustration that members of the opposition felt toward Stuart leadership, her sexuality framed as a dangerous distraction that threatened England's standing in the world. Frequent targets of opposition satire in the latter years of Charles's rule, Stuart courtesans were attacked in the literature and periodicals of the day, their sexuality characterized as hyperactive and their influence over the king given an ominous cast.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> Marvell, *Last Instructions to a Painter*, 372.

<sup>16</sup> One of the best-known attacks on Castlemaine was "The Poor Whore's Petition" (1668), a pamphlet published in the wake of the Bawdy House Riots of 1668. An appeal "to the most Splendid, Illustrious and Eminent Lady of Pleasure, the Countess of Castlemaine," "The Poor Whore's Petition" purported to have been written by the well-known bawds Madame Creswell and Damaris Page, who characterize Castlemaine as one of their own and ask for her help in restoring their trade to its former profitability. Ritual rioting in front of bawdy houses was an annual event in the seventeenth century, but Charles II, fearing the growing public resistance to his reign, put down the riots of 1668 with unusual force. The petition seems to have

Late seventeenth-century political propaganda attacked Stuart courtesans not only for their licentiousness but also for the political and religious power they allegedly wielded over the king. Castlemaine, who had publicly converted to Catholicism, was frequently impugned for the sway she held over Charles's religious policies.<sup>17</sup> And Louise de K roualle, Duchess of Portsmouth, was accused of being a tool of the French government and was rumored to have been sent to England to work on behalf of Louis XIV.<sup>18</sup> Many period satires focused on the economic interests of the Stuart courtesans, and during the Popish Plot and the Exclusion Crisis, when Charles engaged in a public battle with Parliament over the budget, attacks on the mistresses' avarice increased. In 1679, one poem faulted K roualle for Charles's erratic fiscal behavior, claiming that the Duchess's "petitions" had "drained him till he was not able/ To keep his Council, nor a table."<sup>19</sup> In 1680, after Charles prorogued Parliament over fears that it would pass the Exclusion Bill, a popular Whig satire complained that "Our Treasury provides" "Not for the nation, but the fair."<sup>20</sup> And in the summer of 1681, after the House of Commons voted to halt payments to the king until he signed the Exclusion Bill, the author of "An Essay of Scandal"

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been intended both to point out the irony of a womanizer like Charles arresting young men who frequented bawdy houses and to poke fun of Castlemaine by making her a public representative of prostitutes. "The Poor Whore's Petition," *Politics, Literary Culture, & Theatrical Media in London: 1625-1725*, University of Massachusetts, [http://www.london.umb.edu/index.php/doc\\_repository/poor\\_whores\\_petition/](http://www.london.umb.edu/index.php/doc_repository/poor_whores_petition/) (accessed January 23, 2014).

<sup>17</sup> For more on the religious undercurrents of certain attacks on Stuart courtesans, see Alison Conway, "Defoe's Protestant Whore," *Eighteenth-Century Studies* 35 (2002), 215-33 and Tim Harris, "The Bawdy House Riots of 1668," *The Historical Journal* 29 (1986), 537-56.

<sup>18</sup> For more on the political satires of Portsmouth, see Ann A. Huse, "Cleopatra, Queen of the Seine: The Politics of Eroticism in Dryden's 'All for Love,'" *The Huntington Library Quarterly* 63 (2000), 23-46 and Nancy Klein Maguire, "The Duchess of Portsmouth: English Royal Consort and French Politician, 1670-85," in *The Stuart Court and Europe*, ed. R. Malcolm Smuts (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 247-273.

<sup>19</sup> "Colin," in *Court Satires of the Restoration*, ed. John Harold Wilson (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1976), 24.

<sup>20</sup> "The Rabble," in *Poems on Affairs of State, Augustan Satirical Verse, 1660-1714*, Vol. 2, ed. Elias F. Mengel, Jr. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1965), 342.

cited the Stuart mistresses, rather than Parliament, as the source of Charles's financial woes: "Why art thou poor, O King? Embezzling cunt,/ That wide-mouthed, greedy monster, that has done't."<sup>21</sup> Focusing especially on the king's highest-priced courtesans, "An Essay of Scandal" advised Charles to abandon his most expensive mistresses and instead take up with less pricey women: "Remove that costly dunghill from thy doors;/ If thou must have 'em, use cheap, wholesome whores."<sup>22</sup> Stuart courtesans were criticized repeatedly for the alleged sway they held over the king, and these women came under particular fire during the Popish Plot and the Exclusion Crisis, their lavish spending blamed for both England's and Charles's economic woes.

In *The Rover*, Part II, courtesan avarice is a central concern. Early in the play, La Nuche espouses a hard-nosed approach to finance: when the courtesan catches an initial glimpse of Willmore, she swears that even though her "heart pants and heaves at sight of him," she will not bend in her determination to sleep with men only for pay—"I'll not bate a Ducat of this price I've set upon my self, for all the pleasures Youth or Love can bring me" (239). Willmore, whose position as aristocrat-in-exile has left him penniless, is personally affronted by the courtesan's pursuit of wealth, and he spends much of *The Rover*, Part II berating La Nuche for what he characterizes as her greed. Not fifty lines into the play, well before the courtesan has even entered the stage, Willmore condemns La Nuche for being a "mercenary Jilt!", and over the course of *The Rover*, Part II, the rake-hero repeats such an accusation several times (234). In Act One, Scene Two, Willmore denounces La Nuche's actions by suggesting that "all this Cunning's for a little Mercenary gain" (243); later, when disguised as a mountebank, the rake-hero pretends to read La Nuche's fortune and calls her "a slavish, mercenary Prostitute" (261); and in the

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<sup>21</sup> "An Essay of Scandal," in *Court Satires of the Restoration*, 63.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, 64.

play's final act, when La Nuche stands poised to choose another man over him, Willmore condemns the courtesan for being "the mercenary Conquest of [the other man's] Presents" (285). So incensed is Willmore by La Nuche's pursuit of wealth that pair remain apart until the play's final moments. In Act Three, the rake and the courtesan nearly begin a relationship after Willmore agrees to forsake his pursuit of Ariadne; however, such a deal ultimately falls apart. Near the end of the scene, La Nuche calls for her coach rather than allowing Willmore to walk her out of the house, fearing that being seen with a poor captain will lead her to "be pointed at by all the envying Women of the Town" (268). Willmore is infuriated by La Nuche's care for what others think, and he reneges on his previous commitment to be with the courtesan, declaring that he has "grown" "indifferent" to her and railing against what he characterizes as her "insatiate" pursuit of wealth (268). Willmore's repeated disparagement of La Nuche echoes Whig satires of Charles II's mistresses from the period. The rake-hero's goal in attacking La Nuche is different from the intention of the writers who targeted Charles II's lovers—Behn's rake-hero wants to convince La Nuche to bestow sexual favors *gratis*, while the writers accusing Charles's courtesans of avarice sought to change the monarch's sexual and financial behaviors—but these affronts apply similar logic to the women they target, condemning their hunger for wealth and consumer goods as avaricious.

Like *The Rover*, Part II, so *The Rover*, Part I thematizes courtesan greed. In Behn's first *Rover* play, however, such a line of attack is quickly dismissed. In Act Two, Scene Two of *The First Part of the Rover*, Willmore attacks Angellica using similar language to that which he applies to La Nuche in *The Rover*, Part II. (Just as Willmore decries La Nuche's pursuit of "Mercenary Gain" in the second *Rover* play, so in the first, he condemns Angellica for "The

vanity of that pride, which taught you how/ To set such price on sin.”<sup>23</sup>) In the first *Rover* play, however, Angellica swiftly defuses the rake-hero’s critique. Issuing a quick retort to Willmore, Angellica inverts the rake-hero’s line of reasoning by pointing out the parallels between his attempt to marry an aristocratic woman and her effort to secure wealthy male patrons: “Pray tell me, sir, are not you guilty of the same mercenary crime? When a lady is proposed to you for a wife, you never ask how fair, discreet, or virtuous she is; but what’s her fortune” (29). Such a suggestion—that Willmore’s approach to romance is just as avaricious as any prostitute’s—is borne out by the remainder of *The Rover*, Part I. In Act Four, Scene Two of the first *Rover*, when Angellica informs Willmore that Hellena is a wealthy heiress, the rake-hero’s interest in the aristocrat is piqued. Asserting his intention to seek “New joys, new charms, in a new miss that’s kind,” Willmore instantaneously abandons his pursuit of Angellica and instead focuses his attentions on Hellena (62). Earlier in the play, Angellica had announced her willingness to forego her quest for wealth in order to be with Willmore, telling the rake-hero that “The pay I mean, is but thy love for mine” (31), but Willmore does not live up to his vow to do the same. Written before the fierce partisanship of the Popish Plot and the Exclusion Crisis, *The Rover*, Part I does not dwell on the subject of courtesan avarice in the way that *The Rover*, Part II does; rather, it quickly inverts Willmore’s criticism of Angellica, suggesting that aristocrats-in-exile are more likely than courtesans to have their romantic decisions be influenced by financial considerations.

*The Second Part of the Rover* thus spends more time thematizing courtesan avarice than *The First Part of the Rover* does. In the end, though, the second *Rover* play avoids condemning

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<sup>23</sup> Aphra Behn, *The Rover*, in *The Rover and Other Plays*, ed. Jane Spencer (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), 1-88, on 27 (hereafter cited in text).

its courtesan as greedy. In the final moments of *The Rover*, Part II, La Nuche rejects her quest for economic advancement and agrees to be with Willmore on his terms, pledging to engage in a long-term, free-love relationship with the rake-hero “without the formal foppery of Marriage” (294). Previous critics have understood this scene—and, in particular, La Nuche and Willmore’s plan to unite without marrying—as a signal of Behn’s support for female sexuality. In such readings, La Nuche’s embrace of her lust for Willmore becomes an indication of Behn’s advocacy of free-floating female desire, a sign that La Nuche is unencumbered by patriarchal expectations of marriage and/or chastity.<sup>24</sup> While Behn’s choice to unite a courtesan with a rake-hero surely does have radical sexual implications (indeed, I can think of no other Restoration play that concludes by uniting a courtesan and an aristocrat); the ending of *The Rover*, Part II also has implications for partisan politics. In deciding to be with Willmore, La Nuche renounces her pursuit of economic gain, a character arc that allows Behn to refute opposition political writers’ frequent characterization of Stuart mistresses as avaricious.<sup>25</sup>

The terms in which Willmore and La Nuche come together at the end of *The Rover*, Part II emphasize the financial transition that the courtesan undergoes over the course of the play. Publicly rejecting the economic motivations by which she has hitherto been guided, La Nuche declares to Willmore midway through Act Five, “now I am yours, and o’re the habitable World

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<sup>24</sup> Hutner argues that “The final love match between La Nuche and Willmore further demonstrates Behn’s idealistic celebration and promotion of feminine desire in *The Rover*, part II.” Markley claims that “The untrammelled desire that Willmore represents signals his escape into a realm of Cavalier idealism that potentially frees La Nuche to shed her role as sexual object and act upon her desire.” Hutner, “Revisioning the Female Body,” 117; Markley, “Be Impudent,” 124.

<sup>25</sup> In “Carnival Politics, Generous Satire, and Nationalist Spectacle in Behn’s *The Rover*,” Adam Beach argues that in *The First Part of the Rover*, Behn “acknowledges opposition concerns about the raging sexuality of the Stuart court” in the effort to contain those concerns. Similarly, my claim in this section is that, in *The Rover*, Part II, Behn stages proto-Whigs’ attacks on Stuart courtesans as a way of dismissing these attacks. Beach, “Carnival Politics,” 2.

will follow you, and live and starve by turns as fortune pleases” (294). The courtesan thus asserts her intention to be with Willmore in a way that emphasizes the financial implications of her decision—La Nuche acknowledges that in order to unite with the rake-hero, she must be willing to “starve . . . as fortune pleases.” Willmore’s response to La Nuche underscores the transformation that the courtesan has experienced: praising her for having decided to be with him, the rake-hero tells La Nuche, “Thou art reform’d and I adore the change” (294). The final moments of *The Second Part of the Rover* thus emphasize that La Nuche’s choice to be with Willmore is a “reform[ation]”—a positive change away from wealth and toward love. In the context of the courtesan satires circulating in the period, this shift in La Nuche’s character functions not only as a sign of her embrace of sexuality but also as a repudiation of the greedy courtesan caricature forwarded by opposition political writers. Courtesans, Behn suggests, are not the money-hungry figures that Willmore excoriates in the early portions of *The Rover*, Part I, but rather are romantic women motivated by affection.

*The Rover*, Part II’s ability to distance La Nuche from avarice stems not only from the transformation that the courtesan experiences, but also from the play’s pawning off onto its other female characters the greed that it initially ascribes to La Nuche. The clearest example of *The Second Part of the Rover*’s shifting avarice onto other female characters comes in the play’s fourth act, when La Nuche returns home after an argument with Willmore. Lashing out at her bawd, La Nuche accuses Petronella of having instilled in La Nuche the greed for which Willmore has spent much of the play attacking her:

[F]rom Childhood thou has trained me up in cunning, read Lectures to me of the use of Man, but kept me from the knowledg [*sic*] of the right; taught me to Jilt, to flatter and deceive, and hard it was to learn th’ ungrateful Lessons: but oh how soon plain Nature

taught me Love! and showed me all the cheat of thy false Tenets—no—give me Love with any other curse. (277)<sup>26</sup>

Asserting that she does not have a natural affinity for wealth, but rather that her bawd “trained [her] up” to be greedy, La Nuche here declares her intention to stop practicing the “cunning” she has been taught and begin embracing the “Love” that “plain Nature” has “taught” her. Laying the groundwork for La Nuche’s eventual declaration of love for Willmore, the courtesan here begins the process of untangling herself from the accusations of greed that Willmore has previously leveled at her, foisting these accusations onto Petronella instead. In this scene, Behn makes clear that the true source of the greed La Nuche has displayed is not the courtesan herself, but rather her bawd.

As if it were not enough to frame Petronella as greedy, *The Rover*, Part II also pins accusations of avarice onto its third major female character, the aristocratic Ariadne. From Ariadne’s first conversation with Willmore, Ariadne’s attention to finance is clear: in that scene, Ariadne asserts her intention “not to be sold” (245). Understanding such a declaration to signal Ariadne’s disinterest in being paid for sex, Willmore is initially pleased by this proclamation; however, the rake-hero’s response changes, when, in the process of clarifying her intention, Ariadne declares that she plans only to sleep with a man who recognizes her “worth” and who can ascribe a proper “va[l]ue” and “rate” to her qualities—i.e. an aristocratic man who will marry her (245). Seizing upon the financial rhetoric that Ariadne employs when she asserts her intention to marry, Willmore proceeds to condemn the aristocrat for linking money and love:

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<sup>26</sup> This speech parallels a speech in *Thomaso*. In that play, though, Angellica blames her mother, rather than her bawd, for her having become a courtesan. Thomas Killigrew, *Thomaso*, Parts I and II, in *Comedies, and Tragedies* (London: Herringman, 1664), *Early English Books Online* (accessed January 7, 2012), 311-464, on 341.

Name not those words; they grate my ears like Jointure, that dull conjugal cant that frights the generous Lover! Rate—Death, let the old Dotards talk of Rates, and pay it t'atone for the defects of Impotence. Let the sly States-man, who Jilts the Commonwealth with his grave Politiques, pay for the sin that he may doat in secret; let the brisk fool Inch out his scanted sense with a large purse more eloquent than he: but tell not me of rates, who bring a Heart, Youth, Vigor, and a Tongue to sing the praise of every single pleasure thou shalt give me. (245)

Using decidedly royalist language, Willmore here distinguishes himself from “the sly States-man, who Jilts the Commonwealth” and instead asserts his intention never to “pay for the sin” of sex. Ariadne may want Willmore to agree to a “Jointure” or “talk of Rates,” but the rake-hero vows never give in to these tools of the “old” and “sly” and instead makes known his plans to continue pursuing women in the public, “Vigor[ous]” manner to which he is accustomed.

In the end, *The Rover*, Part II validates Willmore’s harangue against Ariadne. Holding fast against the rake-hero’s advances over the course of the play, Ariadne ends the second *Rover* exactly as she begins it: engaged to marry her cousin Beaumont. A man of wealth who proposes to Ariadne in what must be one of the least romantic marriage offers in all of Restoration comedy [“let’s home, *Ariadne*, and try, if possible, to love so well to be content to marry” (297)], Beaumont is the antithesis of the poverty-stricken cavalier. That Ariadne ends the play with him rather than with Willmore affirms the rake-hero’s early condemnation of the aristocrat as too concerned with wealth. Set up throughout the play as a foil to La Nuche, Ariadne ends *The Rover*, Part II with the wealthy man her family wants her to marry, rather than with the romantic cavalier to whom she is attracted. Ultimately, such a characterization helps *The Rover*, Part II to distance La Nuche from the accusations of greed that are leveled at her early in the text, allowing the play to suggest that it is not courtesans, but rather other women, who are truly avaricious.

*The Rover*, Part II’s celebration of La Nuche has been understood as a signal of Behn’s favorable attitude toward female sexuality. Such an interpretation, though, obscures the partisan

implications of this play's treatment of courtesanship. First performed during the Exclusion Crisis, *The Second Part of The Rover* premiered at a moment when many Tory writers were lionizing libertine sexuality as a way of demonstrating their allegiance to the Stuarts. Indeed, 1681 was the year when that most famed celebration of Stuart sexual prowess, John Dryden's *Absalom and Achitophel*, was first published, its opening lines praising the "pious times ... / Before polygamy was made a sin;/ When man on many multiplied his kind."<sup>27</sup> Just as Dryden's paean to promiscuity declared his support for the Stuarts, so Behn's celebration of La Nuche asserts hers. Carefully detaching La Nuche from the monetary motives that initially guide her, *The Rover*, Part II ultimately frames this character as a woman driven by love. Such a characterization serves as a rebuke to the discourse that was circulating about Charles II's mistresses in the period, and in so doing, helps to make the case for Stuart rule.

## 2.2     BAWDRY, GROTESQUE SEXUALITY, AND STUART ECONOMIC PROPAGANDA

La Nuche's bawd, Petronella, has gone largely undiscussed in the critical literature. This character, though, is central to the action of *The Rover*, Part II: set up from the beginning of the play as La Nuche's antagonist, Petronella has, by its conclusion, become the villain of *The Second Part of the Rover*. Behn's play makes it clear that Petronella and La Nuche share certain experiences—they both are employed in the sex trade, for instance, and they both have worked as prostitutes—but *The Rover*, Part II ultimately emphasizes the differences, rather than the

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<sup>27</sup> Dryden, *Absalom and Achitophel*, 178-9.

similarities, between these characters. While the play praises La Nuche's beauty and rewards her with its rake-hero, it denigrates Petronella as grotesque and punishes her by leaving her penniless and alone. Such vilification of bawds was common in the royalist propaganda of the period. As Melissa Mowry has shown, the denunciation of bawds served to bolster the Stuarts' claim to power and limit the era's nascent entrepreneurialism.<sup>28</sup> The similarities between *The Rover*, Part II's characterization of Petronella and late seventeenth-century bawd satires underscore how entangled this play's treatment of female sexuality and its partisan politics are. Behn's portrayal of Petronella echoes one of the period's key strains of royalist propaganda, ridiculing the bawd's sexuality and turning her into a greedy villain.

In the late seventeenth century, the term 'bawd' had a distinct set of gender and sexual implications. The word had been in use for quite some time: since as early as the mid-fourteenth century, it had referred to "One employed in pandering to sexual debauchery; a procurer or procuress."<sup>29</sup> By the early eighteenth century, though, 'bawd' had come to be applied exclusively to women: the *OED* reports that "since c1700 ['bawd' has been] only feminine, and applied to a procuress, or a woman keeping a place of prostitution."<sup>30</sup> Increasingly gendered female, the term 'bawd' also had clear sexual associations in this period. Indeed, all of the Restoration and early eighteenth-century texts that feature bawds make known these figures' previous experience as prostitutes. In "The Insinuating Bawd and Repenting Harlot" (1700?), a regretful prostitute claims that she was "seduc'd . . . to Sin" by her bawd's description of her

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<sup>28</sup> Mowry, "Monstrous Mothers".

<sup>29</sup> *Oxford English Dictionary Online*, s.v. "bawd" (accessed July 6, 2012).

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*

“long Experience” in the sex trade.<sup>31</sup> And the first sentence of “The Devil and the Strumpet: or, the Old Bawd Tormented” (1700?) declares that the bawd Jenny Freeman worked “for several years [as] . . . a Hackney Jilt.”<sup>32</sup>

Like other texts from the Restoration and early eighteenth century, so *The Rover*, Part II features a bawd who once worked as a prostitute. Such experience could serve to point up the parallels between this play’s bawd and its courtesan, emphasizing these characters’ shared work in the sex trade. Ultimately, though, Behn uses Petronella’s and La Nuche’s similar history to heighten the contrast between these two women. In La Nuche’s first line in the play, the courtesan adds force to her assertion that she will not fall for the poverty-stricken Willmore by referring to Petronella, instructing her maid to “see . . . —the sad Memento of a decay’d poor old forsaken Whore, in *Petronella*, consider her, and then commend my prudence” (239). Such a comment hints at La Nuche’s and Petronella’s shared experience as prostitutes; however, this comparison ultimately serves to underscore the courtesan’s difference from her bawd. Unlike Petronella, La Nuche is neither “old” nor “forsaken,” and the courtesan here asserts her intention never to become “poor.” La Nuche only mentions her procuress in this moment in the effort to differentiate herself from Petronella; in so doing, the courtesan makes it clear that her aim is to do a better job of exchanging sex for money than her bawd had.

Negative comparisons between La Nuche and Petronella recur throughout *The Rover*, Part II. In fact, even when Petronella discusses her own experience in the sex trade, she does so pejoratively. In Act Four, Scene Three, when La Nuche declares her intention to be with

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<sup>31</sup> “The Insinuating Bawd and Repenting Harlot” (London), *Early English Books Online* (accessed July 6, 2012), 1.

<sup>32</sup> “The Devil and the Strumpet: or, the Old Bawd Tormented” (London: E. B., 1700), *Early English Books Online* (accessed July 6, 2012), 1.

Willmore and faults Petronella for the avarice that La Nuche has previously displayed, Petronella encourages the courtesan to reconsider her decision to be with the rake-hero. Hinting at the missteps she made while working as a prostitute, Petronella regrets aloud her failure to prize money over love, bemoaning her current situation while referring to herself in the third person: “well, *Petronella*, hadst thou been half as industrious in thy Youth as in thy Age, thou hadst not come to this” (277-8). Elsewhere in Behn’s *oeuvre*, she emphasizes the resemblances between sexualized women from different social registers. In *The Rover*, Part I, for instance, Behn treats Hellena and Angellica more similarly than she does differently, emphasizing these women’s shared sexuality rather than their distinct statuses as heiress and courtesan. Indeed, Nancy Copeland has argued that “the resemblance between Angellica and Hellena . . . call[s] into question the value of female chastity and challenge[s] [Angellica’s] consignment to the status of ‘whore.’”<sup>33</sup> In *The Rover*, Part II, however, Behn leaves the social distinction between courtesan and bawd intact, using these characters’ shared experience to highlight the differences between them.

The contrast that Behn draws between La Nuche and Petronella is especially strong in the realm of sexuality. While La Nuche is the most sought-after courtesan in Madrid, her “bright eyes” (233) and “Angel[ic]” “form” (234) the subject of Willmore’s first conversation when he arrives in town, Petronella is aged and grotesque, her lingering desire the subject of ridicule. Behn’s negative portrayal of Petronella’s sexuality comes to the fore in the play’s second act. There, Petronella visits a man who she thinks is a mountebank, hoping that he can provide her with a potion that will restore her youth. The mountebank is actually Willmore, who has disguised himself as a quack in the effort to sell potions to two English friends, Blunt and

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<sup>33</sup> Copeland, ““Once a whore and ever?””, 20.

Fetherfool, who are attempting to marry a giant and a dwarf.<sup>34</sup> After the Englishmen leave Willmore's stage, Petronella appears on it, "*Dress'd like a Girl of Fifteen*" and carried there by a Spaniard who introduces her as "One *Petronella Elenora*, . . . a famous out-worn Curtezan" (250). The disjunction of Petronella's youthful dress and her status as "out-worn Curtesan" make her the butt of the remainder of this scene's jokes. Drawing on the similarities between the names Elenora and Helen, Blunt makes a rape joke about Petronella, hinting at her aged sexuality when he suggests that she "may be that of *Troy* for her Antiquity, tho fitter for God *Priapus* to ravish than *Paris*" (250). And the bawd is further humiliated by her interaction with Willmore. So willing is Petronella to be convinced of the mountebank's claims that his tonic will cause "*New Flames [to] sparkle in those Eyes;/And these Gray Hairs flowing and bright [to] rise*" that she gives the quack fifty pistoles for his potion and vows that she will return to give him more as soon as she can (252). Eager to maintain her personal appearance and continue circulating in the romantic world, Petronella is ridiculed in this sequence, her sexuality framed as grotesque and her desire to remain young set up as hopeless. *The Rover*, Part II lionizes La Nuche's sexuality, but it pokes fun of Petronella's, positioning the bawd as a desperate, gullible woman who will go to any length to try to continue attracting men.

The source of the second *Rover*'s mountebank scene is clear. Thomas Killigrew's *Thomaso* (1654), the two-play cycle on which Behn's *Rover* texts are based, features a similar exchange, in which "*an old decayed blind, out of Fashion whore*" seeks a youth-restoring cure

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<sup>34</sup> In her introduction to *The Second Part of The Rover*, Janet Todd suggests that Willmore's masquerading as a mountebank is likely a reference to the Earl of Rochester, who was rumored to have disguised himself as a mountebank in order to avoid serving jail time for murder. Janet Todd, introduction to *The Second Part of The Rover*, in *The Works of Aphra Behn*, Vol. 6, 225-7.

from a quack doctor after complaining that her “Age is burnt with desire.”<sup>35</sup> Behn’s decision to include this scene in *The Rover*, Part II underscores exactly how different the sexual politics of the second *Rover* play are from those of the first. Existing scholarship on Behn has highlighted the differences between *The Rover*, Part I and *Thomaso*. Whereas Killigrew’s play has been read as a celebration of masculine libertinism, Behn’s has been understood to evince her proto-feminist gender politics.<sup>36</sup> In fact, in one of the first articles that compared *The Rover*, Part I and *Thomaso*, Jones DeRitter highlighted Behn’s omission of the mountebank scene as evidence of her favorable characterization of female sexuality. Pointing out that Behn both excised this sequence and assigned the name of its elderly prostitute, Hellena, to the aristocratic heroine of *The Rover*, Part I, DeRitter argued that such alterations constituted acts of feminist reclamation.<sup>37</sup> That DeRitter does not discuss *The Rover*, Part II is telling: in this play, Behn includes Killigrew’s mountebank scene, and the same sexual politics that underlie Killigrew’s sequence also shape Behn’s: in both plays, a washed-up prostitute is ridiculed for her ongoing desire, her wish to remain young leading her to foolishly seek assistance from a known charlatan. Killigrew’s best-known critic, Alfred Harbage, argued that Killigrew had a penchant for dividing prostitutes into good and bad, turning some of them into near-perfect fits for his rake-heroes, and others of them into unattractive women desperate for love.<sup>38</sup> In *The Rover*, Part II, Behn takes a similar approach to sexualized female characters, setting up her courtesan as the ideal mate for Willmore while turning her bawd into a grotesque character similar to *Thomaso*’s Hellena.

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<sup>35</sup> Killigrew, *Thomaso*, 363.

<sup>36</sup> Copeland, ““Once a whore and ever?””; Hutner, “Revisioning the Female Body.”

<sup>37</sup> DeRitter, “The Gypsy, *The Rover*, and the Wanderer,” 89-90.

<sup>38</sup> Alfred Harbage, *Thomas Killigrew: Cavalier Dramatist, 1612-1683* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1930), 230.

*The Rover*, Part II's negative characterization of its bawd was not unique in the late seventeenth century. In fact, many Restoration and early eighteenth-century texts attacked bawds.<sup>39</sup> These pieces not only characterize these women's bodies in freakish terms, but they also condemn bawds' effects on English culture, framing procuresses as socially and economically threatening. "The Constables Hue and Cry After Whores and Bawds" (1700?), a pamphlet whose stated intent is to provide law-abiding citizens with information that could help them bring sex workers to justice, concludes by satirizing a bawd. After detailing the procuress's physical misshapeness—mentioning her "fallen out" teeth and the corresponding caving-in of her face—the text proceeds to condemn this character's greed, alleging that "*She ruins Families, to advance her Treasure,/ And sucks her Profit, out of others Pleasure.*"<sup>40</sup> The early portions of *The London-Bawd: with her Character and Life: Discovering the Various and Subtle Intrigues of Lewd Women* (1699/1700?) also describe a bawd's caving-in face and characterize her as "ruin[ing] Families."<sup>41</sup> *The London-Bawd*, though, goes on to spend ten chapters detailing procuresses' trickery. From the young bride whom a bawd persuades to cuckold her wealthy older husband to the citizen husband whom a bawd convinces to bankrupt his family, *The London-Bawd* relays several tales that highlight bawds' deceptive powers, warning people of both sexes and all status positions of the social and economic dangers that could unfold if they fell prey to procuresses' tricks. Maligned both for their grotesque appearance and for the alleged social destruction they wrought, bawds were attacked repeatedly

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<sup>39</sup> For more on eighteenth-century bawd satires, see Mandell, "Bawds and Merchants."

<sup>40</sup> "The Constables Hue and Cry After Whores and Bawds," in *Eighteenth-Century British Erotica* (see note 29), 155-64, on 163.

<sup>41</sup> *The London-Bawd: with her Character and Life: Discovering the Various and Subtle Intrigues of Lewd Women* (London: John Gwillim, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. 1705), *Project Gutenberg* (accessed January 27, 2014).

in Restoration and early eighteenth-century texts, their actions faulted for many of the period's social and economic ills.

In *The Bawdy Politic in Stuart England*, Melissa Mowry takes up such negative representations of bawds, arguing that these characterizations ultimately serve royalist ends. Pointing out that bawd satires represented procuresses as stealing women from their rightful masculine owners, Mowry argues that these texts helped to perpetuate the existing English order, encouraging Englishmen to protect their wives and daughters by continuing to rely upon “the hierarchies between men that stabilized and fortified the society.”<sup>42</sup> In Mowry's reading, these satires frame bawds as symbols of what could go wrong if the free market were left to its own devices:

To discourage all men who owned or might own property from going the way their republican forebears had gone, crown partisans offered a distopic vision of what the economic world might look like in the absence of homosocial hierarchies. It was a world governed by bawds.<sup>43</sup>

Interpreting bawd satires as royalist attempts to decouple entrepreneurialism from republican politics, Mowry reads these texts as crown partisans' endeavors to co-opt England's economic gain for their political benefit. Showing that bawd satires helped “Stuart partisans . . . to appropriate the new entrepreneurial individualism for the Crown,” Mowry demonstrates that these texts served to harness financial growth for aristocratic ends, attempting both to encourage economic development and to maintain the status quo.<sup>44</sup>

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<sup>42</sup> Mowry, “Monstrous Mothers,” 79.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid.

Several of the bawd satires published during the Exclusion Crisis targeted the London procuress Mother Creswell.<sup>45</sup> A Whig who had publically supported Titus Oates's alleged attempt to assassinate Charles II, Creswell was a famed personage in the period, and her opposition politics were well known.<sup>46</sup> In the period's lengthiest treatment of Creswell, *The Whores Rhetorick* (1683), the bawd is attacked for her opposition politics, her partisan beliefs framed as one element of her determination to upset established social and economic hierarchies.<sup>47</sup> Primarily a dialogue between Creswell and her newest recruit, Dorothea, *The Whores Rhetorick* opens with an outline of Dorothea's family history, describing the girl's father as having "much more Nobility in his Veins than Money in his Purse" and characterizing Dorothea's father as having lost his estate in the wake of Charles I's defeat in the Civil War.<sup>48</sup> Creswell, such a narrative suggests, capitalizes on the political misfortunes of others, her opposition politics rendering her all too eager to take advantage of royalists' economic challenges. As *The Whores Rhetorick* progresses, its condemnation of Creswell's Whiggish greed only deepens. In convincing Dorothea to become a prostitute, Creswell draws on the republican rhetoric of the commons, explaining that "a fair Virgin . . . injure[s] the publick . . .

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<sup>45</sup> For more on the royalist implications of Creswell satires, see Mowry, "Monstrous Mothers," 94-7.

<sup>46</sup> One of the late seventeenth-century texts that focuses on Creswell makes clear her support for the so-called Popish Plot. Taking the form of a laudatory letter addressed to the well-known Catholic midwife Elizabeth Cellier, "A Letter from the Lady Creswell to Madam C. the Midwife, on The Publishing her late Vindication . . ." purports to have been penned by Creswell and congratulates Cellier on having been acquitted of charges that she denied that Titus Oates had attempted to assassinate the king. "A Letter from the Lady Creswell to Madam C. the Midwife, on the Publishing her late Vindication . . ." (1680), *Early English Books Online* (accessed March 26, 2013).

<sup>47</sup> For more on Creswell and *The Whores Rhetorick*, see Laura Rosenthal, "A 'Cool State of Indifference': Mother Creswell's Academy," chap. 1 of *Infamous Commerce: Prostitution in Eighteenth-Century British Literature and Culture* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2006).

<sup>48</sup> *The Whores Rhetorick* (London: George Shell, 1683), *Early English Books Online* (accessed January 7, 2012), 2 (hereafter cited in text).

[when she] does hide those precious talents, and conceals that inestimable Treasure, from whence the principle part of mankind might probably expect such infinite satisfaction” (14). And after Dorothea joins Creswell’s ranks, the bawd encourages the young woman to disregard the status system and instead focus on profit, instructing Dorothea to “forget the distinction of Gentleman and Mechanick, but let men be divided in your Books under the names of Poor, Rich, Liberal, and Niggardly” (50). Ultimately, *The Whores Rhetorick* depicts Creswell as attempting to mold Dorothea into just as ruthless a capitalist as she is. In the latter portions of the text, Petronella instructs the young woman in how to cozen Englishmen out of their cash. If Dorothea wants to milk a sensitive patron for additional money, Creswell suggests, she can tell him a sad story—“feign that some of your moveables are pawned for a sum of money . . . which if not redeemed by a certain day, then at hand, will be irrecoverably lost” (47); if the young girl wants to encourage one lover to pay her more, she can play him against another suitor—“it be found expedient at certain times to shew the most liberal and rich of the whole covey, some particular favours, whereby the others may grow jealous, and study to raise themselves in her good liking by some extraordinary piece of gallantry” (91). Advising Dorothea that her “avarice must be insatiable” (40), Petronella spends much of *The Whores Rhetorick* displaying exactly the kind of greed that royalists were eager to link to opposition politicians. Publically opposed to Stuart rule, Creswell is attacked in *The Whores Rhetorick* as a symbol of republican disruption, her delight in Tory failure made clear and her anarchic effect on traditional economies emphasized.

Behn’s characterization of Petronella shares much in common with *The Whores Rhetorick*. As in that text, so in *The Rover*, Part II, the bawd preys upon an innocent girl, convincing her to become a prostitute and teaching her the tricks of the trade. Also like Creswell, Petronella displays a callous dedication to amassing wealth, repeatedly discounting the

importance of love and affirming the significance of money. In the second scene of *The Rover*, Part II, when Petronella sees La Nuche in conversation with the rake-hero, the bawd commands the courtesan to stop speaking to him: “What in Discourse with this Railer—come away—Poverty’s catching” (243). Unsympathetic to La Nuche’s affection for Willmore, Petronella cares only about profit, and spends much of the play attempting to foster in La Nuche such a single-minded commitment to wealth. Even in the play’s fourth act, when La Nuche informs Petronella of her intention to relinquish her pursuit of financial gain, Petronella remains unmoved. In fact, the bawd responds to La Nuche’s announcement that she intends to be with Willmore by reminding the courtesan of consumer goods’ ability to last when beauty cannot: “Do you not daily see—fine Cloaths, rich Furniture, Jewels and Plate are more inviting than Beauty unadorn’d: be old, diseas’d, deform’d, be any thing, so you be rich and splendidly attended, you’ll find your self Lov’d and Ador’d by all” (277). Having “taught [La Nuche] your Trade,” Petronella is disappointed when the courtesan begins to succumb to love’s temptations, and the bawd spends much of the play reminding the courtesan that it is important to amass cash (242).

Like Petronella in *The Rover*, Part II, so Angellica’s maid, Moretta, in *The Rover*, Part I repeatedly asserts the importance of wealth. In her first appearance in *The Rover*, Part I, Moretta reminds Angellica that “’tis only interest that women of our profession ought to consider” (22). Later, when Willmore offers to buy a “share” of Angellica, Moretta informs the rake that “we only sell by the whole piece” (28). At the end of Angellica’s and Willmore’s first scene together, Moretta predicts that Angellica’s decision to sleep with Willmore *gratis* will eventually undo her: “Trophies, which from believing fops we win,/ Are spoils to those who cozen us again” (31). Petronella and Moretta clearly share an emphasis on financial acuity; however,

Behn's two *Rover* plays subject these characters to markedly different treatment. In *The Rover*, Part I, Moretta's financial advice is validated and her predictions about Willmore proven correct: the rake-hero does end up breaking Angellica's heart, and by the end of the play the courtesan is in worse financial shape than she was when she met Willmore.<sup>49</sup> In fact, so accurate are Moretta's predictions about Angellica that, late in the play, the maid issues the courtesan an 'I-told-you-so': "I told you what would come on't . . . Why did you give him five hundred crowns, but to set himself out for other lovers? You should have kept him poor, if you had meant to have had any good from him" (55). Vindicated in both her financial sensibility and her evaluation of Willmore's and Angellica's relationship, Moretta becomes one of the normative voices in *The Rover*, Part I, her practicality set in favorable contrast to the hopeless romanticism that Angellica displays.<sup>50</sup>

Whereas *The Rover*, Part I characterizes Moretta favorably, *The Rover*, Part II frames Petronella negatively. Late in the play, Petronella attempts a series of deceptions that cement the text's vilification of her. Near the end of Act Four, Petronella hatches a plan to masquerade as La Nuche in order to pocket for herself the money that the courtesan's patrons have pledged for a night with her. In the first scene of Act Five, when Petronella realizes that La Nuche's commitment to Willmore is firm, the bawd announces that she intends to "shift for my self" and carry out a plot to "seize all [La Nuche's] Money and Jewels" (286). Both of these schemes end

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<sup>49</sup> For more on Behn's favorable treatment of Moretta, see Rita Allison Kondrath, "Subverting Hierarchy and Vying for Agency: Mistresses and Maidservants in Pix's *The Beau Defeated* and Behn's *The Rover*," in *The Public's Open to Us All: Essays on Women and Performance in Eighteenth-Century England*, ed. Laura Engel (Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2009), 30-54.

<sup>50</sup> Nancy Copeland argues that *The Rover*, Part I values "practical romanticism" over "idealized romanticism." Nancy Copeland, "The Rover," chap. 2 of *Staging Gender in Behn and Centlivre*.

in failure: Petronella's effort to pose as La Nuche collapses when two men end up in the courtesan's bed at the same time, their anger at encountering one another leading them to fisticuffs; and Petronella's pilfering of La Nuche's assets fails when the bawd mismanages her booty, handing it off to the bumbling Englishman Blunt for safekeeping. Ultimately, such belated attempts at securing wealth only serve to confirm Petronella's status as the villain of *The Rover*, Part II. In the final moments of the second *Rover*, La Nuche's bravo brings Petronella onto the stage and exposes the actions that the bawd has taken against the courtesan, reporting that Petronella "has this Night robb'd our Patrona of a hundred thousand Crowns in Money and Jewels" (296). Characterized throughout the play as avaricious and unsympathetic to love, Petronella is the focus of *The Rover*, Part II's ire; by the end of the text, the bawd is so overtaken by greed that she acts out against its heroine, masquerading as La Nuche and attempting to steal her jewels.

Petronella is a unique character in the *Thomaso/Rover* cycle. She does share traits with other figures in Killigrew's and Behn's plays, but she is the only bawd in either of these texts. The cruel treatment that Behn reserves for this figure is also distinctive. In other plays, and particularly in *The Rover*, Part I, Behn treats sexualized female characters favorably; in *The Rover*, Part II, however, Behn turns Petronella into a villain, ridiculing her desire and condemning her avarice. Such a portrayal closely parallels the royalist bawd satires that were circulating in the period and, in so doing, condemns entrepreneurialism's republican politics. In the midst of the fiercest outbreak of political partisanship since the English Civil War, Behn joins her royalist peers by vilifying a bawd and, in so doing, attempts to appropriate for the crown some of the key economic gains of the period.

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The focus of much late seventeenth-century political rhetoric, sexualized female figures played a key role in the partisan discourse that surrounded the Exclusion Crisis. From opposition texts that attacked courtesans as avaricious foreigners to royalist pieces that framed bawds as greedy republicans, the political rhetoric of the Crisis was bound up with the discourse of female sexuality. Written just after Behn had her first plays performed at court, *The Rover*, Part II clearly engages with the hot-button political issues of the day, lionizing courtesans and demonizing bawds as a way of staking its claim for Stuart rule. Recent work on Behn has emphasized the imbrication of her partisan and gender politics, and has highlighted the ways that these twin investments sometimes align and sometimes stand at cross purposes. Examining *The Rover*, Part II's royalism and its treatment of female sexuality provides further insight into this understudied play and furthers the project of untangling the relationship between Behn's partisan and sexual politics.

### 3.0 CHEATING WIVES, VISUAL AUTHORITY, AND WHIG POWER IN *THE SPANISH WIVES*

Sometime in the fall of 1696, the actor William Penkethman strode onto the stage at the Drury Lane theatre and requested that the “spruce gallants” in the audience “oblige a woman twice” and support the second theatrical venture forwarded by playwright Mary Pix.<sup>1</sup> Pix’s first play, *Ibrahim*, had met with box-office success a few months earlier, but Penkethman explained that this evening’s performance would not follow in the “grave” tradition of the dramatist’s previous venture (137). Analogizing *Ibrahim*, a tragedy, to a sexual foray, Penkethman told the audience that while “women will be damned sullen the first night,” this time around, Pix would try her hand at comedy and would attempt “new tricks to please ye” (137). *The Spanish Wives*’ prologue thus drew attention to women’s sexuality as a way of luring the eyes of its putatively male watchers to the stage. The playtext of *The Spanish Wives*, by contrast, does not rely on a typically gendered script of spectatorship. Pix’s first comedy does center on two near-cuckolds who watch their wives’ actions, but these men’s attempts to manage their female partners’ behavior meet with only limited success. The Governor of Barcelona uses knowledge gained by spying to halt his wife’s cheating, but the Marquess of Moncada fails in his effort to keep watch over his wife and by the end of the play, the Marchioness has abandoned the Marquess to be with

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<sup>1</sup> Mary Pix, *The Spanish Wives*, in *The Meridian Anthology of Restoration and Eighteenth-Century Plays by Women*, ed. Katharine M. Rogers, (New York: Meridian, 1994), 131-184, on 136 and 137 (hereafter cited in text). On the difficulty of establishing the precise date of *The Spanish Wives*’ premiere, see Paula Barbour, *A Critical Edition of Mary Pix’s The Spanish Wives*, unpublished diss., Yale University, 1975, 16-7.

the man she loves. Ultimately, *The Spanish Wives* sends a mixed message about the gender politics of spectatorship: one of this play's titular wives is disciplined by a watching man, but the other gains her freedom by sneaking past her husband's eyes.

Pix's first comedy is part of a long tradition of English plays that entwine the themes of cuckoldry and watching. From Claudio's assertion that he will "lock up all the gates of love,/And on my eyelids shall conjecture hang" (4.1.105-6) in *Much Ado About Nothing* (1598) to Brabantio's early warning that Othello should "Look to her, Moor, if thou has eyes to see:/She has deceived her father, and may thee" (1.3.290), many early modern male characters who are concerned about female fidelity express their worries in the language of vision. In these plays, the threat of cuckoldry has decided gender-political resonance: again and again in the dramatic works of the sixteenth, seventeenth, and eighteenth centuries, cuckoldry signals that a husband has lost (or may potentially lose) power over his wife.<sup>2</sup> The threat of the loss of visual power also has gender-political implications: in "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema," Laura Mulvey reads the experience of cinematic spectatorship as one in which male spectators neutralize their fears of emasculation by doubly objectifying the female characters in films—doing so themselves and identifying with the male characters who objectify the women on screen.<sup>3</sup>

Even while cuckoldry and spectatorship are often interpreted through the lens of gender politics, these concerns also had partisan-political resonance in the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries. At a moment when English political texts debated the analogical connection between marital and state governance, the relationship between husband and wife

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<sup>2</sup> For more on cuckoldry and the threat of the loss of masculine power, see Maus, "Horns of Dilemma." (I discuss Maus's argument in greater detail below.)

<sup>3</sup> Laura Mulvey, "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema," in Leitch, et. al., *The Norton Anthology of Theory and Criticism*, 2179-2192.

was often framed as a microcosmic version of the relationship between rulers and their subjects.<sup>4</sup> Indeed, some late seventeenth- and early eighteenth-century marriage plays represent the conjugal relationship in ways that make direct reference to politics. In Thomas Southerne's *The Wives' Excuse, or Cuckolds Make Themselves* (1691 or 1692), one of the titular wives, Mrs. Friendall, describes the marital relationship as a kind of governmental contract (and, in so doing, implicitly calls out her husband for not holding up his end of their conjugal bargain): "in a married state, as in the public, we tie ourselves up, indeed, but to be protected in our persons, fortunes and honours by those very laws that restrain us in other things; for few will obey, but for the benefit they receive from the government."<sup>5</sup>

Discourse about spectatorship from this period also had a partisan-political cast. At a time when most of the major players in England's antitheatrical debates had ties to one of the nation's two political parties, writers' anxious claims about the theatre signaled their concerns about governmental authority. As I discuss in greater detail below, Jeremy Collier's *A Short View of the Profaneness and Immodesty of the English Stage* (1698) repeatedly characterizes the stage as exerting an "absolute" power over its audience members.<sup>6</sup> For Collier, a nonjuror who had refused to swear allegiance to William and Mary, the only rightful possessor of "absolute"

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<sup>4</sup> Political texts that debate the nature of the relationship between political and conjugal authority include Robert Filmer's *Patriarcha* (1680), James Tyrrell's *Patriarcha non Monarcha* (1681), and the first of John Locke's *Two Treatises of Government* (1689). For an exploration of how debates about the nature of political authority shaped late seventeenth-century theatrical depictions of marriage, see Susan Staves, "Sovereignty in the Family," chap. 3 of *Players' Scepters: Fictions of Authority in the Restoration* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1979).

<sup>5</sup> Thomas Southerne, *The Wives' Excuse; or Cuckolds Make Themselves*, in *Four Restoration Marriage Plays*, ed. Michael Corder (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), 255-336, on 282-3.

<sup>6</sup> Jeremy Collier, *A Short View of the Immorality, and Profaneness of the English Stage* ... (London: S. Keble, 1698), *Early English Books Online* (accessed January 23, 2011), 141, 190, 282.

power was James II. That the stage—or, for that matter, any force—would attempt to exert a similarly “absolute” power over the English people constituted heresy in Collier’s eyes.<sup>7</sup> In the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries, discussions of matrimony and spectatorship were bound up with politics, and both conjugal and visual discourse were inflected with partisan resonance.

Recent scholarship has highlighted the Whig politics of many of Mary Pix’s plays.<sup>8</sup> Critical work on *The Spanish Wives*, however, has repeatedly viewed this comedy through the lens of gender; one representative argument characterizes Pix’s first comedy as “radically challeng[ing] the assumptions on which . . . conjugal oppression was based.”<sup>9</sup> Such a reading accurately describes one of *The Spanish Wives*’ marriages (as referenced above, the Marchioness of Moncada does throw off the Marquess’s violent attempts to exert authority over her);

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<sup>7</sup> For more on the non-juror politics of Collier’s antitheatricalism, see Lisa Freeman, “Jeremy Collier and the Politics of Theatrical Representation,” in *Players, Playwrights, Playhouses: Investigating Performance, 1660-1800*, eds. Michael Cordner and Peter Holland (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2007), 135-51.

<sup>8</sup> Pilar Cuder-Dominguez, “Gender, Race, and Party Politics in the Tragedies of Behn, Pix, and Manley,” in *Teaching British Women Playwrights of the Restoration and Eighteenth Century*, eds. Bonnie Nelson and Catherine Burroughs (New York: Modern Language Association, 2010), 263-75; Elizabeth Kubek, “Mary Pix, the London Middle Class, and Progressive Whig Ideology,” in Nelson and Burroughs, *Teaching British Women Playwrights*, 81-92; and Mihoko Suzuki, “Recognizing Women’s Dramas as Political Writing: The Plays of 1701 by Wiseman, Pix and Trotter,” *Women’s Writing* 18:4 (2011), 547-564.

<sup>9</sup> Katharine M. Rogers, introduction to *The Meridian Anthology of Restoration and Eighteenth-Century Plays by Women*, xv. Other critics who have interpreted *The Spanish Wives* as feminist or proto-feminist include Kendall, who deems this play “a model of what a feminist farce is”; Juliet McLaren, who uses scenes from *The Spanish Wives* to support her claim that Pix is a feminist; and Cynthia Lowenthal, who argues that this play “displace[s]” Pix’s critique of English gender relations onto Spain. Kendall, *Love and Thunder: Plays by Women in the Age of Queen Anne* (London: Methuen Drama, 1988), 34; Juliet McLaren, “Presumptuous Poetess, Pen-Feathered Muse: The Comedies of Mary Pix,” in *Gender at Work: Four Women Writers of the Eighteenth Century*, ed. Ann Messenger (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1990), 77-113; Cynthia Lowenthal, *Performing Identities on the Restoration Stage* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 2003), 82.

however, this interpretation does not account for the play's other marriage. By the end of *The Spanish Wives*, the Governor of Barcelona has learned to wield more—not less—power over his wife. In this chapter, I read *The Spanish Wives*' conflicting representations of cheating wives, husbandly authority, and visual power through the lens of the political exigencies that the Whig party confronted in the 1690s. Penned at a moment when Whigs sought simultaneously to defend the acts of resistance that had led to the Glorious Revolution and to protect the power of a sitting king, *The Spanish Wives* sends mixed messages about wifely infidelity and specular authority. These mixed messages, I contend, reveal some of the contradictions that underlay Whig ideologies of power in this moment.

### 3.1 THE POLITICS OF CUCKOLDRY COMEDIES, 1671-1707

Cuckoldry is a frequent theme in the freewheeling world of the Restoration sex comedy. In *The Country Wife*, for example, Horner gains access to married women by trying the “new unpracticed trick” of pretending to be a eunuch; in *The London Cuckolds* (1681), the sparks Townly and Ramble woo Arabella and Eugenia, who are married to the daft citizens Doodle and Dashwell; and in *The Lucky Chance* (1686), the gallant Gayman convinces Sir Cautious Fulbank to allow Lady Fulbank to be cuckolded in exchange for 300£.<sup>10</sup> Frequently, the comedies of the 1670s and 1680s treat cuckoldry with nonchalance. In *Marriage a la Mode*, for example, the threat of cuckoldry serves to remind the two male protagonists that they should love their female partners. Enamored of each other's fiancée and wife, respectively, Palamede and Rhodophil

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<sup>10</sup> Wycherley, *The Country Wife*, 5.

spend much of Dryden's tragicomedy chasing after the other man's partner. In the final scene of *Marriage a la Mode*, each man describes the renewed romantic interest that the other man's pursuit of his beloved has sparked in him:

RHODOPHIL: Gad I am afraid there's something else in't, for Palamede has wit, and if he loves you, there's something more in ye than I have found, some rich mine, for aught I know, that I have not yet discovered.

PALAMEDE: 'Slife, what's this? Here's an argument for me to love Melantha, for he has loved her, and he has wit too, and for aught I know, there may be a mine. But if there be, I am resolved I'll dig for't.<sup>11</sup>

For Palamede and Rhodophil, the potential for cuckoldry serves not as a real danger but rather as a wake-up call about the need to renew their commitments to their female partners. As is the case in many of the humorous plays of the 1670s and 1680s, *Marriage a la Mode* frames wifely infidelity not as the stuff of moral outrage, but rather as the hinge of a clever plot.

When plays take a nonchalant approach to cuckoldry, characters who attempt to prevent their wives from cheating become the butt of these dramas' jokes. Late in the first scene of *The Country Wife*, Mr. Pinchwife, who is obsessed with the idea that he is going to be cuckolded, downplays his wife's attractiveness. In the effort to prevent other men from pursuing Mrs. Pinchwife, Mr. Pinchwife tells his rakish friends that his wife "has no beauty but her youth; no attraction but her modesty" and that she is "wholesome, homely, and housewifely; that's all."<sup>12</sup> Such an understatement does not end up serving the function that Mr. Pinchwife hopes; instead of dissuading the assembled rakes from chasing after Mrs. Pinchwife, this declaration instead ends up earning Mr. Pinchwife the mockery of his friends. Following Mr. Pinchwife's description, the quick-witted Dorilant deems Mr. Pinchwife a "grazier," suggesting that his

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<sup>11</sup> Dryden, *Marriage a la Mode*, 375.

<sup>12</sup> Wycherley, *The Country Wife*, 13.

approach to matrimony is more like that of a cattle-breeder than a husband.<sup>13</sup> And over the course of the play, the rakes' ridicule of Mr. Pinchwife continues: by the end of *The Country Wife*, Sparkish has deemed Mr. Pinchwife a "stingy country Coxcomb," calling him out for being a greedy country man who will share with his friends neither his wife nor "his little firkin of Ale."<sup>14</sup>

*The London Cuckolds* also mocks its central cuckold characters. The character of Dashwell is "A Blockheaded City Attorney" who is so thick that he does not guess that his wife is planning to leave him, even when he arrives home as she is entertaining two would-be suitors.<sup>15</sup> (Dashwell initially expresses some concern about his wife's fidelity, but he is successfully distracted by a display of the "very mysterious Art ... of *Magick*" that results in his being delivered dinner on a moving table.<sup>16</sup>) *The London Cuckolds*' other titular cuckold, Doodle, is so "dull" that as soon as he secures a promise that his wife, Arabella, will only answer 'no' to questions that other men ask her, he believes his hold on her is iron-clad.<sup>17</sup> It is only after Doodle learns of Arabella's affair with the rakish Townly (a romance that she conducts while remaining true to her promise to Doodle) that Doodle realizes the flaw in his plan; after all, as Arabella explains to her husband, "Silence you know gives Consent."<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid., 64.

<sup>15</sup> Edward Ravenscroft, *The London Cuckolds* (London: Jos. Hindmarsh), *Early English Books Online* (accessed January 23, 2015), 8.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid., 18.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid., 53.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid., 5.

Critical work on the cuckoldry comedies of the 1680s has characterized these texts' satirical representations of cuckolds as serving royalist ends.<sup>19</sup> In "Tupping Your Rival's Women: Cit-Cuckolding as Class Warfare in Restoration Comedy," J. Douglas Canfield shows that, by framing cuckolded husbands as unsophisticated and new-monied, cuckoldry satires repeatedly code these men as Whigs. These plays' cuckolders, by contrast, are portrayed as landed, urbane, and Tory. Pointing out that the number of premieres of cuckoldry comedies spiked in the lead-up to the Exclusion Crisis (which, as we have already seen, was a moment of peak anxiety about the stability of established rule), Canfield contends that in the cuckoldry satires of the 1680s, wifely infidelity helped make the case for aristocratic dominance: "the perfect, potent bodies of Cavalier rakes dominate the imperfect, impotent bodies of cits, and ... the bodies of women become the contested ground for class dominance."<sup>20</sup>

*The London Cuckolds* is one of the central texts in Canfield's study, and it features a particularly clear example of the partisan cuckold-coding Canfield describes. In the opening scene of the play, one of the two cuckolded husbands, Dashwell, gets characterized as "a Trudging, Drudging, Cormuging, Petitioning Citizen that with a little Law and much Knavery has got a great Estate."<sup>21</sup> Such a line doubly frames Dashwell as a Whig: not only does the line

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<sup>19</sup> In addition to the Canfield article that this paragraph discusses in detail, Anita Pacheco has also written a piece on the royalist politics of cit-cuckolding comedies. Pacheco's essay focuses specifically on the works of Aphra Behn and contends that Behn's cit-cuckolding comedies strike a balance between supporting Tory principles and critiquing James II: "These plays demonstrate a strenuous commitment to traditional ideals of upper-class identity and conduct, particularly aristocratic notions of honour and trust, while betraying persistent anxieties that the Stuart monarchs do not themselves uphold these traditions." Anita Pacheco, "Reading Toryism in Aphra Behn's Cit-Cuckolding Comedies," 707.

<sup>20</sup> J. Douglas Canfield, "Tupping Your Rival's Women: Cit-Cuckolding as Class Warfare in Restoration Comedy," in *Broken Boundaries: Women and Feminism in Restoration Drama*, ed. Katherine Quinsey (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1996), 113-28, on 115.

<sup>21</sup> Ravenscroft, *The London Cuckolds*, 8.

call him out for being a “Petitioning Citizen” (a person who supported the Exclusion Bill that opposed James II’s accession), but it also highlights Dashwell’s new-monied status (Dashwell has gotten his “great Estate” not through inheritance, but rather through “much Knavery”). That Dashwell’s wife, Eugenia, ultimately leaves him for another man signals *The London Cuckolds*’ unsympathetic take on the traits that Dashwell embodies: by the end of the play, Dashwell’s Whig politics and ‘knavish’ ways have caused him to be left on his own.

Existing scholarship on cuckoldry comedies has focused on texts from the 1680s, but cuckoldry continued to be a theme in English plays of the 1690s and 1700s; in fact, many of the best-known comedies from these decades feature cheating (or nearly-cheating) wives, including John Vanbrugh’s *The Relapse* (1696) and *The Provoked Wife* (1697), William Congreve’s *The Way of the World* (1700), and George Farquhar’s *The Beaux’ Stratagem* (1707). Like their predecessors from the 1670s and 1680s, the cuckoldry comedies of the 1690s and 1700s satirize the cuckolds they feature. The later decades’ plays, though, target different qualities than the previous decades’ plays do: rather than taking aim at traits like prudishness and new money, the cuckoldry comedies of the 1690s and 1700s target qualities such as prurience and aristocratic status. In *The Relapse*, for instance, the near-cuckold is a libertine. Reformed by his upstanding wife, Amanda, in the concluding moments of Colley Cibber’s *Love’s Last Shift* (1696), the rakish Loveless returns to his lascivious ways in Vanbrugh’s sequel to Cibber’s comedy, beginning an affair with Amanda’s cousin in *The Relapse*’s third act. A darker comedy than *Love’s Last Shift*, *The Relapse* has Amanda respond to news of her husband’s infidelity not by drawing on her virtue to lure him back (as she does in Cibber’s play), but rather by engaging in a flirtation with the otherwise-upstanding Worthy. In the final act of *The Relapse*, Amanda explains her decision to veer from her previously faithful ways:

If now [Loveless] strays,  
'Twould be as weak and mean in me to pardon  
As it has been in him t'offend.  
. . . . But let him know,  
My quiver's not entirely emptied yet:  
I still have darts, and I can shoot 'em too.<sup>22</sup>

*The Relapse* punishes Loveless's return to wanton behavior by having his wife consider a dalliance with another man. Using the threat of cuckoldry to punish womanizers and libertines, the cuckoldry satires of the 1690s take aim at a decidedly different set of characteristics than the cuckoldry comedies of the 1680s do.

The shift in the targets of cuckoldry comedies from the 1680s to the 1690s paralleled a shift in the dominant political sensibility in England during these years. The plays of the earlier decade had been composed when the Stuarts were on the throne and the libertine court still reigned; by the 1690s, though, William and Mary had taken power and they had begun a campaign to sanitize the English court.<sup>23</sup> The investment that William and Mary made in courtly virtue paralleled a similar valuation of virtue in other realms of English culture in the 1690s and 1700s. As Lawrence E. Klein has shown, the early eighteenth century saw the rise of a Whig discourse of politeness that, in both its opposition to debauchery and its valorization of propriety over gentility, validated manners over aristocratic privilege.<sup>24</sup> And as Robert Hume and others have demonstrated, the 1690s was the decade when *honnête homme* characters—upstanding men

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<sup>22</sup> John Vanbrugh, *The Relapse; or, Virtue in Danger, Being the Sequel of The Fool in Fashion*, in Canfield, *The Broadview Anthology of Restoration and Early Eighteenth-Century Drama*, 1480-544, on 1536.

<sup>23</sup> Claydon, *William III and the Godly Revolution*.

<sup>24</sup> Lawrence E. Klein, *Shaftesbury and the Culture of Politeness: Moral Discourse and Cultural Politics in Early Eighteenth-Century England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994).

who helped libertines to reform—came to replace libertines as the heroes of humorous plays.<sup>25</sup> At a time when “the new erotics of power linked the rakish libertine to the excesses of the Stuart court,” rulers, political writers, and those involved with the stage all sought to distance themselves from lasciviousness.<sup>26</sup> Whereas the cuckoldry plays of the 1680s had satirized Whiggish traits as a way of drumming up support for Stuart rule, the cuckoldry plays of the 1690s took aim at libertinism as part of a broader effort to clean up the English political sphere and disparage Stuart licentiousness.

The Whig politics of Vanbrugh’s second cuckoldry comedy, *The Provoked Wife* (which premiered just five months after *The Relapse*), are especially clear. In the play’s opening scene, the wealthy Lady Brute considers cheating on her husband, Sir John. In the course of her consideration, Lady Brute justifies her infidelity using language similar to that which had been used to legitimize the Glorious Revolution:

What opposes [my cuckolding my husband]? My matrimonial vow.—Why, what did I vow? I think I promised to be true to my husband. Well; and he promised to be kind to me. But he han’t kept his word.—Why then, I’m absolved from mine. Ay, that seems clear to me. The argument’s good between the king and the people, why not between the husband and the wife?<sup>27</sup>

Arguing that vows are valid only as long as they are upheld by both parties, Lady Brute asserts that her husband’s failure to be kind “absolve[s]” her of her promise to be true, just as was the case “between the king and the people.” That *The Provoked Wife* supports Lady Brute’s act of resistance is evinced by its characterization of her husband. Painted as a depraved lout throughout the text, Sir John gets framed as a tyrant in the play’s third act. After drunkenly

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<sup>25</sup> Robert Hume and Max Novak both discuss the *honnête homme*. Robert Hume, “The Myth of the Rake in ‘Restoration Comedy,’” chap. 5 of *The Rakish Stage: Studies in English Drama, 1660-1800*; Max Novak, *William Congreve* (New York: Twayne, 1971).

<sup>26</sup> Braverman, “The Rake’s Progress Revisited,” 164n6.

<sup>27</sup> John Vanbrugh, *The Provoked Wife* (New York: Norton, 2003), 7.

assaulting a man, Sir John refuses to be taken to jail and uses absolutist rhetoric to justify his behavior:

I am within a hair's breath as absolute by my privileges as the King of France is by his prerogative. He by his prerogative takes money where it is not his due; I by my privilege refuse paying it where I owe it. Liberty and property and Old England, huzza!<sup>28</sup>

Asserting his support for "Old England," Sir John aligns himself with the *ancien regime* in this speech, celebrating his "absolute ... privilege[]" and comparing himself to "the King of France." Over the course of *The Provoked Wife*, then, Vanbrugh sets up a stark political contrast between Sir John and Lady Brute: while Sir John espouses an authoritarian perspective, Lady Brute advocates limited authority. In doing so, the play frames the act of cuckoldry as a revolutionary rejection of tyrannical rule and offers a distinctly Whiggish take on marital infidelity.

In the cuckoldry satires of the 1690s, then, Whig playwrights sought to adapt what was, at base, a Tory genre to their own political ends. Such an effort was underlain by contradiction. In a Stuart context where King and court celebrated sexuality, extramarital affairs were more or less aligned with the self-representation of the regime in power; as such, plays that depicted cuckoldry could still offer political support to the King. In a Williamite world where piety was prized, though, cheating was antithetical to the values espoused by those in power, and the cuckoldry comedies of the 1690s thus stand in conflict with the moral standards of the political perspective that those in power purported to advocate. The cuckoldry comedy's dissonance with the political hegemony of the 1690s perhaps helps to account for the box-office failure of this decade's first cuckoldry satire, *The Wives' Excuse, or Cuckolds Make Themselves*, which premiered in late 1691 or early 1692. This play, which followed on the heels of Thomas Southerne's first successful comedy, *Sir Anthony Love* (1691), was an unexpected theatrical flop:

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<sup>28</sup> Ibid., 56.

*The Wives' Excuse* ran only three nights on its first run and does not seem to have been performed again publically until 1994.<sup>29</sup> Southerne's cuckoldry comedy does many of the things that the successful cuckoldry satires from the later 1690s do: it emphasizes the debauchery of its near-cuckold, Mr. Friendall, showing him chasing after a woman other than his wife and deeming him "an impertinent, nonsensical, silly, intriguing, cowardly, good-for-nothing coxcomb"; it also characterizes Mrs. Friendall's desire to leave her husband in terms that echo the settlement associated with the Glorious Revolution—having her assert, as I quoted above, that "in a married state, as in the public, we tie ourselves up, indeed, but to be protected in our persons, fortunes and honours by those very laws that restrain us in other things; for few will obey, but for the benefit they receive from the government."<sup>30</sup> In the end, though, these moves did not manage to secure Southerne's second play an ongoing audience. A comedy that concludes with the uneasy separation of its main couple, *The Wives' Excuse* does not pull any punches about the fate to which its failed marriage will likely subject its wronged wife. In the play's final moments, Mrs. Friendall, who does not even carry out the cuckoldry plot that she considers early in the play, makes it clear that the verbal separation to which she and her husband agree will not improve her life: "I must be still your wife, and still unhappy."<sup>31</sup> Even while Whig writers of the 1690s attempted to change the contours of the cuckoldry comedy to align with the political hegemony of the day, the acts of infidelity at the center of these plays fit uneasily with

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<sup>29</sup> Paula Backscheider, "Stretching the Form: Catharine Trotter Cockburn and Other Failures," *Theatre Journal* 47 (1995), 443-458, on 443.

<sup>30</sup> Southerne, *The Wives' Excuse*, 302, 282-3.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, 333. Mrs. Friendall is likely correct that she "must be still your wife." While a handful of wealthy, powerful men were able to obtain special permission to divorce during the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries, divorce was not legal in England until the Divorce Reform Act of 1857. Lawrence Stone, *Road to Divorce: England, 1530-1987* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990).

the virtuous way that both William and Mary and the Whig ascendancy represented themselves. The box-office failure of *The Wives' Excuse* reveals some of the tensions that underlay the cuckoldry comedy in the 1690s and 1700s.

Despite the flop of *The Wives' Excuse*, comedies that feature cuckoldry plots continued to premiere throughout the 1690s and 1700s, and some of these plays were phenomenal successes. *The Way of the World*, for instance, features a version of a cuckoldry plot between Mirabell and Mrs. Fainall, and *The Beaux' Stratagem* has a wife who threatens to use cuckoldry to punish a husband she dislikes. Both of these plays, though, modify the cuckoldry satire in ways that address some of the conundrums that this genre posed for the political and moral hegemony of the period. *The Way of the World* circumvents the moral complications of its cuckoldry plot by making its affair antecedent to the events showcased in the play: Mirabell's and Mrs. Fainall's romantic involvement predated the Fainalls' marriage and, as such, makes this play's most scandalous *liaison* not technically an act of infidelity. (Mirabell's and Mrs. Fainall's relationship appears in the text as a cuckoldry threat, but only because Mrs. Marwood misinterprets a rumor.) And in *The Beaux' Stratagem*, as Judith Milhous and Robert Hume have pointed out, George Farquhar ensures that Mrs. Sullen's and Archer's relationship is not technically one of cuckoldry by granting the Sullens a "fantasy-divorce" that allows the pair to separate before Mrs. Sullen dances off the stage with her beau.<sup>32</sup> In the end, then, some playwrights of the 1690s and 1700s were able to adapt the cuckoldry comedy in ways that suited these decades' new political and moral expectations. Cuckoldry satires had previously functioned to license libertinism, but plays of this genre eventually arrived at an uneasy alignment with the moral imperatives of Williamite

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<sup>32</sup> Judith Milhous and Robert D. Hume, "*The Beaux' Stratagem*: A Production Analysis," *Theatre Journal* 34 (1982), 77-95, on 88.

rule, critiquing debauchery and downplaying the acts of marital infidelity they involve. In the end, dramatists like Vanbrugh and Congreve managed to wrangle the cuckoldry satire into a form that more or less meshed with the political hegemony of the 1690s and 1700s, having these plays target libertine behavior and support contractual governance.

### **3.2 SPECTATORSHIP AND PARTISANSHIP IN RESTORATION ANTITHEATRE**

Two of the cuckoldry comedies that premiered in the 1690s and 1700s were written by Mary Pix: Pix's first comedy, *The Spanish Wives*, and her last, *The Adventures in Madrid* (1706), both feature wives who threaten to cheat on their husbands. These plays have a great deal in common: both are set in Spain, both focus on jealous husbands, and both allow clever wives to extricate themselves from unhappy marriages by exploiting problems with their marital contracts. *The Spanish Wives* and *The Adventures in Madrid* also share an entwining of concerns about cuckoldry and vision. In both texts, husbands express anxiety about their inability to see their wives perfectly and link that anxiety to worries about these women's fidelity. As the next section details, *The Spanish Wives*' Marquess of Moncada is obsessed with seeing his wife better; ultimately, the Marquess instills in the Governor of Barcelona a belief in the importance of wifely monitoring. In *The Adventures in Madrid*, the would-be cuckold, Don Gomez, cannot stop his wife's affair because he is blind. In that play's opening scene, Laura, a saucy, truth-telling friend of Don Gomez's wife, Clarinda, draws a bodily link between Don Gomez's failed vision and the marital fate that she hopes will befall him: "Why you deserve to have Horns—

Horns over those Glasses, I mean your Spectacles and false Eye.”<sup>33</sup> By the end of *The Adventures in Madrid*, Laura’s wish has come true: the character that Don Gomez employs to surveil his wife’s actions turns out to be Lisset, one of Clarinda’s female friends in disguise, and over the course of the play, Lisset systematically derails Don Gomez’s attempt at supervision; ultimately, it is Lisset’s watching that allows for the dissolution of Don Gomez and Clarinda’s marriage. In Pix’s two cuckoldry plays, husbands are eager to gain power over their wives by watching them; *The Spanish Wives* and *The Adventures in Madrid* use the language of vision to stage the marital struggles they feature.

Many early-modern English plays that feature cuckoldry also thematize vision. In a well-known article, Katharine Eisaman Maus argues that the connection between cuckoldry and spectatorship seen so often in Renaissance drama grows out of period anxieties about gender, power, and theatrical spectacle. Noting that early-modern antitheatrical texts repeatedly characterize spectatorship as a power relationship in danger of being upset, Maus highlights the gendered language that antitheatrical writers use to discuss their fears that on-stage spectacle will overpower spectators: again and again, she notes, Renaissance antitheatrical works characterize the stage as feminine and the spectator as masculine. Ultimately, Maus argues that what lies “[a]t the foundation of the antitheatrical fear of histrionic display is a fear of losing male identity”; Renaissance antitheatricals, she contends, worried that “the exciting theatrical identification of (male) spectator and (female) spectacle [would lead to] a profoundly dangerous form of sexual compromise.”<sup>34</sup> For Maus, the reason that so many early-modern dramatists emphasized on-stage cuckolds’ desire for ‘ocular proof’ of their wives’ transgressions was that

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<sup>33</sup> Mary Pix, *The Adventures in Madrid* (London: William Turner), *Eighteenth-Century Collections Online* (accessed September 15, 2011), 12.

<sup>34</sup> Maus, “Horns of Dilemma,” 569.

doing so allowed these playwrights to put husbands in a position analogous to the one that antitheatricals characterized audience members as occupying: “the experience of the jealous husband ... provides a way of clarifying and reflecting upon some of the more troubling aspects of the relationship between spectacle and spectators.”<sup>35</sup>

Few antitheatrical texts were published in the decades immediately following the theatres’ re-opening after the Civil War; by the 1690s, though, calls to reform the stage had again begun to appear in print. Like the antitheatrical texts published during the Renaissance, many of the treatises penned during the 1690s and early 1700s centered on writers’ concerns that on-stage spectacle would overpower spectators. In *A Short View of the Tragedy* (1693), Thomas Rymer argued that English theatres’ increasing emphasis on stagecraft was causing the stage to wield an undue influence over its spectators: “[M]ost People are wholly led by these *Two Senses* [seeing and hearing], and follow them upon content, without ever troubling their Noddle further. How many Plays owe all their success to a rare *Show*?”<sup>36</sup> For Rymer, the solution to this problem was simple: English playwrights should restore the chorus to the tragic stage and, in so doing, make the theatre a more sober environment that would be less likely to overpower its watchers. In the best-known antitheatrical tract of this period, *A Short View of the Profaneness and Immodesty of the English Stage*, Jeremy Collier also couched his objections to the stage in concern about the sway that theatrical spectacle would hold over spectators. Unlike Rymer, however, Collier proposed that spectators should stay away from the stage altogether. Characterizing English

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<sup>35</sup> Ibid., 563.

<sup>36</sup> Thomas Rymer, *A Short View of Tragedy* ... (London: Richard Baldwin, 1693), *Early English Books Online* (accessed October 5, 2014), 2. For more on the increasingly spectacular nature of the late seventeenth-century stage, see Daniel J. Ennis and Judith Bailey Slagle, eds., *Prologues, Epilogues, Curtain-Raisers, and Afterpieces: The Rest of the Eighteenth-Century London Stage* (Danvers: Rosemont Publishing, 2007) and Milhous, *Thomas Betterton*.

theatres as a kind of Patient Zero for cultural immodesty, Collier used the language of infection to instruct would-be audience members to stay home:

Must we relate whatever is done, and is every Thing fit for Representation? is a Man that has the Plague proper to make a Sight of? And must he needs come Abroad when he breaths Infection, and leaves the *Tokens* upon the Company? . . . 'Tis much better to be ignorant of a Disease then [*sic*] to catch it.<sup>37</sup>

Framing the theatre as spreading a “Plague” of profaneness, Collier tells his readers to avoid the stage, insisting that it is “better to be ignorant of a Disease” than to have a performance “Infect[]” one’s sensibilities. Just as Renaissance antitheatrical texts expressed concerns about the effects that theatrical spectacle would have on spectators, so Restoration antitheatrical literature centers its objections to the drama on the effects that the theatres will have on audience members, characterizing the stage as a space that “breaths [the] Infection” of Profaneness onto those who watch it.

Sometimes, Restoration antitheatrical writers represent their worries about the stage in the kind of gendered terms that Maus characterizes Renaissance antitheatricals as using, framing theatrical spectacle as a female force that threatens to overpower the rightful authority that male spectators should possess. Early in *A Short View*, for example, Collier represents the stage as “wear[ing] almost all sorts of Dresses to engage the Fancy, and fasten upon the Memory, and keep up the Charm from Languishing.”<sup>38</sup> The idea that the stage is a sexualized woman who threatens to corrupt male watchers does not appear frequently in Restoration antitheatrical texts, however.<sup>39</sup> In fact, Restoration and early eighteenth-century antitheatrical writers are more apt

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<sup>37</sup> Collier, *A Short View*, 35-6.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, 4-5.

<sup>39</sup> Interestingly, late seventeenth-century antitheatrical texts express concern about the stage overpowering *female* spectators more often than they do concern about it overpowering male ones. Indeed, Jean Marsden has argued that one of Jeremy Collier’s central anxieties about

to use the language of partisan politics than the language of gender to describe the power that they fear on-stage spectacle will wield over spectators.

As mentioned above, Jeremy Collier repeatedly expresses concern that the stage exerts an “absolute” force over its audience members. Halfway through *A Short View*, Collier warns his readers that, in a theatrical world that uses spectacle to lionize vice, it is likely that “Pleasure [will] grow Absolute, and Madness carry all before it.”<sup>40</sup> Later in the same chapter, Collier criticizes the power that playwrights wield over audience members by characterizing the author of *King Arthur* as having gone “upon absolute Certainty [to] demonstrate a Scheme of Infidelity.”<sup>41</sup> And in the conclusion to *A Short View*, when Collier’s writing has reached its most fevered pitch, he insists that in the “Nursery” of the stage, the performance of “Passions” is so powerful that “Desire becomes Absolute,” taking control over audience members and shaking their determination to remain true to their “Duty”:

[T]he Disease of the *Stage* grows Catching: It throws its own *Amours* among the Company, and forms these Passions when it does not find them. And when they are born before, they thrive extreamly in this *Nursery*. . . . And thus Desire becomes Absolute, and forces the Oppositions of Decency and Shame. . . . The Passions are up in Arms, and there’s a might Contest between Duty, and Inclination. The Mind is over-run with Amusements, and commonly good for nothing sometime after.<sup>42</sup>

‘Absolute’ did have connotations beyond the political in the late seventeenth century; however, at a moment when Englishmen and -women were in conflict over whether James II or William III should be King, the *Oxford English Dictionary*’s fourth definition for this term—“Of a ruler, government, etc.: having unlimited authority or power; not subject to any constitutional or

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the theatre is that he feared that watching sexualized women on stage would incite desire in female spectators and, “through the visual medium of the playhouse, the lady [would be] transformed into the whore.” Marsden, *Fatal Desire*, 28.

<sup>40</sup> Collier, *A Short View*, 141.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid., 190.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid., 281-2.

external restraint; despotic”—would have had particular resonance.<sup>43</sup> And the politics of a term like ‘absolute’ would certainly not have been lost on someone like Jeremy Collier, who, before the publication of *A Short View*, was best known in England for having performed the highly politicized action of publically absolving the men who were hanged for their role in the assassination plot against William III.<sup>44</sup> For Collier and his conservative clergy brethren, the only things that should be ‘absolute’ in British culture were the church and the king; as such, the idea that the stage would exert such a power over spectators constituted sacrilege. As Lisa Freeman has shown, what underlies Collier’s anxieties about the stage is the fear that “authority would circulate much more promiscuously than it had before”—that the authority the stage could wield over its audience was an indication of the way that power had begun to proliferate beyond its traditional realms.<sup>45</sup> In the end, then, the concern that Collier expresses about the theatre grows out of his conservative politics; that he characterizes the stage as exerting “absolute” power over its audience evinces the high-Tory nature of his understanding of the relationship between spectacle and spectator.

While Collier’s anxieties about the theatre are decidedly conservative, some of this period’s antitheatrical tracts voice a Whiggish set of concerns about the authority that the stage might wield over spectators. Near the end of *The Short View of Tragedy*, for instance, Thomas Rymer criticizes the French opera for its spectacular elements. Taking aim at Louis XIV, a favorite bugbear of Whig writers in this period, Rymer contends that the elaborate displays that were a part of French opera in the late seventeenth century functioned to disable audience members’ critical faculties and, in so doing, stun them into support for the sitting King:

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<sup>43</sup> *Oxford English Dictionary Online*, s.v. “absolute” (accessed March 24, 2015).

<sup>44</sup> Freeman, “Jeremy Collier,” 137.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, 148.

There it is for you to bewitch your *eyes*, and to charm your *ears*. There is a Cup of Enchantment, there is Musick and Machine; *Circe* and *Calipso* in conspiracy against Nature and good Sense. 'Tis a Debauch the most insinuating, and the most pernicious; none would think an *Opera* and Civil Reason should be the growth of one and the same Climate. But shall we wonder at any thing for a Sacrifice to the *Grand Monarch*?<sup>46</sup>

Suggesting that theatrical spectacle is antithetical to “good Sense,” Rymer asserts that “*Opera* and Civil Reason” cannot be “the growth of one and the same Climate” and that on-stage spectacle is directly opposed to effective political citizenship. Unlike Collier, Rymer does not fear the stage’s power because it usurps authority that should belong to the King. No, what is unsettling about the theatre for Rymer is the stage’s ability to *disengage* the people’s inclination to stand up to “the *Grand Monarch*”—its power to turn off the “Civil Reason” in which Rymer places his trust. Voicing a Whiggish, rather than a high-Tory, concern about the power that theatrical spectacle exerts on spectators, Rymer suggests that the opera’s spectacular “charm[s]” have stunned French theatregoers into unwitting support for their King. In the end, Rymer’s ideas about the politics of stagecraft relate back to his claims in favor of the value of the tragic chorus: for Rymer, reinserting the chorus into English tragedy will disrupt the stage’s spectacle and, in so doing, reduce the likelihood that the drama will override citizens’ good political judgment.

Like Rymer, so the anonymous author of *The Stage Condemned* (1698) expresses his concerns about the stage’s effects on its audience in terms whose implications are distinctly Whiggish.<sup>47</sup> Characterizing Roman politicians as having deliberately used the stage to ensure their continued power, the author of *The Stage Condemned* warns his English readers of the potential for theatrical spectacle to suffocate useful political dissent:

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<sup>46</sup> Rymer, *A Short View of the Tragedy*, 9.

<sup>47</sup> I use the masculine pronoun here because, despite the fact that *The Stage Condemned* was published anonymously, its author is usually assumed to have been George Ridpath.

[T]he countenance given to the Stage by *Julius Caesar*, *Pompey*, and other aspiring Romans, seems rather to have been the effect of their Ambition, than propos'd as a cure for it, that by immersing the people in Debauchery and Pleasures, they should be render'd the less careful of their Expiring Liberties, which the Senate being aware of, thought fit whilst they had any power left them, to cashier the Stage.<sup>48</sup>

Characterizing the stage as making people “the less careful of their Expiring Liberties,” the author of *The Stage Condemned* suggests—in an assertion that echoes the ideas Rymer expresses in *A Short View of Tragedy*—that the “Debauchery and Pleasures” seen on the stage serve to overwhelm audience members’ logical thinking skills and inculcates in spectators a slavish devotion to their leaders. Some Restoration and early eighteenth-century defenders of the stage suggested that the stage had the potential to curb rulers’ authoritarian tendencies: in *The Usefulness of the Stage to the Happiness of Mankind. To Government, and to Religion*. (1698), John Dennis argues that, “by shewing the great ones of the Earth humbled,” tragedy has the power to make them better rulers.<sup>49</sup> The author of *The Stage Condemned*, though, pits his understanding of the stage’s power in opposition to the one forwarded by Dennis: for the author of *The Stage Condemned*, the theatre functions not to “cure” “Ambition” but rather to pave the way for tyranny.

As these examples demonstrate, Restoration and early eighteenth-century antitheatrical texts often characterized the power that the stage exerts over its audience members in partisan-political terms. The criticisms of the stage’s effects on spectators came from both sides of the political spectrum. While Collier, a nonjuring member of the clergy, worried about the stage usurping power previously held by the church and the monarchy, Rymer and the author of *The*

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<sup>48</sup> *The Stage Condemned* (London: John Salusbury, 1698), *Early English Books Online* (accessed October 5, 2014), 200.

<sup>49</sup> John Dennis, *The Usefulness of the Stage ...* (London: Richard Parker, 1698), *Early English Books Online* (accessed October 5, 2014), 51.

*Stage Condemned* expressed concern that the theatre would prevent citizens from performing their civic duties. The emphasis that both groups of writers placed on the partisan-political implications of spectatorship is clear, however. From Collier's anxieties about the "absolute" influence that the stage wielded over English theatregoers to Rymer's suggestion that theatrical spectacle helped Louis XIV maintain his grip on power, late seventeenth- and early eighteenth-century advocates of theatrical reform repeatedly characterize the stage as exerting a commanding force over the audience, one that threatened to disrupt the fragile balance of political power that England had struck in the wake of the Glorious Revolution. Discourse about spectatorship is often understood through the lens of gender, but in the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries, conversations about the power of the stage were also invested with political significance.

### **3.3 "WHAT NEED THERE IS OF WATCHING ONE'S WIFE": VISION, CUCKOLDRY, AND POLITICS IN *THE SPANISH WIVES***

Again and again, the conversations about marriage, courtship and fidelity in *The Spanish Wives* unfold in the language of spectatorship, with Pix repeatedly using references to the eye to highlight the power dynamics at work in this play's romantic relationships. In the first scene where the English Colonel Peregrine courts the wife of the Governor of Barcelona, for instance, Peregrine mentions the Governor's wife's gaze three times. First, Peregrine tells the Governor's wife that "thy eyes—they set me in a blaze" (145); then, when the Governor's wife scolds him for flirting with her, Peregrine explains that he approached her because "the little wanton god swims and revels in thy sprightly eyes" (145); and, finally, after the Governor's wife has turned

away his advances definitively, Peregrine mourns her decision by telling her that she “need not, Madam, talk of weapons; your eyes, though they roll in fire, yet shoot chaste beams, and show your heart as cold as ice” (145-6). These references repeatedly highlight the power that the Colonel characterizes the Governor’s wife’s gaze as exerting over him: the Colonel is “set ... in a blaze” by her regard, compelled to flirt with her by the “god” who lives within her eyes, and wounded by the “chaste beams” that her watching “shoot[s].” Much courtship poetry praises women’s eyes for passive quality like their limpidity or their beauty, but the Colonel celebrates the Governor’s wife’s stare for the force it wields. In its references to looking, *The Spanish Wives* repeatedly highlights the power dynamic that undergirds the relationship between watcher and watched, placing particular emphasis on the authority that the act of watching confers on the watcher.

The Governor’s wife is one of many women who watch in *The Spanish Wives*. In the play’s second scene, for example, the servant Hidewell, tells Count Camillus that during a recent imprisonment women stared at him while he was strip-searched: “[I] observe[d] a peep-hole the maids ... had made; and sometimes one eye, sometimes another, viewing my proportions” (142). And in *The Spanish Wives*’ opening scene, the Governor of Barcelona teases the jealous Marquess of Moncada by suggesting that his wife, the Marchioness, spies on other men: “she has made ye a cuckold, in imagination, with every Don she has through any peep-hole seen, since your first marriage” (138).<sup>50</sup> Some of the male characters in *The Spanish Wives* respond

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<sup>50</sup> The gender of the watchers in these references stands in contrast to the gender of the watcher in the parallel sequence in *The Spanish Wives*’ source-text, Gabriel de Bremond’s picaresque French novel *The Pilgrim* (trans. 1680). In one of the comedic sequences in Bremond’s novel, a libertine man creates a peephole between his room and the room of a beautiful Marchioness and, in so doing, is able to watch the Marchioness without her knowing. That *The Spanish Wives*’ peephole references feature a woman watcher would seem an

favorably to the authority that the play characterizes watching women as possessing: Colonel Peregrine, for one, is enraptured by the force that the Governor's wife's eyes exert over him, and Hidewell declares that maids who watched him through the peephole were "The only thing which pleased me" about being imprisoned (142). The Marquess of Moncada, however, feels threatened by even the idea of the power that a watching woman's eyes might wield. In response to the Governor's rib about the Marquess's wife, Elenora, watching other men through peepholes, the Marquess reacts seriously, saying "Oh damn her, damn her!" (138). And as *The Spanish Wives*, progresses, it places repeated emphasis on the Marquess's anxiety about his wife's watching eyes. At the beginning of Act Two, Elenora's maid, Orada, explains that she has begun parroting the Marquess's misogynist rhetoric in the effort to trick him into thinking that she is aligned with him: "[I went into] a long harangue how wives ought to hear with their husbands' ears, *see with their eyes*, and make use of no sense without permission" (147, emphasis added). And in *The Spanish Wives*' third act, the Marquess is in such a rage over his inability to control his wife's senses that he announces his plan to "bring that pampered carcass down" (168). Focusing particular attention on the effect that his murder will have on his wife's eyes, the Marquess fantasizes about the absolute power he will finally be able to wield over Elenora when he kills her: "The roses shall wither in her wanton cheeks; her eyes, whose hot beams dart fire, grow dull and languid: By all my pangs of jealousy, I'd rather clasp a fiend, than doubting sleep by such an angel" (168). In *The Spanish Wives*, Pix repeatedly characterizes the spectatorial relationship as a power dynamic; in some cases, the authority that the watcher

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indication that Pix sought to forward a deliberate critique of the power dynamics of gendered watching in this play; as I discuss below, however, certain aspects of *The Spanish Wives* present a problem for such an interpretation. Gabriel de Bremond, *The Pilgrim: A Pleasant Piece of Gallantry*, trans. P. Belon (London: Bentley, 1680), *Early English Books Online* (accessed September 15, 2011).

possesses yields pleasure in the watched; for the Marquess of Moncada, though, the anxiety about this power differential only increases his jealousy and increases his wish for revenge.

Because *The Spanish Wives* so often sets up women in the position of watcher—and because it characterizes those women as exerting power over that which they watch—it is tempting to read Pix’s first comedy as a kind of proto-Mulveyian critique of the gender politics of spectatorship. Women, we might understand *The Spanish Wives* to suggest, should be empowered to watch over men, and the only men who will resist the authority that such acts of spectatorship confer are violent tyrants who reject the idea of sharing power with anyone. Such a reading certainly does help to explain a good bit of what unfolds in *The Spanish Wives*; however, one of *The Spanish Wives*’ central plots—this play’s reformation of the Governor of Barcelona—runs counter to such an interpretation.

At the beginning of *The Spanish Wives*, the Governor of Barcelona takes a *laissez-faire* approach to marriage. In the play’s first act, the Governor advises the Marquess to “Give but a woman her freedom still,/ Then she’ll ne’er act what’s ill” (138) and voices his belief that “If an old man has a beauteous treasure,/ Let her sing, and dance, and laugh without measure/ And then she’ll think of no other pleasure” (144). *The Spanish Wives* characterizes such a hands-off take on marriage as an English one: the Governor asserts that Englishmen “are the happiest husbands” and claims that even though English husbands do not guard their wives as jealously as Spanish husbands do, acts of cuckoldry are “almost as rare” in England as they are in Spain (138). The rosy picture of English marriage that the Governor paints, however, is not echoed by the rest of the play. The second act of *The Spanish Wives* features a song in which an Englishwoman describes the life that English custom has led her to expect (and, correspondingly, the life to which her Spanish suitor would need to accustom himself were the pair to marry):

At my levee crowding adorers stand,  
Fixed on my eyes, and grasping my white hand;  
All their courts and oglings bent on me,  
Not one regardful look towards thee:  
At this thou must be pleased, or else not see. (154)

Highlighting the power that Englishwomen exert over their husbands, this song uses the language of spectatorship to suggest that English wives are so busy with their “crowding adorers” that they do not cast even “one regardful look towards” their husbands and that husbands must accustom themselves to this reality “or else not see.” Surely designed, at least in part, to elicit a chuckle from its audience members, this song has been read by one contemporary critic as an “ironic complaint.”<sup>51</sup> That *The Spanish Wives* eventually reforms the Governor of Barcelona’s English approach to marriage, though, suggests that the concerns that the song voices about the institution of English marriage are not entirely tongue-in-cheek.

By the end of *The Spanish Wives*, the Governor has undergone a complete transformation in his approach to husbandly duty. Late in the play, after learning that his wife intends to cheat on him with Colonel Peregrine, the Governor quashes her plan to be unfaithful: the Governor forces Peregrine to leave Barcelona and then masquerades as the Colonel in order to teach his wife a lesson about marital infidelity. Such a move is unlike anything the Governor of Barcelona does elsewhere in *The Spanish Wives* (indeed, the early portions of the play portray him as a well-meaning naïf who willfully ignores the evidence of his wife’s planned indiscretion with Colonel Peregrine); however, this character ends the play reformed. The Governor begins *The Spanish Wives* content to watch his wife dance with another man and happy to tout the virtues of wifely freedom, but he ends Pix’s first comedy by asserting his husbandly authority and declaring to his wife, “If with horns my kindness thou dost repay,/ I’ll punish thee some

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<sup>51</sup> Lowenthal, *Performing Identities*, 82.

unknown, uncommon way” (179). That *The Spanish Wives* endorses such a transition in the Governor’s character is indicated not only by the fact that he successfully halts the liaison between his wife and her would-be lover, but also by the gratitude that the Governor’s wife expresses for his intervention: “I was but staggering—and you caught me, Deary” (174). Criticizing English marriages for affording spectacularly beautiful women too much power over their husbands, *The Spanish Wives* reforms the Governor in a way that suggests that some husbands sometimes need to wield more authority over their wives. Certain of this play’s scenes might seem to support a proto-feminist interpretation of *The Spanish Wives*’ visual politics, but its critique and reform of what it characterizes as English marriage suggests otherwise.

The perspective of gender politics, then, does not afford much analytical purchase on *The Spanish Wives*. The lens of partisan politics, I want to argue, proves more helpful in bringing this play into focus. As we have already seen, the cuckoldry comedies of the late seventeenth century represent the conjugal relationship in ways that have implications for period political debates. Over the course of the 1680s and 1690s, playwrights shifted the satirical targets of cuckoldry comedies, turning a genre that had previously lionized libertinism into one that criticized debauchery and changing a form that had once celebrated aristocratic privilege into one that lionized contractual governance. By the mid-1690s, Whig dramatists had managed to adapt the formerly Tory form of the cuckoldry satire to their own ends.

Like the other Whig cuckoldry comedies of the 1690s, so *The Spanish Wives* takes aim at libertinism.<sup>52</sup> Indeed, from his first appearance on stage, the English Colonel Peregrine is

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<sup>52</sup> *The Spanish Wives*’ critique of libertinism stands in contrast to the way that rakishness is represented in its source-text. In *The Pilgrim*, Gabriel de Bremond celebrates the Cassanova-like behavior of its titular *Pilgrim*, lionizing Camille’s sexual exploits and demonstrating his romantic prowess by having the women who fall for him be driven mad by lust.

portrayed as a melodramatic flirt. After he dances with the Governor's wife, the Colonel tells her that he "must die, unless the cordial of returning kindness save me!"; the Colonel then proceeds to tell the Governor's wife that his affection for her is filled with "extasies, paintings, the joys unutterable of vigorous love"; and he later vows to "fix ten thousand burning kisses on [the Governor's wife's] beauteous hand" (145). Evincing not only his over-the-top approach to courtship but also his insincerity, Peregrine's early fawning over the Governor's wife is extreme: everything he says in his opening scene is so overstated as to not possibly be true. As *The Spanish Wives* unfolds, Pix continues to highlight Peregrine's disingenuousness. In the play's third act, Peregrine greets Count Camillus by forwarding an implicit comparison of Camillus's pursuit of the Marchioness and the Colonel's of the Governor's wife: "I ha'n't rested tonight, since I heard of your disappointment, reflecting how my own affair may prove" (162). Camillus, however, disabuses Peregrine of the idea that his desire for the Governor's wife is at all similar to Camillus's for the Marchioness:

Ah Colonel! our cases are very different,—you hunt but for enjoyment, the huddled raptures of a few tumultuous moments:—But I am in quest of virgin-beauty, made mine by holy vows; constrained by fiends, instead of friends, to break the sacred contract, and follow the *capriccio* of a mad old man. (162)

Camillus's "quest" for Elenora is a "holy," "sacred" one, but Colonel Peregrine's "hunt" for the Governor's wife is a transient pursuit of "the huddled raptures of a few tumultuous moments." In a sex comedy written twenty years before *The Spanish Wives*, Peregrine's motives would be celebrated (indeed, both *Thomaso* and *The Rover* feature English libertines who win the hearts of English audiences and Spanish women while espousing the value of "enjoyment"). In Pix's first comedy, however, the Colonel's aims are characterized as being inferior to those of the Count. In fact, even the Colonel admits that his motives for chasing the Governor's wife are not as noble as Camillus's for chasing Elenora: "I grant your passion more heroic;—for I should scarce accept

the Governor's wife for mine, if he would give her" (162). Like many of the Whig cuckoldry plays of the 1690s, *The Spanish Wives* links its portrayal of marital infidelity to a critique of libertinism, characterizing its English Colonel as insincere and having him lose the woman he pursues by the end of the play.

In addition to its critique of libertinism, *The Spanish Wives* also signals its Whig politics with the power that it invests in the marital contract. In his first appearance in *The Spanish Wives*, Camillus explains that he and the Marchioness were engaged to be married before she married the Marquess: "Elenora was, by contract, mine, at Rome, before this old Marquess had her. And could I again Recover her, I don't question but to get leave of his Holiness For a divorce, and marry her myself" (141). Such a contract shapes Camillus's pursuit of Elenora over the course of the play: in the speech where Camillus distinguishes between his attempt at cuckoldry and the Colonel's, for example, Camillus explains that the "holy vows" and "sacred contract" that he and Elenora share make their case "very different" from the Colonel's and the Governor's wife's. That *The Spanish Wives* eventually unites Camillus and Elenora evinces the authority with which this play endows the contract that this couple share. Late in the play, the Marquess sets into motion his plan to spirit Elenora away from Barcelona and, in so doing, keep her for himself. In the play's final scene, though, the Marquess is presented with letters from both the Cardinal Patron and the King of Spain, and these letters demand that the Marquess relinquish Elenora to Camillus. Ultimately, the Marquess's efforts to outrun the contract are stymied and he is forced to give up his attempts to seize power over the Marchioness: "Then that contract—so firm and sure,—I lose her" (170). The Marquess spends the entirety of *The Spanish Wives* attempting—sometimes in terrifying terms—to assert power over his wife. In the end,

though, his power grabs are no match for the authority of Camillus's and Elenora's engagement: in *The Spanish Wives*, the marital contract wins out over aristocratic force.

In 1696, members of the Whig party were asserting the importance of the contract more forcefully than they ever previously had. In the years immediately preceding and following the Glorious Revolution, some radical Whigs had touted the virtues of contractual governance; Gilbert Burnet began *An Enquiry into the Measure of Submission* (1688), for instance, by spelling out the contractual circumstances under which one man could be governed by another: "with Relation to the Law of Nature, *all Men are born free*; And this Liberty must still be supposed Entire, unless so far as it is limited by Contracts, Provisions and Laws."<sup>53</sup> As John Kenyon has pointed out, though, most Whigs of the late 1680s and early 1690s did not make use of the far-left rhetoric that Burnet voices. Eager to reconcile with their Tory peers, the majority of post-1688 Whigs sought to downplay the revolutionary significance of the action they had taken against James II and attempted to characterize the Glorious Revolution as an abdication rather than a regime change.<sup>54</sup> Such an ameliorative strategy seems to have guided Whig rhetoric well into the 1690s; however, Steve Pincus argues that in the wake of the exposure of the Jacobite assassination plot against William III, in February of 1696, Whigs began to assert their beliefs directly, embracing contractual governance, rejecting passive obedience, and standing firmly behind the concept of active political resistance: "Supporters of the revolution

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<sup>53</sup> Gilbert Burnet, *An Enquiry into the Measures of Submission* ... (Edinburgh: 1688), *Early English Books Online* (accessed January 15, 2013).

<sup>54</sup> Kenyon characterizes the Whigs' ambivalence about resistance negatively, framing it as a kind of cowardice. Julia Rudolph, by contrast, argues that it is precisely because post-1688 Whigs adopted a flexible attitude toward resistance that they were able to succeed in effecting the dramatic political change that they did. John Kenyon, *Revolutionary Principles* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977); Julia Rudolph, *Revolution by Degrees: James Tyrrell and Whig Political Thought in the Late Seventeenth Century* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002).

did not seek the middle ground in 1696.... Instead, they chose to meet the Jacobite case head on.”<sup>55</sup> In one of many sermons that were preached on Sunday, April 16, 1696, in celebration of the spoiled assassination plot against William III, Anglican divine William Wake made clear his belief in the importance of contractual governance:

[I]f ever it may be lawful for any People to provide for their Own Safety: If the Constitution of a Limited Monarchy, be not a Meer Notion, that has neither Meaning, nor Privilege in it: If a Nation Govern'd by Laws of its Own Approving; and that never engaged to Obey any Sovereign, but what mutually Obliged Himself to Rule according to Those Laws; has as just a right to the Legal Government of the Prince, as the Prince has to the Legal Obedience of such a People ... Then had This Kingdom also Reason to stand up in Defence of its Laws, and its Religion, establish'd by Those Laws.<sup>56</sup>

First performed in the same year that moderate Whigs began to publically espouse the virtues of resistance and contractual governance, *The Spanish Wives* offers the marital contract a support that aligns with the Whig rhetoric of its moment. In both its critique of libertinism and its staging of the contract's power to upend tyrannical rule, then, *The Spanish Wives* resonates with the Whig politics of the 1690s.

Even while much of Pix's first comedy clearly supports a Whig-partisan interpretation of this play, *The Spanish Wives*' characterization of the Marquess would seem to represent a problem for such a reading. For while *The Spanish Wives* repeatedly characterizes the Marquess as a tyrant [Elenora calls her husband her “jailor” (148) and an “Insufferable tyrant” (149); Camillus refers to the Marquess as Elenora's “tyrant-husband” (161)], Pix's first comedy also does not fully condemn the Marquess. In fact, the Marquess plays a key role in the reform of the Governor of Barcelona—so much so that the success of the Governor's marriage depends upon

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<sup>55</sup> Pincus, 1688, 450.

<sup>56</sup> William Wake, *A Sermon Preached in the Parish Church of St. James Westminster, April xvith, 1696* (London: Richard Sare, 1696), *Early English Books Online* (accessed March 20, 2015), 9-10.

the Marquess. Midway through *The Spanish Wives*, the Marquess stumbles upon the Governor's wife and Colonel Peregrine conversing and spies on the pair in order to "see how virtuously [the Governor's wife] carries herself" (149). Ultimately, the Marquess witnesses the Governor's wife and Peregrine plotting their affair, a fact that validates the Marquess's opinion that the Governor's hands-off approach to marriage has left him a "poor credulous fool" (150). As is true in much of the rest of the play, the Governor initially rejects the warning that the Marquess proceeds to issue him, telling the Marquess "your head is always upon cuckolding" (151); as *The Spanish Wives* unfolds, though, the Governor's knowledge of his wife's plan is precisely what allows him to halt it. When the Governor notices his wife and Colonel Peregrine putting into motion the beginnings of the plot that the Marquess warned him about, the Governor is able to step in, stop the plan, and save himself from being cuckolded. As we have already seen, the Governor takes on a more authoritarian attitude following the successful stop he puts to his wife's plan, and *The Spanish Wives* ultimately characterizes this transition favorably. Even before the Governor's transformation is complete, the Marquess proclaims his intention to "convince this credulous easy man what need there is of watching one's wife" (160). By the end of the play, the Marquess has done just that.<sup>57</sup> Much of *The Spanish Wives* problematizes both men wielding visual authority over women and the tyrannical authority that the Marquess seeks to wield over his wife. In the end, though, this play validates both the importance of a husband "watching one's wife" and the autocratic aristocrat who voices this sentiment. *The Spanish*

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<sup>57</sup> In *The Pilgrim*, the Governor also learns to wield more power over his wife, but there the character's reformation comes about entirely as a result of his own volition; in fact, when Bremond's governor returns to Barcelona and begins to hatch his plan to trick his wife, the narrator praises the Governor's cleverness, noting that "Wise-men have always some fore-sights of the mischief that may befall them" and deeming him a "man of understanding." Bremond, *The Pilgrim*, 188.

*Wives'* treatment of the Marquess would seem to constitute a challenge to a Whig-partisan reading of this play.

1696 was a complicated moment for Whig notions of authority. On one hand, the revelation of the assassination plot against William III caused Whigs to be more assertive about the gains they had achieved during the Glorious Revolution, leading them to embrace the rhetoric of resistance in a way that they previously had not. On the other hand, though, the attempt on William III's life encouraged Whigs to advocate for monarchical authority. Immediately following the events of 1688, public support for William and Mary had been halfhearted: Julian Hoppit suggests that the English people had supported the idea of William III, but that they had not necessarily cared for the person of William III; furthermore, many Tories remained dubious that the new King and Queen had a right to rule.<sup>58</sup> As a result of the national ambivalence about their power, William and Mary were brought to the throne with the understanding that they were *de facto* but not *de jure* rulers—the Duke and Duchess of Orange possessed the English throne by fact, but not necessarily by right. In the wake of the revelation of the assassination plot, though, Whigs sought to assert William's power more strongly, and the Association of 1696 declared William “rightful and lawful king.”<sup>59</sup> Such language went on to become a rallying cry for Whig politicians and clergymen. The print version of William Wake's Thanksgiving day sermon, for example, begins with a dedication that decries the previous *de facto* vs. *de jure* debates and asserts that, in an effort to maintain English political stability, it would be crucial that “the Knavish Distinction of *De Facto*, which was the Foundation-stone of

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<sup>58</sup> Julian Hoppit, *A Land of Liberty? England 1689-1727* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 135.

<sup>59</sup> Cressy, “Binding the Nation.”

the late designed Assassination, Insurrection and Invasion, ... be left out of his Title.”<sup>60</sup> Public sentiment in favor of the sitting King was so powerful that even political conservatives were reported to have felt it: in his diary entry for February 26, 1696, John Evelyn wrote that “I look on [the disruption of the assassination plot] as a very great deliverance and prevention by the providence of God. Though many did formerly pity King James’s condition, this design of assassination and bringing over a French army, alienated many of his friends, and was likely to produce a more perfect establishment of King William.”<sup>61</sup> Prior to 1696, support for William’s rule had been muted. In the wake of the assassination attempt, though, Whigs managed to channel the English people’s previously lukewarm support for the King into an all-out celebration of his power. The Whigs of 1696 thus exhibited a bifurcated approach to political authority: at the same moment that they touted the virtues of political resistance, they also sought to drum up support for the authority of a sitting king.

In much of Pix’s *oeuvre*, the support for the contract is unblinking. In *The Innocent Mistress* (1697), for instance, the existence of a previous marriage contract forces Lady Beauclair to end the play with Mr. Flywife, thus freeing her husband, Sir Charles Beauclair, to be with his Platonic lover, Bellinda. And in *The Adventures in Madrid*, a contractual problem allows Clarinda to get out of her marriage to the jealous Don Gomez, thus paving the way for her to return to her previous lover, the English Belmour. In *The Spanish Wives*, though, there is simultaneous support for the contract and for a certain kind of aristocratic authority: Pix’s first comedy ends with one husband’s authority over his wife being dissolved by a contract and with another husband’s authority over his wife being increased at the suggestion of an aristocrat.

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<sup>60</sup> Wake, *A Sermon Preached ...*, n.p.

<sup>61</sup> John Evelyn, “26<sup>th</sup> February, 1696,” in *The Diary of John Evelyn*, Vol. II, ed. William Bray, *Project Gutenberg* (accessed March 28, 2015).

Such a vexed take on authority evinces the complex approach to power that Whigs took at the moment that *The Spanish Wives* was written. First staged just two months after the revelation of the assassination plot against William III, *The Spanish Wives* was initially performed in a moment when Whigs sought simultaneously to solidify the gains of the Glorious Revolution and to enshrine William's position as absolute leader. Existing work on Pix's first comedy has tended to understand this play through the lens of gender politics, but such an approach does not allow either for a comprehensive understanding of either this play's take on marriage or its perspective on visual authority. At a moment when both cuckoldry plays and rhetoric about spectatorship were bound up with partisan politics, Pix's first comedy's complex representation of marital infidelity and visual authority evinces the conflicting ideologies of power that underlay Whig politics.

#### 4.0 “DARE YOU ... ARRAIGN MY PLEASURES?”: WOMEN GAMBLERS AND WHIG ECONOMICS IN *THE BASSET TABLE*

In her 1720 poem “A Woman’s Case,” Susanna Centlivre asserts her financial wishes clearly. Addressed to Charles Joye, the deputy governor of the then-booming South Sea Company, the poem highlights Centlivre’s contributions to Whig propaganda and requests that—at long last—the party give her her due. Centlivre is careful to couch her plea for a subscription to the company as stemming from her husband: in “A Woman’s Case,” it is Joseph Centlivre who scolds Susanna for failing to monetize her “scribling Vein” and he who instructs his wife to explain to Joye that her words “serve the King as well as They,/ Who lave the *South-Sea* every Day.”<sup>1</sup> That Joseph ostensibly initiates the request, however, does not make the frankness of this poem’s ask any less notable: in a public forum, a woman writer declares that she deserves payment for the work she has done. Other Restoration and early eighteenth-century women playwrights occasionally made reference to their financial circumstances in prologues or dedications, pleading their cases to audience members now and then; “A Woman’s Case,” though, is the only published piece from this period in which a female dramatist makes a direct request for payment.

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<sup>1</sup> Susanna Centlivre, “A Woman’s Case,” in Susanna Centlivre, *The Wonder! A Woman Keeps a Secret*, ed. John O’Brien, (Peterborough: Broadview Press, 2004), 132-139; on 136, 138.

Long understood as a vice, the pursuit of wealth was being reframed as a virtue in the early eighteenth century. In *The Fable of the Bees* (1723), Bernard Mandeville satirizes English civil society, suggesting that because vice is so much more powerful than virtue, the English should harness the utility of vice and allow formerly condemned traits like greed and pride to drive the British economy: man's "vilest and most hateful qualities," Mandeville contends, "are the most necessary accomplishments to fit him for the largest and ... the happiest and most flourishing societies."<sup>2</sup> Even while Mandeville's jaundiced perspective English social ills represented a satirical take on contemporary economic changes, *The Fable of the Bees*' rationalization of the new economy nevertheless participated in a broader Whig attempt to recast as patriotic acts that had long been viewed as avaricious. As Laura Mandell has shown, many early eighteenth-century efforts to legitimize the accumulation of wealth were misogynist in nature. In both *The Fable of the Bees* and *A Modest Defence of Publick STEWS*, Mandell demonstrates, Mandeville defends commerce by foisting onto women many of the period's deleterious associations with finance, representing female consumer desire as monstrous and "scapegoating the figure of woman for morally repugnant aspects of capitalist pursuits."<sup>3</sup> In so doing, Mandell argues, these texts helped to normalize men's pursuit of wealth and pave the way for the rise of financial capitalism.

A devoted member of the Whig party, Susanna Centlivre's favorable attitude toward the market economy is clear throughout her *oeuvre*.<sup>4</sup> In her first gambling play, *The Gamester*

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<sup>2</sup> Bernard Mandeville, *The Fable of the Bees and Other Writings*, E. J. Hundert, ed. (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 1997), 19.

<sup>3</sup> Mandell, "Bawds and Merchants," 107.

<sup>4</sup> For more on Centlivre's Whig politics, see John Wilson Bowyer, "A Political Gambit," chap. 7 of *The Celebrated Mrs. Centlivre* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1952); Douglas R. Butler, "Plot and Politics in Susanna Centlivre's *A Bold Stroke for a Wife*," in Mary Anne

(1705), Centlivre exposes the faux aristocrat the Marquis de Hazard as a phony, and in so doing, manages to undermine the idea (often voiced by Tories of the period) that the landed economy was more stable than the financial one. Unlike other Whig writers of the period, however, Centlivre does not legitimize the market economy by condemning women's participation in it. Centlivre's second gambling play, *The Basset Table* (1705), which was first staged ten months after *The Gamester*, centers on a widow whose affection for cards the play does not censure. One of several female-gambling comedies of the period, *The Basset Table* is the sole play of its type that concludes without having its heroine vow to relinquish play. I argue here that this play's ambiguous conclusion represents an implicit endorsement of women's economic pleasure. Characterizing *The Basset Table* as inverting other Whigs' approaches to female financial desire, I contend that Centlivre's portrayal of Lady Reveller licenses—rather than denounces—women's economic pleasure and that this play explores the opportunities that financial capitalism might allow eighteenth-century women.<sup>5</sup>

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Schofield and Cecilia Macheski, eds., *Curtain Calls: British and American Women and the Theater, 1660-1820* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 1991), 357-70; Brean S. Hammond, "Is there a Whig Canon? The Case of Susanna Centlivre," *Women's Writing* 7 (2000), 373-90.

<sup>5</sup> My argument that *The Basset Table* affords women financial agency aligns with Felicity Nussbaum's idea that the eighteenth-century stage legitimized actresses' labor and, in so doing, provided a small set of women with the unprecedented opportunity to earn large sums of money in a way that English culture deemed acceptable. Nussbaum is interested in the lived experience of eighteenth-century women players, while I examine a female dramatist's characterization of a fictional woman gambler, but we both emphasize the economic possibilities that the stage offered women in this period. Felicity Nussbaum, *Rival Queens: Actresses, Performance, and the Eighteenth-Century British Theater* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2010).

#### 4.1 FINANCIAL UNCERTAINTY, PARTY POLITICS, AND FEMALE DESIRE

The late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries were years of immense economic change in England. As the country moved away from an economy based on land and toward one rooted in financial products like stocks, both the public and private sectors underwent sweeping transformations. In fact, so significant was the economic upheaval in this period that P. G. M. Dickson has argued that scholars should understand the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries as a period of financial revolution.<sup>6</sup> From the national debt, which was first underwritten by the English government in 1688, to joint-stock companies, in which Britons of this period invested with never-before-seen fervor, financial innovations changed eighteenth-century life.<sup>7</sup>

The early eighteenth century's economic transformations were bound up with the period's political turmoil. As previously discussed, the Tory and Whig parties represented distinct English interests in this period—interests that have long been short-handed as “landed” and “moneyed,” respectively.<sup>8</sup> The financial products that emerged in the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries crystallized tensions between these interests. While Whigs had a

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<sup>6</sup> P. G. M. Dickson, *The Financial Revolution in England: A Study in the Development of Public Credit, 1688-1765* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1967).

<sup>7</sup> Geoffrey Holmes has contended that “Few informed Britons could have failed to be aware by the later years of Queen Anne that a new financial world had come into existence.” Geoffrey Holmes, *The Making of a Great Power, 1660-1722* (New York: Longman, 1993), 269.

<sup>8</sup> Tory and Whig attitudes toward commerce were not completely opposed: some businessmen were Tories, and Tories were not against foreign trade. Nevertheless, Whigs' involvement with commerce was far deeper than Tories' was. As Tim Harris points out, the Bank of England had been set up by Whigs, and Whigs went on to lead the Bank: “Only three Tories served as directors of the Bank of England between 1694 and 1715, compared to a total of thirty Whigs.” Harris, *Politics under the Later Stuarts*, 198. For more on the partisan nature of the debate about finance in the early eighteenth century, see Holmes, “The Clash of Interests,” chap. 5 in *British Politics in the Age of Anne*.

history of supporting the Bank of England, for instance, Tories felt threatened by the increasing political sway that the Bank held. In 1707, the Tories' concern about the Bank led them to attempt to block renewal of the Bank's charter. Such legislation did not pass, but just a few years later the Tories did manage to push through another bill that supported their interests: the Landed Qualifications Bill. Requiring ministers of Parliament to own significant parcels of land, the Landed Qualifications Bill helped the landed interest secure governmental privilege even as the financial economy was on the rise. Differences between the landed and moneyed interests shaped partisan debate about the key financial issues of the early eighteenth century, with the period's political parties divided over the financial innovations of the day.

Cultural anxiety about the eighteenth century's financial changes ran high, and many writers of the period mapped their economic worries onto the realm of sexual relationships, displacing financial woes onto the realm of gender as a way of offering imaginary solutions to economic concerns. As Catherine Ingrassia has shown, gendered representations of finance appeared particularly frequently in the wake of the South Sea Bubble.<sup>9</sup> In the first chapter of *Authorship, Commerce, and Gender in Early Eighteenth-Century England: A Culture of Paper Credit*, Ingrassia highlights several texts that fault crazed, pleasure-seeking women for the overvaluation of South Sea Company stock. William Rufus Chetwood's *The Stock-Jobbers, or The Humours of Exchange-alley*, for instance, features several female investors who discuss "the

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<sup>9</sup> Founded in 1711 during the War of Spanish Succession, the South Sea Company was a trading company that, after the war ended, was granted a monopoly in Central and South America. In 1720, news of the Company's monopoly led Britons to rush to invest in it, bringing about a radical overvaluation of its shares. Such investment was quickly followed by a downward correction: in the wake of governmental anti-bubble legislation, public concern about investment began to rise and, even more rapidly than it had inflated, the South Sea Company's bubble burst. In the wake of the Bubble, the Company's rapid rise and fall became a cautionary tale, a symbol of the instability that the era's new financial products could cause.

Pleasure of Business” at length, celebrating their ability to participate in the market.<sup>10</sup> At the beginning of the play’s second act, when these women’s male financial consultant enters the stage, their excitement about the market reaches a frenzied pitch, with all four of the assembled female stockjobbers clamoring for the broker to sell to them and with Lady Pawn-Locket using the sexualized language of pregnancy to demand that the consultant “Satisfy me first, dear Mr. Noodle; I am big with Expectation.”<sup>11</sup> Characterizing female investors as driven by irrational appetites, post-South Sea Bubble texts combine anxieties about female sexuality with concerns about finance, foisting negative associations with the new economy onto women.

Gendered representations of finance appear in the works of both Tory and Whig writers; perhaps predictably, the aims of such representations shift based on writers’ political persuasions. Lady Credit, an allegory of the English national debt, appeared frequently in the period’s partisan periodicals. Whigs were largely in favor of the national debt; however, when Whig Daniel Defoe began using the emblem of Lady Credit, he characterized her as moody and unreliable.<sup>12</sup> In a 1706 appearance in Defoe’s *Review*, Lady Credit is “sullen, sick, and ill-natur’d,” her temperament making it challenging to court her favor.<sup>13</sup> Ultimately, such a threatening characterization came to serve Whiggish ends, though: in the end, Defoe came to use

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<sup>10</sup> Chetwood, *The Stock-Jobbers*, 20.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, 22.

<sup>12</sup> As J. G. A. Pocock has pointed out, Defoe’s representations of Lady Credit shift over time: at the height of the national-debt crisis, for instance, Defoe began to characterize Lady Credit more favorably, depicting her as the daughter of Probity and Prudence and, in so doing, giving her a trustworthy, upstanding pedigree. Such changes only further evince the ways that gendered portrayals of finance were manipulated for partisan ends in this period. J. G. A. Pocock, *The Machiavellian Moment: Florentine Political Thought and the Atlantic Republican Tradition* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1975), see esp. Chap. 13, “Neo-Machiavellian Political Economy: The Augustan Debate over Land, Trade, and Credit.”

<sup>13</sup> Daniel Defoe, “Of Credit in TRADE,” *A Review of the State of the English Nation*, January 10, 1706, in Mackie, *The Commerce of Everyday Life*, 273.

his unfavorable representation of Lady Credit as a way of emphasizing the importance of a disciplined approach to finance. Encouraging the English not to take credit for granted (as he alleges Charles II did), Defoe frames Lady Credit negatively in order to advocate for reining in national borrowing.

Tories were much more anxious about the national debt; as such, their characterizations of Lady Credit serve different ends than Whigs' do. In her appearances in the Tory periodicals of the day, Lady Credit is portrayed in ways that echo Defoe's negative depiction of her—there, she is just as “flighty and hypocritical” as she is in her early representations in *The Review*.<sup>14</sup> As Paula Backscheider has shown, though, the Tory papers use such a characterization not to encourage English fiscal discipline, but rather to undermine the concept of the national debt altogether. Particularly in the latter years of the War of Spanish Succession, Tories' concerns about the national debt mounted, as conservative MPs' hesitance about borrowing led them to threaten to withdraw their support for the war. Lady Credit's appearances in the Tory papers *The Moderator* and *The Medley* serve to undermine Whig approaches to finance and politics, her status as a “Phanatick” and “Pharisaical Being” designed to problematize the notion of the debt itself.<sup>15</sup> Employed for different purposes by Whig and Tory writers, Lady Credit made frequent appearances in early eighteenth-century partisan periodicals, her allegedly fickle attitude alternately licensing and calling into question the national debt she symbolized.

In a period of immense economic change, many Britons explained—and added heft to—their financial arguments by drawing on the familiar realm of sexual relationships. Such rhetoric

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<sup>14</sup> Paula Backscheider, “Defoe's Lady Credit,” *Huntington Library Quarterly* 44 (1981), 89-100; 94.

<sup>15</sup> *The Moderator*, August 25, 1710, as quoted in Backscheider, “Defoe's Lady Credit,” 94.

was shaped by the fierce partisanship of the day, with writers using their representations of women to better support their political perspectives. While Tories tended to characterize women as hysterical in order to suggest that the whole economy was crazed, Whigs more often faulted women for certain problematic aspects of finance while hinting that the economy as a whole was sound. Early eighteenth-century Britons negotiated their anxieties about finance by mapping their concerns onto gender, using the emotionally charged language of sexuality to make political arguments about the shifting economy.

#### **4.2 STAGING ECONOMIC ANXIETY: GAMBLING, PARTISANSHIP, AND *THE GAMESTER***

Just as the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries were a period of risk in the English financial markets, with the government racking up war debt and the citizenry buying up the stocks that were newly on offer, so this era saw the spread of another kind of economic risk: gambling. After being outlawed during Cromwell's rule, gambling returned with Charles II's restoration, and the English took up the pastime in a big way. Dice and card games were both wildly popular in the period, and they were played in British homes and at resorts like Tunbridge Wells and Bath.<sup>16</sup> Repeated governmental attempts to regulate gambling proved unsuccessful, and the popularity of dice and card games rose essentially unchecked until the passage of the

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<sup>16</sup> David Schwartz, *Roll the Bones: The History of Gambling* (New York: Gotham Books, 2006).

Gaming Act in 1845.<sup>17</sup> In fact, so widespread was gambling in England in this period that economic historian Roger Munting has written that “There is no doubt that the interest in gambling reached a peak in the eighteenth century and was one which affected all levels of society.”<sup>18</sup>

In certain regards, gambling and the market economy are similar: both involve risk and reward, and both have the potential to wield a powerful effect on one’s economic circumstances. Eighteenth-century Britons’ ways of talking and writing about gambling underscored these parallels. Indeed, the very language of the period’s games highlights the similarities between banking and gambling: basset, for instance, centers on a “Bank of Mony” that gets distributed by the dealer over the course of play.<sup>19</sup> And one early eighteenth-century text about gambling, *Memoirs of the Lives, Intrigues, and Comical Adventures of the most Famous Gamesters and Celebrated Sharpers*, a 1714 collection of biographical sketches of gamblers, insisted that gambling was more a business than an entertainment. In that text’s preface, the pseudonymous Theophilus Lucas dismisses the idea that gamblers play because they enjoy the tables, instead suggesting that dice and card play is more like finance: “for if Pleasure be all, why is the Stake so high? Why is it pursu’d like Business, and with all the Eagerness of Trade?”<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> David Miers, “A Social and Legal History of Gaming: From the Restoration to the Gaming Act 1845,” *Legal Record and Historical Reality: Proceedings of the Eighth British Legal History Conference* (London: Hambledon Press, 1989), 107-19.

<sup>18</sup> Roger Munting, *An Economic and Social History of Gambling in Britain and the USA* (New York: Manchester University Press, 1996), 15.

<sup>19</sup> Charles Cotton, “Basset,” in *The Compleat Gamester*, 5<sup>th</sup> ed. (London: 1710), in Susanna Centlivre, *The Basset Table*, ed. Jane Milling (Peterborough: Broadview Press, 2009), 137.

<sup>20</sup> Theophilus Lucas, *Memoirs of the Lives, Intrigues, and Comical Adventures of the most Famous Gamesters and Celebrated Sharpers* (London: Jonas Brown, 1714), *Eighteenth-Century Collections Online* (accessed June 11, 2011).

The parallels between finance and gambling in the early eighteenth century went beyond the figurative. Indeed, gambling quite literally underwrote the eighteenth-century English economy. As Jessica Richard has pointed out, the English national debt was initially funded by a lottery.<sup>21</sup> European countries had long used public lotteries to raise funds for civic projects, but the same was not true in England; in England, private lotteries not overseen by the government had dominated. The Million Lottery Act of 1694, however, shut down private lotteries in England and established a governmental lottery in their stead. That the funds from the governmental lottery went on to fund the English military makes clear how deeply bound up English gambling and the financial revolution were. For Richard, the British economy's foundations in gambling signal the element of chance and uncertainty that has underscored financial capitalism since its origins. Against those who have understood the English financial revolution as a period in which a reasoned, modern approach to money triumphed over an erratic, pre-modern one, Richard argues that "The persistence of gambling in capitalism indicates an economy that is built not on rational calculation but on romance."<sup>22</sup> (Indeed, in a detail that illustrates exactly how thoroughly enmeshed gambling and the financial revolution were, Richard notes that the groom-porter, a servant of the king who was responsible for organizing the royal card tables, was also the person who ran the governmental lottery.<sup>23</sup>)

Linked in practice, gambling and the market economy evoked similar anxieties about England's changing financial landscape. Discussions of gambling in this period, then, are as much conversations about modern capitalism as they are discourse about cards and tables. As

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<sup>21</sup> Jessica Richard, "'Putting to Hazard a Certainty': Lotteries and the Romance of Gambling in Eighteenth-Century England," *Studies in Eighteenth-Century Culture* 40 (2011), 179-200.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, 180.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, 179.

we have already seen, Jeremy Collier's non-juror politics shaped his antitheatrical texts; so, too, his conservative beliefs influenced the anti-gambling stance he takes in *An Essay upon Gaming* (1713). In some portions of the text, Collier seems to offer a defense of gambling. Indeed, in one section of this treatise-cum-dialogue, the *Essay*'s defender of gambling, Dolomedes, argues persuasively that gambling's redistribution of wealth is a good thing. Gambling's ability to bankrupt aristocrats, Dolomedes insists, "is nothing but shifting of Property, and putting the Prize into a new Hand: And is not this both a common and reasonable Remove? Why should Wealth be always lodg'd in the same Family? . . . Pardon me, if I have not so much Defence for *Genealogy* and Elder Brothers, as this comes to."<sup>24</sup> Echoing Whiggish lines of support for the market economy, Dolomedes defends gambling by suggesting that dice and cards will benefit younger brothers because such games will expand the number of people who have access to wealth. Even while such a claim might seem to make good sense, Collier's politics ensure that this sentiment is not allowed to stand. Dolomedes's interlocutor, Callimachus, who is set up from the outset of the *Essay* as its victor, makes quick work of his opponent's defense of gambling, dismissing Dolomedes's argument with a single, snide sentence: "I perceive you are not uninstructed in the *Levelling* Doctrine."<sup>25</sup> Evoking the Civil War-era levelling movement that, by the early eighteenth century, had been widely scorned as radical, such a remark takes the wind out of Dolomedes's sails, framing his rhetoric of equality as problematically left-wing.<sup>26</sup> In language influenced by partisan politics, Collier has Callimachus best Dolomedes and, in so

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<sup>24</sup> Jeremy Collier, *An Essay upon Gaming* (London: J. Morphew, 1713), *Eighteenth-Century Collections Online* (accessed March 30, 2012), 28-9.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid.

<sup>26</sup> As Lisa Freeman points out, Collier also uses "levelling" in a pejorative way in *A Short View*. There, he accuses the stage of bringing about "a . . . Levelling in Morality" and characterizes William Congreve as "being engaged in a 'fit of levelling.'" Collier as quoted in Freeman, "Jeremy Collier and the Politics of Theatrical Representation," 138 and 142.

doing, undo the defense of gambling that Dolomedes makes. In the end, Callimachus proves a successful mouthpiece for Collier's belief that "Gaming is commonly scandalous in the Motive, foul in the Management, and frightful in the Consequence."<sup>27</sup> Collier's *An Essay on Gaming* links its author's moral concerns about the table to his partisan investment in aristocratic privilege: this text simultaneously attacks gambling and undermines Whiggish defenses of the new economy.

Susanna Centlivre's writing on gambling also evinces her partisan leanings; her predilections, however, are Whiggish rather than non-juror. Centlivre's first gambling play and first financial success as a playwright, *The Gamester*, ran for an improbable twelve nights at the Lincoln's Inn Fields theatre.<sup>28</sup> Based on Jean-Francois Regnard's *Le Joueur* (1696), *The Gamester* relays the story of the aristocratic Valere, whose obsession with the dice game hazard leads him into financial ruin. Known for taking hold of its players, hazard was derided in many texts of the period. Indeed, in his otherwise pro-gambling gaming manual, *The Compleat Gamester* (1674), English writer Charles Cotton calls hazard "the most bewitching Game that is plaid on the Dice" and cautions readers that "when a man begins to play he knows not when to leave off; and having once accustom'd himself to play at *Hazzard* he hardly ever after minds anything else."<sup>29</sup>

From the start of the play, Centlivre portrays Valere's habit in negative terms. In *The Gamester*'s first scene, Valere is bankrupt and cannot secure a loan either from his father, whose

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<sup>27</sup> Collier, *An Essay upon Gaming*, 13.

<sup>28</sup> All four of Centlivre's previous plays had been performed for only a handful of nights, so a two-week run was unprecedented. F. P. Lock, *Susanna Centlivre* (Boston: G. K. Hall, 1979).

<sup>29</sup> Charles Cotton, *The Compleat Gamester*, 1<sup>st</sup> ed. (London: 1674), *Early English Books Online* (accessed June 11, 2011), 172.

distrust of his son causes him to cut off Valere, or from the pawnbroker, Mrs. Security, whose previous dealings with Valere lead her to believe she will not be repaid. Nonetheless driven to play, Valere seeks other ways to fund his habit, venturing into increasingly questionable moral territory. In the play's fourth act, Valere commits his foulest offense. Down on his luck, Valere gambles away a portrait of his beloved Angelica, who had previously commanded him never to use the piece as collateral. Such an action clearly demonstrates Valere's problematic relationship to cards; however, this bet does not ultimately condemn Valere to an ill fate. The person to whom Valere loses the portrait is, in fact, Angelica herself, and, in the play's final moments, she reveals herself to her beloved. A savvy negotiator, Angelica uses the gambled-away portrait to extract from Valere a promise to cease play. In a move that distinguishes *The Gamester* from *Le Joueur*, Valere ends the play renouncing gambling, declaring that "the course of life that I've run hitherto is grown more hateful to me than toads or adders."<sup>30</sup>

Critics have debated whether Centlivre intended Valere's transformation to be sincere. While twentieth-century scholarship on Centlivre saw this play as a reform comedy influenced by the dictates of Collier's *Short View*, more recent work has called such a claim into question, insisting that Centlivre should be read not as a slavish Collier devotee, but rather as a sly resister of his moral dictates.<sup>31</sup> Whether or not Centlivre's eventual reform of Valere is sincere, the

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<sup>30</sup> Susanna Centlivre, *The Gamester*, in Tanya Caldwell, ed., *Popular Plays by Women in the Restoration and Eighteenth Century* (Peterborough: Broadview Press, 2011), 161 (hereafter cited in text).

<sup>31</sup> Critical pieces that have argued for a straightforward, Collierite, reform-play reading of *The Gamester* include Robert Hume, *The Development of English Drama*, 469-70; John Loftis, *Comedy and Society from Congreve to Fielding* (Palo Alto: Stanford University Press, 1959), 65; and Pat Rogers, *The Augustan Vision* (New York: Barnes & Noble Books, 1974), 161. Articles that have refuted such an interpretation of *The Gamester* include LuAnn Venden Herrell, "'Luck Be a Lady Tonight,' or At Least Make Me a Gentleman: Economic Anxiety in Centlivre's *The*

aspersions she casts on his gambling habit are. Such a moral take on play is in keeping with Whiggish attitudes toward dice and cards. As James Evans has shown, theatrical representations of gambling shift over the course of the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries.<sup>32</sup> While Restoration-era gambling scenes tend to celebrate aristocratic privilege, setting the audience up to be in awe of the sums of money changing hands, post-Revolution gambling scenes more often condemn the gamblers on stage, positioning them as immoral and encouraging audiences to disavow them. That *The Gamester* portrays its protagonist's habit as destructive, then, is a decidedly Whiggish move. In keeping with other post-Glorious Revolution plays' condemnations of gambling, Centlivre frames obsessive gambling as problematic, reforming Valere's hazard habit by the end of the play.

*The Gamester's* Whig politics are further evinced by the aspersions it casts on the landed interest.<sup>33</sup> One of *The Gamester's* key secondary characters is the alleged French aristocrat the Marquis de Hazard, who spends much of his time on stage reminding other characters of his status position. In the play's third act, for instance, the Marquis introduces himself by describing his pedigree:

Sir, I have made the Tour of Europe, and have had the respect paid to me in all courts, that became my quality. In Spain, I kept company with none but archdukes; in France

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*Gamester*,” *Studies in the Literary Imagination* 32 (1999), 45-61; and Victoria Warren, “Gender and Genre in Susanna Centlivre’s *The Gamester* and *The Basset Table*” *SEL* 43 (2003), 605-24.

<sup>32</sup> James E. Evans, ““A sceane of uttmmost vanity’: The Spectacle of Gambling in Late Stuart Culture,” *Studies in Eighteenth-Century Culture* 31 (2002), 1-20.

<sup>33</sup> LuAnn Venden Herrell argues convincingly that *The Gamester* “explores a fundamental economic anxiety brought on by the shift from a system based on land to one based on ready money” (45). Venden Herrell’s reading of this play and my own are, in some ways similar—we both understand it to evince larger concerns about the era’s economic transformation—however, Venden Herrell, who does not consider Centlivre’s Whig politics, sees the play as responding more ambivalently to the new economy than I do. I read *The Gamester* as a firm, Whiggish rejection of the landed economy in favor of a new finance that—in her reform of Valere—Centlivre attempts to moralize.

with princes of the blood—and since I have been here, I have had the honor to sup or dine with most of the great people at court. (136)

Later in the same scene, Hazard claims that his aristocratic status makes him superior to those around him, telling Valere that he cannot pursue the woman Hazard loves because “[Valere] must not pretend to vie with quality!” (137) and refusing to answer a question that Valere’s man poses by asserting “It suits not with my quality, to answer the impertinency of a valet” (138).

The Marquis de Hazard has little to do with *The Gamester*’s primary plot—he interacts with Valere only briefly—and, as such, his performance of status could be interpreted as nothing other than Centlivre’s attempt to entertain her audience with an over-the-top representation of class privilege. However, the particular way that the Marquis’s identity gets revealed suggests that the Marquis de Hazard is in fact quite important to the play’s message. *The Gamester*’s final scene unfolds mostly as expected: finally surmounting the obstacles put in their way, the play’s two primary couples, Lady Wealthy and Lovewell and Angelica and Valere, declare their intentions to marry. Just after these couples declare their affection, though, and before the play can conclude with a celebratory dance, the Marquis de Hazard returns to the stage. The pawnbroker Mrs. Security, also on stage in this sequence, recognizes Hazard and calls out to him, “My cousin, Robin Skipp, I’m glad to see thee with all my heart” (162). Revealing to all assembled Hazard’s true identity as “a footman to the Prince of Conti,” Security exposes Hazard’s aristocratic identity as a sham, making known to the rest of the play’s characters that the Marquis is not what he has claimed to be (162). The exposure of the Marquis’s identity has nothing to do with either of the play’s marriages, so this sequence is unrelated to the play’s comedic conclusion. Nevertheless, Centlivre makes the Marquis’s exposure—rather than the coming-together of the play’s two couples—*The Gamester*’s final event. Such placement underscores this character’s importance to the play. The Marquis is *The Gamester*’s sole

aristocrat and, as such, its only symbol of the landed class. That he is revealed, in the play's final moments, to be its least steady character, helps to undermine the idea that the property economy provided social stability. In *The Gamester*, the landed economy is not the steadying influence that Tory politicians framed it as being, but rather an easily manipulable set of symbols that common con men can take advantage of. Suggesting that the landed economy is no more stable than the financial one—and that the problematic aspects of the new economy are easily reformed—Centlivre makes a strong case for Whig financial policy in *The Gamester*.

Wildly popular in the early eighteenth century, gambling was linked, both literally and metaphorically, to the market economy that was also emerging in the period. Early eighteenth-century discourse about gambling bears traces of writers' political investments. Jeremy Collier's *Essay upon Gaming* is as much a defense of the landed interest as it is an assault on card play. Susanna Centlivre's *The Gamester*, by contrast, supports the moneyed interest by suggesting that—with the proper moral guidance—financial capitalism can become even stabler than the landed economy that preceded it. Linked to the new economy, gambling allowed eighteenth-century Britons to stage their concerns about the financial revolution, offering writers the opportunity to displace onto cards and dice their concerns about the period's economic changes.

#### 4.3 GENDER AND FINANCIAL PLEASURE IN *THE BASSET TABLE*

Only nine months after the success of *The Gamester*, Centlivre staged her second gambling play, *The Basset Table*.<sup>34</sup> Featuring two female gamblers, the middle-class wife Mrs. Sago and the wealthy widow Lady Reveller, *The Basset Table* was the first play performed at the new Haymarket Theatre, which opened in November of 1705. Like the woman stockjobber and Lady Credit, so the female gamester was a symbol of the period's economic anxieties. Frequently sexualized, women players appear in several texts from the early eighteenth century, embodying concerns about the British economy and English sexual mores simultaneously. *The Basset Table* engages these representations of female gamblers, echoing them in its portrayals of both of its women players.

Many late seventeenth- and early eighteenth-century texts warned Englishwomen against gambling. Nevertheless, female players persisted at the table. In one of the best-known late-seventeenth century conduct books, *The Lady's New Year's Gift* (1688), George Saville, the Marquis of Halifax, deems occasional gaming acceptable, but cautions female readers against frequent card-play, highlighting the indolence it inspires. Spending too much time at the gambling table, Saville asserts, "will ingage you into a habit of Idleness and ill hours, draw you into ill mixed Company, make you neglect your Civilities abroad, and your business at home,

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<sup>34</sup> *The Basset Table* was not as well received as *The Gamester*: it ran for only four nights and secured Centlivre just a single night's worth of box-office receipts. Additionally, there is no evidence that, after its initial run, *The Basset Table* was performed again on the English or American public stage until the 1990s. That audience response to Centlivre's second gaming comedy, which features female gamblers, was so different from public reaction to her first, which centers on a male gambler, may point to some of the challenges of "selling" female economic agency.

and impose into your Acquaintance such as will do you no Credit.”<sup>35</sup> Despite such warnings, women continued to play cards; in fact, Charles II’s mistresses were among the best-known card-players in the late seventeenth century. The first English hand of basset was allegedly played at the home of one of Charles II’s lovers, Hortense Mancini, and Lucas’s *Memoirs of the Lives, Intrigues, and Comical Adventures of the most Famous Gamesters and Celebrated Sharpers* features portrayals of several other of Charles’s mistresses, including the Duchess of Cleveland, Nell Gwyn, and Moll Davis.

Early eighteenth-century texts that feature female gamblers blend concerns about these figures’ financial indiscretions with worries about their sexuality, linking women gamblers’ actions at the table to their transgressions in the bedroom. In *An Essay Upon Publick Spirit* (1711), John Dennis has harsh words for both male and female gamblers, faulting all players for an obsession with luxury that he fears will lead to England’s undoing: “While both Sexes are thus transported by so fatal a Frenzy, where can be any Oeconomy; and without Oeconomy, how few can be good Subjects?”<sup>36</sup> Women players, though, earn an extra helping of Dennis’s wrath. Expressing concern that female gamblers’ card play will become more interesting to them than men, Dennis suggests that gambling displaces the “natural Pleasure” that women should take in being regarded by men and replaces that pleasure with an insatiable avarice:

The Women lock themselves up at Cards whole Days and Nights successively, and forget their natural Pleasure of being seen, and of being admir’d; and Avarice . . . gets the better of that Pleasure which is so natural to them, and makes them shew a stronger Passion than that which they have for Men.<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>35</sup> George Saville, Marquis of Halifax, *The Lady’s New-Year’s-Gift* (London: 1688) *Early English Books Online* (accessed June 11, 2011), 160.

<sup>36</sup> John Dennis, *An Essay Upon Publick Spirit* (London: 1711), *Eighteenth-Century Collections Online* (accessed June 11, 2011), 19.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, 18.

For Dennis, gambling is dangerous because women get so wrapped up in it that they forget to focus on that toward which their attention should be directed: men. In a 1713 editorial in *The Guardian*, Joseph Addison echoes some of Dennis's themes, alleging that gambling takes over women's brains and replaces all their "rational" thoughts with images of "*Trumps and Mattadores*."<sup>38</sup> In the end, Addison contends, gambling so thoroughly robs female players of their reason that they end up having to compromise their sexual reputations in order to pay off their creditors: "The Man that plays beyond his Income pawns his Estate; the Woman just finds out something else to Mortgage when her Pin-mony is gone: The Husband has his Lands to dispose of, the Wife her Person."<sup>39</sup> Again and again, early eighteenth-century texts malign female gamblers' financial sense and their reputations, linking women players' affection for cards to sexual improprieties.

In *The Basset Table*, Centlivre's characterizations of Mrs. Sago and Lady Reveller reflect the stereotypes about female gamblers that were circulating in the period. Guilty of both financial and sexual indiscretions, Mrs. Sago is outed as an obsessive gambler and an unfaithful wife even before she appears on stage. At the end of *The Basset Table*'s first act, Sir James Courtly, one of the play's central characters, disparages Mrs. Sago's gambling and her sexual conduct in a single sentence, making reference both to her "Love for Play" and to the "Intrigue" in which he and Mrs. Sago have been involved.<sup>40</sup> When Mrs. Sago finally enters, late in the play's second act, her list of transgressions only grows. There, she fails to respond to her husband's queries about the expensive hampers of wine that have shown up at their house and

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<sup>38</sup> Joseph Addison, *The Guardian* 120, July 29, 1713, in Susanna Centlivre, *The Basset Table*, ed. Jane Milling (Peterborough: Broadview Press, 2009), 138.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, 139.

<sup>40</sup> Centlivre, *The Basset Table*, 58 (hereafter cited in text).

cons Mr. Sago into buying her a diamond ring that the pair clearly cannot afford. By the end of the second act, when Mrs. Sago claims that “*I’th’ Married State, this only Bliss we find,/ An Easie Husband to our Wishes kind,*” it is clear that Mrs. Sago is living outside her means, funding her gambling by lying to her husband about her ever-increasing debt (75). From the earliest moments of *The Basset Table*, Centlivre takes up the condemnations of women gamblers that were circulating in the early eighteenth century, reinforcing them in her characterization of Mrs. Sago.

Early in *The Basset Table*, Lady Reveller’s sexual behavior is maligned as Mrs. Sago’s is. *The Basset Table* begins with two servants complaining about the loose lifestyles of the gambling women they serve: waiting for a late-night game to break up, one footman grumbles that his lady “Games all Night, and Sleeps all Day,” and Lady Reveller’s porter chimes in that he can get no sleep because gambling “is my Lady’s constant Practice” (49).<sup>41</sup> When Lady Reveller’s relatives enter the stage, they also complain about her predilection for cards. Sir Richard Plainman, Lady Reveller’s uncle, casts aspersions on her reputation by grumbling that her “Apartment is a Parade for Men of all Ranks” (51) and by suggesting that “*When Money’s wanting, [Lady Reveller] will her Virtue Stake*” (53). Lady Reveller’s cousin, the “Religious sober” (47) Lady Lucy, critiques Reveller by contending that “there is no difference in the Eye of the World between having really committed the Fault, and lying under the Scandal” (55). Over the course of *The Basset Table*’s first scene, several characters suggest that Lady Reveller’s flirting with the men who cycle in and out of her uncle’s home is wreaking havoc on her good name, hinting that her affection for cards is having a deleterious effect on her reputation.

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<sup>41</sup> For more on the function of servants in *The Basset Table*, see Kate Levin, “*The Basset Table* in Performance,” *Restoration and Eighteenth-Century Theatre Research* 16 (2001), 97-111.

The links that *The Basset Table* forges between women gamblers' affection for cards and their sexual misdeeds have led several scholars to argue that this text is similar to the period's other female-gambling plays.<sup>42</sup> Like the best-known of these plays—Colley Cibber's *The Lady's Last Stake* (1707) and John Vanbrugh and Cibber's *The Provoked Husband* (1727)—so *The Basset Table* has been understood to manage eighteenth-century economic anxieties by faulting hysterical women for the period's financial instability, soothing British concerns about finance by resolving those concerns in the marital realm. Centlivre's representation of Mrs. Sago indeed functions in this way, as the play punishes and resolves this character's economic and sexual promiscuities in its closing moments. *The Basset Table*'s characterization of Lady Reveller does not operate similarly, however. Unlike every other female gambler in early eighteenth-century comedy, Lady Reveller ends *The Basset Table* without being reformed—Centlivre ultimately leaves ambiguous whether this character will cease play. Such ambiguity, particularly in combination with Centlivre's generally favorable portrayal of Lady Reveller's affection for cards, constitutes a distinct departure from other eighteenth-century representations of women players. Most scholars have understood *The Basset Table* to be similar to the period's other female-gambling plays, but in fact it diverges notably from other comedies of its type.<sup>43</sup>

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<sup>42</sup> Scholarship on *The Basset Table* has been dominated by the argument that it is similar to the period's other female gambling plays. See, for instance, Evans, "'A sceane of uttmost vanity'"; Richard, "The Lady's Last Stake: *Camilla* and the Female Gambler," chap. 4 of *The Romance of Gambling*; and Beth Kowaleski Wallace, "A Modest Defence of Gaming Women," *Studies in Eighteenth-Century Culture* 31 (2002), 21-39.

<sup>43</sup> The only other article that highlights the favorable way that *The Basset Table* treats Lady Reveller is Antonella Rigamonti and Laura Favero Carraro's "Women at Stake: The Self-Assertive Potential of Gambling in Susanna Centlivre's *The Basset Table*." The context for that piece, however, is different from the context for mine: Rigamonti and Favero Carraro focus on European works, which means that they do not situate Centlivre's representations of women gamblers vis-à-vis other English representations of women gamblers or vis-à-vis Centlivre's Whig politics. In the end, my argument focuses on how Centlivre's Whiggish support for the

Portrayed negatively for much of the play, Mrs. Sago is disciplined in *The Basset Table*'s final moments, her habit leading to punishment and, eventually, reform. Having spent much of the play deceiving her husband, digging the two of them ever deeper into debt, Mrs. Sago is confronted by the consequences of her borrowing halfway through Act Five. There, Mr. Sago appears on stage flanked by a pair of bailiffs, his wife's overspending threatening to land him in jail. Sir James Courtly, who—despite his affair with Mrs. Sago—has been determined not to let Mr. Sago suffer for his wife's financial indiscretions, swoops in to save the day. After striking a bargain with the bailiffs that guarantees Mr. Sago's freedom, Courtly works with Sago to extract from Sago's wife a vow to cease gambling. Mr. Sago is at first dubious of Mrs. Sago's promise that she will "ne'er play again" (112), but he becomes convinced of her sincerity by the time she swears that she "won't come within the Air [of *Covent Garden*], but take up with City Acquaintance, rail at the Court, and go Twice a Week with Mrs. *Outside to Pin-makers-hall*" (113). With such an assertion, Mrs. Sago takes up the 'proper' position for a middle-class woman in the emergent economy, relinquishing her place as an accumulator of wealth (a gambler at Covent Garden) and promising instead to become a consumer of wealth (a woman who spends her money at Pin Makers' Hall). As if to make clear that such a renunciation will stick, Mrs. Sago goes on to deliver the play's closing speech, turning to the women in the audience and encouraging them to learn from her example: "*Then all you Wives that wou'd avoid my Fate./ Remain contented with your present State*" (116).

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economy intersects with her support for women's place in finance, while Rigamonti's and Favero Carraro's centers on the deviant female behavior that they view Centlivre as licensing. Antonella Rigamonti and Laura Favero Carraro, "Women at Stake: The Self-Assertive Potential of Gambling in Susanna Centlivre's *The Basset Table*," *Restoration and Eighteenth-Century Theatre Research* 16 (2001), 53-63.

Mrs. Sago's character arc parallels those of the female gamblers in other early eighteenth-century plays—in Cibber's *The Lady's Last Stake*, for instance, the gambler Lady Gentle engages in financial promiscuities that nearly lead her to sexual ones, but she is reformed in the play's concluding moments. In the penultimate scene of *The Lady's Last Stake*, the rakish Sir George Brilliant asks Lady Gentle to repay him for a loan he issued her before the play began. Rather than asking her to refund his money, though, Brilliant requests that Lady Gentle pay him back by allowing him "silent leave to Hope" that she will one day leave her husband.<sup>44</sup> Such a request is far from the forced-prostitution scenario that Joseph Addison imagined, but Brilliant's demand offends Lady Gentle nonetheless; in fact, Lady Gentle is so horrified at having her reputation compromised that, after repaying Brilliant, she swears off both gambling and coquetry. Left alone on stage at the end of the scene, Lady Gentle expresses regret for her actions:

How strict a Guard should Virtue keep upon its Innocence? How dangerous, how faithless are its lawful Pleasures, when habitual! This Vice of Play, that has, I fear undone me, appear'd at first an harmless, safe, Amusement; but stealing into Habit, its greatest Hazards grew so familiar, that ev'n the Face of Ruine lost its Terror to me.<sup>45</sup>

Interweaving her compunction for gambling with her shame at having flirted with Sir Brilliant, Lady Gentle here faults her enjoyment of play for the affront Brilliant posed to her "Virtue." Rejecting both cards and coquetry, Lady Gentle publicly renounces her former ways, acquiescing to reform after being pushed to her "last stake."

Scholars have argued that eighteenth-century plays' reforms of their female gamblers allow writers to calm public anxieties about the period's economic crises by deflecting concerns

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<sup>44</sup> Colley Cibber, *The Lady's Last Stake, or, The Wife's Resentment* (London: Lintott), *Eighteenth-Century Collections Online* (accessed June 11, 2011), 66.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, 69.

from the unknown world of economics onto the allegedly more manageable realm of domesticity. In her reading of *The Basset Table*, *The Lady's Last Stake*, and *The Provoked Husband*, for instance, Beth Kowaleski Wallace contends that displacing financial concerns onto the domestic realm permits female-gambling plays to cast the period's economic problems as tractable: "[T]hese plays demonstrate that controlling the flow of one's capital is as easy (or difficult) as controlling one's wife."<sup>46</sup> Making a partisan-political argument about the relationship between the economic and the domestic, James Peck contends that in *The Provoked Husband*, Cibber and Vanbrugh defend Whig economic policy by foisting Tory concerns about financial instability onto the play's female lead:

Lady Townly the elegant female gambling addict articulated in displaced form the commercial anxiety of the Whig party in the wake of the South Sea Bubble. She vivified the psychic anxiety of Whig commercial man, representing it in the containable image of the consuming woman.<sup>47</sup>

These critics, then, read early eighteenth-century female-gambling plays as attempting to calm public anxieties about the English economy, first, by deflecting these anxieties onto women and, second, by suggesting that these women's economic failings can be reformed by their husbands. Just as Laura Mandell has argued that in Mandeville's works "antifeminism comes to be conjoined with mercantile capitalism," so in these texts, critics have understood playwrights as limiting women's financial access and sexual pleasures in the effort to pave the way for the new economy's rise.<sup>48</sup>

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<sup>46</sup> Kowaleski Wallace, "A Modest Defence of Gaming Women," 26.

<sup>47</sup> James Peck, "Anne Oldfield's Lady Townly: Consumption, Credit, and the Whig Hegemony of the 1720s," *Theatre Journal* 49 (1997), 397-416; 412.

<sup>48</sup> Mandell, "Bawds and Merchants," 107.

In the realm of sexuality, *The Basset Table*'s portrayal of Lady Reveller parallels other female-gambling plays' representations of their women gamesters.<sup>49</sup> Although she spends much of the play agreeing with her maid "that Gallantry and Virtue are not inseparable," Lady eventually gives in to the pressure to reform her flirtatious ways (55). In the last act of *The Basset Table*, Sir James Courtly works with Lady Reveller's long-term paramour, the upstanding Lord Worthy, to coordinate an attack on her, a move that ultimately forces Lady Reveller to consent to marry Worthy. After issuing Lady Reveller a loan during the previous scene's hand of basset, Courtly demands sexual repayment for his advance. Lady Reveller refuses Courtly's advances, asserting that she had "resolv'd before to have Repaid in *Specie*," but Courtly ignores her rebuffs, eventually pursuing her so aggressively that she eventually screams out in the hopes of alerting members of the household to her plight (107). Courtly does not intend to extract from Lady Reveller the sexual favors he requests; on the contrary, he chases after her only so that Worthy can save her and bring about her reform. In the end, the two men's plot works exactly as planned. Lord Worthy appears on the scene just as Lady Reveller cries out, breaking open the door and demanding that Courtly "unhand the Lady" (107). Grateful for Worthy's assistance, Lady Reveller retracts her earlier rejection of him and instead begs Worthy to "forgive me—and if still you think me Worthy of your Heart—I here Return you Mine—and will this Hour Sign it with my hand" (108). By the time the pair re-enter the stage, Lady Reveller has become a dutiful partner, and she and Lord Worthy are engaged to be married. Although Lady Reveller resists

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<sup>49</sup> In fact, so strongly does Centlivre's treatment of Lady Reveller's sexuality resemble other early eighteenth-century comedies' representations of women gamblers that Laura Rosenthal has suggested that Colley Cibber knowingly borrowed from *The Basset Table* for *The Lady's Last Stake*. For more, see Rosenthal, "Writing (as) the Lady's Last Stake: Susanna Centlivre," chap. 5 of *Playwrights and Plagiarists in Early Modern England* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1996).

sexual reform early in the play, by the end of *The Basset Table* she has become the kind of modest, settled woman that her family has been encouraging her to be.

Even while *The Basset Table*'s characterization of Lady Reveller's sexuality parallels the representations seen in other early eighteenth-century female-gambling plays, this text's take on Lady Reveller's gambling stands in contrast to the portraits of women's gaming seen in those plays. Unlike Mrs. Sago, Lady Gentle, and Lady Townly, Lady Reveller does not give up gambling at the end of *The Basset Table*. In the wake of Courtly's attack, Lady Reveller makes known her regrets, declaring to Lord Worthy that "I . . . hate my self for all my Folly" (108); however, Lady Reveller does not announce an intention to stop playing cards. Indeed, even in her closing lines (a moment when several of the eighteenth century's other female-gambling characters renounce cards), Lady Reveller remains silent on the subject of basset, instead forgiving Courtly for the trick he played on her, expressing her condolences to Mr. Sago for his financial woes, and poking fun at Plainman. Over the course of *The Basset Table*, other characters speculate that Lady Reveller will relinquish her place at the table—following his assault on her, Courtly contends that "there will be no more Gaming I assure you in that House" (113); and Lady Lucy claims that in marrying Lord Worthy, Lady Reveller's "Course of Life must of Necessity be chang'd" (114)—but Lady Reveller herself never vows to stop gambling. In fact, at *The Basset Table*'s clearest opportunity to signal an end to Lady Reveller's play—when Worthy is asked whether he "will confine your Ladship from play"—neither Worthy nor Reveller replies (114).

In comparison to other early eighteenth-century female-gambling plays' treatment of their women card-players, *The Basset Table*'s failure to reform Lady Reveller's gambling is surprising. Given that Centlivre portrays Lady Reveller's affection for cards sympathetically

throughout the play, however, the uncertain way that this play's characterization of Lady Reveller's habit concludes does not come as a shock. Throughout *The Basset Table*, Centlivre treats Lady Reveller's gambling favorably; indeed, nowhere in the play is this character's gaming shown to have deleterious effects. As a widow, Lady Reveller controls her own finances; as such—as her maid reminds Plainman early in the play—Lady Reveller is “accountable to none for [her] Actions” (52). Unlike Mrs. Sago, Lady Gentle, and Lady Townly, all of whom are married, Lady Reveller has no chance of making a gambling decision that would distress her romantic partner. And even if Lady Reveller had a husband, this character does not play cards in a way that would do damage to his finances. Lady Reveller simply never wagers more money than she can afford. Indeed, even in the play's fourth act, when Courtly gives Lady Reveller the money for which he later demands sexual repayment, the widow does not actually require a loan. As soon as she runs out of funds at the table, Lady Reveller declares her intention to “fetch more Money” (102), clearly indicating that she has reserves of cash stored elsewhere in the house. The only reason this character accepts Courtly's funds in lieu of her own is because it is more convenient: Courtly has slipped money into her pockets as she is playing, and she thus “Discovers a Purse in the Furbeloes of her Apron” before she gets up to retrieve her own money (102). Never portrayed as disruptive, Lady Reveller's gambling habit does not jeopardize her financial position or lead her to deceive others at any point during the play.

Several times over the course of *The Basset Table*, other characters attempt to frame Lady Reveller's gambling negatively; the play itself, though, gives little credence to such concerns. Indeed, *The Basset Table* makes it clear that even the one sequence that could be understood to cast aspersions on Lady Reveller's card play—Lord Courtly's attack—is a manifestation of Courtly's enjoyment of trickery rather than the just result of Reveller's affection

for basset. In the moments immediately following Courtly's assault on Reveller, Lord Worthy tries to fault Lady Reveller's gambling for the aristocrat's attack on her, suggesting that her affection for basset was the reason for Courtly's advances: "Now you Discover what Inconveniency your Gaming has brought you into . . . now you have prov'd it at your own Expendence" (108). The play's structure clearly resists such a narrative, however. Since *The Basset Table*'s first scene, Courtly has been encouraging the play's male characters to nab their desired female partners by playing tricks on them. There, he instructs Lord Worthy and Ensign Lovely, the play's other suitor, that, "*To gain all Women there's a certain Rule,/ If Wit should fail to please, then Act the Fool;/ And where you find simplicity not take,/ Throw off Disguises—and Profess the Rake*" (57). Ultimately, *The Basset Table* makes it clear that Courtly's attack on Lady Reveller stems from his enjoyment of such trickery. In the play's fourth act, Courtly suggests that he and Lord Worthy hatch "a Plot" against Lady Reveller that will "either Quench your Flame, or Kindle hers" (92). The "Plot" that the pair eventually mount is thus the product of Courtly's rakish maneuvering, rather than the result of Lady Reveller's play, and such a fact is underscored by a self-congratulatory remark that Courtly makes immediately following his attack. After Lady Reveller and Lord Worthy declare their affection for one another and agree to marry, Courtly says, in an aside to the audience, "How I Applaud my self for this Contrivance" (108). Over the course of *The Basset Table*, several characters fault Lady Reveller's enjoyment of basset for various of her problems; Centlivre's play itself, however, resists such blame. Even in the moment when *The Basset Table* could most easily condemn Lady Reveller's gambling, Centlivre's comedy instead emphasizes that the ill fate Lady Reveller suffers is a result of Courtly's wiles.

Unlike other Whig writers, so many of whom combined a favorable characterization of the new economy with a condemnation of women, Centlivre makes clear both her advocacy of the new finance and her support for a female character's engagement with the economy. By carefully distinguishing between Mrs. Sago's and Lady Reveller's styles of play, Centlivre ultimately supports the pleasure that Lady Reveller derives from basset. Written at a moment when Centlivre's own economic position paralleled Lady Reveller's, *The Basset Table* makes space for a woman to participate in the English economy.

The only other early eighteenth-century play that features multiple female gamblers treats the two characters' gaming habits similarly, condemning their affection for cards throughout: in *The Beau Defeated*, Mary Pix portrays negatively both the gambling of the citizen's widow Mrs. Rich and the card-play of the aristocratic women Lady La Basset and Mrs. Trickwell. Mrs. Rich is obsessed with improving her social status, and until she can do so by marrying an entitled man, she spends her time playing basset with aristocratic women, convinced that she is "sufficiently recompensed" for the large sums of money she loses by "the honorable company I am admitted into."<sup>50</sup> Lady La Basset and Mrs. Trickwell, Mrs. Rich's gambling friends, are caricatures of the upper class, and the play condemns their scheming, gossipy ways. Portrayed as obsessed with wealth, all three of these women go on to be punished for their avarice. Mrs. Rich ends the play engaged to marry Elder Clerimont, whose aristocratic status satisfies her wish for a title but whose position as a country squire means that she will no longer participate in either the London society or the gambling tables she so loves. Lady La Basset is subjected to an even worse fate: in the play's final moments, she is exposed as an imposter, her status as "the

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<sup>50</sup> Mary Pix, *The Beau Defeated*, in Canfield, *The Broadview Anthology of Restoration and Early Eighteenth-Century Drama*, 810-856, on 813.

cast Mistress of Sir *Francis Basset*” made known to all.<sup>51</sup> In Pix’s play, all forms of female gambling are unacceptable and must be disciplined; throughout, *The Beau Defeated* makes known its opposition to the gambling habits of the women players it features.

*The Basset Table*, by contrast, emphasizes the differences between Mrs. Sago’s and Lady Reveller’s approaches to gambling. In so doing, Centlivre’s play sets itself up to license Lady Reveller’s style of play. Scholars have theorized many motivations for gambling. In perhaps the best-known theoretical piece on the topic, Clifford Geertz argues that the highest-stakes gambling contests have less to do with making money than they do with asserting one’s status position. Observing Balinese gamblers’ practices as the social and economic stakes of cockfights increase—indeed, become “so high that it is . . . irrational for men to engage in it at all”—Geertz notes that participants’ worries about money actually decline.<sup>52</sup> Such competitions, Geertz concludes, are about “deep play” rather than financial gain, about status instead of money. Geertz notes that it is in the lower-stakes matches that players care about money: in shallow-play contests, “one finds the handful of more pure, addict-type gamblers involved—those who *are* in it mainly for the money”; in deep-play contests, by contrast, “much more is at stake than material gain: namely, esteem, honor, dignity, respect.”<sup>53</sup> In his analysis of gambling’s importance to the novels of the French Enlightenment, Thomas Kavanagh shows that the distinction between deep and shallow play can also be seen in eighteenth-century gambling. While aristocrats tended to gamble in ways that asserted their status, betting enormous sums of money and evincing their disregard for cash, middle-class players wagered in ways that made

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<sup>51</sup> Ibid., 855.

<sup>52</sup> Clifford Geertz, “Deep Play: Notes on the Balinese Cockfight,” *Daedalus* 134 (2005; originally published in 1972), 56-86, on 71.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid., 72, 71.

clear their respect for money, either by making conservative bets or by caring a great deal about winning.<sup>54</sup>

Mrs. Sago's gambling habit parallels that of the shallow players in Geertz's work and the middle-class players in Kavanagh's. Keen to improve her economic status, this character gambles obsessively, doing so in the effort to earn money and acquire things. From the play's first act, Mrs. Sago's obsession with improving her economic station is clear. There, Courtly comments on Mrs. Sago's friendship with Lady Reveller:

[Mrs. Sago] has a vast Passion for my Lady *Reveller*, and endeavours to mimick her in every thing—Not a sute of Cloaths, or a Top-knot, that is not exactly the same with hers—then her Plots and Contrivances to supply these Expences, puts her continually upon the Rack. (58)

Imitating Lady Reveller in both dress and hairstyle, Mrs. Sago also attempts to parrot the widow at the basset table. Not possessed of the sums of money that would allow her to gamble as Lady Reveller does, Mrs. Sago must instead engage in "Plots and Contrivances" in order to maintain her seat at the basset table. Ultimately, Mrs. Sago's obsession with wealth causes her to wager more money than she and her husband have: just as Valere's reckless play nearly ends both his financial and his romantic prospects in *The Gamester*, so Mrs. Sago's gambling almost ruins both her economic standing and her marriage. Fixated on accruing wealth, Mrs. Sago gambles obsessively in *The Basset Table*, risking all that she has in pursuit of a lifestyle she cannot afford.

Lady Reveller's gambling, interestingly, is neither deep nor shallow: this character plays basset not to assert her social status or to make money, but simply because she likes it. Indeed, Centlivre's portrayal of Lady Reveller repeatedly emphasizes the pleasure that this character

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<sup>54</sup> Thomas Kavanagh, *Enlightenment and the Shadows of Chance: The Novel and the Culture of Gambling in Eighteenth-Century France* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1993), see esp. Chap. 2, "Gambling as Social Practice."

takes in play. In *The Basset Table*'s first scene, for instance, Lady Reveller tells Sir Richard Plainman that she has no intention of letting his condemnation of her habit deny her one of "the Pleasures of Youth" (51). And later in the play, Lady Reveller again underscores the joy that cards bring her. At the end of Act Three, after an argument, Lord Worthy threatens to leave England because, he claims, Lady Reveller hates "every thing but Play" (88). Unfazed by such an ultimatum, Lady Reveller reminds Lord Worthy that a man soliciting her pleasure in one realm has no business obstructing it in another: "Dare you, the Subject of my Power—you, that Petition Love, Arraign my Pleasures?" (88). Making it clear that she takes pleasure in basset, Lady Reveller refuses to change her habit for either her uncle or her suitor. Drawing a contrast between Lady Reveller's play and Mrs. Sago's, *The Basset Table* frames the widow's habit favorably throughout, neither suggesting that Lady Reveller needs to be reformed nor altering her play in its final moments.

At the moment Centlivre was writing *The Basset Table*, her own economic position bore some key similarities to Lady Reveller's. With *The Gamester*, Centlivre had finally achieved her first financial success as a playwright: the play ran for twelve nights, gaining Centlivre three nights of box-office receipts and a not-insignificant fame. (Indeed, so well-known was *The Gamester* that the cover of early editions of *The Basset Table* advertises it as having been written by "the author of *The Gamester*."<sup>55</sup>) Centlivre remained far from wealthy—three nights' worth of receipts was not a fortune by any stretch—but *The Gamester*'s success did afford her a measure of financial validation that playwrighting had not previously offered her.<sup>56</sup> Only a year and a half before she penned *The Gamester* and *The Basset Table*, Centlivre had been in dire

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<sup>55</sup> Centlivre, *The Basset Table*, 37.

<sup>56</sup> For more on playwrights' compensation in this period, see Paulina Kewes, *Authorship and Appropriation: Writing for the Stage in England, 1660-1710*. Oxford: Clarendon, 1998.

financial straits. In a revealing passage from the preface to an earlier comedic work, *Love's Contrivance* (1703), Centlivre compares her position to that of a gambler, declaring that "Writing is a kind of Lottery in this fickle Age, and Dependence on the Stage as precarious as the Cast of a Die."<sup>57</sup> With *The Gamester*, though, Centlivre's luck came in, and she found herself in a new position of career success. As is true of Lady Reveller, so Centlivre negotiated her financial success alone: she did not marry Joseph Centlivre until 1707 and, as such, navigated her early years as a playwright as a single woman. In the context of a culture that largely condemned women's involvement with finance, both Centlivre and Reveller negotiated the realm of financial success on their own. Having compared herself to a gambler just three years earlier, Centlivre gives a woman player the benefit of the doubt in *The Basset Table*, licensing the joy that Lady Reveller takes in play.

Unlike the other female-gambling plays of the period, *The Basset Table* does not condemn Lady Reveller's gaming as hysterical, nor does Centlivre's comedy fault its protagonist's engagement with finance for the economic woes of the early eighteenth century. Instead, this play characterizes Lady Reveller's gambling favorably, characterizing those who condemn it unfavorably and allowing to continue at the end of the play. Differentiating Lady Reveller's gambling from Mrs. Sago's, Centlivre implicitly licenses pleasure as a motivation for play, supporting Lady Reveller's engagement with finance. A playwright clearly concerned with her own economic position, Centlivre intervenes in public discourse about female gamblers in *The Basset Table*, supporting—rather than condemning—Lady Reveller's participation in finance.

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<sup>57</sup> Susanna Centlivre, Preface to *Love's Contrivance*, in Centlivre, *The Basset Table*, 147.

In the early eighteenth century, women often bore the brunt of cultural anxieties about England's economic upheaval, their engagement with finance sexualized and vilified in order to pave the way for capitalism's rise. Susanna Centlivre's support for the new economy is as clear as any other Whig playwright's; however, in the context of her female-gambling play, Centlivre does not take the path carved out by her peers. Most critics have understood this play as similar to other female-gambling plays of the period, and indeed its characterization of Mrs. Sago is. Ultimately, though, Centlivre distinguishes between types of female gamblers in *The Basset Table* and, in so doing, manages to license female financial pleasure. Unlike other Whigs of the period, Centlivre asserts her favorable attitude toward the new economy in misogynistic terms. Rather, she uses her support for financial capitalism to explore the possibilities that such a system might offer women, possibilities that likely would have appealed to Centlivre herself.

## 5.0 PANDERED WIVES AND PASSIVE OBEDIENCE IN *A WIFE TO BE LETT*

Eliza Haywood's only comedy, *A Wife to Be Lett* (1723), focuses on a husband's attempt to rent his wife to another man. Such a plot appears in other Restoration and early eighteenth-century texts; however, Haywood's play is unique in its lionization of the wife for sale. In many other texts of this period, rented wives are characterized as desiring, their sexuality framed as responsible for their husbands' attempts to rent them. In *A Wife to Be Lett*, though, the pandered wife is the play's heroine. Over the course of *A Wife to Be Lett*, Mrs. Graspall (a role originally acted by Haywood herself) overcomes her lust for the man to whom her husband attempts to rent her, and the play characterizes such a victory as a triumph.<sup>1</sup> Mrs. Graspall's greedy husband, by contrast, serves as the play's antagonist. From the trustworthy Courtly's early description of Mr. Graspall as "the most covetous miserable Wretch that ever was" to Mr. Graspall's eventual proposal that his wife sleep with another man, this character is portrayed as miserly and unfeeling throughout, his avarice set in opposition to his wife's moral rectitude.<sup>2</sup> Even while *A*

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<sup>1</sup> Marcia Heinemann was the first scholar to investigate Haywood's career as an actress; Catherine Ingrassia examines the various positions that Haywood held in the theatre (actress, playwright, and chronicler of stage history) and argues that her experiences with drama provide insight into her novels. Marcia Heinemann, "Eliza Haywood's Career in the Theatre," *Notes and Queries* 20 (1973), 9–13; Catherine Ingrassia, "'The Stage Not Answering My Expectations': The Case of Eliza Haywood," in Nelson and Burroughs, *Teaching British Women Playwrights*, 213–22.

<sup>2</sup> Eliza Haywood, *A Wife to Be Lett*, in *Eighteenth-Century Women Playwrights, Vol. I: Delarivier Manley and Eliza Haywood*, eds. Margarete Rubik and Eva Mueller-Zettelmann (London: Pickering and Chatto, 2001), 165–214, on 170 (hereafter cited in text).

*Wife to Be Lett* characterizes Mr. Graspall unsympathetically, however, the play does not conclude with Mrs. Graspall rejecting her husband. Late in the text, Mrs. Graspall reveals Mr. Graspall's attempt at pandering to all of the play's characters, but she refuses the power that such an exposure affords her. Rather than lording her moral superiority over her husband, Haywood's heroine ends *A Wife to Be Lett* by re-asserting Mr. Graspall's power, declaring that "I . . . shall ever make it my Study to prove a most obedient Wife" (211).

Previous critics of *A Wife to Be Lett* have read this play as an outgrowth of Haywood's proto-feminism, interpreting its treatment of wife pandering as a critique of the patriarchal structure of marriage.<sup>3</sup> Mrs. Graspall's ready submission in *A Wife to Be Lett*'s concluding moments represents a challenge to such interpretations, however. If Haywood's comedy is designed to criticize husbandly authority, why does its heroine's closing speech emphasize her intention to be "obedient," particularly to a man whom the play has characterized as unworthy of her compliance? In this chapter, I forward a partisan-political reading of *A Wife to Be Lett*.<sup>4</sup> Recent scholarship has emphasized the role that Haywood's Toryism played in shaping her early work.<sup>5</sup> Building on such criticism, I argue that *A Wife to Be Lett* stages one of the central

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<sup>3</sup> Polly Stevens Fields, "Manly Vigor and Woman's Wit: Dialoguing Gender in the Plays of Eliza Haywood," in *Compendious Conversations*, ed. Kevin Lee Cope (Frankfurt: Peter Lang, 1992), 257–66; Earla A. Wilputte, "Wife Pandering in Three Eighteenth-Century Plays," *Studies in English Literature, 1500–1900* 38 (1998), 447–64.

<sup>4</sup> My work in this chapter is indebted to the ideas about passive obedience, early eighteenth-century Tory politics, and seduction plots that Toni Bowers lays out in *Force or Fraud*.

<sup>5</sup> Toni Bowers, "Collusive Resistance: Sexual Agency and Partisan Politics in *Love in Excess*," in *The Passionate Fictions of Eliza Haywood: Essays on Her Life and Work*, eds. Kirsten Saxton and Rebecca P. Bocchicchio (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2000), 48–67; Marta Kvand, "The Outsider Narrator in Eliza Haywood's Political Novels," *Studies in English Literature, 1500–1900* 43 (2003), 625–43; Melissa Mowry, "Eliza Haywood's Defense of London's Body Politic," *Studies in English Literature, 1500–1900* 43 (2003), 645–65. For an

political conundrums confronted by Tories of the period: how can an obedient person resist? Resistance presented an ideological challenge for early eighteenth-century Tories: when the Tory party emerged in the late seventeenth century, it was defined by its members' dedication to political obedience; over the course of the eighteenth century, though, Tories' to commitment to obedience was tested.<sup>6</sup> As Whigs curried favor with monarchs and achieved a majority in Parliament, Tories found themselves at odds with both royal and parliamentary authority. In *A Wife to Be Lett*, Haywood stages the conflict between obedience and dissent: Mrs. Graspall is obliged to submit to her husband, but she must also disobey his command that she sleep with another man. In the end, Haywood's heroine manages both to resist the unlawful demand that her husband makes of her and to retain her subservience to Mr. Graspall. Such balance turns Mrs. Graspall into an exemplar of one of the core principles of early eighteenth-century conservative ideology—passive obedience—and makes her a role model for early eighteenth-century Tories.

## 5.1 PANDERED WIVES AND FEMALE SEXUALITY

Instances of men exchanging—or attempting to exchange—their wives for currency can be found throughout the English historical record, appearing as early as 1073 and as late as the early

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argument that casts doubt on the idea that Haywood was a Tory in the 1720s, see Kathryn R. King, *A Political Biography of Eliza Haywood* (London: Pickering & Chatto, 2012).

<sup>6</sup> The best account of Tory politics in the early eighteenth century is Colley, *In Defiance of Oligarchy*.

twentieth century.<sup>7</sup> Characterized by twentieth-century scholars as a precursor to divorce, wife selling signaled the dissolution of one marriage and the inauguration of a new one, making it clear that the first husband was no longer responsible for the debts of his former wife and that the new husband would instead take on her obligations.<sup>8</sup> From the late sixteenth through the late eighteenth century, wife selling was a public affair: on market day, a husband would walk his wife to town in a halter and auction her off in front of the assembled townspeople in an exchange that “imitat[ed] as closely as possible the sale of a cow or a sheep.”<sup>9</sup>

Like wife selling, so wife pandering was underpinned by the notion that women could be assigned monetary value. In the case of wife pandering, though, husbands sought to improve their financial standing by renting out their wives rather than selling them off: acting as pimps, wife panderers leased their wives to other men, loaning these women out for brief periods of time. Wife pandering appears a handful of times in late seventeenth- and early eighteenth-century legal records and literary texts, and it was, on a few occasions, the topic of much public conversation.<sup>10</sup> In 1738, Theophilus Cibber, who was the son of celebrated eighteenth-century actor and playwright Colley Cibber and who had himself acted in two of the period’s wife-pandering comedies—*A Wife to Be Lett* and Henry Fielding’s *The Modern Husband* (1732)—brought a lawsuit against William Sloper, a member of Parliament whom Cibber accused of having had an affair with his wife, the famed actress Susannah Cibber. (Such lawsuits were

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<sup>7</sup> Samuel Pyeatt Menefee, *Wives for Sale: An Ethnographic Study of British Popular Divorce* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1981).

<sup>8</sup> For more on wife selling as one of the precursors of divorce, see Stone, *Road to Divorce*, 143-8.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, 145.

<sup>10</sup> For a detailed examination of wife pandering in eighteenth-century English legal and literary culture, see Thomas Lockwood, introduction to Henry Fielding, *The Modern Husband*, in *The Wesleyan Edition of the Works of Henry Fielding: Plays*, Vol. 2 (1731-4), ed. Thomas Lockwood (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 181-207.

allowed under a statute that barred “criminal conversation,” a polite term for cuckoldry.<sup>11</sup>) Over the course of the salacious Cibber vs. Sloper trial, it became clear that Theophilus had not only condoned Sloper’s affair with Susannah but had even collected money from Sloper in exchange for the pair’s relationship.<sup>12</sup> The jury’s eventual verdict in the case evinced their disregard for Theophilus: trials of this type almost always resulted in a victory for the plaintiff, and Sloper was indeed found guilty of criminal conversation, but Theophilus was granted only £10 in losses, rather than the £5000 for which he had sued.<sup>13</sup> In the end, the members of the jury seem to have agreed with the defense’s assessment that “the plaintiff cannot be injured, if he has not only consented, but has even taken a price.”<sup>14</sup>

As is the case with many Restoration and early eighteenth-century texts about wife pandering, the published materials that surrounded the Cibber vs. Sloper trial vilify the pandering husband for his actions, highlighting Theophilus’s greed and foregrounding his mistreatment of Susannah. In his opening statement for the defense, one of Sloper’s attorneys asserted that it was

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<sup>11</sup> For more details on the law of criminal conversation, see Stone, “The Action for Criminal Conversation,” chap. 9 of *Road to Divorce*.

<sup>12</sup> One servant testified that she had seen Theophilus bid Susannah good night as she let herself into Sloper’s bedroom, and another witness said that he had overheard Theophilus refer to Sloper as “Mr. Benefit,” a reference to the theatrical practice of the benefit night, in which actors were awarded all of the proceeds from a single performance of a play. An audience member’s remembrance of the trial transcript was published in many different texts over the course of the eighteenth century, including *Adultery Anatomized: In a Select Collection of Tryals, for Criminal Conversation* (London: 1761), *Eighteenth Century Collections Online* (accessed June 21, 2013).

<sup>13</sup> Unsatisfied by the award that the jury granted him, Theophilus sued Sloper again the following year, alleging that his ongoing relationship with Susannah had contributed to Theophilus’s financial decline. In that trial, Theophilus was awarded £500 in damages, but this influx of cash did not resolve his financial woes. By the time of his death, Theophilus’s debt was so notorious that Oliver Goldsmith penned an entire essay focused on the young Cibber’s excess. Oliver Goldsmith, “Essay VIII: Supposed to be Written by the Ordinary of Newgate,” in *The Works of Oliver Goldsmith*, Vol. 1, ed. J. W. M. Gibbs (London: George Bell and Sons, 1885), 301-3, *Google Books* (accessed July 24, 2013).

<sup>14</sup> *Adultery Anatomized*, 151.

not Sloper, but rather Theophilus, who was at fault for the events discussed at trial: “if there was a suspicion of any thing amiss in the acquaintance between Mr. Sloper and Mrs. Cibber . . . the plaintiff must thank himself for it.”<sup>15</sup> A poem published around the time of the trial echoes the idea that Theophilus was to blame. Underneath an etching of Sloper drawing the bedcovers over Susannah while Theophilus looks on, a series of rhyming couplets faults Theophilus for the scene being depicted:

*How mean's the Wretch, whose abject Mind,  
By Love, nor Honour's Ties confin'd;  
Will Barter for a Trifling Sum,  
All Ease and Happiness to Come;  
Betray the Innocent to Sin,  
And draw th'unwary Sportsman in.*<sup>16</sup>

In addition to satirizing pandering husbands, many Restoration and early eighteenth-century wife-pandering texts take aim at pandered wives. Often characterized as active participants in their husbands' decisions to rent them, these women are frequently framed as excessively desirous, their lust having laid the groundwork for their pandering. In the Cibber trial, for instance, Sloper's attorneys attempted to frame Susannah as a sexual predator who used her acting skills to lure the unwitting defendant into a relationship. Characterizing theatres as places that had never been “celebrated for virtue” and disparaging players as having “an uncommon propensity to love without any confinement of the passion to a particular subject,” the defense defamed the drama throughout the trial, seeking to convince the members of the jury that the Cibbers had drawn on their acting talents to tempt Sloper into an affair.<sup>17</sup> Sloper's attorneys directed especially harsh words toward actresses. In his opening statement, one of

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<sup>15</sup> *Adultery Anatomized*, 139.

<sup>16</sup> “Pistol's a Cuckold, or Adultery in Fashion,” in Mary Nash, *The Provoked Wife: The Life and Times of Susannah Cibber* (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1977), 145.

<sup>17</sup> *Adultery Anatomized*, 137.

Sloper's lawyers asserted that female players "learn all the allurements that can engage the eye and ear, and strike the imagination of young gentlemen; they dress, chat, sing, dance, and charm unguarded young gentlemen, who are not aware of any ill consequences."<sup>18</sup> And in the defense's closing argument, another of Sloper's attorneys applied such a notion of actresses' sexuality to Susannah directly, suggesting that she, "being mistress of the alluring arts of the stage, first engaged [Sloper's] affection and drew him in."<sup>19</sup> Drawing on the sexualized stereotypes of female players that circulated widely in the Restoration and early eighteenth century, Sloper's lawyers sought to characterize Susannah as an active participant in her own pandering, framing her as a manipulative woman who had used her acting skills to prey upon their client.

Sloper's lawyers, of course, had a vested interest in maligning Susannah's reputation: doing so was a part of their effort to distance their client from his responsibility in the affair. The defense's attack on Susannah was not unique in wife-pandering texts of the period, however. In fact, the accusations that Sloper's lawyers made against Susannah echo charges that were leveled at other early eighteenth-century pandered wives. A 1730 editorial that warns its readers about potential abuses of the criminal-conversation statute condemns pandered wives in the same terms that Sloper's lawyers had applied to Susannah:

[I]t is melancholy to see a Man and his Wife sometimes enter seriously and deliberately into a Combination, and craftily plot the Ruin of some heedless, thoughtless young Fellow; the Wife by her Allurements and seeming Fondness, and the Husband by the Opportunities he gives.<sup>20</sup>

Characterizing husbands and wives as scheming to "craftily plot the Ruin of some heedless, thoughtless young Fellow," this writer blames women for the "Allurements" they would

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<sup>18</sup> *Adultery Anatomized*, 139.

<sup>19</sup> *Adultery Anatomized*, 150.

<sup>20</sup> *Fog's Weekly Journal*, April 11, 1730, as quoted in Lockwood, introduction to Fielding, *The Modern Husband*, 190.

allegedly employ in the effort to entrap hapless men. Paralleling Sloper's attorneys' idea that Susannah drew in their client by "alluring" him into an affair, such language places as much blame on wives' sexuality as it does on husbands' scheming for the abuses of the criminal-conversation statute it highlights.

Perhaps the best-known example of an eighteenth-century text that faults a wife for her own pandering is Fielding's *The Modern Husband*. A play whose plot parallels the events of the Cibber/Sloper affair, *The Modern Husband* centers on the story of a husband, Mr. Modern, who intends to bring a criminal-conversation suit against a wealthy man to whom he has rented his wife. From the opening moments of the play, Fielding highlights Mrs. Modern's economic and sexual imprudence: in *The Modern Husband*'s first scene, Mrs. Modern receives a bill she cannot pay; in its second scene, the audience learns that she has set up gambling engagements every night for the proceeding three weeks; and in the play's fourth scene, Mr. Modern makes explicit what *The Modern Husband* has already suggested—that his wife's gambling debts led him to rent her out in order to avoid bankruptcy: "'Twas you, Madam, who by your unbridl'd Pride, and Vanity run me into Debt, and then—I gave up your Person to secure my own."<sup>21</sup> Capitalizing on some of the assumptions about female gambling and in chastity that circulated in this period, Fielding clearly implicates Mrs. Modern in her own pandering, setting up her financial indiscretions as the reason for her husband's decision to rent her out. As *The Modern Husband* progresses, Mrs. Modern's sexual improprieties mount: when she learns that the affable Mr. Bellamant has come into money, Mrs. Modern chases after him despite the fact that he is happily married; and when Mrs. Modern's former paramour, Lord Richly, asks her to convince the

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<sup>21</sup> Henry Fielding, *The Modern Husband*, in *The Wesleyan Edition of the Works of Henry Fielding: Plays*, 208-87, on 223.

virtuous Mrs. Bellamant to have a dalliance with him, Mrs. Modern complies. Framing Mrs. Modern's twin failings of gambling and sexuality as responsible for her husband's decision to pander her, *The Modern Husband* blames Mrs. Modern for the act of wife rental it depicts, blaming this character's profligacy and sexuality for the situation in which she finds herself.

Susannah Cibber and Mrs. Modern are both characterized as active participants in the schemes that their husbands lay out. Even when wives refuse their husbands' attempts to pander them, though, texts still blame these women for such schemes. In the third dialogue of Bernard Mandeville's *The Virgin Unmask'd* (1709), the profligate Dorante seeks to rent out his wife, Aurelia, as a way of recouping the money he has squandered while living beyond his means. This scheme ultimately fails—Aurelia is a virtuous character, and when she cannot convince Dorante not to rent her out, she literally takes herself out of circulation, evading her husband's attempt to pander her by wrapping herself so tightly in a sheet that her would-be lover cannot gain access to her body. Nevertheless, Mandeville's text still faults Aurelia for Dorante's attempt to rent her out. When the young girl who is listening to the story of Dorante and Aurelia praises Aurelia for her modesty, the old woman who is narrating the story corrects the girl's celebration of Aurelia:

[Y]ou ascribe, that to her Virtue which proceeded from nothing, but her Superlative Love to *Dorante*: He was Quality, Riches, Honour, he was every thing to her; she doated upon him so excessively, that she thought there was no Bliss without him; and neither desired nor knew, any other Felicity, than what she enjoy'd in his Company: Do but mind, what the Consequence must be of such an extraordinary Passion, and you'll find, that she might have withstood much greater Temptations, than ever she lay under, without being a *Saint*, as you call her.<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> Bernard Mandeville, *The Virgin Unmask'd* (London: J. Morphew, 1709), *Eighteenth-Century Collections Online* (accessed July 1, 2013), 74.

Insisting that Aurelia is not the “*Saint*” that the young listener has deemed her, Mandeveille’s narrator instead blames Aurelia for the act of pandering that *The Virgin Unmask’d* depicts, alleging that the “extraordinary Passion” that this character felt for Dorante blinded her to the impropriety of his proposal to rent her out. That Aurelia avoids the fate to which her husband consigns her would seem to make this character an exemplar of virtue, her behavior a model of how an eighteenth-century woman should comport herself under duress. Ultimately, though, even the heroic stand that Aurelia takes against her own pandering is not enough for this character to avoid blame. Framed as excessively “Passion[ate],” Aurelia is faulted for the pandering that she suffers, “her Superlative Love to *Dorante*” figured as responsible for her husband’s attempt to rent her to another man.

Even while most of the wife-pandering texts from the Restoration and early eighteenth century critique pandering husbands for the scenarios they depict, these works also attack pandered wives. Often presented as excessively desirous, many of the pandered wives that appear in period discourse are blamed for their own rental, their louche behavior characterized as having brought about their husbands’ pandering. Emphasizing these women’s links to sexualized activities such as acting and gambling, writers repeatedly cast aspersions on the pandered wives they feature, maligning these women’s reputations and attacking them as willing partners in their husbands’ schemes.

## 5.2 THE POLITICS OF WIFE PANDERING

Restoration and early eighteenth-century wife-pandering texts turn on questions of authority and resistance. Can husbands command their wives to behave in illicit ways? Is it acceptable for

wives to resist their husbands' demands? Issues of consent and subjection, of course, also dominated the period's political texts. As the balance of power between monarch, Parliament, and people shifted over the course of the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries, English thinkers argued over who held political authority, to what powers that authority was entitled, and under what circumstances that authority could be resisted. Several scholars have pointed out that the rhetoric of politics and the rhetoric of sexual violence were bound up with one another in this period: rape appears frequently in late seventeenth-century political texts, and the representations of rape that appear in Restoration and early eighteenth-century plays are often politically inflected.<sup>23</sup> While previous work on the intersection between politics and the rhetoric of sexual violence in this period has not examined wife pandering, many acts of wife pandering do constitute a kind of sexual violence.<sup>24</sup> In at least some cases, the husband asks his wife to engage in a sexual activity to which she may not have consented, and in those instances, wife pandering highlights a man's abuse of legal power over a woman. In staging dilemmas of subjecthood and leadership, many representations of wife pandering—like many representations of other acts of sexual violence—echo the key political debates of the day.

At a moment when political conversations centered on the nature of the analogical relationship between governmental power and the conjugal relationship, representations of rape

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<sup>23</sup> Jennifer Airey, *The Politics of Rape: Sexual Atrocity, Propaganda Wars, and the Restoration Stage* (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 2012); Bowers, *Force or Fraud*; Susan J. Owen, "He that should guard my virtue has betrayed it": The Dramatization of Rape in the Exclusion Crisis," *Restoration and Eighteenth-Century Theatre Research* 9 (1994), 59-68; Julia Rudolph, "Rape and Resistance: Women and Consent in Seventeenth-Century English Legal and Political Thought," *Journal of British Studies* 39 (2000), 157-84.

<sup>24</sup> None of the secondary work on representations of sexual violence in this period looks at wife pandering. The one extant piece of scholarship on late seventeenth- and early eighteenth-century wife-pandering plays (Earla Wilputte's "Three Wife-Pandering Comedies") does touch on these texts' satires of Whig greed; however, politics is not that article's central concern, and the piece provides no grounding in the political rhetoric of the day.

allowed writers to comment on some of the problems of governance. In *Observations upon Aristotles Politiques* (1652), for instance, the royalist Robert Filmer makes his case that monarchy is the best form of government, in part, by taking up the rape of Lucrece. Contending that even the Roman king Tarquin was a successful ruler, Filmer frames as unwarranted the accusations of tyranny that were leveled at Tarquin in the wake of the attack that his son, Sextus Tarquinius, made on Lucrece:

[I]t is unjust to condemn the father for the crime of his son. It had been fit to have petitioned the father for the punishment of the offender. The fact of young Tarquin cannot be excused, yet without wrong to the reputation of so chaste a lady as Lucrece is reputed to be, it may be said she had a greater desire to be thought chaste than to be chaste. She might have died untouched and unspotted in her body if she had not been afraid to be slandered for in chastity. Both Dionysius Halicarnasseus and Livy, who both are her friends, so tell the tale of her as if she had chosen rather to be a whore than to be thought a whore. To say truth, we find no other cause of the expulsion of Tarquin than the wantonness and licentiousness of the people of Rome.<sup>25</sup>

Faulting Lucrece for her own rape (“she had a greater desire to be thought chaste than to be chaste”), Filmer grounds his defense of the monarchy in a willful act of victim blaming. Retellings of the Lucretia story often have a republican cast, using Lucrece’s rape as a symbol of the tyranny that Rome threw off when it unseated Tarquin and became a republic, but Filmer relays the story of Lucrece’s rape in a way that glorifies the Roman empire, blaming Lucrece for having brought about what he characterizes as Tarquin’s unjust dethroning.<sup>26</sup> Written in the midst of the Interregnum, *Observations upon Aristotles Politiques* supports the institution of

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<sup>25</sup> Robert Filmer, *Observations Upon Aristotles Politiques . . .*, in *Patriarcha and Other Writings*, ed. Johann P. Sommerville (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 235-86, on 259.

<sup>26</sup> In his book on reworkings of the Lucretia myth, Ian Donaldson claims that the story’s tendency to lionize the Roman republic troubled seventeenth-century conservatives: “Devoted English Royalists found it difficult to recount with complete serenity this great republican myth, being haunted by the suspicion that they might be thought to be endorsing, either in a specific or a general sense, its revolutionary sentiments.” Ian Donaldson, *The Rapes of Lucretia: A Myth and Its Transformations* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1982), 111.

monarchy absolutely, attempting to rescue from infamy even the most legendary of tyrants. In the process, Filmer tries to turn the story of Lucrece's rape into a morality tale about the dangers of vanity rather than an example of Tarquin's overreach.

Just as the period's conservative political texts make allusions to acts of sexual violence, so do its liberal ones. In fact, so frequent are the references to sexual violence in late seventeenth-century Whig writings that Julia Rudolph has argued that modern contract theory is undergirded by a "rhetoric of rape" that "relied on a traditional understanding of women as subordinate to men."<sup>27</sup> As in Filmer's *Observations upon Aristotles Politiques*, so in Whig political works, rape is often linked to accusations of tyranny; in Whig discourse, however, those accusations of tyranny are allowed to stand. As Rudolph shows, many late seventeenth-century Whig texts use the example of rape as a way of attacking the actions of James II, framing the last Stuart king as a tyrant in order to defend the actions of liberals during the Glorious Revolution. In the anonymously published *A Political Conference . . .* (1689), three men debate the nature of civil liberty and the relationship between sovereigns and subjects. Outlining various situations in which subjects may justifiably disobey their leaders, Civicus, the dialogue's normative voice, highlights as one such scenario the king disobeying his own country's laws about murder or rape: "It is beyond doubt, that there is a difference betwixt a King's Natural and his Civil Capacity; if a King should invade a Subject to kill him, or to ravish his Wife or Daughter, he might lawfully resist."<sup>28</sup> Such a reference to sexual violence serves only to justify the resistance of a single man—"a Subject"—to his monarch; however, the rhetoric in which this claim is

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<sup>27</sup> Rudolph, "Rape and Resistance," 161.

<sup>28</sup> *A Political Conference Between Aulicus, a Courtier; Demas, a Countryman; and Civicus, a Citizen . . .* (London: Baldwin, 1689), *Early English Books Online* (accessed 5 October 2013), 30.

grounded also gets employed in the service of culture-wide rebellions. In *An Enquiry into the Measures of Submission* . . . (1689), Gilbert Burnet makes a metaphor of rape as a way of arguing that subjects may disobey a monarch who abuses his military power:

[I]f the souldierie are connived and encouraged in the most enormous Crimes, that so they may be thereby prepared to commit great ones, And from single Rapes and Murders, proceed to a rape upon all our Liberties, and a Destruction of the Nation: If I say, all these things are true in Fact, then it is plain, that there is such a Dissolution of the Government made, that there is not any one part of it left Sound and Entire.<sup>29</sup>

Moving beyond the “single Rapes and Murders” that Civicus references, Burnet suggests that tyrants’ actions constitute “a rape upon all our Liberties, and a Destruction of the Nation.” Such a metaphor helps Burnet to frame James II as a tyrant and, in so doing, legitimizes citizens’ work against a sitting king. Positioning James II as having “Dissol[ved] the Government”—and, by extension, legitimizing their party’s acts of resistance during the Glorious Revolution—Whig writers of the late seventeenth century drew on the rhetoric of sexual violence to add force to their claims. In framing James II as a sexual oppressor who had abrogated his rights to citizens’ obedience, these thinkers sought to legitimize actions that might otherwise have been understood as riotous. Whig behavior during the Glorious Revolution was recast not as anarchical but rather as justified.<sup>30</sup>

Appearing frequently in the political rhetoric of the day, the act of rape also features prominently in the dramatic literature of this period, playing a key role in the plots of plays as diverse as Behn’s libertine comedy *The Rover*, Part I and Nathaniel Lee’s political tragedy *Lucius Junius Brutus*. In her study of theatrical representations of rape from the late seventeenth century, Jennifer Airey argues that sexual violence appears so often on the Restoration stage

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<sup>29</sup> Burnet, *An Enquiry into the Measures of Submission* . . . , 15.

<sup>30</sup> For more on the Glorious Revolution as a moment of dangerous political upheaval, see Pincus, 1688.

because the rhetoric of rape and the rhetoric of politics were so bound up with one another in this period. Showing that “Sexual violence pervades the pamphlet debates, appearing regularly in works of political propaganda and religious controversy,” Airey contends that “To understand fully the treatment of dramatic rape, we need to examine the continuities between depictions of rape onstage and the culture of sexually violent propaganda offstage.”<sup>31</sup>

Literary representations of rape had been invested with political significance since well before the Restoration—indeed, the trope of the tyrant rapist can be seen throughout the Western canon—but rapes in the drama of the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries have a uniquely partisan cast. Staged at the moment that political parties were emerging in England, Restoration and early eighteenth-century plays often inflect their acts of sexual violence with import that is either specifically Tory or specifically Whig. In her article about rape on the Exclusion Crisis-era stage, Susan Owen contrasts partisan writers’ ways of representing sexual violence in this period, pointing out that while Tory playwrights tend to use rape as a way of “demonizing rebellion,” Whigs employ it to condemn Catholicism.<sup>32</sup> In the political tragedy *Venice Preserv’d* (1682), for instance, Tory dramatist Thomas Otway maligns opposition politicians by having the leader of a mob that is plotting to destroy the Venetian government rape the play’s central female character. In the religious tragedy *The Female Prelate* (1680), by contrast, Whig playwright Elkanah Settle maligns Catholicism by having a conniving servant of the corrupt (female!) Pope rape the innocent lover of the king of Saxony.

Wife pandering is clearly different from rape—as we have already seen, the sex act on which wife pandering centers does not always take place against the woman’s will. Wife

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<sup>31</sup> Airey, *The Politics of Rape*, 5, 7.

<sup>32</sup> Owen, ““He that should guard my virtue has betrayed it,”” 62.

pandering and rape do have some key similarities, though: both test the limits of men's control over women's bodies and, in so doing, both parallel the debates about leadership and submission that were central to the day's political tensions. Like Restoration and early eighteenth-century plays that stage rapes, so dramas from the period that feature wife pandering invest this act with partisan import, setting up the marital power struggles at the center of these plays in ways that parallel the debates that were unfolding in the Tory and Whig parties during this period. Aphra Behn's wife-pandering comedy, *The Lucky Chance*, for instance, is shot through with themes that resonate with the dilemmas that Tories faced in the final years of James II's rule. The pandered wife in Behn's play, Lady Fulbank, is married to the wealthy Sir Cautious; however, at the start of *The Lucky Chance*, Lady Fulbank reveals that before she married Sir Cautious she had exchanged "sacred vows" with another man, the rakish Charles Gayman.<sup>33</sup> From the play's earliest moments, then, Lady Fulbank's loyalties are divided—does she owe allegiance to her current husband or to the man to whom she had previously been betrothed? At the moment Behn penned *The Lucky Chance*, the Tories found themselves similarly flummoxed by their obligations. The Tories, of course, had long been supporters of Stuart rule; indeed, during the Exclusion Crisis of 1681-2, it was they who had secured James's accession to power. By 1686, though, the Tories had become disenchanted with James's reign. After acceding to the throne, the Catholic James took a series of actions against Anglican divines, and the Tories' alliance with the Church of England made many conservatives begin to rethink their loyalty to the king.<sup>34</sup> In *The Lucky Chance*, Lady Fulbank ultimately bucks both of her loyalties: when, in the play's

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<sup>33</sup> Behn, *The Lucky Chance*, in Spencer, *The Rover and Other Plays*, 183-270, on 201.

<sup>34</sup> Mark Goldie shows that James II's actions against the Church of England alienated Tory members of the Anglican clergy, and that these divines began to resist his rule as early as 1686. Goldie, "The Political Thought of the Anglican Revolution."

third act, Sir Cautious and Gayman inform her that they wagered her in a bet and that she is now obliged to sleep with her former lover, Lady Fulbank lashes out at her husband and her former lover, decrying Gayman's attempt to "make me a base prostitute, a foul adulteress" and Sir Cautious's complicity in leaving "my honour thus unguarded."<sup>35</sup> By the end of *The Lucky Chance*, Lady Fulbank comes to reject both of the male authority figures to whom she had previously made vows, and this character ends the play obliged to no one.

In her reading of *The Lucky Chance*, Anita Pacheco interprets this play's favorable characterization of Lady Fulbank as an expression of Behn's partisan politics.<sup>36</sup> Placing *The Lucky Chance* in the context of Behn's other plays from the 1680s, Anita Pacheco argues convincingly that Behn's experiments with the cit-cuckolding comedy allow her to critique Stuart rule. Pacheco's interpretation of *The Lucky Chance* highlights the play's celebration of Lady Fulbank and suggests that Behn's lionization of this figure is a part of *The Lucky Chance*'s surprisingly flexible take on oaths. Whereas Tories often understood oaths as binding, Behn's favorable treatment of a woman who breaks the vows she has sworn to both her husband and her lover frames oaths "not [as] absolute but mutual and conditional upon both parties' fulfilment of their respective duties."<sup>37</sup> Ultimately, Pacheco reads Behn's treatment of Lady Fulbank as helping to "make the case for resistance to James."<sup>38</sup>

Just as *The Lucky Chance* tackles one of the key issues with which late seventeenth-century Tories were wrestling, so Fielding's wife-pandering comedy, *The Modern Husband*, takes up one of the controversies at the center of the early eighteenth-century Whig party: the

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<sup>35</sup> Behn, *The Lucky Chance*, 263, 264.

<sup>36</sup> Pacheco, "Reading Toryism."

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, 706–7.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, 707.

leadership of Robert Walpole. The forceful way that Walpole occupied his role as England's first Prime Minister in the 1720s and 1730s was the subject of much opposition writing in the early eighteenth century.<sup>39</sup> (Indeed, Fielding himself would go on to become vehemently anti-Walpole in the wake of Walpole's passage of the Licensing Act of 1737, which severely restricted the English theatre.) At the time that *The Modern Husband* was written, though, Fielding was aligned with the Whig party, and the print version of the play opens with a dedication to Walpole.<sup>40</sup> Reminding the Prime Minister of the important relationship between writers and statesmen, Fielding suggests that in exchange for Walpole's looking favorably upon *The Modern Husband*, Fielding will praise the "Humanity and Sweetness of Temper, which shine thro' all your Actions."<sup>41</sup> *The Modern Husband's* opening praise of a strong leader stands in contrast to the crisis of leadership staged in the play itself. As we have already seen, wife-pandering texts of this period often critique pandering husbands for the crimes they depict, framing men like Theophilus Cibber or characters like Dorante as greedy and callous. *The Modern Husband* also critiques its pandering husband, but it takes a different approach from the one forwarded in these other wife-pandering texts: rather than framing Mr. Modern as heartless or obsessed with wealth, this play sets up its pandering husband as problematically subservient. Characterized as ineffectual and cowering throughout, Mr. Modern is so debased that, late in the play, he tells the man who has cuckolded him, Lord Richly, that he is "the most oblig'd of all

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<sup>39</sup> Jerry C. Beasley, "Portraits of a Monster: Robert Walpole and Early English Prose Fiction," *Eighteenth-Century Studies* 14 (1981), 406-31.

<sup>40</sup> For a long time, scholars read Fielding's dedication to Walpole as a satire. In his introduction to *The Modern Husband*, though, Thomas Lockwood argues convincingly that the dedication should be read as "sincere." Lockwood, introduction to Fielding, *The Modern Husband*, 192.

<sup>41</sup> Fielding, *The Modern Husband*, 211.

your Lordship's Slaves."<sup>42</sup> Taking repeated aim at such meekness, *The Modern Husband* satirizes Mr. Modern's subservience many times over the course of the play, and in the final act Fielding goes so far as to suggest that this character's spinelessness is to blame for his wife's flaws. There, in the play's fourth-to-last scene, one of the play's normative voices, the earnest Mr. Gaywit, forwards the claim that Mrs. Modern's "Faults are more her Husband's than her own."<sup>43</sup> *The Modern Husband* does vilify its pandered wife, setting up Mrs. Modern's gambling debts as forcing her to forego her 'last stake' in order to avoid bankrupting her husband, but ultimately the play blames Mr. Modern for having allowed Mrs. Modern to land in the position she did. Inveighing against the governance its pandering husband displays, *The Modern Husband* critiques Mr. Modern's leadership as problematically weak, framing this character as too subservient to control his rowdy wife. In combination with its opening celebration of Walpole, *The Modern Husband's* negative portrayal of Mr. Modern can be understood to represent Fielding's perspective on the dilemma of leadership that the Whig party was beginning to confront, asserting the playwright's support for strong leadership in a period when Walpole's fierce hold over Parliament was being called into question.

In the Restoration and early eighteenth century, the discourse of sexual violence and the discourse of politics were deeply imbricated. From the frequency with which rape appears in the period's political texts to the political cast with which many of the day's dramatic representations of rape were inflected, the realm of sexual violence and the realm of politics were clearly bound up with one another in this moment. Written as political parties began to emerge in England, late seventeenth- and early eighteenth-century plays that feature acts of sexual violence are especially

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<sup>42</sup> Ibid., 276.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid., 282.

notable for the partisanship they express. Echoing the political propaganda that circulated in this period, dramatic representations of rape often have either a clear Tory or a clear Whig cast, their stagings of sexual violence engaging the same tropes seen in the period's political texts. As is the case with representations of rape from this period, so many portrayals of wife pandering from the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries are invested with a partisan cast. These texts' acts of wife rental often unfold in language that evokes the major issues that English politicians confronted in the so-called "First Age of Party."<sup>44</sup>

### 5.3 THE TRIUMPH OF PASSIVE OBEDIENCE: MRS. GRASPALL AS TORY HEROINE

Of the late seventeenth- and early eighteenth-century texts that feature wife pandering, *A Wife to Be Lett* stands alone in its portrayal of the wife for rent as virtuous. Early in the play, Haywood's heroine expresses desire for the man to whom her husband attempts to pander her; by the end of *A Wife to Be Lett*, though, Mrs. Graspall has won out over her lust for Sir Harry Beaumont.<sup>45</sup> I argue here that Haywood's way of characterizing Mrs. Graspall has partisan

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<sup>44</sup> Clyve Jones, ed. *Britain in the First Age of Party, 1687-1750: Essays Presented to Geoffrey Holmes* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2003).

<sup>45</sup> For much of *A Wife to Be Lett*, Mrs. Graspall is clearly attracted to Beaumont. In response to her maid's initial reference to the gallant, Mrs. Graspall "blushes" (174); left alone on stage at the end of the same scene, Mrs. Graspall deems Beaumont a man "most form'd to charm" (174); and when Mrs. Graspall appears on stage again in the middle of the play's second act, she complains aloud that thoughts of Beaumont prevent her from reading, bemoaning that she sees "*Beaumont . . . in ev'ry Line – Beaumont in all the Volume*" (180-1). Interestingly, Ann Minton's 1802 adaptation of *A Wife to Be Lett* excises all of the evidence of this affection. In Minton's adaptation, Beaumont is a less gallant character than he is in Haywood's original, and Mrs. Graspall's responses to Beaumont are gone, including her blush, her soliloquy, and her

implications. When the Tory party emerged during the Exclusion Crisis, it was grounded in the doctrine of passive obedience, which mandated that subjects obey their leaders in all but the most extreme scenarios.<sup>46</sup> By the early eighteenth century, though, the Tories' commitment to passive obedience had become more complicated. Exiled from power in the wake of the accession of George I and their loss in the 1714 parliamentary elections, the Tory party found itself in the political minority for much of the early eighteenth century. Such a position required the Tories to balance their heritage of obedience with the political exigency of resistance. In *A Wife to Be Lett*, Haywood stages a conundrum that parallels the one faced by the Tories of this period: when Mr. Graspall commands Mrs. Graspall to sleep with another man, she must disobey him, but such an act violates the obedience to which this character has long been dedicated. Haywood's heroine ultimately responds to such a dilemma by striking a careful balance between subservience and resistance. Managing to continue abiding by the doctrine of passive obedience even as she evades her husband's command to sleep with another man, Mrs. Graspall comes to embody one of the key principles of early eighteenth-century Toryism, becoming a model for members of the party faithful.

From Mr. and Mrs. Graspall's first conversation about wife pandering, Haywood hints at the political resonance of this act. Preparing to broach the idea that Mrs. Graspall allow herself to be rented, Mr. Graspall asserts several times the deference that he expects from his wife, outlining a vision of spousal subservience that is decidedly absolutist in form. In his opening

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scene of reading. In the effort to make Mrs. Graspall an appropriate heroine for nineteenth-century audiences, Minton seems to have removed any evidence that this character was not virtuous. Ann Minton, *The comedy of A wife to be lett, or, The miser cured: compressed into two acts* (London: A. Seale, 1802).

<sup>46</sup> For a thorough description of passive obedience, see Corrinne Harol, "The Passion of Oroonoko: Passive Obedience, The Royal Slave, and Aphra Behn's Baroque Realism," *English Literary History* 79 (2012), 447-75.

line in the play, Mr. Graspall declares that “the Wife is oblig’d to obey the Commands, and study the Interest of her Husband” (190). Elaborating on such a claim, Mr. Graspall explains that “I mention Obedience to a Husband . . . that it being fresh in thy Memory, thou might’st not boggle at any thing which tends to the enriching thy Husband” (190). And a bit later in this scene, just before Mr. Graspall makes his wife aware of his intention to rent her, he again references the obedience he understands his wife to owe him: “remember that Obedience to a Husband ought to be the *Primum Mobile* in a Woman” (191).

In the eighteenth century, the term ‘obedience’ had a strong political valence. Of course, ‘obedience’ also had marital resonance in this period (the wifely vow “to obey” had been a part of the English Book of Common Prayer since the book’s initial publication in 1549).<sup>47</sup> But the principle of passive obedience, which had emerged in tandem with the Church of England, had been a central tenet of English politics from the Reformation through the early seventeenth century, and it remained a contested concept in England until well into the eighteenth century. The doctrine of passive obedience became particularly important to Tories in the lead-up to the Exclusion Crisis. Stemming from the idea that the Bible mandated complete subservience to sovereign authority, the doctrine of passive obedience was grounded “upon the steady Belief of the Subject’s Obligation to an Absolute, and Unconditional Obedience to the Supream Power, in all Things Lawful and the utter Illegality of Resistance upon any Pretence whatsoever.”<sup>48</sup> The doctrine thus permitted disobedience only if rulers’ commands were illegal. In the words of a passage quoted in the first paragraph of Anglican divine Abednego Seller’s *The History of*

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<sup>47</sup> Church of England, *The Boke of the Common Praier . . .* (1549), *Early English Books Online* (accessed 29 August 2012).

<sup>48</sup> Henry Sacheverell, “The Perils of False Brethren, both in Church, and State” (London: 1709), *Eighteenth Century Collections Online* (accessed 13 February 2013), 8.

*Passive Obedience since the Reformation: "it is the duty of every Christian, in things lawful, actively to obey his Superior; in things unlawful, to suffer rather than obey, and in any case, or upon any pretence whatsoever not to resist."*<sup>49</sup>

The understanding of citizens' obligations to their rulers that underlay the doctrine of passive obedience differed from the conceptions of the relationship between subject and monarch that were at work in Catholic and conservative Protestant ideology, and during the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries, the concept of passive obedience formed a key part of English national identity, holding widespread support among the English populace.<sup>50</sup> By the late seventeenth century, though, the doctrine's dominance had begun to wane. During the Exclusion Crisis of 1679-81, the Tories drew on the concept of passive obedience in their efforts to keep the Duke of York in the line of succession. Exclusion Crisis-era Whigs, by contrast, rejected the Tory argument that resisting Stuart rule was tantamount to opposing God himself, and they instead came to embrace a more moderate version of the resistance theory that Parliamentarians had forwarded during the Civil War.<sup>51</sup> Following James's accession to the throne, support for passive obedience declined. In the late 1680s, Tories' disillusionment with the king's actions grew and Whigs' modified resistance theory came to play an increasingly important role in

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<sup>49</sup> Abednego Seller, *The History of Passive Obedience since the Reformation* (Amsterdam: Theodore Johnson, 1689), *Early English Books Online* (accessed 9 May 2013), n. p.

<sup>50</sup> Richard L. Greaves shows that while some English people called political obedience into question during the reign of Mary Tudor, political consensus about the doctrine returned during the rule of Elizabeth I. Richard L. Greaves, "Concepts of Political Obedience in Late Tudor England: Conflicting Perspectives," *Journal of British Studies* 22 (1982), 23-34.

<sup>51</sup> For more on the doctrine of passive obedience, as well as John Milton's role in laying the groundwork for the Whig rejection of it, see George Sensabaugh, "Milton and the Doctrine of Passive Obedience," *Huntington Library Quarterly* 13 (1949), 19-54. For more on Whig resistance theory, see Lois G. Schworer, "The Right to Resist: Whig Resistance Theory, 1688 to 1694," *Political Discourse in Early Modern Britain* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), eds. Nicholas Phillipson and Quentin Skinner, 232-52.

English politics.<sup>52</sup> By the end of the seventeenth century, a moderate form of resistance theory had achieved hegemonic status in England, troubling the vaunted position that passive obedience had previously held.

In the early years of the eighteenth century, passive obedience experienced a brief resurgence, again coming to play a key role in Tory politics.<sup>53</sup> In 1709, Anglican minister Doctor Henry Sacheverell espoused the principle in his sermon “The Perils of False Brethren.”<sup>54</sup> Promptly indicted by Parliament Whigs, Sacheverell was accused of undermining the Glorious Revolution and was subjected to a trial in Parliament. The Whigs had expected Sacheverell’s trial to drum up public support for their party, but in the end, the party that benefitted from the Sacheverell affair was the Tories. Public attitudes toward the doctor proved remarkably favorable, and protests opposing his indictment were widespread. Ultimately, public pressure on Parliament led the doctor to receive a shorter-than-expected jail sentence, and the Tories went on to channel the public’s response to the trial into success at the ballot box. In 1710, the Tory party won parliamentary elections, and from 1710 to 1714, they held a majority in both Parliament and Anne’s cabinet. So mainstream did the doctrine of passive obedience become

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<sup>52</sup> Melinda Zook shows that John Locke’s political philosophy was shaped by Whig rhetoric from the Exclusion Crisis. Julia Rudolph demonstrates that the Whigs who set in motion the events of the Glorious Revolution also drew on the resistance theory of this period. Zook, *Radical Whigs and Conspiratorial Politics in Late Stuart England* (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1999); Rudolph, *Revolution by Degrees*.

<sup>53</sup> Arthur Mainwaring dated the resurgence of popular commitment to passive obedience in England to 1704-5. Mainwaring, *Four Letters to a Friend in Great Britain* (1710), 4, as quoted in Geoffrey Holmes, *The Trial of Doctor Sacheverell*, (London: Eyre Methuen, 1973), 33.

<sup>54</sup> The most thorough treatment of the Sacheverell affair is Holmes, *The Trial of Doctor Sacheverell*.

during these years that in the 1710s even moderate Tories like George Berkeley came to advocate the doctrine publicly.<sup>55</sup>

In *A Wife to Be Lett*, Mrs. Graspall gives voice to a vision of wifely obligation that aligns with the doctrine of passive obedience. At first, Mrs. Graspall seems to agree with her husband's more absolutist conception of obedience; indeed, in her second line in the couple's first conversation about pandering, Mrs. Graspall vows to "answer [her husband's commands] with a ready Compliance" (190). As the pair's discussion of wife pandering unfolds, however, Mrs. Graspall adds qualifications to the obedience that she is willing to provide her husband. When Mr. Graspall declares his hope that his wife "would'st not scruple any thing for thy old Lovy," Mrs. Graspall pushes back against her husband's sovereignty: "I hope you can command me nothing I can make a Scruple of obeying you in" (191). And when Mr. Graspall advises Mrs. Graspall that she "had best consent quietly to what I desire, or I shall make you," this character asserts more clearly the boundaries she intends to place on her obedience: "No Husband's Power extends to force the Execution of unlawful Commands" (192). Over the course of the Graspalls' first conversation about wife pandering, then, Mrs. Graspall delimits the obedience she vows to pay her husband. That the boundaries she sets are in keeping with the doctrine of passive obedience is evinced by her words' echo of the definition of passive obedience that Abednego Seller cited in the preface to his *History*. Just as that passage claims that adherents of passive obedience must act in accordance with their leaders' instructions except "*in things unlawful, [when they may] suffer rather than obey,*" so Mrs. Graspall asserts that she will obey her husband unless the "Commands" he makes of her are "unlawful."

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<sup>55</sup> For more on Berkeley's "Passive Obedience," see G. J. Warnock, "On Passive Obedience," *History of European Ideas* 7 (1986), 555-62.

Mrs. Graspall is not the only character in *A Wife to Be Lett* whose actions align with the doctrine of passive obedience. The cousins Marilla and Celemena, around whom the play's subplot centers, also behave in a manner in keeping with this principle. At the beginning of the second act of *A Wife to Be Lett*, the audience learns that the cousins have been pledged to marry men that they do not love. Just before he died, Marilla's father contracted her to the wealthy Toywell; and prior to the start of the play, Celemena's father pledged her to the country squire Sneaksby, believing that Sneaksby's wealth "will set you on a foot with the Nobility" (179). *A Wife to Be Lett* makes it clear that Toywell and Sneaksby will make terrible husbands—Toywell is "the greatest Fop in Nature" (169) and Sneaksby a "Blockhead" (170)—but neither Marilla nor Celemena attempts to undo her engagement. In the cousins' opening scene, Marilla tells Celemena that "the religious Observance I owe to the Vow I made my dying Father, leaves me no choice" (177), and Celemena declares to her father that "my Duty obliges me not to dispute with your Commands" (179).<sup>56</sup> Even while these women pledge obedience to their fathers, though, they manage to end *A Wife to Be Lett* engaged to the men they desire: Marilla concludes the play with the affable Courtly, and Celemena ends Haywood's text betrothed to Gaylove. Crucially, the schemes that lead to these engagements are brought about by Marilla and Celemena's male paramours, rather than by the women themselves: Gaylove and Courtly start the rumor about Marilla's poverty that causes Toywell to break off his and Marilla's engagement; and Gaylove and Courtly also launch the plot against Sneaksby and Celemena's union, plying the squire with liquor so that Celemena's father will stumble upon him in bed with a maid. That it is Gaylove and Courtly who carry out these schemes allows Marilla and

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<sup>56</sup> Celemena hints that she may go behind her father's back to undo his plans—in an aside she says that she "may find some way to evade [her father's wishes]" (179)—but she does not ultimately carry out such a plot.

Celemena to maintain their subservience to their fathers throughout the text. Standing poised to suffer in marriages they do not want rather than disobeying the fathers who have consigned them to these marriages, Marilla and Celemena exemplify the doctrine of passive obedience. In rewarding these women for their compliance, rescuing them from the marriages they fear and rewarding them with the men they love, *A Wife to Be Lett* evinces its support for passive obedience.

The Tories' political success in the final years of Anne's reign was short-lived. Manipulated by the Whigs who wielded influence over his advisers, George I proscribed the Tories from his ministry when he acceded to the throne in 1714, and in the following year, the party was defeated at the polls in the wake of the Jacobite rebellion of 1715.<sup>57</sup> That the Whig majority that prevailed in the election of 1715 went on to pass a series of gerrymandering bills that kept the Tories in the political minority meant that the party was forced into a position of long-term subordination.<sup>58</sup> The Tory party did not regain majority rule in Parliament until 1745.

The Tories' status as political minority forced them to confront an ideological conundrum. On the one hand, the party's long-term commitment to the doctrine of passive obedience compelled its members to be subservient to political authority. On the other hand, the Tories' minority position in both Parliament and George's ministry set them up in a position of resistance vis-à-vis Whig and Hanoverian hegemony. In her definitive account of the Tory party during this period, Linda Colley shows that the Tory party responded to this conundrum by doubling down on the conservative principles in which it had long been grounded. Asserting that

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<sup>57</sup> Not all Tories were Jacobites, but anxieties about Jacobitism shaped the public response to Tories for much of the early eighteenth century.

<sup>58</sup> For a helpful history of English political parties, see Hill, *The Early Parties and Politics in Britain*.

the Tories retained a distinct political identity throughout their proscription from George's ministry, Colley shows that while the Tories did adopt certain more liberal beliefs, the party remained committed to the doctrines that had defined it since its inception: "What is striking about tory political argument in the late seventeenth and eighteenth centuries is its capacity to adapt to dynastic and parliamentary flux while still retaining traditional emphases."<sup>59</sup> In Colley's estimation, the Tories responded to proscription not by turning to resistance, but rather by remaining grounded in their conservative principles, continuing to adhere to doctrines—like passive obedience—that had long played a role in their identity as a party.

Like early eighteenth-century Tories, so Mrs. Graspall finds herself in a position that tests her commitment to conservative principles. When, in the play's third act, Mr. Graspall orders his wife to sleep with Sir Harry Beaumont, allowing the gallant "free Ingress, Egress and Regress" to her body, Mrs. Graspall seems as though she will need to sacrifice either her chastity or her obedience (192). In the end, though, Mrs. Graspall manages to preserve both of these things. That *A Wife to Be Lett* emphasizes the obedient nature of Mrs. Graspall's actions in the play—even when those actions are, in fact, resistant—evinces this text's support for passive obedience.

In the final scene of *A Wife to Be Lett*, Mrs. Graspall performs an act of resistance. After assembling all of the play's characters in the Graspall home, Mrs. Graspall stages an "Entertainment" (207) that, in addition to revealing a number of other key plot points, exposes Mr. Graspall's attempt to pander her, making clear to all present that her husband tried to "let me out to Hire, and forc'd my trembling Vertue to obey" (210). Designed to humiliate Mr. Graspall so that he will retract his attempt to pander her, Mrs. Graspall's scheme serves its intended

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<sup>59</sup> Colley, *In Defiance of Oligarchy*, 115.

function. By the end of the scene, Mr. Graspall has publicly declared regret for his attempt to rent out his wife to Sir Harry Beaumont, and he avers when Mrs. Graspall asserts “You wou’d not tempt me then, were it again to do” (210). Mrs. Graspall’s actions in this sequence are clearly defiant; however, *A Wife to Be Lett* works to distance its heroine from the idea that the scheme she carried out was resistant. Over the course of the play’s final scene, for instance, Haywood’s heroine takes no credit for the plot she hatched. Once Mrs. Graspall’s scheme has been exposed, it is not Mrs. Graspall, but rather Sir Harry Beaumont, who explains to Mr. Graspall the goal of the scheme: “this Plot was laid on purpose to cure you, if ’twas possible, of that covetous, sordid Disposition, which has ever been the Blot of your Character” (211).<sup>60</sup> And it is also Beaumont, not Mrs. Graspall, who tells Mr. Graspall how he should achieve his wife’s forgiveness, directing the greedy husband to “admire [Mrs. Graspall’s] Vertues, and entreat her Pardon” (211). *A Wife to Be Lett* further dissociates Mrs. Graspall from the spirit of resistance by having this character refuse the power over her husband that her plot allows her. In his final line in the play, Mr. Graspall gets down on his knees and pleads with his wife, “*Pudsy*, dear *Pudsy*, can’st thou forgive me” (211). Mrs. Graspall, though, rejects the position of superiority in which such a gesture places her. Commanding her husband to get up and reassume his dominant place in their marriage, Mrs. Graspall concludes the play by framing her actions in a manner that is in keeping with the doctrine of passive obedience: “Rise, Sir, this is not a Posture for a Husband—I form’d this Design only to make you worthy of that Name, and shall ever

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<sup>60</sup> That Beaumont describes the scheme that Mrs. Graspall hatched in passive voice, noting that the “Plot *was laid*” rather than that Mrs. Graspall laid it, only further distances Haywood’s heroine from the resistant plan that she laid.

make it my Study to prove myself a most obedient Wife” (211).<sup>61</sup> Refusing credit for the clever scheme she has carried out and renouncing the power over her husband that such a plot affords her, Mrs. Graspall ends *A Wife to Be Lett* readily submitting to Mr. Graspall’s rule.<sup>62</sup> Framing Mrs. Graspall’s actions as something other than out-and-out resistance, *A Wife to Be Lett* instead emphasizes the subservient nature that underlies this character’s behaviors, ultimately figuring this character as the very model of obedience.

*A Wife to Be Lett* continues its effort to frame Mrs. Graspall as passively obedient in its epilogue (which, in the play’s original casting, was delivered by Haywood herself). Following a summary of the play’s actions, the epilogue turns, in its second stanza, to Mrs. Graspall herself. Just before it does so, however, the epilogue makes a comment about insubordinate wives:

Women, *however stirring in their Way,*  
*Are ne’er too active, when they move t’obey;*  
*They rather would (if I can understand ’em)*  
*Not do at all – than do as Spouse commands ’em.* (213)

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<sup>61</sup> The plots of *The Lucky Chance* and *A Wife to Be Lett* are, in many ways, similar; however, there is a revealing difference in these plays’ final moments. Just after Sir Cautious Fulbank informs his wife of his intention to rent her, he regrets his decision and tries to take it back, attempting to atone for his attempt at pandering by falling to his knees and begging Lady Fulbank for forgiveness. Lady Fulbank ultimately rejects such a ploy: when Sir Cautious implores his wife to “Hold, oh hold, my dear,” Lady Fulbank responds by instructing him to “Stand off; I do abhor thee,” and in her next line, she tells him to “Rise, ’tis in vain you kneel” (265). That Lady Fulbank remains impassive to her husband’s kneeling while Mrs. Graspall acquiesces instantly to hers evinces the key distinction between the heroines of Behn’s and Haywood’s wife-pandering comedies.

<sup>62</sup> That *A Wife to Be Lett* seeks to de-emphasize the rebellious nature of Mrs. Graspall’s actions is also suggested by the image on the frontispiece of the play’s early print editions. Featuring two women talking to a man while another man looks on from a different room, this cover does not feature the play’s final scene (which certainly would have been its most memorable sequence), but rather its penultimate scene, in which Mrs. Graspall exposes Amadea’s true identity to Beaumont. The second-to-last scene of *A Wife to Be Lett* is not particularly important to the play’s central plot; showcasing it rather than the final scene further downplays the significance of Mrs. Graspall’s act of resistance, displacing the plot she so carefully hatched from the cover of Haywood’s comedy.

Framing wives' resistance to their husbands as acts of not-doing, the epilogue suggests that women respond to their husbands' "*commands*" by being "*ne'er too active*" and by "*Not do[ing]* at all" what has been requested of them. Such a characterization sets up wives' actions as something other than defiance, positioning women's "stirring" against their husbands as gestures of non-compliance rather than as actions of insubordination. That the epilogue's effort to distance wives from the practice of resistance comes just as it stands poised to pivot to Mrs. Graspall links *A Wife to Be Lett*'s heroine to this tradition of wifely not-doing. Just as the closing scene of *A Wife to Be Lett* downplays the agency Mrs. Graspall displayed in plotting against Mr. Graspall, so the play's epilogue emphasizes the passivity of wifely defiance, characterizing women's acts of marital rebellion as "*Not do[ing]*" rather than active resistance.

Like the Tory party of the early eighteenth century, so the heroine of *A Wife to Be Lett* finds herself in a position that requires her both to obey and to resist. Ultimately, Mrs. Graspall responds to this conundrum in a way that remains true to the doctrine of passive obedience, disobeying the illicit command her husband makes of her but making it clear that she intends to remain subservient to him. That *A Wife to Be Lett* works so carefully to frame Mrs. Graspall's actions as obedient rather than resistant evinces this play's effort to characterize its heroine in ways that would resonate with the members of the Tory faithful. Managing the contradictory injunctions to obey and to resist, Mrs. Graspall embodies a way of responding to the ideological tension that Tories of the period faced, exemplifying how to live in a manner that was in keeping with party principles.

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The act of wife pandering appears with some frequency in eighteenth-century literary and judicial records, and in many of these documents pandered wives are framed as desiring.

Previous scholarship on Restoration and early eighteenth-century depictions of sexual violence has made clear the political implications of representations of rape and incest; however, this work has not previously taken up the politics of wife pandering. In their pointed staging of dilemmas of consent and resistance, though, representations of wife pandering do have partisan implications. Earlier work on *A Wife to Be Lett* has interpreted this play's treatment of wife pandering as an outgrowth of Haywood's feminism. Such readings ignore the play's repeated emphasis on Mrs. Graspall's obedience, however. Placing Haywood's only comedy in its partisan context allows for a more nuanced understanding of this play and brings to light the Tory resonance of its heroine, teasing out her way of modeling the doctrine of passive obedience.

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