

Performing Libertinism in Charles II's Court

Politics, Drama, Sexuality

J. Webster

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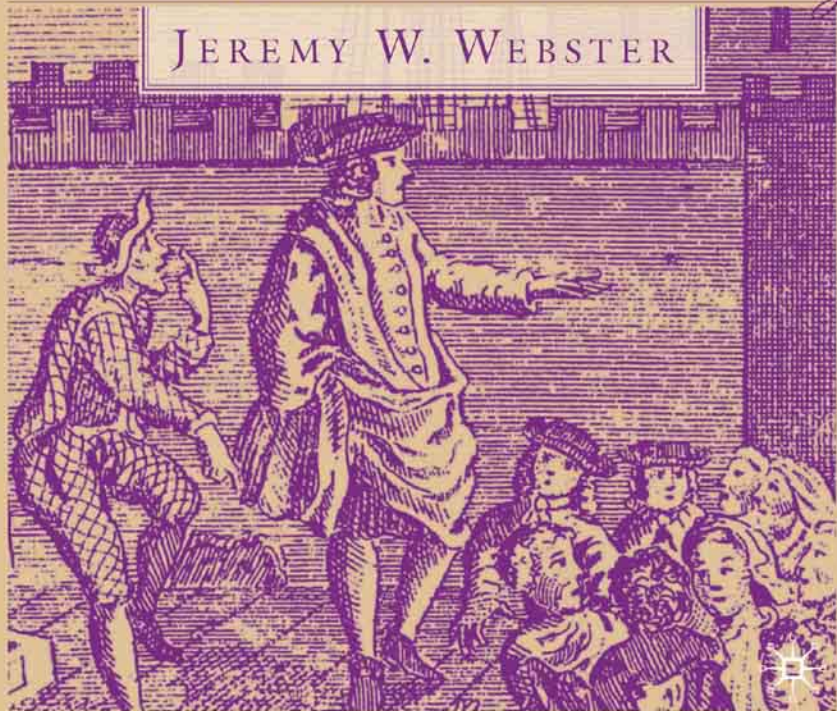
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JEREMY W. WEBSTER



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For Paul

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CHAPTER 1



PERFORMING LIBERTINISM: AN INTRODUCTION

*Leave this gawdy gilded Stage,
From custome more than use frequented
Where fooles of either sex and age
Crowd to see themselves presented!
To loves Theatre the Bed
Youth and beauty fly together
And Act so well it may be said
The Lawrell there was due to either.
Twixt strifes of Love and war the difference Lies in this
When neither overcomes Loves triumph greater is.*

—John Wilmot, earl of Rochester,
The Works of John Wilmot.

This amatory poem's¹ conceit of a stage performance encapsulates a key feature of Restoration libertinism: a reputed skepticism of public institutions combined with a need for public attention. Like many of Rochester's poems, this short lyric enacts the typically private act of a persona's attempt to seduce a woman. Calling on his mistress to leave the "gawdy gilded Stage" of court life crowded by "fooles of either sex and age" and retreat with him to the private sphere of "loves Theatre the Bed," Rochester's persona maintains that their play will be a private performance for their own enjoyment where "neither overcomes," making their pleasure all the "greater." Despite its plea to "Leave [the] gawdy gilded Stage" of public life, this poem, like others written by Rochester, was probably circulated among his friends and

other members of Charles II's court, making this call for private love a public document of his sexual and aesthetic abilities. Consequently, this poem stands as a public testament to the poet's desire, a return to that stage while wearing the laurel of a successful lyric poem.

The central tension in this poem between public performance and private enjoyment lies at the heart of Restoration libertinism as it was recorded in the literary works of Rochester, Sir Charles Sedley, Sir George Etherege, William Wycherley, and George Villiers, duke of Buckingham. Above all else, these libertines were public performers of private pursuits. Throughout Charles II's reign, the libertine was a familiar figure as a sexual adventurer and as a radical questioner of social, political, and moral values. Not only was the libertine a dominant figure in the poems and plays of the Restoration period, but he was also a frequent subject of conversation in the alehouses and coffee shops of London, in the corridors of Whitehall, and in the drawing rooms of country houses. Thus, the libertine was constantly performing for an audience—either in actual deed or in reported tale. As this poem suggests, the libertines in Charles II's court were also skeptical of public life and the ability and willingness of England's public institutions to indulge, protect, and further their private joys. Indeed, the libertine's pursuit of pleasure often placed him at odds with England's many figures of traditional authority: London's constables; women's husbands, fathers, and employers; and England's king and his ministers. Like Rochester's poetic persona, the libertine often called upon one lover or another to retreat to love's theater and to act its play with him, only to return to the stage of public life shortly thereafter to entertain his friends and king with the story of successful seduction. Libertines thus performed traditionally secretive acts—excessive drinking, carnality, sodomy, sedition, assault, and sacrilege—in the public sphere in a variety of ways.

On the gaudy gilded stage of Charles II's court, the libertines performed drunken scenes of transgressive love and sex. I am not the first scholar to maintain that libertinism is best studied as a series of public performances—James Turner suggests, for example, that “libertinism was not so much a philosophy as a set of performances, and its defining ‘properties’ . . . are better understood as theatrical props than as precise attributes” and Vincent Quinn points out that “the theater's place in libertine culture suggests . . . its playful, performative qualities.” But previous studies of Restoration libertinism use the theater as a metaphor for quickly explaining why this movement was not a philosophical one. Unlike these studies, this book takes the theatrical metaphor as its central concern. It analyzes the performative

nature of libertinism as its defining constitutive element and traces its consequences for English politics, drama, and sexuality. Where Turner and Quinn see libertine performances in terms of “theatrical props” and “scandalous roles,” this book argues that libertinism was performed in at least three ways: the libertines were actors who captivated spectators with their scandalous behavior, the libertines were playwrights who embodied their own reputations in their libertine protagonists, and, through their activities and plays, the libertines were themselves texts to be analyzed, interpreted, and evaluated.² In other words, libertines enacted private acts in public. They based their libertine protagonists, such as Horner, Dorimant, and Manly, on these reputed acts; as a result of their lived and theatrical visibility, these men became celebrities available for public evaluation and interpretation. As we shall see, libertinism’s blurring of public and private acts challenged the political strategies of Charles and many of his ministers, helped to shape the direction of Restoration drama, and expanded the possible sexual roles and identities available to late-seventeenth-century men and women.

This performance-based paradigm raises several questions that are yet to be adequately addressed in scholarship on libertinism, Restoration literature, or seventeenth-century history. What does it mean that libertinism was a series of performances, beyond suggesting that libertines (mis)behaved publicly and purposefully? What was the relationship between libertinism and the Restoration theater? How did the theater serve as a model for libertine behavior? Why did libertines adopt performance as a model for their activities? Where did it get them culturally and politically? Is there evidence that the libertines understood their behavior as in some sense instantiating their identities as libertines? And finally, what were the effects of these performances, that is, why do the answers to these questions matter? This introductory chapter begins sketching out my answers to these questions by placing libertine performances within the contexts of the libertine fraternity in Charles II’s court, Stuart ideology, and the theatricality of Restoration politics.

LIBERTINE PERFORMANCES

Public performance of transgressive activities was at the heart of what it meant to be a libertine. One such public performance involving Sir Charles Sedley is arguably the most infamous of Samuel Pepys’s accounts of libertine activity in the early 1660s. He reports that on June 16, 1663, Sedley, accompanied by Charles Sackville, Lord

Buckhurst, and Sir Thomas Ogle, dined at the Cock Inn. During their meal, Sedley was seen

coming in open day into the Balcone and show[ing] his nakedness—acting all the postures of lust and buggery that could be imagined, and abusing of scripture and, as it were, from thence preaching a Mountebanke sermon from that pulpitt, saying that there he hath to sell such a powder as should make all the cunts in town run after him—a thousand people standing underneath to see and hear him.

And that being done, he took a glass of wine and washed his prick in it and then drank it off; and then took another and drank the King's health.³

As a performance of lust, buggery, sacrilege, and sedition, this episode encapsulates many of the characteristics of libertinism in and around the court of Charles II. Pranks such as “acting all the postures of lust and buggery that could be imagined” fueled contemporary perceptions of libertines as sexual revelers who were always ready to scandalize the general populace. And scandalized they were: offended at Sedley's behavior, the passersby in the street rushed the tavern's door, but when its locks prevented their entrance, he and his friends pelted them with empty wine bottles.

Scholars have examined this and similar activities by members of the libertine circle in terms of “[w]hat Milton called the ‘injury and outrage’ of the privileged classes,” as Turner writes. Indeed, much of the scholarship on Restoration libertinism emphasizes what George Haggerty calls “the breathtakingly clear power dynamics at work in the so-called libertine ethos.” Michael Mangan offers a typical definition of the Restoration rake: “the sexually predatory male, whose goal is to have as many affairs in as short a time as possible, and who plays off the illicitness of the liaison against his own reputation for sexual conquest.” In this view, libertines flaunt “a deliberately provocative male self-fashioning that depends on a conventional misogynous understanding of hierarchical relations between the sexes,” to borrow Harold Weber's words. This vision of libertinism as class and gender violence builds on previous work on the philosophical traditions on which libertines based their ideas and actions. One of the first scholars to articulate these underpinnings was Dale Underwood, who argues that libertinism was less a “philosophic system” than a “way of life” that drew heavily on Machiavellian and Hobbesian concepts of the natural man. As he explains,

There is at least an implied recognition by most seventeenth-century libertines that the stress upon freedom of indulgence led in actuality to

a state of “war” much like that which characterized the natural man for Machiavelli and Hobbes. The more idealistically minded might tend to skirt this consequence of “liberty.” But the Restoration libertine, particularly as we shall find him in the comedy of manners, is always fully and ironically aware of this reality. He insists, in fact, upon man as naturally self-seeking in motivation and ruthless in his means.

While Underwood emphasizes the rake’s ironic self-awareness of humankind’s selfish pursuit of liberty, more recent scholars have studied the ways in which the libertine’s “freedom of indulgence” depended on the violence and oppression inherent to Machiavellian and Hobbesian notions of life as “war.” Warren Chernaik, for example, maintains that “the ideology of libertinism can justify oppression in the name of freedom, liberating the will to possess and destroy.” Placing libertine performances in the context of “popular forms of festive violence,” James Turner faults Rochester and his fellow libertines for claiming the freedom to enact the lawlessness associated with the pornographic underworld “without surrendering upper-class identity.” These scholars concur with Haggerty that the libertines’ activities served to preserve the privileges of their elite status “that the chief license that these careless aristocrats seek is sexual.” As Anna Bryson maintains, the rake’s “cynicism was a gesture of status and hence, perversely, reasserted that status in the very act of sneering at the hypocrisy of the language which officially supported it. No radical, he viewed civil forms and codes not as an obstacle to humanity, but as the mask of the eternally brutish and selfish character of mankind whose methods might be sophisticated by ‘civil’ society but whose basic aims could not be transformed within it.”⁴

These scholars are certainly right to see libertine performances such as Sedley’s as expressions of the rakes’ elite aristocratic privilege: These men could enact such performances of sacrilege and sedition precisely *because* they were elite intimates of the king. I believe, however, that there are two problems with this stress on libertinism as primarily socio-cultural violence. First, it de-emphasizes Underwood’s recognition that “most seventeenth-century libertines” *themselves* were “fully and ironically aware” that “freedom of indulgence led in actuality to a state of ‘war.’” As we will see throughout this book, the plays written by libertines in Charles II’s court were often concerned with this problem and, rather than ignoring the social consequences of their acts and writings, often foregrounded these consequences as part of their sociopolitical agenda. Second, I also disagree with the dismissal of a radical component to Restoration libertinism. One of the stated

aims of Turner's *Libertines and Radicals in Early Modern England*, for example, is to "challenge the liberationist claim of libertinism, since its doctrine of sexual freedom is always complicated by the politics of class and gender." While libertine ideology was indeed "complicated" by the rakes' enjoyment of the privileges of aristocratic masculinity, libertinism was not simply "predatory and misogynistic," as Bryson claims.⁵ Indeed, the only way to show just how "complicated" Restoration libertinism truly was is to elaborate fully both its embracing of aristocratic male privilege at the expense of other classes and women *and* its radical challenge to the patriarchal system upon which that privilege was based. While scholars such as Turner, Bryson, Chernaik, and others have effectively demonstrated the former aspect of libertinism, this book articulates the latter more fully.

At issue here is the definition of "radicalism," a hotly contested term among historians for the better part of the last two decades. J. C. Davis, for example, insists that radicalism involves an attempt "in theory or practice to subvert the status quo and replace it, rather than simply to improve or amend it." Richard Greaves similarly restricts radicalism "to those who espoused active disobedience of the law, particularly in the form of such activities as rebellion, assassination, the publication of allegedly seditious literature, and the use of violence to prevent legally constituted authorities from enforcing the law." Other historians take a broader view. Gary S. de Krey, for instance, argues that the exclusionist elements in the late 1670s

advanced an ideological rationale for their political actions which challenged the Restoration order in city, state and church. This challenge arose from the London Whigs' popular understanding of civic government and electoral processes. City Whigs based these understandings upon right rather than upon prescription, and they derived the institutions and the processes of London government from custom rather than from the crown. Furthermore, both in their words and in their deeds, London exclusionists sanctioned resistance to magistrates whose actions showed disagreement with these premises.⁶

Growing out of an emphasis on the debates of the period on whether power rested in and flowed from the monarch to the people through the Parliament or from the people through the Parliament to the monarch, this alternative definition of radicalism accentuates a belief in the electoral processes (and thus the Parliament as the seat of governmental power rather than the crown), its roots in custom and common law over monarchical prerogative, and its active and varied resistance to opposing viewpoints.

In evaluating the two sides of this debate, Lotte Mulligan and Judith Richards note that the definitions of radicalism that require wholesale structural changes are “theoretically as well as practically unachievable” in the seventeenth century. They maintain that even in times of great social and political upheaval, seventeenth-century discussions of social and political changes were “confined within a linguistic framework that both provided scope for many alternative programs and set the limits within which any could be articulated.” In other words, on a rhetorical level, actual subversion of political ideology was impossible, since the debate itself was always grounded in already available political discourses. To demonstrate this thesis, Mulligan and Richards analyze attitudes of seventeenth-century reformers toward poverty. Among their conclusions, Mulligan and Richards find that even the most “radical” reformers in the period—ones who all scholars agree were “radical”—nevertheless retained their culture’s patriarchal model of familial and societal organization based on “hierarchical relations between the sexes.” It should not be surprising, therefore, that the libertines in Charles II’s court likewise embraced many aspects of patriarchy as the foundation of their vision for a better society. These libertines clearly were neither feminists nor levelers. But they, like their nonconformist contemporaries, were radical in their challenge to “Restoration order in city, state, and church.” In fact, Christopher Hill argues that Rochester should be seen as a “radical royalist” and that the sexual libertinism of the 1670s has much in common with some of the radical religious sects of the 1640s and 1650s, most notably the Ranters. Summing up Hill’s argument, Sarah Ellenzweig writes, “the Ranters not only glorified sex and sinful behavior as evidence of grace but also denied the immortality of the soul and looked forward to the skeptical antiscritpturism that became the distinctive mark of the rake’s heterodoxy twenty years later.”⁷

Analyzing the performative nature of libertinism will help us see its radicalism more clearly. Sedley’s performance at the Cock Inn functions much like performance art today, although there are obvious limits to this analogy. Roselee Goldberg notes that “By its very nature, performance defies precise or easy definition beyond the simple declaration that it is live art by artists.” Although performance may not be defined easily as an art form, its general parameters are well known. As Goldberg explains

Performance has been a way of appealing directly to a large public, as well as shocking audiences into reassessing their own notions of art and its relation to culture. . . . The work may be presented solo or with

a group, with lighting, music or visuals made by the performance artist him [*sic*] or herself, or in collaboration, and performed in places ranging from an art gallery or museum to an “alternative space,” a theatre, café, bar, or street corner. Unlike the theatre, the performer *is* the artist, seldom a character like an actor, and the content rarely follows a traditional plot or narrative. The performance might be a series of intimate gestures or large-scale visual theatre, lasting from a few minutes to many hours; it might be performed only once or repeated several times, with or without a prepared script, spontaneously improvised, or rehearsed over many months.

Although most observers would initially remark that performance art is a twentieth-century phenomenon and, therefore, unrelated to seventeenth-century libertinism, Goldberg maintains that there is a history of this kind of performance that includes medieval passion plays, a 1598 mock naval battle, royal progresses, and public spectacles. Based on these examples, she claims that performance art “can be esoteric, shamanistic, instructive, provocative or entertaining.”⁸

Sedley’s debauchery anticipates many of these elements of performance art. He spontaneously casts himself as an actor enacting rather conventional “postures,” mimicking several kinds of performance, including ministers preaching sermons, street vendors hawking their wares, priests administering the sacrament, and revelers drinking toasts. He also performs identifiable sexual acts to shock the audience. As I argue later in this chapter, one of the goals of this improvisation was to cause the audience to reassess their notions of social mores. And finally, Sedley performs his drunken acts on the stage of a tavern balcony before an audience of “a thousand people.” While this number seems incredible, its general purport is what is important—Sedley and his friends were performing outrageous acts before a crowd of people interested in watching their activities. One doubts if Sedley would have enjoyed his act as much if he and his friends had been drinking indoors or if the passersby below had reacted with indifference. Just as “live art” requires an audience, libertine performances rely on observers to respond to their transgression of normative codes of conduct.⁹

There are obvious limits to how far one can take the parallels between Sedley’s performance and twentieth-century performance art—it is doubtful that Sedley could have articulated an artistic project in the same way that twentieth-century artists issue manifestos against the commodification of contemporary art, for example—but there are striking similarities between libertine performances in the late seventeenth century and live art in the twentieth century.

Foremost among these similarities are the attempts of both forms to provoke their audiences into reexamining the assumptions concerning art, life, and politics they hold dear. As Goldberg writes

Provocation is a constant characteristic of performance art, a volatile form that artists use to respond to change—whether political in the broadest sense, or cultural, or dealing with issues of current concern—and to bring about change, in relation to the more traditional disciplines of painting and sculpture, photography, theater, and dance, or even literature. Performance art never settles exclusively on one theme, issue, or mode of expression; rather, it defines itself in each case by responding provocatively. It rarely aims to seduce its audience and is more likely to unravel and examine critically the techniques of seduction, unnerving viewers in the process, rather than providing them with an ambiguous setting for desire.¹⁰

Like performance artists, Restoration libertines provoke their audiences with their performances of traditionally secretive acts in public, challenging their observers to examine critically the foundations upon which Stuart institutions were built.

Harold Weber notes that “The rake necessarily raises ambivalent responses, for the sexual energy that he represents threatens the stability of the social order even while it promises to provide the vitality that must animate the structures of that order.” These “ambivalent responses,” says Weber, govern not only the plots of Restoration comedies but our own reactions to libertine activities as well. The works of Turner, Bryson, Chernaik, Haggerty, and others have been grounded in one form of feminist response to libertine “frolics”—one that emphasizes the aristocratic male’s oppression of women and lower-class men. Another response to these activities can be rooted in feminist theories of performance. In writing about current trends in performance studies, Elin Diamond notes a shift in focus “from authority to effect, from text to body, to the spectator’s freedom to make and transform meanings.” Her particular interest involves feminist theory’s relationship to this shift. As she writes, “feminists . . . know that highly personal, theory-sensitive performance art, with its focus on embodiment (the body’s social text), promotes a heightened awareness of cultural difference, of historical specificity, of sexual preference, of racial and gender boundaries and transgressions.”¹¹ Seeing libertinism through the lens of performance studies will help us see that the rakes in Charles II’s court were not just misogynist predators. Rather, through their libertine performances, they used first their bodies and then those of their actors as social texts responding

provocatively to historically specific issues of politics, culture, sex, and gender “boundaries and transgressions.”

Shocking the public with sexual postures and profane mimicry was only one way in which libertinism was a set of performances. Nearly every aspect of the libertine’s personal life was displayed for public consumption. Beginning in 1666, for example, Buckingham shocked court society with his affair with a married woman, Anna Maria Brudenell, countess of Shrewsbury. Pepys reports one incident involving Buckingham and Henry Killigrew, who insulted the countess in public, in which Buckingham “did soundly beat and take away [Killigrew’s] sword and make a fool of, till the fellow prayed him to spare his life” (8.348). This “fray” was tantamount to a public declaration of Buckingham’s affair with Lady Shrewsbury, and led to his duel with her husband, who was severely injured and died two months later. While Parliament was “full of nothing but the talk of this business” (9.27), Pepys records even more startling gossip the following May:

I am also told that the Countesse of Shrewsbury is brought home by the Duke of Buckingham to his house; where his Duchess saying that it was not for her and the other to live together in a house, he answered, “Why, Madam, I did think so; and therefore have ordered your coach to be ready to carry you to your father’s;” which was a devilish speech, but they say true; and my Lady Shrewsbury [*sic*] is there it seems. (9.201)

Besides the “devilishness” of this speech, what stands out is that it *is* a speech, an anecdote, a witty piece of dialogue equally at home in a Restoration comedy as in real life. If what “they” say is indeed true, Buckingham is just as likely as his wife or mistress to have spread the word of his witty remark, entertaining his friends, the king, and anyone else who might listen with his sharp retort to what Buckingham surely saw as his wife’s insolence. As we will see in chapter 2, Buckingham lived his life, even its potentially shameful parts, as if it were a play for public viewing. As with Rochester’s “Leave This Gawdy Guilded Stage,” public knowledge of Buckingham’s sexual and domestic affairs demonstrates that the majority of the libertine’s life, especially his love life, was available for public scrutiny and entertainment.

Who exactly were these libertine performers? Where did they enact their libertinism and who constituted its audience? Often called the Court Wits, the performers of libertinism were an elite circle of men centered on the court of Charles II. The members of this circle formed a loose fraternity, a coterie of artistic (John Wilmot, earl of Rochester; Charles Sackville, Lord Buckhurst; Sir Charles Sedley;

Sir George Etherege; Sir Carr Scroope; and William Wycherley), political (George Villiers, duke of Buckingham; John Sheffield, earl of Mulgrave; and Henry Guy), and social figures (Henry Savile; John, Lord Vaughan; Henry Bulkeley; and Fleetwood Shepherd), who craved the importance and power that accompanied fame.¹² Most of these men were gentleman artists: poets, playwrights, and performers who initially shared a creative vision. Indeed, John Harold Wilson argues in his seminal 1948 monograph, *The Court Wits of the Restoration: An Introduction*, that “the Court Wits constituted a unique group of writers; they were, in effect, a little ‘school,’ and each of them, to some degree at least, spoke for the group as much as for himself.” While my study follows in Wilson’s footsteps in its assumption that the wits “can be seen best as individuals if they are seen first as a cohesive group,” I also concur with James Turner’s contention that we must, if at all possible, avoid “anachronism, imprecision, and ambiguity” in studying libertinism.¹³ One way of avoiding such errors is to be as precise as possible. I have, therefore, limited this study to a subset of the libertine circle comprised of its most important theatrical figures. Another method to avoid imprecision is to acknowledge changes within the group’s artistic and ideological project. As I argue throughout this book, while the group coalesced around a core set of beliefs in the 1660s, Restoration libertinism did not remain fixed or stable, but rather evolved in response to the political events of the 1670s.

The libertines’ celebrity statuses were fueled by these men’s proximity to the king. As Wilson notes, “By virtue of both rank and temperament, [Charles] was the first of the Wits.”¹⁴ During the 1660s, the king was intimately involved in the libertines’ activities, occasionally accompanying them to brothels, drinking with them in private houses, and protecting them from some of the consequences of their behavior. Almost immediately after Charles’s restoration in 1660, the older members of his court noted with dismay the growing influence of “men of mirth,” as Edward Hyde, earl of Clarendon, called them.¹⁵ In 1661, for example, James Butler, duke of Ormonde, reported to Clarendon that “the king spent most of his time with confident young men, who abhorred all discourse that was serious, and, in the liberty they assumed in drollery and raillery, preserved no reverence towards God or man, but laughed at all sober men, and even at religion itself.”¹⁶ By 1661, Sedley, Buckhurst, Shepherd, Savile, Bulkeley, and Killigrew were already among these “confident young men.” By 1665, Rochester and Etherege had become associated with the group. Wycherley, Scroope, Mulgrave, Guy, and Vaughan

were attached to the fraternity by the early 1670s. The constitution of the group would change as political and artistic differences arose between members of the fraternity. These differences would result in the complete disintegration of the group by 1680.

This book focuses primarily on five members of this circle—Buckingham, Rochester, Etherege, Wycherley, and Sedley—for three reasons. First, these men were playwrights and, therefore, not only lived a life of libertine performance but also wrote about libertinism for the stage. Second, these men were the most infamous libertines in Charles II's court; they are the men contemporaries most talked about and the libertines whose lives and works continue to shape our understanding of Restoration history and literature. And finally, they were also the members of the libertine group who were most intimately connected to Charles II. As the son of James I's principal favorite, Buckingham grew up as Charles's playfellow. With the Restoration, he became a key figure in Charles's government. Rochester also had a personal connection to the king: his father, the first earl of Rochester, had helped spirit young Charles out of the country during the Civil War. Though lacking such familial ties to the king, other members of the theatrical group enjoyed similar access to his attentions through their wit, sexual adventures, and participation in the Parliament. As James Gill notes, Sedley apparently earned his way as one of the king's drinking companions through "his wit, intelligence, and civility." Vivan de Sola Pinto writes, "The King delighted in him to an Excess, and he pleas'd his Majesty in one thing, in which he eminently differ'd from all the rest of the Wits of the Court, *viz.* That he never ask'd the King for any thing." Etherege's entrance into the group was made through his friendship with Buckhurst and the relative success of his first two plays, *The Comical Revenge* (1664) and *She Would If She Could* (1668). His connections at court were cemented in 1668 when he was made a Gentleman of the Privy Chamber in Ordinary and secretary to England's ambassador to Turkey. Wycherley's first play, *Love in a Wood* (1671), brought him first to the attention of the king's mistress, Barbara Villiers, duchess of Cleveland, and then into the libertine circle itself. Before long, writes Willard Connely, "the King chose Wycherley for a companion in his hours of leisure" and "From time to time . . . gave the poet a hundred pounds, as if in payment for a hundred bubbles of merriment."¹⁷ These five men formed the core of the libertine circle in Charles II's court. Through their public acts and theatrical works, they were also the most responsible for creating the libertine's reputation as a debauchee, wit, and scoundrel. While many of the other members of

the circle were also poets and/or politicians, these five men combined libertine performance in their own lives with writing for the theater as a means of responding to the policies and activities of Charles's government.

Considering that each of these five members of the libertine circle wrote plays for the public theater, it is not surprising that theater and live art provide useful models for understanding their libertinism.¹⁸ While their plays met with varying financial and critical success in the theater, they were always among the most discussed plays at court. Buckingham was the first of the libertines to write for the stage. In 1661, he rewrote the final two acts of *The Chances*, a popular play by John Fletcher. He subsequently collaborated with associates on three other plays: *Sir Politick Would-Be* (1663–1664), *The Country Gentleman* (1669), and *The Rehearsal* (1671). His plays often offended the court with their political satire; *The Country Gentleman* was even suppressed due to its personal ridicule of one of Charles's advisors. Etherege's reputation began with the debut of his first play, *The Comical Revenge, or, Love in a Tub*. While Pepys thought the play "merry, but only so by gesture, not wit at all" (6.4), it was nevertheless successful, earning more than £1,000 in a month's time. His second play, *She Would If She Could*, sold out its premiere in February 1668. As Pepys reports, "there was 1000 people put back that could not have room in the pit" (9.54). Etherege's most successful play, *The Man of Mode, or Sir Fopling Flutter*, premiered in March 1676 with Charles II in attendance. John Downes reports that being "well Cloath'd and well Acted," it "got a great deal of Money."¹⁹ Sedley's first drama, a comedy titled *The Mulberry Garden*, premiered in May 1668. Perhaps because the plot is conventionally resolved, the play disappointed some members of the audience. Pepys writes that he did not "see [the King] laugh nor pleased the whole play from the beginning to the end, nor the company; insomuch that I have not been less pleased at a new play in my life I think" (9.203). "Nevertheless," John Harold Wilson reminds us, "the play was revived a number of times, and apparently with success," though this "was probably due to its author's eminence and courtly favor."²⁰ Sedley composed two additional plays, *Antony and Cleopatra* (1678) and *Bellamira* (1687), which pleased his fellow wits. As Etherege wrote in a letter to Buckingham, "*Bellamira* gave me that intire Satisfaction that I cannot read it over too often."²¹ Wycherley's plays, especially *Love in a Wood* (1671), *The Country Wife* (1675), and *The Plain Dealer* (1676), were among the most performed and published plays of the subsequent century. And finally, Rochester adapted at least one complete play,

Valentinian, originally written by John Fletcher, before his death in 1680, though the tragedy was not performed until four years later.²²

These performers and their friends enacted libertinism on “stages” throughout London and the countryside. Indeed, their behavior in the pit would often compete with the actors for the audience’s attention. Pepys, for example, was distracted by Sedley’s attempts to seduce a nearby woman during a performance of *The Maid’s Tragedy*. He records being

vexed all the while with two talking ladies and Sir Ch. Sidly, yet pleased to hear their discourse, he being a stranger; and one of the ladies would, and did, sit with her mask on all the play; and being exceeding witty as ever I heard woman, did talk most pleasantly with him; but was, I believe, a virtuous woman and of quality. He would fain know who she was, but she would not tell. Yet did give him many pleasant hints of her knowledge of him, by that means setting his brains at work to find out who she was; and did give him leave to use all means to find out who she was but putting off her mask. He was mighty witty; and she also making sport with him very inoffensively, that a more pleasant rencontre I never heard. (8.71–72)

Like many of their fellow playgoers, the libertine wits attended the theater to be seen as much as to see the play. As Sedley’s conversation with this masked woman illustrates, the theater also afforded libertines the opportunity to meet and seduce new women. Another place to “meet” women, of course, was the brothel. As Pepys records on December 2, 1668, he went to speak with the duke of York “and heard the silly discourse of the King with his people about him, telling a story of my Lord of Rochester’s having of his clothes stole while he was with a wench, and his gold all gone but his clothes found afterward, stuffed into a feather-bed by the wench that stole them” (9.382). While this was not the form of performance Rochester and his fellow libertines preferred, the brothel was nevertheless a place they visited frequently. The libertines in Charles’s court also performed their outrageous deeds on the streets of London. Sedley and Buckhurst, for example, were once arrested for “running up and down all the night with their arses bare through the streets, and at last fighting and being beat by the watch” (Pepys 9.335–336). Sedley’s drunken performance at the Cock Tavern also illustrates that libertine performances often took place in and around London’s taverns.

Libertine performances were not limited to London, however. The libertines’ deeds also took place in the countryside. In 1677, for example, Rochester and some friends were rumored to have participated in

a “beastly prank” of “running along Woodstock Park naked.”²³ The details of Rochester’s activity were embellished as word spread of his nudity to include speculation that the libertines were attempting to impress several young women with the sight of their genitalia. When Henry Savile hears that Rochester had subsequently taken ill, he writes to his friend to ascertain whether these rumors are true. Concerned that this “unseasonable pranke” has led to Rochester’s illness, Savile writes, “there has been such a story made concerning your last adventure as would persuade us grave men that you had stripd yourselfe of all your prudence as well as of your breeches.” Rochester subsequently confirms the most mundane aspects of the story, asserting that “we went into the river somewhat late in the year and had a frisk for forty yards in the meadow to dry ourselves.”²⁴ The inflation of the wits’ libertine performances as they circulated through the gossip mill was typical. As a result, the libertines were seemingly everywhere, getting drunk, seducing women, frequenting whores, starting brawls, and generally causing mischief. While many of these stories were likely to have been little more than fabrications, libertinism was nevertheless defined by the public’s perception that every detail of these accounts was possibly true. As we shall see, the libertine wits played up their association with these reported deeds, using them to construct protagonists for their theatrical ventures and, thus, capitalizing on the audience’s interest in their scandalous adventures.

The multitude of people who reportedly stood beneath the balcony of the Cock Tavern and first watched and then violently responded to Sedley’s performance of lust, buggery, sacrilege, and sedition suggests that libertine performances generated spectators who evaluated and interpreted their activities. Initially, Charles II and their fellow libertines were the primary audiences for the wits’ scandalous performances. Being the king’s companions and entertaining him with stories of exciting activities, however illegal and antisocial, often kept the libertines out of the Tower and local jails. For example, Pepys records the following account in his diary on October 26, 1668:

I had an hour’s talk with [Lord Sandwich] about the ill posture of things at this time, while the King gives countenance to Sir Ch. Sidly and Lord Buckhurst, telling him their late story of running up and down the streets a little while since all night, and their being beaten and clapped up all night by the constable, who is since chid and imprisoned for his pains. (9.338–339)

While such stories serve to confirm Pepys’s view of the “ill posture of things at this time,” which he attributes at least in part to the king’s

surrounding himself with libertines, they also demonstrate that, if the story were compelling enough, entertaining the king with tales of libertine adventure might lead to the imprisonment of the constable who had dared attempt to break up the libertine's revels. The libertines in Charles II's court, therefore, learned quickly how advantageous it was to recount their every adventure with wit and humor, especially when the king was nearby. Their contempt for authority, entertainingly represented, ironically brought them status within the court and further access to the king.

The audience for libertine performances quickly grew to include members of the court and citizens in and about London. Just as the wits' poetry circulated around the court in manuscript form, anecdotes concerning their exploits likewise made the rounds at Whitehall, the Parliament, and London's fashionable hotspots.²⁵ As Sedley's Cock Tavern performance suggests, many Londoners found the wits' activities fascinating, and when Buckingham was sent to the Tower in 1667, the streets were lined with observers watching his every move. Rural inhabitants apparently found reports of the libertines' bad behavior equally riveting. John Harold Wilson notes that accounts of Sedley's lusty behavior were spread throughout England: Anthony à Wood in Oxfordshire received secondhand information about the event, and as the gossip proliferated, the details of Sedley's drunken revelry were filled in and embroidered. As Wilson points out,

The affair was so widely commented upon . . . that a lurid version of it reached saintly Philip Henry in far-off Flintshire; it came by way of "a letter from Mr. Joshua Hotchkis to his brother-in-law Ralph Eddon." In his diary, the trusting Reverend Philip noted that the three rakes had "had six dishes of meat [i.e., six courses] brought in by six naked women"—a nice touch. After dinner (presumably ignoring the disrobed damsels), the Wits "went forth in their shirts into the balcony" and there were blatantly blasphemous. Finally, they went back in, saying, "Come now, let us go in and make laws for the nation." Buckhurst was a member of Parliament.

With such a wide circulation of tales of their activities, it is not surprising that the libertine wits' plays were well attended by all segments of society. Pepys's assertion in 1668 that "citizens, prentices, and others" (9.2) of lower birth were increasingly attending the theater suggests that audiences for such plays as *The Rehearsal*, *The Country Wife*, and *Antony and Cleopatra* included representatives from the court and common citizens, shopkeepers, and their apprentices. And finally, audiences could participate in libertine performances without

even knowing that they were. As Gilbert Burnet reports in his account of Rochester's life, when the latter was once banished from court, he "disguised himself, so that his nearest Friends could not have known him, and set up in *Tower-Street* for an *Italian Mountebank*, where he had a Stage, and practised Physick for some Weeks not without success."²⁶ When Rochester later rejoined the court, he entertained the king and his friends with tales of his incognito performance. The libertines in Charles II's court seemed to have "had a Stage" just about everywhere in England and used it to perform their acts of transgressive sexuality and drunken adventures that entertained some members of Restoration society and horrified others.

As the audience's reaction to Sedley's performance attests, witnesses to libertine activities did not simply or passively observe their behavior. Audiences interpreted, evaluated, and responded to libertine activities. Scholars have already identified the late seventeenth century as the cradle of modern spectatorship. As Terry Eagleton argues, "In the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, the European bourgeoisie begins to carve out for itself a distinct discursive space, one of rational judgement and enlightened critique rather than of the brutal ukases of an authoritarian politics." Kristina Straub notes that "attempts to bring social order to this 'discursive space' " resulted in the creation of a "binary opposition between spectator and spectacle." In their work on public spaces in the eighteenth century, Peter Stallybrass and Allon White also discuss this binary. In analyzing one of John Dryden's prologues, these scholars maintain that "It is no longer sufficient for Dryden that the theatre-goers participate in the spectacle and enjoy themselves as part of a crowd: they must be disciplined into 'true judges', silent appreciators or critics in short, separating out their individual faculties of evaluation from the visceral pleasures of crowd behavior." This "disciplining" of the audience into "silent appreciators" was an ongoing process throughout the eighteenth century, according to Eagleton, Stallybrass, and White; its result was the creation of modern criticism.²⁷ The lives, performances, and works of the libertine wits in Charles II's court were on the cusp of this development. As we have already seen, spectators responded to libertine performances with anything but silent appreciation. Theater audiences were no different.

The libertine playwrights in Charles II's court actively engaged their audiences as critical spectators, relying upon their observers' critical attention as a means of exerting political and cultural power. Like many of their contemporaries, the libertines' plays begin and end by evoking the audience's judgment and calling for approval of the dramatic work. Nancy Armstrong reminds us in her work on the domestic

novel that the “work of the pen is rivaled only by that of the eyes.” These libertines seem to have intuitively understood what Michel Foucault would analyze as the “pleasure that comes of exercising a power that questions, monitors, watches, spies, searches out, palpates, brings to light.” Consequently, libertines exercised a power that, in Foucault’s words, asserted itself “in the pleasure of showing off, scandalizing, or resisting.” Through their public spectacles and theatrical works, libertine performers encouraged their spectators to question, monitor, watch, and spy on their transgressive performances, their bringing to light private activities through public behavior. The public’s pleasure in evaluating libertine performances kept them watching the libertine fraternity’s activities and plays. This appeal to the public’s voyeuristic interest in libertine sex and scandal brought them a measure of power in Restoration society. By being “fixed by a gaze, isolated and animated by the attention they received,” to borrow Foucault’s words, libertine performers simultaneously exerted an influence over popular views on politics, the theater, and sexual behavior.²⁸

By entertaining and provoking their spectators, libertines in Charles II’s court became the first modern celebrities to thrive on the attention and notoriety that accompanied their scandalous behavior. They then used the spotlight to challenge their culture’s dominant discourses. Sedley’s and Buckingham’s infamous performances, for example, critiqued the cultural norms of their day, including marriage, fidelity, Protestantism, and fealty to the king. Most scholars agree that Restoration libertinism coalesced around several key components, the foremost of which was skepticism. As Warren Chernaik points out, “Where Hobbes and Lucretius challenged false, illegitimate authority, the libertines assumed that *all* authority was illegitimate: the state, the church, the family were institutions equally parasitic on man’s fear of freedom.”²⁹ Sedley’s behavior outside the Cock Tavern attacks all three of these institutions. His toast to the king, made with a glass he has just “washed his prick in,” undermines the traditional meaning of drinking to the king’s health to affirm his authority and legitimacy. His “abusing of scripture” and mimicry of the sacrament likewise challenges the authority of the church. And his enactment of “all the postures of lust and buggery that could be imagined” rejects marital fidelity and normative sexuality. Sedley’s drunken performance mimics these rituals in order to undermine their cultural legitimacy and to call into question the institutions that rely on these rituals for their continued relevance—the monarchy, the church, and the family. Buckingham’s reported speech that he would send his wife away in

order to make room for his mistress in his house likewise reflects the libertine's rejection of the family as an authoritative institution. His comic willingness to send his wife away so that he and his mistress can live together in peace rejects all notions of familial duty and husbandly honor. Consequently, these performances were not merely entertainments; they were ideological and political statements that helped shape the future of English culture. A problem arose, however, when Charles II also became a critical spectator of the libertines' performances and found their ideological bent contrary to his own.

LIBERTINISM, STUART IDEOLOGY, AND THE THEATRICALITY OF RESTORATION POLITICS

If we examine libertine performances within their historical context, we see that libertines did more than "pose . . . in a variety of scandalous roles . . . to signal their dissatisfaction with existing cultural norms." Libertine performances dramatically attacked certain elements of their society in an effort to participate in the continuing negotiations of the larger political and cultural settlement that followed the Restoration of the monarchy in 1660. Libertine performances thrived between the poles of the two great political events of Charles II's reign: his Restoration in 1660 and the exclusion crisis of the late 1670s and early 1680s. In the eighteen years between Charles's Restoration and the eruption of a crisis that laid bare what Susan Owen calls "the fragility and the constructed nature of post-interregnum Stuart ideology," contentions over the nature and locus of power and authority dominated English culture.³⁰ The libertines in Charles's court were actively involved in this struggle. Initially, they wanted to affect the king's policies and to influence his ministers. When they were prevented from wielding this kind of power by the end of the 1660s, they aspired to influence English society more broadly by attempting to change the populace's ideas of authority, religion, and morality. The theater presented these libertines with a special arena in which to subvert the dominant discourses of their day, one with a potentially more coherent ideological focus than the platforms afforded in the alehouse or coffeehouse and with less potential oppression and domination than the magistrates' bench or the gallows. They, therefore, turned to the theater as the primary disseminator of libertine ideology. The problem for Charles II with the libertines' use of the theater was the fact that their challenge to his court's official discourse of moderation raised undesirable doubts by

encouraging audiences to be questioners, that is, modern spectators, rather than obedient subjects. Libertine performances, thus, threatened order at a time when order was by no means guaranteed.

Charles returned to England in 1660 with a specific ideology in hand. Numerous scholars have pointed out the vexed nature of ideology. As Slavoj Žižek reminds us, “‘Ideology’ can designate anything from a contemplative attitude that misrecognizes its dependence on social reality to an action-oriented set of beliefs, from the indispensable medium in which individuals live out their relations to a social structure to false ideas which legitimate a dominant political power.” John B. Thompson provides a definition that I find particularly useful for this project: “ideology is a system of representations which serves to sustain existing relations of class domination by orienting individuals towards the past rather than the future, or towards images and ideals which conceal class relations and detract from the collective pursuit of social change.” As historian John Patrick Montaña explains, the restored “government led by Clarendon immediately set about appropriating every possible authorizing language and imagery in an attempt to create the sort of inclusive consensus essential to maintaining its power and authority.” The main pageant of the Lord Mayor’s Day show in October 1660, for example, told the story of Charles’s escape from revolutionary forces by hiding in an oak tree. This relation of divine providence along with other Lord Mayor’s Day shows, argues Montaña, “celebrated the rejection of puritanical rule, the revival of trade and prosperity, and the restoration of unity and concord” by connecting Charles’s present reign with the Stuart past before the execution of his father. It is not coincidental that drama was the primary vehicle for disseminating Stuart ideology. Tzvetan Todorov maintains that “a society chooses and codifies the acts that most closely correspond to its ideology; this is why the existence of certain genres in a society and their absence in another reveal a central ideology, and enable us to establish it with considerable certainty.” The Restoration period saw a flowering of both professional and popular theatrical genres—heroic drama, comedy, social satire, personal tragedy, Lord Mayor’s Day shows, and the like—that codified late Stuart ideology. These forms reflected the dominant class’s vision of itself. As Michael Kreyling suggests, “A cultural group accepts its narrative form, and rejects others, because that form alone embodies the group’s nearest image of itself as its most truthful and accessible scripture. The group defines and recreates itself in the repetition of its form, confirms its understanding of the nature of things in the ritual of retelling, and advances its causes against a host of enemies and

aliens in the promulgation of its story.”³¹ Theatrical discourse was the most prominent genre through which Charles II’s government, one “cultural group,” inculcated its subjects with its ideology. It was also the genre through which libertines, by the 1670s another such group, most effectively responded to that ideology.

Owen maintains that “Royalist ideology portrayed the king’s return as God’s answer to the heartfelt prayer of a nation suffering under a band of greedy ruffians.” This propaganda did not exactly match reality. As historians frequently note, in the words of James M. Rosenheim, “Despite the initial welcome extended to him, Charles II returned to the English throne in 1660 accompanied by skepticism and even hostility from substantial numbers of his subjects.” Many of England’s citizens feared the Restoration’s effects on their nation. Ralph Josselin, a vicar in Essex, was one such person. Writing on January 25, 1660, the eve of his own birthday, Josselin summed up his impression of world affairs:

When I look back into the world I find nothing but confusions, hopes of a peace between Spain and France, but sad wars in the north, the Swedes bustling as a rod tearing the flesh of the nations, but not advantaging themselves, and our poor England unsettled, and her physicians hitherto leading her into deep waters. Cromwell’s family cast down with scorn to the ground, none of them in command or employment, the nation looking more to Charles Stuart, out of love to themselves not him, the end of these things God only knoweth; we have had sad confusions in England, the issue only God knoweth.

Others took a more pragmatic view of the monarchy’s return. Algernon Sidney, for example, wrote, “Since the Parliament hath acknowledged a king, I knowe, and acknowledge, I owe him duty and the service that belongs unto a subject, and will pay it. If things are carried in a legall and moderate way, I had rather be in employment, than without any.” These sentiments express the uncertainty Charles II’s return evoked throughout the nation. That his subjects entertained these doubts about the new king’s government suggests that the England of 1660 was politically and culturally different from that of his father and grandfather: Charles was now one part of a governmental structure that no longer felt obliged to acquiesce to his demands. While Charles brought with him an ideology of monarchical authority influenced by his years in absolutist France, many of his subjects now thought of the monarch and monarchical power differently. As Jonathan Scott points out, “On the eve of his return His would-be Majesty was already being warned that ‘those who most endeavoured

your coming in, desired it upon such terms that you would have no more power than a Duke of Venice.' ” Indeed, as Paula Backscheider notes, the House of Commons of the Convention Parliament, which convened on April 25, 1660 to work out the Restoration settlement, “behaved as a partner in power, not like a group summoned at pleasure to endorse or facilitate a sovereign’s policies and plans,” as previous parliaments had traditionally done.³²

Historians have demonstrated that these doubts arose from the continuing friction caused by unsettled disagreements over religion and the power of the monarch. As Scott points out, according to most of England’s citizens, the “first crisis of popery and arbitrary government, under Charles I, had led the country into an unspeakable series of disasters,” not the least of which was the “more terrible ‘popery’ (protestant fanaticism) and arbitrary government (high-taxing military rule)” of the interregnum. Charles’s situation was made more complicated by his subjects’ continued fears that seemed to accompany his reign. In his *Account of the Growth of Popery*, written in 1677, Andrew Marvell alleged that a conspiracy “to change the lawful Government of England into an Absolute Tyranny, and to Convert the Established Protestant Religion into down-right Popery” could be traced back to 1665 and described various factors that had distanced the people from the court during the previous 12 years, namely, the court’s pro-Catholic sympathies, the attempt to align England politically with Catholic France against the Protestant Dutch, perceived threats to Parliament’s independence, and an apparent attempt by the king to rule through a standing army.³³ Charles’s Declaration of Indulgence in 1662, in which he attempted to extend religious toleration to both Dissenters and Catholics, initiated some of these fears, but disappointments in the war against the Dutch and the trauma of the Fire of London in 1666 gave greater substance to them. Paranoia was so rampant that, when the Dutch fleet sailed up the Medway in June 1667 and burned the dockyard and ships stationed at Chatham, many believed that it was part of a conspiracy to destroy Protestantism and to pave the way for a Catholic government. By 1673, Charles was in the middle of another war against the Dutch, which had yet to produce a major victory for the English. A standing army, ostensibly raised to defend England against possible Dutch invasion, fueled fears of arbitrary government and forcible conversion to Catholicism. The fact that a French General led the English army certainly did not help matters. When the Parliament reconvened in February 1673, outcries against popery and arbitrary government led to the passage of the Test Act, requiring all civil and military

officers to take the Anglican sacrament and make a declaration against transubstantiation. James, duke of York, the king's heir, subsequently confirmed his rumored conversion to Catholicism by refusing to take the sacrament in the Church of England at Easter.

Doubts about Charles's reign were also symptomatic of the fact that, as Jonathan Sawday reminds us, "The restoration of the king was an unprecedented event in British history." Because of its uniqueness, the newly restored government, continues Sawday, required "the manufacture of a form of legitimation from the materials which were to hand." Statues, heraldic devices, royal ceremonies, civic events, and public displays of the operation of government were among the first materials utilized by the new government:

Charles arrived at Dover on 25 May 1660, by which time the government had indulged in a virtual orgy of expenditure in which the symbolic forms representative of republicanism were replaced with the symbolic forms representative not just of monarchism, but of monarchism as it had existed at the moment of its dissolution in 1649. It was as if History was now in reverse, flowing backwards towards the crisis point of January 1649.

By the time Charles stepped foot on English soil, his father's statue had been replaced in Guildhall yard, the king's arms had been reinstalled in courtrooms, the navy's colors, flags, and standards had been replaced with those of 1648, and the king's arms once again hung over the speaker's chair in the Parliament. Owen argues that, to minimize opposition, the government offered the populace "triumphalist values around which to unify the nation; but these were more a literary fiction than a reality." Indeed, as Scott notes, the "restoration was not a *fait accompli* but an aspiration, quickly inaugurated but tardily and bloodily achieved. The things to which it directed itself included not only institutional reconstruction but the recontainment within those institutions of the ideas, and fears, by which they had previously been destroyed." To this end, the new king oversaw every aspect of his initial entrance into the city of London, including the designs of the triumphal arches, the texts of the accompanying pageants, and the content of subsequent illustrations of his progress. Likewise, as Backscheider notes, the trials and executions of the regicides "became hideous but magnificent theater" and the bodies of Cromwell, Bradshaw, and Ireton were exhumed, publicly dismembered, and displayed for the people's view. As a result, "Charles II made London a national theater and used it in a variety of ways to help secure his throne and establish his interpretation of the monarchy."³⁴

The “institutional reconstruction” that followed the restoration of the monarchy included the reopening of the theaters. As Owen suggests, “The Restoration of the theatres together with the king was to be a symbol of the rejection of the ‘puritan’ regime of the interregnum.” Drama in all its forms was indeed a “political instrument” closely controlled by Charles and his government. Charles I had used the masque as a tool to support his vision of kingship; Charles II used both formal theater and popular spectacles to create a myth with which to appeal to a broad public consensus. In fact, as Kenneth Richards notes, “Charles II took full opportunity to exploit by personal appearance and celebratory display the popularity of his return, and for a time he made the London streets his stage, as if by public pomp and spectacle he were intent to banish from memory forever his father’s last ‘memorable scene.’” Charles also maintained control over the professional theater and, as Owen points out, “was actively engaged in discussing with the dramatists what they should write, and with theatre management what should and should not be staged.” Furthermore, as Nancy Klein Maguire suggests, whereas drama before 1649 “criticized the regime in power, the Restoration playwrights [i.e., those writing just after the reopening of the theaters] bolstered the new government by organizing a theatrical/political network which produced pro-Stuart propaganda.” In effect, Klein writes that the new playwrights of the Restoration “worked as a public relations team advertising the restored monarchy.”³⁵

While theatrical events of all types were marshaled by the new government to spread a favorable vision of the new regime, not all Restoration playwrights simply toed the Stuart line. J. Douglas Canfield has productively analyzed the range of ideological investments of Restoration drama in his seminal monographs *Tricksters and Estates* and *Heroes and States*. In these books, Canfield examines the ways in which Restoration “drama generally reinscribes Stuart ideology.” Reimagining generic categories based on ideology, Canfield proposes, for example, that most Restoration comedies are what he calls “social comedy, comedy that socializes threats to the ruling class, threats that are explicit (like a competing class and its attendant ideology) or implicit (like resistance to its control of the transmission of power and property through genealogy).” Among his examples of social comedies are Etherege’s *The Man of Mode* and Aphra Behn’s *The Rover*, since these plays “reunite the beautiful people with landed estates and the political hegemony they symbolize.” Other plays are “subversive” of Stuart ideology, since they maintain that “no class has a natural right to dominate another, but each oligarchy rules in turn

because it can, because like the sword and the phallus of the male protagonists, it has the power to dominate.”³⁶ According to Canfield, Wycherley’s *The Country Wife* is a good example of this form of comedy, since Horner’s status as profligate outsider at the end of the play potentially destabilizes his cuckolds’ transmission of estates in the future. In *Tricksters and Estates*, libertines are among a long list of tricksters who contend for the possession of estates. As might be expected of tricksters, challengers of order, libertine drama moved back and forth across the ideological divide of supporting and critiquing the political hegemony. The libertines in Charles II’s court were both implicated in and critical of Stuart ideology. On the one hand, like other members of England’s elite, these libertines had a vested interest in the transmission of wealth and property, hoping to accumulate as much of each as possible and then to pass on their estates to their legitimate heirs. These men also enjoyed the cultural power that came with privilege and resisted any challenge to it. On the other hand, libertines often found themselves shut out from exercising political power in Charles’s court, a power that could be necessary to preserve the transmission of property and the exercise of cultural power. Charles thought of them more as an entertainment committee than as real participants in government decisions and actions.

That Charles, along with other members of the court and its observers, saw the libertines in his court as sources of entertainment rather than as a source for what Richard Hillman calls “therapeutic self-exploration,” a typical function for trickster figures, severely limited the libertines’ effective participation in the activities of the ruling class. Telling important people about their exploits served the libertines well in the 1660s. It sometimes kept them from going to the Tower, and it often brought them money, admirers, and sexual partners. These same exploits, however, led to their marginalization within Charles II’s government by the early 1670s. As a result of this marginalization, some of the libertines in Charles’s court turned to writing for the theater as a means of counteracting their potential loss of celebrity and cultural significance. Just as their performances of scandalous activities on the streets of London and throughout the countryside were ideological acts, the libertines’ plays were similarly engaged with the political and cultural issues of their day, such as the nature of authority and conflicts among the social orders. In fact, performing public acts and writing plays that made ideological and political statements was inherent to and a constitutive element of libertinism. In writing of the Marquis de Sade, Foucault argues that the defining characteristic of libertinism was its drive to reveal

private acts to the public:

the libertine is he who, while yielding to all the fantasies of desire and to each of its furies, can, but also must, illumine their slightest movement with a lucid and deliberately elucidated representation. There is a strict order governing the life of the libertine: every representation must be immediately endowed with life in the living body of desire, every desire must be expressed in the pure light of a representative discourse.

Although Sade is a very different kind of libertine than the Restoration rakes, his seventeenth-century predecessors nevertheless share his drive to endow life with desire and to represent that desire in discourse.³⁷ What made libertinism in the 1660s and 1670s so spectacular was the fact that these men craved celebrity to such an extent that they were driven not only to perform outrageous acts of debauchery—in public and in private—but also to write and talk about their exploits at every opportunity, especially when no one of any importance had been around to witness and therefore retell for others the details of their exploits. Through stories of the wits' libertine performances and their plays that reproduced these performances on stage, Sedley, Rochester, Buckingham, and their friends fashioned themselves into cultural icons symbolizing moral laxity and sexual decadence in the court.

While Etherege, Buckingham, and Sedley began writing for the theater in the 1660s, their marginalization at court in the early 1670s transformed their dramatic works, as the libertine circle sought to protect and to further its celebrity. In particular, libertines began to draw more forcefully upon their reputations as rakes in order to cast versions of themselves as the central figures in their plays. This casting complicated the relationship between audience and playwright since the writer, and by extension the libertines' circle as a whole, became confused with his actors. The audience did not simply observe the actor Henry Harris playing the part of Medley but rather analyzed his performance in order to ascertain whether he was *actually* playing Etherege or Sedley. This confusion was a powerful side effect of the libertines' need to translate their activities into representative discourse. Stephen Greenblatt argues in his work on Renaissance self-fashioning that "self-fashioning derives its interest precisely from the fact that it functions without regard for a sharp distinction between literature and social life. It invariably crosses the boundaries between the creation of literary characters, the shaping of one's own

identity, the experience of being molded by forces outside one's control, the attempt to fashion other selves."³⁸ By crossing the boundaries between literature and life, the Restoration libertines embraced the gossip concerning their scandalous activities and incorporated it into their plays. By becoming authors, these playwrights fashioned an identity for themselves that transcended the mere entertainment value of their lived acts and theatrical plays. This fashioning also imbued their literary works with the libertines' ideological points of view.

The relationship between authorship, playwriting, and identity is a unique one. Drama relies on the "fluid delimitations" between art and life, in the words of Martin Esslin, as one of the primary characteristics of the genre. As Esslin writes, "the fact is that the art, activity, human craving or instinct which embodies itself in drama is so deeply enmeshed in human nature itself, and in a multitude of human pursuits, that it is wellnigh impossible to draw the exact dividing line between where one kind of activity stops and drama proper starts." Understanding the blurriness of this line is one of the primary goals of performance studies today. In taking up relationships between theatrical performance and "real life," W. B. Worthen argues that theatrical performances "can be understood to cite—or, perhaps subversively, to resignify—social and behavioral practices that operate outside the theater and that constitute contemporary social life."³⁹ In other words, Worthen maintains that dramatic performances are given life not by the texts that give rise to them but by the social performances they imitate. The view that social performances authorize theatrical ones is particularly useful to understanding the libertines in Charles II's court as playwrights. Dramatic works by Buckingham, Etherege, Wycherley, Rochester, and Sedley base their libertine protagonists on their own reputations. This casting of versions of themselves in their plays takes theatrical conventions a step further than the playwrights had previously taken them by citing *their own* social and behavioral practices as the foundations of their plays. That libertine dramas, such as *The Rehearsal*, *The Country Wife*, and *The Man of Mode*, cited the social and behavioral practices of "real life" people has been a common place of Restoration drama since the late seventeenth century. John Dennis, for example, famously defended George Etherege's *The Man of Mode* against charges of immorality by arguing that it accurately depicted historical figures: "Now I remember very well, that upon the first acting [of] this Comedy, it was generally believed to be an agreeable Representation of the Persons of Condition of both Sexes, both in the Court and Town; and that all the

World was charm'd with *Dorimont*; and that it was unanimously agreed, that he had in him several of the Qualities of *Wilmot* Earl of *Rochester*, as, his Wit, his Spirit, his amorous Temper, the Charms that he had for the fair Sex, his Fals[e]hood, and his Inconstancy."⁴⁰ These perceived similarities between fictional characters and court libertines suggest that Buckingham, Rochester, Sedley, Etherege, and Wycherley drew upon their own rumored exploits to create their dramatic protagonists.

Beyond amusing the king or filling the theater, gossip and accounts of the wits' activities also show that libertinism was a kind of double performance—once for the immediate pleasure of wine, wit, and/or women and, at least once but perhaps repeatedly for the pleasure of recounting their adventures with wine, wit, and/or women to people who had not been part of their original pleasures.⁴¹ Writing plays based on these activities and then publishing them was the next logical step in appealing to a wider audience outside the court. But unlike Dryden or Aphra Behn, for example, libertines such as Buckingham, Rochester, and Sedley were amateur playwrights. Paulina Kewes argues that playwrights in general enjoyed a “rising stature” after the reopening of the theaters. She notes, “Dramatists . . . were increasingly thought of as individuals who carried their own identity and authority, and from whom the printed artefact originated.” While aristocratic playwrights often waived their right to receive the proceeds from the third-night benefit performance, amateur writers nevertheless influenced the production of their plays: “They customarily supervised rehearsals and exercised a degree of control over casting and scenery.” Unlike earlier playwrights, they also retained the right to publish their work. While professional writers were able to supplement their income with the small stipend that publishers paid for their work, writes Kewes, “Genteel amateurs would, as a matter of course, forego the payment, but would expect to be consulted before printing began and, afterwards, to receive a batch of printed copies for presentation to friends and patrons.” The publication of play scripts was increasingly important in this period, since more people read plays as literacy rates grew throughout the late seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Furthermore, as Kewes points out, reading dramatic texts as literature became the fashion during the puritan revolution, when the theaters were closed and access to dramatic performances was restricted. Thus, aristocratic playwrights were able to shape both the production of the play's performance as well as the production of the script's printing just when each were enjoying greater and more diverse audiences. This power allowed the libertine playwrights to

ensure that spectators and readers effectively experienced their plays' critiques of politics, religion, and morality. Buckingham, for example, coached the star of *The Rehearsal* in mimicking Dryden's mannerisms, and Etherege presumably made sure that the actor playing Dorimant effectively aped Rochester. With the exception of Rochester, who died before his play was published, the libertine wits also supervised the initial publication of their plays, which remain the most authoritative printings of their works.⁴²

In the process of expanding the audience for their performances, the libertines in Charles II's court also began to fashion "other selves," to borrow Greenblatt's phrase. Libertines saw the world as their stage and performed scandalous acts to gain the public's attention. Libertines also perpetuated their own celebrity by regaling court society with tales of their exploits. Thus, libertines effectively wrote the scripts of their lives, acted the parts of dashing, aristocratic hedonists, and then publicized accounts of their infamous deeds through conversation, poetry, and eventually drama to an interested audience. Greenblatt maintains that "Identity is a theatrical invention that must be reiterated if it is to endure." Like Greenblatt, feminist theorist Judith Butler maintains that identity is fashioned through reiteration. While Greenblatt focuses on the author's fashioning of the self through the creative process of authorship, Butler's primary contribution to the field is her analysis of how identity is performed "on the surface of the body" through "acts, gestures, and desire [that] produce the effect of an internal core or substance." As she identifies, "Such acts, gestures, enactments, generally construed, are *performative* in the sense that the essence or identity that they otherwise purport to express are *fabrications* manufactured and sustained through corporeal signs and other discursive means." In this view of performance, which focuses on gender identification, the term "performativity" becomes a key word. As Butler explains, "performativity must be understood not as a singular or deliberate 'act,' but, rather, as the reiterative and citational practice by which discourse produces the effects that it names." According to Butler, gender and sex are performed on the body through various gestures, acts, and desires. Through the repeated performance of these gestures, acts, and desires, the subject becomes convinced that the performance is essential to his or her identity rather than a role he or she has learned to play. These performances are supported and affirmed by a culture's various discourses, including those of the media, literature, the law, and political parties, for example. These definitions of identity and gender are in keeping with Restoration notions of "person." Thomas

Hobbes writes, for example,

The word Person . . . signifies the *disguise* or *outward appearance* of a man, counterfeited on the Stage; and sometimes more particularly that part of it, which disguiseth the face, as a Mask or Visard: And from the Stage, hath been translated to and Representer of speech and action, as well in Tribunalls, as Theaters. So that a *Person*, is the same that an *Actor* is, both on the Stage and in common Conversation; and to Personate, is to *Act*, or *Represent* himself, or an other.

Cynthia Lowenthal notes that this definition of “person” reflects the culture’s sense that “identity can be shaped and changed, represented and acted, that it does not inhere in the very cells and fibers of the body.”⁴³

Examining Restoration libertinism as a series of performances suggests that libertinism was itself an enactment upon the surface of the body that gave rise to a distinct social identity. The libertine became an identifiable role played by men in Charles II’s court through dress, sexual performance, and the repetition of their deeds and the stories and literary texts based on these deeds. Through the reiterative performance of libertine acts via gossip and drama, a vision of a certain kind of aristocratic masculine identity, the libertine, was perpetuated in Restoration society. Through their performance of such acts and gestures as running naked through the streets of London, getting drunk and preaching Mountebank sermons, acquiring mistresses and seducing other men’s wives, and disguising themselves as tavern keepers and Italian physicians, and then repeating these performances over and over again in deed, in tale, and in their plays, the libertine wits created an identity for themselves in the court of Charles II. In the early 1660s, their role was purely decorative. The libertines accompanied Charles as his drinking companions, but had no particular interest in serving in his government in a major capacity. By the mid-1660s, at least one member of the group—Buckingham—aspired to greater political influence, and briefly became one of Charles’s primary advisors. When Buckingham fell from power in the early 1670s, the wits’ political aspirations were dashed, and the theatrical group slowly split into two factions: the aristocrats (Buckingham, Sedley, and Rochester) who joined the opposition party in the Parliament, and the gentlemen (Etherege and Wycherley) who continued to support the king’s agenda. Throughout the 1670s, the libertine playwrights cited the libertine identity in their plays. The libertine wits’ dramatic works during the 1670s were thus among the “reiterative and citational practices” through which libertine

ideology was performed on and created by the libertine body. Because their characters were in part drawn from the playwrights' own reputations, which therefore confused the characters with their authors, these dramatic representations worked to create the libertine personae in the public's imagination. In other words, the libertines' casting of versions of themselves in their plays served to create visions of who they were in the popular imagination. Each of their plays reiterates the libertine identity, but each subsequent play also contributes new attributes to that identity that previous plays did not. Wycherley's *Horner*, Etherege's *Dorimant*, Rochester's *Valentinian*, and Sedley's *Antony* all share basic libertine characteristics, but each of these characters is also different from the others. On the surface, these additions are merely fine tunings of the libertine personae, small alterations that help to keep the character interesting. More importantly, however, these differences signal changes in the group's views, relationships, and resolutions to the social and behavioral practices in the culture outside the theater.

Initially, the libertines in Charles II's court cast themselves as tricksters, figures who challenged the traditions and ideologies that bound Restoration society together. In writing about Jacobean drama, William Dynes maintains that, through the trickster's efforts, "the most fundamental relationships—between parents and children, husbands and wives, merchants and customers—are examined, threatened, and ultimately healed." By challenging social norms, the trickster produces meaning and order. As William Johnson notes,

In many Trickster narratives his paradox of simultaneously producing and challenging, creating and destroying, subverting and recreating the textual universe often involves a catalytic chaos out of, and because of, which the Trickster participates in generating a new world. At times such generation necessitates elimination of the old political, social, religious, psychic, narrative order; at times it transforms, fashions, or re-forms these into new models—or unforms them into their originals. To do this, the Trickster travels between one region and another, one realm of experience and another, and mediates between things manifest and things hidden.⁴⁴

While the libertines of the Restoration period did not explicitly articulate their identities as tricksters per se, they nevertheless hoped to serve a similar function in English society. By challenging Stuart ideology's vision of marriage, the family, and government, these libertines worked to fashion a new model for English culture based on their own views of individual liberty, which included more permissive

notions of sexual behavior and individual conscience. This agenda is embodied in the libertine protagonists of their plays in the 1670s. Like their creators, these characters challenge the social order of their settings to create a new “political, social, religious, psychic, narrative order.”

In each case, an important marker of the libertine trickster's challenge to the Stuart social and political order is his relationship to other men. Eve Sedgwick's classic study *Between Men: English Literature and Male Homosocial Desire* analyzes homosocial bonds in a variety of literary texts, including Wycherley's *The Country Wife*. According to Sedgwick, “[I]n any male dominated society, there is a special relationship between male homosocial (including homosexual) desire and the structures for maintaining and transmitting patriarchal power. . . . For historical reasons, this special relationship may take the form of ideological homophobia, ideological homosexuality, or some highly conflicted but intensely structured combination of the two.” In her analysis of *The Country Wife*, Sedgwick asserts that “the men's heterosexual relationships in the play have as their raison d'être an ultimate bonding between men,” a bonding that “if successfully achieved, is not detrimental to ‘masculinity’ but definitive of it.”⁴⁵ This vision of male relationships in Restoration England offers us an important insight into libertinism—libertine masculinity was grounded as much in the rake's bonding with other libertines as in his sexual activities with women. While Sedgwick confines her analysis primarily to the libertine's drive to cuckold other men, understanding the libertine's friendships with other rakes is crucial to our appreciation of his challenge to Stuart society; libertines are at the peak of their ability to transform society when they are closely allied to their male companions.

A performance of masculinity, sexuality, and homosociality, libertinism is inevitably a major plot point in narratives of the history of sexuality. Because the libertines in Charles II's court were the “last generation to conceive masculinity as permitting a relatively inclusive sexual behavior,” Michael McKeon, for example, places “the paradigmatically masculine figure of the aristocratic rake of the Restoration” at the center of what he sees as “the early modern shift from a sexual system of hierarchy to one of difference.” In his study of male love in the eighteenth century, however, George Haggerty draws upon the works of Sedgwick and Alan Bray to argue that the concept of male friendship offers scholars a better model for understanding male–male desire than libertinism. Summarizing Bray's analysis, Haggerty emphasizes that the two figures of the masculine friend and the

sodomite were distinct and even “diametrically opposed . . . in the public imagination” throughout the Renaissance, but during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, these two figures “become mutually indistinguishable” at important cultural moments. Contrary to Haggerty’s dismissal of the libertine’s importance in the history of same-sex desire, I hope to demonstrate in this study that, although the libertine is not the defining identity of male sexuality in the eighteenth century, he is nevertheless important to the history of male sexuality because he is a liminal figure who combines the characteristics of the “masculine friend” with those of the “sodomite.”

Warren Chernaik argues that “In several poems as well as in letters, Rochester explicitly contrasts the companionship of an all-male society, convivially sharing several bottles of wine, with the more threatening and invasive pleasure sought in sexual pursuit.” The homosocial bonding between Restoration libertines, however, goes well beyond the “rivalries and intimacies of male bachelor companionship . . . which is routed through heterosexual conquest,” to borrow Michael Mangan’s characterization. Rather, according to Rochester, the bonds of friendship, juxtaposed against the vagaries and betrayals of court life, are, as Chernaik writes, all that “allow a brief respite from the dominant values of a world akin to the Hobbesian state of nature.” This conception of libertinism is supported by a letter written by Rochester, typically the paragon of libertine sexual conquest, to his friend Henry Savile, another member of the libertine fraternity. As Rochester writes, sometime in the early 1670s,

Tis not the least of my happiness that I thinke you love mee, but the first of all my pretentions, is, to make itt appeare that I faithfully endeavor to deserve it, if there bee a reall good upon Earth ‘tis in the Name of freind, without w^{ch} all others are merely fantasticall, how few of us are fitt stuff to make that thing, wee have dayly the melancholy experience; However Deare Harry let us not give out or despaire of bringing that about w^{ch} as it is the most difficult & rare accident of life, is allsoe the Best, nay perhaps the only good one.⁴⁶

The libertine seduces sexual partners with promises of flying to love’s theater, but the only real retreat from the “gawdy gilded Stage” of court life, says Rochester, is with one’s male companions. The libertine moment of the 1660s and 1670s is an important episode in the study of male friendship and male sodomy. My study shows how contemporaries’ constructions of libertine excess as sodomy affected not only the period’s visions of libertinism but also those of the libertine

playwrights' themselves, increasingly divorcing it from masculine friendship and creating the image of the rakish libertine hell bent on sodomizing the God-fearing populace.

This study reads libertine drama within its historical context, the libertine fraternity in Charles II's court, in order to focus on the manner in which these libertine playwrights use performance, both theatrical and personal, to fashion political and social identities in the 1670s. Chapter 2 focuses on the ways in which libertine plays became more political in the early 1670s. Using Buckingham's experiences at court as a model, I argue that libertine performances include a distinct political agenda of social liberation as Buckingham turned to writing for the theater as a means of gaining a political base outside the court of Charles II. Chapter 3 argues that Wycherley's early plays, *Love in a Wood* (1671), *The Gentleman Dancing-Master* (1672), and *The Country Wife* (1675), resignify the social and behavioral practices of both libertines and their critics in order to affirm libertine codes of conduct and undermine the moralism of their critics. According to these comedies, libertine codes of conduct can serve as a force to reform marriage, parent-child relationships, and constructions of individual honor. *The Country Wife*, however, complicates this propagandistic use of the libertine figure by leaving Horner unmarried and isolated even from his male companions at the end of the play. This chapter argues that Horner's final choice of pleasure over society becomes a crucial moment in the evolution of the libertine fraternity because it forces the members of the circle to take a stand on which is more important to them: pleasure or society. Chapter 4 studies the response to Horner's choice by Etherege in *The Man of Mode* and by Wycherley himself in *The Plain Dealer*, both of which premiered in 1676. By this time, the libertine circle was in a similar position to that in which Horner found himself at the end of *The Country Wife*: isolated from influence and financially threatened. As a result of this decline in power, wealth, and opportunity, each of these plays suggests that the libertine must resolve to participate in society's institutions rather than reject them for personal pleasure. While Etherege's and Wycherley's final plays respond to the libertine circle's isolation by making pragmatic arguments for the libertine's social integration through marriage and friendship, other members of the wits' coterie cast libertinism's decline in more tragic terms. As I suggest in chapter 5, Sedley's *Antony and Cleopatra* (1677) and Rochester's *Valentinian* (written by 1677–1678) maintain that libertine performances cannot be reconciled to society's mores and strictures as Etherege and Wycherley would prefer. Through their tragic depictions of libertine

protagonists, Sedley's and Rochester's plays imagine the devastating end of libertine excess and argue that social conventions powerfully and compellingly demand the libertine's emasculation and utter downfall.

Chapter 6 concludes this study by examining the process by which critics of libertinism marginalized the libertines within Charles II's court and tracing the consequences of their strategy. Focusing on the pornographic closet drama *Sodom*, a play that censures the libertines by associating them with sodomy, a strategy that was so effective that this association continues even today, this chapter maintains that, while the libertines in Charles II's court were unable to persuade their fellow Englishmen and women to replace traditional morality with libertine excess, their performances nevertheless made an important contribution to English social history. Through their enactments of scandalous exploits throughout London and the countryside, the libertines in Charles's court expanded the cultural consciousness of possible sexual variations in 1670s England, but many of these variations were abhorrent to the proponents of more normative morality and conventions. Ironically, however, in order for these proponents of restrictive virtue to preach their rhetoric of morality, they had to evoke the image of the transgressive libertine performing outrageous acts. In order to exclude the libertine's performances from the list of acceptable behaviors, his acts had to continue to be named and cited and thus perpetuated. Libertine performances were therefore crucial to England's history of sexuality in two ways: they continued to offer Englishmen and women alternatives to normative sexual behavior long after the libertine wits themselves had passed into history, and they served as one of the activities that had to be excluded from proper sexual behaviors, allowing normative sexual desire to become in fact normative.

My aim in this book is to change how we insert libertinism's radical performances into our scholarly discussions of Restoration politics, theater, and sexuality. As I have already suggested, the libertine wits of Charles's court provide us with one means of connecting relationships between the political sphere and the social sphere, between the Restoration of the monarchy and the exclusion crisis of the late 1670s. Indeed, this book hopes to fill two gaps currently left in scholarship on the period. First, it studies the period between the subjects of studies that already exist. On the one hand, Nancy Klein Maguire's study, *Regicide and Restoration*, ends where my study begins. On the other hand, Susan Owen's *Restoration Theatre and Crisis* begins where my work ends. Second, it works to return libertinism to a more

central role in our understanding of politics, theater, and sexuality in the period. I maintain that our vision of the period is incomplete without a clearer picture of libertinism's participation in the use of plays to voice political and sexual dissent in the period. It is not my goal, however, to provide an exhaustive account of Stuart politics between the Restoration and the exclusion debates. Rather, this book studies libertine drama with reference to the sociopolitical events of the 1660s and 1670s. I trace the evolution of the ideological statements of the libertines' plays by reading them within the context of the Restoration settlement and the subsequent polarization of English society in order to provide a more complete understanding of libertinism's place in Stuart culture. The libertine wits in Charles II's court continue to dazzle us with the spectacle of their performances. Their plays continue to be staged, and their lives and acts fascinate literary scholars, biographers, and historians. Though the glory days of their drunken, sometimes criminal, exploits have passed, libertines such as Buckingham, Etherege, Wycherley, Rochester, and Sedley were vital in England's passage from the patriarchal past to the modern world. The rest of this book describes their unique and important contributions to English politics, drama, and sexuality during the reign of Charles II.

CHAPTER 2



PRODUCING LIBERTINE POLITICS: *THE REHEARSAL*

HAVING dashed about London for nearly a month, hiding by day and changing quarters each night in an attempt to avoid arrest on charges of high treason, George Villiers, duke of Buckingham, gave himself up and made his way to the Tower of London on June 28, 1667. Accused by his own steward of prognosticating the king's death by hiring an astrologer to cast the king's horoscope, Buckingham's life was at stake if found guilty of this crime. As Theobald Taaffe, earl of Carlingford, reported to James Butler, duke of Ormonde, Charles II received Buckingham that morning and "was very kind to the Duke," asserting "that he would be content to have his head cut off, if he did not prove that the witnesses examined against the Duke were suborned and bribed." In the face of this danger, Buckingham invested his journey to the Tower with the appearance of a triumphant royal progress. As another of Ormonde's correspondents related, "My Duke of Buckingham in his way to the Tower dyed at the Sun in Bishopsgate, gazed on by numerous spectators to whom he designedly showed himself with great ceremony from the balconye." He even sent advance "word to the Lieutenant of the Tower that he would come to him as soon as he had dined." The crowds cheered his performance, since, as Samuel Pepys reported, "the world reckon[s] him to suffer upon no other account then that he did propound <in Parliament> to have all men questioned that had to do with the receipt of the Taxes and prizes," a motion to guarantee that the king's tax agents faithfully performed their duties and to call into question the governing practices of his political nemesis, Lord Chancellor Edward Hyde, earl of Clarendon.¹

Buckingham's "designedly show[ing] himself with great ceremony" to spectators on the way to the Tower was a political performance. Purposefully mimicking the general contours of a royal progress or city pageant, Buckingham cast himself as the protagonist in a political drama. Falsely accused of wrongdoing by his enemies at court, he starred in this drama as the champion of good government, appealing to the common folk of London against corrupt ministers at court as he merrily marched to his unjust, and therefore only temporary, imprisonment. Presenting himself as a combination of Christ, Shakespeare's Prince Hal, and Charles I, Buckingham converted what could have been his last moments as a free man into a triumph of public relations. His transformation of politics—the court intrigues that led to his arrest for high treason—into public performance was a strategic effort to use his popularity outside the court to augment his own influence with the king and to challenge the influence of men such as Clarendon and the duke of York. This strategy was only partially successful and lasted just a short time. Buckingham contributed to Clarendon's dismissal as lord chancellor in 1667 but failed to gain for himself any lasting influence with the king. This chapter argues that Buckingham responded to this failure by resorting to another kind of performance, the theatrical drama. Like his life at court, his move to playwriting was also inherently political. Favoring toleration for religious groups outside the Church of England, encouraging pro-English trade policies against Ireland, France, and the Netherlands, and supporting Parliamentary independence from the crown, Buckingham championed positions that made him popular with non-Anglicans, merchants and farmers, and radical factions that wanted to limit the powers of the restored monarch. His political fortunes and authorship of *The Rehearsal* dramatically shaped the direction of libertinism in the 1670s.

Writing for the theater was a natural extension of Buckingham's desire to be admired by citizens outside the court. Michael McKeon suggests that a need for validation was an element of aristocratic ideology. He writes, "The notion of honor as a unity of outward circumstance and internal essence is the most fundamental justification for the hierarchical stratification of society by status, and it is so fundamental as to be largely tacit. What it asserts is that the social order is not circumstantial and arbitrary, but corresponds to and expresses an analogous, intrinsic moral order." Linda Zionkowski notes that "Besides courage and valor in the king's service, another indicator of this 'unity of status and virtue' that validated the 'rule of the best' was elite participation in, if not dominance over, the literary culture of their time." With the reopening of the theaters in 1660 and Charles's

subsequent patronage of theatrical events, playwrights enjoyed an increased level of prestige in the new Stuart culture. As a result, wealthy aristocrats could authenticate their participation in the literary culture by writing for the stage. Zionkowski argues in her study of the professionalization of poetry that Rochester, Buckingham, and their circle wrote not for public entertainment but for private diversion. Such poetry, says Zionkowski, was an expression of these aristocrats' leisure, which gave them time for intellectual and artistic entertainments: displays of their elevated status. Writing for the stage might seem to contradict this idea of writing as a leisure activity, except for the fact that aristocrats typically reinforced their status as amateur writers by declining payment from theatrical companies for their plays.² The public nature of the theater uniquely suited Buckingham's need for "more numerous spectators." Since literacy rates were climbing in the period—Lawrence Stone maintains that 45 percent of adult males were literate by 1675—playwriting could potentially reach both literate and illiterate citizens.³ Furthermore, where the theater had previously been the exclusive province of the wealthy and well connected, by the end of the 1660s its audience had become increasingly populated by ordinary citizens. When Samuel Pepys attended the theater in 1668, for example, he saw "a mighty company of citizens, prentices and others" in the audience and observed, "when I begin first to be able to bestow a play on myself, I do not remember that I saw so many by half of the ordinary prentices and mean people in the pit" (9.2). With *The Rehearsal*, Buckingham initiates the libertine circle's writing for two audiences, the court *and* the "mean people in the pit," as a form of political action. Just as he had in 1667, when he lost power as a result of the accusation of treason, Buckingham once again appealed to people outside the court's inner circle in an effort to assert his utility to Charles. If the duke could show his monarch that he enjoyed the support of the people, then perhaps Charles would replace his current advisors with Buckingham once again. Previously Buckingham had entertained the populace with his progress to the Tower; in *The Rehearsal* he makes them laugh at the king's ministers in an effort to convince his audience that those ministers were incapable of leading the nation in the right direction.

BUCKINGHAM THE PERFORMER AS POLITICIAN

Before we can understand the politics of *The Rehearsal*, we need to examine Buckingham's standing in the network of politicians in Charles II's court during the 1660s. When *The Rehearsal* premiered

in 1671, Buckingham appeared to be the most powerful courtier in Charles II's Privy Council. The duke's popularity and prominence at court bewildered many of Charles's other ministers, including Clarendon. As Clarendon writes in his *Life*,

It cannot be imagined, considering the loose Life He led (which was a Life more by Night than Day) in all the Liberties that Nature could desire or Wit invent, how great an Interest He had in Both Houses of Parliament; that is, how many in Both would follow his advice, and concur in what He proposed. His Quality and Condescensions, the Pleasantness and Sharpness of his wit, unrestrained by any Modesty or Religion, drew Persons of all Affections and Inclinations to like his Company; and to believe that the Levities and Vanities would be wrought off with Age, and there would enough of Good to be left to become a great Man, and make him useful to his Country, for which He pretended to have a wonderful Affection and Reverence; and that all his Displeasure against the Court preceeded from their declared Malignity against the Liberty of the Subject, and their Desire that the King should govern by the Example of France. He had always held Intelligence with the principal Persons of the levelling Party, and professed to desire that Liberty of Conscience might be granted to all; and exercised his Wit with most License against the Church, the Law, and the Court. . . . He found a Respect and Concurrence from Men of different Tempers and Talents, and had an incredible Opinion with the People.⁴

Clarendon's description of Buckingham's prominence as a politician in the 1660s suggests that the duke's importance was in a large measure due to these three strengths: Buckingham was close to the king, enjoyed popularity with "the people," or citizens outside the court, and knew how to use performances of various sorts as a means of appealing to both of these audiences. Why, then, have so much "Displeasure against the court?" In part, this displeasure was the result of political differences. As Clarendon notes, Buckingham championed "the Liberty of the Subject" and opposed absolutism. Furthermore, Buckingham's apparent status as the king's favorite belied the fact that Charles rarely entrusted the duke with any real responsibility. Indeed, Buckingham's enemies at court were often given more important policy-making assignments while the duke was relegated to relatively minor ceremonial roles due to the "Liberties" of his libertine lifestyle, which led to his belief in "Liberty of Conscience" for all people and his association with radical groups such as the Levellers.⁵ As a result, by 1671, Buckingham was a relatively marginalized figure within Charles's

court. He turned to playwriting as a means of lashing out against his political enemies, who enjoyed the king's continued favor, and as an attempt to regain a prominent position at court.

Throughout the 1660s, Buckingham appeared to be a political insider. Within a year of the monarchy's restoration, he was sworn in as a member of the Privy Council and was made lord-lieutenant of Yorkshire, "where all the nobility and gentry came to wait upon His Grace and the town received him with all the joy and best music they could make."⁶ His path to political prominence, however, had more to do with personal attachment to the king, which dated back to their earliest childhood, than to his governing ability. Buckingham's father was plucked from obscurity when he caught the attention of James I, Charles's grandfather. James became enamored with the beautiful, French-educated young man and made him his cupbearer. His rise from cupbearer to virtual prime minister was meteoric, and in all likelihood the first duke of Buckingham was also James's lover.⁷ When the first duke was assassinated in 1628, his son was placed in the care of the royal family and raised with Prince Charles and his brother James. Thus, Buckingham's personal attachment to Charles preceded his earliest memories and was based at least in part upon their elders' close relationships.

As his later life bears out, Buckingham learned that prominence at court could be achieved through a personal connection to the king. Indeed, such attachment could often outweigh mistakes, faults, or disagreements with Charles or his other ministers. Throughout 1666, for example, the king intervened in Buckingham's squabbles with one noble or the other and constantly kept his childhood companion out of serious trouble. First, while debating a bill in Parliament, Buckingham "made reproachful reflections upon all the persons of Ireland" and was subsequently challenged by Thomas Butler, duke of Ossory, the eldest son of the duke of Ormonde.⁸ When Charles heard of the duel, he sent representatives to keep the two men apart until the House of Lords could deal with the matter. A few days later, Buckingham got into a shouting and shoving match with Henry Pierrepont, the marquess of Dorchester. Charles sent them to the Tower to cool off. Within a week, Buckingham was again arguing with another nobleman, this time Henry Somerset, the marquess of Worcester, taking him by his nose, and "pull[ing] him about" the room during a committee meeting.⁹ Again, Buckingham was punished by being made to spend a brief stint in the Tower. In each case, the king's attachment to Buckingham prevented him from facing more serious punishment. No doubt, a similarly expected intervention on Charles's part helped

Buckingham remain merry on his way to the Tower less than a year later.

As the large crowd watching his progress to the Tower attests, Clarendon was correct in attributing Buckingham's star status at court in the 1660s to an attachment to "the people," citizens who looked up to the duke as a champion of dissent and respect for commoners. As Clarendon notes, Buckingham frequently spoke on behalf of religious freedom for Levellers, Presbyterians, Anabaptists, and even atheists. Even before his introduction of a bill into Parliament calling for religious toleration for dissenting Protestants in December 1667, he was known as an opponent of religious repression.¹⁰ Regarding the economy, he took the side of English goods over foreign imports. In 1666, for example, he worked feverishly on behalf of the Irish Cattle Bill, which sought to end the import into England of cheap Irish beef, which hurt English farmers. It was during the debate on this bill that Buckingham offended the duke of Ossory. His immensely successful glass works factory in Yorkshire—the duke even patented his glass-making process—was also said to have destroyed the glass trade in Venice in favor of English goods. Such successes made him a darling of the English manufacturing and farming classes. And finally, as Hester Chapman notes, "nearly everyone who served under or worked with Buckingham spoke well of him and became devoted to his interests." One Yorkshire gentleman, for example, wrote to a correspondent in 1666 to praise the duke for his preparations against the Dutch:

The Duke of Buckingham's prudent management has made all sorts of persons in the city and country show the greatest readiness to serve on occasion. He has mustered his troop, which is well equipped, and those who came in hopes to be listed outnumbered those entertained; he dismissed them kindly with ten shillings a man for the charge of their journey. It is wondered by his gentlemen that nothing is said of him publicly, so I beg that this may be in the next Gazette.¹¹

Buckingham's popularity went hand in hand with his positions against Clarendon's repressive views on religion and pro-Irish trade laws; it is no wonder then that his consignment to the Tower was, as Pepys reports, seen by many as an attempt by Clarendon to silence his more popular adversary.

Buckingham's personal attachment to the king and his popularity among the people combined to make him appear to be one of the most prominent politicians in Charles's court during the 1660s. This appearance was deceptive, however. As Ronald Hutton points out, "He was not made a minister despite constant intriguing, and the only post he

obtained was the ornamental one of Master of the Horse, which he bought . . . for an enormous sum.”¹² The limits of his influence became glaringly apparent in 1665 when England declared war on Holland. Buckingham immediately volunteered for naval service and requested the command of a flagship. James, duke of York, who as lord high admiral commanded the navy, rejected his application. As Henry Mordaunt, earl of Peterborough, reports, “Buckingham’s fickleness and uncertainty (for those are the epithets of such as would favour him), gives scandal to every sober thing. He has quitted his ship, sent back his goods, and abandoned to shift several gentlemen (who) came with him, and because of the appearance of her strength and the goodnesse of her defence thrust himself aboard the *Earl of Sandwich* as a private volunteer to the disturbance of that shipp and the dislike of everyone.”¹³ Determined to take a leadership role in the prosecution of the war, Buckingham next requested “that in respect of his Quality and his being a Privy Counsellor, He might be present in all Councils of War.”¹⁴ When the duke of York again denied his request, Buckingham took his petition directly to the king, who sided with his brother, arguing that the duke was too fickle for command and should instead return to Yorkshire and prepare for a possible invasion. Soon, the disgruntled Buckingham was the unofficial leader of an unofficial opposition in the House of Lords; the duke of York, the earl of Clarendon, and Sir Henry Bennet¹⁵ were his primary targets.

With these three men as the primary investigators of the charges against him in the early summer of 1667, Buckingham desperately needed the king’s favor and the people’s support as he made his way to the Tower. He used his third strength, his ability to perform entertaining roles effectively and at the right time, to gain this favor and support against the capital offenses charged against him. The duke stood accused of attempting to predict the king’s demise by reading his horoscope. One of Buckingham’s republican friends, a man named Braythwaite, whom Buckingham had hired as his steward, came to Charles, accusing the duke of high treason. Braythwaite pointed to Dr. John Heydon as the astrologer hired by the duke, and Heydon was immediately arrested and his correspondence was confiscated. According to Clarendon,

The King was so exceedingly offended at this Carriage and Behavior of the Duke, that He made Relation of it to the Council-Board, and publicly declared, “that He was no longer of that Number,” and caused his Name to be left out in the List of the Counsellors, and “that He was no longer a Gentleman of the Bedchamber,” and put the Earl of

Rochester to wait in his Place. His Majesty likewise revoked the Commission by which He was constituted Lord Lieutenant of the East Riding in Yorkshire, and granted that Commission to the Earl of Burlington: So that it was not possible for his Majesty to give more lively Instances of his Displeasure against any Man, than He had done against the Duke.¹⁶

Charles, therefore, ordered Buckingham's arrest, and Buckingham went into hiding. The evidence against Buckingham was flimsy at best.¹⁷ Consequently, it seems unlikely that the actual evidence against Buckingham was the real focus of his arrest and subsequent interrogations. Indeed, sources from the period note that Buckingham was rumored to have been making disparaging remarks about the king and his ministers for some time. Sir John Reresby, for example, reports that Buckingham had "been some time in disgrace at Court" even before he was accused of casting Charles's nativity.¹⁸ As Clarendon points out,

the Meanness and Vileness of the Persons with whom He kept so familiar Correspondence, the Letters between them which were ready to be produced, the disrespectful and scandalous Discourses which He often held concerning the King's Person, and many other Particulars which had most inflamed the King, and which might fully have been proved, would have manifested so much Vanity and Presumption in the Duke, as must have lessened his Credit and Reputation with all serious Men, and made him worthy of severe Censure.¹⁹

Within the context of Buckingham's "disrespectful and scandalous" behavior, these charges were simply one more item on a list of "Particulars" that had "inflamed the King."

Buckingham's ability to perform a wide range of roles that effectively appealed to specific audiences throughout his disgrace, imprisonment, and examination before the king bears as much responsibility for his release as the flimsiness of the evidence—after all, Buckingham was not formally tried for his alleged crimes; the result of his examination before the king could easily have led to his remaining in the Tower without a trial if Charles had so wished. Two performances in particular seem especially important in his successful fight against the charges made against him: his bravado in performing the role of the wronged minister giving himself up to unjust accusations and corrupt ministers of the government and his performance of the role of a submissive servant who has always been loyal to his personal friend, the king. The first of these roles took several shapes. First, the

duke appealed directly to the general populace to support him against Clarendon when he “designedly showed himself with great ceremony from the balcony” during his progress to the Tower and demonstrated his great popularity with the people on the streets. Second, he made this appeal in the Parliament when he played up the contrasts between himself and the unpopular Clarendon during his progress. Indeed, one of the accusations his enemies made against him was that he was attempting to make himself so popular that he was becoming a treasonous threat to the new monarch and his ministers. Clarendon notes that Charles brought to his attention the evidence against Buckingham and emphasizes the implications of the duke’s attempts to predict his own and Charles’s futures. Clarendon writes,

The King now shewed [me] all those Examinations and Depositions which had been taken; and that Letter to the Fellow [Heydon], “which,” His Majesty said, “He knew to be every Word the Duke’s own Hand;” and the Letters of the Duke from the Fellow, which still give him the Stile of Prince, and mentioned what great Things his Stars had promised to him, and that He was the Darling of the People, who had set their Hearts and Affections and their Hopes upon his Highness, with many other Foolish and fustian Expressions.²⁰

Clearly one of the things that “inflamed” Charles against Buckingham was the possibility that his friend saw himself as a “Prince,” a “Darling of the People” whose “Hearts and Affections and . . . Hopes” might one day lead him to challenge the king’s very right to rule. Buckingham’s progress to the Tower foregrounded his influence over and popularity with the people in the streets lining up to watch his march to imprisonment and inevitably contrasted it with the unpopularity of Charles’s current advisors.

Perhaps because of the duke’s threatening popularity, it soon became apparent that his enemies at court were intent on vigorously prosecuting his case. While Charles soon “appeared less Angry than He had been, and willing that an End should be put to the Business without any publick Prosecution,” Clarendon was firm that Buckingham be deposed and then questioned before the Privy Council,²¹ and hence a committee consisting of Arlington, Sir William Morris, Sir William Coventry, and Lord Clifford questioned the duke. The transcript of his examination suggests that Buckingham’s responses to Arlington’s questions are simultaneously carefree, evasive, and hostile, and demonstrate that he understood that the real audience for this deposition was the king and the members of the court who would be present at the

reading of the evidence against him during his examination before the Privy Council. For example, when Arlington begins the deposition by challenging the accused to answer his questions honestly, Buckingham responds, "I hope when I do answer you'll believe what I say. Otherwise I shall have but an unequal part of this businesse, if I am not to be believed when I spake truth, and am made speake only that advantage may be taken from what I say; but however I promise you I will answer clearly and very positively to any question you aske of mee." His thinly veiled hostility to Arlington makes clear that Buckingham suspected his interrogator's motives and thought it likely that Arlington would attempt to misconstrue his answers. The duke circumvents such attempts by turning the whole interrogation into a farce and forcing Arlington into a defensive position. When asked if he knows a "Doctor John Heydon," Buckingham responds, "I do know one Heydon, but I do not know whether Hes a Dr. or his name be John or no." Likewise, when asked what his relation to Heydon is, Buckingham pretends to misunderstand the question. When Arlington attempts to get the duke to admit that he has entrusted Heydon with important correspondence, Buckingham turns the question around to make Arlington look foolish. As the transcript reads,

- Du.* My Lord I suppose you have had conversation with him.
Arl. I have seen him.
Du. Pray my Lord as to mattir of parts what do you take him to be?
Arl. I saw him but once.
Du. W[e]ll my Lord, I don't know w[ha]t you take him to be, but the first time I saw him I tooke him to be so silly a f[e]llow that I would not thinke it fit to trust him with a tallow candle.²²

Throughout the interrogation, Buckingham brilliantly calls Arlington's judgment into question. The interrogation continues in this vein until Arlington apparently gave up and abruptly ended the conversation. Buckingham's playful answers to Arlington's questions show that he believes his exoneration lay in entertaining the king through wit rather than calling each piece of evidence into question on a factual or logical basis.

While insulting the king's ministers might seem witty in a deposition, the same kind of performance could very well be seen as treasonous if directed at the king. In fact, the accusation that Buckingham was trying to make himself popular with the people was made again during his examination before the king, reminding Charles of the duke's rumored slander against him. Buckingham was therefore extremely

careful to minimize his popularity in an effort to diffuse his monarch's worries. As Pepys records, "it is said that when he was charged with making himself popular (as ended he is, for many of the discontented Parliament, Sir Robt. Howard and Sir Tho. Meres and others, did attend at the Council-chamber when he was examined), he should answer that whoever was committed to prison by my Lord Chancellor or my Lord Arlington could not want being popular" (8.342). Indeed, Buckingham attempted to cast his previous performances as the popular man of the people as a threat against Clarendon and Arlington but not as a threat to Charles's reign. This contrast was even noted by Pepys in his recording of court gossip about Buckingham's examination before the Council. As he writes, the duke "carr[ied] it very submissively and pleasingly to the King; but to my Lord Arlington, who doth prosecute the business, he was most bitter and sharp, and very slighting" (8.330).

Buckingham's performance of the role of a humble, loyal, and loving servant of the king apparently won the day: after a brief interview in which most of the evidence against him was called into question, Buckingham was acquitted of any wrongdoing.²³ Buckingham's victory, however, resulted in a permanent rift in his relations with the king's other ministers and left the duke a minority figure within the government. Buckingham followed up his release from the Tower by spearheading the opposition to Clarendon's ministry, which ultimately brought about the latter's disgrace and removal from the government. Initially, Clarendon's fall benefited Buckingham. As Resesby points out, "The Duke of Buckingham, who was now perfectly restooed to the Kings favour and acted as principal minister of state. The King consulted him chiefly in all matters of moment, the forraign ministers aplyd themselves to him before they were admitted to have audience of the King, &c." During this period, Buckingham worked to help the dissenters and was widely seen as the primary influence behind the king's wish to dispense with the Act of Uniformity in 1668. As Viscount Conway wrote in February of that year, "The great interest now driven on in the kingdom is by the duke of Buckingham, who heads the fanatics. The king complies with him out of fear; the Commons are swayed by him as a favorite and a premier minister; he himself thinks to arrive to be another Oliver, and the fanatics expect a day of redemption under him." But appearances were not what they seemed. The House of Commons was not swayed to brush aside the law, and Buckingham was already a relatively inconsequential figure in Charles's government. Indeed, as Resesby notes, the duke's

new responsibilities were “soe unfit for this caractere, by reason of his givinge himselfe up to his plesures, that (turning the night into day and the day into night) he neglected both his attendance upon the King, the recieveing of ministers and other persons that waited to speake to him, and indeed all sort of business, soe that he lasted not long.” Charles soon placed him among a group of five politicians, known as the Cabal, so-called after the initials of their names, Clifford, Arlington, Buckingham, Ashley, and Lauderdale, as head of his government.²⁴ While Buckingham served as the presumptive leader of the group, Charles empowered Clifford and Arlington to enact his policies. Charles’s continued reliance on Arlington, who had so openly sought Buckingham’s conviction in 1667, however, made it abundantly clear that Buckingham’s role in the government would continue to be minimal.

Buckingham’s marginalization was undoubtedly caused both by his libertine activities as well as his continued association with radical politics. He proposed in Parliament a Bill for Comprehension, which would guarantee religious freedom for dissenters, and consorted with well-known radicals, such as John Wildman. He also advocated radical positions in his speeches before the Parliament. In May 1668, for example, he attempted to arbitrate a dispute concerning privilege between the two Houses. The House of Lords had claimed jurisdiction over a case between Thomas Skinner and the East India Company, a jurisdiction that the Commons refused to acknowledge. Buckingham was part of the conference committee commissioned to resolve the dispute. His speech on this matter echoes the radical arguments of London’s Whigs. As Gary S. De Krey reminds us, “City Whigs based these understandings [of civic government and electoral processes] upon right rather than prescription, and they derived the institutions and the processes of London government from custom rather than from the crown.” In his speech, Buckingham squarely places the origin of the “Right of the Commons” and the “Privilege of the Lords” in custom: “If we are in the wrong, we and our Predecessors have been so for these many hundred of years: and not only our Predecessors, but yours too; This being the first time that ever an Appeal was made in point of Juridicature, from the Lords House to the House of Commons.” According to the duke, judicial power flows downward from the king as a result of “the Lawes of this Land,” laws that have their origin in “Common Sence” and the “Magna Charta.” He concludes that the real dispute here is between the lords and the judiciary, which must be constrained by “what we practise every day,” that is, the custom of appealing certain cases to the House of Lords. Thus,

his speech is grounded in much of the same discourse as London's radicals: custom, precedent, and "the Lawes of the Land" are the authorities for legislative, judicial, and executive power; an argument that surely did not sit well with the king and his other ministers, who, to return to Clarendon's words, desired Charles to "govern by the Example of France."²⁵

With the Treaty of Dover in 1670, in which Charles publicly allied himself with France, England was once again thrown into political turmoil. Both Nonconformists and allies of the Church of England were shocked by the king's alliance with a militantly Catholic power, and some suspected that there was some sort of secret articles that promised Charles's conversion to Catholicism. This treaty further signaled Buckingham's subsidiary role within the government. Although Buckingham was the ostensible negotiator of the treaty, secret negotiations led by other members of the court were Charles's real aims, which included agreeing to convert publicly to Catholicism in exchange for a subsidy from Louis XIV. These aims were hidden from Buckingham. As Charles writes in a letter to his sister, "it will be good that you write sometimes to [Buckingham] in general terms that he may not expect that there is [*sic*] further negotiations than what he knows . . . he may suspect that there is something of [the Catholic] interest in the case, which is a matter he must not be acquainted with, therefore you must have a care not to say the least thing that may make him suspect anything of it."²⁶ The public's reaction to this new alliance was not positive, and the duke of York's subsequent refusal to attend Anglican service complicated matters further, as did the Cabal ministry's lack of political unity.

Thus, by 1671, Buckingham, while still a member of Charles's government, was not officially in charge of any particular office or facet of government. Members of the Privy Council, who enjoyed the king's trust more tangibly, viewed him with hostility and seemed anxious for his downfall. In a time of political crisis following the Dutch Wars, the government began to propagate its ideology of moderation by appealing directly to the populace with a strategic message of national order meant to stifle dissent, a message I discussed in chapter 1. This appeal and its push for political consensus could potentially challenge Buckingham's own popularity with the average citizen and threatened his pet project, religious toleration. With the personal politics of the court fueled by rivalries and personality conflicts, Buckingham could only perceive this move as a sign of Charles's further support of Arlington at his own expense. As a result of the machinations against him, Buckingham had learned two important lessons about how to

gain political power. First, aligning oneself with “the people” could be a double-edged sword—popularity focused more of the court’s attention on a minister, but this attention could also evoke the king’s envy and distrust. Support outside the court was therefore potentially career and life threatening if it was not simultaneously accompanied by Charles’s approbation. Second, one way to achieve both popular and monarchical favor was to enact entertaining performances that aimed political critique at the king’s ministers and away from the king himself. Making the king laugh along with other spectators could be an effective means of neutralizing political enemies and securing more political capital for oneself. Buckingham worked to enact both of these lessons in his masterpiece, *The Rehearsal*. In writing this play, he attempted to gain the benefits of the lived libertine performances on the streets, brothels, and alehouses of London, that is, the influence that comes with popular celebrity, by using the theater to entertain Londoners with an insider’s depiction of the king’s incompetent ministers, men markedly inferior to himself.

BUCKINGHAM THE POLITICIAN AS PLAYWRIGHT

A play about playwriting, *The Rehearsal* is an exercise in drama as a political act. On one level, the play can be read as a straightforward satire of heroic drama and its most prominent proponent, John Dryden, as a number of scholars have illustrated.²⁷ Scholars agree that *The Rehearsal* parodies elements of Dryden’s 1670s ten-act play, *The Conquest of Granada* and its hero Almanzor. On another level, the play can be read as a satire of the court’s political intrigues and ideology.²⁸ Both satiric projects are alluded to in the play’s prologue.

We might well call this short Mock-play of ours
 A Posie made of Weeds instead of Flowers;
 Yet such have been presented to your noses,
 And there are such, I fear, who thought ‘em Roses.
 Would some of ‘em were here, to see, this night,
 What Stuff it is in which they took delight.
 Here, brisk insipid Blades, for wit, let fall
 Sometimes dull Sence; but oft’ner, none at all:
 There, strutting Heroes, with a grim-fac’d train,
 Shall brave the Gods, in King Cambyzes vain.
 For (changing Rules, of late, as if men writ
 In spite of Reason, Nature, Art, and Wit)
 Our Poets make us laugh at Tragedy,
 And with their Comedies they make us cry.²⁹

Instead of a nosegay made of “Flowers,” a typical accessory at the theater, this play is one made of the “Weeds” of heroic drama. Because some spectators have mistaken heroic plays for “Roses,” this play will strip away the genre’s deceptive traits, including its depictions of “brisk insipid Blades” who mistake “dull Sence” for “wit” and “strutting Heroes” who grimly “brave the Gods.” With such characters, says Buckingham, heroic drama neglects traditional theatrical rules based on “Reason, Nature, Art, and Wit” and, as a result, “make[s] us laugh at Tragedy” and cry at comedy. The prologue ends by asserting that if the play’s depiction of heroic drama helps the audience to “grow wise” and reject the genre’s “feats” (21) and the “reasons for ‘em too” (22), then it will have successfully “reform’d your Stage” (27).

Like Rochester’s “Leave this Gawdy Guided Stage,” the stage referred to in Buckingham’s prologue is more than just the theatrical space and the plays produced on it. This stage is also the theater of Charles II’s court. It is important to note that the prologue focuses the audience’s attention on the “brisk insipid Blades” and “strutting Heroes” rather than on King Cambyzes. Buckingham’s attacks on the “Stuff” of heroic drama are also attacks on Charles’s other ministers and on their politics of moderation more generally; the “stage” becomes an elaborate metaphor for the court and its ideology. The epilogue makes the play’s political project explicit:

If it be true, that Monstrous births presage
The following mischiefs that afflicts the Age,
And sad disasters to the State proclaim;
Plays, without head or tail, may do the same. (11–14)

Throughout the epilogue, Buckingham connects Charles II’s reign with heroic drama, as both Charles and Dryden had already done. By critiquing the latter explicitly, he critiques the former implicitly. Heroic drama, says Buckingham, is a monstrosity that predicts “mischiefs” and “disasters to the State.” If heroic drama is little more than “Weeds,” then the “State” is an uncultivated garden that must be tended. The epilogue asserts, “We have these ten years felt [heroic drama’s] Influence” (19), a period of time that coincides with the Restoration of Charles II’s government. The duke offers his play as an entertaining guide to the problems of each. By following the play’s advice, which is to “have, at least, once in our lives, a time / When we may hear some Reason, not all Rhyme” (17–18), the kingdom will have “peace” (15). The epilogue therefore ends by calling for “a year of Prose and Sence” (20). According to Buckingham, the court’s use of “Rhyme”

is just artifice, pleasing words used to hide its incompetence and political machinations; the realistic "Prose" of libertinism offers the people common "Sence." What exactly does this prescription mean? A close examination of the inner and outer plays demonstrates three things: *The Rehearsal* establishes libertines as dramatic and social critics capable of offering the audience an alternative to the ideology of Dryden, Arlington, and the duke of York; the play suggests that heroic drama is a vehicle through which Charles's unworthy ministers attempt to valorize themselves, as a means of perpetuating their own political plots; and the play offers a radical alternative to the court's ideology, an alternative based on libertinism.

The play's opening scene echoes the prologue and the epilogue's critique of the contemporary dramatic and political scene by casting the libertine as a critic, beginning with the chance meeting between Johnson and Smith, two friends whose conversation immediately turns to "all the strange new things" that are occurring in London (1). Johnson is a libertine, much like Buckingham himself: as he explains to Smith, "I love to please my self as much, and to trouble others as little as I can: and therefore do naturally avoid the company of those solemn Fops, who, being incapable of Reason, and insensible of Wit and Pleasure, are always looking grave, and troubling one another, in hopes to be thought men of Business" (1). When Smith asks him how he spends his time, he answers, "I eat and drink as well as I can, have a She-friend to be private with in the afternoon, and sometimes see a Play" (2). According to *The Rehearsal*, giving oneself over to one's pleasures, what Buckingham himself was criticized by his enemies for doing, is a natural and reasonable thing to do. One of these pleasures, according to Johnson, is going to the theater, an activity that involves more than just passively "see[ing] a Play." Indeed, as the rest of *The Rehearsal's* plot makes clear, being a man of "Reason," "Wit," and "Pleasure" also means being a drama critic. As we saw in chapter 1, scholars identify the late seventeenth century as the period in which modern criticism began. By constructing his audiences as critics of the characteristics of heroic drama, Buckingham also casts them as critics of the court's policies and actions.

Johnson and Smith, in their guise as critics, interact with one another. Their conversation dramatizes and models Buckingham's criticism of heroic drama as "Monstrous" and unnatural. When Johnson mentions that he sometimes sees a play, it allows his conversation with Smith to turn to an evaluation of the contemporary dramatic scene. According to Johnson, the state of Restoration theater is poor, since "there are such things . . . such hideous, monstrous things, that it has almost

made me forswear the Stage, and resolve to apply my self to the solid nonsense of your pretenders to Business, as the more ingenious pastime” (2). The reason for this decline, says Johnson, is the advent of a “new kind of Wits” (2): “your Blade, your frank Persons, your Drolls: fellows that scorn to imitate Nature; but are given altogether to elevate and surprise” (2). As usual, Smith responds with a question: “Elevate, and surprise? pr’ythee make me understand the meaning of that” (2). Although Johnson claims, “I don’t understand that my self” (2), he postulates that it means “Fighting, Loving, Sleeping, Rhyming, Dying, Dancing, Singing, Crying; and every thing, but Thinking and Sence” (2). According to Johnson, these activities, the main elements of heroic drama, fail “to imitate Nature.”

As we have seen, the play’s epilogue calls for age of “Reason” and “Sence” because of this failure. These words constitute the libertines’ phrase for allowing one’s senses to guide one’s responses to the world around him or her. Rochester’s “A Satyre against Reason and Mankind” (1674), often considered the definitive statement on the libertine circle’s views and beliefs, follows Buckingham’s dramatic proposal of this idea. Rochester’s poem argues that there are two kinds of reason, one right and one wrong. As Reba Wilcoxin notes, these two kinds “are distinguished by the nature of the evidence on which any proposition rests.” For Rochester and his companions, “the only admissible source of knowledge is the senses”.³⁰

Thus whilst against false Reasoning I enveigh,
I own right reason, which I would obey:
That Reason which distinguishes by Sense,
And gives us Rules of Good and Ill from thence:
That bounds Desires with a reforming Will
To keep ‘em more in vigour, not to kill.³¹

According to Rochester’s poem, reason helps one enjoy his pleasures, regulating them only to help one continue to enjoy them further. Buckingham’s play agrees with this idea, arguing that Johnson’s libertinism—pleasing oneself, eating and drinking well, enjoying a she-friend, and attending plays—is a natural and reasonable pursuit because it fulfills the body’s innate desires. In contrast, the court’s rejection of these pursuits, embodied in Buckingham’s marginalization at court because of his libertinism, is unnatural and unreasonable.

Buckingham uses his mimicry of heroic drama to critique the devaluing of personal pleasure by some members of the court. He does this, in part, by mocking the genre’s discourse of heroic love. In heroic

dramas, the hero loves a virtuous woman but, in contrast to the libertine, always chooses duty over sex. Dryden's *Almanzor*, for example, is tested throughout *The Conquest of Granada* by the conflict between his love for the king's wife and his desire to remain loyal to his liege. According to Buckingham, however, this privileging of duty over love emasculates men by substituting meaningless ideals for natural sexuality, as illustrated in the characters of Prince Prettyman and Prince Volscius. In act 2, scene 3, Prince Prettyman bemoans his state in life:

How strange a captive am I grown of late!
 Shall I accuse my Love, or blame my Fate?
 My Love, I cannot; that is too Divine:
 And against Fate what mortal dares repine? (15)

Prince Prettyman searches for idealistic meanings to attach to his heroic actions, ideals such as "Love" and "Fate." This search, meanwhile, has rendered him unable to act in manly ways. His "captivity" is the result of his love for Chloris, whose entrance causes him to fall asleep. As Bayes, the author of the internal play, explains to Johnson and Smith, "Does not that, now, surprise you, to fall asleep just in the nick? His spirits exhale with the heat of his passion, and all that, and swop falls asleep, as you see" (16). In the interest of "surprise," Bayes's play abandons nature. Instead of "the heat of passion" inspiring the lover to enjoy his beloved sexually, as a libertine would, it causes him to slumber and miss his chance to be with her. Prince Volscius is likewise unmanned by heroic love: he is unable to finish dressing himself for battle because he is paralyzed by the choice between duty and love. As he proclaims in act 3, scene 2, as day contends with night at dusk, "So does my Honour and my Love together / Puzzle me so, I can resolve for neither" (30). Consequently, he comically exits the stage with one boot on and one boot off. Because heroic love denies men the ability to enjoy their sexual desires, the same denial that members of the court sought to foist on Buckingham, the duke criticizes it, and by extension these members of the court, as unnatural.

Other scholars have already delineated additional ways in which *The Rehearsal* parodies heroic drama. Instead of reiterating these parodic strategies here, I would like to examine further the play's use of heroic drama as a stand-in for the ideologies and practices of Buckingham's enemies at court. Buckingham maintains that heroic drama falsely valorizes the actions of Charles II's ministers. As we saw in chapter 1, scholars have already noted that Charles II recognized the power of theater and spectacle as a political tool. Charles's government

was committed to employing theatrical events to impress upon the minds of the populace that monarchy brought with it national unity, social accord, and economic prosperity. As Nancy Klein Maguire notes, “More than any of the playwrights, Dryden was conscious of the development of Carolean culture.” Indeed, “in his increasingly capable hands,” writes Maguire, Dryden’s heroic rhymed plays “helped to mold the new culture.”³² In *The Rehearsal*, Buckingham objects to the direction this “new culture” was taking. Dryden claimed that heroic drama’s spectacle accurately reflected the values and magnificence of the court. As he writes in his dedication of *The Conquest of Granada* to the duke of York, “Heroique Poesie has always been sacred to Princes and to Heroes. . . . ‘Tis, indeed, but justice, that the most excellent and most profitable kind of writing, should be addressed by Poets to such persons whose Characters have, for the most part, been the guides and patterns of their imitation.” The king’s brother and heir has been his own such pattern for imitation, says Dryden:

‘Tis from this consideration, that I have presum’d to dedicate to your Royal Highness, these faint representations of your own worth and valour in Heroique Poetry; or, to speak more properly, not to dedicate, but to restore to you those Ideas, which, in the more perfect part of my characters, I have taken from you. . . . And certainly, if ever Nation were oblig’d either by the conduct, the personal valour, or the good fortune of a Leader, the *English* are acknowledging, in all of them, to your Royal Highness. Your whole life has been a continu’d Series of Heroique Actions: which you began so early that you were no sooner nam’d in the world, but it was with praise and Admiration.³³

Dryden proceeds to delineate these “Heroique Actions,” which include a number of military victories over various opponents.

While this dedication might easily be read as simply a conventional, albeit overinflated, attempt to praise Dryden’s patron, whom he calls “the most unshaken friend, the greatest of Subjects, and the best of Masters,” it is also an attempt to cast members of Charles’s inner circle as themselves heroic, deserving of the king’s uncritical support, a casting anticipated in Buckingham’s criticism of the genre.³⁴ According to Buckingham, heroic drama’s warmongering and use of spectacle to dazzle the audience is little more than propaganda to help the audience forget that Charles’s previous administrations, which included the duke of York and Arlington in important roles, failed to win real victories against the Dutch, allowed the Dutch to sail up the Medway, and watched as London helplessly burned in 1666. These same men prevented Buckingham from taking an active role in the prosecution

of the war, denying him a seat in the councils of war and preventing him from exercising the command of a ship. These men also advocated arbitrary government that denied freedom of conscience. According to Buckingham, heroic drama's attempt to cast the king's advisors and their ability to wage war as heroic is little more than posturing and hollow words.

This argument is contained in Buckingham's recasting of Dryden's *Almanzor* as Bayes's *Drawcansir*. In particular, Buckingham exaggerates *Almanzor*'s heroism, which Alfred Harbage maintains is defined in terms of his "physical courage, prowess in arms, magnanimity, and fidelity to a code of personal honor." Aristocratic ideology held that these traits were the characteristics of an ideal cavalier. Courage and martial ability proved a man's capability to shed his enemies' blood, an ability that was particularly valuable during the 1660s and 1670s. Many of the men who attended the theater had lived through the civil war; many had also participated in the wars with the Dutch during the 1660s; by 1671, England was preparing for a third such war. Even those gentlemen who had not yet performed military service were nevertheless "bred and trained for war."³⁵ Many aristocrats held commissions in the army, the King's Guards, or the navy, and all gentlemen were trained to defend themselves, their purses, and their honor.³⁶ Dryden's *Almanzor* is intended to be an exemplar of the aristocratic vision of honor. In keeping with this vision, *Almanzor* possesses incredible fighting skills. His bravery in a bullfight that occurs before the start of the play astonishes Boabdellin, the Islamic king of Granada, and he distinguishes himself in every battle, usually defeating entire enemy armies almost singlehandedly.³⁷ Military ability was one of the primary elements in defining aristocratic masculinity in this period, but Restoration audiences also liked a hero with a heart. Consequently, heroic dramas also included generosity of spirit and heroic love as components of masculine virtue. Accordingly, *Almanzor* is magnanimous: during his first battle against the Spanish army, Dryden's protagonist captures the enemy general but generously promises to set him free so that they can fight again another day.³⁸

Buckingham seeks to undermine the ideology of heroic drama because its rhetoric masks the fact that the "honor" it espouses is, in the duke's opinion, another form of theater, one used by unworthy courtiers to achieve power. Buckingham exposes this rhetoric as empty and hollow, despite Dryden's hope to persuade the audience "that what they behold on the Theater is really perform'd."³⁹ Heroic drama's ridiculousness, says the duke, lies in the fact that Charles's ministers use heroic drama's rhetoric of honor to cast *themselves* as heroic.

A heroic play such as *The Conquest of Granada* does not depict King Ferdinand performing heroic feats of arms and love; rather, his servants are heroic in *their* pursuit of war and conquest in his name. By parodying the form and content of heroic drama, Buckingham gets his audience to laugh at this construction of Charles's closest advisors, men such as the duke of York and Arlington. Buckingham exaggerates the vision of heroism that emphasizes courage, military prowess, magnanimity, and personal honor in order to contrast it with the inadequacies of these men, his enemies at court. According to Buckingham, these ministers are unable to prosecute successfully a war against the Dutch and should be replaced, preferably with himself.

Throughout *The Rehearsal*, Buckingham exposes Dryden's representation of Charles's honorable ministers prosecuting warfare in service to the king as ridiculous. In particular, he portrays these ministers as men who lack personal honor. He exaggerates heroic drama's depiction of militarism into empty boasts of horrific senselessness. Rather than performing acts of bravery, Buckingham's version of a heroic protagonist vainly struts around boasting of his deeds, which consist of increasingly outlandish acts of bad manners and senseless violence. Dryden's Almanzor becomes Bayes's protagonist Drawcansir, "a fierce *Hero*, that frights his Mistress, snubs up Kings, baffles Armies, and does what he will, without regard to good manners, justice or numbers" (34). In act 4, scene 1, for instance, Drawcansir interrupts a royal feast. When asked who he is, he replies, "He that dares drink, and for that drink dares die, / And, knowing this, dares yet drink on, am I" (37). He then, as the stage directions read, "snatches the Boles out of the Kings hands, and drinks 'em off." After frightening the kings off the stage, he proclaims, "I drink, I huff, I strut, look big and stare; / And all this I can do, because I dare" (38). Rather than serving "to raise the character of Drawcansir" in the minds of the audience, as Bayes says is the purpose of this scene (38), this brief speech accomplishes the opposite, transforming this "hero" into a common bully committed to senseless violence. As Drawcansir exclaims in act 5,

Others may boast a single man to kill;
But I, the bloud of thousands, daily spill.
Let petty Kings the names of Parties know:
Where e'er I come, I slay both friend and foe.
The swiftest Horsmen my swift rage controuls,
And from their Bodies drives their trembling souls. (51)

For Drawcansir, manly honor knows no boundaries—it is uncontrolled "rage"—and does not distinguish between friend and foe.

Consequently, Buckingham exposes the rhetoric of heroic drama as something perverse rather than natural, elevating and enriching. To emphasize this point, Buckingham has Bayes praise his protagonist for his courage after he threatens to depose Jove: "There's a brave fellow for you now, Sirs. I have read of your *Hector*, your *Achilles*, and a hundred more; but I defie all your Histories, and your Romances too, I gad, to shew me one such Conqueror, as this *Drawcansir*" (51–52). Thus, in the world of this play, "courage" becomes little more than a euphemism for boastful commitment to violence. Because it is empty posturing, this form of heroism must constantly prove itself through ever more outlandish rhetoric not the least of which is its hostility to love. This exaggeration has two goals. First, it becomes so extreme that its departure from reality becomes readily apparent. Second, it allows Buckingham to compare men like Dryden and Arlington unfavorably to true heroes, men presumably like himself, who could "shed his enemies' blood" *and* make love to his mistress.

Buckingham continually drives home that heroic drama is little more than hollow verbal posturing throughout *The Rehearsal*. While he aspires to fight for his king by commanding a battleship, Charles's other ministers stay in London and talk about war. In Act 5, scene 1, Bayes stages an entire battle "in the representation of two persons only" (47). As he explains, "I make 'em both come out in Armor, *Cap-a-pea*, with their Swords drawn, and hung, with a scarlet Ribbon at their wrists, (which, you know, represents fighting enough) each of 'em holding a Lute in his hand" (47). The two characters, a general and a lieutenant general, then "play the battel in *Recitativo*" (48). After reciting the activities and the towns of origin of their respective troops, the two generals begin the fight in what can only laughingly be called "earnest":

<i>Gen.</i>	Stand: give the word.
<i>Lieut. Gen.</i>	Bright Sword.
<i>Gen.</i>	That may be thine, But 'tis not mine.
<i>Lieut. Gen.</i>	Give fire, give fire, at once give fire, And let those recreant Troops perceive mine ire.
<i>Gen.</i>	Pursue, pursue; they fly That first did give the lye. (49)

In this "battle," the excitement and spectacle of Dryden's heroic dramas is transformed into mundane conversation. Buckingham's use of couplets here evokes heroic drama's elevated language, but the content of these lines, almost entirely monosyllabic words that express little

more than basic actions, mocks the grandeur of Dryden's poetry. By undercutting heroic drama's language and style, Buckingham suggests that the court's use of heroic drama is similarly an empty performance of heroism, used in this case to valorize the king's ministers. When Drawcansir is first described to Johnson and Smith as someone who disregards proper behavior, fairness, or the numbers of his foes, they question the "hero's" character. As Smith queries, "But, Mr. Bayes, I thought your *Heroes* had ever been men of great humanity and justice" (35). Bayes replies: "Yes, they have been so; but, for my part, I prefer that one quality of singly beating of whole Armies, above all your moral vertues put together, I gad" (35). Like Dryden's, says Buckingham, Bayes's rhetoric of "moral virtues" is just an excuse to mesmerize his audience with war and combat. While Dryden elevates magnanimity into a grand action by casting it as a national, divinely inspired virtue, Buckingham suspects that this rhetoric is simply a justification for violent spectacle in support of Charles's incompetent ministers.

Buckingham's critique of Charles's ministers goes beyond making fun of Dryden's heroic plays, however. On the one hand, the play ridicules Dryden himself as a bad playwright and as a fop. As several scholars have already noted, Bayes was instantly recognized as a parody of Dryden himself, due to his dress, mannerisms, and dialogue.⁴⁰ On the other hand, Buckingham uses Bayes to ridicule his political arch-nemesis, Arlington. This second representation occurs most clearly in act 2, scene 5, which contains "some fighting," to use Bayes's description of the inner play (18). After the soldiers have killed one another in a battle, Bayes explains to Johnson and Smith, "all these dead men you shall see rise up presently, at a certain Note that I have made in *Effaut flat*, and fall a Dancing" (19). The music plays, but the actors cannot get their dance in order and complain that "'tis impossible to do any thing in time, to this Tune" (19). Exasperated by these complaints, Bayes offers to demonstrate the scene for them. As the stage directions indicate, he lies down flat on his face until the music strikes the "Effaut flat" and then rises up hastily and falls down again, accidentally "breaking" his nose. This painful indignity evokes the director's curse: "A plague of this damn'd stage, with your nails and your tenter-hooks, that a man cannot come to teach you to Act, but he must break his nose, and his face, and the divel and all" (19–20). The scene ends with Bayes leaving the stage to find "a wet piece of brown papyr" (20) to stop his bleeding.

The "wet piece of brown papyr" used by Bayes becomes an important marker of identity in this scene by associating Bayes with Arlington.

As Margarita Stocker points out, Buckingham's "careful coaching of John Lacy in the part of Bayes, which concentrated on the mannerisms of Dryden . . . provided a visual cover for the figure's satire of Arlington."⁴¹ George McFadden was the first to make a case for seeing Bayes as a parody of Arlington. McFadden's first piece of evidence for this association is that Arlington wore a black patch on his nose; he argues that the brown paper Bayes places on his own broken nose is a direct reference to this patch. He also cites contemporary accounts that discuss similar ridicule of Arlington. Laurence Echard's *History of England* (1718), for example, notes that, as Arlington lost power in 1672, "several persons at Court took the liberty to act and mimic his Person and Behaviour, as had formerly been done against the Lord Chancellor Clarendon; and it became a common Jest for some Courtier to put a black Patch upon his Nose, and strut about with a White-Staff in his Hand, in order to make the King merry."⁴² McFadden goes on to quote a manuscript satire by Buckingham himself entitled "Advice to a Painter" that satirizes Arlington using much of the same language as he uses to depict Bayes:

First draw an arrant fop, from top to toe,
Whose very looks at first dash show him so.
Give him a mean, proud garb, a dapper face,
A pert, dull grin, a black patch 'cross his face;
Two goggle eyes, so clear, though very dead,
That one may see, through them, quite through his head.⁴³

While McFadden views this parodying of Arlington as minimizing Buckingham's ridicule of Dryden, Stocker rightly reads "Bayes as a conflation of theatrical and political caricature."⁴⁴ This connection of Bayes with Arlington further ties Buckingham's argument against heroic drama to the court. *The Rehearsal's* play with the instability of "fact" and "fiction," "real life" and "theater," suggests that the court is also a stage, one equally choked with the weeds of "strutting Heroes" and "brisk insipid Blades."

Buckingham further criticizes the court for its self-interested plotting for more power. This theme is established early in *The Rehearsal* when the Gentleman Usher and Court Physician discuss their scheme to depose their kings. Throughout this scene, the two men whisper their plans to each other so that the audience cannot hear them. As Bayes explains to Johnson and Smith, these characters whisper "because they are suppos'd to be Politicians; and matters of State ought not to be divulg'd" (13). As Stocker points out, "If Bayes suggests that the

suppression of information is characteristic of politics, we may well conclude from this and similar hints that there is an actual contemporary situation of conspiracy, suppression, repression, and confusion.”⁴⁵ Such plotting, at least from Buckingham’s vantage point, certainly occurred. His own schemes to topple Clarendon’s ministry and replace him as Charles’s primary minister were partially successful, whereas his plots to command a battleship and participate in the councils of war were not. Arlington’s machinations to minimize his rival’s influence at court, including his prosecution of Buckingham for attempting to forecast the king’s death, were similar examples of the way politics worked in the period.

Because Buckingham had failed to receive the preferment that he had constantly hoped to achieve, the play’s epilogue, as we have seen, calls for a radical change in the political system, one based on common “Sence.” Buckingham connects the “Rhyme” of heroic drama with the “mischiefs” of the political sphere. As Stocker notes, “The explicit identification of dramatic decadence with current political perturbation, of theatrical with political plots, picks up a topos used by Davenant amongst others, describing the surprising historical ‘plot’ which brought about the Restoration itself.”⁴⁶ The epilogue associates these instances of unrest with the generic characteristics of heroic drama and evokes drama’s connection to political power. If “Monstrous” plays predict state disasters, Buckingham’s play purports to have the potential to inaugurate an age of “peace,” “Reason,” and “Sence.” Buckingham rejects the work of “solemn Fops” like Dryden, since their notions of “Reason” attempt to deny the body’s basic needs as part of a project to bring greater political order to the nation, an order characterized by obedience to the king and to his misguided and incompetent ministers. Although their representations of heroism claim to be representative of reality, they are in fact affectations, just like the mannerisms of fops, who “are always looking grave, and troubling one another, in hopes to be thought men of Business” (1). In contrast, Buckingham calls for men to follow their pleasures, to allow their senses to help them decide right from wrong: that is, to become libertines. Like Johnson, says Buckingham, men should be guided by their desires, should “eat and drink as well as [they] can, have a She-friend to be private with in the afternoon, and sometimes see a Play” (2). This, for Buckingham and his fellow libertines, was “right reason.”

As appealing as Buckingham’s prescription might have been for his fellow Wits, others declined his invitation to be guided by their desires. As Robert Hume points out, “*The Rehearsal* did nothing to diminish the popularity of rhymed plays—most of which are subsequent to it.”⁴⁷

While Dryden and Arlington might have been stung by the play's parody of them, their positions at court were seemingly unaffected by Buckingham's ridicule. More importantly, *The Rehearsal* did little to improve Buckingham's acquisition of power and responsibility within Charles II's court. Buckingham and Arlington continued to squabble, and by January 1674 both men were political liabilities. Buckingham was called before the House of Commons to answer charges of embezzling "public funds, breaking the Triple Alliance by the negotiations of 1672, raising troops in Yorkshire, speaking treasonously against the sacred person of His Majesty and negotiating secretly with Louis XIV." He was also indicted for the immorality of his relationship with the countess of Shrewsbury. The duke's strategy for responding to these accusations was to incriminate Arlington as much as possible and to attempt to exonerate himself of any wrongdoing. As Hester Chapman sums up,

While deploring the misfortunes that had fallen on his administration, Buckingham felt it his duty to point out the blundering ineptitude of those in authority over him. He did not actually name the King and the Duke of York; but he made it quite clear that he was referring to them when he reached his peroration. "I can hunt the hare," said His Grace, "with a pack of hounds, but *not with a brace of lobsters*." He then bowed to the House and withdrew.⁴⁸

This speech enacts the same strategy that Buckingham employed in *The Rehearsal*: blame the king's advisors for being incompetent and argue that the solution to England's problems is to put greater trust in Buckingham.

This strategy failed to win over the House, however, and Buckingham lost his place in the government. His fall from power was followed by an order to appear before the House of Lords to answer for his liaison with Shrewsbury. While he was able to talk his way out of trouble with the Lords, the result of these trials was the fracturing of his relationship with the king. Buckingham retired to the countryside until Charles's displeasure subsided, returning to London and his seat in the House of Lords in April 1675, though he was still not received at court. Perhaps as a result of isolation from the king, Buckingham publicly joined the opposition country party, supporting their activities against the Test Act, which made government offices dependent on swearing an oath never to take up arms against the king or to make any changes in the government of the church or state, and for the election of a new Parliament. For supporting this latter effort,

Buckingham was again sent to the Tower in February 1677, though this time Charles did little to help his old friend regain his liberty. The story of Buckingham's political fortunes after *The Rehearsal* is therefore the exact opposite of what he had hoped: he fell from the king's favor, lost political power, and eventually ended up imprisoned once again.

Despite Buckingham's subsequent ill fortunes, his burlesque established the libertine playwrights' use of theater as a form of political action. *The Rehearsal* casts these libertines as somewhat alienated cultural critics. The libertine playwrights in Charles II's court would write for the stage as a means of reforming the stage of Charles's court specifically and London life more generally. As we have seen, the basis for their cultural criticism would be the belief that proper reason emphasized pleasure and sensual experience over abstract, arbitrary ideals. In contrast, the court's rejection of these pursuits (and the king's refusal to continue to rely on Buckingham as his primary advisor) is unnatural and unreasonable; notions of reason held by men like Arlington and the duke of York kill the body's desires by devaluing activities that Buckingham and his fellow libertines enjoy. Heroic drama becomes the focus of Buckingham's criticism as a mask for the unnaturalness of the court's hostility toward pleasurable pursuits. In taking a view of nature and reason that emphasized sensual experience over abstractions, Buckingham initiates the libertine wits' opposition to the use of drama as an instrument of Stuart ideology. Throughout the rest of the decade, the wits would cast their works as oppositional attacks on limits on the enjoyment of one's body. On the one hand, they would oppose aristocratic attempts to privilege national duty over individual pleasure; on the other hand, their plays reject moralistic arguments against pleasure based on the belief that sensuality was inherently corrupt and sinful. Regardless of the genre used in these attacks, many of the libertines' subsequent plays offered radical revisions for Stuart ideology, emphasizing freedom of conscience, equality of marital and sexual choices for men and women, and the pursuit of sexual fulfillment.

Buckingham's farce also made the wits' later plays possible by teaching the libertine playwrights a valuable lesson: drawing upon the reputations of living persons was a profitable dramatic strategy. Unlike Buckingham, however, Wycherley, Etherege, Rochester, and Sedley used their own reputations as libertines as the basis of key characters in their plays rather than simply mocking someone else. This change of strategy enabled them to present positive alternatives to the discourses of their critics. And finally, *The Rehearsal* taught the wits that

appealing to people outside the court through the depiction of libertine performances on stage was an effective way of propagating their ideas to a larger audience. The following chapters map out these alternatives, which change over the course of the decade as the wits negotiate the nature of libertine performance with one another.

CHAPTER 3



STAGING LIBERTINE CONDUCT: *LOVE IN A WOOD*, *THE GENTLEMAN DANCING-MASTER*, AND *THE COUNTRY WIFE*

When William Wycherley's first play, *Love in a Wood, or St. James's Park*, premiered in 1671, his connections at court were tenuous at best, but its success changed his social status and brought him a place among the court's libertine wits. The play illustrates his wit and spirit, his understanding of libertinism, and his willingness to participate in similar activities as the libertines at court. According to John Dennis, for example, this play brought Wycherley to the attention of the king's mistress, Barbara Villiers, duchess of Cleveland, and permanently connected him to the libertine circle. Dennis's version of Wycherley's introduction to Cleveland sounds as if it were a scene from a Restoration comedy: as the new playwright drove through Pall-Mall shortly after the play's premiere, he came upon Cleveland, "who, thrusting half her body out of [her] Chariot, cry'd out aloud to him, *You, Wycherley, are a Son of a Whore*, at the same time laughing aloud and heartily." Realizing that her exclamation was a reference to the end of a song in his play that claimed "When parents are slaves / Their brats cannot be any other; / Great wits and great braves / Have always a punk to their mother," and that she was thus complimenting him as a wit, Wycherley ordered his coachman to turn around. When his coach came alongside hers, writes Dennis, Wycherley initiated the

following conversation:

Madam, you have been pleased to bestow a Title on me which generally belongs to the Fortunate. Will your Ladyship be at the Play to Night? Well, she reply'd, what if I am there? Why then I will be there to wait on your Ladyship, tho' I disappoint a very fine Woman who has made me an Assignment. So, said she, you are sure to disappoint a Woman who has favour'd you for one who has not. Yes, he reply'd, if she who has not favour'd me is the finer Woman of the two. But he who will be constant to your Ladyship, till he can find a finer Woman, is sure to die your Captive.

Pleased at his address, the duchess met him that evening, and this, says Dennis, "was the beginning of a Correspondence between these two Persons, which afterwards made a great Noise in the Town."¹

Love in a Wood brought Wycherley more than just a mistress. It also gained him entrance into the court society and made him one of the leading playwright/libertines in London. Dennis reports that the affair with Cleveland also marked the beginning of Wycherley's friendship with Buckingham, Barbara's cousin and would-be lover. When his kinswoman refused his numerous advances, writes Dennis, Buckingham resolved to ruin her reputation and her favor with the king by publicizing the names of her lovers. Among these names was Wycherley's. Realizing that this publicity could ruin all of his hopes for preferment at court, Wycherley applied to Rochester and Sedley to intervene with the duke on his behalf. Dennis reports the outcome:

Upon their opening the Matter to the Duke, he cry'd out immediately, *that he did not blame Wycherley, he only accus'd his Cousin. Ay, but, they reply'd, by rendring him suspected of such an Intrigue, you are about to ruine him, that is, your Grace is about to ruine a Man with whose Conversation you would be pleas'd above all things.* Upon this Occasion they said so much of the shining Qualities of Mr. Wycherley, and of the Charms of the Conversation, that the Duke, who was as much in love with Wit, as he was with his Kinswoman, was impatient till he was brought to sup with him, which was in two or three Nights. After supper Mr. Wycherley, who was then in the Height of his vigor both of Body and Mind, thought himself oblig'd to exert himself, and the Duke was charm'd to that degree, that he cry'd out in a Transport, *By G—my Cousin is in the right of it;* and from that very Moment made a Friend of a Man whom he believ'd his happy rival.²

Buckingham, as Master of the Horse, subsequently appointed Wycherley an equerry of the royal household, "largely a sinecure,

involving only occasional attendance on the king” that “carried an income, which he was no doubt very grateful to receive.” Clearly not holding a grudge over his relationship with Cleveland, Charles also gave Wycherley an occasional £100.³ From this point on, Wycherley was associated with the libertine circle at Charles II’s court.

Focusing on Wycherley’s early plays, this chapter examines the development of his notions of libertine conduct and performances during the early 1670s. As a playwright who is both inside the libertine circle at court and outside its inner circle, composed of the aristocrats with long-standing personal ties to the king, like Buckingham, Rochester, and Sedley, Wycherley presents us with a unique vision of libertinism, one that embraces libertine freedom and decadence while simultaneously insisting on a socially productive function for libertine activities. By the premiere of *Love in a Wood*, the libertines had begun to experience the consequences of their public pursuits of sensual pleasure. As we saw in chapter 2, Buckingham was increasingly marginalized within the court of Charles II, and the libertine circle was cut off and had no influence over Charles’s policies and was therefore unable to use its personal ties to the king as a basis for persuading the nation to embrace the value of pleasure over duty and responsibility. Additionally, portions of the general citizenry embraced an ideology of personal virtue and circumspection that led increasing numbers of people to scorn the libertines’ public performances of drunkenness and sexual excesses. This chapter argues that Wycherley responds to this increasingly hostile situation by transforming the libertine of popular gossip into a comic trickster. In these plays, Wycherley adapts reports of the actual libertine performances of the court wits’ circle and attempts to make them more palatable to general audiences. He then allows his entertaining libertine protagonists to triumph over the severe and/or ridiculous critics of sexual freedom.

As a consequence of this strategy and in accordance with the dictates of comedy, the first two of these plays ultimately tame the libertine’s excesses and contain his activities within acceptable codes of behavior by marrying him to an appropriate wife. *Love in a Wood* and *The Gentleman Dancing-Master* begin this process by casting the libertine wits as the trickster heroes of the plays, and then allowing these libertine protagonists to embrace love and marriage. In these plays, Wycherley attempts to do two things. On the one hand, he responds to criticisms of libertine performance by reining in his characters’ libertine behavior or casting it in a manner that is humorously harmless. Indeed, none of the libertines in his first two plays transgress the society’s codes of conduct to such an extent that the audience cannot

laugh as the comedy demands. On the other hand, unlike the proponents of personal virtue and circumspection, most of Wycherley's libertine characters end their plays happily contributing to society's propagation via marriage and potential childbirth. Wycherley uses these libertines to critique the same elements of society that argue against sexual freedom and libertine excesses and to enact radical reform in marital, familial, and sexual relationships by emphasizing liberty of conscience over repressive moral obligation.

Wycherley's most famous play, *The Country Wife*, however, complicates the libertine's fate by leaving its protagonist, Horner, unmarried and isolated from homosocial bonding at the end of the play. Rather than minimize the fears of critics of libertinism in this play, Wycherley allows Horner to embody all of the qualities that worry these critics: a seemingly unquenchable thirst for sexual variety and pleasure, the ability to seduce married women, and the wit to disguise his activities from these women's husbands. Indeed, Horner becomes every other man's nightmare, capable of seducing or destroying the reputation of any woman. He cuckolds nearly every man in the play and even threatens the future happiness of his best friend when he chooses to allow that friend's love interest to be falsely accused of being his own mistress. Unlike typical comic protagonists, Horner explicitly continues his libertine pursuits beyond the confines of the play. This pursuit leaves him unmarried and friendless and thus disconnected from society's future and institutions. Horner nevertheless remains a likeable character throughout *The Country Wife*. As a result, he continues Wycherley's goal of easing social fears of libertine performance. Although Horner embodies most of these fears, he nevertheless comically triumphs over proponents of restrictive virtue and prudish sexuality, and his triumph elicits the audience's laughter rather than their horror. As we will see, however, his choice of pleasure over duty and obligation forces the members of the libertine circle to make a similar choice between self-centered pleasure and social bonding. As a result, *The Country Wife* becomes a pivotal play in the libertine wits' dramatic and political development.

SAMUEL PEPYS AND CRITIQUES OF LIBERTINE PERFORMANCE

By the middle of the 1660s, the libertines' performances of sexual and riotous excess were increasingly seen by some members of Restoration society as evoking the wrath of God. Indeed, the Great Fire of London in 1666 was interpreted by men like John Evelyn and Samuel

Pepys as divine retribution for the nation's sins, the foremost of which was sexual license at court. As Evelyn writes on October 10, 1666,

This day was indicted a Generall fast through the nation, to humble us, upon the late dreadfull Conflagration, added to the Plage & Warr, the most dismall judgments could be inflicted, & indeede but what we highly deserved for our prodigious ingratitude, burning Lusts, disolute Court, profane & abominable lives, under such dispensations of Gods continued favour, in restoring Church, Prince, & People from our late calamities, of which we were altogether unmindful even to astonishment.

Pepys too thought that the libertines' activities would evoke God's wrath, and was horrified that the king countenanced their scandalous behavior. For example, on January 17, 1668, Pepys narrates the events surrounding Buckingham's duel with his mistress's husband. Lord Shrewsbury was seriously injured in the fight, another man was hurt, and a third man was killed outright. As Pepys discloses, "this may prove a very bad accident to the Duke of Buckingham, but that my Lady Castlemaine doth rule all at this time as much as ever she did, and she will, it is believed, keep all matters well with the Duke of Buckingham; though this is a time that the King will be very backward, I suppose, to appear in such a business."⁴ The king's indulgence of the duke's deeds appalled Pepys. As he laments, "This will make the world think that the King hath good councillors about him, when the Duke of Buckingham, the greatest man about him, is a fellow of no more sobriety then to fight about a whore" (9.27). Similarly, when Rochester assaulted Thomas Killigrew in the king's presence, Pepys records that it "doth much give offence to the people here at Court, to see how cheap the King makes himself" (9.451) and maintains that it is "to the King's everlasting shame to have so idle a rogue his companion" (9.452). As these statements make clear, Pepys's reactions to the libertines' behavior were inextricably connected to his belief that their influence hurt the king's ability to govern the country. He was especially concerned that the libertines influenced Charles's own behavior. Pepys's linkage of the libertines' exploits and the king's actions is made explicit in his entry for July 18, 1668. During a visit to Newmarket, says Pepys, "the Duke of Buckingham did in the afternoon, to please the King, make a bawdy sermon to him out of the Canticles" (9.264). Subsequently, "my Lord Cornwallis did endeavor to get the King a whore, and that must be a pretty girl, the daughter of the parson of the place; but that she did get away, and leaped off of some place and killed herself—which if true, is very sad" (9.264–265).

Because of such reported acts, Pepys was convinced that “the nation [is] in certain condition of ruin, while the King . . . is only governed by his lust and women and rogues about him” (8.361).

These critiques of the court's general moral decline and the libertines' specific activities are part of a larger shift in the way some segments of the English society defined virtue and honor. Michael McKeon famously argues that one class of people espoused what he calls “progressive ideology,” which argued that honor is derived from virtue, or goodness of character, rather than from status, or the biological inheritance of position. According to this worldview, moral uprightness in the common citizen is more creditable than aristocratic wealth and position. As the republican William Sprigge asserted, “Nor should I speak a syllable against Honours being Hereditary could the valour, Religion, and prudence of Ancestors be as easily intail'd on a line or family, as their Honours and Riches . . . Could they transmit their vertues as well as names unto their posterity, I should willingly become the Advocate of such a Nobility.” Progressive ideology challenged an older tradition, often called patriarchalism, that compared the monarch's role as national sovereign to a father's role as the head of his family: just as a father was considered the absolute authority over his household, the king was the absolute authority over his subjects. As McKeon points out, while this traditional ideology “was entertained and acted upon as a tacit and unexamined article of belief” throughout English history, the Puritan revolution of the 1640s called the terms of this analogy into question. In 1644, for example, Henry Parker argued that just as the abuse of power cannot be allowed within a family, it cannot be tolerated in the sovereign either: “And who now hath any competent share of reason, can suppose, that if God and nature have been so careful to provide for liberty in Families, and in particulars; that Man could introduce, or ought to endure slavery, when it is introduced upon the whole States and Generalities?”⁵

Increasingly, the elites of the English society agreed. Although some attempts to revive patriarchalism were made after the restoration, by the 1660s, England by and large rejected the notion that the monarch possessed absolute sway over his people.⁶ While progressive ideology opposed traditional notions of monarchical authority, it nevertheless maintained the husband's/father's authority over his wife and children. Although a father or husband did not have absolute sway over his family—he should not, for example, punish his children or wife by doing them lasting physical harm—a man should ensure his own and his family's virtue by teaching himself and his relations to

control their desires, keeping them within the bounds of acceptable morality. Thus, like Stuart ideology, progressive ideology emphasized social order. Unlike aristocratic ideology, however, this ordering of society was not based on ancestry but on the moral ordering of the self, a bottom-up structuring of society rather than top down. By properly keeping in check the individual's moral virtue, families would consequently become well regulated. As families achieved proper virtue, society as a whole would necessarily become more ordered.⁷

The basic ideas of progressive ideology are perhaps best illustrated by a brief examination of Pepys's diary, which exemplifies many aspects of this ideology, especially its emphasis on self-propriety and introspection.⁸ On June 30, 1663, for example, Pepys writes, "I do perceive more and more that my time of pleasure and idleness of any sort must be flung off, to attend the getting of some money and the keeping of my family in order, which I fear by my wife's liberty may be otherwise lost" (4.206). Many parts of this statement reflect Pepys's acceptance of progressive ideology's basic ideas. First, he believes that he must fling off "pleasure and idleness of any sort," activities that Pepys thoroughly enjoyed. For example, he chronicles many episodes in which he fantasized about, seduced, or tried to seduce several women. Pepys often records his fantasies concerning Lady Castlemaine, which include erotic dreams.⁹ Other entries describe his liaisons and attempted liaisons with various women. On February 6, 1668, for instance, he reveals that he had attempted to touch the thigh of one of his wife's friends.¹⁰ On May 3 of the same year, he discloses that he had pleased himself in church while fantasizing about a nearby woman, and on May 6, he records that he seduced a friend's daughter while walking through Crutched Friars.¹¹ On February 20, 1665, he mentions his seduction of the wife of one of his clients.¹² And in October 1668, his wife caught him in the act of embracing their maid with his hands under her clothing (9.337). Pepys's interest in sex also influenced his reading. In January 1668, he purchased *L'escolle des filles, ou La philosophie des dames, divisée en deux dialogues*, a pornographic work that Pepys describes as "the most bawdy, lewd book that ever I saw" (9.22). Despite his assertion that he "was ashamed of reading in it" (9.22), he nevertheless reads it in February "for information sake," though he also admits that reading it gave him an erection and caused him to masturbate (9.59). These sorts of activities, along with his frequent visits to the theater, constitute some of the "pleasure and idleness" that Pepys thinks "must be flung off" because they distract him from the "getting of some money and the keeping of my family in order." In progressive ideology, individual

virtue was connected to individual wealth. By casting off frivolous pursuits in favor of tending to one's business affairs, one could cultivate one's soul and one's pocketbook at the same time.

Second, Pepys's concerns about his "wife's liberty" illustrate the husband's duty to watch over and regulate his family's virtue. A large part of Pepys's desire to maintain order in his family revolved around his belief that Elizabeth was "devilishly taken off of her business" (4.183). Her primary function, as he saw it, was to maintain their household and the domestic arrangements. He frequently berates (and even hits) her for what he sees as her negligence in failing to maintain a clean house or to cook an adequate dinner.¹³ His hostility toward his wife is further fueled by his suspicion that she was having an affair with her dancing master. These suspicions began when he found the two of them alone in the house together "not dancing but walking" (4.140). Throughout the late spring and summer, Pepys frequently admits that his fears are groundless, but he nevertheless continues to be plagued by them. Consequently, although his jealousy often enrages him to what he admits are ludicrous acts—at one point he even checks to make sure that his wife "did wear drawers today as she used to do" (4.140)—he usually tries to hide his jealousy from her because he is "ashamed" to reveal his suspicions (4.140). Like his own extramarital sexual and pornographic reading activities, Pepys sees his jealous fantasies concerning his wife as promoting his idleness and inattention to business and complicating his ability to keep his family in order. He also believed that he and his wife would be more virtuous and wealthier if he were successful in regulating her business and social pursuits.

In order to regulate both his illicit sexual conduct and that of his wife's, and their pursuits of their respective business, Pepys increasingly looked within himself for the source of virtue and integrity. Throughout the diary, Pepys not only records his sexual liaisons and suspicions concerning his wife but also the feelings of guilt they arouse. For example, on June 29, 1663, he reveals that "I have used of late, since my wife went, to make a bad use of my fancy with whatever woman I have a mind to—which I am ashamed of and shall endeavour to do so no more" (4.204). Pepys endeavored to resist sexual and emotional temptations by regulating his behavior through oaths and resolutions. As he writes on January 7, 1663,

I do find my mind so apt to run to its old wont of pleasures, that it is high time to betake myself to my late vows, which I will tomorrow, God willing, perfect and bind myself to, that so I may for a great while

do my duty, as I have well begun, and encrease my good name and esteem in the world and get money, which sweetens all things and whereof I have much need. (4.6–4.7)

These vows generally revolve around limiting such things as the number of plays he may see in a given period of time, the frequency of his drinking, the time spent in idleness, his expenditures, his criticism of his wife, and his dalliances with other women.¹⁴ Pepys would write down his vows and rehearse them on Sundays, penalizing himself whenever he broke them by donating small sums of money to the poor. Through this method, Pepys hoped to train himself to virtue by regulating the self.

In contrast to Pepys's attempts at ordering himself and his family, the libertines were seen as men bent on disorder and moral chaos. Evelyn and Pepys were not alone in criticizing the court for its moral laxity, nor were they the only observers to blame the court's libertine activities for such problems as the Plague, the Fire of London, or England's poor showing in the Dutch Wars. As we saw in chapter 1, libertine performances in the 1660s evoked the public's fascination, but these performances also often inflamed their outrage and censure. John Milton famously summed up his view of the libertinism at court in Book One of *Paradise Lost*. In describing the demon Belial, he writes,

In courts and palaces he also reigns
And in luxurious cities, where the noise
Of riot ascends above their loftiest towers,
And injury and outrage: and when night
Darkens the streets, then wander forth the sons
Of Belial, flown with insolence and wine.¹⁵

Libertine “riot,” writes Milton, leads to social “injury and outrage.” Like Milton, many citizens believed that it was only a matter of time before the court's insolent and drunken riots again brought God's judgment on England. While not all of these critics connected the court's behavior specifically to libertine figures like Buckingham, Rochester, and Sedley, many people, including Pepys, did. Because the libertine wits challenged religious and political authority through their public performances of riotous behavior, writers like Pepys, Milton, and Evelyn criticized them for jeopardizing the peace of the nation and the reign of Charles II. Wycherley's first two plays reply to these criticisms and attempt to radically reform both the perception of libertinism in Restoration culture and the culture itself at large.

THE LIBERTINE AS COMIC
TRICKSTER: *LOVE IN A WOOD* AND
THE GENTLEMAN DANCING-MASTER

Wycherley's dramatic response to critiques of libertinism involved transforming the libertine into a comic trickster. *Love in a Wood* and *The Gentleman Dancing-Master* are what J. Douglas Canfield calls "social comedies," plays that socialize "threats to the dominant aristocracy" and reaffirm "its patriarchal order by absorbing the vital energy of its youth and satirizing those who stand in their way." In social comedies, argues Canfield, tricksters are often "social rebels" who threaten the Stuart "sexual political economy." Most of these comedies, including *Love in a Wood* and *The Gentleman Dancing-Master*, feature such rebels "who resist the marriages necessary to sustain the system but conclude in those marriages after all—albeit with some freedom of choice within class."¹⁶ Although Canfield discusses each of these plays in this study, his analyses are necessarily brief and cursory due to the broad scope of his book. In this section, I want to fill in the gaps left by Canfield's readings and offer correctives to his study in order to better understand these plays' responses to Stuart and progressive ideologies. Wycherley casts at least one of his libertine figures as a trickster in each of these plays. He inserts libertine conduct into rather conventional comic plots, which depict libertine performances as little more than the entertaining whims of young men usually on their ways to suitable marriages. He then contrasts these witty and engaging characters with ridiculously severe moralists who are often proven to be hypocrites, hiding their own pursuits of money and pleasure behind a veneer of virtue. By casting libertines as comic tricksters, Wycherley depicts libertine performances as socially productive reformations of Restoration social mores.

In both comedies, Wycherley draws upon the reputations of actual court libertines to flesh out his libertine protagonists and favorably contrasts these characters with proponents of an ideology that believed that virtue could be cultivated through the suppression of sexual experimentation and freedom. As a result, these plays do more than simply "reaffirm . . . patriarchal order," as Canfield maintains. They also do more than just "exhibit political, moral, and religious conservatism," as James Thompson insists. Rather, they seek to reshape the conservative Stuart social order radically, transforming it into one more amenable to libertine ideology. Robert Markley argues that "stylistically, Wycherley's plays describe a complex and profoundly ironic attempt to accommodate a radical practice to a conservative

ideology; they exhibit an insistent, embattled anti-authoritarianism that questions the ability of any discourse—including the playwright's own—to stabilize moral, social, and ideological values."¹⁷ This chapter draws upon the instability of the libertine tricksters' disruptive presence in these plays in order to show that the "radical practice" Wycherley "attempt[s] to accommodate to a conservative ideology" is in fact libertinism itself—a practice that, for Wycherley, ultimately proves too unstable to be accommodated in his third play, *The Country Wife*.

Premiering in March 1671, *Love in a Wood* depicts what Robert Hume calls parallel "love-and-jealousy plot[s]" over the course of twenty-four hours. One set of plots involves a group of libertines. As Canfield points out, the characters involved in these plots are the "sympathetic characters." Valentine, who has been banished for fighting a duel over his mistress, Christina, worries over her faithfulness during his exile. His jealousy is aroused, in part, by Ranger, who meets Christina by accident when his own mistress, Lydia, who has been spying on his ramble through St. James's Park in search of women, convinces Christina to pretend that she (and not Lydia) is the woman that Ranger saw following him. He subsequently becomes enamored of the beautiful Christina and thus causes Lydia to become jealous of her. These love plots are resolved in act 5 when each couple is accidentally reunited in the nighttime darkness of St. James's Park. In the confusion caused by the darkness, Valentine learns that Christina has indeed been faithful to him and Lydia learns that Ranger has given up his attempt to woo Christina in favor of returning to her. Another set of plots involves the play's low characters that Canfield calls the "punitive" characters.¹⁸ Alderman Gripe and his sister Lady Flipant are each trying to get married. Flipant constantly disparages marriage in a misguided attempt to lure men into marrying her. Gripe is courting Lucy, who turns out to be the mistress of his daughter's love interest, Dapperwit, a fop who associates with Ranger and his friends. In contrast to the libertines' happy endings, both of these characters are punished at the end of the play. Flipant marries a man she thinks is wealthy but who is actually broke and who marries her solely because of the erroneous hope that she has money, and Gripe is forced to marry Lucy, who has been publicly revealed as Dapperwit's mistress, in order to try to produce a new heir after his daughter Martha marries Dapperwit without his permission. In both of these sets of plots, Wycherley argues his thesis that marriage should set men and women free rather than being an "insupportable bondage" (5.2.127).

As distinguished theater critic and historian Martin Esslin reminds us, “All drama is . . . a political event” because “it either reasserts or undermines the code of conduct of a given society.” For Esslin, the political nature of drama resides in its effects on the audience: “in theatre a human community directly experiences its own identity and reaffirms it. This makes theatre an extremely political, because pre-eminently social, form of art.” W. B. Worthen expands upon this point in his essay “Drama, Performativity, and Performance,” wherein he locates the political nature of drama in its representation of contemporary life for the audience. He argues that theatrical performances “can be understood to cite—or, perhaps subversively, to resignify—social and behavioral practices that operate outside the theater and that constitute contemporary social life.”¹⁹ Whether true or false, tales of libertine excess fueled the popular imagination throughout the 1660s and early 1670s and made the libertines’ every move one of interest to the people of London. A play depicting many of the “social and behavioral practices” of Restoration society, including the love intrigues of libertines, their mistresses, and their satellites, *Love in a Wood* capitalizes on this interest, in part to earn Wycherley a place among the libertine wits. But this play also initiates Wycherley’s examination of the libertine’s place in Restoration society. In this play, Wycherley depicts the libertine as a character who actively opposes arguments for curtailing and circumscribing individual freedom and pleasure and who pushes the boundaries of the generally accepted norms of social behavior in order to transform Stuart society into a more libertine culture.

The play’s depiction of libertine characters begins in act 1, scene 2, a scene that emphasizes their homosociality. Valentine, Ranger, and Vincent are *Love in a Wood*’s libertine protagonists, who reflect the activities of the libertine circle at court. Like Buckingham, Valentine has fought a duel over a woman’s love. His rival was seriously injured in the fight, forcing Valentine to flee the country to avoid being arrested for murder. Like Sedley (and most of the other rakes), Vincent is fond of drinking. He is first seen arguing with Dapperwit, a fop who associates with the libertines because he fancies himself a wit, over the latter’s appeal to Ranger, “let’s have no drinking tonight” (1.2.1–2). When Vincent objects to this proposal, Dapperwit accuses him of forcing them all to drink. Vincent later reveals that, as a child, he had aspired to become a drawer of beer (2.1.30), and when he quarrels with Dapperwit again, he asks Ranger, “Why does he always rail against my friends . . . and my best friend, a beer-glass” (2.1.60–61). Furthermore, he praises the new fashion of “midnight coursing” in

St. James's Park (2.1.2), since "A man may come after supper with his three bottles in his head, reel himself sober without reproof from his mother, aunt, or grave relation" (4–6) and is happy that this fashion allows a man to "carry a bottle under his arm, instead of his Hat" without anyone observing it (17–18). While Vincent goes to the park to drink, Ranger, as his name implies, goes to hunt for women. As he proclaims Rochester-like, "Hang me if I am not pleased extremely with this new fashioned caterwauling, this midnight coursing in the Park" (2.1.1–3), since here a man "[m]ay bring his bashful wench and not have her put out of countenance by the impudent honest women of the town" (7–9). Thus, like Buckingham, Sedley, and Rochester, these characters are described as "contemners of matrons, seducers or defamers of married women and deflowerers of helpless virgins, even in the streets, upon the very bulks; affronters of midnight magistracy and breakers of windows" (3.1.54–58). These characters are founded upon the image of the libertine companions—drinking, fighting, and running after women—the same activities condemned by Pepys, Evelyn, and Milton.

Canfield notes that Ranger is a "sexual trickster,"²⁰ but he does not analyze Ranger's trickster role within the play. Michael P. Carroll defines tricksters in terms different from that of Canfield. According to Carroll, tricksters fall into two categories: the clever hero, who "consistently outwits stronger opponents," and the "selfish-buffoon." These latter tricksters are selfish, writes Carroll, "because so much of the trickster's activity is oriented toward the gratification of his enormous appetites for food and sex"; they are buffoons "because the elaborate deceits that the trickster devises in order to satisfy these appetites so often backfire and leave the trickster looking incredibly foolish."²¹ Ranger is such a selfish-buffoon. When the audience first meets him, he is attempting to evade his mistress, Lydia. "Intending a ramble to St. James's Park tonight, upon some probable hopes of some fresh game" (1.2.101–102), Ranger discovers that Lydia has pursued him to the park. His first trick is therefore a failure. Upon discovering Lydia's pursuit, Ranger resolves to turn the tables on her and attempts to follow her home so that he can embarrass her into admitting that she does not trust him. To prevent this, Lydia enacts a second trick by ducking into Christina's lodgings and convincing her to pretend that it was she whom Ranger had been following. Ranger falls for this trick and is soon persuaded that Christina was the woman he had followed, since "to tell her I followed her for another were an affront rather than an excuse" (2.2.116–117). Here, however, Lydia's plan backfires, since as Ranger's conversation with Christina continues,

he, as any libertine would, falls in love with her (or rather lusts for her) and proclaims that he will call on her the next day. The result of this lust, however, will make Ranger look foolish.

Over the course of the play's comedic plot, writes Canfield, these libertine characters must be "taught lessons that socialize them as part of [the] superior hegemonic group."²² These lessons revolve around two issues. On the one hand, Ranger's trickery disrupts the libertine homosocial circle depicted at the beginning of the play as Valentine becomes jealous of Ranger's importuning of Christina. By the end of the play, the libertines are taught how to reconcile their amorous intentions with their homosocial bonds. On the other hand, these characters must deal with the issue of marriage: rather than seeing marriage as "bondage" (5.2.127), Wycherley's plays argue that a husband and wife should view it as an alliance that does not inhibit each other's freedom. Valentine must learn to curtail his jealousy, and Ranger must learn to stop giving Lydia reasons to be jealous. Both of these lessons are complicated by Ranger's selfish buffoonery. Valentine's jealousy over Christina is the result of a series of misunderstandings, all involving Ranger. When Vincent swears that Christina has not been out of her apartment since Valentine left the country, Ranger immediately enters the scene and tells them that he has not only fallen in love with her but that he also followed her from the Park back to her apartment, where he had an interview with her. This convinces Valentine that Christina has not been mourning his absence, as Vincent swears she has. When Lydia tests Ranger's love for her by sending him a forged letter purporting to be from Christina, Ranger follows the letter's instructions and shows up at Vincent's house to meet with her. Valentine just happens to be behind the door. Despite Christina's assertions that she did not send the letter, Valentine is convinced that she has been false to him. Consequently, Ranger's trickster libertinism has destabilized not only the more general society depicted in *Love in a Wood* but has also threatened to damage the play's libertine fraternity.

Lydia, unlike Valentine, has real reason to be jealous of Ranger's desire for other women. He spends most of the play attempting to trick her into leaving him alone so that he can go "coursing in the Park." Not only does he avoid Lydia's company so that he can pursue other women, but he also flirts with Flippant and falls in love with Christina upon first meeting her. Throughout the play, Ranger often feels foolish when Christina fails to return his desire for her, leading him to proclaim that he will abandon these wild ways: "Lydia, triumph; I now am thine again. Of intrigues, honourable or dishonourable, and all

sorts of rambling I take my leave” (4.3.394–396). This reformation from “intrigues” and “rambling” is short lived, however. When next wandering in the park, Ranger again stumbles upon Christina. Their paths are crossed with Valentine and Lydia, leaving Christina with Valentine and Ranger with Lydia. However, still thinking that the woman he is with is Christina, Ranger declares that he loves Lydia but that he will make one last attempt on Christina. When Lydia cries out as a result of his advances, Ranger realizes his mistake and claims that he knew it was her all along. This kind of behavior is what has led Anna Bryson to emphasize the libertine’s “anti-civility,” especially in his treatment of women, but, contrary to her reading of libertine activities, Wycherley’s play also depicts libertines as liberators of women, giving them a choice in marriage and romantic relationships unavailable to them in traditional patriarchy.²³

Both libertine characters finally learn their lessons and are properly socialized by the end of the play. When Valentine follows Christina in St. James’s Park in act 5, he believes he will hear her confess her love for Ranger. Thinking that he is Ranger, she tells him instead to go to Valentine and explain how she has been innocent of any wrongdoing and that he has pursued her against her will. As she proclaims, “straight you must go clear yourself, and me, to him you have injured in me—if he has not made too much haste from me as to be found again. You must, I say, for he is a man that will have satisfaction and in satisfying him you do me” (5.1.520–525). Valentine finally reveals himself to her by telling her, “Then he is satisfied” (526). He goes on to argue that marriage will cure him of his jealous tendencies. As he proclaims to Christina, “Jealousy, sure, is much more pardonable before marriage than after it. But tomorrow, by the help of the parson, you will put me out of all my fears” (5.2.111–114). Ranger also declares that he will reform, though he jokingly asserts that he will merely trade places with Lydia: as he tells her, “I may have my turn of watching, dogging, standing under the window, at the door, [or] behind the hanging” (5.2.120–122). Lydia replies, “But if I could be desperate now and give you up my liberty, could you find in your heart to quit all other engagements and voluntarily turn yourself over to one woman and she a wife too? Could you away with the insupportable bondage of matrimony?” (5.2.123–127). He replies,

You talk of matrimony as irreverently as my
 Lady Flippant. The bondage of matrimony! No—
 The end of marriage now is liberty
 And two are bound—to set each other free. (5.2.128–131)

While Ranger will probably continue to pursue other women from time to time, his assurance to Lydia is that he will give her the same freedom he takes, if he takes it. Thus, *Love in a Wood's* two major libertines end the play prepared to be happily united with their loves in a radically reformed version of marriage, one that combines marriage with individual autonomy. They are rewarded with their brides because of their ability to adapt—reconciling with one another—and thus reconstituting the libertine homosocial circle: Valentine will give up his jealousy, while Ranger will give up trying to seduce other libertines' mistresses.²⁴

Wycherley favorably contrasts these characters with the low characters in the play, a contrast that demonstrates just how radical Wycherley's libertine notions of marriage were. Dapperwit, for example, is a fop who, while fancying himself a wit, is actually "as barren and hide-bound as one of your damned scribbling poets" (1.2.114–115). Indeed, his conversation largely consists of denigrating whichever character, Ranger or Vincent, is offstage. In comparison to Dapperwit's false wit, Ranger, Vincent, and Valentine are true wits worthy of their happy endings. Lady Flippant, a puritan widow who pretends to hate the idea of marriage as a means of ensnaring a husband, is a hypocrite whose claims to morality evaporate as soon as Ranger expresses an interest in seducing her in St. James's Park. While she hides her sexual desire behind a veneer of moral virtue and ultimately deceives her suitors with an appearance of wealth, the libertines are exactly who they appear to be, enjoying their activities without deceiving anyone. Mrs. Joyner is a procuress who cheats her customers by promising to arrange their marriages but mostly extorts money from them. And Sir Simon Addleplot disguises himself as a servant in order to woo the young woman that Dapperwit is courting. Addleplot ultimately gives up this pursuit in favor of marrying Flippant, whom he erroneously thinks is wealthy. Unlike the libertines, these characters, who espouse the values of Pepys, Evelyn, and Milton, attempt to achieve their goals through deception, dishonesty, and disguise.²⁵

The most important of these characters, however, is Alderman Gripe, described in the list of characters as a "seemingly precise, but a covetous, lecherous, old usurer of the City." Gripe hopes to marry Lucy, but his suit is inhibited by the fact that he is "a censorious, rigid fop" (1.1.97). Throughout act 1, scene 1, Joyner praises Gripe with several tributes that play upon his appearance of being a moral exemplar. According to Joyner, his "virtue is proof against vainglory" (108); he "cannot backslide from [his] principles" and "cannot be terrified by

the laws nor bribed to allegiance by office or preferment" (124–126); "Through [him] virgins are married or provided for as well; through [him] the reprobate's wife is made a saint and through [him] the widow is not disconsolate nor misses her husband" (140–143); and he is "the pink of courteous aldermen" (148), "the headband of justice" (150), "the bellows of zeal" (153), "the fob of liberality" (155), "the picklock and the dark lanthorn of policy and, in a word, the conventicle of virtues" (157–158). Joyner praises Gripe for his moral virtue at the same time that he is paying her to arrange his seduction of a young woman. This suggests that, while Gripe pretends to virtue, he is in fact a hypocrite. Throughout the play, he not only backslides from his principles but also actively transgresses every one of them. The implication of Joyner's ironic praise is that Gripe seduces virgins and then arranges their marriages in order to cover his affairs; he also associates with neglected wives and widows as a means of seducing them.

Arranging this seduction is a difficult task, however, since his money and his reputation for morality are what Gripe prizes most.²⁶ In order to establish the latter, Gripe loudly proclaims his virtue. He vehemently rejects the pleasures of wickedness, claiming that "I abominate entertainments" (3.2.340–341), that "I hate modes and forms" (3.2.351–352), and that "I am a modest man" (3.2.375–376). He has even locked up his daughter to keep her away from her suitor, Dapperwit, and exclaims, "I cannot rest till I have redeemed her from the jaws of that lion" (1.1.196–197). Furthermore, contrary to Joyner's praise of his "liberality," Gripe is in fact stingy. When Joyner takes him to visit Lucy, she points out the humbleness of their abode:

'Tis a small house, you see, and mean furniture, for no gallants are suffered to come hither. She might have had ere now as good lodgings as any in town, her Moreclack hangings, great glasses, cabinets, China embroidered beds, Persian carpets, gold plate and the like, if she would have put herself forward but your worship may please to make 'em remove to a place fit to receive one of your worship's quality, for this is a little scandalous, in truly. (3.2.318–326)

Joyner means this description as a hint for Gripe to ease his advances by giving Lucy a present, part of which Joyner will take for herself. But his tightfistedness prevents him from taking her hint. He justifies his miserliness by asserting, "Temperance is the nurse of chastity" (3.2.336). He also insists that he likes his mistress's lodgings "well enough" for its "privacy" and that "I love privacy, in opposition to the wicked who hate it" (3.2.327–329), a disparagement of the libertines' public performances of what Gripe deems "wicked."

When Gripe continues to miss her point, Joyner tells him that unless he “send for something to entertain her with . . . the young gentlewoman will despise you” (3.2.353–354, 358). When even this explicit suggestion fails, Joyner returns to flattery. As she tells him, “I am so ashamed she should find me so abominable a liar. I have praised you to her and, above all your virtues, your liberality, which is so great a virtue that it often excuses youth, beauty, courage, wit or anything” (3.2.366–370). Gripe still refuses, maintaining that liberality is “the virtue of fools; every fool can have it” (3.2.371–372). His stinginess nearly derails his suit. When he is left in a room alone with Lucy, he locks the door and immediately “takes her in his arms” and begins kissing her (3.2.461). She cries, “Murder, murder, oh oh! Help, help, oh!” (3.2.463–464), and her mother, her landlord, and his apprentice break down the door. Lucy accuses him of “ravis[h]ing” her, and finally Gripe understands that he must buy his way out of the situation. As Lucy’s mother tells him, “’tis a charitable thing to give a young maid a portion” (3.2.526–527). To hush up the scandal, Gripe pays her family £500. In this scene, Wycherley first exposes Gripe’s greed, causing the audience to laugh at his inability to ease his seduction of Lucy by giving her a small gift. Wycherley then reveals his lechery, which has been hidden by Gripe’s rhetoric of virtue. His private acts become public despite his efforts to conceal them.

Gripe receives a further comeuppance at the end of the play. While he again visits Lucy, his daughter Martha marries Dapperwit, whom Gripe dismisses as “An idle, loitering, slandering, foulmouthed, beggarly wit!” (5.2.2–4). When his daughter enters with her husband, Gripe asks her why she has married him. She replies, “I found myself six months gone with child and saw no hopes of your getting me a husband, or else I had not married a wit, sir” (5.2.27–29). Thus, his attempts to control his family by locking his daughter at home have not prevented her from getting pregnant nor from marrying a man of her (not his) choice. Furthermore, his reputation is in ruins, and Lucy has his £500. To make matters worse, Lucy is revealed to be Dapperwit’s mistress, marking Gripe as a dupe of everyone else’s machinations. Gripe nevertheless decides that the only way to take revenge on his daughter and Dapperwit is to marry Lucy in spite of her dishonesty:

My daughter, my reputation and my money gone—but the last is dearest to me. Yet at once I may retrieve that and be revenged for the loss of the other and all this by marrying Lucy here. I shall get my five hundred pound again and get heirs to exclude my daughter and frustrate

Dapperwit. Besides, 'tis agreed on all hands, 'tis cheaper keeping a wife than a wench. (5.2.56–63)

Notably, this final reason for marrying another man's mistress—that it is “cheaper” than maintaining his own—is the one that actually convinces Gripe to marry Lucy. Money matters more to him than anything else. He also realizes that, if he and Lucy were to have a son, he could disinherit Martha and Dapperwit, allowing his money to go to the new heir. Gripe is ridiculed in *Love in a Wood* and given this embarrassing ending because he is a hypocrite. From the libertine's point of view, Gripe hypocritically condemns other people's pleasures but indulges his own desire, as seen in his sexual advance to Lucy. He censures and denies libertine pleasures as a strategy for covering up his own sexual activities.²⁷ Wycherley contrasts the hypocrisy of men who proclaim the rhetoric of morality but secretly want to live the life of a libertine with the actual freedom and liberty libertines espouse. According to *Love in a Wood*, it is the libertine trickster, and not the proponent of progressive ideology, who can most successfully reform society's institutions. The libertine productively challenges false notions of authority and morality while upholding a belief in individual autonomy for men and women and love based on choice rather than compulsion. He continues this theme in his next play.

Wycherley's satire of characters who espouse progressive ideology continues in his second play, *The Gentleman Dancing-Master*, which premiered in February 1672. This play focuses on Hippolita, a fourteen-year-old girl who has been secluded from men and is about to be forced into marriage with her cousin, a fop who so loves French manners that he insists on being called Monsieur de Paris. This marriage has been arranged by her tyrannical father, who has changed his name to Don Diego due to his love of Spanish culture. Clearly, the smartest person in the play, Hippolita, arranges her own freedom and choice of husband by manipulating her cousin into passing a message to Gerrard, a young libertine “they talk of so much in town,” getting Gerrard into her room, and then passing him off as her dancing instructor when her father finds him there.²⁸ Wycherley exaggerates the major ideas of progressive ideology more pointedly in this play by making Hippolita's father, Don Diego, sterner, as well as more foolish, than Alderman Gripe. His foolishness revolves around his commitment to what he sees as Spanish modes and customs. As he relates to his sister, Mrs. Caution, “I have been fifteen years in Spain for it, at several times, look you. Now in Spain he is wise enough that is grave, politic enough that says little, and honourable enough that is

jealous, and though I say it that should not say it, I am as grave, grum [*sic*] and jealous as any Spaniard breathing" (2.1.36–42). His love of all things Spanish extends to his mode of dress, his taste in food, and his treatment of his daughter. As he asserts,

I will be a Spaniard in everything still and will not conform, not I, to their ill-favoured English customs, for I will wear my Spanish habit still, I will stroke my Spanish whiskers still and I will eat my Spanish olio still and my daughter shall go a maid to her husband's bed, let the English custom be what 'twill. I would fain see any finical, cunning, insinuating monsieur of the age debauch or steal away my daughter. (2.1.44–52)

While Don Diego insists that he is merely looking out for his daughter's well-being, Hippolita suspects that he has a different motive in keeping her locked within their house. As she proclaims, "I am an heiress and have twelve hundred pounds a year, lately left me by my mother's brother, which my father cannot meddle with and which is the chiefest reason, I suppose, why he keeps me up so close" (2.1.233–237). The primary joke of the play is that Don Diego's fears concerning his daughter's future is exactly what happens: Gerrard steals her away by insinuating himself into the household and pretending to be her dancing master.

Wycherley's characterization of Don Diego exaggerates progressive ideology's rhetoric of familial order even further than his depiction of Gripe in *Love in a Wood*. Convinced that his daughter's chastity can only be maintained through paternal discipline, Don Diego decides that the way to ensure this discipline is to confine her to the house. In fact, his first appearance in the play is during a conversation with his sister about his daughter:

Don Diego. Have you had a Spanish care of the honour of my family, that is to say, have you kept up my daughter close in my absence, as I directed?

Caution. I have, sir. But it was as much as I could do.

Don Diego. I knew that, for 'twas as much as I could do to keep up her mother—I that have been in Spain, look you.

Caution. Nay, 'tis a hard task to keep up an English woman.

Don Diego. As hard as it is for those who are not kept up to be honest, look you, con licentia, sister.

Caution. How now, brother! I am sure my husband never kept me up.

Don Diego. I knew that, therefore I cried "con licentia," sister, as the Spaniards have it.

Caution. But you Spaniards are too censorious, brother. (2.1.1–17)

Don Diego equates his honor with locking his daughter at home because he is convinced that any woman who is not kept safely at home cannot be chaste, even his sister, whose reputation he has no other reason to doubt than that her husband did not lock her up. As a result, Caution, a character who agrees with her brother's close watch over his daughter, finds that his opinions have gone too far—even a virtuous woman like herself cannot live up to his standards. Thus, the audience is meant to conclude that his “Spanish care of the honour of [his] family” is indeed “too censorious.”

Wycherley means for his audience to laugh at Don Diego's Spanish affectations; he is after all an Englishman whose real name is James Formal. We are also meant to condemn his excessive tactics in managing his daughter. To indicate this response to Don Diego, Wycherley begins the play with Hippolita's take on her father's mannerisms and choice for her husband. Indeed, the first lines of the play are a criticism of her father's choices: “To confine a woman just in her rambling age! Take away her liberty at the very time she should use it! O barbarous aunt! O unnatural father! To shut up a poor girl at fourteen and hinder her budding; all things are ripened by the sun! To shut up a poor girl at fourteen!” (1.1.1–6). She and her maid, Prue, proceed to list all of the things they have missed out on because of Don Diego's practices.

- Hippolita.* Not suffered to see a play in a twelve-month—
Prue. Nor to go to Ponchinello nor Paradise—
Hippolita. Nor to take a ramble to the Park nor Mulberry Gar'n—
Prue. Nor to Tatnam Court nor Islington—
Hippolita. Nor to eat a sillybub in New Spring Gar'n with a cousin—
Prue. Nor to drink a pint of wine with a friend at the Prince in the Sun—
Hippolita. Nor to hear a fiddle in good company—
Prue. Nor to hear the organs and tongs at the Gun in Moorfields—
Hippolita. Nay, nor suffered to go to church because the men are sometimes there! Little did I think I should have ever longed to go to church!
Prue. Or I either but between two maids.
Hippolita. Not see a man—
Prue. Nor come near a man—
Hippolita. Nor hear of a man—
Prue. No, miss, but to be denied a man and to have no use at all of a man!
Hippolita. Hold, hold. Your resentment is as much greater than mine, as your experience has been greater. (1.1.9–32)

By denying his daughter any pleasure, Don Diego has made her even more desirous of all pleasures. In particular, she desires a man because she has been kept away from male companions. Like Gripe's daughter, her seclusion has only made her more likely to pursue a sexual partner right under her father's nose. Like Hippolita, the audience is to characterize her father's strategy as "barbarous" and "unnatural."²⁹ Throughout the play, Wycherley holds Don Diego up to ridicule for his Spanish manners and acceptance of the general ideas of progressive ideology, especially in his need to maintain control over his family due to his concerns for her chastity and inheritance.

Wycherley contrasts Don Diego's obsessive need to control his daughter's virtue and money with her desire to be free. In doing so, Wycherley streamlines the plot of his play, reducing its number of characters, eliminating the subplots of *Love in a Wood*, and consolidating his libertine figures into just one character, Gerrard. As with Valentine, Vincent, and Ranger, Gerrard is introduced to the audience as a typical libertine. Like Wycherley's previous libertines, he resembles the reputations of the libertines at court in several ways. He dines at the same restaurants as the aristocratic libertines. He is first seen drinking and dining with his male companions, including Martin and Monsieur de Paris at Chateline's, "an expensive restaurant in Covent Garden fashionable for its French cuisine and elite clientele."³⁰ He also knows the local prostitutes intimately. When two prostitutes, Flounce and Flirt, force their way into his dining room at the tavern, it is clear that Gerrard and Martin already know them. Although the two women are wearing masks, Gerrard immediately recognizes them, revealing their names in an aside to the audience (1.2.224). When they attempt to enlist his company, he addresses them on familiar terms: "Ladies, I am sorry you have no volunteers in your service. This is mere pressing and argues a great necessity you have for men" (1.2.225–227). When Gerrard chides them for "pressing" men into service, the women respond, "You need not be afraid, sir. We will use no violence to you—you are not fit for our service, we know you" (1.2.228–230). They go on to tease him, "The hot service you have been in formerly makes you unfit for ours now. Besides, you begin to be something too old for us; we are for the brisk houzas of seventeen or eighteen" (1.2.231–234). Gerrard asserts that he is not too old for them, but simply tired of their acquaintance. "Besides," says Gerrard, "you are come a little too early for me, for I am not drunk yet" (1.2.236–237). Gerrard then retires to prepare for his visit with Hippolita the next day. Like the libertines in Wycherley's circle, Gerrard is part of a male circle of friends, visits prostitutes from time

to time, drinks excessively, and is up for the excitement of arranging a liaison with a beautiful girl.

Wycherley contrasts Gerrard with Don Diego by casting him in a sexual intrigue in which he poses as a dancing instructor in order to spirit Hippolita out of her father's house, a pose that is noticeably undercut by Gerrard's inability to dance or play an instrument.³¹ When Gerrard sees Hippolita through her window, he appreciates her beauty and decides he must see her in person. He, therefore, breaks a window and enters the house. Canfield reads Hippolita as a "nubile trickster," a rebellious young woman who insists on her right to choose a husband, defying her guardians' wishes.³² Like Ranger, however, Gerrard is the character that most closely fits the traditional sense of the trickster figure. He too is a selfish-buffoon. While Gerrard is a libertine trickster, intent on seducing the beautiful Hippolita, he is comically slow to pick up on Hippolita's hints that he should carry her away from her father's house. Clearly hoping for a Rochester, Hippolita leadingly asks him, "What should you come in at the window for, if you did not mean to steal me?" (2.1.221–222). The answer, of course, is that Gerrard only anticipated sleeping with her, not marrying her or spiriting her away from her father. Accordingly, he insists that he "will not give [her] occasion" to cry out in fear of his kidnapping her (2.1.230). Hippolita is, therefore, forced to give him a reason (beyond her beauty) to want to carry her out of the house and marry her. She finds that reason in her inheritance. As she complains, "O money, powerful money! How the ugly, old, crooked, straight, handsome young women are beholding to thee!" (2.1.239–242). Because of her beauty and fortune, Gerrard decides he will have her as his wife and immediately proposes that they flee the house together: "Come, come my dearest, let us be gone. Fortune as well as women must be taken in the humour" (2.1.270–272).

Their plan is foiled, however, when Don Diego appears suddenly and discovers them together. Gerrard poses as Hippolita's dancing master not just as a way of preventing a duel with her father but also as a means of courting her. As he tells her, "Well, miss, since it seems you have some diffidence in me, give me leave to visit you as your dancing-master, now you have honoured me with the character, and, under that, I may have your father's permission to see you, till you may better know me and my heart and have a better opportunity to reward it" (2.1.560–566). Hippolita puts his heart to the test, first by insisting that he play the part of the dancing instructor despite the fact that he cannot dance, and then by telling him that she is not in fact a heiress in order to see whether he loves her just for her money.

Gerrard passes both tests. Despite being made to look ridiculous, he pretends to teach her to dance. And when Hippolita asks whether he would “be such a fool as to steal a woman with nothing,” he declares, “I’ll convince you, for you shall go with me and since you are twelve hundred pound a year the lighter you’ll be the easier carried away” (4.1.649–653). Gerrard thus proves that, unlike her father, he loves her but not for her money or reputation. He is therefore rewarded with her hand in marriage.

In the end, Don Diego is forced to accept his daughter’s marriage to Gerrard at sword’s point but claims that he knew who Gerrard was all along and that he was only testing to see if Gerrard was actually a “man of honour” (5.1.820). This claim is a derivative of Don Diego’s need to control his household: he is unable to admit that his daughter and Gerrard have duped him and must attempt to reassert his control over the situation, even if that assertion is little more than an empty declaration. If the audience were to take the threat of violence seriously, this play would end up feeding fears of libertine excess rather than allaying them—Gerrard does threaten Hippolita’s father at sword’s point. Wycherley, therefore, attempts to strike a delicate balance between Gerrard’s prowess with a sword and his comic attempts to pretend to be a dancing master. Indeed, Gerrard’s seduction of Hippolita is nearly derailed when he cannot stop laughing at Don Diego’s obtuseness. For example, while watching his daughter’s lesson, Don Diego asks whether Gerrard is planning on stealing his favorite student, who, unknown to Don Diego, is his own daughter, in order to marry her. Gerrard responds, “No, no, sir, steal her, sir, steal her! You are pleased to be merry, sir, ha, ha, ha. (*Aside*) I cannot but laugh at that question” (3.1.365–367). This laughter becomes uncontrollable when Don Diego pursues the topic further, betting that Gerrard will steal his student away. As Gerrard admits in an aside to the audience, “I shall not be able to hold laughing” (3.1.374–375). Don Diego interprets his laughter as a confession that he does intend to steal the girl away from her father. Gerrard again confesses to the audience, “My laughing may give him suspicions, yet I cannot hold” (3.1.384–385). When Don Diego insists that the father might get the upper hand by refusing to give his daughter her fortune, Gerrard responds, “I hope it will not be in his power, sir, ha, ha, ha,” and reveals to the audience that “I shall laugh too much anon” (3.1.391–392). This scene minimizes Gerrard’s threat to the audience by making him a comic character in the play. His subsequent threat of violence against Don Diego is tempered by the facts that the audience has already laughed at him as an incompetent dancer, that Gerrard

almost reveals himself through his uncontrollable laughter, and that Don Diego is a fool who deserves his comeuppance.

By making libertine tricksters a productive part of the social order through their homosocial relationships with other men and marriages to socially appropriate women, Wycherley offers his audience a vision of patriarchy and marriage at odds with that of aristocratic and progressive ideologies. Wycherley's take on these issues can be summed up by the final couplet of each play. *Love in a Wood* ends with a libertine character's assertion that "The end of marriage now is liberty / And two are bound—to set each other free" (5.2.130–131). This play maintains that successful marriages are based on the ability of spouses to trust each other without jealousy and to protect one another's "liberty." According to Wycherley's depictions of such characters as Gripe and Don Diego, men like Pepys, Evelyn, and Milton used the rhetoric and practices of self-control and familial order as a means of exerting and marshalling patriarchal authority. His plays anticipate what Lawrence Stone calls "affective individualism," a social trend "toward greater freedom for children and a rather more equal partnership between spouses" as "there developed much warmer affective relations between husband and wife and between parents and children" (221). At its root, claims Stone, this trend was predicated on a growing belief in individual autonomy, a belief summed up by Richard Overton in 1646: "To every individual in nature is given an individual property by nature, not to be invaded or usurped by any: for everyone as he is himself, so he hath a self propriety, else he could not be himself. . . . For by natural birth all men are equally and alike born to like propriety, liberty and freedom."³³ While progressive ideology's belief in "personal autonomy and a corresponding respect for the individual's right to privacy, to self-expression, and to the free exercise of his will within limits set by the need for social cohesion" initially extended almost solely to men, the libertines in Wycherley's plays advocate a woman's equal right to privacy, self-expression, and free will. To make this point, the play contrasts the activities of two libertines and their mistresses with the plots of low characters who espouse deception and greed as the basis of marital bonds. *The Gentleman Dancing-Master* ends with its lead female character's proclamation that "When children marry, parents should obey, / Since love claims more obedience far than they" (5.1.841–842). In this play, Wycherley argues against traditional views of the father's right to control his children's choice of a marriage partner, claiming instead that husbands and wives must freely choose the relationship and that these choices should be based on passion for one another.

This vision of marriage and paternal relationships is radically different from that espoused by men like Pepys. Rather than regulating desire, Wycherley's trickster protagonists suggest that sexual and affective liberty—that is, libertinism—is necessary for a healthy, well-governed, and safe society. Like other tricksters, these libertines are the agents of change—of social development—in the society as depicted in the respective plays.³⁴ Wycherley would complicate this formula in his next play, *The Country Wife*.

THE LIBERTINE'S DILEMMA: *THE COUNTRY WIFE*

When Wycherley returned to writing plays, he defied the expectations of social comedy and wrote a play predicated on the idea that the primary libertine trickster would not end the plot integrated into society's future by marrying a beautiful young woman and by affirming homosocial bonds. This play is, of course, *The Country Wife*, which premiered in January 1675. Wycherley's most famous libertine, Horner, is characterized by a social duplicity that goes beyond the comparatively simple, good-natured tricks and innuendo of Ranger, Valentine, Vincent, and Gerrard. Horner is no longer a jolly epicurean like Wycherley's previous libertines, whose libertinism was largely defined as being prone to pursuing pleasures of one sort or another. Instead, he takes the use of trickery a step further. Like Gerrard, Horner spends the play in disguise, but, unlike Gerrard, Horner does not use disguise in order to save a woman from a bad marriage proposal by marrying her himself. Instead, his disguise is meant solely as a vehicle for pursuing his own sexual pleasures. Horner is what Michael Carroll calls a "clever hero," a trickster "who consistently outwits stronger opponents, where 'stronger' can refer to physical strength or power or both."³⁵ Horner's opponents in *The Country Wife* are "stronger" in the sense that they have unfettered sexual access to women through marriage and knowledge of his libertine intent to seduce those women; they are on their guard against his efforts. Horner must, therefore, find a way to trick these men into providing him with this same sexual access. Accordingly, he has asked a quack physician to report throughout the town that he is "as bad as an eunuch."³⁶ His goal here is to convince the city husbands that he is impotent, tricking them into giving him unlimited and private admission to their wives. Horner's new reputation is soon tested when Sir Jasper Fidget, Lady Fidget, and Mrs. Dainty Fidget visit his lodgings. The gossip of Horner's impotency, combined with his assertions that

he now hates women, convinces Sir Jasper that Horner is “an innocent man” (1.1.141). This is precisely what Horner had expected. As he explains to Quack, “upon the report and my carriage, this grave man of business leaves his wife in my lodgings, invites me to his house and wife, who before would not be acquainted with me out of jealousy” (1.1.162–166). The ruse works so well that, over the course of the play, Horner is able to seduce Lady Fidget, Mrs. Dainty Fidget, Mrs. Squeamish, and Margery Pinchwife.

Helen Burke has argued that *The Country Wife* “offers a radical critique of male/female relationships and the rationalization of these relationships by social structures.” According to Burke, this play “seeks to disclose and denaturalize sexual categories, putting into question the very symbolic system that designates woman as the ‘Other.’” Drawing upon Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick’s examination of homosocial desire in the play, Burke analyzes the “ambiguous and dangerous status” of women in the play, but disagrees with Sedgwick’s assertion that this status is most clearly revealed in Wycherley’s juxtaposition of Horner with Pinchwife and Harcourt. Instead, Burke maintains that the status of women comes to the foreground when the play’s two principal female characters, Alithea and Margery, interact with Pinchwife, who futilely attempts to stabilize the categories of “sister” and “wife,” respectively. The play also undermines the discourse of homosocial desire, writes Burke, “by suggesting the possibility of an alternative economy of female desire,” an economy revealed in the play’s depiction of Mrs. Squeamish, Mrs. Dainty Fidget, and Lady Fidget. She concludes that *The Country Wife* is best examined as an example of Freud’s category of the “tendentious joke,” a kind of joke that “shatters respect for institutions and truths in which the hearer has believed, on the one hand by reinforcing the argument, but on the other hand by practicing a new species of attack.”³⁷ For Burke, this “new species of attack” is Wycherley’s use of Horner’s ruse of impotency. Like Burke, I argue that *The Country Wife* offers a radical critique of male/female relations in Restoration society. Reading the play in the context of libertine tricksters, however, highlights the fact that this play, unlike Wycherley’s earlier works, offers more than one alternative to existing marriage practices. On the one hand, *The Country Wife* continues the revision of marital relationships begun in his earlier plays. This revision is embodied in the relationship between Harcourt and Alithea. On the other hand, the play offers Horner’s status as a continuing libertine trickster at the end of the play as a second alternative to the existing patriarchal order. In contrast to Burke’s methodology,

how these two alternatives work in the play is best seen by returning to Sedgwick's technique of comparing Horner to Pinchwife and Harcourt.

In his libertine trickery, Horner uses society's definition of honor against itself.³⁸ Indeed, *The Country Wife* laughs at the lengths people will go to in order to protect their honor, which is based solely on reputation. As Horner explains to the physician, "your women of honour, as you call 'em, are only chary of their reputations, not their persons, and 'tis scandal they would avoid, not men" (1.1.191–194). As long as the women are thought to be faithful to their husbands, then they *are* faithful wives. Their identities lie in what is said about them, not in what they actually do.³⁹ His ruse of impotency provides them the cover to indulge their sexual desires with him without risking their reputations and, therefore, their honor. Thus, like Wycherley's earlier proponents of progressive ideology, these women are hypocrites. Horner's deception also gives him the opportunity to glimpse other unexpected activities of "honorable" women. For example, he discovers that the women of honor often engage in bawdy talk and drunken behavior in private. As he relates to Quack, "your bigots in honour are just like those in religion; they fear the eye of the world more than the eye of Heaven and think there is no virtue but railing at vice and no sin but giving scandal" (4.3.23–27). This works for Horner as well. When asked whether he will be able, upon some future falling out, to maim the honor of the women he sleeps with, Horner reminds Lady Fidget that no one would believe him if he attempted to ruin her: "the reputation of impotency is as hardly recovered again in the world as that of cowardice, dear madam" (2.1.653–655). Once he has gained the repute of sexual incapacity, says Horner, for all intents and purposes, he is impotent in the eyes of other men. Horner fulfills his sexual desire through the same method that these hypocrites use to mask their desires. He declares "A pox on 'em, and all that force nature and would be still what she forbids 'em! Affectation is her greatest monster" (1.1.302–304). Throughout the play, Horner contends that nature, the physical body, forbids the suppression of sexual desire, which is precisely what progressive ideology's notion of "honor" tries to do. To get around this, says the libertine, people are forced to affect honor by railing against vice in public in order to pursue their pleasures in private, the same critique of progressive ideology that Wycherley put forward in his earlier plays. This use of rhetoric to deny the physical as a good in and of itself is what Wycherley finds monstrous and unnatural. He therefore works to radically transform social constructions of desire. Using the play to

imagine the libertine trickster as such a transformative character, however, also poses problems for Wycherley and the libertine circle.

The one husband who does not fall for Horner's ruse is Pinchwife, a squire just returned to London with his young country wife. A former "whoremaster," he has married Margery not because he loves her but because she has been raised in the country (1.1.419). As he explains to Horner, "we are a little surer of the breed there, know what her keeping has been, whether foiled or unsound" (1.1.427–428). Pinchwife is so obsessed with marrying a woman he can control that he has married a naïve woman who is completely unprepared for the London society. Acquainted with Horner's previous exploits, Pinchwife is convinced that Horner will seduce his wife if they ever meet and therefore goes to extraordinary lengths to prevent Horner from encountering her. Like Alderman Gripe and Don Diego, Pinchwife contends that the only way to ensure a woman's virtue is to keep her locked up from other men. He, therefore, attempts to keep his new wife away from Horner and his friends, first by bringing her to a play but sitting in the cheapest seats, then by denying them any access to her by locking her in her room, and finally by having her dress as a boy when the two of them go out.⁴⁰ In each case, Pinchwife's obsession with the possibility that his wife will cuckold him, ironically shows her the path to doing so: he accidentally tells her that Horner is in love with her and, like Don Diego's locking up his daughter, unwittingly convinces her that London life is full of "plays, visits, fine coaches, fine clothes, fiddles, balls, [and] treats" (2.1.92–94). Likewise, his having her dress in the clothes of a boy gives Horner the opportunity to address her directly, to kiss her, and to walk alone with her, the end result of which is to convince her that she is in love with the libertine and hates her husband. Pinchwife's foolish attempts to keep his wife away from Horner arouse the audience's laughter, particularly since they accomplish the opposite of his repressive desires.

Where Wycherley's previous critiques of progressive ideology in *Love in a Wood* and *The Gentleman Dancing-Master* concentrated primarily on ridiculing their excessive repression of sexual freedom, he uses the character of Pinchwife to attack this belief system's fears concerning aristocratic libertinism more pointedly. Several scholars point out that Pinchwife's jealousy is ultimately a crisis of masculinity.⁴¹ The possibility of his wife's unfaithfulness fuels his anxieties concerning his own masculinity, causing him to react with the threat of violence. For example, when he insists that she write Horner a letter that demands that he never address her again, he tells her, "Write as

I bid you, or I will write 'whore' with this penknife on your face" (4.2.110–111). Despite his threat, Margery leaves out such words as "nauseous" and "loathed," because she "can't abide to write such filthy words" (4.2.124–126). When Pinchwife discovers her failure to write exactly as he has commanded, he again threatens her: "Once more write as I'd have you, and question it not, or I will spoil thy writing with this. (*Holds up the penknife.*) I will stab out those eyes that cause my mischief" (4.2.127–130). This threat has more to do with Pinchwife's fears that Margery will be unfaithful to him *with Horner* than with any fear that she will simply be unfaithful. Norman Holland points out that this scene betrays Pinchwife's anxiety over his own masculinity in relation to Horner's:

Wycherley, of course, had not read Freud: we cannot expect that he was aware of the overtones of swords and knives. Nevertheless, his insight here is brilliant. Pinchwife—his name is significant—fears and distrusts women; these fears create a hostility that tends to make him an inadequate lover: unconsciously, he satisfies his aggressive instincts by frustrating and disappointing women he makes love to. Disappointing women, in turn, creates further situations that increase his fears. Thus he falls into the typical self-defeating spiral of neurosis.⁴²

This is precisely what happens through the rest of the play. When he leaves Margery alone for a brief time, she takes the opportunity to write a new letter declaring her love for Horner, which Pinchwife unwittingly delivers to him. When Pinchwife later insists on bringing his sister to Horner's rooms, his wife disguises herself in Alithea's clothes and accompanies her husband in her place. Thus, Pinchwife comically orchestrates his own cuckolding by escorting his wife to her new lover. He is both a horrific character in his threat of violence toward his wife and the play's comic butt. Unlike his previous proponents of progressive ideology, with Pinchwife, Wycherley argues that these proponents' criticisms of libertine performances reveal their own inability to deal with sexual desire. Indeed, as David Vieth notes, Pinchwife's sword and penknife are not simply phallic symbols but "inadequate substitutes for true masculinity."⁴³ Because they must hide their desire behind hypocrisy, says Wycherley, they oppose the masculine displays of debauchery performed by the libertine wits.

The Country Wife contrasts Horner with Pinchwife to show the moral and sexual bankruptcy of progressive ideology. The scene in which Pinchwife threatens his wife as she writes Horner a letter is followed by the famous "china scene," act 4, scene 3, in which Horner gives Lady Fidget and Mrs. Squeamish some of his "china,"

a euphemism for sex. When Sir Jaspar Fidget finds his wife in Horner's arms, Lady Fidget covers their true activities first by insisting that she is tickling the supposed eunuch and then by saying that she is forcing him to be her shopping companion. As she explains to her husband, "I was fain to come up to fetch him, or to go without him, which I was resolved not to do, for he knows china very well and has himself very good, but will not let me see it lest I should beg some. But I will find it out and have what I came for yet" (117–122). She then goes into Horner's chamber and locks the door behind her. Horner goes "into her the back way" (139) and proceeds to have sex with her as her clueless husband laughingly warns her from the other side of the door that Horner will "use you roughly and be too strong for you" (148–149). Soon Mrs. Squeamish enters the scene and, upon learning that Horner is giving out "china," exits through another door hoping to join the rake and Lady Fidget in Horner's chamber. When she returns unsatisfied, she demands her fair share of china too. As she exclaims, "Good Mr. Horner, don't think to give other people china and me none; come in with me too" (211–213). Unfortunately for her, however, Horner has "none left now" (214). As he consoles her, "Do not take it ill. I cannot make china for you all, but I will have a roll-wagon for you too, another time" (226–228). The joke of this scene is, of course, that Horner is cuckolding Sir Jaspar Fidget as the clueless man stands on the other side of the door. The comic displacement of Horner's sexual capability onto china heightens the audience's laughter at Sir Jaspar Fidget's stupidity; the audience knows the sexualized meaning of "china," while Sir Jaspar does not. Despite this laughter, however, this scene also demonstrates that Pinchwife's fears concerning Horner are realistic: the libertine trickster will go to any length to dupe husbands into letting him have sex with their wives while the men practically watch him do it. Pinchwife's fears are well grounded, but Wycherley keeps the audience on Horner's side of the ideological divide by depicting him as a comic trickster. He merely and merrily takes advantage of the moral hypocrisy of the Lady Fidgets and Mrs. Squeamishes. His threat to husbands like Sir Jaspar Fidget and Pinchwife lies in these men's belief in restrictive morality. And finally, there is also a limit to Horner's libertine tricks: his "china" does run out. The libertine protagonist's threat is, therefore, comically contained.

The play also contrasts Horner with Harcourt, his libertine friend who, like Wycherley's previous rakes, ends the play in marriage. Harcourt's libertinism balances love with friendship, and he is the only male character in the play at whom the audience is not encouraged

to laugh.⁴⁴ Horner reinforces his ploy of impotency by denigrating women and asserting the efficacy of masculine friendship, claiming to Harcourt and their friend Dorilant, “Women serve but to keep a man from better company; though I can’t enjoy them, I shall you the more. Good fellowship and friendship are lasting, rational and manly pleasures” (1.1.234–238). Harcourt replies, “For all that, give me some of those pleasures you call effeminate too; they help to relish one another” (239–241). Harcourt’s particular relish is Alithea, Pinchwife’s sister who is engaged to Sparkish, the play’s fop. As soon as Harcourt meets her, he wishes she were his. He, therefore, uses libertine tricks to win her approbation. When Sparkish asks how he likes her, Harcourt replies, “So infinitely well that I could wish I had a mistress too, that might differ from her in nothing but her love and engagement to you” (2.1.169–171). Partly because of her engagement to Sparkish and partly because she does not believe Harcourt really loves her, Alithea resists his advances. Like Gerrard, Harcourt spends the rest of the play proving to Alithea that she should marry him and not Sparkish. When she insists that Sparkish loves her, Harcourt asserts, “Marrying you is no more a sign of his love than bribing your woman, that he may marry you, is a sign of his generosity. Marriage is rather a sign of interest than love, and he that marries a fortune covets a mistress, not loves her. But if you take marriage for a sign of love, take it from me immediately” (2.1.266–271). She contends that her reputation will suffer if she breaks her engagement, but Harcourt argues that her reputation will suffer even more by marrying a fop like Sparkish. When Alithea tries to put a stop to Harcourt’s lovemaking, he tricks Sparkish himself into convincing her to continue speaking to him in private. She maintains that she is worried for Sparkish’s honor, but Harcourt immediately replies, “why, dearest madam, will you be more concerned for his honour than he himself?” (3.2.251–252). Harcourt even prevents Alithea’s marriage to Sparkish by disguising himself as their parson, yet she still refuses to marry him until, as a result of Margery dressing up in Alithea’s clothes and going with Pinchwife to Horner’s lodgings, Alithea is accused by Pinchwife of being Horner’s mistress. When Sparkish believes the accusation, Alithea agrees to break off their engagement and marries Harcourt instead. Thus, like Wycherley’s previous comic libertine tricksters, Harcourt ends the play happily tied to England’s future through marriage.

Horner’s status at the end of the play stands in marked contrast to Pinchwife’s and Harcourt’s. Pinchwife, the representative of progressive ideology, and Harcourt, the representative of Wycherley’s earlier trickster libertines, each affirm marriage in the final act of the play.

Pinchwife is persuaded against his better judgment to accept publicly that his wife has not slept with Horner even though he thinks otherwise, and Harcourt is happily engaged to Alithea. In contrast, as Canfield points out, “Horner is the unconverted rake, whose great sexual energy remains uncontained and, combined with his great trickster wit, therefore threatens to disrupt the orderly transmission of power and property.”⁴⁵ To continue his pursuit of unchecked sexual indulgence, Horner has forsworn the institutions that guarantee the propagation and ordering of society: marriage and homosocial bonding. As Horner proclaims in the play’s final lines:

Vain fops but court and dress and keep a putther,
 To pass for women’s men with one another,
 But he who aims by women to be priz’d,
 First by the men, you see, must be despis’d. (5.4.483–486)

As this short poem demonstrates, Horner has come a long way from the comic intrigues of Ranger, Vincent, Valentine, and Gerrard. Unlike his predecessors, Horner ends the play unwed and without any of his libertine friends in on his ruse of impotency—Harcourt and Dorilant continue to believe that he is indeed impotent.⁴⁶ Where previous libertines in Wycherley’s plays and the actual libertines in Charles II’s court love to tell their friends, the court, and anyone else who would listen all about their sexual adventures and campaigns, Horner only shares his plans with and reports his exploits to his doctor, who has to spread the word of Horner’s impotency to make it believable.

In his first three plays, Wycherley creates successive libertine characters who more and more aggressively enact society’s images of transgressive and immoral libertine performances. Ranger, Valentine, and Vincent drink, duel over their mistresses, and chase women in St. James’s Park, but two of the three end the play in marriage—Vincent, the least active member of the threesome, remains wedded to beer. Likewise, Gerrard forces a father to allow him to marry his daughter, but the threat of violence is offset by the libertine’s comic inability to dance and propensity to laugh while posing as a dancing master. In contrast, Horner manipulates and tricks everyone around him, just as Pepys feared that the libertines in Charles II’s court would, and does so without guilt or regret. Unlike typical tricksters, he also fails to reform and bring rebirth to society. In fact, he is even willing to falsely accuse Alithea, his friend’s love interest, of being his own mistress in order to preserve his reputation as a eunuch.

Although he claims to Harcourt that he does this simply to protect Margery's honor, the fact is preserving Margery's reputation is necessary for him to continue to pose as a eunuch in order to sleep with other men's wives. His protection of her honor is, therefore, a selfish act rather than a generous one. This scene demonstrates that the most admirable characters in the play are Harcourt and Alithea. When Alithea is accused of being Horner's mistress, Harcourt immediately takes her side. As he tells her, "have no trouble, you shall now see 'tis possible for me to love too, without being jealous; I will not only believe your innocence myself, but make all the world believe it" (5.4.295–298). He then tries to get the truth out of Horner, asserting "This lady has her honour and I will protect it" (303–304). Without further proof of Alithea's innocence, Harcourt even agrees to marry her before the gathered characters, which includes her brother and former fiancé, Sparkish. Harcourt and Alithea end the play happily because they have true honor. Pinchwife, on the other hand, ends the play uneasy about his wife's virtue. While he is forced to believe in her innocence, he remains fundamentally unconvinced of Horner's "impotency." That he is cuckolded and then forced to assert the contrary illustrates the play's key point: people expose themselves to the excesses of libertines like Horner through their own hypocrisy rather than through libertine malevolence.

James Thompson argues that, by choosing to allow Alithea to be accused in order to preserve his reputation as a eunuch, Horner "commits himself to a course which leads to the despicable, a course which leaves no room for compromise or a rational mean; one can no more be partially impotent than partially honorable. Horner deliberately cuts himself off from more attractive characters, choosing the Fidgets and the Pinchwives over the Harcourts." As Thompson maintains,

When Harcourt offers himself as a husband who can provide both sexual service and respectability, we finally see that Horner is no better than Pinchwife, for Horner's insistence that sex is the only good is as equally one-sided, as equally defective, as Pinchwife's insistence that reputation is the only good. Our change in attitude toward Horner is precipitated by his confrontation with Alithea, the play's most naive and idealistic character. Until this last scene, Wycherley has been careful to keep these two extremes of idealism and expediency apart, but in the end they collide and Horner is forced to choose. Wycherley emphasizes the difficulty of the choice, and in so doing, he forces us all to reexamine our allegiances, in effect, forcing us to choose sides too.⁴⁷

While Wycherley may not have begun the play with the intention of equating Horner with Pinchwife, Thompson is right to see the play's

ultimate effect as forcing the audience to reexamine their potential allegiance to Horner. Horner succeeds in maintaining his masquerade of impotency, and Margery Pinchwife is silenced into compliance with his ruse. Rather than marry his new mistress, Horner will continue his conquests into the future, rejecting society's institutions of marriage and masculine friendship. Unlike Wycherley's previous libertine tricksters, who resignify the actual activities of libertines in Charles II's court to make them less threatening to the general populace, Horner remains an ambiguous and potentially menacing figure. Thus, by the end of this experiment with libertinism, Wycherley has presented himself, the libertine circle, and the audience with the argument that they must all choose between two alternatives: the socially integrated libertinism of Ranger, Valentine, Gerrard, and Harcourt—one that uses libertine tricks to reform marriage basing it on mutual liberty—or the socially isolated libertinism of Horner, who continues to use trickery in order to pursue sexual pleasure outside society's institutions. *The Country Wife* suggests that the pursuit of pleasure as the primary good in life will lead a libertine to the necessary rejection of social institutions and even masculine friendship. If the libertines in the wits' circle want to continue to gratify their selfish appetites for the pleasures of drinking, fighting, and whoring, Wycherley believes that they must ultimately reject society's institutions altogether. This creates a dilemma: if the libertines reject social institutions as Horner does, they will also have to cut themselves off from the benefits of their elite positions in the libertine court circle.

Although Wycherley presents the necessity of choosing between these alternatives in this play, he does not explicitly seem to favor one choice over the other at this time. Wycherley's own resolution to this dilemma would not become clear until his final play: *The Plain Dealer*. In fact, all of the plays that the members of the Court Wits' fraternity wrote after *The Country Wife* take up this fundamental question about the libertine's position in society. That the members of this coterie chose different answers suggests that Horner's dilemma exposed a rift in the libertine fraternity, one that divided the wits along status and political lines. Chapter 4 examines the conclusions proposed by Wycherley and Sir George Etherege in *The Plain Dealer* and *The Man of Mode*, respectively. These members of the gentry argue that the libertine must be reincorporated into the social and political institutions of their day in order to have the economic means to pursue pleasure without evoking fear on the part of England's citizenry. Their plays, therefore, reject Horner's choice to remain isolated, modeling their libertine protagonists on Harcourt's embodiment of true honor and romantic love. As continuing supporters of the Stuart regime,

Etherege and Wycherley hope that libertines in Charles II's court can continue to perform pleasurable activities and remain productive citizens at the same time. Chapter 5 analyzes the responses of Sedley and Rochester to the dilemma posed by Horner's choice. These aristocratic members of the libertine circle, who join the opposition in the Parliament against the Stuart regime, maintain that social integration excludes the very characteristics that define libertine performances. Foremost among these characteristics is skepticism and the subversion of traditional notions of family, religion, and government. By composing plays that depict the tragic end of libertine protagonists, Sedley and Rochester argue that society will not allow the libertine to pursue pleasure and be seen as responsible citizens, as Etherege and Wycherley imagine. *Antony and Cleopatra* and *The Tragedy of Valentinian* suggest that the libertine must, like Horner, withdraw from social obligation if he is to continue his pursuit of pleasure.

CHAPTER 4



SCRIPTING LIBERTINE TRICKSTERS: *THE MAN OF MODE* AND *THE PLAIN DEALER*

HOrner's choice to maintain his ruse of impotency at the end of William Wycherley's *The Country Wife* is fundamentally a decision to abandon reputation, fraternity, and marriage in order to continue to satisfy his sexual desire unabated. In making this choice, he became the paradigmatic libertine figure of the Restoration for many scholars. But as we have already seen, Horner's isolation at the end of the play is not representative of Wycherley's earlier protagonists, nor does it reflect the fact that the libertines in Charles II's court cultivated homosocial bonds between themselves as a means of augmenting their prominence at court and throughout London. Indeed, unlike Wycherley's previous libertine tricksters, who adapt the transformative activities of libertines in Charles II's court to make them less overtly threatening to the general populace, Horner remains an ambiguous and potentially menacing figure. Unlike Ranger, Valentine, Gerrard, and Harcourt, who end their plays successfully reinscribed into the social nexus through a radically re-envisioned form of marriage, Horner stands alone, unwed, and with no libertine friend as a confidant. Horner's isolation is, at least in part, a witty victory over the sexual hypocrisy of many of the other characters in the play, including Pinchwife, Sir Jasper Fidget, Lady Fidget, Mrs. Dainty Fidget, and Mrs. Squeamish, but his isolation also dramatizes the increasing social and political isolation of the libertine wits in Charles II's court. By 1675, none of the wits enjoyed substantial influence at court—Buckingham

had been disgraced and removed from the Privy Council in 1672 and now struggled to help lead the opposition party in the Parliament—and England did not seem to be moving toward greater liberty of conscience politically, religiously, or sexually.

Horner, therefore, represents the libertines' possible fate if they continue to privilege individual pleasure over social obligation. As William Dynes points out, the trickster's energy is "subversive until it is either brought back into the community or summarily expunged from it."¹ With its ending, *The Country Wife* presents the libertine circle with these same alternatives: they must choose between the libertinism of Harcourt (and Ranger, Valentine, and Gerrard), one that reconfigures homosocial, marital, and familial relationships from within the community by basing them on individual liberty and pushing, but not too aggressively transgressing the boundaries of socially acceptable behavior, or the libertinism of Horner, which pursues sexual pleasure outside of society's institutions and therefore is threatened with social expulsion. In dramatizing this choice, *The Country Wife* takes libertine performance to its most radical extreme: the libertine rejects arguments against sexual license put forward by members of the middling sort in order to embrace a philosophy that saw sexual consummation as the *only* good in life. By going to this extreme, *The Country Wife* put forward a vision of libertinism in which the wits were outside society's institutions altogether, one that envisioned them without the support of friends, the privileges of the court, the constraints of marriage, or the acclaim of reputation. The remainder of the plays written by members of the libertine wits' circle during the 1670s map out their individual responses to this vision.

This chapter analyzes the ways in which Sir George Etherege's *The Man of Mode* (March 1676) and William Wycherley's *The Plain Dealer* (December 1676) reflect their playwrights' responses to the vision of libertinism presented by Horner's choice. Scholars have long noted that, in the words of Richard W. Bevis, Etherege and Wycherley "form one of the oddest couples in literary history." "Nothing," writes Bevis, "dramatizes the disparities [in these men's works] more strikingly than the concurrence of *The Plain Dealer* and *The Man of Mode*—the final play of each man." While Wycherley's *The Plain Dealer* was immediately considered, in the words of John Dryden, "one of the most bold, most general, and most useful satires which has ever been presented on the English theatre," Etherege's willingness "to leave so much in ambiguous shadow . . . has led to three centuries of argument over the meaning of the action and the human value of [his] protagonists."² Reading these two plays together becomes less odd, however, when

they are placed within the context of the development of libertine performance in the mid-1670s. Both of these plays respond to the same epistemological crisis that libertines in the court of Charles II found themselves in by mid-decade. The libertine wits were out of power at court and challenged by a vocal portion of the public. Like Horner, their continued indulgence in libertine performances led to their political and economic isolation in London in the 1670s. This chapter reads *The Man of Mode* and *The Plain Dealer* in the context of this isolation. Returning to the strategy of Wycherley's earlier comedies, these plays argue that the libertine trickster must transform society's institutions from within rather than reject them. Etherege's last dramatic work attempts to contain libertine performance within socially acceptable boundaries by moderating many of its excesses through the possibility of marriage. Wycherley's final work similarly argues that the libertine must be integrated into society's future through marriage and homosocial bonding. While these plays work to allay citizens' fears of the wits' sexual excesses, their primary goal is to convince the playwrights' fellow libertines of the expediency of the libertine's engagement in marital, extramarital, and homosocial relationships.

THE COSTS OF LIBERTINE PERFORMANCE

Horner's choice at the end of *The Country Wife* dramatically reflects the libertine circle's increasing isolation in London's sociopolitical culture by the middle of the 1670s. While the libertine playwrights' theatrical works had been fairly successful, their offstage performances kept them out of power politically. As we saw in chapter 3, segments of London society labeled libertines as destroyers of the public peace and corrupters of royal morality. As a result of these critiques, Charles distanced himself from public displays of the libertines' more excessive performances, drunkenness, whoring, and general mischief, even if he did not fully disengage himself from privately indulging himself with wine and mistresses in the company of Buckingham, Rochester, Sedley, and others. Charles's disengagement from the wits became *public policy* with the dismissal of Buckingham from the Privy Council in 1672. By the middle of the 1670s, two additional factors complicated the libertine fraternity's political and social status: the economic realities of financing a libertine lifestyle and the increasing association of libertine performance with sodomy. This section surveys the effects of economic and perceived moral impoverishment on the libertine circle's status in London society, a status that *The Man of Mode* and *The Plain Dealer* attempt to change.

Libertine activities—drinking, whoring, dining, gambling, and playgoing—were inevitably expensive, especially at a time when England's economy was changing. Throughout the late seventeenth century, large numbers of England's upper classes increasingly found themselves in economic difficulties as changes in the economy brought lower returns on most aristocrats' investments. As James M. Rosenheim notes, "Where inflation and a growing population had boosted land prices, rents, and gentry prosperity for a hundred and fifty years before 1650, after this point prices and rents both stagnated." This stagnation often forced aristocrats to borrow money; others adapted to this new market economy "by taking up innovative crops and agricultural methods and by employing the novel managerial skills and accepting the financial risks these involved." This changing economy was particularly hard on members of the gentry who liked to enjoy the luxuries and entertainments of London. Not only did these men require lodgings, but they also had to pay for "lifestyle" costs," which would include servants' wages and liveries, stables, furniture and interior decoration, and tailored goods. It became more difficult for most landowners "to generate the necessary income to support the expenditures expected of persons of quality," expenditures that continuously grew: "trips to urban centres, overseas tours, the employment of private tutors, implementation of architectural and interior improvements, and enjoyment of fashionable consumer items of every description were nothing if not costly." Members of the libertine circle added wine, prostitutes, and gambling to these expenses. As a result of these economic realities, men like Etherege and Wycherley relied on the receipts from productions of their plays to supplement their incomes and often depended on marriages to rich, landed women to pay their debts.³ Such necessity permeates *The Man of Mode* and *The Plain Dealer* and helps explain Etherege and Wycherley's contention that the libertine cannot succeed outside of society's institutions. The unmarried man receives no fortune without a wife, and the companionless man cannot rely on his friends to help bail him out of debt. The only way to continue in a libertine lifestyle, say these plays, is to guarantee one's financial stability. A poor libertine's credit would only stretch so far, and his social and political influence could not outlive his purse.

Economic stability was particularly important to Etherege and Wycherley, members of the gentry who did not inherit much wealth or social standing from their families. The son of a royalist captain who died in exile with the royal family in 1650, Etherege inherited land in Kent worth about £40 a year. This income would have been

enough to maintain a bachelor in relative comfort if he had not been obliged to share a portion of it with his siblings.⁴ Etherege turned to the theater as a means of supplementing this income. Playwriting expanded a writer's income in two additional ways: profits from the printing of the plays and stipends from court appointments that were given to men and women of note. The success of his first two plays, *The Comical Revenge* (1664) and *She Would If She Could* (1668), led to his appointment as one of forty-eight Gentlemen of the Privy Chamber, which brought with it a small annuity, and also as secretary to Sir Daniel Harvey, the ambassador to Turkey, in 1668. Etherege received £200 a year for this latter appointment, which lasted until 1671.⁵ By the time his next play, *The Man of Mode*, was produced in 1676, Etherege no doubt welcomed the additional income he made from the play's success. As he later wrote to a friend, "Had I spent my time as wisely as Dick Brett, Sir Patrick Trant, and many others, I might discover misteries which wou'd deserve your favour, but I need not tell you I have preferr'd my pleasure to my profit and have followed what was likelier to ruin a fortune already made than make one: play and women."⁶ Like Etherege, Wycherley also lacked the inheritance of a large estate or the income of a major court appointment. His financial situation was made more difficult by the fact that his father "was still alive and vigorously spending all his available capital on law suits."⁷ Wycherley was eventually imprisoned for his debts in 1681 and remained in prison for four years. In the cases of both playwrights, the success of their plays brought them money that enabled them to pursue their libertine pleasures either directly through receipts or indirectly through court appointments. Each playwright, therefore, had a vested interest in shaping the public's image of libertines to maximize their interest in seeing plays about them. Each playwright knew how to tease the audience with scenes and language that were bawdy enough to evoke their interest but were not so bawdy as to confirm some citizens' notions that libertine performances threatened the durability of the nation's political and social institutions.

One of the major challenges to these playwrights' depictions of the libertines was some people's perception that the libertines in Charles II's court were not only morally bankrupt but were also actively bringing about the demise of social order. The most extreme "proof" of their degeneracy was an association of libertinism with sodomy. Alan Bray explains that sodomy in the seventeenth century denoted more than just sex between men. "Sodomy" could describe a wide range of activities, including bestiality, rape, adultery, incest, and even

excessive drinking, all of which could lead sinners down the slippery path toward the worst sin of all, sex between men.⁸ If Etherege and Wycherley needed to assure themselves of their economic stability through marriage and rich friends, they also needed to minimize any association with sodomy. While our understanding of contemporary constructions of libertines as aristocratic bisexuals, for lack of a better word, is limited, the hints we do have suggest that any association with buggery would clearly keep a libertine from enjoying much political or social power. Indeed, sodomy was a capital offense. The most famous example of this fact in the seventeenth century was the trial and execution of Mervin Touchet, earl of Castlehaven for committing sodomy with several of his servants, helping them rape his wife and adolescent daughter-in-law, and attempting to disinherit his son and will his estate to one of his catamites. As Cynthia Herrup notes, pamphlets and other retellings of the earl's trial and execution appeared throughout the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, and members of Charles II's court would have been well aware of the case.⁹ While Rochester and his libertine friends were somewhat insulated from the potential consequences of their activities by their intimacy with the king, even Charles's power to protect them was limited in the 1670s as he came under more intense pressure to cleanse his court of vice and corruption.

Connections between the libertine circle and sodomy began as early as 1663 with Sedley's drunken public performance of "all the postures of lust and buggery that could be imagined." This association was furthered by repeated suggestions of sex with young men and boys in Rochester's poetry. In "Love to a Woman," for example, his persona proclaims that he will abandon female companionship in favor of drinking with his male friends, and "if buizy Love intrenches," says the speaker, "There's a sweet soft Page of mine / Can doe the Trick worth Forty wenches." As Maximillian Novak explains, "In his poetry [Rochester] frequently played with ideas of experimental sex, including homosexuality, and did not hesitate to treat all bodily functions—menstruation, premature ejaculation, defecation—as entirely natural, as part of humankind's animal self." This point of view led many of his contemporaries to critique his perceived lifestyle. Indeed, contemporary poems, such as "I Rise at Eleven, I Dine about Two," borrow many incidents from the earl's own life to describe the daily routine of a rake:

I Rise at Eleven, I Dine about Two,
I get drunk before Seven, and the next thing I do;

I send for my *Whore*, when for fear of a *Clap*,
 I Spend in her hand, and I Spew in her *Lap*:
 There we quarrel, and scold, till I fall asleep,
 When the *Bitch*, growing bold, to my Pocket does creep;
 Then slyly she leaves me, and to revenge th' affront,
 At once she bereaves me of *Money*, and *Cunt*.
 If by chance then I wake, hot-headed and drunk,
 What a coyle do I make for the loss of my *Punck*?
 I storm, and I roar, and I fall in a rage,
 And missing my *Whore*, I bugger my *Page*:
 Then crop-sick, all *Morning*, I rail at my *Men*,
 And in Bed I lye Yawning, till Eleven again.

According to this poem, libertine performances consisted largely of whoring, drinking, regurgitating, and bugging their servants. While scholars debate how accurately this poem describes Rochester's life and even whether Rochester might have written it himself, its allusion to a well-known incident in which Rochester's money was stolen by a whore suggests that its author nevertheless meant it as a general description of the earl's routine, one that summed up contemporary perceptions of Rochester's debauchery.¹⁰ However natural the rake may claim his activities be, poems like this one depict them as diseased, meaningless, and absolutely corrupt. As we have seen, this vision of libertinism resonated with many segments of English society.

As shown in chapter 3, one of the criticisms Pepys and other court observers made was that the rakes in Charles II's company might be sodomites. This suspicion contributed to the fact that no one took the libertines seriously when it came to political matters, and their cultural influence was largely one of instilling fear within the populace rather than convincing them to join in their rakish adventures. These fears even began to find their way onto the stage by the middle of the decade. Thomas Shadwell's *The Libertine*, which premiered on June 12, 1675, stands as one of the most formidable critiques of libertine activities at this time. Throughout the play, Don John, a rewriting of the Don Juan figure, and Don Antonio reminisce "about their career of crime, justifying their actions in the name of libertine philosophy." Don John sums up the philosophy that the libertine's excesses are natural in an early speech:

Nature gave us our Senses, which we please:
 Nor does our Reason War against our Sense.
 By Nature's order Sense should guide our Reason,
 Since to the mind all objects Sense conveys.

But Fools for shadows lose substantial pleasures,
 For idle tales abandon true delight,
 And solid joys of day, for empty dreams at night.
 Away, thou foolish thing, thou chollick of the mind,
 Thou Worm by ill-digesting stomachs bred:
 In spite of thee, we'll surfeit in delights,
 And never think ought can be ill that's pleasant.

Shadwell mimics the philosophy of men like Rochester and, like the composer of "I Rise at Eleven," dramatizes where that philosophy takes them. Like Pepys, Shadwell's vision of libertinism includes crimes such as rape, murder, and the subversion of justice. These crimes, says Shadwell's play, lead to the dissolution of social order. As Hellen Pellegrin points out, "Shadwell's topic is not merely one aspect of libertinism—atheism or sexual permissiveness, for example—but the moral debility that ensues when the debt to pleasure is the only obligation one recognizes." Or, as Derek Hughes notes, the play "explores the destructive potential of the rake, expressing Shadwell's continuing concern with the debasement of the gentility." Aphra Behn would also take up this theme in her magnum opus, *The Rover*, in 1677.¹¹ The libertine's economic and moral impoverishment, the perceived belief that, like Horner, the libertine put the pursuit of pleasure above all other concerns and especially above all social responsibilities, threatened to isolate men like Etherege and Wycherley from their livelihood, the successful production of plays based on their own circle's activities and reputations. *The Man of Mode* and *The Plain Dealer* work to combat this isolation, and each argues that the rake must be integrated into society in order to continue his pursuit of pleasure.

EARNING THE LOVE OF A GOOD WOMAN: *THE MAN OF MODE*

Unlike Buckingham's farce or Wycherley's first three comedies, *The Man of Mode*, which premiered on March 11, 1676, emphasizes that the libertine trickster's reformation of Restoration culture should also lead to his own reformation through his investment in society. Like Wycherley's early plays, Etherege's final play contains the libertine's excessive performance of whoring, drinking, and carousing through his presumptive marriage at the end of the play but with an emphasis on the libertine's ability to fall in love with a woman equal to his wit and performance. Etherege's primary focus in this comedy is to reject Horner's version of socially isolated libertinism, choosing instead to

advocate a libertinism that is tempered by the possibility of social responsibility and domesticity.¹² The play begins with the libertine Dorimant attempting to cast off his current mistress, Mrs. Loveit, in favor of new game, Loveit's best friend Bellinda. As he pursues a liaison with Bellinda, he falls in love with a heiress, Harriet, who has been brought to town to marry Dorimant's friend, Young Bellair. Neither Harriet nor Bellair intends to follow through with this marriage, as Harriet insists that she will find her own husband and Bellair is in love with another young woman, Emilia. Over the course of the play, Dorimant succeeds in bedding Bellinda, embarrassing Loveit, and attaching himself to Harriet. Young Bellair likewise succeeds in subverting his father's intention of marrying Emilia by marrying her himself. The play ends with Young Bellair happily married to Emilia and Dorimant in love with Harriet. Unlike Wycherley's plays, however, Etherege's protagonist is not assured of his marriage to his heiress, since she insists that he continue to prove his love by following her into the country. As she tells him, "When I hear you talk [of passion] in Hampshire, I shall begin to think there may be some little truth enlarged upon."¹³ By requiring Dorimant to remove to the country, Harriet effectively cuts him off from his usual libertine pursuits. In effect, she demands that he abandon the most public aspects of libertine performance if he hopes to marry her (and possess her fortune). As we shall see, Dorimant hopes to circumvent her plans, but Etherege provides his audience with every indication that Harriet's strategy will prevail. Consequently, *The Man of Mode* presents a vision of libertinism that potentially circumscribes the most outrageous excesses associated with libertine performance within the bounds of marriage between two equals, the reformed libertine trickster and his witty, beautiful, rich, and principled wife. Thus, in addition to society, the libertine and *his* social circle are transformed by his trickery.

Like Wycherley's libertine protagonists, Dorimant's behavior throughout *The Man of Mode* is a resignification of the codes of conduct of Etherege's libertine circle. As John Dennis writes, "upon the first acting [of] this Comedy, it was generally believed to be an agreeable Representation of the Persons of Condition of both Sexes, both in Court and Town." Where the actions of Ranger, Valentine, Gerrard, Horner, and Harcourt are based loosely on the libertine wits' activities, Dennis confirms that Dorimant is a more explicit recreation of John Wilmot, earl of Rochester:

it was unanimously agreed, that he had in him several of the Qualities of *Wilmot* Earl of *Rochester*, as, his Wit, his Spirit, his amorous Temper,

the Charms that he had for the fair Sex, his Fals[e]hood, and his Inconstancy; the agreeable Manner of his chiding his Servants, which the late Bishop of *Salisbury* takes Notice of in his Life; and lastly, his repeating, on every Occasion, the Verses of Waller, for whom that noble Lord had a particular Esteem.

Like Rochester and his fellow wits, Dorimant is charming, able to “tempt the angels to a second fall” (3.3.137). He is also inconstant, expressing his amorous intentions toward at least four women over the course of the play, and he orchestrates much of the play’s sexual intrigue. Lady Woodvill sums up her understanding of his reputation when she asserts that Dorimant “is the prince of all the devils in the town” who “delights in nothing but in rapes and riots” (3.3.133–134). According to her, he is indeed “a wild extravagant fellow of the times” (4.1.372–373). Her view of Dorimant echoes the criticisms of the wits’ activities made by Pepys, Milton, Evelyn, Shadwell, and other observers, a view that is proven false by the end of the play. Dorimant’s friend Medley is also said to be based on the reputation of the libertines: Dennis maintains that he is based on the personality of Fleetwood Shepherd, a relatively obscure member of the group, while others assert that he is a version of Sedley or of Etherege himself.¹⁴

Unlike Wycherley’s previous comedies, however, Etherege’s masterpiece takes some of the criticisms of libertine activities seriously and dramatizes his protagonist’s reformation in response to the love of a beautiful, rich, and extremely intelligent young woman. Indeed, as Etherege participates in the continuing process of libertine self-fashioning by writing this play, he not only dramatizes the activities of the libertine circle on stage but also criticizes those aspects of libertinism that would keep the libertine outside of society’s institutions. Not surprisingly, these aspects revolve around the libertine’s sexual behavior. First, Etherege suggests a possible relationship between libertinism and sodomy, a relationship seemingly played for shock value by Dorimant, but then rejects same-sex activities as a viable aspect of libertine performance. Similarly, Etherege initially associates Dorimant with superficial foppery but again ultimately rejects this association in favor of the possibility of fecund sexuality in marriage. And finally, Etherege gives the audience the opportunity to critique Dorimant’s cruelty to his cast off mistresses. Unlike previous libertine plays, *The Man of Mode* clearly presents the libertine’s faults and allows the audience to evaluate his behavior. This potentially negative evaluation serves to propel the action forward toward Dorimant’s reformation through his future marriage to Harriet.

Previous libertine plays grounded their protagonists in a homosocial circle of fellow libertines. *The Man of Mode* complicates the libertine's homosociality by suggesting a relationship between libertinism and sodomy in the interaction of Dorimant and Medley. This relationship draws upon the ambiguity between friendship and sodomy in the late seventeenth century. As I noted previously, Alan Bray has extensively analyzed these two categories, arguing that the two figures of the friend and the sodomite "exercised a compelling grip on the imagination of sixteenth-century England." Over the course of the seventeenth century, however, the distance between these categories grew smaller. Indeed, as George Haggerty notes in summarizing Bray's argument, "the two figures not only frequently parallel each other in interesting ways but also, at signal moments, become mutually indistinguishable." Although Haggerty goes on to exclude libertinism from the discourse of male friendship, I believe that Medley's entrance in act 1, scene 1 of *The Man of Mode* is such a "signal moment," purposefully evoking both the Renaissance signs of masculine friendship and the late-seventeenth-century signs of sodomy. Bray further postulates that the ambiguity between friendship and sodomy grew as the nuclear family became the center of affective ties during the seventeenth century. As the heterosexual bond between husband and wife carried more social meaning than it had previously, homosexual desire was represented as a perversion of heterosexuality, losing the political connotations that it had possessed in the sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries.¹⁵

The Man of Mode dramatizes many of these sociosexual changes occurring in England during the Restoration period. When Etherege adopted Rochester's persona for his protagonist, he displaced the earl's sodomitical reputation onto Medley, Dorimant's most intimate friend in the play. D. R. M. Wilkinson maintains that Medley has an exceptional role in the play,

for he is so essentially uncommitted, so very aware, so deprecating and so genially barbed, that we can take him to be the Ideal True Wit (if not the ideal libertine) in Etherege's plays. He is in a sense the complete exponent of the pattern of witty conversation: he is not to be trusted and can even be a threat to Dorimant, and he is perfectly invulnerable.

To some extent, Medley occupies the same outsider status that Horner holds in *The Country Wife* but with one notable difference: Medley maintains an intimate bond with Dorimant. While Wilkinson is correct to see Medley's role in the play as "exceptional," he overstates

his idealness and invulnerability. Throughout the play, Medley's focus is primarily on Dorimant, and his first words are "Dorimant my life, my joy, my darling-sin" (1.1.73–74). After greeting Dorimant, Medley embraces and kisses him, evoking the Orange-Woman's exclamation: "Lord what a filthy trick these men have got of kissing one another!" (1.1.75–76). On the one hand, this exclamation and kiss publicly evoke the sign system associated with masculine friendship, a system that, according to Bray, was marked by the public embrace, by eating together, and by sharing a bed. On the other hand, the phrase "darling-sin" certainly "draw[s] attention to the same-sex desire inherent" in two men kissing, as John Franceschina notes. Furthermore, Medley seems to be jealous of Dorimant's friendship with Young Bellair; he admires feminine beauty, but does not pursue women and is an opponent to marriage; he is portrayed as effeminate, "one who is comfortable with women as companions not lovers and who shares their habits." All of these characteristics are in keeping with traits associated with sodomites during this period.¹⁶

By subtly evoking Rochester's reputation as a suspected sodomite, Etherege not only gives his protagonist a greater sense of authenticity but also initiates a critique of what libertinism had come to represent in the public mind. Although Etherege casts Dorimant's libertinism in the tradition of Wycherley's early comedies, *The Man of Mode* also sets about to undermine and ultimately to rewrite this tradition. Just as the Orange-Woman objects to Dorimant's kiss with Medley, Etherege criticizes aspects of Rochester's libertinism and ultimately leads his Rochesterian protagonist to replace his public gestures of sodomitical friendship with public promises of giving up some aspects of his libertinism in order to marry. He attempts to reform the public's vision of libertinism in two additional ways. First, he repeatedly associates Dorimant with Sir Fopling Flutter, the play's title character, in order to criticize the libertine's affectation and his frequent use of performance as a means of hiding his true nature. Second, Etherege depicts Dorimant's cruelty to his mistresses. Sir Fopling, as his name suggests, is a fop who cares more for affected appearance than for true substance. As Dorimant relates, "He went to Paris a plain bashful English blockhead, and is returned a fine undertaking French fop" (4.1.328–330). He is a man of the modes, following the styles and forms set by others, rather than a character who lives by his own wit and discrimination. Libertines had previously held up the fop as the epitome of everything that was unnatural, the complete opposite of the rake. Buckingham's depiction of Bayes in *The Rehearsal* is the prime example of this. From the play's opening scene, however, Dorimant and Sir Fopling are

frequently paired together. For example, during his conversation with Medley and Young Bellair in act 1 Dorimant spends his time dressing. In the course of this scene, Dorimant's servant and friends point out to him that "You love to have your clothes hang just" (377), that he is wearing "a mighty pretty suit" (389), and that "No man in town has a better fancy in his clothes than you have" (392–393). Initially, Dorimant attempts to distance himself from these praises. He asserts, "I love to be well dressed sir: and think it no scandal to my understanding" (378–379). When asked by his servant whether he will use perfume, he declines, insisting "I will smell as I do today, no offence to the ladies' noses" (382–383). And he bemoans, "That a man's excellency should lie in neatly tying of a ribbond, or a cravat! how careful's nature in furnishing the world with necessary coxcombs" (385–388). When Dorimant insists that his servant's and friends' praises "will make me have an opinion of my genius" (394–395), the conversation turns to a discussion of Sir Fopling Flutter, who is introduced as "a great critic . . . in these matters" who has just "arrived piping hot from Paris" (396–397). As Rose Zimbaro points out, "Sir Fopling, with all of his extravagances and affectations, is introduced into a discussion that takes place at the very moment when our attention is drawn to Dorimant's affectations in manner and dress."¹⁷

Dorimant, the "pattern of modern gallantry," and Sir Fopling, the "pattern of modern foppery," are often presented as mirror images of one another (1.1.400–401, 402–403). Young Bellair, for example, recalls that Sir Fopling gave Mrs. Loveit "a catalogue of his good qualities, under the character of a complete gentleman" (1.1.422–424). According to Sir Fopling, a gentleman "ought to dress well, dance well, fence well, have a genius for love letters, an agreeable voice for a chamber, be very amorous, something discreet, but not over-constant" (1.1.424–427). In this scene alone, Dorimant has already demonstrated four of these traits: his abilities to dress well, to write love letters, to be amorous, and to be discreet but not overly constant. Furthermore, as Zimbaro reminds us, "Dorimant is not only the double of Sir Fopling, but Sir Fopling *recognizes* him as a double." Sir Fopling recalls that Dorimant was once mistaken for a French chevalier in the Tuilleries and asserts that no one "retain[s] so much of Paris" as he does (3.2.172–173).¹⁸ The audience, too, is forced into this recognition in act 4, when Dorimant assumes the disguise of Mr. Courtage, "a man made up of forms and common-places, sucked out of the remaining lees of the last age" (4.1.375–376).

Harriet, the woman with whom Dorimant has fallen in love, provides this description of Courtage, a description that also summarizes

her criticism of Dorimant's own character. Lisa Berglund points out that Harriet "recognizes that Dorimant is so much the rake" that "he calculates every word and movement, and she therefore confronts him with the charge of affectation." As she describes Dorimant to Young Bellair, "He's agreeable and pleasant I must own, but he does so much affect being so, he displeases me" (3.3.28–29). Later, she characterizes him as "Affectedly grave, or ridiculously wild and apish" (5.2.66–67). Likewise, when Dorimant asserts to Harriet that "That demure curtsy is not amiss in jest, but do not think in earnest it becomes you," she responds: "Affectation is catching I find; from your grave bow I got it" (4.1.118–121). As Berglund maintains, "Harriet's retort tells Dorimant that she finds his pose—that of the libertine—no more attractive than he finds her assumed prudery."¹⁹ As Harriet explains to him, Dorimant's seductive conversation might work on "some easy women" but it will not affect her, since "we are not all born to one destiny" (4.1.181–182). Throughout the play, what Harriet demands of Dorimant is a believable declaration of his love, one that connects his conversation to his desire and that leads to marriage. In other words, she attempts to force him to give up his social trickery in exchange for marital respectability and sexual honesty. This requirement suggests that Etherege, like Harriet, finds fault with the present, that is, post-Horner, image of libertine performance as merely the flip side of foppishness, a calculated and affected style of presentation consisting of disguises, tricks, and ruses of illicit seduction.

Harriet's criticism of Dorimant's affected performances is extended in the play to include libertine posing more generally. As many scholars note, Dorimant is the most sophisticated and self-conscious of the wits' libertine figures. His sophistication lies in the fact that Etherege foregrounds the notion that Dorimant, like the libertine wits themselves, is always performing cozening tricks. Where Gerrard in *The Gentleman Dancing-Master* and Horner in *The Country Wife* had used disguise to seduce specific women, Dorimant's entire life is made up of one performance after another. Like Rochester, Dorimant believes that the world is "a gawdy, guilded Stage" with himself as the star of the production. Throughout *The Man of Mode*, Dorimant operates as the lead actor in a play. In act 1, for example, he discusses his orchestration of his break up with his old mistress, Mrs. Loveit, since, as he reveals to Medley, "next to the coming to a good understanding with a new mistress, I love a quarrel with an old one" (216–218). To achieve this goal, he and his new mistress, Bellinda, have scripted a play to act in front of Loveit. As Dorimant explains, Bellinda "made me yesterday at the playhouse make her a promise

before her face, utterly to break off with Loveit, and because she tenders my reputation, and would not have me do a barbarous thing, has contrived a way to give me a handsome occasion" (240–244). While visiting her friend Loveit, says Dorimant, Bellinda "means insensibly to insinuate a discourse of me, and artificially raise [Loveit's] jealousy to such a height, that transported with the first motions of her passion, she shall fly upon me with all the fury imaginable" (253–257). Dorimant will then "play [his] part" (258). As he goes on to explain, I will "confess and justify all my roguery, swear her impertinence and ill humor makes her intolerable, tax her with the next fop that comes into my head, and in a huff march away" (258–262).

Act 2, scene 2 contains the enactment of Dorimant and Bellinda's plan, which comes off with only one hitch: Bellinda is horrified by his cruelty to Loveit. In act 3, scene 2, she admonishes him for the "cruel part" he has "played" and asks him, "how could you act it?" (79–80). The answer to Bellinda's question is simple. Dorimant's libertinism is all about playing parts with no consideration for how his actions affect other people. While he is well aware that his libertinism is merely a performance, others are not. This is the danger of libertine performance, says Etherege: if one is always performing tricks, then no one can tell when the libertine is genuine. With only one exception, his eventual love for Harriet, all of Dorimant's relationships in the play seem to be predicated on playacting social roles (his friendship with Young Bellair, e.g.) or pursuing sexual desire, not on genuine feeling or emotional commitment. As the representative of the libertine circle, Dorimant's trickster performance certainly reminds the audience of the wits' own privileging of deceit over sentiment and reflects Etherege's critique of such priorities.

Dorimant continues to perform as a trickster as he moves on to a third mistress. While he works to end his affair with Loveit and to consummate his affair with Bellinda, Dorimant meets and falls in love with Harriet, a beautiful heiress raised in the country. Harriet's mother, Lady Woodvill, however, has heard of Dorimant's reputation and refuses to be in the same room with him. Consequently, he assumes a new name, Mr. Courtage, as well as a new personality. Courtage is an obsequious fop. Dorimant plays this role so that he can speak with Harriet and court her in front of her mother and other guests. His playacting culminates in act 4, scene 1, in which Dorimant and Harriet court one another by enacting a courtship before the other characters. They begin by critiquing one another's "curtsy" and "grave bow" and proceed by discussing the ways in which society judges others based on appearances (118, 121). Dorimant is able to

throw off this disguise in act 5, after his friends convince Lady Woodvill that his reputation as a heartless rake was unjust. As she exclaims, "Mr. Dorimant, everyone has spoke so much in your behalf, that I can no longer doubt but I was in the wrong" (2.426–428). Although these lines are spoken in the middle of Dorimant's cruelest treatment of Loveit, he escapes censure because his friends cover up his behavior with their praise of his character. Because Dorimant is always performing tricks, it is difficult for the characters as well as the audience to believe anything he says or does. As we shall see, this is the challenge Etherege answers: how to integrate the libertine trickster into society and make his reformation seem genuine. Unlike Wycherley's early protagonists, Dorimant's ability to obtain Harriet as his wife is predicated on a self-conscious rejection of future libertine trickery.

Like Harriet, Dorimant's cast-off mistress, Mrs. Loveit, also criticizes his use of tricks to seduce women. Her critique raises the second way in which Etherege subverts Dorimant's rakish ways: his depiction of Dorimant's cruelty toward Loveit. As Laura Brown notes, it is significant that Etherege chooses to depict at length Dorimant's coldly calculated cruelty toward Loveit and his quickly forgotten declarations of eternal love for Bellinda. She concludes: "By this means Dorimant's whole represented relationship to his cast off mistresses is weighted toward a sympathy for them, at his expense." Even though Susan Staves maintains that this assertion "lapse[s] into sentimental humanism" and Hume notes that "by seventeenth-century standards the women deserve no sympathy," the play seems to support Brown's reading. When the audience first meets Loveit in act 2, scene 2, she offers a view of Dorimant that is generally shared by them: "I know he is a devil, but he has something of the angel yet undefaced in him, which makes him so charming and agreeable, that I must love him be he never so wicked" (17–20). Having Loveit share the audience's vision of Dorimant potentially allows for sympathy with her point of view more broadly. Indeed, Etherege also allows the audience to agree with Loveit's later criticisms of Dorimant. In act 5, scene 1, she proclaims to him that no one can dissemble "so artificially as you" (5.1.128) and proves this assertion by exposing his ruse against her: "Had I not with a dear experience bought the knowledge of your falsehood, you might have fooled me yet. This is not the first jealousy you have feigned to make a quarrel with me, and get a week to throw away on some such unknown inconsiderable slut, as you have been lately lurking with at plays" (5.1.177–182). The audience knows from Dorimant's own admission in act 1 that Loveit's accusation is justified. In fact, she never taxes him with an accusation that is not true.

All of her complaints against him are proven over the course of the play to reflect his behavior accurately. As a result, when he disingenuously declares “I begin to think you never did love me” (5.1.191), says Brown, “we are able to reverse the charge.”²⁰

If the idea that the audience sees the justice of Loveit’s accusations against Dorimant is debatable, Etherege makes sure that we see Bellinda’s heartfelt pain at her own self-deception. As Judith Fisher notes, Bellinda “has nearly twice as many asides as Dorimant or Mrs. Loveit while other characters have only one if any. The actress playing Bellinda, therefore, has the strongest relationship with the audience even though she does not have the strongest dramatic power.”²¹ What power she does have lies in our sympathy for her self-deception. After her liaison with Dorimant, Bellinda extracts a promise from him to never again see Loveit, except “in public places, in the Park, at court and plays” (4.2.33–34). Dorimant readily agrees to this, assuring her that “’Tis not likely a man should be fond of seeing a damned old play when there is a new one acted” (4.2.34–36). In spite of this promise, Dorimant immediately visits Loveit’s apartment, where, unbeknownst to him, Bellinda has mistakenly been brought. Although she is only partially correct when she asserts that “Other men are wicked, but then they have some sense of shame! he is never well but when he triumphs, nay! glories to a woman’s face in his villainies” (5.1.298–301), the general accuracy of her charge seems clear to the audience. As she declares at the end of the scene, “I knew him false and helped to make him so! Was not her ruin enough to fright me from the danger? It should have been, but love can take no warning” (5.1.340–343). When Dorimant declares to Loveit in the play’s final scene that Harriet “is the mask [that] has kept me from you” (5.2.322–323), Bellinda bemoans to the audience that “He’s tender of my honour, though he’s cruel to my love” (324–325). Our sympathy for her is solidified by the fact that she has learned her “lesson”: when Dorimant attempts to make up with her, she resists the temptation and swears “may I be as infamous as you are false” if she ever succumbs to his advances again (5.2.347–348).

As Etherege criticizes what libertinism has come to represent—deceit, sodomy, and ruthless sexual conquests—he replaces Horner’s isolated vision of libertinism with one that embraces the strong possibility of domesticity. The most prominent change that Etherege makes in libertine performance lies in the kind of suitable partner he creates for his trickster rake in the guise of Harriet Woodvill. Her suitability lies in her ability to contain Dorimant’s libertine activities. As Michael Neill reminds us, “Dorimant’s only effective rival on the

battlefield is Harriet.” Her effectiveness is in part due to the fact that Harriet is cast throughout the play as a woman who can enact the same kinds of performances as the libertines but who also contains these performances within society’s prescribed boundaries. Like Dorimant, she knows how to dissemble and to perform identities. Unlike the libertine, however, her tricks are part of a game that has no losers. When her maid assumes that Harriet will marry the man her mother has brought her to town to marry, Harriet responds, “Hast thou so little wit to think that I spoke what I meant when I overjoyed her in the country, with a low curtsy, and ‘What you please, madam, I shall ever be obedient.’ . . . [T]his was . . . to get her up to London! Nothing else I assure thee” (3.1.37–40, 42–43). Such performances continue when she meets this man, Young Bellair: the two act the part of young lovers in order to avert their parents’ suspicions that neither has any intention of marrying the other. In fact, Harriet readily agrees with this plan “for the dear pleasure of dissembling” (3.1.128–129). She even uses affectation against Dorimant to hide her love for him in the following conversation from act 4, scene 1:

- Dorimant.* Where had you all that scorn, and coldness in your look?
Harriet. From nature sir, pardon my want of art: I have not learnt those softnesses and languishings which now in faces are so much in fashion.
- Dorimant.* You need ’em not, you have a sweetness of your own, if you would but calm your frowns and let it settle.
- Harriet.* My eyes are wild and wandering like my passions, and cannot yet be tied to rules of charming. (122–131)

As Roberta Borkat notes, “Harriet’s consummate use of art is [revealed by] her declaration that she uses no art; she seeks to conceal her passion by convincing Dorimant that she cannot conceal passion.”²² Like Dorimant and the libertine wits, Harriet uses performance as a means of both attracting men and hiding her true thoughts. Unlike them, however, her use of trickery protects her honorable reputation, attracts a permanent mate, and never masks her true identity.

Harriet’s female version of libertine trickery can also be seen in her flaunting of social convention.²³ When Medley first describes her to Dorimant, he asserts that she has “More [wit] than is usual in her sex, and as much malice. Then she’s as wild as you would wish her, and has a demureness in her looks that makes it so surprising” (1.1.157–160). As Medley’s description suggests, Harriet’s “wildness” is tempered; Etherege keeps Harriet’s public behavior within the bounds of female propriety. For example, in act 3, scene 3 she walks alone with Young

Bellair in the mall. Their separation from the group is a violation of social convention, but Harriet's decision is simply excused by her mother as a "freak" whim (6). Her mother will not "look strangely" at Harriet's walking off with her intended fiancé because her self-control will prevent her from doing anything rash (5). As she explains to Bellair,

Young Bellair. These conversations have been fatal to some of your sex, madam.

Harriet. It may be so; because some who want temper have been undone by gaming, must others who have it wholly deny themselves the pleasure of play? (53–57)

Harriet sees no reason why she should not have the liberty to converse with young men as much as she likes, since she will never confuse that liberty with license. It is precisely when their conversation turns to the "pleasure of play" that Dorimant enters the scene and Harriet's "gaming" begins:

Dorimant. You were talking of play, madam, pray what may be your stint?

Harriet. A little harmless discourse in public walks, or at most an appointment in a box barefaced at the playhouse; you are for masks, and private meetings; where women engage for all they are worth I hear.

Dorimant. I have been used to deep play, but I can make one at small game, when I like my gamester well.

Harriet. And be so unconcerned you'll ha' no pleasure in't. (75–85)

This last criticism of Dorimant demonstrates that Harriet also understands that, as Loveit later exclaims, he takes "more pleasure in the ruin of a woman's reputation than in the endearments of her love" (5.1.207–209). Because of this understanding, Harriet is careful to preserve her reputation in all of her dealings with Dorimant. As she says in act 5, scene 2, "May he hate me, (a curse that frights me when I speak it!) if ever I do a thing against the rules of decency and honour" (187–189). Harriet's trickery not only allows her the pleasure of play but also keeps her from staking her entire reputation on a game that could destroy her. She remains firmly within the bounds of "decency and honour" in all of her interactions with men. Her success at the end of the play suggests that this form of libertinism is the one Etherege hopes the audience will approve.

As Neill points out, Harriet's power throughout the play lies in her ability "to manipulate others into ludicrous breaches of stylistic propriety which Dorimant employs so effectively." One such breach is made in Dorimant's own libertine pose. When Dorimant notices her embarrassment at his arrival in act 5, scene 2 and asks "What have we here, the picture of the celebrated Beauty, giving audience in public to a declared lover," she retorts, "Play the dying fop, and make the piece complete sir" (107–111). Again, she casts him as the affected fop, since all he knows is posing and disingenuous performance. Where he sees a scene in which he can play the part of a lover, she finds an opportunity of putting him back in his place. Until he can stop playing the part and prove that he truly loves her, she refuses to hear his rehearsed lines of seduction. This strategy works. By the end of this scene, Harriet compels Dorimant to make such extravagant declarations of his love that he exhausts the affected role of seducer and surrenders to her superior gamesmanship. He even declares, like Horner did, "I will renounce all the joys I have in friendship and in wine, sacrifice to you all the interest I have in other women" (5.2.156–158). As Neill describes, at this point Dorimant has blundered, "and Harriet springs her trap": "Hold—though I wish you devout, I would not have you turn fanatic—could you neglect these a while and make a journey into the country?" (159–161). "By forcing him to this comic humiliation," says Neill, "she has in fact compelled the only gesture of heroic sacrifice which her wit will allow her to accept," his removal away from the city and into the country. As Harriet asserts to Dorimant earlier in the play, "When your love's grown strong enough to make you bear being laughed at, I'll give you leave to trouble me with it" (4.1.195–197). As Jocelyn Powell notes, "This is the iron hand in the velvet glove, right enough."²⁴ If Dorimant values reputation above all else—as is suggested by his request that Medley not "expose me to the town this day or two" (3.3.354–355) after his plot to make Loveit reject Sir Fopling initially fails—then Harriet will make him risk that reputation in public as a testimony to his love. We know that Dorimant's love for Harriet is genuine not only because he is willing to be embarrassed by her but also because he reveals it to the audience in an aside. As he explains in act 4, "I love her, and dare not let her know it, I fear sh'as an ascendant o'er me and may revenge the wrongs I have done her sex" (4.1.164–166). By this admission, the audience is led to believe that Dorimant's hopes of marrying Harriet at the end of the play are based on his love for her and not simply on his need for her fortune, which is the excuse he uses to justify his actions to Loveit.

After establishing Dorimant as a libertine trickster in the tradition of Wycherley's early protagonists and then critiquing Dorimant and that trickster tradition, Etherege moves toward a potential domestication of libertinism. By providing Dorimant with a suitable mate in the form of Harriet, Etherege modulates libertinism's excesses and guarantees the libertine's incorporation into the community. Unlike Wycherley's Horner, Dorimant ends his play by embracing marriage over bachelorhood and restraint over license. His choice is made clear in the following conversation with Harriet, which follows her request that he accompany her into the country:

- Dorimant.* To be with you I could live there: and never send one thought to London.
- Harriet.* Whate'er you say, I know all beyond High Park's a desert to you, and that no gallantry can draw you farther.
- Dorimant.* That has been the utmost limit of my love—but now my passion knows no bounds, and there's no measure to be taken of what I'll do for you from anything I ever did before.
- Harriet.* When I hear you talk thus in Hampshire, I shall begin to think there may be some little truth enlarged upon. (5.2.162–173)

Knowing that Dorimant's pursuit of sex revolves around London, Harriet elicits a promise from him that he will leave London, and thus his libertine tricks, behind. His new behavior, says Dorimant, will be unlike "anything I ever did before." When Dorimant then begins to propose marriage to her, Harriet cuts him off, postponing any promise until he has proven his love by leaving the city. He promises to follow her, but she promises nothing except to hear his protestations of love. Unlike Bellinda, Harriet is quite aware that Dorimant's promises last only until his desires are satisfied. What Harriet, therefore, undertakes is the transformation of Dorimant's desires: she wants to wean him away from licentiousness and toward domesticity. As Norman Holland points out, "she does not want a permanent residence in the country which would stifle Dorimant's energy and competence. What she does want is to teach him to bring his natural desires to the social framework of marriage."²⁵ For this reason, she postpones any public declaration of her love for him until he has proven that what he truly desires is honorable marriage.

Finally, while Etherege ultimately transforms his libertine—Dorimant does agree to follow Harriet into the countryside—his libertine trickster nevertheless hopes to remain a libertine. After his

declaration of limitless love for Harriet, Dorimant seems once again to make advances toward his former mistresses. He declares to Loveit that he is marrying Harriet simply “to repair the ruins of my estate” (5.2.327–328) and that “To satisfy you I must give up my interest wholly to my love, had you been a reasonable woman, I might have secured ’em both, and been happy” (315–317). In other words, he would marry Harriet for her money and maintain his relationship with Loveit on the side. Likewise, Dorimant insists to Bellinda, “We must meet again” (344). “Hence,” as Robert Wess notes, “Dorimant is not the rake reformed. But neither is he the rake triumphant.”²⁶ Whatever he tells Harriet, in his own mind at least, his future continues to hold liaisons with women other than her, but none of the other women currently want to continue their relationships with him. Harriet makes sure of this by driving Loveit from the stage. When Lady Woodvill becomes convinced that Dorimant’s reputation is not what she had thought, Loveit protests and advises Bellinda to “give thy self wholly up to goodness” (5.2.432–433). Harriet takes this opportunity to disarm her primary rival, Loveit:

- Harriet.* Mr. Dorimant has been your God Almighty long enough, ’tis time to think of another—
- Loveit.* Jeered by her! I will lock my self up in my house, and never see the world again.
- Harriet.* A nunnery is the more fashionable place for such a retreat, and has been the fatal consequence of many a *belle passion*.
- Loveit.* Hold heart! till I get home! should I answer ’twould make her triumph greater. (434–443)

Thus, it is Harriet, rather than Dorimant, who is triumphant at the end of the play, and one suspects that she will know how to keep him home at night, safe from the Loveits and Bellindas of the world.

Throughout the play, Harriet demonstrates that she knows the tricks and techniques of her rivals and that she is able to play Dorimant’s game better than either he or his mistresses can. As a result, Etherege’s libertine is moving toward domestication, whether he wants to or not. This domestication of the libertine is both radical in its empowerment of the female and contained in its rejection of a libertinism divorced from society’s institutions. Unlike Horner, his protagonist at the end of the play is likely to marry a woman at least as equally witty and vivacious as himself. Although he intends to continue indulging his libertine desires, she has other ideas and will probably be able to control these desires. While Etherege clearly does not reject the libertine’s fundamental belief in pleasure, *The Man*

of *Mode* suggests that he sees a point at which the libertine must place greater value on other goods in life: marriage, property, and the perpetuation of social institutions. Rather than stand outside of society's mores and institutions, says Etherege, the libertine must engage in social interaction without turning every conversation into a hollow performance of social codes or trickster fictions of romance. Instead, he must, like Ranger, Valentine, Gerrard, and Harcourt, mature into the upright, married citizen in a new form of marriage between equals. William Wycherley's *The Plain Dealer* makes a similar case.

HOMOSOCIAL BONDING, MARRIAGE, AND THE LIBERTINE: *THE PLAIN DEALER*

Wycherley's final play, *The Plain Dealer*, which premiered on December 11, 1676, interrogates the difference between the appearance of honor and its reality. Through this interrogation, Wycherley argues for a libertinism that, unlike Horner's, is socially connected through homosocial bonding and heterosexual marriage. Starting almost exactly where *The Country Wife* left off, *The Plain Dealer* begins with its libertine hero isolated from society. Manly has chosen "a sea life only to avoid the world," which he sees as corrupt, full of artificiality and affectation.²⁷ Indeed, Manly hates society and everyone in it, with only two exceptions, his mistress Olivia and his best friend Vernish. Upon leaving for his latest voyage, Manly entrusted Olivia with the remainder of his wealth. When he returns, he discovers that she has played him false, has married someone else, and now refuses to return his fortune. With the help of his lieutenant, Freeman, and his servant, who, unknown to Manly, is actually a disguised woman, Fidelity, who is secretly in love with him, Manly discovers that Olivia has married Vernish and exacts his revenge on his former intimates by tricking Olivia into sleeping with him and thus cuckolding Vernish. The play ends with his discovery of Fidelity's love, which convinces him to marry her. With this plot, Wycherley ultimately argues in the figure of Manly for the abandonment of libertine isolation in favor of heterosexual marriage and homosocial friendship, rejecting any association with sodomy. Furthermore, if, like Freeman, one chooses to remain a libertine, suggests *The Plain Dealer*, he can only do so by rejecting extreme sexual excess, thus essentially transforming the libertine into a comic figure instead of a social threat. Thus, as in *The Man of Mode*, the libertine and the society in which he lives are transformed by the end of the play.

Canfield argues that with this revenge Manly “becomes a trickster whose wronged phallus asserts itself in the dark and reestablishes dominance.” The personal nature of this revenge, however, seems out of keeping with the traditionally comic function of tricksters. The true tricksters of the play are Freeman and Fidelity. Freeman is, like Ranger, a trickster whose “activity is oriented toward the gratification of his enormous appetites for food and sex” and whose deceits perform a comic function in the play. He plays the devil’s advocate in debates with Manly, articulating a pragmatic libertinism as a way of gratifying his appetites. Fidelity is another kind of trickster who “travels between one region and another, one realm of experience and another, and mediates between things manifest and things hidden.”²⁸ In particular, Fidelity mediates between the gender expectations of males and females through her disguise as a boy. Through Fidelity’s ruse, Olivia’s marriage to Vernish is revealed and Manly is socialized into acceptable social behaviors. Indeed, *The Plain Dealer* is the story of these tricksters educating Manly. He must learn what real honor is and how to judge one performance from another; Freeman’s and Fidelity’s tricks are crucial to this process. Manly begins the play convinced that honor means always telling the truth. He is deceived by his mistress and best friend because they adopt his rhetoric of honor, performing his version of honor so well that they convince him of their virtue. On the other hand, he is unable to see the true honor of Freeman and Fidelity because they speak the language of society, which Manly believes is an irredeemably corrupt performance. His education teaches Manly that no one performs only one role, that the performance of honor is much more complex than rhetorical mimicry, on the one hand, and adopting social conventions, on the other. This education reintegrates Manly into society through marriage and friendship. As a result, Wycherley argues in this play that, contrary to Horner’s choice at the end of *The Country Wife*, the libertine must find a place for himself within society. According to *The Plain Dealer*, Horner’s choice to remove himself from the institutions of society is a wrong one; he maintains that the libertine must learn to exist within society’s mores if he is to distinguish between true and false virtue.

Manly is a very different libertine than any of the wits’ previous protagonists. This difference is crucial to understanding Wycherley’s project in this play. Manly begins *The Plain Dealer* as a person cut off from society due to his belief in plain dealing—in always telling someone the truth no matter how hurtful or shocking the truth may be. At the beginning of the play, Manly imbues his plain dealing with a sense of heroism. He sees himself as an epitome of honesty and courage,

caring nothing for money, reputation, or business:

if I ever speak well of people (which is very seldom indeed), it should be sure to be behind their backs, and if I would say or do ill to any, it should be to their faces. I would justle a proud, strutting, overlooking coxcomb at the head of his sycophants rather than put out my tongue at him when he were past me, would frown in the arrogant, big, dull face of an overgrown knave of business rather than vent my spleen against him when his back were turned, would give fawning slaves the lie whilst they embrace or commend me, cowards whilst they brag, call a rascal by no other title though his father had left him a duke's, laugh at fools aloud before their mistresses, and must desire people to leave me when their visits grow at last as troublesome as they were at first impertinent. (53–69)

Not surprisingly, this plain speaking frequently offends those around him. For example, he is challenged to a duel when, as he relates to Freeman, he gives “sincere advice to a handsome, well-dressed young fellow . . . not to marry a wench that he loved and I had lain with” (3.1.616–618). Manly carries libertinism's critical stance too far. As this admission makes clear, like Wycherley's previous libertines, Manly also engages in casual sex, but unlike Ranger, Gerrard, or Horner, he is willing to divulge his mistresses' secrets in the name of honesty. This willingness is a result of Manly's complete isolation—he holds no stake in society and therefore feels free to disregard its strictures, mores, and “pure good manners” (1.1.52). It is this detachment, and not his criticism of society's corruption, that is faulted in the play. Manly must learn two things: how to identify who is actually honorable and who is not and, in the case of the latter, how to deal with their corruption without cutting himself off from society.

In many respects, Manley begins his play just beyond where Horner ended his. Like Horner, Manly has cut himself off from society and had even “resolved never to return again for England” when he set sail on his last voyage (1.1.136–137). Manly's isolation, however, is due to his commitment to plain dealing rather than to infinite sexual conquest, as Horner's was. Even so, Manly's posture is as extreme as Horner's had been. Where Horner challenges the social order through sex, Manly threatens to disrupt it through misanthropy and violence. As the play opens, Manly has withdrawn to his lodgings and has posted two sailors at his door to turn away all visitors. When the foppish Lord Plausible sneaks past the guards, Manly rages at him for his use of social pretense. Indeed, the play opens with his critique of men like Plausible, faulting them for “your decorums, supercilious

forms and slavish ceremonies, your little tricks, which you the spaniels of the world do daily over and over for and to one another, not out of love or duty, but your servile fear" (1.1.1–5). That is, Manly storms against society's forms, ceremonies, and hypocrisy. As he tells Lord Plausible, "I will not, as you do, whisper my hatred or my scorn, call a man fool or knave by signs or mouths over his shoulder whilst you have him in your arms. For such as you, like common whores and pick-pockets, are only dangerous to those you embrace" (1.1.21–26). To avoid this danger, Manly insists on his independence from society. As he relates, "I'll have no leading-strings; I can walk alone. I hate a harness and will not tug on in a faction, kissing my leader behind, that another slave may do the like to me" (1.1.10–13). Lord Plausible asks, "What, will you be singular then, like nobody? Follow, love, and esteem nobody?" (14–15). Manly asserts that he would rather be alone than "general, like you, follow everybody, court and kiss everybody, though perhaps at the same time you hate everybody" (16–18). As this conversation shows, Manly begins the play believing in absolutes: one is either solitary or one is a social whore; one is truthful either to everyone or to no one. For him, there is no middle ground.

The rest of his conversation with Plausible revolves around what a "person of honour" does (48). Plausible maintains that an honorable person disparages someone behind his back and compliments him to his face. Manly insists in the opposite. As their dialogue continues, Manly becomes increasingly agitated with Plausible's presence, until he finally thrusts Plausible forcibly from the room. As Manly ejects Plausible from his house, the stage is left to his two sailors, who comment on their captain's "discontent" (147):

- 1 Sailor.* I never saw him pleased but in the fight, and then he looked like one of us coming from the pay-table, with a new lining to our hats under our arms.
- 2 Sailor.* A pox, he's like the Bay of Biscay, rough and angry, let the wind blow where 'twill.
- 1 Sailor.* Nay, there's no more dealing with him than with the land in a storm, no near—
- 2 Sailor.* 'Tis a hurry-durry blade. Dost thou remember after we had tugged hard the old leaky longboat to save his life, when I welcomed him ashore, he gave me a box on the ear and called me fawning water-dog? (150–162)

Even when someone saves his life, Manly cannot believe he does it out of any consideration except hypocritical self-interest. These men's conversation, combined with Manly's physical violence toward

Plausible, casts Wycherley's title character as an excessively angry and untrusting man whose hostility goes beyond outraged plain dealing to encompass a disdain for ordinary human relationships.²⁹ He is another Drawcansir, someone who cannot distinguish between virtue and vice because he cannot allow for any middle ground between absolute perfection and total corruption.

What we are to make of Manly's point of view and violent behavior is complicated by Wycherley's seeming identification with his protagonist. Although George Granville, Lord Lansdowne, initially describes Wycherley as having "all the Softness of the tenderest Disposition; gentle and inoffensive to every Man in his particular Character; he only attacks Vice as a publick Enemy," he goes on to write that

In my Friend, every Syllable, every Thought is masculine; His Muse is not led forth as to a Review, but as to a Battle; not adorn'd for Parade, but Execution; he would be tried by the Sharpness of his Blade, not by the Finery; Like your Heroes of Antiquity, he charges in Iron, and seems to despise all Ornament but intrinsick Merit. And like those Heroes has therefore added another Name to his own, and by the unanimous Consent of his Contemporaries, is distinguish'd by the just Appellation of Manly *Wycherley*.³⁰

Other contemporary writers validate Lansdowne's description.³¹ Although it is possible that Wycherley's friends were using this appellation ironically, Wycherley cultivated the association of himself with his protagonist: he signed himself "The Plain Dealer" in the preface to the *Miscellany Poems* of 1704 and in the Dedication to *The Plain Dealer* itself. This association suggests that, contrary to some scholars' contentions, by the end of the play Manly is not the object of Wycherley's satire. Rather, we are to read Manly's progress through the play as Wycherley's exemplar for the audience and his fellow libertines. This reading is confirmed by the fact that Wycherley made significant departures from his source play, Molière's *Le Misanthrope*. Alceste, Molière's protagonist, ultimately rejects society altogether, including his mistress, Célimène, who refuses to leave with him.³² In contrast, Manly ultimately accepts a position in society rather than leave it. By the end of the play, Manly has abandoned his philosophy of isolation in exchange for marriage with Fidelia and friendship with Freeman. Unlike Horner, Manly's libertinism is brought back into society by the end of the play.

Wycherley depicts Manly's extreme contempt for society as an error. He makes this argument in a variety of ways. First, Wycherley criticizes the fact that his protagonist's idealism is based on a refusal to

accept the way in which society works. In act 1, for example, Freeman condemns Manly's impractical philosophy. Manly criticizes Freeman for being "a latitudinarian in friendship" (247). He maintains, "thou dost side with all mankind but will suffer for none. Thou art indeed like your Lord Plausible, the pink of courtesy, therefore hast no friendship, for ceremony and great professing renders friendship as much suspected as it does religion" (248–253). Manly disbelieves Freeman's assertions of friendship because he claims Freeman professes amity to everyone. He argues that Freeman's insincere profession of friendship to some, out of courtesy, means that he can never be trusted to really mean it when he claims to be Manly's friend. Freeman disagrees, arguing that men cannot always tell the truth. As he asks,

Why, don't you know, good captain, that telling truth is a quality as prejudicial to a man that would thrive in the world as square play to a cheat, or true love to a whore! Would you have a man speak truth to his ruin? You are severer than the law, which requires no man to swear against himself. You would have me speak truth against myself, I warrant, and tell my promising friend, the courtier, he has a bad memory? . . . And so make him remember to forget my business. (284–295)

Manly responds that the courtier, along with Freeman's subsequent examples, "should love thee for thy plain-dealing" (333). Freeman disagrees: "against your particular notions I have the practice of the whole world. Observe but any morning what people do when they get together on the Exchange, in Westminster Hall, or the galleries in Whitehall" (337–341). According to Freeman, society is based on pretense and the performance of accepted roles. For instance, when Manly accuses Freeman of using "pimps, flatterers, detractors, and cowards" as if they were "the dearest friends in the world" (267–270), Freeman responds that this is how one behaves in public: "What, you observed me, I warrant, in the galleries at Whitehall doing the business of the place! Pshaw, Court professions, like court promises, go for nothing, man! But, faith, could you think I was a friend to all those I hugged, kissed, flattered, bowed to?" (271–276). Thus, Freeman believes that everyone plays a role designed to win favor with people who can either help or hurt you. This, says Freeman, is the way society works; one simply has to learn to play the game.

Manly, however, rejects this idea of performance. While previous libertine figures were often tricksters—Gerrard and Horner disguise themselves in order to seduce women and Dorimant embraces the philosophy that life is just one big stage—Manly insists that all performances are innately false and should, therefore, be avoided.

Like proponents of progressive ideology, he maintains that virtue is an essential characteristic that is readily apparent. He further asserts that this quality is innate to only three people: himself, Olivia, and Vernish. According to Manly, virtue cannot be performed. As he asserts,

I have but one [friend], . . . nay, can have but one friend, for a true heart admits but of one friendship as of one love. But in having that friend, I have a thousand, for he has the courage of men in despair, yet the diffidency and caution of cowards, the secrecy of the revengeful and the constancy of martyrs, one fit to advise, to keep a secret, to fight and die for his friend. Such I think him, for I have trusted him with my mistress in my absence, and the trust of beauty is sure the greatest we can show. (233–243)

Because of his rejection of performance as a way of life, Manly is unable to distinguish true friends—Freeman and Fidellia, from enemies—Vernish and Olivia. He dismisses Freeman’s friendship, since Freeman professes friendship with everyone but then points out all of their flaws when their backs are turned. Similarly, he rejects Fidellia’s friendship as mere flattery. Dressed as a cabin boy, Fidellia has followed Manly to sea, where her fears of battle have caused her to appear cowardly. Because of this apparent cowardice, Manly interprets the “cabin boy’s” affection for him as hypocrisy. As he proclaims to him/her, “Thou hast been a page, by thy flattering and lying, to one of those praying ladies who love flattery so well they are jealous of it, and wert turned away for saying the same things to the old housekeeper for sweetmeats as you did to your lady; for thou flatterest everything and everybody alike” (383–388). Manly erroneously assumes that, because she praises him, she praises every authority figure as a means of getting what she wants. Thus, in both cases Manly cannot distinguish between true love and flattery.

Manly is also unable to recognize his true enemies. Because he believes Olivia’s performance in the role of constant lover, he leaves his wealth in her hands while he goes to sea. He returns to find that she has betrayed him and married another man, who later turns out to be Vernish, his “bosom and only friend” (*dramatis personae*). Their betrayal not only provides Manly with the opportunity to condemn his society’s moral bankruptcy, but also calls into question his own behavior and judgment. As he admits in his description of Vernish’s friendship quoted above, Manly places his faith in Olivia and Vernish because he believed that they are what they appear to be. Olivia spends her time railing against society, performing the same kinds of speeches that Manly recites. As she tells her cousin, Eliza, in act 2, scene 1,

"Ah, cousin, what a world 'tis we live in! I am so weary of it" (1–2). When Eliza expresses her doubts about Olivia's earnestness, Olivia swears that society is her "aversion" (29), a word she also uses to describe her feelings toward "dressing and fine clothes" (33–34). Indeed, she exclaims that she "detest[s]" visits and balls (54–55), "abominate[s]" plays since they are "filthy, obscene, hideous things" (56–58), refuses to go "masquerading in the winter and Hyde Park in the summer" as they are "[i]nsipid pleasures" (59–61), "nauseate[s]" marriage (65), and claims going to court is her "aversion of all aversions" (75). This performance of aversion to all of the pleasures of London is just that—a performance. In fact, Olivia loves all of these things, as Eliza points out throughout their conversation. Indeed, according to Eliza, her cousin is simply performing another of London's fashions, railing against anything and everything. As she says, "Well, but railing now is so common that 'tis no more malice but the fashion, and the absent think they are no more the worse for being railed at than the present think they are the better for being flattered" (87–91). Eliza concludes, "But in fine by the word aversion I'm sure you dissemble, for I never knew woman yet that used it who did not" (103–105). Manly's problem is that, unlike Eliza, he cannot see that Olivia is dissembling, aping his own modish performance of moral severity.

Olivia's true opinion of Manly becomes apparent when he overhears her conversation with Lord Plausible and Novel, another fop. When Novel reports that Manly has arrived safely from his previous voyage, Olivia responds, "I heard of his fighting only, without particulars, and confess I always loved his brutal courage because it made me hope it might rid me of his more brutal love" (2.1.582–585). Their conversation then moves to making fun of Manly's "fanatical hatred to good company" (603) until Manly can no longer bear listening and reveals his presence. As a result of this scene, Manly now knows that her rhetoric of honor and love was simply a hollow performance of these qualities, which, as he tells her, "fitted me for believing you could not be fickle though you were young, could not dissemble love though 'twas your interest, nor be vain though you were handsome, nor break your promise though to a parting lover, nor abuse your best friend though you had wit" (626–631). Knowing that her game is up, Olivia proceeds to dress down Manly by ridiculing all of his traits, including his title, his notion of "honour" (690), his "mien" (696), his "soldier-like, weather beaten complexion and that manly roughness of your voice" (697–698), his "carelessness in your dress" (703), and the "pretty sullenness" of his humor (721). Her revelations of her true feelings toward him illustrate that he has been

the cause of his own double crossing. As Olivia later explains, his philosophy of isolation was his mistake: “he that distrusts most the world trusts most to himself and is but the more easily deceived because he thinks he can’t be deceived” (4.2.243–245). All that she and Vernish had to do to deceive him was to mimic his performance. As she relates, “I knew he loved his own singular moroseness so well as to dote upon any copy of it; wherefore I feigned an hatred to the world too that he might love me in earnest” (4.2.250–253). Thus, as Brown points out, Manly’s “misplaced trust in Olivia and Vernish shows that he does not know the world, that his affections are too violent and too hastily bestowed, that, in fact, his defiant ignorance of society causes him more pain and loss than even the current immorality necessitates.”³³

Because of his ignorance of society, Manly must be educated to conform to its manners, mores, and customs. Initially, this is made even more difficult by the fact that, despite her betrayal of him, Manly still loves Olivia. As he soliloquizes,

How hard it is to be an hypocrite!
 At least to me, who am but newly so.
 I thought it once a kind of knavery,
 Nay, cowardice, to hide one’s faults; but now
 The common frailty, love, becomes my shame.
 He [Freeman] must not know I love th’ ungrateful still,
 Lest he contemn me more than she, for I,
 It seems, can undergo a woman’s scorn
 But not a man’s— (3.1.30–38)

In effect, Manly must learn to perform more complicated roles in society, sharing some aspects of himself freely and hiding others, but he believes his love for Olivia has simply perverted his honor. Instead of speaking plainly, he now does the opposite and becomes a hypocrite just like her. This is not the lesson Wycherley has in mind for his protagonist. His real education is effected through Fidelity’s participation in his revenge against Olivia and Vernish. When he discovers Olivia’s duplicity, he decides to trick her into sleeping with him. Sending Fidelity, still disguised as a boy, to court Olivia, Manly switches places with his messenger at the crucial moment and sleeps with his former fiancée. His revenge will come the next evening, when he has arranged for the other characters in the play to discover Olivia in his arms during a second tryst. According to his plan, this discovery will dishonor Olivia and expose her new husband as a cuckold. Since Manly sleeps with Olivia without her knowledge—she believes she is seducing his messenger—scholars have described his action as a rape.

If, as Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick has argued, cuckolding is “by definition a sexual act, performed on a man, by another man,” then Manly has been feminized by his (effectual) cuckolding by Vernish.³⁴ His “rape” of Olivia is a reflection of his previous all or nothing view of honor, an attempt to regain his masculinity by cuckolding his former friend. But, in fact, this revenge is little more than his “pretty sullenness” gone bad, the same hostility and anger that he has always displayed toward the world. In effecting this rape, he has gone from espousing the rhetoric of progressive ideology to enacting the worst fears of men like Pepys, Evelyn, Milton, and Shadwell.

Aspasia Velissariou points out that Manly's attempt to restore his dominance over Olivia is undermined by his use of Fidelia, a woman disguised as a man, to accomplish this revenge.³⁵ His use of Fidelia demonstrates that his aggressive masculinity has blinded him to reality: he cannot even tell a woman from a man. One of the reasons Manly has not discovered Fidelia's secret is that he is clearly uninterested in his page as a sexual companion. This too distances him from some of the previous libertines like Rochester, whose poems about bugging his page, as we have seen, led some of his contemporaries to associate libertinism with sex between men. Indeed, one of the typical tropes of early modern comedy is dressing a heroine up as a boy to create sexual tension as her master begins to desire her sexually only to be surprised when his potential catamite turns out to be a woman. For example, over the course of *Twelfth Night* Shakespeare's Orsino begins to demonstrate a suggestive interest in his page, a woman dressed as a boy. Wycherley's *The Country Wife* evokes a similar joke when Horner comes across Margery Pinchwife dressed as her younger brother. He takes the opportunity to kiss her, a situation that evokes the idea of sodomitical activities while at the same time denying it, since the audience (as well as Horner) knows that the “boy” is really a woman. Manly, however, never expresses any sexual interest in his page and spends most of his play refusing to see his servant, berating “him” for not being more manly and commanding “him” never to return to his sight again. Where Etherege evokes Dorimant's potential intimacy with Medley and then dismisses the possible sexual relationship through Dorimant's interest in Harriet, Wycherley places his libertine protagonist in a potentially suggestive situation and then refuses to have Manly desire his page. Wycherley avoids associating his protagonist with sodomy in order to disassociate the libertine image from same-sex sexual activities, but he simultaneously points out that Manly's skepticism about performing roles leaves him unable to see that Fidelia is a woman playing the part of his servant.

Vernish, Manly's seeming friend but actual enemy, first discovers that Fidelia is actually a woman. When he finds her, dressed as a man, alone with his wife (just after Manly has slept with her), he immediately assumes that the "young man" has slept with his wife. Fidelia attempts to allay his suspicions, exclaiming, "I am a woman, sir, a very unfortunate woman" (4.2.433). As the stage directions read, he tests the truthfulness of her declaration by "Pull[ing] off her peruke and feel[ing] her breasts" (4.2.435–436). Unfortunately, feeling her breasts excites Vernish, causing him to attempt to force himself upon her. As he declares, "there is a bed within, the proper rack for lovers, and if you are a woman, there you can keep no secrets; you'll tell me there all unasked" (4.2.457–460). Although a servant interrupts Vernish and diverts him from this endeavor, this attempted rape is just one more indignity that Fidelia suffers as a result of Manly's blindness. Following him as a servant in order to be near the man she loves, Fidelia has already been cast aside by Manly. He even goes so far as to call her "a thing I hate" and orders her to "Be gone" immediately (1.1.431, 445). Manly later recalls her into his service in order to effect his revenge on Olivia. When she begs him not to pursue this course of action, Manly declares, "Go, be gone, and prevail for me or never see me more" (3.1.133–134). Throughout the play Fidelia proclaims her love for Manly to the audience and suffers his brutality quietly. His cruelty is made all the more stark in contrast to her faithful love for him. It is when her sufferings are finally revealed to him that Manly undergoes his transformation and rejoins society.

Manly's discovery of Fidelia's true sex, and thus her trickster identity, transforms him and opens his eyes to his blindness. When Manly and Fidelia meet Olivia in her rooms again the second night, he arranges for the other characters in the play to find them there. But before the others arrive, Vernish enters and runs at Manly with his sword. As the two men fight, Fidelia loses her peruke in the scuffle and is slightly injured. Observing her, Manly exclaims, "What means this long woman's hair? And face, now all of it appears, too beautiful for a man? Which I still thought womanish indeed! What, you have not deceived me too, my little volunteer? . . . Come, your blushes answer me sufficiently, and you have been my volunteer in love" (5.3.100–104, 114–115). Fidelia responds,

I must confess I needed no compulsion to follow you all the world over, which I attempted in this habit, partly out of shame to my own love to you and fear of a greater shame, your refusal of it, for I knew of your engagement to this lady and the constancy of your nature; which nothing could have altered but herself. (116–122)

Despite Fidelity's last assertion, it is she, and not Olivia, who alters Manly for the better. As he declares, "I know not what to speak to you or how to look upon you. The sense of my rough, hard and ill usage of you, though chiefly your own fault, gives me more pain now 'tis over than you had when you suffered it" (124–128). He offers to make up for his offense by marrying her. His recognition of her love both proves the devotion of her love and forces him to realize that his masculine aggression and hostility have prevented him from judging people correctly. He now resolves to remain a part of society rather than to leave it, as he had earlier proposed. Where he had declared himself "already so far an Indian" (1.1.703–704) in his antipathy for society in act 1, after his discovery of Fidelity's love he proclaims, "you deserve the Indian world and I would now go thither out of covetousness for your sake only" (5.3.168–170). Manly ends the play by accepting his place in society through his education by the play's tricksters.

Thus, Wycherley rejects Horner's vision of libertinism in favor of one that moderates the libertine's aggressive masculinity and rejection of society. Unlike Etherege's *The Man of Mode*, however, *The Plain Dealer* does not effect this moderation through the rhetoric of romantic love. Manly avoids declarations of love similar to Dorimant's for Harriet: his statements are characterized by the idea that Fidelity has earned his love through her sufferings. Giving her the cabinet that Olivia stole from him, Manly tells Fidelity, "Then, take forever my heart and this with it, for 'twas given to you before [by Olivia] and my heart was before your due" (5.3.140–142). Even his offer to sail to India is marked by its emphasis on bringing back a fortune for his new love, an offer that is countered by Fidelity's revelation that she possesses £2,000 a year. What Wycherley emphasizes with this rhetoric of "value" (5.3.171) is the idea that marrying a wife with a fortune is the most important ingredient in facilitating a happy marriage. Furthermore, Manly embraces homosociality at the end of the play too. As he says to Freeman, "Nay, if thou art a plain-dealer too, give me thy hand, for now I'll say I am thy friend indeed. And, for your two sakes, though I have been so lately deceived in friends of both sexes, I will believe there are now in the world Good-natured friends who are not prostitutes, And handsome women worthy to be friends" (5.3.200–206). As Sandra Sherman notes, Manly's pronouncement of Freeman's plain dealing here looks toward the future: unlike his previous behavior in the play, "Manly is prepared to respond to Freeman's request to 'Try me' and will do so under a pragmatic regime that does not short-circuit the result."³⁶

The other alternative is to get a living from a widow, as Freeman has done. According to the play's cast of characters, Freeman is "a gentleman well educated, but of a broken fortune, a complier with the age." Because of his broken fortune, Freeman must become a trickster who deceives a wealthy wife into marriage to pay his debts and expenses. In the play's first scene he settles on the Widow Blackacre, "a litigious she-pettifogger, who is at law and difference with all the world" (1.1.464–465), as the object of his ruse. As he exclaims when she first arrives on stage, "I wish I could make her agree with me in the church. They say she has fifteen hundred pounds a year jointure" (1.1.465–467). In spite of his frequent attempts to get the Widow to hear his "business" (1.1.574), however, Freeman is initially unable to trick her into marriage. As a result, he changes tactics, persuading her son to name him as his guardian, a move that would allow him to control Jerry Blackacre's inheritance. When the Widow challenges this move by declaring Jerry a bastard, Freeman arranges for the constable to overhear her declaration that she plans to perjure herself, slander her child, and use forged documents in her court case. Beaten at her own game, the Widow is ultimately forced to grant Freeman an annuity of £400 a year and to pay off his debts. Thus, Freeman evades both marriage and separation from society. Unlike Valentine, Ranger, Gerrard, Dorimant, and Manly, he does not end his play preparing for marriage to the object of his desire. Unlike Horner, he does not end the play alone, having rejected friends and society in order to maintain his self-serving ruse. Instead, he uses his ruse to gain a pragmatic foothold within society. His annuity and freedom from his creditors will allow him to continue his pursuit of "wine and women" (2.1.1062) and remain Manly's friend, to maintain his libertine lifestyle *and* to remain a part of society. Throughout his dealings with the widow, Freeman emphasizes the pragmatic reasons behind his pursuit of her. Where Dorimant falsely claimed to be marrying Harriet for her money, Freeman is actually in search of a wife solely as a means of economic security. Unlike Dorimant, however, Freeman exchanges trickster deceit for legal prosecution, but the effect is the same: both men end up getting connected to other members of society.

While Freeman's pursuit of the widow is a comic subplot in the play, it nevertheless sets the play's overall vision of human affairs. We know that Freeman's point of view is Wycherley's because the play satirizes the Widow Blackacre and brings Manly around to agree with Freeman's basic philosophy.³⁷ Whether one marries a wealthy wife or forces a wealthy widow to support you with a yearly income, *The Plain Dealer* suggests that money allows one to participate in society.

This argument can be seen in the play's final conversation between Manly, Fidelia, and Freeman. As Manly tells his new love interest,

I was going to tell you that for your sake only I would quit the unknown pleasure of a retirement and rather stay in this ill world of ours still, though odious to me, than give you more frights again at sea and make again too great a venture there in you alone. But if I should tell you now all this and that your virtue (since greater than I thought any was in this world) had now reconciled me to't, my friend here would say, 'tis your estate that has made me friends with the world. (5.3.187–195)

Freeman responds, "I must confess I should, for I think most of our quarrels to the world are just such as we have to a handsome woman, only because we cannot enjoy her as we would do" (196–199). Freeman's point of view is that of the play: once one has learned to enjoy the world, however corrupt it may be, and has the economic means to do so, one is able to live happily within it. According to Wycherley, this integration into society and not a separation from it is the correct choice for the libertine.

In both *The Man of Mode* and *The Plain Dealer*, the playwrights argue that the economic and social realities of London life in the late seventeenth century necessitated the libertine's incorporation into society's institutions, heterosexual marriage and homosocial friendship. Etherege's Dorimant embraces love and, although he seems to intend to continue his libertine dalliances with other women, will probably be kept fairly close to home by his intended bride, Harriet. Wycherley's Freeman and Manly each end their play integrated into society, though in very different ways. Freeman is allied with Manly but also remains single, able to continue his libertine pursuits, while Manly prepares to marry Fidelia and to give up his previous isolation. In both of these plays, the libertines associate their choices with economic betterment: Dorimant claims to marry Harriet for her money, Freeman gets a living out of the Widow, and Manly acknowledges that Fidelia's inheritance will allow him to give up his seafaring life. This association makes sense within the context of Etherege's and Wycherley's financial positions. Etherege and Wycherley were particularly susceptible to the expenditures of libertine life in London and the economic fluctuations occurring throughout England. Indeed, their pleasures had led them both into serious financial trouble. A few years after the premiere of *The Man of Mode*, Etherege was knighted, an honor that contemporaries suggest he purchased in order to pave the way to marry a wealthy woman. He apparently needed such

a marriage to pay off his gambling debts.³⁸ Wycherley, on the other hand, fell sick shortly after the premiere of *The Plain Dealer*. He never fully recovered from this brain fever, which left him financially destitute. In 1679, he married Lady Letitia-Isabella, but this marriage led to even greater financial ruin: it lost him the king's favor, and his wife, rather than being rich as Wycherley thought, was herself deeply in debt. When Wycherley was imprisoned for debt in 1681, Charles left him there, and he did not regain his freedom until 1685, the year of Charles's death and the ascension of James II to the throne. Thus, each of these playwrights attempted to follow their own advice and combine marriage and economic betterment but was disappointed.

The members of the wits' circle did not universally welcome this integration of the libertine into domestic bliss, however. While Etherege and Wycherley favored the rejection of sexual excess as a means of retaining a place in society, other, aristocratic members of the theatrical group maintained that this domestication of the libertine effectively emasculated him. According to Sedley and Rochester, social integration precluded the libertine's continued hedonistic pursuit of pleasure. In their view, there could be no such thing as a domesticated libertine. These aristocratic members of the coterie thus proposed a different solution to the dilemma posed by Horner's choice at the end of *The Country Wife*. By the mid-1670s, the libertine fraternity was thus divided on this issue, a division that forecasts the ultimate dispersal of the libertine circle before the end of Charles II's reign.

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CHAPTER 5



ENACTING LIBERTINE ISOLATION: *ANTONY AND CLEOPATRA* AND *THE* *TRAGEDY OF VALENTINIAN*

On February 15, 1677, George Villiers, duke of Buckingham, stood in the House of Lords to argue that, according to two statutes of Edward III, the present Parliament, which had just been opened by the king, had no legal existence because it had been prorogued for more than a year. Claiming that the members of the House of Commons “look upon themselves as a standing Senate, and as a number of men pickt out to be Legislators for the rest of their whole lives,” Buckingham called on the king to enact the “remedy which the Law requires, and which all the Nation longs for, the calling of a new Parliament.” The motion was defeated, and, over the next two days, Buckingham and his three supporters were called upon to retract their views. When they refused, the four men were committed to the Tower for contempt. While the duke was apparently allowed to take with him his cook and his butler, Buckingham’s consignment to the Tower on this occasion was quite different from his progress and the accompanying public support he enjoyed ten years earlier. Indeed, Buckingham and his supporters were by this time politically isolated, and no one crowded the streets in support of the duke on his way to the Tower. To the contrary, some citizens organized a bonfire in celebration of his imprisonment. More importantly, the king allowed his old friend to stay in the Tower for the next several months. The four men’s request to be released in May was denied, and Buckingham was permitted only two days respite from the Tower, in June, to speak

privately with the king. Charles finally relented a month later, and the duke was released on July 22. He was formally pardoned on August 5.¹

Buckingham's five-month imprisonment is illustrative of the libertines' political fortunes in the late 1670s, an isolation that is reflected in Sir Charles Sedley's *Antony and Cleopatra*, which premiered the same month that saw Buckingham's consignment to the Tower, and John Wilmot, earl of Rochester's adaptation of John Fletcher's *Valentinian*, which he probably finished before 1677.² Like Horner, Sedley's and Rochester's protagonists pursue sexual pleasure regardless of the limitations society attempts to impose upon them. Unlike the depictions of genteel libertine figures in the wits' earlier plays, however, these protagonists do not pursue wine, women, and song as merely part of a humorous plot to win a wife or establish a long-term sexual liaison. Instead, Antony, Cleopatra, and Valentinian are monarchs who are more obsessed with sexual pleasure than with governing their nations. While the libertines' elevated status in these plays has led most scholars to see these works as critiques of Charles II's pro-French policies and tendencies toward absolutism, reading them within the context of the political project of libertine performance suggests the possibility that Sedley and Rochester also sympathize with the monarch who is torn between national duty and personal desire. Such sympathy suggests that their protagonists' tragic ends should not be read simply as a condemnation of these monarchs' sexual choices but rather as a dramatization of the tragic impossibility of reconciling libertine performance with national life. Indeed, these plays argue that social conventions powerfully demand the libertine's emasculation, utter downfall, and social isolation. Rochester and Sedley use the emerging form of affective tragedy to respond both to the political climate of their day and to argue that the libertine who seeks to combine the pursuit of pleasure with political power will inevitably lead a tragic life. In other words, say Sedley and Rochester, one cannot be a libertine without leaving the "gawdy gilded stage" of court life behind.

LIBERTINES, HOMOSOCIALITY, AND AFFECTIVE TRAGEDY

Buckingham's, Sedley's, and Rochester's political views in 1677 reflect the fact that the libertine circle's marginalization from political power was almost total. While these men had been among the king's most intimate acquaintances throughout the 1660s, they were now little more than political nuisances, best handled by being sent to the

Tower from time to time. As discussed in chapter 2, Buckingham's transition from virtual prime minister to secondary leader of the opposition party in the House of Lords was played out on the public stage. Sedley's evolution away from the Court Party was less public. In 1672, Sedley sent his legal wife to a nunnery and illegally married Ann Ayscough. While this change in wives was in keeping with Sedley's libertine lifestyle, his second "marriage" seems to have weaned him away from the most decadent aspects of the libertine way of life. It was also shortly after this time that Sedley withdrew his support from the Court Party. In 1670, his name appeared among a list of pensioners paid to vote in favor of the king's policies, but by 1675 his name was no longer among such lists.³ His participation in efforts to exclude Catholic heirs from the throne beginning in 1678 publicly declared his affiliation with the opposition Country Party. Rochester's political activities during this period are more difficult to pin down but were nevertheless problematic for the king. In June 1676, he, Etherage, and several other friends visited Epsom, where Rochester initiated a fight with the constable and his men. One of Rochester's friends was killed in the fray. The king "was incensed and was determined to make an example of the Earl." An order was issued for Rochester's arrest for murder, and he went into hiding in London by disguising himself as a foreign pathologist, Dr. Alexander Bendo. When things cooled down, Rochester went to the king privately and was apparently forgiven. He briefly began to attend the House of Lords in early 1677, though, as Jeremy Lamb notes, his "appearances tailed off very quickly . . . from more than a dozen in March to just one in May."⁴ As a result of their political and personal activities, therefore, all three men were, at best, on tenuous terms with the king by the end of 1677.

Throughout the 1670s, Charles distanced himself from the libertines' public adventures, a withdrawal that can be explained by more than just getting older and settling down to the usual monarch's life of social drinking with friends and a few mistresses. This change should also be placed in the context of the political climate of the early 1670s. By 1673, Charles was in the middle of a third Dutch War, which had yet to produce a major victory for the English. Just two days before this war erupted, Charles again issued a Declaration of Indulgence that permitted Catholics to worship in their own houses. A standing army, ostensibly raised to defend England against Dutch invasion, fueled fears of arbitrary government and forcible conversion to Catholicism. The fact that a French general led the army certainly did not help matters. When Parliament reconvened in February 1673,

outcries against popery and arbitrary government led to the passage of the Test Act, requiring all civil and military officers to take the Anglican sacrament and make a declaration against transubstantiation. James, duke of York, the king's apparent heir, subsequently declared his conversion to Catholicism by refusing to take the sacrament in the Church of England at Easter. Throughout the early 1670s, Charles was under increasing pressure to alleviate his people's fears by providing strong, Protestant leadership. This obviously did not include wild revelries with notorious libertines.

Due to their increasing isolation from the king, Rochester, Sedley, and Buckingham embraced the opposition Country Party in Parliament. After Buckingham's fall from power in 1672, his political career seemed finished; the duke adapted to the situation at hand and began actively pursuing greater influence among the opposition elements in the House of Lords. By 1675, the Country Party was a fairly distinct group in both houses of Parliament. As Andrew Swatland points out, "Their policies, which included securing a Protestant succession to the throne, protecting subjects' rights and liberties, easing restrictions on Protestant dissenters and the adoption of a Protestant foreign policy, were designed to reduce the danger from popery and arbitrary government." The latter of these was Buckingham's object in his speech in February 1677. His offense in this speech was his challenge to the king's authority. According to the duke, Charles had ignored the laws of England and arbitrarily called an illegal Parliament into session. Such accusations reflected the Country Party's belief in limiting the monarch's power. Buckingham's position vis-à-vis the king was perhaps made more difficult by the publication of Andrew Marvell's *An Account of the Growth of Popery and Arbitrary Government in England*, which also appeared in February 1677. Arguing that "There has now for diverse Years, a design been carried on, to change the Lawfull Government of England into an Absolute Tyranny, and to convert the established Protestant Religion into down-right Popery," Marvell's pamphlet summed up many people's fears that Charles II's government was too Catholic and prone to whittle away limitations on absolutism.⁵ These fears erupted into political crisis in the fall of 1678, when Titus Oates made his famous accusation that Catholics were planning to assassinate the king in order to install his brother on the throne.

While neither Sedley nor Rochester delivered any speeches in Parliament on the issue of excluding Catholics from the throne, their political views on the subject of monarchy and succession have often been discerned by analyzing *Antony and Cleopatra* and *Valentinian*.

It is perhaps an understatement to say that time has not been kind to either of these plays. While *Antony and Cleopatra* briefly enjoyed some success immediately after its premiere in February 1677, it was soon upstaged by John Dryden's *All for Love* the following December. The superiority of Dryden's version of the story became critical dogma with the publication of Vivian de Sola Pinto's biography of Sedley in 1927. As Pinto writes, "It is true that the ranting which disfigures most of the riming tragedies of the reign of Charles II is not to be found in Sedley's 'Antony and Cleopatra,' but the colourless, conventional diction and the unenterprising metre make us almost long for the wildest moments of [Dryden's heroes] Almanzor and Maximin."⁶ Subsequent scholars agree: John Harold Wilson describes the play as "puerile" and "chaotic"; Robert Hume calls it "execrable" and "awful"; and H. Nevile Davies dismisses it as "unnecessarily complicated" and "diffuse."⁷ The critical perception may best be summed up in the words of Peter Caracciolo, who praises Dryden for reading Sedley's play "carefully enough to salvage something from the wreckage."⁸ *Valentinian*, which was not performed until 1684, four years after Rochester's death, has fared better only in the sense that it has been almost completely ignored by scholars and has thus avoided such harsh condemnation.

One notable exception to the denigration of Sedley's tragedy and the neglect of Rochester's adaptation is Richard Braverman's readings of both works in *Plots and Counterplots: Sexual Politics and the Body Politic in English Literature, 1660–1730*. Braverman analyzes *Antony and Cleopatra* as a warning to England of what can happen when absolutism replaces republicanism. In his analysis, Antony represents Charles and the pro-French policies that accompany his move toward increasing monarchical power over Parliament, and Caesar and his Roman forces represent the final triumph of tyranny over freedom. Braverman connects this reading of the play with Sedley's allegiance to the opposition party in Parliament. He maintains that, "Through the coded idiom of parallel history," *Antony and Cleopatra*, like contemporaneous plays by Nathaniel Lee, articulates the Country Party's critique of the court's absolutism. He sees *Valentinian* in much the same light: "Like *Antony and Cleopatra*, *Valentinian* portrays royal insouciance in the face of political strife, but it has a sharper political edge, moving beyond advice to resistance."⁹ This resistance, says Braverman, consists of its depiction of a military uprising against a tyrannical emperor, who symbolizes Charles II's move toward absolutism.

While Braverman's readings on these plays are the strongest yet written, reading *Antony and Cleopatra* and *Valentinian* in the context

of their authors' association with the libertine circle provides us with a different interpretative emphasis. These are the only two tragedies written by members of the libertine wits' fraternity. This change in genre should therefore be foregrounded in any discussion of the plays, but establishing exactly what kind of tragedies these plays are is rather difficult. *Antony and Cleopatra* is written in heroic couplets but does not seem to conform to the usual content of heroic drama. *Valentinian* adopts neither the form nor the content of heroic tragedy and includes a startlingly frank depiction of its hero's sexual excess, which includes the rape of a beautiful woman and sex with a court eunuch. Rather than reading these plays as failed heroic tragedies, as Wilson, Hume, and Davies do, a more productive reading sees them as affective tragedies, a genre that began to emerge in the mid-1670s. Laura Brown explains that affective tragedy was a transitional form that replaced heroic drama and survived on the stage until the rise of moral drama in the early eighteenth century. According to Brown, "Restoration affective tragedy substitutes the unfortunate and undeserved situation of its central character for the aristocratic status of the heroic protagonist." As a result of this substitution, "The characters and episodes of an affective tragedy are comprehensible not in terms of an internal standard of judgment that directs our assessments and expectations, but rather in terms of the expressed pathos of the situation." While these plays should be read against the grain of heroic drama, their protagonists are not always low born. Rather, when the play "maintains the legendary and exotic aristocratic characters typical of the heroic action," says Brown, "it either gives those heroes an effectually antiaristocratic ideology, or depicts them at the tragic and passive close of their careers and consequently defines them not so much by their status as by their unfortunate situation." Stripping the heroic play of its "evaluative efficacy and meaning" and substituting the judgmental response of admiration with one of pity, affective tragedy fragments the "neat love-and-honor standard" of heroic drama, "leaving love alone as the preeminent and potentially most pathetic choice."¹⁰ Brown analyzes two early examples of this genre: Nathaniel Lee's *The Rival Queens* and Dryden's *All for Love*, both of which premiered in 1677.

I discussed heroic drama in chapter 2, but a brief review of its characteristics here will help us compare affective tragedy to the older genre. As Alfred Harbage notes, heroic drama's "conception of virtue was purely aristocratic, limiting the quality to the traits of epic heroes: physical courage, prowess in arms, magnanimity, and fidelity to a code of personal honor." As a result, heroic dramas in the 1670s were

typically defined by three characteristics: the heroic couplet, the conflict between love and valor, and what Robert Hume calls “the titanic protagonist,” a hero who energetically pursues “some ideal which stretches human capacities to the utmost.” By mid-decade the genre was in crisis as playwrights, including Dryden, its most active proponent, increasingly distanced themselves from these characteristics and moved toward affective, or sentimental, tragedy instead. Dryden’s *Aureng-Zebe*, for example, is often praised by scholars for its transcendence of the genre’s stifling rules. Premiering in November 1675, *Aureng-Zebe* tells the story of a royal family in India: when the emperor falls in love with Indamora, his son’s fiancée, the family disintegrates, which leads to a civil war. While Dryden admits to violating some of the genre’s conventions in this play, most notably its requirement of heroic couplets and his placement of all fight scenes offstage, he nevertheless maintains his overall allegiance to the format. As Richard W. Bevis points out, “Imperial wars still impend, ‘vast’ and ‘great’ are favourite adjectives and some emotional tropes are absurd.”¹¹ Likewise, *Aureng-Zebe*, the wronged prince, is a military superman, who both defeats the armies of two treasonous brothers and refuses to rise up in arms against his lecherous father. As a result, he achieves his virtuous status by successfully subjugating his love for Indamora to his notions of honor and loyalty to the emperor. Thus, Dryden’s play revises in some ways the form of heroic drama while maintaining its basic conventions and ideological content.

Affective tragedy pointedly discards heroic drama’s conventions and/or ideology. Bevis notes that in heroic plays “themes of honour and martial valour would brace the soul, while that of love would soften the heart, and the characters would provide patterns for imitation, ideals in the Platonic sense.” When affective tragedy depicts the lives of aristocratic protagonists, replacing the brave adventures of a military hero who is typically torn between his love for a beautiful woman and the demands of civic duty, it does so in order to foreground “anti-absolutist sentiment.” As Brown notes, such plays often assume “a natural and necessary analogy” between “the pathetic victim” and “the absolutist tyrant.” Analyzing Lee’s *The Rival Queens*, Brown sums up the ideological function of this genre:

Lee’s tendency to weaken the heroic action, to undermine its inclusive aristocratic hierarchy of values, to divide love from honor, and to depict the inevitable and disastrous choice of love over empire and even life results in an increasing recourse to pathetic situation at the expense of definable merit. It reflects as well a loss of confidence in the efficacy

of assessment and a lack of attention to consistent characterization in general, and a concurrent prevailing sense of gloom and pessimism. These are the initial, defining qualities of early affective form, and they are, for Lee, perfectly synonymous with an inchoate and incomplete but parallel loss of confidence in the aristocratic ideals that govern the world of the heroic action, and ultimately with an uncertainty about monarchy itself.¹²

Because of its “uncertainty about monarchy” and “loss of confidence” in the values of the aristocracy, affective drama was, according to Brown, a useful dramatic genre for playwrights who favored republicanism and the Country Party’s Parliamentary agenda of curtailing Charles II’s move toward Catholicism and absolutism.

George Haggerty’s discussion of Restoration tragedy in *Men in Love* picks up on many of these same issues to analyze the erotics of male friendship in Dryden’s *All for Love*, Lee’s *The Rival Queens*, and Rochester’s *Valentinian*. According to Haggerty, these representative works of Restoration tragedy “hold up erotic male friendship as an ideal” as part of an ideology that believed the friendship model elucidated by Alan Bray only functioned soundly when it has an “erotic as well as a political valence.” Indeed, Haggerty provocatively maintains that “sexualized male relation[s]” help “to define the heroic.” Although Haggerty borrows from the work of Elin Diamond to posit *Valentinian* as a “gestic” moment that makes “visible the contradictory interactions of text, theater apparatus, and contemporary social struggle,” since Rochester’s play “suggests that male friendship is more than platonic and that male–male love is more than sodomitical,” he nevertheless excludes libertinism from this theater of male erotic friendship. As he writes, “Libertines are ‘homosocially’ united, of course, but theirs is a homosociality of satiric individualism.” While my previous chapters have argued against interpreting all libertine performances in terms of “satiric individualism,” Haggerty is correct to see libertine tragedy as doing something different when compared to the works by Dryden, Lee, and others. Dryden, for example, provides his Antony with an intimate male friend, Dolabella, whose love for Antony “has a decidedly erotic power.” Sedley’s Antony has no such male companion. Likewise, although Haggerty argues that *Valentinian*’s “pledge of eternal love” to the eunuch Lycias “is clearly the most homoerotic expression in Restoration tragedy,” as we will see later in this chapter this relationship cannot be defined as one of male friendship.¹³ While Haggerty might point to these absences as evidence of the libertine’s “satiric individualism,” I believe that

Sedley's and Rochester's depictions of their tragic libertines insist on their isolation from male homosocial intimates not because libertinism itself was defined by such isolation, but because political and social isolation had come to plague the libertines of Charles II's reign by the middle to late 1670s. *Antony and Cleopatra* and *Valentinian* tragically present libertine monarchs who, because of their privileging of personal desire over public duty, have been isolated from their subjects and are unable to connect with others outside of sexual intercourse. These plays mourn the end of the aristocratic privilege the libertines had previously enjoyed, a loss that has left the libertine circle increasingly fragmented and disconnected from power and from friendship. The tragedy of these plays lies precisely in the fact that their protagonists lack homosocial bonds—erotic or otherwise—and are therefore unable to separate political power, the sphere usually sustained by male friendship, from erotic power, the sphere defined by sexual desire.

LIBERTINES “IN LOVE AND PLEASURE DROWN’D”: *ANTONY AND CLEOPATRA*

Sedley's *Antony and Cleopatra* depicts the last days of its protagonists' rule over the eastern half of the Roman Empire. While this play is less obviously affective than Dryden's *All for Love*, which premiered several months after Sedley's play, it nevertheless rejects the aristocratic values embraced by heroic drama and, like Dryden's version of the story, “consist[s] of an action and apotheosis determined and achieved not by Herculean merit, but by the pathos of despair and death,” to borrow Brown's description of *All for Love*. Beginning just after the naval battle at Actium, Sedley's tragedy depicts the events that lead to Antony and Cleopatra's downfall. A steady flow of Antony's soldiers desert his army, while his closest advisers futilely attempt to wean Antony away from Cleopatra long enough to win a military victory against Octavius Caesar. Cleopatra's advisers and companions likewise try to convince their queen to abandon Antony and make a pact with Octavius, but Cleopatra is incapable of doing either. Indeed, she and Antony are captives of their love, indulging each of their desires for one another and seemingly unable to be apart for more than a few minutes. In keeping with the historical sources, Sedley's Antony is eventually deceived into thinking that Cleopatra is dead and falls on his own sword. When Cleopatra learns of his act, she arranges her own suicide by a poisonous snake. Throughout the play,

Antony and Cleopatra are suffering lovers who, like the hero of *The Rival Queens*, which premiered a month later, “repeatedly and explicitly choose love over empire.”¹⁴ Their all-consuming love for one another turns Antony and Cleopatra into isolated victims, and Sedley wants the audience to pity their plight.

In this play, Sedley responds to the values and conventions typically associated with heroic drama. Sedley retains the heroic form—*Antony and Cleopatra* is written in heroic couplets—but significantly revises its ideology. The play transforms the epic vision of the aristocracy by resignifying the traditional military traits of the heroic protagonist, undermining these qualities through Antony and Cleopatra’s eroticism. At first glance, Sedley’s Antony shares many of the heroic characteristics of Dryden’s Almanzor and Aureng-Zebe. He demonstrates heroic magnanimity. For example, after losing the battle at Actium, in which he followed Cleopatra’s ship as it retreated from the conflict, Antony shoulders the blame for the loss, refusing to reproach his Egyptian queen for her flight. When his advisors accuse Cleopatra of undermining the war effort, Antony defends her, saying that “her love is stronger than her fears, / Her Country she has made the Seat of War, / ’Tis just her safety be our early’st care.”¹⁵ Also like Aureng-Zebe, Antony proves his physical courage and prowess in arms. Not only does he beat back Caesar during hand to hand combat, Antony also charges through Agrippa’s army in act 3 to save Cleopatra from captivity. With these heroic characteristics, Antony’s martial skills, noble spirit, and physical courage, Sedley establishes Antony as a mirror of traditional heroism, but his heroism is just that: a reflection or shadow lacking substance. Throughout the play, Sedley contradicts the traditional definition of heroism by depicting Antony as a failed military leader. Because of their love, Antony and Cleopatra fail to live up to the standards of heroic drama.

Sedley’s play immediately defines itself against heroic drama’s conventions by beginning the action just after the Battle of Actium, in which Cleopatra’s ship suddenly left the battle, causing Antony to disengage from the fighting in order to follow her. Antony’s failure to complete the battle immediately eliminates any claim he would have to heroic status under the ideology of heroic drama. According to the Romans, he has been unmanned by his love for Egypt’s queen. The play opens with Caesar’s comment that “Our Arms an easie Victory have found / Over a Foe, in love and pleasure drown’d” (1). For Caesar and his Roman advisors, the idea that one might drown in one’s desires is clearly a negative proposition. When Agrippa points

out that “Love of our Country and our Interest / Is the true passion of a *Roman* Breast. / All other are Usurpers” (2), Caesar describes the extent of Antony’s metaphorical drowning:

He thinks his life depends upon her [Cleopatra’s] eye,
As that of Plants does on the Sun relye.
The ignorant are learn’d, if she think so,
And Cowards even *Hercules* out-do. (2)

This criticism of Antony’s infatuation is predicated on the misogynistic belief that Cleopatra is disrupting the natural order. As Agrippa later asks, “was it ever seen / A Woman rul’d an Emperor till now? / What Horse the Mare, what Bull obeys the Cow?” (21). According to the Romans, Cleopatra has become Antony’s sun, emasculating him by distracting him from honor and the manly pursuits of war and politics. Because of her, Antony has lost his ability to reason, is unable to differentiate between the learned and the ignorant, and is little more than a coward. Indeed, Antony’s desire for her has even robbed him of his ability to distinguish cowards from heroes. For example, Antony cannot correctly interpret the treasonous deeds of Photinus, one of Cleopatra’s servants who plots to overthrow his queen. In the course of the play, Photinus kills several of Antony’s loyal soldiers, opens Alexandria’s gates to the Roman army, foments revolt among Cleopatra’s subjects, and convinces Antony to kill himself by telling him that the queen is dead. While several characters point out Photinus’s machinations, Antony cannot see him for what he is until it is too late. No longer the Antony of heroic battles and great speeches, this Antony is the shadow of a hero, undone by the incompatibility of political duty and his consuming love for Cleopatra.

Indeed, Antony repeatedly chooses his love for Cleopatra over traditional notions of honor. Parallel to Sedley’s own decision to leave his wife and “marry” Ann Ayscough, Antony has abandoned his wife, Octavia, and is fathering children with the Egyptian queen. As Caesar maintains in act 2, scene 2, Antony’s “present life does his past glory stain,” since he “makes a [foreign] Queen the Partner of his reign” (17). Because of this partnership, says Caesar, “The Roman Empire he does much deface, / And with the Spoil adorns her foraign race” (17). Antony’s glorious past has been sullied by his abandonment of familial and national responsibility. Instead of governing his half of the Roman Empire, he is luxuriating in public displays of opulence and

lasciviousness. As Octavius complains to his sister,

The names of Emperor and Queen they scorn,
 And like immortal Gods themselves adorn.
 He does for *Bacchus*, she for *Isis* pass,
 And in their shapes, the wond'ring Crowd amaze. (17)

In act 3, Caesar reports that these public libertine performances are part of Antony's decadence. According to Octavius, in private Antony is ruled entirely by pleasure and lives a life of nothing but "slothful Days and drunken Nights" (20). Furthermore, Caesar maintains that Antony is so unconcerned with his empire that he seeks the council of "Buffoons and Players" rather than "the free tongues of *Romans*" (20). Instead of governing his empire, says Octavius, Antony plays sexual matchmaker: "To marry Whores to Fencers is his sport, / And with their Issue through his loathed Court" (20). As Caesar sums up, Antony is "bloody," "unjust," controlled by his "Lust," "luxurious," and "loud [in] his ease" (20). All of Octavius's criticisms condemn Antony for his neglect of social and public duty in favor of his libertine dalliance with Cleopatra.

Just as the Romans blame Cleopatra for emasculating Antony, the Egyptians blame Antony for distracting Cleopatra from her responsibilities as queen. As Memnon, one of her advisers, contends, Antony should have kept the "Scene / Of War and Rapine further from the Queen" during the Battle at Actium (3). In other words, he should have forbidden Cleopatra from participating in the battle. If he had, says Memnon, Egypt would have been able to wait out the conflict and then ally itself with whoever was the victor, a wise strategy from the point of view of Egypt's military leaders but not one that Cleopatra is able to adopt. Due to her love for Antony, Cleopatra will not remain neutral in the Romans' war against each other. She loves Antony more than she values her country's welfare. Because of Antony's influence, the Egyptian counselors believe that the only answer to their country's problems is his death. As Chilax concedes, however, "'Tis a rough Medicine [Cleopatra] will never use, / And fatal were th' advice should she refuse. / We know his interest does her Council sway" (4). Consequently, Memnon and Chilax swear to devise a plot to end Antony's life and vow to lay down their arms as soon as they "free [Cleopatra] from *Antonius* pow'r" (4). As they maintain, "He's not our Prince; for publick good he dies, / And for our Country falls a Sacrifice" (4). Thus, like the Romans, the Egyptians value political rule over private love, arguing that the

nation's good must take precedence over the lovers' private joys. Because their subjects and peers strive to destroy them politically, Antony and Cleopatra's passion is doomed. Their enemies use their love as the means by which to overthrow them.

While the entire world seemingly condemns their love, Antony and Cleopatra constantly assert the sincerity of their passion for one another. But the intensity of this love leaves them hardly able to part with one another, even for the length of a single battle. For example, after the defeat at Actium, Antony resolves to reengage Caesar's forces. Cleopatra immediately objects to this plan, asking, "But then your Love, in absence, will it last?" (10). Her fear is that, since Antony is away from her, he will choose or be forced to return to Octavia's bed. Antony insists his love for Cleopatra will survive their separation and that he will use their love as a motivation for victory. As he proclaims,

My Heart shall like those Trees the East does show,
Where Blossomes and ripe Fruit hang on one Bough.
With new desires, soft hopes, at once be prest;
And all those Riper Joys, Love gives the blest.
Courage and Love shall sway each in their turn,
I'll fight to conquer, conquer to return.
Seeming Ambitious to the publick view,
I'le make my private end and dearer, You.
This Storm once past; in Peace and love we'l Raign,
Like the Immortal Gods, the Giants slain. (10)

He will leave Cleopatra in order to guarantee their future together. Using the promises of his future love with Cleopatra as a source of inspiration, Antony claims that he will conquer Octavius Caesar in order to protect these delights. Antony fights the Roman armies solely out of love for Cleopatra. Being with her is his "private end" rather than the hope of governing an empire. As Paula Backscheider reminds us, "In the early Restoration, when the theater was identified so closely with the court and when the theater openly accepted its function as a site of distribution and interpretation of news, the theater was a hegemonic apparatus that was being used to influence a critical public in order to legitimate an ideology."¹⁶ Heroic drama was one methodology the court used to achieve this influence. Antony, therefore, attempts to cast his love for Cleopatra in traditionally heroic terms—they will slay Caesar's armies and will reign like Gods—but his attempts to valorize love fail because the rhetoric of heroic ideology cannot contain their privileging of private love over public duty.

Antony's speech, quoted above, is made to ease Cleopatra's mind, but she continues to struggle with her fears. She attempts to get him to stay with her by appealing to his love. As she insists, "Moments to absent Lovers tedious grow; / 'Tis not how time, but how the mind does go. / And once *Antonius* wou'd have thought so too" (10). He insists that he has already proven his love for her beyond all reasonable doubt:

Dearer than ever think not that I part,
Without the utmost Torment of my Heart.
Whil'st you perswade, your danger chides my stay,
Make me not cast me and your Self away.
How well I lov'd, you at *Actium* see,
When to be near you I left Victory.
And chose to be companion of your flight,
Rather than conquer in a distant Fight.
Press not that heart you know so well, too far,
Our Fortune will no second frailty bear. (10)

The torment that Antony and Cleopatra feel in this scene renders them as objects of pity for Sedley rather than objects of admiration typical in heroic drama. These protagonists are torn between their "Fortune," to love one another above all other considerations, and their duty to rule their nations. Sedley wants his audience to respond to Antony's plight with the same pity he bestows on others: when Cleopatra decides to execute the son of a traitor as an example to future offenders, Antony begs for his life, arguing that "He must not die, nor is it true revenge, / When the offenders suffer by exchange" (8). As he explains, "'Twere cruelty to kill the Innocent / For Crimes they neither knew, nor cou'd prevent" (9). Since his and Cleopatra's "crimes" of loving one another above all other considerations are equally unpreventable, we too are to feel pity for their plight.

Unlike heroic drama, "where the proper act eventually ensures both love and honor," *Antony and Cleopatra* insists that love and honor, as these concepts are defined by Restoration society, are mutually exclusive. Following the characteristics of affective tragedy, their choice of love over national duty brings "disaster, suicide, and death."¹⁷ In act 5, Photinus, Cleopatra's disloyal servant, falsely reports that Cleopatra has killed herself after hearing that Antony is dead. Unable to bear this news, Antony proposes that he and his men kill each other. This proposal is another indication that Antony has become no more than the shadow of the military hero he once was: the honorable man would fall on his sword, not ask his lieutenant to

kill him. But this is exactly what Antony does, exclaiming, “Strike good *Lucilius*; ’Tis a friendly part: / Let no Foes weapon pierce thy Masters Heart” (53). However, as the stage directions read, Lucilius goes behind Antony, “makes as if he would kill him, but passes the Weapon through his own Body” (53). Antony immediately recognizes his mistake and admits, “The Noblest way: thou show’st me what to do. / Thou giv’st th’ Example, and I’le give the blow” (53). After Antony stabs himself, all of his advisers except Photinus flee the scene. This duplicitous man reveals that Cleopatra is actually not dead and that he plans to betray her to Caesar in order to rule Egypt himself. Cleopatra’s servants find Antony and carry him to her, where the lovers say goodbye, each taking the blame for the other’s downfall. As Antony asserts, “’Twas I that pull’d on you the hate of *Rome*, / And all your Ills past, present, and to come” (57). He advises her to make peace with Caesar by claiming that Antony forced her to fight on his side. Since “Your Beauty and my Love were all your Crime,” says Antony, she should live on after his death and rule her country in peace by whatever means necessary (58). As he exclaims with his dying breath, “Dearest Queen, / Let my Life end before your Death begin. / O *Rome!* thy freedom does with me expire, / And thou art lost, obtaining thy desire” (59).

Signaling that she too will place personal passion over her public responsibility, Cleopatra determines not to outlive her lover and arranges to have an asp brought to her. As she brings the serpent to her breast, she argues that her and Antony’s deaths are ennobled by their rejection of the world of politics and public duty in favor of their desire for one another. When her servant Charmion asks why the queen did not think of killing herself when Julius Caesar died, Cleopatra compares Caesar to Antony. Caesar, she says, “lov’d me not!” since “Glory and Empire fill’d his restless mind” (60). Antony, on the other hand, truly loved her and not her empire. As she proclaims while kneeling over his corpse,

. . . my *Antonius* lov’d me with his Soul.
 No cares of Empire did his Flame controul.
 I was his Friend, the Partner of his mind;
 Our days were joyful, and our nights were kind;
 He liv’d for Me, and I will die for Him. (60)

If, as Haggerty claims, male friendship defined the heroic, Sedley rejects that definition by replacing masculine homosociality with what Cleopatra characterizes as heterosexual friendship. His Antony and

Cleopatra kill themselves as part of a rejection of the kind of commitment to public duty that gives other heroic dramas a more or less happy ending. Whereas Dryden's heroes end their plays having honorably reconciled political duty with private desire—or rather, sublimated desire in favor of duty, Cleopatra and her lover valiantly attempt but ultimately fail to make this reconciliation. Thus, Sedley presents Antony and Cleopatra as victims of their love. As Antony relates after he stabs himself, their deaths put them “out of Fortunes reach” (53). He and his Egyptian queen have been fated to love one another. Their tragedy lies in the fact that, while the world of this play forces its inhabitants to choose heroism over love, Antony and Cleopatra insist on valorizing their love over political duty.

Not only does Sedley represent Antony and Cleopatra as love's victims, but he also undermines the points of view of their critics, who espouse traditional notions of heroism and public responsibility, lest the audience mistakenly take Caesar and the Egyptians as Sedley's mouthpieces. In particular, Sedley subverts the idea that Antony and Cleopatra's critics are themselves honorable. Like Shakespeare's Octavius, Sedley's Caesar is a Machiavellian figure, a man who values power more than anything else. When Caesar berates his sister Octavia for threatening to embrace Antony's cause in Rome, she responds to his assertion that this would be a poor return for his love by pointing out his hypocrisy: “Your Love! your Pride and endless Thirst of sway. / To gain my friends, my Quarrel you pretend, / But universal Empire is your end” (34). She sees her brother as someone who mouths the rhetoric of heroic ideology merely to gain more power. Likewise, after Caesar's initial assertion that Cleopatra and Antony are drowned in their own pleasures, his most trusted general, Agrippa, responds by bemoaning the fact that Romans are at war with Romans. As he laments,

Our souls did once our conquer'd Bodies loath,
And seldome did one World contain 'em both.
Yet now by hopes we're flatter'd to live on,
And with the Common Herd of Mankind run,
Crouching to Fate, which we by death might shun. (1)

In Agrippa's eyes, Caesar's war with Antony and Cleopatra also represents the end of honor itself. In the past, when a Roman was defeated in battle, he avoided shame by nobly ending his own life. But this is no longer the case. Instead, Romans have become common men, yielding the time and manner of their deaths to Fate's decree. Thus,

rather than noble leaders who make their own destinies, Caesar and his men have become mere mortals acquiring more and more power until Fate decides their end. Cleopatra's advisors are also undermined by their duplicity and machinations: with the exception of the women who kill themselves with their queen, each of her Egyptian counselors considers betraying their queen as a way to save their country. These betrayals are portrayed as base and cowardly throughout the play. As Caesar realizes at the end of the play, his victory over Antony and Cleopatra has been decreed by fate.

Great minds the Gods alone can overcome—
 Let no man with his present Fortune swell
 The Fate of growing Empire who can tell?
 We stand but on that Greatness whence these fell. (62)

Because the downfall of Antony and Cleopatra was determined by the gods, their end is pitiable. Even Caesar feels pity for them in part because fortune may have a similar fate in store for him.

Rather than faulting Charles II for his dalliances with mistresses, Sedley's play accepts the idea that some people are fated to be libertines pursuing pleasures, enslaved to desire, and traces the tragic consequences of combining power with erotic power. According to Haggerty, Dryden's Antony sees power and erotic power as synonymous, illustrated by his intimate relationship with Dolabella. Indeed, as Haggerty notes, in *All for Love* "Antony's love for Dolabella is heroic by definition. It places him beyond any simple moralistic reading of masculine desire and celebrates aristocratic privilege at the same time that it documents the collapse of that privilege as a cultural possibility."¹⁸ As the subtitle for Dryden's play makes clear, however, the poet laureate saw this collapse as a "World Well Lost." For Sedley and his fellow libertines, this collapse was more tragic. Distanced from political influence since the early 1670s, the libertine circle finds itself isolated, fragmented, and cut off from the social networks that had once brought them privilege and cultural authority. Sedley's Antony has no Dolabella; instead, he and his female lover-friend are tragic versions of Horner, victims of their desires, of their attempt to combine eroticism and politics. Where the libertine fraternity had once hoped to transform English society through political influence, *Antony and Cleopatra* maintains that such transformation is impossible and mourns the demise of libertinism as an avenue for sociopolitical change. Importantly, the result of Antony and Cleopatra's reign is not radical social or political reformation but the advent of even more

repressive tyranny under Caesar. No longer the intimates of the king, libertines in Charles II's court, like Horner, had to choose between maintaining their libertine performances in isolation or giving up most aspects of libertinism in favor of participation in national and social institutions. While his play's lovers chose to exit the public realm, Sedley's "marriage" to Ayscough and subsequent involvement in Parliament during the late 1670s and 1680s ironically suggests that, while he may have regretted the end of aristocratic libertinism, he chose for himself marriage and public duty over the pursuit of individual pleasure.

THE LIBERTINE'S "LOVE-SCORCH'D SOUL":
THE TRAGEDY OF VALENTINIAN

Depicting the final, passive days of the reign of the Roman emperor Valentinian, Rochester's *The Tragedy of Valentinian*, an adaptation of a play previously written by John Fletcher and which was probably begun in the mid-1670s and left unfinished at the time of the earl's death in 1680, traces the emperor's lust for and rape of Lucina, the wife of one of his courtiers, Maximus.¹⁹ Having fallen obsessively in love with Lucina, Valentinian attempts to seduce her, first through his own means of persuasion and then by sending his servants to convince her of her duty to satisfy his desire. As the emperor waits for her answer to his proposal that she become his mistress, a handsome eunuch, Lycias, catches his eye and soon becomes his catamite. When Lucina refuses Valentinian's advances, he arranges to lure her to the palace, where he rapes her. His innocent victim soon dies from the shame of her disgrace, and Valentinian retreats to his bedroom with his catamite to mourn. Condemned to death for trying to spirit Maximus out of the country, one of the emperor's most trusted generals, Aecius, finds Valentinian with Lycias and kills the latter before the emperor can prevent it. Valentinian then kills Aecius. Swearing revenge for his wife's death, Maximus then enters the stage and has his soldiers kill the emperor. Maximus is installed as the new emperor. This play has been read as a royalist argument, for example, by J. Douglas Canfield, in favor of "divinely sanctioned loyalty even to a thoroughly corrupt king" and by Richard Braverman as a republican call for "resistance" to Charles II's lack of concern during political crisis. Kirk Combe offers a third alternative: *Valentinian* is a "critique of the mechanics of power wherein the general politics of truth . . . is clearly exposed for what it is—mere chicanery." Reading *Valentinian* as an affective tragedy helps to make some sense of Rochester's

political and libertine agenda in the play. Valentinian's pursuit of pleasure goes beyond that of the wits' typical characters. In contrast to Etherege's and Wycherley's strategies in *The Man of Mode* and *The Plain Dealer*, Rochester depicts his libertine protagonist as the embodiment of all the activities for which critics such as Pepys, Evelyn, and Milton had faulted libertinism. Going even further than Sedley, Rochester foregrounds Valentinian's eroticization of power: the emperor's sexual gratification depends upon his use of power to get what he wants. Indeed, for Valentinian "power and erotic power are synonymous," to borrow Haggerty's description of Dryden's Antony.²⁰ In depicting this figure, Rochester, like Sedley, portrays the end of libertinism, exploring the incompatibility of power and libertinism. Valentinian's libertinism creates political crisis, and the protagonist increasingly finds himself alone, cut off from his subjects and most trusted advisors. Despite this depiction of libertine excess, however, Rochester, like Sedley, emphasizes Valentinian's helplessness in opposing his fate. Consequently, the audience is meant to pity this monarch for his tragic end rather than to judge him.

Valentinian opens with a speech by Maximus detailing the central problem of the play: the emperor has fallen in love with his wife and risks the health of his nation by neglecting the political sphere in favor of time with Lucina. As Maximus bemoans,

Not less than thrice this Week has his Gay-Court,
With all its Splendor shin'd within my Walls:
Nor does this glorious Sun bestow his Beams
Upon a barren Soyl, My happy Wife,
Fruitful in Charms for *Valentinian's* Heart,
Crowns the soft Moments of each welcome Hour,
With such variety of successive Joys,
That Lost in Love, when the long Day is done,
He willingly would give his Empire up
For the Enjoyment of a Minute more.²¹

This speech immediately establishes a dichotomy between "Empire" and "Love." The emperor, "Lost in Love," is willing to "give his Empire up" in order to spend more time with Lucina, who seems to return Valentinian's admiration—as her husband relates, the emperor's attentions are not falling on "a barren Soyl." This situation mimics the typical scenario of heroic drama: a protagonist loves a married or otherwise unattainable woman and must find a way to balance that love with his honor by accepting his moral duty to her husband or lord. The typical heroic protagonist proves his acceptance of this

duty by winning military victories for the man who possesses the woman he loves. By making the protagonist the emperor, *Valentinian* strays from the usual plotline of heroic drama. Here, the question of honor is reversed: what is Maximus's duty to Valentinian? Should he allow the emperor to sleep with his wife? Or should he rise up against the emperor's sexual advances and commit treason? Both men love the same woman. In order to possess her, neither can remain honorable. Maximus must challenge the emperor if he is to keep his wife, and the emperor cannot be an honorable ruler *and* pursue the wife of one of his most gifted and trusted lieutenants. Not only are love and honor mutually exclusive in this play, they are in direct opposition to one another. Like *Antony and Cleopatra*, *Valentinian* ultimately rejects the conventions of heroic drama: Valentinian is not a military hero nor does he balance heroic love with political duty. Instead, this play is an affective tragedy, one that constructs its protagonist as the victim of fate, of the irreconcilability of politics and libertinism.

Valentinian is indeed "Lost in Love," but Rochester also emphasizes the fact that his passion for Lucina has been destined by the gods. The emperor knows that his desire for Maximus's wife has made him reviled by his subjects, but he cannot help himself. As he complains to Lucina in act 1,

Which way, *Lucina*, hope you to escape,
The Censures both of Tyrannous and Proud,
While your Admirers languish by your Eyes
And at your feet an Emperor despairs!
Gods! Why was I mark'd out of all your Brood
To suffer tamely under mortal hate? (5)

Valentinian is well aware of the political price he is paying for his love for Lucina, neither of whom can escape destiny. Indeed, as Aecius reports to Maximus early in the play, Valentinian is losing political support because of his "Thirst of Love" (2). Aecius complains that the emperor "neglects [his Imperial Crown] for Garlands made of Roses" while "Whole Provinces fall off, and scorn to have / Him for their Prince, who is his Pleasures Slave" (2). Like Antony, Valentinian is literally a slave to his passion—despite the political stakes, he believes himself fated to love Lucina. He has been "mark'd" by the gods "To suffer tamely under mortal hate." Rochester emphasizes this suffering early in the play. As Valentinian asks the gods,

And must I feel the Torments of Neglect?
Betray'd by Love to be the Slave of Scorn?

But 'tis not you, Poor harmless Deities,
 That can make *Valentinian* sigh and mourn!
 Alas! All Power is in *Lucina's* Eyes! (6)

The gods have abandoned Valentinian to the hypnotic power of Lucina's eyes, leaving him no course but the consummation of his desire for her. He *wants* to pursue traditional honor. As he exclaims, "How soon could I shake off this heavy Earth / Which makes me little lower than your selves, / And sit in Heaven an Equal with the first" (6). As emperor, he is just "a little lower" than the gods, and he understands that his traditional role is to pursue greatness. "But," as he goes on to explain, "Love bids me pursue a Nobler Aim," the fulfillment of his desire with Lucina (6). Only her "pity" will save his "bleeding Heart" from total despair (6). It is, thus, Valentinian's fate to love Lucina rather than pursue traditional heroism, and, like any protagonist of affective tragedy, he is meant to be pitied rather than scorned by the audience.

As Aecius suggests, Valentinian's desire for Lucina and neglect of the political sphere has led his subjects to see him as a tyrant. His choosing love over honor has subverted the political order. Maximus blames the emperor for this subversion rather than the subjects who are "falling off so fast from this wild man" (2). As he explains,

The whole World groans beneath him: By the Gods,
 I'd rather be a Bondslave to his Panders,
 Constrain'd by Power to serve their vicious Wills,
 Than bear the Infamy of being held
 A Favourite to this fowl flatter'd Tyrant.
 Where lives Vertue,
 Honour, Discretion, Wisdom? Who are call'd
 And chosen to the steering of his Empire,
 But Whores and Bawds and Traitors! (2)

Maximus believes that Valentinian has replaced the heroic characteristics of virtue, honor, discretion, and wisdom with the libertine propensities toward whores and bawds. According to Maximus, who is defined throughout the play as a traditional hero, these sexual subjects are "Traitors" to the emperor because they distract him from his political duties. Valentinian's "Panders" have made him a "Tyrant" in the eyes of his people because he uses the powers of his office to achieve his own pleasures. Maximus's sarcastic response to this situation is a desire to become one of the emperor's panderers, since, he argues, being a "Favorite" amounts to little more than that anyway.

While this speech is ostensibly about Valentinian's political tyranny, hovering just beneath the surface is Maximus's anxiety concerning his wife: if Valentinian continues to pursue Lucina and seduces her, Maximus's metaphorical status as one of the emperor's panderers will become literal. His wife will be one of the emperor's "Whores," and he will have to decide whether to become one of the "Traitors" either by allowing the emperor to gratify his lust or by actively opposing it. Until that choice arises, all Maximus can do is retreat into the traditional discourse of heroic ideology. As he bemoans to Accius, he longs for the "Glory of a Souldier" and suffers from the "want of Action" (2). This speech establishes Maximus as the traditionally heroic alternative to the libertine Valentinian.

The play's primary depiction of Valentinian's subversion of the political order, the dangerous combination of his political power and his lust, is his rape of Lucina. It becomes apparent that he desires Lucina and is willing to do whatever it takes to possess her when Valentinian attempts to convince her to become his mistress. She resists, arguing that surrendering to his advances would be a betrayal of her wifely duties. Like her husband's behavior, Lucina's resistance is also grounded in the ideals of heroic ideology. As she relates to Valentinian, while her life is "submitted to your Will[,] her "Honour" will be preserved by "Heav'n" (6):

And shou'd the Gods abandon worthless Me
 A Sacrifice to shame and to dishonour;
 A Plague to Rome, and Blot to *Caesar's* Fame!
 For what Crime yet unknown shall *Maximus*
 By Me and *Caesar* be made infamous?
 The faithfull'st Servant, and the kindest Lord!
 So true, so brave, so gen'rous, and so just,
 Who ne'er knew fault: Why shou'd he fall to Shame? (6)

Thus, Lucina's primary argument against Valentinian's desire is that consummating it would dishonor her husband, the emperor's "true," "brave," "gen'rous," and "just" servant. This argument is predicated on her belief that Valentinian shares heroic ideology's belief in individual heroism in the service to national duty over individual love and desire. According to this ideology, shame and dishonor are the worst things that could befall a hero. She maintains that, despite their desire for one another, she and Valentinian must fulfill their duty to Maximus, her "Lord" and his "faithfull'st Servant." To do otherwise would be to bring shame on them all. Her final premise in this vein is

that the fates have destined her for her husband and not for the emperor. As she reasons,

Had Heav'n design'd for me so great a Fate,
As *Caesar's* Love I shou'd have been preserv'd,
By careful Providence for Him alone,
Not offer'd up at first to *Maximus*. (7)

The simple fact that she is married to Maximus, says Lucina, is proof that the gods have destined her for him. If this were a heroic play, Valentinian would either be persuaded by these arguments (and would therefore wait until Maximus's death to pursue Lucina) or the gods would intervene on Lucina's behalf and preserve her honor when Valentinian is driven to rape her. But Rochester's play is not a heroic drama.

Valentinian is willing to put aside all other values in order to possess Lucina. He maintains that it is Maximus's "Duty and Allegiance" to allow him to sleep with his wife (7). He argues that as emperor he is entitled to claim her as his own. As he asks her, "Can you believe your Husband's Right to you / Other than what from me he does derive?" (7). This argument draws upon the tenets of patriarchalism, which argued that the father/husband was the head of his household just as the king is the head of the nation. Just as the king rules the nation, the father/husband rules his family.²² According to this ideology, paternal authority derives from monarchical authority. Valentinian raises this notion in order to suggest that Maximus's right to his wife derives from the emperor's right to govern his subjects. He further maintains that his desire for Lucina is pure; he hopes to install her as his empress, not just as his paramour. While the gods have given him the world to rule, says Valentinian, they have not given him a "Partner" (7). As he questions Lucina,

And shall those Gods who gave me all, allow
That one less than my self should have a Claim
To you the Pride and Glory of the whole?
You, without whom the rest is worthless dross;
Life a base Slavery, Empire but a Mock;
And Love, the Soul of all, a bitter Curse! (7)

Without Lucina as the partner of his reign, says Valentinian, life will be nothing more than drudgery and ruling the empire just a mockery. He insists that, since he despises the "tedious Toils and Empire" and

the “servile Pride of Government,” he will “Find Peace and Joy, and Love and Heav’n” in Lucina’s eyes (7). Although she is clearly attracted to him, Lucina claims that she is confused by her feelings for him and must consult the gods. Valentinian allows her this opportunity but threatens that they must incline her heart to him or else he will abandon their worship altogether. He will avoid his pathetic fate of endlessly loving another man’s wife by obtaining her for himself, one way or another.

When Lucina continues to refuse his advances, Valentinian rapes her. In fact, he claims that her virtuous refusal makes his rape of her more enjoyable. As he relates, “to possess her chaste and uncorrupted, / There lies the Joy and Glory of my Love!” (19). The fact that she wants to sleep with him but will not give up her ideas of feminine honor fuels Valentinian’s lust; her resistance only increases his desire and makes its consummation all the more pleasurable. In order to clear the way for the assault, Valentinian sends Maximus away and arranges for Lucina to be lured to the palace. When she still refuses his advances, Valentinian has her taken to his bedroom and posts a troop of “Masquers” outside, since “’Twill serve to draw away / Those listening Fools, who trace it in the Gallery” (46). “And,” as he relates to Lycinius, “if by chance odd noises should be heard, / As Womens shrieks, or so, say, ‘tis a Play / Is practising within” (46). As these performers dance on stage, the rape occurs offstage. Just as men like Pepys, Milton, and Evelyn feared, transgressive libertine performance has now spread to engulf not only the libertines themselves but their satellites as well.

Valentinian’s obsession with gratifying his sexual impulses stands at the heart of the play’s central conflict. Throughout the play, the emperor’s pleasure is portrayed as being in opposition to his governing of his empire. This conflict becomes clearer in act 5, which depicts the aftermath of Valentinian’s rape of Lucina. Canfield argues that Aecius represents loyalty, as exemplified in Aecius’s declaration that “My Duty’s my Religion” (59).²³ Accordingly, after Lucina dies of shame, Aecius attempts to prevent Maximus from exacting revenge on the emperor by proposing that the two of them flee to Egypt. Aecius argues that Valentinian’s punishment for his misdeeds must be left to fate, since “Faith to Princes broke, is Sacrilege, / An injury to the Gods” (58). Calling on these gods to “Judge him your selves” (58), Aecius works to keep both the emperor and his friend safe from one another. This loyalty is further proven when Valentinian is convinced by one of his slaves that Aecius is dangerous and must be condemned to death. Claiming that to run would be “Treason” (67), Aecius

bravely stands up to the emperor's assassins, scaring away two cowards and causing Pontius, a soldier whom Aecius has offended, to kill himself rather than to violate his loyalty to the general. Aecius then confronts the emperor himself, kills Valentinian's paramour, Lycias, and impales himself on his master's sword.²⁴ Because of Aecius's loyalty to his emperor, Canfield concludes that Rochester's tragedy preaches loyalty to even corrupt monarchs.

To perceive the play simply as a defense of political loyalty, however, minimizes its ultimate rejection of the political sphere. While the play, contrary to Braverman's reading, does seem to advocate loyalty to God's chosen monarch, however tyrannical, it also embraces the idea that the pursuit of pleasure cannot be feasibly combined with political power as a vehicle for transforming social mores. Rochester's position on the failure of libertinism to revolutionize society's views of sexuality can be seen in the way in which he portrays Valentinian's pursuit of sodomy, the ultimate act of subverting political order. Throughout the final act, Aecius makes clear that what he opposes is the emperor's "lawless Lust" (77). Initially, it might seem that what makes Valentinian's lust "lawless" is simply the fact that his avenues of pleasure include the pursuit of other men's wives, rape, and sex with other males. However, while the implication of boundlessness is certainly implied by Aecius's characterization of Valentinian's sexual desire, his primary objection seems to be that this lust has been fueled by the emperor's "mischievous" advisors (59). Because of their role in Lucina's rape and his sense of duty to his master, Aecius decides to punish these advisors instead of Valentinian. As he proclaims to Proculus, the emperor's jester,

. . . There has been mischief done,
 And you (I hear) a wretched Instrument:
 Look to't, when e're I draw this Sword to punish,
 You and your grinning Crew will tremble, Slaves;
 Nor shall the ruin'd world afford a Corner
 To shelter you, nor that poor Princes Bosom,
 You have invenom'd and polluted so. (59)

These words become deeds in the play's final scene, where Aecius finds Lycias in the emperor's arms. Since "Heav'n alone must punish" Valentinian, Aecius kills the eunuch, proclaiming that "I'le do Heav'ns justice on thy base Assister" (76). As the emperor's catamite, Lycias can indeed be called "base," but Aecius's primary criticism revolves around Lycias's role as Valentinian's "Assister," an accomplice

in Lucina's rape. Consequently, what makes Valentinian's lust "lawless" is his transgression of his political duty by relying on ill-chosen advisers who convince him to use his political power to gratify his sexual desire, as demonstrated in his ability to have Maximus sent away, to have Lucina lured to the palace, and to have the players cover up his rape of Lucina. It is the emperor's combination of politics and pleasure, according to Rochester, that precipitates his downfall. In other words, says Rochester, sexual liberty cannot be effected through the monarch's selfish exertion of political power to fulfill his own lusts.

At first glance the play might seem to fault Valentinian for his liaison with Lycias, but this interpretation does not hold up to scrutiny. First, Lycias is portrayed as a faithful servant. As the emperor's catamite, he actually shares Aecius's sense of duty to his master. When, for example, Valentinian first proclaims that "I must use thee *Lycias*," the eunuch replies, "I am the humble Slave of *Caesar's* Will, / By my Ambition bound to his Commands, / As by my Duty" (27). He then succumbs to the emperor's advances and becomes his catamite. Furthermore, his part in the rape of Lucina is minimal—he merely informs her that her husband has been sent to the battlefield by the emperor and describes Maximus's fears that he may not return to see his wife again. Interestingly, as Haggerty rightfully suggests, portions of Rochester's adaptation of *Valentinian* read as a celebration of sodomy. This celebration begins as soon as Valentinian orders Chylax to arrange his liaison with Lycias. After the emperor leaves the stage, Chylax is left alone to recite the benefits of sodomy to the audience. As he relates, Lycias is "a soft Rogue" who's "worth a thousand Womens Nicenesses," since

The Love of Women moves even with their Lust,
Who therefore still are fond, but seldom just;
Their Love is Usury, while they pretend,
To gain the Pleasure double which they lend. (19)

According to Chylax, women's aim during sexual relations is to gratify their own desire. For this reason, they are not primarily concerned with gratifying their male partners. The male, therefore, receives less pleasure than he might otherwise enjoy. In contrast to this, says Chylax, "a dear Boy's disinterested Flame / Gives Pleasure, and for meer Love gathers pain" (19). He maintains that eunuchs provide men with greater sexual pleasure because they have no concern for their own gratification. Additionally, because these young men are not

seeking their own sexual pleasure and actually suffer pain through their sex with other men, their declarations of love are more pure than those of women: “In him alone Fondness sincere does prove, / And the kind tender Naked Boy is Love” (19).

The play’s praise of sodomy continues in act 5, scene 5, which opens with Valentinian and Lycias lying together on a couch. Here, the emperor asserts that his pleasure is more important than his kingdom. As he sighs to his paramour, “Oh let me press these balmy Lips all day, / And bathe my Love-scorch’d Soul in thy moist Kisses” (74). Since Lycias is “all sweet and soft,” Valentinian intends to mourn the loss of Lucina, who has expired from shame after her rape by the emperor, by enjoying himself with the eunuch. Calling the young man an “Altar of my Love” on which he will “pour out Pleasure and blest Sacrifice / To the dear memory of my *Lucina*,” Valentinian claims that he will renounce the political world and revel in his pleasure (74).

No God, nor Goddess[,] ever was ador’d
 With such Religion, as my Love shall be.
 For in these charming Raptures of my Soul,
 Claspt in thy Arms, I’ll waste my self away,
 And rob the ruin’d World of their great Lord,
 While to the Honour of *Lucina*’s Name,
 I leave Mankind to mourn the loss for ever. (75)

Here, Valentinian mimics the language of Cleopatra after Antony’s suicide—like her, he will forsake “Mankind” and “waste my self away.” Unlike Cleopatra, however, his method of self-annihilation will be sodomy rather than a lethal snake bite. While he previously abandoned political duty to pursue Lucina, Valentinian will now abandon “the ruin’d World,” everything except his new religion. Perversely, sodomy is this religion’s form of worship. As a result, Valentinian’s “religion” recalls other Classical cults based on fertility and sexual pleasure. Like the cult of Dionysius, this religion will feature sex as its primary mode of devotion, but this sex will be exclusively sodomitical. Consequently, sodomy becomes something sacred and beloved for Valentinian.

According to Haggerty, “Valentinian’s pledge of eternal love is clearly the most homoerotic expression in Restoration tragedy.” While this may very well be true in the sense that it may possibly be the most *explicit* homoerotic expression in Restoration tragedy, any positive association of this speech with homoerotic love as we define it today is undermined by the fact that the end result of pursuing this new

religion will be that Valentinian will “waste away,” leaving his subjects to mourn his loss, a loss dedicated not to his catamite but to the woman he raped. This scene’s homoeroticism is further undermined by the fact that, contrary to Haggerty’s reading, Lycias is not Valentinian’s “friend.” Haggerty builds upon Alan Bray’s analysis of seventeenth-century eroticized male friendship and its function “to maintain legal authority and hegemonic control.” He also borrows Jonathan Goldberg’s assertion that “friendship and sodomy are always in danger of (mis)recognition since what both depend upon physically—sexually—cannot be distinguished.” Although he maintains that “Lycias’s status as a eunuch should not disguise the fact that he is an attractive young man who offers the Emperor rich and lusty kisses in response to his own,” Valentinian’s love for Lycias seems predicated solely on the sexual gratification the eunuch provides his master out of duty rather than affection or reciprocal lust.²⁵ Furthermore, Valentinian casts his sexual activity with Lycias as a surrogate for his wished for but now impossible sexual intercourse with the deceased Lucina.

That *Valentinian* distinguishes between sodomy and friendship is important. Instead of interpreting Valentinian’s relationship with Lycias as one of friendship, we should see their intimacy as paralleling that of Edward and Gaveston in Christopher Marlowe’s *Edward II*. As Haggerty, Bray, and Goldberg explain, the king commits sodomy in Marlowe’s play “not by sleeping with Gaveston but by his act of preferment in raising Gaveston to the level of the aristocracy.” As Goldberg notes, “*sodomy* is the word for everything illicit, all that lies outside the system of alliance that juridically guarantees marriage and inheritance, the prerogatives of blood, as the linchpin of social order and the maintenance of class distinctions.” In celebrating sodomy in this play, Rochester celebrates such a radical overturning of the sociopolitical order through illicit sexual intercourse. Cut off from homosocial bonds by fate, Valentinian seeks to unite political and erotic power, a union that leads to his rape of Lucina and his dalliance with Lycias. In his analysis of *Sodom*, a play I examine at length in chapter 6, Harold Weber analyzes the “dangerous political implications” of this pornographic satire that constructs and validates “an unusual literary world of homosexual machismo in which male virility grounds and proves itself on the male body.” Valentinian similarly proves his ability to wield erotic power by creating an “economy of desire predicated on a system in which boys and women are interchangeable objects.” When Aecius kills Lycias, Valentinian’s revelry is

transformed into mourning. As he exclaims when Lycias is stabbed,

He bleeds! mourn ye Inhabitants of Heav'n!
 For sure my lovely Boy was one of you!
 But he is dead, and now ye may rejoyce,
 For ye have stol'n him from me, spiteful Powers!
 Empire and Life I ever have despis'd,
 The vanity of Pride, of Hope and Fear,
 In Love alone my Soul found real Joys! (76)

Alone, cut off from “men of equal position,” to borrow a phrase from Weber, Valentinian exists outside the system of alliance that maintains his society, an existence that the libertines in Charles II's court had once seemed to share.²⁶ As a result, Valentinian's subjects rise up against him, his life ends in tragedy, and libertinism is removed from power at court.

The emperor claims that he will choose pleasure over politics, that he will give up political power in order to enjoy his sacred sex with Lycias. The problem is that Valentinian fails to accomplish this rejection of political power and position. As his employment of the masquers reveals, he implicates several of his servants in staging his assault on Lucina. This usage is in keeping with Valentinian's general use of political power to achieve his pleasures. Indeed, Valentinian sees his subjects as little more than the instruments of his sexual gratification. When his courtiers fail to convince Lucina to become his mistress, Valentinian questions how they “dare . . . be alive” when his desire is “unsatisfied”:

Wretches! whose vicious Lives when I withdraw
 The Absolute Protection of my Favour
 Will drag you into all the Miseries
 That your own Terrors, Universal Hate,
 And Law, with Jayls and Whips can bring upon you,
 As you have fail'd to satisfie my Wishes,
 Perdition is the least you can expect
 Who durst to undertake and not perform! (18)

Valentinian's rape of Lucina and use of members of his court to arrange and to achieve this assault demonstrates that his sexual excess becomes a form of monarchical abuse. All that Valentinian is concerned with is satisfying his own “Wishes,” even when this gratification involves the violation of his duty to his subjects. Even his liaison with Lycias is ultimately the result of Valentinian's use of power.

Lycias succumbs to the emperor's advances out of "duty" rather than out of mutual desire. As a result, Valentinian's sexuality and his effective governance of Rome are mutually exclusive of one another. The irreconcilability of the two is the key theme throughout Rochester's tragedy.

More than one scholar has noted that Valentinian "brings to mind King Charles."²⁷ John Harold Wilson even goes so far as to say that Rochester "intended Valentinian as a portrait of Charles II, and that his own personality was reflected in the character of Maximus, the philosophical-minded favorite of the Roman emperor."²⁸ While Valentinian is indeed an interrogation of how mixing political with erotic power can lead to tragedy, reading the play within the context of Rochester's libertine performances suggests that he was no Maximus. Wilson maintains that Maximus's critique that the emperor's advisers are all "shallow Rascals, Pimps, Buffoons and Bawds" mouths Rochester's own complaint in his scepter lampoon that Charles surrounded himself with similarly disreputable people.²⁹ This parallel, however, is complicated by the fact that Rochester himself would have qualified as one of these rascals in the eyes of most court observers. The key difference between Rochester and any "Pimps" who might have been advising the king in the mid-1670s is that Rochester was no longer one of the king's most intimate companions. What Rochester dramatizes in this play is his belief that society will not allow the monarch to pursue a liberatory view of sexual pleasure and remain the monarch. Just as Lycias is blamed by Aecius for Valentinian's transgression of political order, the libertines in Charles's court were often blamed for the king's profligacy and its political consequences. The king's use of power to satiate his desire, says this play, leads his subjects to rise up against him to exclude him from governing the nation. Charles has attempted to avoid this fate by distancing himself from his most visible Lyciases, the libertine circle. If the libertines are to avoid a more tragic fate, says Rochester, they must abandon the political sphere, performing libertine acts in "Love's theater, the bed," rather than on the stage of Charles II's court. But like Valentinian's fall, the collapse of libertine privilege is cast in tragic rather than celebratory terms.

Unlike Sedley, Rochester continued to live as much of a libertine lifestyle as the illnesses that marked his later years allowed, but by the time the play was performed in 1684, he had been dead for four years as a result of complications from syphilis. His deathbed conversion, widely publicized in *Some Passages of the Life and Death of Rochester*, an account by Gilbert Burnet, "a passionate proselyter and debater,"

to borrow Wilson's words, quickly became associated with the repudiation of libertine excess and subversive performances. The story of Rochester's recantation of his libertine beliefs proved useful in the larger cultural abjection of libertinism that would follow and the criticisms of Charles throughout the Exclusion Crisis. As Germaine Greer notes, after Rochester's death on July 26, 1680, the sermon preached at his funeral quickly went "into print, bound up with Burnet's account of the poet's life, to be sold up and down the country as an object lesson in the corrupting influence of an ungoverned monarch." Despite the popularity of Burnet's account, this conversion story was met with some skepticism by Rochester's contemporaries as well as later historians. As Greer sums up,

Burnet, chief apologist for the Whig cause, was pursuing his own politico-religious agenda, namely, "the reforming a loose and lewd age" by the inculcation of whiggish morality. *Some Passages in the Life* is actually an interminable sermon addressed to a sick man, most of whose anguished questions his interlocutor did not quite understand. When Burnet met Rochester for the first time, in the autumn of 1679, the poet was already seriously ill; he did not see him again until he was dying. Burnet's account exaggerates the disorderliness and irreligion of the poet's life in order to demonize a monarch who took money from the absolutist King of Catholic France so that he could rule without Parliament.

Others have suggested that Rochester's mother, desperate to redeem her son's reputation, "stage-managed" the entire conversion, while her son was essentially out of his mind, ironically taking Rochester's final "performance" completely out of his own hands. For enemies of the king, one of the appealing aspects of Rochester's one tragedy is that it could be made to fit into such a project of demonizing the monarch. There is no objective evidence, however, that Rochester shared this view or that he would have changed his lifestyle had he not become ill.³⁰ The common interpretation of Burnet's account of Rochester's death has strongly influenced critics' reviews of his dramatic work. Because his conversion was seen as a repudiation of Charles as libertine monarch, *Valentinian* has been read in much the same way.

By the end of 1680, the year of Rochester's death, the libertine circle in Charles II's court had fallen apart. Whether by choice or force, the group had become isolated from the political sphere they had once aspired to dominate. None of the surviving members of the group ever again played significant roles in either the court or the

theater. Although *The Rehearsal* was not Buckingham's last play, after the Country Party's defeat during the Exclusion Crisis he retired to Castle Helmsley, his Yorkshire estate. He worked on another play, *The Restoration*, an adaptation of Fletcher's *Philaster*, in 1682 and 1683, but it was never produced. In 1687, the duke's horse fell dead during a fox hunt, and Buckingham caught a chill while sitting on the cold, wet ground as he waited for a fresh horse to be brought to him. He was taken to bed and died two days later, on April 16, 1687. In 1680, after a roof collapsed on him, causing a skull injury, Sedley found religion and dedicated himself even more devotedly to politics. During the 1680s, he supported the Whig cause against Charles and his successor James and celebrated the ascension to the throne of Mary and William of Orange in 1689, becoming one of the new regime's staunchest supporters throughout the 1690s. He also wrote one last play, *Bellamira*, in 1687, a dark comedy portraying the activities of a female libertine. He died in 1701. As discussed in chapter 4, Sir George Etherege was knighted in 1679 and probably married for money at about the same time. In 1685, he became a diplomat first in Ratisbon and, in 1689, in Paris, an exile with the deposed court of James II. He died three years later. William Wycherley fell sick with a brain fever in 1677, an illness from which he never fully recovered. In 1682, he was imprisoned for debts, gaining his freedom only in 1686 with the help of James II. The ascension to the throne of William and Mary in 1689 once again cut off his financial support, forcing him to live as cheaply as possible in London. Despite these hardships, he became friends with Dryden and the young Alexander Pope. He died in 1715, just eleven days after marrying for a second time.

CHAPTER 6



CENSURING LIBERTINE SEXUALITY: *SODOM*

Shortly after the death of John Wilmot, earl of Rochester in July 1680, publishers began to produce volumes of “his” work: collections of his manuscript poems that had circulated around the court and London, mixed in with verses by several of his contemporaries, including Aphra Behn, John Oldham, Sir Carr Scroope, and Sir George Etherege. Even though these volumes were anthologies of poetry by several authors, publishers attributed the poems solely to Rochester. Gilbert Burnet, Rochester’s first biographer, explains one reason for this inaccurate attribution:

[H]e laid out his Wit very freely in Libels and Satyrs, in which he had a peculiar Talent of mixing his Wit with his Malice, and fitting both with such apt words, that Men were tempted to be pleased with them: from thence his Composures came to be easily known, for few had such a way of tempering these together as he had; so that, when any thing extraordinary that way came out, as a Child is fathered sometimes by its Resemblance, so it was laid at his Door as its Parent and Author.¹

Anthony à Wood adds a second reason for the publication of all of these verses under Rochester’s name: “No sooner was the breath out of his body but some person, or persons, who had made a collection of his poetry in manuscript, did, meerly for the lucre sake (as ’twas conceived) publish them under this title, *Poems on Several Occasions*.”² Because of the public’s interest in what they thought were Rochester’s satirically bawdy poems, at least ten editions of the pirated poems appeared in the months following Rochester’s death.

This literary craze culminated in the publication of an obscene and satiric closet drama, *Sodom*, in 1684, which was also attributed to the earl.³ Like the verse miscellanies, this play was presumably “fathered” upon Rochester due to its perceived “Resemblance” to his “Wit” and “Malice”—similar to his poems, the play contains several graphic descriptions of adultery, sodomy, incest, bestiality, and masturbation—as a means of augmenting its attractiveness to potential purchasers. The play begins with a declaration by the king of Sodom, Bolloxinian, that all of his subjects are free to indulge in sodomy, a declaration advocated by his four chief advisors, Borastus, Pine, Pockennello, and Tewly. The play’s subsequent six scenes trace the effects of his declaration on his people. Scene 2 depicts the queen’s attempts to ease her sexual frustration by having her ladies in waiting masturbate her with larger and larger dildoes. In the third scene, Princess Swivia teaches her brother, Prince Pricket, how “to swive” (B3.2), but renders him impotent when she and Cunticula, a lady in waiting, exhaust him sexually. Tired of masturbation, Queen Cuntagratia unsuccessfully attempts in the next scene to seduce her husband’s primary military advisor, Buggeranthes, who, despite his reputation of “fuck[ing] all women in a trance” (B2.51), rejects her advances because he is impotent, “a decrepid Leatcher, [who] must retire / With Pr[ick] too weake to act what [he] desire[s]” (B4.51–53). In scene 5, Bolloxinian expostulates on the joys of sodomy, bestows sexual gifts on his people, and receives gifts from neighboring monarchs, including forty young men from the King of Gomorah, each of whom will gratify the king’s “honored Lust” (B5.140). The next scene depicts the further unhappiness of the queen’s ladies in waiting, who unsuccessfully attempt to seduce the court’s official dildo-maker, Virtuoso. In keeping with the Biblical myth, the play’s final scene represents the kingdom’s destruction by God when Bolloxinian refuses to give up his “old beloved sin” (B7.49) and retires to a cavern where he intends to expire while buggering his favorite catamite.

The attribution of *Poems on Several Occasions* and *Sodom* to Rochester illustrates the traits that the readers in the 1680s associated with Rochester and his libertine circle: in the first half-decade after his death, Rochester’s libertine performances and literary works were synonymous in the public’s eye with the transgressive sexual practices described in these works. That any explicit depiction or discussion of sex was the defining characteristic that associated these works with Rochester can be seen in the fact that many of the poems included in *Poems on Several Occasions* actually criticize the libertine performances rather than celebrate them, as Rochester tended to do. In other words,

anything that depicted libertine sexuality—either positively or negatively—became associated with Rochester’s name as long as the depiction was even remotely titillating or scandalous. One example of the poems erroneously attributed to Rochester that were critical of libertinism is Behn’s “The Disappointment,” a proto-feminist response to Rochester’s “The Imperfect Enjoyment” that deflates the libertine fantasy of male sexual power over women and criticizes libertines like Rochester for their cavalier treatment of their sexual partners. The inclusion of “The Disappointment” in *Poems on Several Occasions* can only be explained by its depiction of illicit sex: its style and argument is completely inconsistent with Rochester’s typical pro-libertine lyrics. That Behn’s poem is included among Rochester’s “works” in these volumes illustrates that any poem that deployed sexually explicit imagery became associated with Rochester regardless of the fact that he might very well have been its satiric target.

The attribution of *Sodom* to Rochester makes a similar elision between a work that uses obscene language to praise libertinism and one that employs this discourse to condemn it. While earlier chapters have examined the Court Wits’ methods of self-representation, this chapter analyzes the ways in which their critics dramatized their activities. Critics of libertinism often turned to sexually explicit imagery as a means of arguing against the libertine circle’s prominence at court. Throughout the late 1670s and early 1680s, critics of Charles II’s use of monarchical prerogative employed sexually explicit satire of his carnal activities as an implicit critique of his absolutist and Catholic tendencies. These satires often focus on the role of Charles’s libertine advisors in leading the nation to immorality and attempt to exclude the libertines from such influence over the king by satirically and sometimes graphically depicting their sexual behavior. Thus, critics of libertinism use the same tactics that the libertines themselves used to interest spectators in their works and points of view—pornography. This chapter examines the consequences of using such obscene satire to exclude the libertines from influence at court. *Sodom* presents a seventeenth-century reading of the libertine’s body as a sociopolitical text. In this play, libertinism’s opponents dramatically transform libertine homosociality and sexual energy into a wide range of sodomitical acts, including anal sex, masturbation, and bestiality. By depicting the libertine body as inherently sodomitical, disruptive of the sexual, social, and political order, *Sodom* draws on the libertine’s trickster subversiveness to expel the libertine from political influence. This play and its political allies were not successful, however, in completely eradicating the libertine’s cultural influence. Indeed, the very process

that this play uses to ostracize libertines from the political sphere, that is, pornography, ensures libertinism's continued evocation in literary works that hoped to cite the libertine as the bane of morality, social order, and political responsibility. In order to exclude the libertine's performances from the list of acceptable behaviors, his acts had to continue to be named and cited in sermons, poems, plays, and novels. Libertine performances were therefore crucial to England's process of allowing normative sexual desire to become in fact normative.

LIBERTINISM AND *SODOM*'S PRURIENT POLITICS

Textually speaking, *Sodom* is a difficult work to study. A closet drama meant to be read rather than performed, the "play" has more in common with satiric poetry than it does with the plays of Dryden, Etherege, Wycherley, or Behn. Furthermore, it exists in at least eight manuscript versions, its date of authorship can only be estimated as sometime in the mid-1670s, and its authorship continues to be debated. Because of the printer's initial attribution, the play has often been ascribed to Rochester, though this attribution has been contested since the 1690s. The debate over its authorship has dominated studies of the play for the past few decades, with Larry Carver, J. W. Johnson, Paddy Lyons, Warren Chernaik, and Ros Ballaster arguing for or accepting the Rochester attribution and Harold Love, Alan Bray, Harold Weber, Cameron McFarlane, Paul Hammond, and George Haggerty either explicitly or implicitly rejecting his authorship.⁴ While most studies of *Sodom* have been in search of an author, two scholars have been particularly noteworthy for their attempts to explicate the play's political content. Placing the play in the context of debates over the Declaration of Indulgence of 1672, Richard Elias's "Political Satire in *Sodom*" argues that "sodomy becomes a grisly metaphor for popery" in the play and that the play's satire "follow[s] the associative logic of the Country Party: misusing the prerogative would lead to popery and arbitrary government on the model of France." Harold Weber's "Carolinean Sexuality and the Restoration Stage: Reconstructing the Royal Phallus in *Sodom*" builds upon Elias's work to argue that "*Sodom* fashions its obscenity quite directly as a violent attack on women, an integral part of its attempt not simply to marginalize but to exile, erase, and annihilate the female body." He connects *Sodom*'s "sexual disgust with women" to its "political purposes":

Sodom represents a vision of an erotic apocalypse; a sexual *Dunciad*, the play does not depend on the saturnian Dulness that helps to bring the

“Smithfield Muses to the ear of Kings” but a sexual perversity and destruction that the king himself visits on the land. Though Charles’s easy, self-indulgent sexuality may seem to have little in common with Bolloxinion’s insistent taste for “men’s beastly arses,” the play’s satiric transformation of the one into the other suggests the extent of the fears generated by Charles’s antic behavior.

As a response to these fears, says Weber, *Sodom* “practices a type of gender genocide, the intensity of its desire to annihilate the female commensurate with the futility of its attempt to imagine an alternative sexual economy.”⁵

These scholars are certainly correct to read *Sodom* as a political work centered on Charles’s Declaration of Indulgence. Because of its attack on this attempt to achieve religious freedom through royal proclamation rather than Parliamentary statute, Elias maintains that *Sodom* should be read alongside similar satires from the period. Many of these satires not only condemn the king for issuing this declaration but also blame his advisors, who are seen as both libertines and proponents of tyranny and Catholicism. “The Dream of the Cabal,” for instance, describes an imaginary meeting of the king’s cabinet. Among his ministers’ imagined advice in this poem is the suggestion that Charles’s issue of the Declaration of Indulgence was a smoke screen for a military dictatorship:

Give them but conventicle-room, and they
Will let you steal the Englishman away,
And heedless be, till you your nets have spread,
And pull’d down conventicles on their head.
Militia, then, and parliaments, cashier;
A formidable standing army rear;
They’ll mount you up, and up you soon shall be.
They’ll fear, who ne’er did love, your monarchy.⁶

“Nostradamus’ Prophecy,” another poetic satire, goes a step further and foretells London’s destruction by the fire and brimstone of heaven as punishment for the court’s “barefac’d Villainy,” which includes the king’s attempts to use “declarations” to cover up his financial mismanagement of the Exchequer and the court’s indulgence in “sodomy,” “whoring,” and “incest.”⁷ The poem’s assertion that “whoring shall be the least crime at court” was certainly echoed by other writers of the period. Samuel Pepys, for instance, fills his diary with accounts of court gossip concerning the king’s sexual misdeeds. The king’s liaisons with Barbara Villiers, duchess of Castlemaine, actress Nell Gwyn, Louise

de Keroualle, duchess of Portsmouth, and others were well known throughout London society.

Like these poetic satires, *Sodom* denigrates more than just Charles II's policies and sexual practices; it participates in a larger cultural attack on the court's libertine ethos, personified by Rochester, Sedley, Buckingham, Etherege, and Wycherley. While Elias's and Weber's essays help us understand many aspects of *Sodom*'s political satire, their readings of the play are limited by their attempts to minimize the pornographic nature of this work. By refusing to treat the potential pleasures of the text seriously, these critics have, along with other scholars, only partially understood *Sodom*'s historical relevance. While Elias's work on *Sodom* correctly identifies the play's politics, it does so by arguing that *Sodom*'s "real purpose" is "to arouse political indignation and not prurient involvement." This strategy for approaching *Sodom* has been useful to scholars who confess to having difficulty dealing with the play's obscenity. As Elias's contention concerning the play's "real purpose" suggests, he works to minimize the text's pornographic nature by emphasizing politics over prurience and denies "that *Sodom* was intentionally pornographic." Harold Love examines the play's obscenity more forthrightly but nevertheless maintains that "the play's presentation of sex is comic, not erotic." And Weber confesses that, as a scholar reading a paper on *Sodom* at a conference, he "felt terribly anxious, implicated in the vulgarity and misogyny of the text." In contrast to these scholars, Rachel Weil's "Sometimes a Scepter is Only a Scepter: Pornography and Politics in Restoration England" deftly elucidates the relationship between the "political" and the "prurient" in Restoration verse satires. Weil's essay deals more comfortably with her sources' combination of political critique and obscenity, since she begins by recognizing the difficulty of drawing a clear line between "attacks on the regime that are written from a sexually puritanical point of view and poems which themselves seem to express either a sexually libertine ethos or offer the reader the pleasures of pornography, or both." She maintains that the political and the prurient in these poems work together to produce textual meaning. If we draw from Weil's analysis of these poems to read *Sodom* we will see more clearly that the play's political satire is aimed at Charles's courtiers as much if not more than it is aimed at Charles himself and that what it attempts "to exile, erase, and annihilate," to borrow Weber's phrase, is not just women but libertinism as well.⁸

To accomplish this erasure, *Sodom* marries the discourse of pornography with the form of heroic drama. As Weil explains of Restoration poetic satires, "some of the most effective satire of the period attacked

the sexual libertinism at court by pretending to praise it, or by putting extravagant celebrations of libertine sexuality into the mouths of courtiers or Tories.” Often, this “intention was embedded in layers of irony” or obscured by “a mock-heroic tone.” Within this context, it is not surprising that *Sodom* is written as a mock-heroic play. Richard Bevis defines heroic drama as “a kind of grand opera without music, a splendid artifice in which monarchs, nobles, and generals of astonishing virtue or evil endured momentous conflicts of love and honour while nations quaked and audiences admired the magnificence of the thought, language, scenes, and costumes.”⁹ These aspects of the plays made them entertaining, but these works also had a pedagogical function: through their depictions of conflicts between love and honor, audiences would learn to privilege national duty over private passion.

Anything but a grand opera, *Sodom* mimics a heroic drama but with a very different purpose. Its opening lines parody Dryden’s *The Conquest of Granada* Part I, which famously begins,

Thus, in the Triumphs of soft Peace, I reign;
And, from my Walls, defy the Pow’rs of Spain:
With pomp and Sports my Love I celebrate,
While they keep distance, and attend my State.¹⁰

Boabdelin’s speech emphasizes his political duties—he is successfully leading his nation in a war against Spain, as evidenced by the “peace,” “pomp,” and “sports” celebrated within the walls of the city while the Spanish troops retreat, unable to penetrate the city’s defenses. Furthermore, the entertainment offered by these revels serve a political purpose: they are expressions of his “love” for his people and his attention to his “state.” Thus, he is portrayed as an effective political leader. Like Buckingham’s *The Rehearsal*, *Sodom* parodies the characteristics of a heroic drama in order to undermine the ideology that underpinned it. But in this case, that ideology is now seen to be libertinism itself. In *Sodom*, Boabdelin is transformed into the lecherous Bolloxinian, who declares:

Thus in the Zenith of my lust I reign:
I eat to swive & swive to eat againe.
Let other Monarchs who their Scepters beare
To keepe their subjects lesse in love than feare,
Bee slaves to Crownes, my nation shall be free:
My Pintle onely shall my scepter bee.
My laws shall Act more pleasures then Command,
And with my Prick I’le governe all the land. (1.1–8)

In contrast to Boabdelin's speech, Bolloxinian emphasizes his rejection of political duty in favor of the pursuit of pleasure: while "other Monarchs" are "slaves to Crownes," he will "free" his nation to "eat" and "swive" just like himself. Furthermore, his "laws" and his mode of governing his people will be based on his penis, since all of his declarations will encourage his subjects to pursue whatever sexual pleasures they enjoy rather than command them to engage in only one kind of behavior. The play thus transforms Dryden's rhetoric of the monarch's duty to his "state" into a farcical celebration of royally sanctioned pleasure seeking, that is, libertinism. Bolloxinian will release his subjects from all civic restraints on sexual enjoyment so that they, like the libertines in Charles II's court, can be free to pursue their erotic pleasures.

As Weber writes, "*Sodom* . . . focuses on the protagonist of the heroic drama, creating in Bolloxinian a grotesque sexual version of the Dryden hero, an Almanzor of the bedroom whose considerable energies seek only a sexual outlet."¹¹ Bolloxinian's use of his "prick" to govern his kingdom farcically revises the values usually associated with a heroic drama: courage, military acumen, generosity of spirit, and personal honor. In the character of Bolloxinian the play sexualizes each of these values and thereby comically transforms them into pornographic vice. Like the libertines in Charles II's court, pleasure is the code by which he lives. Consequently, the play transforms heroic courage and feats of arms into Bolloxinian's sexual audacity and stamina. In the play's final scene, for example, the monarch challenges the authority of the gods:

Bolloxinian. Which of the Gods more then my selfe can doe?
Pockennello. Alas they're pimps, sir, in respect of you.
Bolloxinian. Ile Heaven invade & bugger all the Gods
 And drain the spring of their immortal Cods.
 Ile make em rubb till Pr[ick] and Bollocks cry
 You've frig'd us out of immortality. (B7.10–15)

Here Bolloxinian threatens the gods, claiming that he will sodomize them and then masturbate them until their seminal fluids are exhausted. With this exhaustion, says Bolloxinian, he will have also robbed them of their immortality, bestowing it upon himself. By sodomizing the gods, Bolloxinian will have heroically achieved the human quest for immortality, becoming a god himself. Thus, the play recasts martial bravery as sexual bravado, a recasting that comically valorizes the king's sodomy and masturbation. Great feats of martial

combat are likewise transformed into the king's impressive sexual exploits. Bolloxinian claims, for example, to have gratified himself sexually with each of his subjects. As he boasts, "I have fuckt and buggerd all [the] land" (B5.107). These exploits continue when the king is faced with the prospect of performing anal intercourse with forty young men, gifts from his fellow monarch, the King of Gomorrah. Ordering his servants to "Grace e'ry Chamber with a pr[e]tty boy," Bolloxinian vows to enjoy each of the young men in turn (B5.135). As a result, the heroic protagonist's military prowess and heroic courage are farcically replaced by the king's sexual potency. Where the hero of Dryden's play defeats entire armies, Bolloxinian "ha[s] fuckt and buggerd" an entire kingdom.

Bolloxinian is also farcically magnanimous. When a courtier tells him the pitiable story of a woman who, unable to copulate with the horse she loves, has been forced out of "dispaire" (B5.78) to masturbate herself with a "Cows bob tayle" (B5.58), the king decides to "encourage vertue" (B5.88). As he commands one of his servants,

Such women ought to live. Pray find her out.
 Shee shall a pintle have, both stiffe & stout,
 Pr—shall howrly by her c—t be Suckt:
 Shee shall be daily by all nations fuckt.
 Industrious C—ts should never Pintles want:
 Shee shall be M[istress] to my Elephant. (B5.81–86)

Bolloxinian's courtiers praise his benevolence toward this woman, declaring that his "hono[r]'s matchlesse" (B5.87). Bolloxinian's "honorable act" is to grant this woman an endless supply of penises, including that of his elephant, to gratify her sexual needs. His generosity of spirit is further demonstrated when he extends his indulgence of sodomy to the soldiers in his army. As the general Buggeranthus reports, the men have taken to following the king's example: "If lust pr[e]vaile they want no womans aid / Each buggers with Content his own Com'rade" (B5.51–52). The soldiers have consequently quit visiting prostitutes and live instead "like man & wife, sister & Brother" (B5.56). Bolloxinian's approval of this new situation demonstrates once again that the play farcically alters what the word "honorable" means by changing militaristic activities and qualities into increasingly perverse sexual behavior.

These characteristics reveal that Bolloxinian, like the figures in the poems studied by Weil, has an "absurdly misplaced sense of what heroism is." Through these comic revisions, *Sodom* transforms heroic

drama into satire. *Sodom* satirizes its subject by depicting it in mock-heroic terms, much like Alexander Pope would do in *The Rape of the Lock*. Raymond-Jean Frontain argues that the play is best read in terms of Mikhail Bakhtin's theory of carnivalesque grotesque: "During carnival, Bakhtin claims, the world—and especially the body—is turned upside down as attention that is traditionally reserved for the head is transferred to the material bodily lower stratum, and the bodily acts most subject to the rules of social decorum—eating, drinking, elimination, and copulation—are performed publicly and with gusto."¹² *Sodom* turns the world of heroic drama—which valorizes war and unconsummated, platonic love—upside down. Rejecting the ideal for the material, *Sodom* comically valorizes Bolloxinian's sexual code of "honor": in this carnivalesque world, sexual indulgence is virtue; prudishness is abjected. This reversal recasts the rhetoric of heroic drama as little more than sex talk. The casting of a sodomitical monarch as a heroic protagonist is obviously meant to "make us laugh." While this fantasy of sexual hedonism is potentially hilarious in its implausibility, it is, as we have seen, also the worst nightmare of men like Pepys, John Milton, and Thomas Shadwell, all of whom feared that this was exactly what the libertines in Charles II's court were working toward.

Thus, like the poems studied by Weil, *Sodom* should be read on two levels. At one level, the play is a political satire, criticizing Charles II, his regime, and the libertines in his court. According to Weil, the poetical satires of Charles's reign argue "that the king refused to stand up militarily against the burgeoning power of Louis XIV . . . , that the country was being bankrupted because Charles spent extravagantly on his mistresses, that the king cared more for his pleasure than for the business of state." *Sodom* makes a similar critique. The first of these criticisms is echoed in scene B5, in which Bolloxinian describes his ties to the King of Gomorrah with three of his advisers:

- Tewly.* My Leige, a stranger at yo[ur] royall Gate
Does from Gomorrah w[ith] a message waite,
Who forty striplings does on Camells bring.
- Bolloxinian.* Oh Tis a p[re]sent from our Brother King.
Conduct him in. Twas very kindly done
Of Bro[ther] Tarsehole—this has savd my sonne.
I love strange flesh: a mans Pr[ick] cannot stand
Within the limits of his owne Comand,
And I have fuckt and buggerd all [the] land.
- Borastus.* Pleasure should stri[v]e as much in tyme of peace
As power in tyme of war doth to increase.

Buggeranthus. The end of warre is to make pease at last,
Where pleasure payes for all the trouble past. (99–111)

Like the poetic satires' vision of Charles, Bolloxinian prefers pleasure to the affairs of state. This conversation takes place just after the king and his advisers discuss the current state of the army, which has turned to bugging one another. Elias notes that the juxtaposition of the king's conversation concerning the army with the arrival of the king of Gomorrah's present for his "brother King" "is parallel to the pattern Marvell and others read into events of 1673." As he relates,

In June, John Evelyn visited the "formidable camp on Blackheath, raised to invade Holland; or, as other suspected, for another design," which was, according to Marvell, the advancement of "the French government" and "the Irish religion." By the end of the year, Du Moulin's pamphlet *England's Appeal from the Private Cabal at White-Hall* stirred suspicions about Charles's secret entanglements with "our Brother King" of France, as Louis XIV was styled in diplomatic correspondence.¹³

Sodom alludes to these entanglements and Charles's acceptance of gifts from Louis to emphasize the threat from France that Charles continued to ignore in favor of his pursuit of sexual pleasure.

This scene also alludes to the perceived voraciousness of Charles's sexual appetite. Bolloxinian admits that King Tarsehole's gift of forty young men "has savd my sonne." In other words, the king craves for new sexual partners to such an extent that even his son is in danger of being the object of his lust. This statement parallels contemporary satires that faulted Charles for his sexual excesses. Like Charles, the king of Sodom initially has a mistress, Fuckadilla, and speaks throughout the play of numerous erotic conquests and sexual partners. Like other poetic satires of the period, *Sodom* uses Charles's own rhetoric justifying his regime against the government. As Weil points out, "Where Charles presented himself as an amorous husband to the nation, satirists could treat him as its rapist or as an adulterous husband ignoring his marriage vows." The idea that the king might lust after his own children, she continues, certainly took the "fantasy that Charles had slept or wanted to sleep with every woman in the nation" as "an emblem of his overweening power." Furthermore, the play's opening scene implicates not only the king in the play's satire but his libertine advisers as well. These libertines not only encourage their monarch to engage in sodomy but seduce him into it. As Elias points out, the play agrees with contemporary pictures "of Charles as the

dupe of his advisers" and "fitfully develops the expected consequences of royal laxness."¹⁴

At first glance, it may seem contradictory that an anti-libertine play would employ pornographic imagery and situations, since the graphic nature of these images would seem to contradict principles of strict morality. While Elias argues that this anti-libertine argument is consistent with the Country Party's logic, Weil maintains that the reasons for using pornography to depict the king's potential tyranny and Catholicism needs explanation. As we saw in chapter 2, however, the move to guarantee religious freedom was closely associated with libertinism more generally and Buckingham's political goals in particular. The play's satire of indulgence is therefore not only a critique of Charles II, but also of libertinism more broadly. Indeed, sodomy in the play is as much a metonymy for libertinism as it is a metaphor for Catholicism. *Sodom* imagines the libertine invested with all the power of absolute monarchy, "liberating" his subjects to pursue all of the sexual activities they can imagine, however immoral and corrupt many thought those acts were. Indeed, libertinism's espousal of religious toleration was often tied to radical elements of the Country Party itself. As Weil concludes,

the lines between court and country, the regime and its opponents, and sexual puritanism and sexual libertinism were more hazy and complicated than the traditional stereotypes suggest.

Nonetheless, the notion that a sexually puritanical opposition confronted a libertine court is true in one sense. Even where the moral or erotic directions of political poems are ambiguous, the poems always associate the king himself with sexual libertinism, and no attempt is made to use sexual libertinism as the basis for an antiabsolutist political stance.

Libertinism's association with absolutism came from Charles's tactics in attempting to achieve toleration—his indulgence, which Buckingham supported, dispensed with existing parliamentary laws. As Elias explains, "If the king could employ his prerogative authority in this high-handed way, so his opponents reasoned, there was nothing to prevent him from making himself an absolute monarch like Louis XIV."¹⁵ Libertinism in *Sodom* is therefore implicated in absolutism despite some libertines' (including Buckingham's) actual opposition to Catholicism and tyranny.

As the play's explicit representations of libertine debauchery suggest, on another level the play works as pornography. Love argues that *Sodom* "sets out to say that all physical expressions of sexual desire

are hilarious.” This reading obviously and inaccurately minimizes the play’s pornographic potential. Like other contemporaneous political satires, *Sodom* uses the prurient to make its political argument: the play attempts to horrify its readers by graphically depicting the depravities of the court. As Weil maintains, the potential side effect of this methodology is to “offer the reader the pleasures of pornography.” Similar to Oldham’s “Sardanapalus,” which Weil studies in her essay, *Sodom* includes “a quasirealistic representation of sexual acts and has many of the elements that we would recognize in modern pornography: the huge and magnificent penises, the women literally dying to be penetrated, and, importantly, the equation of sex with power over and violence against women.” *Sodom* incorporates many of the tropes of modern pornography: “lesbian” sex scenes, the sexual education of the male virgin by a female teacher, and several depictions of heterosexual sex. When Bolloxinian turns to sodomy for sexual release, his queen is forced to rely on her maids of honor to help her masturbate, an activity that requires ever larger dildoes to satisfy her desire. Prince Prickett, Bolloxinian’s son, is introduced to the joys of sex by his sister, Swivia, and a maid of honor, Cunticula. Several of the scenes begin with sexual vignettes, including a dance in which six naked men and six naked women play with one another’s genitals before engaging in sexual relations. The women of *Sodom* are dying to be penetrated. Indeed, Cuntigratia literally dies by masturbating herself to death in an attempt to satisfy her desire, an impossibility now that the men of the play are bugging each other. And finally, like many examples of modern pornography, *Sodom* can be read as a misogynist fantasy of male power over women. Weber, as we have seen, analyzes the play’s equation of sex with power over women in his reading of *Sodom*, which argues that the play “fashions its obscenity quite directly as an attack on women, an integral part of its attempt not simply to marginalize but to exile, erase, and annihilate the female body.”¹⁶ Although the playwright might have intended his work to have been read primarily as a political text, the method he used to make his political critique nevertheless potentially allows his readers to read the text as pornography.

By combining political satire with pornographic description, the writer of *Sodom* hopes to undermine the apparent political and cultural prominence of the libertines in Charles II’s court. The myth of Sodom, and its attendant act of sodomy, is a particularly common site upon which the political and the pornographic cross during the seventeenth century. One of the weaknesses of Elias’s and Weber’s arguments is their failure to adequately historicize this term: for Elias the word simply

means “buggery,” and Weber equates “sodomy” with both buggery and the modern concept of homosexuality.¹⁷ Both of these usages of the term are too reductive and do not provide these otherwise excellent essays with an adequate explanation for why the play employs sodomy as a metaphor for absolutist political power. As Alan Bray explains, while the labels “sodomite” and “bugger” were the only words, in general use before the eighteenth century, that were even remotely equivalent to today’s “homosexual,” “neither was synonymous with homosexuality alone.” Bray notes that “buggery” could mean bestiality as well as sex between men, and “sodomy” was a concept at least as broad: ‘Sodomitical villainies with men and beasts’ was how one writer put it in 1688. It could also be a heterosexual sin. In 1641 the authorities in the Massachusetts Bay colony considered a case of heterosexual relations with under-age girls and, according to Governor Winthrop, ‘it was a great question what kind . . . this sin was, whether sodomy or rape or etc.’ ” “Sodom” and “Little Sodom” were also the names of two brothels in London where men could hire women during the Restoration period. Because of the looseness of sodomy’s definition, says Bray, it was “often associated with other sexual sins; the one was all too apt, it was thought, to lead to the other.” The general consensus in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries was that rape, adultery, incest, and even excessive drinking could lead to male–male anal sex. As Bray concludes, the underlying notion behind the words “sodomy” and “buggery” was thus larger than sex between men. This broader notion was debauchery. While, as Bray points out, “debauchery was a temptation to which all, in principle at least, were subject,”¹⁸ debauchery was especially seen as the libertine’s catch word. It made sense, therefore, to follow the logical progression of the libertine’s reputation as a rapist, adulterer, and drunkard to the libertine as sodomite. This also makes sense of the fact that, while *Sodom* frequently depicts discussions of sex between men, the play never actually presents two men engaging in sex. To represent any form of debauchery was, according to this logic, to represent, or at least to evoke, sodomy. Libertines were by definition, then, sodomites. As sodomites, these men were not only threats to the nation’s sexual order, but to its political order as well. By satirizing their goal of liberating individuals to follow their own consciences as the most extreme form of sexual perversion, *Sodom* works to annihilate their influence at court and erase them from the conversations of God-fearing men and women throughout England. As we have seen, such criticism had largely achieved its goal of excluding the libertines from political power by the mid-1670s. It had not, however, met with equal success in the cultural sphere.

EXCLUDING LIBERTINE PERFORMANCE

Through the deployment of sexually graphic images, *Sodom* farcically and moralistically envisions what might have happened to England had the libertines successfully transformed the nation into a new Sodom. At the instigation of his advisers, the king liberates his subjects to pursue whatever sexual acts bring them pleasure. Eventually, Sodom's sins catch up with its citizens: Cuntigratia, the queen, masturbates herself to death, many of the citizens contract venereal disease, and, when the gods decide to punish Sodom for its sins by raining down fire and brimstone, Bolloxinian retires to a cave with his favorite catamite. This element of the play therefore suggests that England is better off avoiding the libertine way of life. Bolloxinian's proclamation that "My laws shall Act more pleasures than Comand, / And with my Prick I'll go[v]erne all the land" (1.7–8) becomes his credo by the fifth scene: "Pleasure should stri[v]e as much in tyme of peace / As power in tyme of war doth to increase" (B5.108–109). Bolloxinian demonstrates his commitment to this creed in the final scene when first Flux, the court physician, and then heaven demands that he turn away from sodomy and return to monogamous relations with his wife, Cuntigratia. The king refuses both demands. First, Flux insists that the king change his ways:

To love & nature all their rights restore:
 ffuck women & lett Bugg'ry be no more.
 Itt does that Propogable end destroy
 Which nature gave w[ith] pleasure t'enjoy.
 Please her, & sheel be kind: if yo[u] displeas[e],
 Shee turnes into Corrupcon & disease. (B7.43–48)

Flux serves as the voice of political duty in this scene, arguing that Bolloxinian must give up his private vices for the good of the nation. Importantly, Flux, and not the king, frames the argument as one of natural sexuality, claiming that nature has made vaginal intercourse pleasurable so that the species would procreate. According to him, sodomy is unnatural and is the cause of the nation's sexual ills, which include venereal disease, sore genitals and anuses, and impotence (B7.24–29). When Bolloxinian disregards Flux's advice, the ghost of Cuntigratia appears to warn her husband of his impending death, followed by the fire and brimstone of hell. This fire is exactly what many Londoners imagined would happen to the court and the libertine wits if they continued to indulge in their libertine exploits.

This rejection of libertinism in *Sodom* could be read in terms of what scholars have seen as the English culture's movement toward a new vision of gender and sexuality. Libertine performances, real, imagined, and staged, created an image of what a libertine was in the minds of their observers through the proliferation of gossip detailing the supposed acts of the libertine circle and the staging of plays that built upon this gossip as a means of acquiring a larger audience. Libertine performances therefore served a performative function: through "a regularized and constrained repetition of norms," to borrow Judith Butler's words, the libertine subject was created. According to Butler, performativity is "a ritualized production, a ritual reiterated under and through constraint, under and through the force of prohibition and taboo, with the threat of ostracism and even death controlling and compelling the shape of the production."¹⁹ The wits' performance of the libertine acts radically challenged England's prohibitions against sexual excess, marital infidelity, and sodomitical behavior.²⁰ Through the "ritualized production" of gossip and the theater, by which the wits attempted to subvert the laws, the traditions, and the mores of their day, libertine performance became more than just a series of acts engaged in by a circle of aristocratic hooligans. Rather, libertinism became a "sexed position," an identity formed and shaped by its culture's regulation of sexual desire. According to Butler, "'sexed positions' are not localities but, rather, citational practices instituted within a juridical domain."²¹ Through the wits' dramatic, rumored, and actual practices, the "libertine" became an identity with which men like Rochester, Sedley, Etherege, Wycherley, and Buckingham could give themselves a name in public discourse. Just as theatrical performances cite real-life activities for their authorization in W. B. Worthen's vision of drama, the libertines cited the reiterated libertine acts described in gossip and plays as the basis for their libertine identities. Rochester was a libertine, in other words, because he repeatedly performed the acts associated with the libertine identity created, in part, by the repeated acts that Rochester and his friends performed.

Many elements of English society feared and condemned this libertine persona as immoral, degenerate, and subversive. These critics therefore increasingly worked to isolate the libertine wits at court by defining these men as sodomites. The cultural process of defining the libertines as sodomites, one expression of which was *Sodom*, stands at a crucial juncture in the transition from the seventeenth-century sexual system, based on the binary of eroticized masculine friendship and politicized sodomy described by Bray, to a system that, at least

rhetorically, desexualized male homosociality and depoliticized male homosexuality examined by Haggerty. Butler argues that modern heterosexually “sexed positions are themselves secured through the repudiation and abjection of homosexuality and the assumption of a normative heterosexuality.” The mechanism of “repudiation and abjection” used to shape heterosexual and homosexual roles in twentieth-century society is the same process by which England excluded the libertine performances from the canon of accepted sexual practices in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Beginning in the 1670s, libertinism was increasingly placed “in the domain of the culturally impossible, the domain of the imaginary, which on occasion contests the symbolic, but which is finally rendered illegitimate through the force of law.” Many of the acts associated with libertinism—rape, adultery, sodomy, incest, and so on—were explicitly outlawed in the seventeenth century. As Bray explains, these laws were based on the period’s “principle of order behind the apparent multiplicity of creation.”²² Anything that threatened this order was relegated to the sphere of the illegal.

Sodomy broadly defined was certainly listed in the class of activities that threatened to dissolve civil order. As Jonathan Goldberg writes,

although sodomy is, as a sexual act, anything that threatens alliance—any sexual act, that is, that does not promote the aim of married procreative sex (anal intercourse, fellatio, masturbation, bestiality—any of these may fall under the label of sodomy in various early legal codifications and learned discourses), and while sodomy involves therefore acts that men might perform with men, women with women (a possibility rarely envisioned), men and women with each other, and anyone with a goat, a pig, or a horse, these acts—or accusations of their performance—emerge into visibility only when those who are said to have done them also can be called traitors, heretics, or the like, at the very least, disturbers of the social order that alliance—marriage arrangements—maintained.²³

As we have seen throughout this book, the libertine tricksters were certainly “disturbers of the social order,” especially marriage. They could also easily be labeled traitors and heretics. The rendering of the libertine as “culturally impossible” and illegitimate can be seen in such texts as Pepys’s *Diary*, Milton’s *Paradise Lost*, and Shadwell’s *The Libertine*, discussed previously. Another illustration of this repudiation of the libertine performances can be found in *Sodom*. Through its depiction of the libertine’s punishment by heaven, *Sodom* abjects the libertines like Rochester, Buckingham, Sedley, Etherege, and

Wycherley and participates in a larger cultural process of excluding these men from the domain of the culturally possible by suggesting that the same fate awaits anyone else who participates in similar activities.

Through this cultural process of exclusion, libertinism had an oppositional affect on England's notions of gender and sexuality. Randolph Trumbach and Michael McKeon argue that, as English society increasingly accepted the rhetoric of individual merit and virtue, as opposed to natural, hereditary worth, it also restructured its notion of gender identities, making them more strictly defined than they had previously been. With this restructuring, more and more members of English society accepted the idea that gender behavior was an expression of one's biological sex: men naturally exhibit masculine characteristics and women display essentially feminine ones. As Trumbach maintains, "The modern gender role for men presumed that most men desired women exclusively and that all masculine behavior flowed from such desire." This ordering of gender and sexual identities also began to account for those members of the society who did not follow this pattern. Men who desired other men were increasingly viewed as possessing feminine gender characteristics. The libertines were a part of an older culture that did not subscribe to this equation of gender and sexual identity. Instead, they embraced a view of life that combined masculinity with sex between males by depicting the libertine as a man whose erotic power was such that he could seduce both young women and men. As Trumbach explains,

In this world the love of boys certainly did not exclude the love of women; but the love of boys was seen as the most extreme act of sexual libertinism; and it was often associated, as well, with religious skepticism, and even republican politics. It is as though sodomy were so extreme a denial of the Christian expectation that all sexual acts ought to occur in marriage and have the potential of procreation, that those who indulged in it were likely also to break through all other conventions in politics and religion. The unconventionality of that minority of rakes who were sodomitical was therefore frightening to society at large; but they were not held in contempt. It was, instead, that they were secretly held in awe for the extremity of their masculine self-assertion, since they triumphed over male and female alike.²⁴

Throughout the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries, English society began to construct a new version of the normative masculine desire by excluding from it the erotic desire for other men. *Sodom* can be read as an early proponent of this exclusion. The voice of the law in *Sodom* rejects sodomy between men as a viable expression of sexual pleasure as part of its rejection of the libertine influence and

political power. Scholars have suggested that Bolloxinian is a figure of Charles II.²⁵ The play constructs Bolloxinian as a *libertine* monarch and associates him with the most extreme elements of his courtiers' libertine performances. As *The Secret History of the Reigns of K. Charles II and K. James II* would later accuse, "Charles 'set himself by his persuasion and influence to withdraw both men and women from the laws of nature and morality, and to pollute and infect the people with all manner of debauchery and wickedness,' in order to 'weaken and make soft the military temper of the people by debauchery and effeminacy, which generally go hand in hand together.'" ²⁶ Along with its potential critique of Charles II, therefore, the play rejects libertinism as it had come to be imagined in the eyes of the English citizens, a series of outrageous performances that transgressed every known law and sexual prohibition, including that against sodomy, in the name of pleasure.

This rejection of libertinism was not unproblematic, however. Drawing upon Michel Foucault's work in *The History of Sexuality*, Butler reminds us that, "in the process of articulating and elaborating the prohibition, the law provides *the discursive occasion* for a resistance, a resignification, and potential self-subversion of that law." In other words, prohibitions invite their own transgressions. Indeed, says Butler, "the prohibitive law runs the risk of eroticizing the very practices that come under scrutiny of the law. The enumeration of prohibited practices not only brings such practices into a public, discursive domain, but it thereby produces them as potential erotic enterprises and so invests erotically in those practices, even if in a negative mode."²⁷ *Sodom* demonstrates this point and illustrates that the pornographic language with which critics condemned the libertine performances was the same language that maintained libertinism's virulently subversive attraction for some readers. As I noted earlier, one of the satiric techniques that Weil identifies in Restoration poetry is to falsely praise the libertine sexuality. While *Sodom's* moralistic message is ultimately conservative, the play's pornographic depiction of libertine excess contains a counterargument to this conservatism. While this counterargument is clearly meant as a false celebration of sodomy, the play runs the risk of eroticizing anal sex through Bolloxinian's description of the joys of sex with other men. In act 3, the king explains why he has turned exclusively to sodomy:

Since I ha[v]e bugger[e]d humane arse, I find
Pintle to Cunt is not soe much inclin[e]d.

By oft formenting, C[un]t so big does swell
That Pintle works like Clappers in a Bell,

All Vacuum, no grasping fflesh does glide
 Or hug the brawny muscles of his side,
 Tickling the ner[v]es, the prepuce or glan[s],
 Which all mankind w[ith] such delights intrance. (B5.1–14)

According to Bolloxinian, vaginal sex cannot compare to the pleasures of anal intercourse because of the physical differences between the vagina and the anus and rectum. For this reason, the king dismisses Flux's later argument extolling the pleasure of sex with women. If pleasure shows us what is natural, asks Bolloxinian, then "What Act does love or nature Contradict?" (B7.35). Indeed, all pleasures are natural according to this philosophy. While many of *Sodom's* readers would probably find this question ridiculous, the potential exists for some readers to take this question seriously and to identify not with Flux's condemnation of libertine excess but with Bolloxinian's celebration of it.

Bolloxinian's question reflects the libertine philosophy of basing distinctions between good and evil on pleasure and pain as articulated in Rochester's "Satyr Against Reason and Mankind." As we saw in chapter 2, Rochester's poem argues that there are two kinds of reason, one that distinguishes good and evil from the senses—that is, what feels right is right—and that kills pleasure and denies appetite out of a misguided attempt to curry favor with God in the afterlife. Bolloxinian embraces the same epistemology as Rochester's satire: he argues that, if sodomy is more pleasurable than vaginal sex, then sodomy must be as natural a sexual activity as vaginal intercourse. Flux responds that heaven simply decrees that some things are wrong. When faced with the prospect of abandoning "my old beloved sin" (B7.49), Bolloxinian refuses to repent and declares, "Ile Reigne and bugg[er] still" (B7.56). Even when fire, brimstone, and a cloud of smoke appear, the monarch continues to adhere to his sexual preferences. "Leering on his catamite Pockennello," the king proclaims, "Let Heavens descend & sett [the] world on fire! / Wee to some darker Caverne will retire; / There on thy Bugger'd A[r]se I will Expire" (B7.83–85). Unlike Antony, Cleopatra, and Valentinian, Bolloxinian does not end the play in death. The king's survival at the end of the play amplifies the subversive voice in *Sodom*—a more explicit, violent death for Bolloxinian and his catamite would have further emphasized the play's anti-libertine message. This celebratory voice, however, argues that political duty, rightly conceived, should advocate individual conscience and should advance rather than retard sexual pleasure. By undermining the claims of those forces that argue that

Bolloxinian's pleasure is unnatural and by employing the light-hearted praise of anal sex between men, the play potentially subverts its own satiric aim, inadvertently maintaining libertinism as an erotic alternative to the prohibitive laws against extramarital and other forms of transgressive sex.

That anti-libertine texts could be read in ways adverse to their authors' original intention is illustrated by another Oldham poem included in *Poems on Several Occasions*. Most commonly known as "The Satire against Virtue," Oldham's "Satyr" is a Pindaric Ode spoken in the voice of "a Court Hector" who "Curses" all the "virtuous Fools, / Who think to fetter Free-born Souls, / And tie 'em up to dull Mortality, and Rules" (1–3). As James Zigerell explains, Oldham's poem is part of a long tradition that turns "the universe of moral principles upside down" in order to teach "profound and memorable moral lessons." Like later works by Swift and Fielding, "the carefully organized argument [of Oldham's poem] permits a reader to accept for the moment what is condemned by any right-thinking person." Or, as Raman Selden puts it, "The 'Ode' is a paradoxical encomium, in which the speaker adopts the stance of a committed sinner who inverts the history of ethical exempla, damning the virtuous (Aristotle, Brutus, Socrates) to praise the vicious (Herostratus, Nero, Guy Fawkes, Cain)."²⁸ The speaker, for example, argues that vice should be performed with grace:

None, but dull unbred Fools, discredit Vice,
Who act their Wickedness with an ill Grace;
Such their Profession scandalize,
And justly forfeit all that Praise,
All that Esteem, that Credit, and Applause,
Which we by our wise Menage from a Sin can raise:
A true and brave Transgressor ought
To sin with the same Height of Spirit Caesar fought.²⁹

Selden analyzes the ways in which such passages mimic not only Rochester's themes but his style as well in order to make his critique of libertinism. Because of its close mimicry of the libertine rhetoric, it was not immediately obvious to some readers that this critique was Oldham's aim. Wood, for example, thought the poem was among "the mad and ranting and debauched specimens of poetry of this author Oldham."³⁰ Another poet even penned an angry reply to what he saw as Oldham's immorality in praising vice. As a result of these readings, when Oldham published the authoritative edition of his work in 1682—the poem had first appeared in a pirated edition in

1679—he repudiated the pirated version's title, “A Satire against Virtue,” and published an “Apology for the foregoing Ode,” in which he makes clear the original satire's ironic intention “not to Flatter Vice, but to Traduce.”³¹ This satire's ironic use of the libertine rhetoric to condemn the libertine performances allowed readers to read the poem's intent as actually supporting those performances. Once the text was published, Oldham could no longer control how readers interpreted his work.

The same potential exists with the text of *Sodom*. Indeed, not all readers understood it as a critique of the obscene acts it describes. Oldham's “Upon the Author of the Play call'd *Sodom*,” for example, excoriates *Sodom* and its author for its “foul descriptions . . . Sunk quite below the reach of Infamy” (14–15).³² The poem's distaste for the sexual acts portrayed in this closet drama is clear: Oldham uses invective, gender inversion, and scatological imagery to associate the play's author with sodomy, arguing ultimately that the act of writing the play is the same as the act of bugging another male. An extended curse on the “abandon'd Miscreant” (1) who wrote this “Disgrace to Libels” (12), Oldham's diatribe first asserts that *Sodom*'s author is simply a bad writer who lacks “Wit” (17) and is a “Weak feeble strainer, at meer Ribaldry” (18) and then argues that the paper the play was written on is no different than the paper the author's muse would use to absorb her menstrual discharge. Oldham then feminizes the playwright: “Sure Nature made, or meant at least t' have don't, / Thy Tongue a Clytoris, thy Mouth a C[un]t” (29–30). This play, writes Oldham, is such an offense toward nature that a “Dildoe” should “gag” the playwright's vaginal mouth “and make't for ever dumb” (31–32). The poem concludes by imagining how the closet drama will be used: “Bawds” will quote from it (38), apprentices will use it as an “Incentive” when they cannot achieve an erection while visiting whores (41), and porters will use it to wipe their “Fundament . . . when they shite” (50–51). As a result of this latter use, maintains Oldham, the book “it self [will] turn Sodomite” as it rubs against men's anuses (42). The author of this play is therefore a “Vile Sor” (21) who spreads moral contagion and an intellectual form of sexually transmitted diseases by luring morally weak men to read this sodomitical play. Ironically, Oldham made a career out of the satiric use of sexually graphic language or shockingly libertine rhetoric to critique the immorality of his day: poems as “A Satire Against Virtue” and “Sardanapalus,” to cite two examples, pretend to celebrate positions that the poet actually rejects. It is therefore surprising that Oldham is unable to read correctly the satiric aim of *Sodom*,

but this example makes clear that, if someone who shared the play's ideology could fail to understand its social and political goals, then it should not be surprising that other readers might embrace the pornographic pleasures this text censors.

While its pornographic scenes of debauchery are meant by the writer as a critique of the libertines in Charles II's court, the text's language in describing the acts it purports to condemn could potentially be read as crossing the line into celebration. Like Oldham's "A Satire against Virtue," *Sodom* ironically and hyperbolically borrows much of the language and imagery of the libertine performances to associate libertine radicalism with sexual deviancy. While the play's author and other similar critics of libertinism might have succeeded in minimizing the libertine performers' influence at court by portraying them as insatiable sexual monsters, incestuous sodomites who promote bestiality, adultery, and masturbation, this strategy had the unforeseen effect of guaranteeing libertinism's cultural vitality even after the libertine circle in Charles II's court had disintegrated. Despite the conservative aspect of its message, *Sodom* confirms that libertinism espouses a liberatory view of sex, one that expanded the cultural landscape of possible sexual permutations in the 1670s London. Many of these permutations were anathema to the morals and conventions of late seventeenth-century English society, as we saw in the writings of Pepys and Milton, but the same texts that prohibit their expression ironically maintain their continued presence in English literature and society. In order to demonize libertinism as "culturally impossible," proponents of monogamous marriage between husband and wife as the sole expression of sexual desire ironically had to evoke libertinism first and then demonize it in order to ban it from polite society.

Works like *Sodom* effectively worked to minimize its political influence in the 1670s and 1680s. For some thirty years after Rochester's death, however, the libertine performances continued to help shape the direction of English theater. Such plays as Nathaniel Lee's *The Princess of Clèves* (1682), Thomas Southerne's *Sir Anthony Love; or, The Rambling Lady* (1690), Colley Cibber's *Love's Last Shift; or, The Fool in Fashion* (1696), John Vanbrugh's *The Relapse; or Virtue in Danger, Being the Sequel of Fool in Fashion* (1696), and William Congreve's *The Way of the World* (1700), just to name a handful, owe much to the libertine drama of the 1670s for their characters, plots, and themes. Trumbach and McKeon argue that England moved away from defining normative sexuality against libertinism, defining it instead against sodomy, more narrowly defined as anal sex between men. Where sodomy in the Restoration had included a number of

widely divergent sexual acts performed by just about anyone, by the early eighteenth century its definition had become more narrow, and sodomites “were presented as members of a third gender who were effeminate and exclusively interested in other males” as sexual partners. As the figure of the depoliticized sodomite loomed larger in the English imagination, the libertinism of the Rochester circle was increasingly defined in terms of heterosexual rape. According to Trumbach, “Rochester’s bisexual sodomy . . . could no longer be used as the supreme example of license; it had come instead to be seen as incompatible with a libertine’s driving interest in women.”³³ Eighteenth-century libertines, such as Samuel Richardson’s Lovelace and Mr. B and Fanny Burney’s Sir Clement Willoughby, are typically depicted not as sodomites but as men who cannot control their lust for women, leading them to frequent brothels, to seduce an infinite line of women, and to rape honorable women who refuse their advances.

While *Sodom*’s depiction of libertine sodomy had made libertine debauchery potentially more erotic than its author had intended, texts in the eighteenth century more effectively eliminated both sodomy and attractiveness from the libertine ethos by casting Rochester in particular and libertines in general in more clearly heterosexual but less erotic terms, ones that depicted these rakes as heterosexuals gone wrong—as rapists, corruptors of virgins, and profligates unable to produce legitimate heirs. This transformation of Rochester and libertinism is demonstrated by *The School of Venus, Or, Cupid restor’d to Sight; Being A History of Cuckolds And Cuckold-makers, Contain’d in an Account of the Secret Amours and pleasant Intrigues of our British Kings, Noblemen, and others; with the most incomparable Beauties, and famous Jilts*, which was published in 1716. This collection of bawdy tales contained an account of Rochester’s “affair” with a country lass, Madam Clark. Having fallen in love with her, Rochester pursues Clark’s love, but when she refuses to satisfy his desire, “he began to use Violence.” When Clark’s grandmother hears her scream, she runs upstairs to her granddaughter’s bedroom, “where finding a Tryal of Skill betwixt the Earl and the young Gentlewoman, and being one that lov’d to see Generation Work go forward, she piously gave an helping Hand, by holding her Legs ’til his Lordship had robb’d her of that Jewel which never could be retriev’d again.”³⁴ Libertinism thus continued to be evoked in the eighteenth century, but its connotations changed. No longer the sodomitical hedonists of Rochester’s generation, eighteenth-century libertines were identified either with insatiable sexual hunger, as in Richardson’s novels, rapists who seek to exert power over any woman who comes within their grasp, or, as in

the case of Burney's *Evelina*, with relatively comic sexuality, strawmen whose challenge to normative sexuality is purely pro forma. As the actual libertines faded into history, eighteenth-century writers were able to reconstruct libertinism to suit their ideological purposes and, as a result of this reconstruction, to exclude libertine performances from the socially acceptable much more effectively than the pornographic political satires of the late seventeenth century, which could not control their readers' responses to the acts their works described. Seventeenth-century satirists effectively minimized libertine political influence by associating them with political and social disorder, but eighteenth-century writers effectively limited the libertine's cultural power, his potential ability to open up new sexual possibilities, by demonstrating either how abusive the rake's erotic power could be toward women or how easily the rake could be heterosexualized, brought back into the fold of normative sexuality through the love of a good woman.

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CHAPTER 7



CONCLUSION

The libertine wits in the court of Charles II failed to achieve political influence in large part because of their critics' success in associating them with social disorder at a time when such disorder was a threat to the stability of the monarchy. As we have seen, their exclusion from politics did not happen over night; rather, it took the better part of a decade to transform men such as Buckingham, Sedley, and Rochester from political insiders with immediate access to the king into political pariahs banished from court and the king's presence throughout the late 1670s. By the time Charles had weathered the exclusion crisis in 1681, the libertines' circle no longer existed. Even so, their exploits immediately became the stuff of legends. The combination of their dramatic legacies with accounts of the libertines' historical performances of sexual excess made their presence in the 1670s a spectacular moment in English cultural history. As John Harold Wilson reminds us,

There were other rakes in the eighteenth century and after; there were even some who combined poetry with the life of pleasure. But the unusual combination of circumstances which produced the Court Wits of the Restoration—a closely knit, aristocratic society, a violent reaction against enforced morality, a cynical *carpe diem* philosophy, and a monarch who, himself a Wit, valued and protected his witty companions—has never been duplicated.¹

My study has argued that foremost among “the unusual combination of circumstances” that made the wits' moment so spectacular was their construction of libertinism as a series of performative acts that embraced a radical political and social agenda. As I have argued throughout this book, libertines such as Buckingham, Rochester,

Etherege, Wycherley, and Sedley were public performers of typically secret pursuits. They delighted in bringing the activities of their bedrooms onto the public stage, both literally and metaphorically. Etherege and Wycherley rose to fame by staging witty libertine plays. Buckingham, Sedley, and Rochester initially gained their notoriety by entertaining Charles II and his court with tales of their drunken exploits and sexual conquests. Their every action became the subject of conversation in the alehouses, taverns, and coffee shops of London and the drawing rooms and dining halls of the countryside. While these men relied on their unsavory reputations to gain political influence and economic stability, they were also skeptical of public institutions because they saw the government, the church, and the family as inhibitors of their pleasures and performances. Writing for the public theater was one way these libertines fought against these institutions. Their plays suggest that these men initially sought power and influence as vehicles for guaranteeing the hedonistic indulgence of their various desires, but eventually abandoned this project when it became clear that the public's response to their activities would only serve as a barrier to the satisfaction of those desires.

By the advent of the exclusion crisis in 1678, the libertine circle was fragmented and none of its members were major players in the events that insured that the Catholic James, duke of York, would inherit the throne. The splintering of the libertine circle into two halves reflects a similar division that had occurred throughout England by the late 1670s. As historians note, fractures in the Restoration settlement began almost immediately after Charles returned to England. As J. R. Jones writes, "It is a cliché to conclude that the Restoration failed to restore national unity, social and religious harmony and political stability." Jones points to a number of factors that contributed to the continuing cultural discord, including the libertinism at court:

The euphoria of April and May 1660 did not last for long. Divisions quickly reappeared in society, and the early revival of the old pre-war split between Court and County was exacerbated by the religious differences caused by the reimposition of religious uniformity in 1661–2. Cynicism was bred by the short-sighted and irresponsible behaviour of Charles, his courtiers and most ministers; their greed for money and places, their reckless extravagance and exhibitionist behaviour, could be maintained only at the expense of the public. Commonwealth hypocrites had apparently been succeeded by frivolous rakes. Much more fundamentally the King, who in 1660 had been careful to establish his credentials as a constitutional ruler, gave serious cause as early as 1662 for fears and suspicions that he intended to follow

absolutist policies, and that he favoured Catholicism. These suspicions were never entirely to disappear during the period.

As Susan Owen points out, “In the 1670s such tenuous consensus as existed was placed under enormous strain, finally breaking down.”² In part because of the court’s association with “frivolous rakes,” pressures on Charles to distance himself from the libertines in his court increased as political stability more generally grew during the 1670s.

The political instability that began in the early 1660s continued to grow until it erupted in the exclusion crisis of the late 1670s. This crisis revolved around issues of royal prerogative, religious toleration, arbitrary government, Parliamentary independence, and monarchical succession. As a result of the continuing contest over these issues, a significant portion of Parliament attempted to exclude the Catholic James, duke of York, from the throne. The exclusion debates demonstrated that political instability cut not along class lines but ideological ones. As Melinda Zook points out, “London’s political culture was not divided by class, popular and elite, but rather by party, Whig and Tory. These cultures divided vertically; London harbored a divided elite as well as a divided mob.” Historians continue to debate the origins and early nature of political parties in England, a debate that I cannot discuss here. What is important about this scholarship for my purpose is to note the degree to which English culture was ideologically divided by the late 1670s, a point on which historians agree. R. Malcolm Smuts notes, for example, that “Whig and Tory . . . describe polarities of belief rather than structured parties” before 1681. Jonathan Scott agrees that the formation of parties reflects the period’s “ideological polarization”: “Party politics was nothing other than the institutionalisation of that polarity of belief that had been both the cause and the consequence of the troubles.” And finally, Tim Harris also emphasizes the exclusion crisis and the resulting political scene as the consequence of ideological conflict: “The [historical] sources not only tell us about deep political division in this society in the years 1681–1683 (and after), but they also reveal that people described each other and themselves as Whigs or Tories, that they recognized the existence of ideological and political polarization, and that many partisans existed who firmly identified their allegiance with one camp as opposed to another.” In sum,

The Exclusion Crisis exacerbated the divisions among courtiers and old cavaliers, and saw a larger division in the “political nation” which was both horizontal and vertical. On the one hand, the Tory assertion that

the royal cause had the support of “the better sort” had some basis in reality: the Whigs really did draw more support from the merchant citizen class and the lower classes in the city than the Tories did. On the other hand, if the Whigs enjoyed support among the nobility, the Tories could also mobilize support from below: the court, the country gentry, the lawyers, the citizens were all divided.³

By 1681, England was a divided nation nearly from top to bottom.

Such political division also existed in the theater among playwrights and their audiences. While “playwrights, like other Royalists, defended the traditional power-structure in an attempt to rehabilitate themselves and their culture” in the early 1660s, Nancy Klein Maguire maintains that the theaters no longer “support[ed] a consistent political line” by the late 1670s. Owen notes that theatrical audiences were also divided politically, though these audiences were “probably predominantly Tory.” According to Owen, however, Whig ideology in the theaters became more vigorous as the events of the exclusion crisis unfolded. The libertine wits were part of the wedge that drove the theater apart ideologically. As Smuts explains, after the early years of the Restoration, “court playwrights and poets had divided into rival factions. Some, including John Dryden, Poet Laureate after Davenant’s death in 1667, were allied to the Duke of York, while an anti-Yorkist group [materialized] around the Duke of Buckingham.”⁴ These alliances—and their opinions of the duke of York’s fitness as England’s future monarch—would form the core around which ideological polarization would galvanize during the exclusion crisis; however, these divisions also cut into the libertine circle itself as Buckingham, Rochester, and Sedley aligned themselves with the Whigs, and Etherege and Wycherley sympathized with the Tories. Thus, by 1680, nearly every aspect of English society and culture was polarized into political factions.

While the fragmentation of aristocratic society in England was in large measure due to specific political forces, including the Puritan revolution and government, the continuing anxieties concerning Charles II described above, and the exclusion crisis, this shift also reflected larger sociological changes throughout Europe. These changes accompanied a more general modification in power relations between the traditional members of the governing elite (the king, members of Parliament, and the aristocracy) and more recent additions (bankers, financiers, and merchants) to the power structure. Michel Foucault in *The History of Sexuality* theorizes such cultural changes throughout Europe during this period in terms of a shift in

the sovereign's right to decide life and death. According to Foucault, beginning in the seventeenth century this right started diminishing, as European monarchs were no longer invested with an absolute and unconditional sway over their subjects' lives. This change, says Foucault, was the result of an increasing accumulation of political power in European parliaments. The Civil War, the Restoration settlement, and the subsequent exclusion crisis are just three examples in English history that support Foucault's thesis. In each of these cases, Parliament contended with the monarch for political supremacy. As a result of such contests, says Foucault, rulers throughout Europe were increasingly forced to find alternative means of controlling their subjects.

In England, one of these alternatives can be seen in the theatrical qualities of Charles II's reign. As discussed in chapter 1, Charles initiated his use of theater as a means of arguing for Stuart ideology as soon as he was invited back to England. The exhumation and dismemberment of Cromwell's corpse at Tyburn was just one of the early spectacles that "went beyond showing people their 'folly' to aiming at an ultimate discrediting" of the Puritan regime.⁵ The government's use of theater quickly expanded to include the two days surrounding the king's coronation and annual pageants in London celebrating Lord Mayor's Day, which "offered an indispensable supplement to the pamphlets and plays in expressing official views to the public."⁶ Heroic drama also provided the government with a tool for controlling public opinion. There were, of course, limits to drama's effectiveness in controlling the population. As the populace became politically fractured, the theaters followed suit. By the advent of the crisis in the late 1670s, the theaters were hotbeds of political debate only moderately controlled by the government's ability to censor unwelcome ideas.

According to Foucault's thesis, this use of public spectacle and theater reflected a growing emphasis on the monarch's responsibility to ensure, to maintain, and to develop the vibrancy of the social body. Foucault uses this new emphasis on the monarch's role as national physician to his people to argue that this change in discourse was accompanied by a change in the ways European cultures discussed the body. As he explains,

The new procedures of power that were devised during the classical age and employed in the nineteenth century were what caused our societies to go from *a symbolics of blood* to *an analytics of sexuality*. Clearly, nothing was more on the side of the law, death, transgression, the symbolic,

and sovereignty than blood; just as sexuality was on the side of the norm, knowledge, life, meaning, the disciplines, and regulations.

This formulation can be recast into McKeon's terms of aristocratic and progressive ideologies. According to Foucault's schema, aristocratic ideology valued the "symbolics of blood" because ancestry, lineage, and honor were determined by one's bloodline and by one's willingness to shed and to risk one's blood. This value came under increasing critique as the belief in goodness of character replaced notions of innate honor. As society moved toward a middle-class work ethic heavily influenced by Puritanism, stress was laid on maintaining a healthy working population. Consequently, says Foucault, "mechanisms of power [began to be] addressed to the body, to life, to what causes it to proliferate, to what reinforces the species, its stamina, its ability to dominate, or its capacity for being used."⁷ The activities of the Society for the Reformation of Manners, which sought to eradicate prostitution and sodomitical subcultures, at the turn of the century are perhaps the first visible signs of the growing strength of progressive ideology in England.

This shift throughout Europe from a system of power relations based on absolutism and bloodlines to one based on social contract, parliamentary government, and sexual identities, to rephrase Foucault's idea, did not happen overnight. As Foucault points out, "While it is true that the analytics of sexuality and the symbolics of blood were grounded at first in two very distinct regimes of power, in actual fact the passage from one to the other did not come about . . . without overlappings, interactions, and echoes." One such overlapping in this transition from the aristocratic body's symbolism of blood to the bourgeois body's sexuality, says Foucault, was libertinism. While he examines the contemporaneity of the Marquis de Sade with this transition, his thesis is also applicable to the libertines in late-seventeenth-century England. As he writes, "Sade carried the exhaustive analysis of sex over into the mechanisms of the old power of sovereignty and endowed it with the ancient but fully maintained prestige of the blood."⁸ According to Foucault, Sade's combination of this new analysis of sex with the mechanisms of the old power system was effected through the libertine's drive toward representation:

the libertine is he who, while yielding to all the fantasies of desire and to each of its furies, can, but also must, illumine their slightest movement with a lucid and deliberately elucidated representation. There is a strict order governing the life of the libertine: every representation

must be immediately endowed with life in the living body of desire, every desire must be expressed in the pure light of a representative discourse.⁹

While the desires that Sade expressed included “the prestige of the blood” on a more literal level,¹⁰ Foucault’s description of the libertine as he who is driven to represent desire in discourse is also constitutive of libertinism in England. The libertines in Charles II’s court were compelled to represent their actions on stage as part of their effort to reshape Stuart ideology. Much like the trickster characters in many of their plays, these men hoped to use their scandalous activities to “challenge . . . the customs and beliefs that bind together [their] community.” As with these characters, the libertines’ energy to elucidate their fantasies and desires through theatrical representation was seen as “subversive until it [was] either brought back into the community or summarily expunged from it.”¹¹

Bringing libertine performances back into the community or expunging them from the list of acceptable social practices was not an easy task. Although Etherege and Wycherley argued in their final plays that the libertine must be integrated into society’s political and cultural institutions in order to survive financially, the libertine figure did not go into obscurity quietly. Indeed, the very processes that opponents of libertine performances used to exclude them from society maintained their cultural visibility and significance. While Robert Hume is certainly correct in asserting that “the sex comedies of Etherege and Wycherley were actually atypical [of Restoration drama] and . . . the vogue for such plays was quite brief,” the libertine fraternity’s influence on English political, theatrical, and social history should not be overlooked.¹² I have attempted to demonstrate throughout this book that the libertines in Charles’s court affected the direction of English politics during the 1670s. As a result of his association with these libertines, Charles’s own libertine activities became more visible to the public’s eye. As his regime came under pressure to ensure political stability, Charles was forced to distance himself from the wits’ excesses. As some members of the libertine circle turned to audiences outside the court for approval and political influence, their plays worked to change the dynamics between men and women, parents and children, husbands and wives. In order to continue participating in the cultural debates of their day, some of the libertine playwrights argued that their trickster activities had to be moderated and made to exist within the limits of social acceptability. Other libertine writers insisted that this moderation was impossible

and subsequently depicted the tragic end of libertine pleasure. By the denouement of the exclusion crisis in the early 1680s, the libertine circle was fractured beyond repair.

Although libertinism failed to become the dominant discourse of English culture, libertine performances continue to grace theatrical stages even centuries after their deaths. Their plays continue to be revived and their works remain among the most studied of Restoration literature. Many scholars agree that continuing interest in their poems and plays reflects our culture's sympathy with many of the components of libertine performance. In a society marked by continuing debates on feminism, homosexuality, and pornography, it is not surprising that the wits' discussions of politics, gender roles, and sexuality have elicited a consistent scholarly interest. John Adlard's 1974 statement on Rochester, that his mixture of sublime love with frank depictions of premature ejaculation, erotic fantasies, masturbation, and the use of dildoes "brings him into harmony with certain thinkers who are changing our lives, or at least provoking us, today," is equally true of his friends and our own time.¹³ Buckingham's use of public performance for political ends, Etherege and Wycherley's examination of sexual power in marital and familial relations, and Sedley's celebration of erotic love make their plays of continuing importance today. One example of the libertines' legacy in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries is Stephen Jeffreys's 1994 play and 2005 film, *The Libertine*, a postmodern retelling of many of the major events in Rochester's life in the 1670s. The play begins with a monologue delivered by the play's protagonist, a fictionalized version of Rochester:

Allow me to be frank at the commencement: you will not like me. No, I say you will not. The gentlemen will be envious and the ladies will be repelled. You will not like me now and you will like me a good deal less as we go on. Oh yes, I shall *do* things you will like. You will say "That was a noble impulse in him" or "He played a brave part there," but DO NOT WARM TO ME, it will not serve. When I become a BIT OF A CHARMER that is your danger sign for it prefaces the change into THE FULL REPTILE a few seconds later. What I require is not your *affection* but your *attention*. I must not be ignored or you will find me as troublesome a package of humanity as ever pissed into the Thames. Now. Ladies. An announcement. (*He looks around.*) I am up for it. All the time. That's not a boast. Or an opinion. It is bone hard medical fact. I put it around, d'y know? And you will watch me putting it around and sigh for it. Don't. It is a deal of trouble for you and you are better off watching and drawing your own conclusions from a distance than you would be if I got my tarse pointing up your petticoats. Gentlemen.

(*He looks around.*) Do not despair, I am up for that as well. When the mood is on me. And the same warning applies. Now, gents: if there be vizards in the house, jades, harlots (as how could there not be) leave them be for a moment. Still your cheesy erections till I have had my say. But later when you shag—and later you *will* shag, I shall expect it of you and I will know if you have let me down—I wish you to shag with my homuncular image rattling in your gonads. Feel how it was for me, how it is for me and ponder. “Was that shudder the same shudder he sensed? Did he know something more profound? Or is there some wall of wretchedness that we all batter with our heads at that shining, livelong moment.” That is it. That is my prologue, nothing in rhyme, certainly no protestations of modesty, you were not expecting that I trust. . . . I am John Wilmot, Second Earl of Rochester and I do not want you to like me.¹⁴

Rejecting the conventions of Restoration dramatic prologues, which tended to be written in verse and to emphasize the playwright’s hope that the audience will approve of his or her humble play, while mimicking seventeenth-century speech with such words as “tarse,” “vizards,” “jades,” and “harlots,” this fictionalized Rochester reconceives the seventeenth-century earl as a postmodern sexual hero. This Rochester has one goal in life, “put[ting] it around,” is aware that he is a character in a late-twentieth-century play, addresses the audience directly, and warns them not to confuse his charm with likeability. This Rochester demands his audience’s attention rather than their approbation and then takes it a step further by inviting these gentlemen and ladies to identify with him sexually, to imagine themselves *as him* whenever they go home and have sex later that night. No longer simply a historical figure, he tells them to feel “how it *is* for me” and then compare their own “wretchedness” with the insights he propounds throughout the play that follows this prologue. Rejecting “protestations of modesty,” this Rochester is an alpha male who inspires lust in all he meets, seduces women and men at will, uses them for his pleasure, and then moves on to the next sexual conquest.

Throughout its plot, the play returns to Rochester’s advice that the audience members resist liking him. The final allusion to this advice occurs in the play’s last monologue, also delivered by “Rochester.” After depicting Rochester’s final illness, the play has several of the other characters eulogize him. After these eulogies, Rochester appears on stage alone. As he relates,

When I poured away the last bottle of wine I saw the blood of Christ streaming onto the floor and it took all my effort not to throw myself

on my face and guzzle. But I desisted and my mind cleared and I made an inventory of my life and found much wanting: injuries to divers people: want to attention to my affairs: a lifetime of spitting in the face of God, and I knew I was to be cast down. I had long ago discarded the layer of formal politeness with which we negotiate the world, but now I had to wade through the slough of my licentiousness until I found level ground underfoot, a ground of true sensibility and love of Christ. Now I gaze upon a pinhead and see angels dancing. Do you like me now? Do you like me now? (84)

This Rochester repeats the same process of excluding libertine performances demanded by Restoration and eighteenth-century English culture. Just as Rochester's own society insisted on the rejection of libertine pleasures as a means of achieving sexual virtue, Jeffreys's *The Libertine* depicts its postmodern hero reexamining his life and discarding the same libertine trickster performances originated by the historical figure upon which this character is based. Audiences today, however, are perhaps likely to have a different answer to this character's final question than would Pepys, Milton, Evelyn, and others who expressed their abhorrence for Rochester's libertine deeds and admired his final reformation.

In this play, Rochester's conversion to Christianity is a betrayal of the "man" we have seen on stage throughout the play. The man who has been "as troublesome a package of humanity as ever pissed in the Thames" has suddenly become another Pepys, alone, delineating his sins, hoping for salvation. Rochester's opening remark that we will not like him is (arguably) proven true: the audience does not like this final proponent of "true sensibility and love of Christ." We have been entertained by the play's depiction of Rochester's subversive performances of libertine activities. We laugh as he attempts to stage a production of *Sodom*. We enjoy his romantic though nevertheless illicit love affair with Elizabeth Barry. We find his debauching of his new servant, the appropriately named Alcock, humorous and engaging rather than frightening and seriously immoral. Indeed, this play demonstrates that what makes libertine performance of continuing interest to us today is precisely its transgressive nature and subversion of attempts to abject the pursuit of pleasure. While this character attempts to exclude the "slough of licentiousness" in which he has lived from acceptable morality, his attempt ultimately fails. The play humanizes Rochester, makes him our contemporary, and in doing so suggests that we do admire and identify with him. Our culture today often abjects the pursuit of pleasure in order to justify our notions of

acceptable sexual morality. My study of the court libertines' representations of libertinism in Restoration drama suggests that this abjection is perhaps unavoidable; it also suggests that, like the libertine performances of Buckingham, Wycherley, Etherege, Sedley, and Rochester, abjected sexual behavior will continue to dazzle us with its spectacularity despite, if not because of, such attempts to exclude the pursuit of pleasure from our culture.

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NOTES

1 PERFORMING LIBERTINISM: AN INTRODUCTION

1. Wilmot, *Works*, Ed. Harold Love, 32. The exact context of this poem is unclear, but as David M. Vieth writes, “It is tempting to imagine that this lyric, which survives in Rochester’s own handwriting, was addressed to some actress who was his mistress, perhaps Elizabeth Barry” (Wilmot, *Complete Poems*, ed. David M. Vieth, 85).
2. Turner, *Libertines and Radicals*, x; Quinn, “Libertines and Libertinism,” 540. That Turner and Quinn use performance as just a metaphor in their definitions of libertinism is demonstrated by the fact that neither returns to this trope as a central aspect of their studies. *Libertines and Radicals*, e.g., only occasionally incorporates additional theatrical images or terms, most obviously “dramatic irony” and “metatheatricity” (214) in his chapter on “Upper-Class Riot and Inversionary Wit,” which focuses on Wycherley and Rochester.
3. Pepys, *Diary*, 4.209. Because I quote from Pepys’s *Diary* frequently, subsequent quotations from this work are cited internally by volume and page number.
4. Turner, *Libertines and Radicals*, 161; Haggerty, *Men in Love*, 6; Mangan, *Staging Masculinities*, 106; Weber, “Drudging in Fair Aurelia’s Womb,” 115; Underwood, *Etherege and the Seventeenth-Century Comedy of Manners*, 12, 27; Chernaik, *Sexual Freedom*, 4–5; Turner, *Libertines and Radicals*, 200; Haggerty, *Men in Love*, 7; Bryson, *Courtesy to Civility*, 269. Maximillian Novak also argues against a radical component to Restoration libertinism, suggesting that libertines “often tended to be conservative about the ways in which laws and moral standards might be used to govern the masses” in his essay “Margery Pinchwife’s ‘London Disease,’ ” 18. Susan Staves, on the other hand, sees libertinism in much the same terms as I do, that Rochester and Sedley purposefully “shock their more conservative contemporaries” and that plays by Etherege and Wycherley helped to transform theatrical depictions of marriage “to depend less on traditional status where any well-behaved opposite-sex person of the correct age and class will do and more on a match of individuated personalities where not only character but even something so apparently frivolous as ‘taste’ could be at issue” (*Players’ Scepters*, 138, 120). For a lengthier

- discussion of libertinism and Hobbesian notions of pleasure, see Virginia Birdsall, *Wild Civility*, 9–39. I do not reject all of Mangan’s definition. As I hope to make clear in my subsequent analysis, I object to emphasizing the “predatory” and “misogynist” nature of libertinism without reference to its radical components as well. In this regard I follow Weber’s example. While he analyzes the misogynist qualities of Rochester’s poetry in “Drudging in Fair Aurelia’s Womb,” he also maintains that “the rake is too complex and enigmatic a figure to be reduced to a sexual machine: his love of disguise, need for freedom, and fondness for play all establish the complexity of the rakish personality” in *The Restoration Rake-Hero*, 3. As I argue later in this chapter, these qualities are combined in the figure of the libertine trickster, a figure that poses a radical challenge to Stuart ideology.
5. Turner, *Libertines and Radicals*, ix–x; Bryson, *From Courtesy to Civility*, 271.
 6. Davis, “Radicalism in a Traditional Society,” 203; Greaves, *Enemies Under His Feet*, viii; De Krey, “The London Whigs,” 460–461. For more discussion on these definitions of radicalism, see Scott’s *England’s Troubles*, Ashcraft’s *Revolutionary Politics and Locke’s Two Treatises of Government*, and De Krey’s “The First Restoration Crisis.”
 7. Mulligan and Richards, “A ‘Radical’ Problem,” 122; Hill, “John Wilmot,” 298–315; Hill, “Freethinking and Libertinism,” 61–63; Ellenzeig, “The Faith of Unbelief,” 32.
 8. Goldberg, *Performance Art: From Futurism to the Present*, 8.
 9. “Live art” is the British term for performance art. See Goldberg, *Performance: Live Art Since 1960*, 12.
 10. Goldberg, *Performance: Live Art Since 1960*, 13.
 11. Weber, *Restoration Rake-Hero*, 6; Diamond, “Introduction,” 3–4. Some scholars have already challenged the vision of Restoration libertines as simply sexual predators. Sarah Wintle, e.g., points out that “It is usually—though not always—too simple to call [Rochester] an antifeminist, and poetry seems to have forced him to confront problems that lurked beneath everyday prejudice” (“Libertinism and Sexual Politics,” 134). Similarly, Douglas M. Young argues for reading Etherege and Wycherley as early feminists due to their depictions of active, witty female protagonists in their comedies in *The Feminist Voices in Restoration Comedy*.
 12. These categories are not discrete ones since members of each division could just as easily be listed in more than one of the categories. I have listed them under the label by which each person is most famous. The list itself is taken from John Harold Wilson’s *The Court Wits of the Restoration*, pp. 7–9. It should be noted that some members of the coterie later became “bitter enemies,” in Wilson’s words (8). The circle also included Charles, Lord Middleton, Sidney Godolphin, Baptist

- May, Francis Newport, Samuel Butler, and Edmund Waller, though these men were never permanent members of the Court Wits' fraternity.
13. Wilson, *Court Wits*, v. Turner, "The Properties of Libertinism," 75.
 14. Wilson, *Court Wits*, 5.
 15. Qtd. in Wilson, *Court Wits*, 5.
 16. Qtd. in Pinto, *Sir Charles Sedley*, 54.
 17. Gill, "Sir Charles Sedley," 236; Pinto, *Sir Charles Sedley*, 55; Connely, *Brawny Wycherley*, 96. Those members of the fraternity who wrote plays also had several other common interests, most of which were typical of members of the aristocracy of their day. All but Etherege had performed some sort of military service: Buckingham served the king in 1651; Sedley was a Commissioner of the Militia, an appointment to raise forces as a protection against the Commonwealth's army in 1659; Rochester fought at Bergen in the 1665 war against the Dutch; and Wycherley probably served in Ireland in the company of the earl of Arran in 1662. Likewise, all five were gentlemen, all married, and all but Wycherley, who was dependent on his father's money until 1697, were wealthy. Rochester and Etherege married into wealth; and Buckingham and Sedley inherited their family's estates. Buckingham and Rochester also received substantial allowances from the king. Similarly, each of these playwrights was well educated. Rochester and Sedley attended Wadham College, Oxford. Wycherley was educated in France, attended Queens College, Oxford, for a few months, and then enrolled as a student in the Inner Temple, though it is unlikely that he finished his legal training. Etherege likewise began a legal training in London and might have attended Cambridge, and Buckingham received an M.A. from Trinity College, Cambridge. And finally, all but Etherege were rather flexible in their religious beliefs until shortly before their deaths: Wycherley converted from the Church of England to Catholicism and back again before the age of twenty, but, like Etherege, died a Catholic; Sedley expressed little interest in religion until 1680, when a serious illness precipitated by the collapse of a roof injured his skull; Rochester also reportedly found religion in 1680 just before his death; and while on his deathbed Buckingham repented that he had been "a shame and a disgrace to all religion" just before taking the sacrament (qtd. in O'Neill, *George Villiers*, 19).
 18. These men were among the most important patrons of the arts during the 1660s, 1670s, and 1680s. As evidence, many of their contemporaries dedicated plays to them. As John Harold Wilson points out, "With few exceptions, Restoration plays were dedicated to members of the royal family (including the royal mistresses) or to munificent noblemen, who were supposed to acknowledge the compliment with a gift of five or ten guineas" (*Court Wits*, 22–23). Nathaniel Lee, John Dryden, Thomas Otway, John Crowne, and Francis Fane each dedicated plays to Rochester; Dryden and Thomas Shadwell dedicated

- plays to Sedley; and Shadwell dedicated *Timon of Athens* (1678) to Buckingham. In addition, their support could guarantee the success of a new play. As John Dennis recalled, “When these or the Majority of them Declard themselves upon any new Dramatick performance, the Town fell Immediately in with them, as the rest of the pack does with the eager cry of the stanch and the Trusty Beagles” in *Critical Works*, 2.277. For example, when Wycherley’s last play, *The Plain Dealer*, was first performed in 1676, members of the audience, says Dennis, initially “appeared Doubtfull what Judgment to Form of it” until the court wits, “by their loud approbation of it, gave it both a sudden and a lasting reputation.”
19. Qtd. in Link, “George Etherege,” 102.
 20. Wilson, *Court Wits*, 154.
 21. Qtd. in Pinto, *Sir Charles Sedley*, 266.
 22. As Paddy Lyons points out in *Rochester: Complete Poems and Plays*, “Rochester’s adaptation is at once minimalist and radical. . . . Rochester’s reworking of Fletcher aims simultaneously to change as little of his source as possible while also altering as far as possible the effect of what is retained” (323). Anne Richter also notes that “In [Rochester’s] hands, Fletcher’s tragedy *Valentinian* became a different and much more interesting play” in “John Wilmot, Earl of Rochester,” 14. Rochester’s name was also erroneously attached to a pornographic closet drama, *Sodom*, in part because it fits his libertine reputation of illicit and sodomitical sexual activities.
 23. Robert Harley, Reports of the Royal Commission on Historical Manuscripts, *Portland*, 3, 356. Qtd. in Wilson, *Court Wits*, 39. See Wilson’s *Court Wits* for more details on this gossip.
 24. Wilmot, *Letters*, 157, 159.
 25. See Love, *Culture and Commerce of Texts* for more information about the circulation of poetry in Charles II’s court.
 26. Wilson, *Court Wits*, 41; Burnet, *Some Passages of the Life and Death of Rochester*, 54. Burnet goes on to write that Rochester “took pleasure to disguise himself as a Porter, or as a Beggar; sometimes to follow some mean Amours, which, for the variety of them, he affected. At other times, merely for diversion, he would go about in odd shapes, in which he acted his part so naturally, that even those who were in on the secret, and saw him in these shapes, could perceive nothing by which he might be discovered.”
 27. Eagleton, *The Function of Criticism*, 9; Straub, *Sexual Suspects*, 4; Stallybrass and White, *The Politics and Poetics of Transgression*, 84. See Straub, *Sexual Suspects*, 3–23 and Hughes’s *The Drama’s Patrons* for more on this process of disciplining the theater audience. For more discussion of the rise of modern criticism, see Eagleton, *The Function of Criticism*, 9–27 and Stallybrass and White, *The Politics and Poetics of Transgression*, 80–124.
 28. Armstrong, *Desire and Domestic Fiction*, 122; Foucault, *History of Sexuality*, 45.

29. Chernaik, *Sexual Freedom in Restoration Literature*, 25. For more information on the philosophical underpinnings of libertinism, see Underwood, *Etherege and the Seventeenth-Century Comedy of Manners*, 10–40; Chernaik, *Sexual Freedom in Restoration Literature*, 22–51; Weber, *Restoration Rake-Hero*, 13–90; and Markley, *Two Edg'd Weapons*, 30–55.
30. Quinn, “Libertines and Libertinism,” 540; Owen, *Restoration Theatre and Crisis*, 20–21. Some examples of scholarship on this contention over authority and its representations include Miller’s “The Later Stuart Monarchy,” Seaward’s *The Cavalier Parliament*, Sawday’s “Re-Writing a Revolution,” Maguire’s *Regicide and Restoration*, Backscheider’s *Spectacular Politics*, Owen’s *Restoration Theatre and Crisis*, Scott’s *England’s Troubles*, Harris’s “Understanding Popular Politics in Restoration Britain,” and Montaña’s *Courting the Moderates*.
31. Žizek, *Mapping Ideology*, 3–4; Thompson, *Ideology and Modern Culture*, 41; Montaña, “The Quest for Consensus,” 33, 39; Todorov, “The Origin of Genres,” 164; Kreyling, *Figures of the Hero in Southern Narrative*, 10–11.
32. Owen, *Restoration Theatre and Crisis*, 7; Rosenheim, “Documenting Authority,” 591; Josselin, *Diary*, 125; quoted in Scott, *Algernon Sidney and the English Republic*, 143; Scott, *England’s Troubles*, 64; Backscheider, *Spectacular Politics*, 1. In fact, Charles frequently acquiesced to the Convention House of Common’s executive actions, which included a rejection of the king’s stated desire to prorogue Parliament in September, insisting instead for an adjournment. See Jones, *Country and Court*, 132–133, for more details on the Convention Parliament’s relationship with Charles.
33. Scott, *England’s Troubles*, 164; Marvell, *Account*, 3. For more on these issues, see Harris, *Politics Under the Stuarts*, 52–61.
34. Sawday, “Re-Writing a Revolution,” 171, 175; Owen, *Restoration Theatre and Crisis*, 7; Scott, *England’s Troubles*, 6; Backscheider, *Spectacular Politics*, 7, 2.
35. Owen, *Restoration Theatre and Crisis*, 11; Richards, “The Restoration Pageants of John Tatham,” 51; Owen, 11–12; Maguire, *Regicide and Restoration*, 7, 85.
36. Canfield, *Tricksters and Estates*, 1–2.
37. Hillman, *Shakespearean Subversions*, 8; Foucault, *Order of Things*, 209. I do not, however, want to overstate the similarity of the Restoration libertines to Sade. Too close a comparison is inaccurate at best and misleading at worst, bringing scholars to stress too highly libertinism’s aggressiveness and hostility to others. Warren Chernaik, e.g., makes just this misstep in his brief introductory discussion of libertine aggression and violence in *The Country Wife*. In this passage, he compares and maintains that Sade is the logical extension of Horner’s sex as “a symbolic enactment of mastery.” The Sadeian libertine’s “predation,” the ultimate expression of which is murder, is nothing

- like the Restoration libertine's exploration of power in sexual relationships. See *Sexual Freedom in Restoration Literature*, 5.
38. Greenblatt, *Renaissance Self-Fashioning*, 3.
 39. Esslin, *Anatomy of Drama*, 11, 10; Worthen, "Drama, Performativity, and Performance," 1098. In this essay, Worthen takes on other theorists, including Elin Diamond and Richard Scheckner, who define performance theory in opposition to the structures and conventions of traditional dramatic theater. Too often, says Worthen, theorists who study the performance of gender, linguistic performance, or social ritual and activity as performance exclude theatrical drama from performance studies, since the theater is seen to be tied exclusively to texts: Why study theatrical production as a branch of performance theory, these theorists ask, when these productions are little more than realizations of the dramatist's script? Because of such thinking, maintains Worthen, the traditional theater is becoming an increasingly ignored mode of performance. Worthen argues against this view of drama by suggesting that various schools of performance theory can shed new light on theatrical production by redefining stage performances as doing something beyond just giving life to a script.
 40. Dennis, "A Defense of *Sir Fopling Flutter*, A Comedy Written by Sir George Etherege," *Critical Works*, 2:248. Dennis goes on to cite Rochester's "agreeable Manner of his chiding his servants" and "his repeating, on every Occasion, the Verses of *Waller*" as additional connections with Dorimant.
 41. Here, I paraphrase, Wilson's characterization of the libertine circle's interest in "the unholy trinity: wine, women, and song," *Court Wits*, 17.
 42. Kewes, *Authorship and Appropriation*, 30, 19, 24, 109. For more on the rise in literacy, see Hunter, *Before Novels*, 61–88. It should also be noted that the Wits rarely supervised subsequent editions of their plays, leading to a proliferation of errors and emendations in the texts.
 43. Greenblatt, *Renaissance Self-Fashioning*, 201; Butler, *Gender Trouble*, 136; Butler, *Bodies that Matter*, 2; Hobbes, *Leviathan*, 217; Lowenthal, *Performing Identities on the Restoration Stage*, 3.
 44. Dynes, "The Trickster-Figure in Jacobean City Comedy," 367; W. C. Johnson, "Spenser's Hermetic Tricksters," 339.
 45. Sedgwick, *Between Men*, 25, 50.
 46. McKeon, "Historicizing Patriarchy," 309, 307; Haggerty, *Men in Love*, 12; Chernaik, "I Loathe the Rabble," 9; Mangan, *Staging Masculinities*, 107; Chernaik, "I Loathe the Rabble," 11; Wilmot, *Letters*, 92–93. See Bray's "Homosexuality and the Signs of Male Friendship in Elizabethan England" and "The Body of the Friend" for more on the relationship between the masculine friend and the sodomite. Following Treglown's editorial decisions in his edition of Rochester's correspondence, I have not modernized or corrected the orthography in the earl's letter to Savile.

2 PRODUCING LIBERTINE POLITICS: *THE REHEARSAL*

1. Earl of Carlingford to Ormond, July 2, 1667, Carte Manuscripts, Bodleian Library, 35:520; Letter to Ormond, June 29, 1667, Carte Manuscripts, Bodleian Library, 35:502; Pepys, *Diary*, 8.299, 302. Subsequent quotations from Pepys's diary are cited internally by volume and page number.
2. McKeon, *Origins of the English Novel*, 131; Zionkowski, *Men's Work*, 30, 31. See Kewes, *Authorship and Appropriation*, pp. 14–15 for more on gentlemen amateurs. As I discuss in chapter 4, William Wycherley and Sir George Etherege are exceptions to the libertine circle's amateur writing—each of these men wrote, at least in part, in order to make money.
3. Stone, “Literacy and Education in England,” 121.
4. Hyde, *Life*, 2.280–281.
5. For more on Levellers, see De Krey, “Radicals, Reformers, and Republicans,” 75–79.
6. Qtd. in Chapman, *Great Villiers*, 114.
7. For more information on James I's relationship with the first duke of Buckingham, see Bergeron, *King James and Letters of Homoerotic Desire*, and Young, *King James and the History of Homosexuality*.
8. Conway to Ormonde, October 27, 1666, Carte Manuscripts, Bodleian Library, 34:459.
9. Qtd. in Chapman, *Great Villiers*, 132.
10. Bruce Yardley argues in “George Villiers, Second Duke of Buckingham, and the Politics of Toleration” that Buckingham's “commitment to toleration was often little more than a means to a political end” (318). His thesis, however, is undermined by his failure to account for the duke's contemporaries' assertions of Buckingham's commitment to toleration throughout the 1660s and 1670s.
11. Chapman, *Great Villiers*, 125, 116.
12. Hutton, *Charles the Second*, 259.
13. Dom. State Cal., Charles II, 14:95. Qtd. in Burghclere, *George Villiers*, 144.
14. Hyde, *Life*, 2:397.
15. Henry Bennet was made Baron Arlington in 1665 and earl of Arlington in 1672. Hereafter I refer to him simply as Arlington.
16. Hyde, *Life*, 2:378.
17. According to the “Memorandum of Evidence” on the case, witnesses reported that they were approached to testify against the duke in exchange for money. A Mrs. Davenport, e.g., claimed that one of Arlington's witnesses confessed to her that he had received £100 to testify against Buckingham. Likewise, Clarendon writes in his *Life* that, when Buckingham finally appeared before the king to plead his

- case, he succeeded in getting Charles to admit that the remaining evidence against him, a letter, “which the King and the Lord Arlington, who Both knew his Hand well, [had previously] made no Doubt to be his Hand,” was in fact not his handwriting but his sister’s (2:382). See British Library, Additional Manuscripts, 27872:12 for more on this evidence.
18. Reresby, *Memoirs*, 64.
 19. Hyde, *Life*, 2:381–382.
 20. Hyde, *Life*, 2:377.
 21. Hyde, *Life*, 2:381.
 22. “The Examination of H.G. the Duke of Buckingham taken in the Tower July the First. By: the L^d Arlington, S^r Wm Morris, S^r Wm Coventry, & Tho. Clifford,” Additional Manuscripts, British Library, 27872:13.
 23. Pepys attributes Buckingham’s success to an entirely different source: “The Duke of Buckingham is it seems set at Liberty, without any further charge against him or other clearing of him, but let to go out; which is one of the strangest instances of the fool’s play with which all public things are done in this age that is to be apprehended. . . . But it is worth considering the ill state a Minister of State is in under such a prince as ours is; for undoubtedly, neither of those two great men would have been so fierce against the Duke of Buckingham at the Council-table the other day had they [not] been assured of the King’s good liking and supporting them therein; whereas, perhaps at the desire of Lady Castlemayne (who I suppose hath at last overcome the King), the Duke of Buckingham is well received again, and now these men delivered up to the interest he can make for his revenge” (8.342).
 24. Reresby, *Memoirs*, 71–72; Lee, *The Cabal*, 176. See Lee, *The Cabal*, for more information on the members of this government.
 25. De Krey, “The London Whigs,” 460–461; Villiers, “The Duke of Buckingham’s Speech,” 83–85; Hyde, *Life*, 2.280–281.
 26. Qtd. in Ashcraft, *Revolutionary Politics*, 20.
 27. See O’Neill’s “George Villiers,” 257–258; Baker’s “Buckingham’s Permanent *Rehearsal*”; and Peter Lewis’s “*The Rehearsal*: A Study of Its Satirical Methods,” for more on the play’s satire of heroic drama.
 28. McFadden’s “Political Satire in *The Rehearsal*” and Stocker’s “Political Allusion in *The Rehearsal*” discuss the play’s political satire.
 29. This chapter uses the 1672 edition of *The Rehearsal*. This edition is shorter than later ones—most scholars use the third quarto, published in 1675, since it contains the author’s extensive amendments. The 1672 edition, however, is the edition that most reflects the text for the play’s initial performance. I have retained this edition’s spelling even when it departs from modern convention. Subsequent quotations from this text are cited parenthetically using line numbers for the prologue and epilogue and page numbers for scenes from the play.
 30. Wilcoxin, “Rochester’s Philosophical Premises,” 192.

31. Wilmot, *Works*, ed. Harold Love, 59–60.
32. Maguire, *Regicide and Restoration*, 190–191.
33. Dryden, *Works*, 11.3.
34. Dryden, *Works*, 7.
35. Harbage, *Cavalier Drama*, 55; Wilson, *Preface*, 69.
36. See McKeon, *Origins of the Novel*, for more on constructions of aristocratic honor in the period.
37. See Part II, act 1, scene 1, lines 49–98.
38. Almanzor's commitments, however, change rapidly throughout the play. His definition of loyalty is best summed up by his declaration: "I alone am King of me" (11.30). This philosophy guides all of his decisions and serves to make his "acts of erratic and defiant heroism" more consistent. See Brown, *English Dramatic Form*, 15. These acts include challenging the king's authority to sentence him to death, refusing to surrender his prisoners to the king, leading a rebellion against Boabdelin, and abandoning the rebellion in order to reinstate Boabdelin on the throne.
39. Dryden, "Of Heroique Plays," *Works*, 11.14.
40. See 162–163 of Sheridan Baker's "Buckingham's Permanent *Rehearsal*?" for a full summary of the personal satire against Dryden. While most scholars follow Baker's lead, George McFadden disputes many of Baker's examples as unproven. See McFadden, "Political Satire in *The Rehearsal*," 120–121, for more information concerning this debate. See 4–5 of the play for Bayes's description of his methods of invention.
41. Stocker, "Political Allusion in *The Rehearsal*," 14.
42. Echard, *The History of England*, 911. Qtd. in McFadden, "Political Satire," 122.
43. Qtd. in McFadden, "Political Satire," 122.
44. Stocker, "Political Allusion," 21.
45. Stocker, "Political Allusion," 20.
46. Stocker, "Political Allusion," 16. For more information concerning these plots, see Beloff, *Public Order and Popular Disturbances, 1660–1714*.
47. Hume, *Development*, 290–291.
48. Chapman, *Great Villiers*, 206, 207.

3 STAGING LIBERTINE CONDUCT: *LOVE IN A WOOD, THE GENTLEMAN DANCING-MASTER, AND THE COUNTRY WIFE*

1. Wycherley, *Plays*, ed. Holland, 1.2.370–373; Dennis, *Critical Works*, 2:409. Subsequent references to *Love in a Wood* are cited internally.
2. Dennis, *Critical Works*, 2:410.
3. Rogers, *William Wycherley*, 46.

4. Evelyn, *Diary*, 464; Pepys, *Diary*, 9.27. Subsequent quotations from Pepys's diary are cited internally by volume and page number.
5. William Sprigge, *A Modest Plea for an Equal Common-Wealth against Monarchy* (1659), qtd. in McKeon, *Origins of the English Novel*, 155–156; McKeon, “Historicizing Patriarchy,” 296; Henry Parker, *Jus Populi* (1644), qtd. in McKeon, “Historicizing,” 296. See Schochet, *Patriarchalism in Political Thought* and Laslett, Introduction, *Patriarcha and Other Political Works*, for more complete descriptions of patriarchalism.
6. The attack on Filmer's ideas was led by John Locke and his *Two Treatises of Government*. See Schochet's *Patriarchalism in Political Thought* and Ashcraft's *Revolutionary Politics and Locke's Two Treatises of Government* for more detailed examinations of Locke's critique of Filmer's work.
7. See McKeon, *Origins of the English Novel*, 150–167.
8. As scholars frequently acknowledge, Pepys's diary is particularly useful for such a description because, “[u]nlike the more famous libertines who wrote their memoirs to prove their virility . . . , Pepys wrote only to himself and told almost everything” (Wilson, *Private Life of Mr. Pepys*, 2). Lawrence Stone, e.g., maintains that, thanks to his diary, “Pepys is someone we know better than any man who ever lived before him” (*Family, Sex, and Marriage in England*, 227).
9. On August 15, 1665, he recalls the dream he had the night before, which he thought “is the best that ever was dreamed—which was, that I had my Lady Castlemayne in my armes and was admitted to use all the dalliance I desired with her” (6.191).
10. On this occasion, the woman, Mary Mercer, rebuffed his advances. The remarkable thing about this scene is the fact that Pepys's advance was likely made in the presence of his wife: he was accompanying her and several of her friends home after seeing Etherege's *She Would If She Could* (9.54–55).
11. Of the first incident, he writes: “After dinner to church again where I did please myself con mes ojos shut in futar in conceit the hook-nosed young lady, a merchant's daughter, in the upper pew in the church under the pulpit” (9.184). Crutched Friars was a street in London. Pepys relates that after walking up and down the street several times, he met several acquaintances. “I did see our Nell, Payne's daughter, and her yo did desear vengá after migo, and so ella did seque me to Tower-hill to our back entry there that comes upon the degres entrant into nostra garden; and there, ponendo the key in the door, yo tocar sus mamelles con mi mano and su cosa with mi cosa et yo did dar-la a shilling” (9.188).
12. As he writes, “it being dark, did privately entrer en la maison de la femme de Bagwell, and there I had sa compaignie, though with a great deal of difficulty; néanmoins, enfin je avais ma volonté d'elle” (6.40). The next day, he records that he has “a mighty pain in my forefinger of my left hand, from a strain it received last night in struggling avec

- la femme que je mentioned yesterday” (6.40). Richard Ollard notes that Pepys’s and Mrs. Bagwell’s “affair, for want of a better word, went on for two or three years.” See Ollard, *Pepys: A Biography*, 100, for more details about their interaction.
13. See, e.g., 1.54, 1.284–185, 1.308, 1.237, 1.238, 4.13, 4.29, 4.121, 4.287, 5.283, 6.46–47, 7.125, 7.243, 7.397, 5.291, and 9.402. As Michael McKeon points out, this division of labor increasingly diminished women’s ability to find work outside the home. As a result, women were often encouraged to marry at an earlier age as a means to insure their economic well-being (McKeon “Historicizing,” 299).
 14. See, e.g., 1.84, 2.142, 2.200, 2.242, 3.40, 3.80, 3.89, 3.93, 3.98, 3.125, 3.132, 3.207, 3.230, 3.294, 3.302, 4.8, 4.56–57, 4.123, 4.149–150, 4.164, 4.182, 4.235, 4.431, 4.433, 4.434, 5.3, 5.14, 5.25, 5.31, 5.33, 5.55, 5.113, 5.195, 5.250, 5.284, 6.20, 6.29, 6.35, 6.53, 6.336, 7.15, 7.23, 7.25, 7.63, 7.86, 7.205, 7.401, 8.45, 8.171–172, 8.175, 8.399, 8.527, 9.47, 9.545.
 15. Milton, *Paradise Lost*, 1.497–502.
 16. Canfield, *Tricksters and Estates*, 31.
 17. Canfield, *Tricksters and Estates*, 31; Thompson, *Language in Wycherley’s Plays*, 3; Markley, *Two-Edg’d Weapons*, 138–219. In his study of Wycherley’s plays, Thompson maintains that “Wycherley was not regarded as subversive or threatening” (3) by his contemporaries, in part because “his plays always include some exempla of right conduct; however corrupt and immoral contemporary society and speech may be made to appear, standards for right speech remain intact” (4). This reading, however, underestimates the ideological function of the libertine in Wycherley’s plays and divorces Wycherley from the libertine circle in Charles II’s court. While it is true that Wycherley was never one of the most prominent members of the libertine fraternity, it should also be observed that Wycherley was not a Pepys, Evelyn, or Milton either. Indeed, his plays have a great deal more in common with the former than they do with the latter. This fact is obscured in studies, such as Thompson’s, that see Wycherley as a cultural conservative. My reading of Wycherley is much more in line with the work of Markley, who sees the plays as culturally disruptive.
 18. Hume, *Development*, 278; Canfield, *Tricksters and Estates*, 264, n. 2.
 19. Esslin, *An Anatomy of Drama*, 29; Worthen, “Drama, Performativity, and Performance,” 1098.
 20. Canfield, *Tricksters and Estates*, 264, n. 2.
 21. Carroll, “The Trickster as Self-Boffoon and Culture Hero,” 106.
 22. Canfield, *Tricksters and Estates*, 103.
 23. Bryson, *From Courtesy to Civility*, 254. Bryson omits examples, such as *Love in a Wood*, that contradict her vision of libertinism.
 24. In contrast to my argument, W. Gerald Marshall attributes the play’s rewards and punishments to Wycherley’s belief in providence. See “Wycherley’s *Love in a Wood* and the Designs of Providence,” 8–16.

25. Eric S. Rump studies these characters' contributions to the play's plot in more detail in his essay "Theme and Structure in Wycherley's *Love in a Wood*."
26. In valuing his money and his reputation, Gripe parallels Pepys's goal of "getting of some money and . . . keeping of my family in order" (4.206). Throughout the *Diary*, Pepys links his reputation with his finances, since what his superiors think of him directly determines his ability to earn more money and advance his career.
27. For other discussions of Gripe's character see Fujumura, *The Restoration Comedy of Wit*, 132–133; Birdsall, *Wild Civility*, 117–119; Zimbaro, *Wycherley's Drama*, 46–47; and Chadwick, *The Four Plays of William Wycherley*, 33–35.
28. Wycherley, *Plays*, ed. Holland, 1.1.106. Subsequent references to this play are cited internally.
29. Aspasia Velissariou discusses the disciplinary strategies of Don Diego and Pinchwife in greater detail, arguing that these plays "register a critical point in the transition from the system of alliance to that of sexuality" by dramatizing "the tensions deriving from the discrepancy between forms of sexual control specific to alliance and emerging notions of sexuality that clearly challenge the assumptions on the basis of which such control operates" ("Patriarchal Tactics of Control," 115–116).
30. Rogers, *William Wycherley*, 23.
31. W. Gerald Marshall studies Gerrard's acting in more detail in "The Idea of Theatre in Wycherley's *The Gentleman Dancing-Master*," 1–10.
32. Canfield, *Tricksters and Estates*, 34–35.
33. Stone, *The Family, Sex, and Marriage*, 221–222. The word "liberty" would take on greater political resonance during the 1670s, as Tim Harris argues in "'Lives, Liberties, and Estates': Rhetorics of Liberty in the Reign of Charles II," 217–241. Harris maintains that "most Englishmen in the later seventeenth century would have believed that they possessed certain rights and privileges which the government ought to respect and protect, and that the most fundamental of these were the rights to life, to liberty, and to the security of their property" (219). This right to property, Stone and Harris agree, increasingly included the right to property in oneself.
34. Carroll argues that this is the typical function of selfish-buffoon tricksters in "Trickster as Selfish-Buffoon and Culture Hero," 106. Canfield also emphasizes this productive quality in tricksters throughout his study of Restoration comedy.
35. Carroll, "Trickster as Selfish-Buffoon and Culture Hero," 106.
36. Wycherley, *Plays*, 1.1.6–7. Subsequent references will be noted internally.
37. Burke, "Wycherley's Tendentious Joke," 227, 228, 229, 237, 239. Harold Weber similarly analyzes these characters as dynamic figures that change over the course of the play in his essay, "Horner and His

- ‘Women of Honour.’” See also, Cohen, “The Revenger’s Comedy: A Reading of *The Country Wife*,” which argues that Horner becomes “the very plaything” of these female gallants (31).
38. Arguably the most traditional way of analyzing this play has been to focus on its depiction of honor. See, e.g., Birdsall, *Wild Civility*; Chadwick, *Four Plays*; Thompson, *Language in Wycherley’s Plays*; Markley, *Two-Edged Weapons*; Matlack, “Parody and Burlesque of Heroic Ideals in Wycherley’s Comedies”; Morris, “Language and Honor in *The Country Wife*”; Steiger, “‘Wit in a Corner’”; Weber, “Horner and His ‘Women of Honour’”; and Payne, “Reading the Signs in *The Country Wife*.”
 39. For more on this hypocrisy, see Charles Hallett’s excellent essay, “Hobbesian Substructure of *The Country Wife*.” Hallett points out that Wycherley suggests that “the social contract teaches men of nature not so much to give up certain pleasures in order to live in peace as to dissemble in order to obtain their natural desires” (390). See also Steiger, “‘Wit in a Corner,’” 56–60. For more on the relationship between the play and Hobbes’s views, see Hughes, “Naming and Entitlement,” 264–269.
 40. Peter Ackroyd argues that Pinchwife’s dressing his wife in boy’s clothes is an example of dramatic transvestism that symbolizes Pinchwife’s attempt to deprive Margery of her femininity. See *Dressing Up: Transvestism and Drag*, 30. He also reproduces an illustration depicting Margery Pinchwife on page 143.
 41. David Vieth maintains that the play “is centrally concerned with providing a definition of masculinity” in “Wycherley’s *The Country Wife*,” 335. Giles Slade argues that Wycherley’s exploits “a new theatrical freedom when he combined the figures of the eunuch and the rake” in this play in “*The Two Backed Beast*,” 23. He goes on to analyze Restoration society’s “double fixation with male inadequacy and the hypersexual reaction to it.” William Freedman contends that the play “is a serious comment on the self-destructive impotence, neglectfulness, and ineptitude of the Restoration male whose representative sign in the eunuch” in “Impotence and Self-Destruction,” 431. And Eve Sedgwick examines homosocial bonding’s reliance on the transmission of women as commodities of exchange in her important reading of *The Country Wife in Between Men*.
 42. Norman Holland, *First Modern Comedies*, 74.
 43. Vieth, “Wycherley’s *The Country Wife*,” 339.
 44. Cynthia Matlack takes a different view of Harcourt and Alithea, arguing that they are in the play in order “to pose the question of their effectiveness in society” (“Parody and Burlesque,” 274). She maintains that Wycherley ridicules Alithea’s sense of honor. Harcourt’s making love to a woman constrained by “honor,” says Matlack, implicates him in this ridiculousness.
 45. Canfield, *Tricksters and Estates*, 127. Aspasia Velissariou sees Horner’s status at the end of the play in another light, arguing that he “appears

- as an oppositional force to oppressive forms of male power while, in fact, he suggests a viable alternative to that power. The sexual exchange of women among men is still in operation under Horner, but this is effected as a result of their own consent.” See “Patriarchal Tactics of Control,” 116.
46. For an explication of friendship in the play, see Berman, “The Ethic of *The Country Wife*.”
47. Thompson, *Language in Wycherley’s Play*, 89; Thompson, “Ideology and Dramatic Form,” 168. *The Country Wife*’s ending has vexed some readers with its departure from comic conventions. Scholars have, therefore, proposed a number of readings based on this departure. Charles A. Hallett maintains that Wycherley satirizes the idea that “the best society is the one founded upon enlightened self-interest” in “The Hobbesian Substructure of *The Country Wife*,” 380. Wallace Jackson attempts to reconcile the play’s depiction of love and lust by arguing that the play “is not wholly subversive of marriage” in “The Country Wife: The Premises of Love and Lust,” 541. H. W. Matalene maintains that “the action of Wycherley’s comedy teaches us that human conduct is perhaps never more ‘artificially’ determined by social hopes and fears than it is when two people come to the point of copulating together” in “What Happens in *The Country Wife*,” 397. In contrast to many of these scholars, John A. Vance argues “That *The Country Wife* has no delightful resolution punctuates the playwright’s belief that life is ambiguous, incongruous, frustrating, deceptive, and filled with fear: after all, often what emerges from chaos is only chaos” in *William Wycherley and the Comedy of Fear*, 129.

4 SCRIPTING LIBERTINE TRICKSTERS: *THE MAN OF MODE AND THE PLAIN DEALER*

1. Dynes, “The Trickster-Figure in Jacobean Comedy,” 367.
2. Bevis, *English Drama*, 86–87. Bevis quotes from Dryden, “The Author’s Apology for Heroic Poetry and Poetic Licence,” 1.199.
3. Rosenheim, *Emergence of a Ruling Order*, 49; Rosenheim, *Townshends of Raynham*, 76; Rosenheim, *Emergence*, 51. For more information on England’s economic changes in this period, see Stone, *Crisis of the Aristocracy*; Stone, *Family and Fortune*; and Clay, *Economic Expansion and Social Change: England 1500–1700*, Vol. 1. For a fuller discussion of landowners’ expenses see Rosenheim, *Townshends of Raynham*, 73–79. In this section, Rosenheim studies the expenditures of Horatio Townshend, providing details of Townshend’s expenses in London during the 1670s and 1680s, which could exceed some £2,800 a year, or one-half of his annual income (79). For more information on playwriting and income, see Powell, *Restoration Theatre Production*, 151. As Jocelyn Powell reminds us,

- “a writer traditionally got the benefit of every third performance in a run” (150). Although the average nightly profits were around £50, early performances of a new play by a major playwright could earn the company and the dramatist significantly more money.
4. See Huseboe, *Sir George Etherege*, 15–20, for more information about this inheritance and how it affected Etherege’s later work.
 5. See Fujimura, “Etherege at Constantinople,” for more information about Etherege’s experiences as Harvey’s secretary.
 6. Qtd. in Link, “George Etherege,” 102.
 7. Zimbaro, “William Wycherley,” 286. As Katharine Rogers explains in *William Wycherley*, 19: “In 1673, the tenants on Daniel’s newly acquired lands sued him for exploiting and oppressing them in various ways, such as charging excessive fees when tenants changed.” These lawsuits continued until 1682.
 8. Bray, *Homosexuality in Renaissance England*, 14. I discuss sodomy in chapter 6 once again.
 9. See Cynthia B. Herrup’s *A House in Gross Disorder*, for a complete discussion of this trial and its aftermath.
 10. Pepys, *Diary of Samuel Pepys*, 4.209; Wilmot, *Works*, 38. “The Disabled Debauchee,” “A Ramble in St. James’s Park,” and “The Imperfect Enjoyment” make similar allusions to libertines who sleep with younger men and boys. Novak, “Libertinism and Sexuality,” 59; Wilmot, *Works*, 274–275. See Pepys, *Diary*, 9.382 for an account of Rochester’s dalliance with this prostitute.
 11. Pellegrin, Introduction, xii; Shadwell, *The Libertine*, 1.1.30–41; Pellegrin, Introduction, lxxv–lxxvi; Hughes, *English Drama*, 102. For more on Behn’s critique of libertinism in *The Rover*, see Kaufman, “‘The Perils of Florinda’: Aphra Behn, Rape, and the Subversion of Libertinism in *The Rover*, Part 1.”
 12. Scholars have long debated whether this play is a comedy or a satire and whether we are to approve of Dorimant or find him “glamorous but reprehensible,” as Robert Hume does in “Reading and Misreading *The Man of Mode*,” 10. Dale Underwood and David Krause agree with Hume’s reading. This vision of the libertine protagonist has led these scholars to misread the play as satiric or as condemning Dorimant’s libertinism, a misreading challenged by Brian Corman’s “Interpreting and Misinterpreting *The Man of Mode*.”
 13. Etherege, *Plays*, ed. Corder, 5.2.171–173. Subsequent references to this text are cited internally.
 14. Dennis, “A Defence of Sir Fopling Flutter, A Comedy Written by Sir George Etherege,” *Critical Works*, 2.248. For more information on Medley’s “true” identity, see Corman, “Interpreting and Misinterpreting *The Man of Mode*,” 39; McKillop, *English Literature From Dryden to Burns*, 76; and Summers, *The Playhouse of Pepys*, 334. Summers agrees that “Dorimant was generally recognized to be Rochester” and asserts: “It is disputed whether Sir Charles Sedley was

- Medley, and Etherege himself Young Bellair; or whether Etherege drew himself in Medley” (334). Francis Lockier, Dean of Peterborough, asserted this latter possibility. See Spence, *Observations*, 1:281.
15. Bray, “Homosexuality and the Signs of Male Friendship,” 1; Haggerty, *Men in Love*, 12. See also Bray, *The Friend*, 140–199, and Bray and Rey, “The Body of the Friend,” 79–84.
 16. Wilkinson, “Etherege and a Restoration Pattern of Wit,” 507; Bray and Rey, “The Body of the Friend,” 66–72; Franceschina, *Homosexualities in the English Theatre*, 115; Johnson, “Representation of Male Homosexuality on the English Restoration Stage,” 137. As Johnson maintains, “men had been kissing as a sign of friendship on the stage since the Restoration” (133). Because of this, one can “speculate that what the Orange Woman sees as new or remarkable (and one suspects nothing much misses her) is not the kissing itself, but the implication it carries about the nature of the two men’s relationship” (133). See 133–138 for a more complete discussion of Medley’s association with sodomy. Carl Miller disagrees with this reading, arguing that the orange-woman’s comment points not to Dorimant and Medley’s possible sexual activity but to her own puritanical opinions. Contrary to most scholars, Miller maintains that the play’s primary exemplar of sodomitical desire is Sir Fopling, who may have been modeled after a rumored sodomite at court. For more on his argument, see *Stages of Desire*, 221. Cameron McFarlane provides an excellent catalog of the traits associated with sodomites in his *The Sodomite in Fiction and Satire, 1660–1750*. See in particular chapter two, “Sodomitical Practices,” 25–68. See Paul Hammond’s “Rochester’s Homoeroticism” for more on the evidence for and against Rochester’s homosexual activities.
 17. Zimbaro, “Toward Zero/Toward Public Virtue,” 58.
 18. Zimbaro, “Toward Zero/Toward Public Virtue,” 58. Several other scholars also compare Dorimant and Fopling. See, e.g., Berglund, “The Language of the Libertines: Subversive Morality in *The Man of Mode*”; Fisher, “The Power of Performance”; Wandalie Henshaw, “Sir Fopling Flutter, or the Key to *The Man of Mode*”; David Krause, “The Defaced Angel: A Concept of Satanic Grace in Etherege’s *The Man of Mode*”; and Robert Wess, “Utopian Rhetoric in *The Man of Mode*.” For more on fops and their function in Restoration comedy, see Staves, “A Few Kind Words for the Fop.” Scholars have also debated the fop’s place in the history of sexuality. Philip Carter examines the fop in relation to changing notions of masculinity in the period in “Men about Town,” and Laurence Senelick analyzes the fop’s relationship to homosexual subcultures in early-eighteenth-century London in “Mollies or Men of Mode?”
 19. Berglund, “Language,” 379.

20. Brown, *English Dramatic Form*, 45; Staves, “The Secrets of Genteel Identity in *The Man of Mode*,” 124; Hume, *Development*, 88; Brown, *English Dramatic Form*, 45.
21. Fisher, “The Power of Performance,” 16.
22. Neill, “Heroic Heads and Humble Tails,” 136; Borkat, “Vows, Prayers, and Dice,” 127.
23. Harold Weber analyzes female libertines in his book, *The Restoration Rake-Hero*, 130–178.
24. Neill, “Heroic Heads and Humble Tails,” 136, 137; Powell, “George Etherege and the Form of a Comedy,” 64.
25. Holland, *The First Modern Comedies*, 94. Weber questions whether Harriet’s potential domestication of Dorimant will actually change anything. As he writes, “I wonder if her victory over Dorimant really subverts the male structures of power that define society in the play; does that victory win her a different place in the play’s prevailing economy? Is there a different place within this male economy? Even Harriet’s final triumph, when she secures Dorimant’s promise to court her in the country, suggests the preeminent power of men” (“Charles II, George Pines, and Dorimant,” 215). While it is true that the libertine playwrights’ depictions of marriage ultimately remain grounded in patriarchal notions of the sexual economy, as Weber suggests, the play’s representation of the equality between Harriet and Dorimant is subversive of much, though not all, of late-seventeenth-century Stuart patriarchy. Whether or not Harriet is positioned differently by the end of the play, Dorimant surely is. He has recognized not only her equality to him as a human being but has accepted her terms for participating within the sexual economy. Furthermore, Etherege has certainly recognized Harriet’s superior wit and ability to continue to control her marital relationship well into the future.
26. Wess, *Utopian Rhetoric*, 151. My reading of the play’s promise of marriage seeks to mediate between the positions of scholars who insist on Dorimant’s continued libertinism after the end of the play and scholars who affirm Dorimant’s reformation. Krause’s “The Defaced Angel,” e.g., argues for the former position; Corman’s “Interpreting and Misinterpreting” and Pat Gill’s *Interpreting Ladies* argue for the latter.
27. Wycherley, *Plays*, ed. Holland, 356. Subsequent references to this play are cited internally.
28. Canfield, *Tricksters and Estates*, 139; Carroll, “The Trickster as Selfish-Buffoon and Culture Hero,” 106; Johnson, “Spenser’s Hermetic Tricksters,” 339.
29. See Kaufman, “Idealization, Disillusion, and Narcissistic Rage,” 121, for more on Manly’s disdain for human relationships.
30. Qtd. in McCarthy, *William Wycherley: A Biography*, 98–99, and Donaldson, “‘Tables Turned’: *The Plain Dealer*,” 306.

31. See McCarthy, *William Wycherley: A Biography*, 98–99, for more information on these descriptions of Wycherley.
32. See Dorman, “Wycherley’s Adaptation of *Le Misanthrope*,” and Friedson, “Wycherley and Molière,” for more detail on Wycherley’s departures from his source play.
33. Brown, *English Dramatic Form*, 56.
34. Sedgwick, *Between Men*, 49. For more on the Olivia scene as rape, see Adams’s “What Happened in Olivia’s Bedroom? Or Ambiguity in *The Plain Dealer*” and Bode’s “A Rape and No Rape: Olivia’s Bedroom Revisited.”
35. Velissariou, “Gender and the Circulation of Money and Desire in Wycherley’s *The Plain Dealer*,” 33.
36. Sherman, “Manly, Manliness, and Friendship,” 27.
37. Helen Burke takes this plot as her central concern in her essay “‘Law-Suits, ‘Love-Suits,’ and the Family Property in Wycherley’s *Plain Dealer*.” Arguing for the cultural relevance of the play, Burke maintains that “the central crisis of the play is the crisis of disappropriation suffered by the male subject, a crisis that unfolds along a double register: the anxiety about male property at the individual level as duplicated by an anxiety about property at the broader social and economic level” (90). See also Bode’s “‘Try Me, At Least’: The Dispensing of Justice in *The Plain Dealer*,” for another reading of the relationship between the Widow Blackacre plot and the Manly-Olivia plot.
38. See Link, “George Etherege,” 109, for more information on this gossip.

5 ENACTING LIBERTINE ISOLATION: ANTONY AND CLEOPATRA AND THE TRAGEDY OF VALENTINIAN

1. Villiers, “The Duke of Buckingham’s Speech,” 105, 111. See Phipps, *Buckingham*, 25–27, and John Spurr, *English in the 1670s*, 242–243, for more information about this sequence of events.
2. Larry Carver argues that Rochester began working on the manuscript of the play in 1675 and continued to shape it for the next few years. Harold Love maintains that the earl probably wrote the play during the summer of 1676. See Carver, “Rochester’s *Valentinian*,” and Wilmot, *Works*, 449.
3. See Pinto, *Sir Charles Sedley*, 129–130, for more details on Sedley’s second “marriage” and subsequent retirement from libertine life. See Pinto, *Sir Charles Sedley*, 177 and Braverman, *Plots and Counterplots*, 138, for more information about Sedley’s move toward the opposition in Parliament.
4. Goldsworthy, *The Satyr*, 199; Lamb, *So Idle a Rogue*, 183. Rochester attended Parliament four times in February, thirteen times in March, seven times in April, and only once in May. See Wilmot, “Alexander

- Bendo's Brochure" in *Works*, 112–117 for more on his time as Dr. Bendo.
5. Swatland, *House of Lords*, 211; Marvell, *Account*, 3.
 6. Pinto, *Sir Charles Sedley*, 277.
 7. Wilson, *The Court Wits*, 168, Hume, *Development*, 314, and Davies, "Dryden's 'All for Love' and Sedley's 'Antony and Cleopatra,'" 222. J. Douglas Canfield ignores the play altogether in his study of Restoration tragedy, *Heroes and States*.
 8. Caracciolo, "Dryden and the 'Antony and Cleopatra' of Sir Charles Sedley," lv.
 9. Braverman, *Plots and Counterplots*, 136, 158.
 10. Brown, *English Dramatic Form*, 69, 70, 69. See Hume, *Development of English Drama*, 150–161, for a detailed examination of the theory behind affective tragedy in the period.
 11. Harbage, *Cavalier Drama*, 55; Hume, *Development*, 193; Bevis, *English Drama*, 48.
 12. Bevis, *English Drama*, 40; Brown, *English Dramatic Form*, 75–76.
 13. Haggerty, *Men in Love*, 24, 25, 37, 38, 25–26, 28, 38.
 14. Brown, *English Dramatic Form*, 71.
 15. Sedley, *Antony and Cleopatra*, 6. This facsimile edition does not include line numbers. Subsequent references are to page numbers and are cited internally.
 16. Backscheider, *Spectacular Politics*, 65.
 17. Brown, *English Dramatic Form*, 72.
 18. Haggerty, *Men in Love*, 28, 29.
 19. Montague Summers notes that "Rochester made sweeping changes [to Fletcher's script], rewriting whole scenes, compressing others, omitting characters . . ., adding interest and individuality to the figure of Lycias, and wholly altering the catastrophe, for Valentinian at the conclusion is assassinated by Aretus and the soldiery and does not die from poison early in act 5. The action is thus unified and direct, and, whatever criticism may have to urge concerning details of diction and phrase, the play gains by being more closely knit together and determined." See, Summers, *The Playhouse of Pepys*, 291–292. Larry Carver's "Rochester's *Valentinian*" provides a more concrete summary of Rochester's alterations. As he writes, "By eliminating act V of the original; cutting three scenes, III, ii and iii, and IV, ii; adding two of his own, V, ii and v; adding 245 lines to I, i, 75 lines to II, i, 77 lines to III, ii and 219 lines III, iii, and by substantially rewriting IV, i and ii and V, ii, Rochester moved Fletcher's Jacobean mélange of rant, poisonings, and rape in the direction of neoclassical unity" (25). Paddy Lyons points out in *Rochester: Complete Poems and Plays* that his "reworking of Fletcher aims simultaneously to change as little of his source as possible while also altering as far as possible the effect of what is retained" (Wilmot, *Rochester*, 323). Anne Righter agrees, suggesting that Rochester's change in emphasis made *Valentinian*

- “a different and much more interesting play” in “John Wilmot, Earl of Rochester,” 14.
20. Canfield, “Royalism’s Last Dramatic Stand,” 251; Braverman, *Plots and Counterplots*, 158; Combe, *A Martyr for Sin*, 136; Haggerty, *Men in Love*, 28. See also, Canfield, *Heroes and States*, 57.
 21. Wilmot, *Valentinian*, 1. Subsequent references to the play are to page numbers and are cited internally.
 22. See McKeon, “Historicizing Patriarchy,” 296, for more information on patriarchalism.
 23. Canfield, “Royalism’s Last Dramatic Stand,” 251–253.
 24. This is a change from Fletcher’s play, in which Aecius poisons himself.
 25. Haggerty, *Men in Love*, 38; Goldberg, *Sodometries*, 119; Haggerty, *Men in Love*, 38.
 26. Haggerty, *Men in Love*, 27; Goldberg, *Sodometries*, 122, Weber, “Carolinean Sexuality,” 73, 75; Weber, “Drudging in Fair Aurelia’s Womb,” 102.
 27. Braverman, *Plots and Counterplots*, 158.
 28. Wilson, “Satiric Elements,” 41.
 29. Wilson, “Satiric Elements,” 47.
 30. Wilson, *Court Wits*, 202; Greer, *John Wilmot, Earl of Rochester*, 25, 2–3. Summaries of the skepticism about Rochester’s conversion, Burnet’s account, and Rochester’s mother’s role in the affair can be found in Wilmot, “Introduction,” *The Letters of John Wilmot, Earl of Rochester*, 34–37, and Hill, “John Wilmot, Earl of Rochester,” *Collected Essays*, 309.

6 CENSURING LIBERTINE SEXUALITY: SODOM

1. Burnet, *Some Passages*, 51.
2. Wood, *Athenae Oxonienses*, 171.
3. Harold Love refers to this play as *Sodom and Gomorah* in his 1999 edition of Rochester’s attributed and possible works. While I am using his edition here, I refer to it by the more often used name, *Sodom*. See Wilmot, *Works*, ed. Love, 302–333. Citations for this play are noted internally by scene and line number.
4. See Carver, “The Texts and the Text of *Sodom*,” 19–40; J. W. Johnson, “Did Lord Rochester Write *Sodom*?” 119–153; Wilmot, *Rochester*, ed. Lyons, 314; Chernaik, *Sexual Freedom*, 231–232; Ballaster, “John Wilmot,” 211–212; Love, “Did Rochester Really Write *Sodom*,” 319–336; Bray, *Homosexuality*, 21, 28; Weber, “Carolinean Sexuality,” 68, 86; McFarlane, *Sodomite*, 81–82; Hammond, “Rochester’s Homoeroticism,” 208; Haggerty, *Men in Love*, 24.
5. Elias, “Political Satire in *Sodom*,” 434, 436; Weber, “Carolinean Sexuality and the Restoration Stage,” 69, 84, 85.
6. Lord, *Poems on Affairs of State*, 197, lines 161–168.
7. Lord, *Poems on Affairs of State*, 186–187, lines 13–23. The subsequent quotation is from line 18.

8. Elias, "Political Satire in *Sodom*," 429, 428; Love, "Did Rochester Really Write *Sodom*?" 332; Weber, "Carolinean Sexuality," 68; Weil, "Sometimes a Scepter," 130; Weber, "Carolinean Sexuality," 69. Weil mentions *Sodom* three times in passing in her essay. See "Sometimes a Scepter," 143 and 148.
9. Weil, "Sometimes a Scepter is Only a Scepter," 127; Bevis, *English Drama*, 40. For more on the characteristics of heroic drama, see Hume, *Development*, 192–199. Weber also notes the play's satire of heroic drama in "Carolinean Sexuality."
10. Dryden, *Works*, Vol. 11, p. 23, 1.1.1–5.
11. Weber, "Carolinean Sexuality," 73.
12. Weil, "Sometimes," 133; Frontain, "Bakhtinian Grotesque Realism," 73.
13. Weil, "Sometimes," 130–131; Elias, "Political Satire in *Sodom*," 436.
14. Weil, "Sometimes," 137, 142; Elias, "Political Satire in *Sodom*," 434.
15. Weil, "Sometimes," 132; Elias, "Political Satire in *Sodom*," 432.
16. Love, "Did Rochester Really Write *Sodom*?" 332; Weil, "Sometimes," 130, 131; Weber, "Carolinean Sexuality," 69.
17. See Elias, "Political Satire in *Sodom*," 434–435 and Weber, "Carolinean Sexuality," 74–77.
18. Bray, *Homosexuality in Renaissance England*, 14, 16.
19. Butler, *Bodies that Matter*, 95.
20. Randolph Trumbach sums up these prohibitions nicely: "Traditional Christian doctrine taught that sex ought to have a procreative purpose and should occur only in marriage. And patriarchy required that husbands, fathers, and masters should not endanger their families by improvidently spending their substance on loose women, or risk the health of the wives and children with venereal diseases contracted from such women, or tolerate irregular sexual behavior in their young male servants or apprentices." See *Sex and the Gender Revolution*, Vol. 1, 72.
21. Butler, *Bodies*, 108.
22. Butler, *Bodies*, 111; Bray, *Homosexuality*, 25. Again, "the law" should be understood not only as the literal laws of England, but as the entire regulatory apparatus of patriarchy, including the state, the church, and the family.
23. Goldberg, *Sodometries*, 19.
24. Trumbach, "Sex, Gender, and Sexual Identity in Modern Culture," 187; Trumbach, "The Birth of the Queen," 130–131.
25. Elias maintains that *Sodom* ridicules Charles II and his court by "mingl[ing] the idioms of sex and politics" in "Political Satire," 423. Weber concurs and argues that Bolloxinian "represents Charles raised to the *n*th power" in "Carolinean Sexuality," 73. McFarlane also agrees and argues that the play suggests "that Charles's use of his prerogative is unnatural, that is, tyrannical and arbitrary" in *The Sodomite in Fiction & Satire*, 86.
26. Weil, "Sometimes," 143.

27. Butler, *Bodies that Matter*, 109–110.
28. Zigerell, *John Oldham*, 33; Selden, “Rochester and Oldham,” 189.
29. *Poems on Several Occasions*, 111, lines 28–35.
30. Qtd. in Selden, “Rochester and Oldham,” 193.
31. Qtd. in Selden, “Rochester and Oldham,” 193.
32. *Poems on Several Occasions*, 118–120. Quotations from this poem are cited internally by line number. Since *Poems* was published before *Sodom*, we can deduce that *Sodom* was circulating in some form at least by 1680. The attribution of the play to Rochester may well have originated after the earl’s death. While Oldham may not have associated these transgressive activities with Rochester and libertinism, the publisher and reading audience of *Poems* probably did.
33. Trumbach, *Sex and the Gender Revolution*, 75.
34. Prinz, *Rochesteriana*, 20–21. According to this apocryphal story, Madam Clark subsequently becomes Rochester’s mistress until his untimely death. Destitute and ruined, she is forced into prostitution, but soon dies at the hands of a greedy pimp.

7 CONCLUSION

1. Wilson, *Court Wits*, 205.
2. Jones, “Introduction,” 9; Owen, *Restoration Theatre and Crisis*, 11.
3. Zook, “Violence, Martyrdom, and Radical Politics,” 76; Smuts, *Culture and Power in England*, 151; Scott, *England’s Troubles*, 493; Harris, “Party Turns?” 588–589; Owen, *Restoration Theatre and Crisis*, 11.
4. Maguire, *Regicide and Restoration*, 3; Smuts, *Culture and Power in England*, 142; Owen, *Restoration Theatre and Crisis*, 14; Smuts, *Culture and Power in England*, 142.
5. Backscheider, *Spectacular Politics*, 8.
6. Montañó, *Courting the Moderates*, 125.
7. Foucault, *History of Sexuality*, 136, 148, 147.
8. Foucault, *History of Sexuality*, 149, 148.
9. Foucault, *Order of Things*, 209.
10. As Foucault explains, for Sade blood “flowed through the whole dimension of pleasure—the blood of torture and absolute power, the blood of the caste which was respected in itself and which nonetheless was made to flow in the major rituals of parricide and incest, the blood of the people, which was shed unreservedly since the sort that flowed in its veins was not even deserving of a name” (Foucault, *History*, 148–149).
11. Dynes, “The Trickster-Figure in Jacobean City Comedy,” 367.
12. Hume, “Texts within Contexts,” 77.
13. Adlard, *The Debt to Pleasure*, 7.
14. Jeffreys, *The Libertine*, 3. Subsequent quotations from this text are cited internally.

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