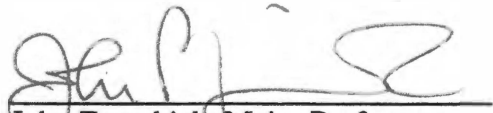


To the Graduate Council:

I am submitting herewith a dissertation written by Jeremy W. Webster entitled "'This Gaudy Gilded Stage': Rhetorics of Libertinism in the Drama of the Court Wits, 1671-1678." I have examined the final copy of this dissertation for form and content and recommend that it be accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy, with a major in English.


John Zomchick, Major Professor

We have read this dissertation
and recommend its acceptance:







Accepted for the Council:


Associate Vice Chancellor and
Dean of the Graduate School

**"THIS GAUDY, GILDED STAGE": RHETORICS OF LIBERTINISM IN
THE DRAMA OF THE COURT WITS, 1671-1678**

A Dissertation
Presented for the
Doctor of Philosophy
Degree
The University of Tennessee, Knoxville

Jeremy W. Webster
August 1999

Thesis
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DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to my parents,
Robert and Patti Webster, for their love and support
and to my sister, Adrienne,
whose courage, generosity, and friendship continuously inspire me.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

A number of people have helped and inspired me throughout this project. One of the first and most influential of these benefactors was Margaret J. M. Ezell. I first fell in love with Restoration and Early Eighteenth-Century literature in Margaret's graduate course, and her belief in my abilities and interests has been an inspiration to me ever since. She remains the standard by which I measure all other scholar-teachers and the model after which I pattern my own professional endeavors. Not the least of her contributions to my work was her suggestion that I ask James M. Rosenheim to serve on my Master's committee. In the nine years since we first met, Jim has played a wide range of roles in my life. Each has been indispensable. I thank Margaret, Jim, and all of my other teachers and friends at Texas A&M University. They established the foundation upon which this project stands.

I have been equally fortunate in my professors at the University of Tennessee. Since nearly my first week here, John Zomchick has been a wonderful counselor. His example as a teacher, guidance as an advisor, and encouragement as a mentor have been crucial to my success in graduate school. I greatly appreciate his tireless efforts in working with me on this project, from reading the primary works to rereading multiple drafts of each chapter to chatting about the profession. His advice has always been unerring. I am equally indebted to Linda Bensel-Meyers for her support and encouragement over the last five years. She has indulged my interest in rhetoric and has fostered my skills both as an administrator and a scholar. Without her example and support, I could not have succeeded in my professional pursuits thus far. Misty Anderson has also been a key contributor to my work. Her early and consistent vision of this project as a book, penetrating suggestions for revision, and example as a junior faculty member have been a constant

source of encouragement. And finally, Chris Holmlund has been a wonderful outside reader for this project. Her reading of my work, like her advice for my career, has always been right on target. I could not have found a better committee to work with and I am thankful for their help, wisdom, and support.

I am also grateful to my friends, fellow students, and family for their encouragement over the last few years, especially Susan G. North, who has been a close friend and confidant. I am particularly indebted to her not only for working with me on other projects but for her ability to comment on my work and to offer sharp analysis without threatening our friendship. I look forward to our future collaborations. My parents and sister have also provided me with essential emotional support during my graduate studies. I appreciate their confidence in and unfailing love for me.

Finally, I literally could not have completed this project without Paul Jones. His companionship has been a daily source of inspiration and motivation. He has been my toughest reader and my dearest friend. Without him, surviving graduate school would have been impossible.

ABSTRACT

My dissertation explores the ideological meanings attached to the Court Wits' representations of libertine figures in their plays during the 1670s. In describing the Marquis de Sade, Michel Foucault wrote, "the libertine is he who, while yielding to all the fantasies of desire and to each of its furies, can, but also must, illuminate their slightest movement with a lucid and deliberately elucidated representation" (*Order* 209). This definition is equally true for the Restoration Court Wits, an elite fraternity of literary and political figures known for their hedonistic philosophy and Epicurean lifestyles that included George Villiers, Duke of Buckingham; John Wilmot, Earl of Rochester; Sir Charles Sedley; Sir George Etherege; and William Wycherley. Not the least part of these lifestyles was a cultural posing, a penchant for self-consciously theatrical affectations and adventures. Throughout their literary works, and especially their dramas, the members of this coterie drew upon their infamous reputations in order to cast versions of themselves as the central figures in the theater of Restoration court life. In particular, I argue that the Wits use these figures to resist the limitations imposed by aristocratic ideology's rhetoric of national heroism and progressive ideology's articulation of innate virtue. I conclude that these playwrights employ rhetorical strategies to expose the ideological limitations of their day and, in doing so, resist their culture's move toward what Foucault calls bourgeois sexuality.

To demonstrate this thesis, I examine nine plays written by members of this circle. Chapter One introduces the Court Wits' fraternity and defines what I mean by the aristocratic, progressive, and libertine ideologies. Chapter Two argues that Buckingham's *The Rehearsal* deploys libertine ideology in the form of epideictic rhetoric to respond to aristocratic ideology's discourse of national heroism, transforming heroic drama into farce

through gender parody and thereby undermining its claim to verisimilitude. Chapter Three studies Wycherley's early comedies, *Love in a Wood*, *The Gentleman Dancing Master*, and *The Country Wife*, to argue that these plays serve as a kind of deliberative rhetoric, a use of art to explore the possibilities of libertine ideology to reshape aristocratic society at this time. In particular, Wycherley employs libertine ideology in these plays to reject progressive ideology's argument that honor is a virtue that anyone could cultivate through introspection and moral behavior. Chapter Three examines the rhetorical choices of Etherege and Wycherley in *The Man of Mode* and *The Plain Dealer*, respectively, arguing that each turns away from radical libertinism and embraces an integration of the libertine into society's institutions. Chapter Five analyzes plays by Rochester and Sedley to demonstrate that each pushes libertine ideology to its most extreme limits in order to test whether it remains a viable alternative to aristocratic and progressive ideologies. Although Rochester and Sedley maintain that libertinism is such an alternative, by 1680 the Wits' fraternity and their experimentation with libertinism disintegrates as its members find themselves aligned with different political factions during and after the Exclusion Crisis of the later 1670s.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Chapter One: Introduction:

The Court Wits and Rhetorics of Libertinism	1
---	---

Chapter Two: Strutting Heroes and Solemn Fops:

Gender Parody as Libertine Ideology in Buckingham's <i>The Rehearsal</i>	40
--	----

Chapter Three: Interrogating the Body's Truth:

Gender and Libertine Performances in Wycherley's Early Comedies	71
---	----

Chapter Four: The Limits of Libertinism:

Etherege and Wycherley	109
----------------------------------	-----

Chapter Five: Transgressing the Limits of Libertinism:

Rochester and Sedley	142
--------------------------------	-----

Chapter Six: Conclusion:

The Court Wits' Legacy	179
----------------------------------	-----

Bibliography	187
------------------------	-----

Vita	204
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Chapter One

Introduction: The Court Wits and Rhetorics of Libertinism

Studies of Restoration literature have long noted the cultural and aesthetic significance of the Court Wits, a fraternity of literary and political figures which included George Villiers, Duke of Buckingham; John Wilmot, Earl of Rochester; Charles Sackville, Lord Buckhurst; Sir Charles Sedley; Sir Carr Scroope; Sir George Etherege; and William Wycherley.¹ Two reasons for the group's cultural and literary significance exist. First, these men were among the most important patrons of the arts during the 1660s and 1670s. As John Dennis recalled, "When these or the Majority of them Declared 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 staunch and the Trusty Beagles" (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" (277). Second, such triumphs as *The Rehearsal*, *The Country Wife*, and *The Man of Mode* demonstrate that theirs were also among the most successful plays. Even so, as John Harold Wilson points out, "their influence upon the stage was far out of proportion to their dramatic productivity" (*Court Wits* 144): members of this coterie produced, penned, or adapted only 15 plays during the nearly two decades of their association from the early 1660s to 1680.²

¹ Robert Hume provides an excellent discussion of scholars' treatment of the Wits' influence and dominance within the Restoration theater in his *The Development of English Drama in the Late Seventeenth Century*. See pp. 24-28. See Wilson's *Court Wits* pp. 7-10 for an overview of the group's membership.

² During the same period, Dryden composed some 20 plays, Thomas Shadwell wrote 13, Aphra Behn wrote 12, John Crowe wrote 10, Nathaniel Lee wrote 9, and Roger Boyle, Earl of Orrery, Thomas Durfey, and Thomas Otway each wrote 7.

Despite this disproportionate influence, recent scholarship has been disinclined to study these writers' dramatic works within the context of their authors' artistic, social, and political fraternization. Three reasons for this reluctance exist. In large part, this disinclination stems from critical interest in individual authors and individual works, an interest that began with the biographical criticism of the 1920s and 30s and continued with the publication of the first authoritative editions of the Wits' works during the 1950s and 60s. The study of Rochester's canon is a prime example of this trend. As David M. Vieth points out in the preface to his landmark *Attribution in Restoration Poetry*, "serious scholarly concern with Rochester, which began with the second quarter of the twentieth century, seems to divide into two traditions" (vii). Initially, says Vieth, such scholars as John Hayward, Johannes Prinz, Vivian de Sola Pinto, and John Harold Wilson stressed Rochester's biography (vii-viii). "More recent work," including James Thorpe's 1950 edition of *Rochester's Poems on Several Occasions*, William B. Todd's 1953 bibliographical study, and Vieth's own early articles on authorship and textual variants, emphasized the importance of establishing a canon of Rochester's poetic works (Vieth viii). Similar biographies and editions were concurrently published for other members of this group: Hester W. Chapman and Wilson penned biographies of Buckingham; Eleanore Boswell, Sybil Rosenfield, and Thomas Fujimura composed studies of Etherege's biography; Pinto wrote *Sir Charles Sedley 1639-1701: A Study in the Life and Literature of the Restoration* in 1927; Charles Perromat and Willard Connelly produced biographies of Wycherley; and Thorpe, Gerald Weales, and Montague Summers published editions of Etherege's poems, Wycherley's plays, and Wycherley's poetry, respectively. More recent scholarship, following this early work, largely studies the Court Wits as individuals rather than as a group.

Secondly, previous to the twentieth century, literary critics generally maintained that the Restoration initiated a "period of wild and desperate dissoluteness" (Macaulay 422). As

scholars' understanding of the sociology of the Restoration audience has changed over the course of the past century, their interest in this elite circle has likewise altered. For example, in describing the Restoration court Thomas Macaulay argued that

in London the outbreak of debauchery was appalling; and . . . the places most deeply infected were the Palace, the quarters inhabited by the aristocracy, and the Inns of Court. It was on the support of these parts of town that the playhouse depended. The character of the drama became conformed to the character of its patrons. The comic poet was the mouthpiece of the most deeply corrupted part of a corrupted society. And in the plays, . . . we find, distilled and condensed, the essential spirit of the fashionable world during the anti-Puritan reaction. (422)

Allardyce Nicoll's *A History of Restoration Drama: 1660-1700*, first published in 1923 and long considered the standard history of the drama of the period, concurs with Macaulay's view. As he writes, "The spectators . . . for whom the poets wrote and the actors played were the courtiers and their satellites. The noblemen in the pit and boxes, the fops and beaux and wits and would-be-wits who hung on to their society, the women of the court, depraved and licentious as the men, the courtesans with whom these women of quality moved and conversed as on equal terms, made up at least four-fifths of the entire audience" (1.8). More recently, however, scholars have taken a more complex view of the audience's composition, arguing that the Restoration audience became increasingly diverse and included larger numbers of "the bourgeois component" (Hume, *Development* 25) as it approached the 1680s. As Robert Hume sums up, "What one must conclude from recent work, however fragmentary and contradictory, is simply that a courtly coterie audience is, at least, an exaggeration, and probably mostly a myth" (27).

As the critical consensus has moved toward revising the importance of the court coterie, it has also tended to marginalize the Court Wits' faction. For example, Hume's *The Development of English Drama in the Late Seventeenth Century* cites John Harold

Wilson's *A Preface to Restoration Drama*, published in 1965, as providing a "rather misleading impression" of the play-going audience (27). According to Wilson, between 1660 and 1680 "the theaters were dominated by a Court-and-Town coterie" (*Preface* 31). It is this use of the word "coterie" that bothers Hume. As he writes, Wilson's "suppositions about the 'coterie' are questionable, and his account of the nature of the drama seems to me misleading" (27). The first of these objections is largely a matter of terminology, especially since Wilson concurs with other scholars that Restoration audiences were composed of nearly all strata of society and increasingly reflected the tastes and interests of the middling sort.³ The second objection has to do with proportion: while Hume does not deny the Wits' influence, he does question Wilson's sense that it dominated the Restoration stage. Hume consequently focuses his study on the playwrights' interaction with the increasingly important tastes of the middle class. The study of this interaction has become typical in recent studies of the Wits' plays.

And finally, many scholars undoubtedly believe that the Court Wits' fraternity has already been adequately studied in John Harold Wilson's *The Court Wits of the Restoration: An Introduction*. Wilson's monograph has received praise as a "lively, authoritative survey of its subject" (Rogers 166) and has stood as the only book-length analysis of the Wits' social, political, and artistic association since its publication in 1948. This is unfortunate since, as its title suggests, this work was intended to serve as a beginning for future scholarship in this area, not its end. As Wilson explains in his preface, "Essays on the Court Wits as individuals, however well done, have always been somewhat unsatisfactory because of a natural tendency to treat the subject of the essay as a phenomenon taken bodily out of his cultural environment" (v). What Wilson hoped to do was to begin the process of reinserting the Wits back into their social, literary, political, and historical context. Wilson highlighted this context by basing his work on the assumption

³ See pp. 31-42.

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" (v). Accordingly, his essay "is not aimed at completeness in biography or bibliography; rather it is designed to present a unified study of the human and literary activities of the coterie" (v-vi). Consequently, Wilson provides chapters on the Wits' private and public lives, correspondence, lyric poetry, lampoons and satires, drama, and literary criticism.

However, just as Wilson's work did not attempt to provide complete biographies of or bibliographies for the Court Wits, its consideration as the final study on this group is also questionable because its discussions of the Wits' poetic works have indirectly been amended by more recent scholarship. For example, while Wilson analyzed the Wits' poetry in terms of its thematic and generic links to Classical and English traditions, including such writers as Horace, Ovid, Anacreon, Catullus, Donne, Cowley, Waller, and Denham,⁴ more recent scholarship has begun to emphasize the means by which the Wits' poems were produced for circulation. In particular, Harold Love's 1993 book *Scribal Publication in Seventeenth-Century England* places Rochester's poetry within the context of its circulation in manuscript form first among the members of the Wits' coterie and then into increasingly public view in order to examine the meanings that can be extrapolated from this circulation. To demonstrate these meanings, Love studies two functions of manuscript publication: the distribution of information and the transmission of ideology. As he writes, the handwritten text bonded "groups of like-minded individuals into a community, sect or political faction, with the exchange of texts in manuscript serving to nourish a shared set of values and to enrich personal allegiances" (177). He concludes that scribal publication served "as a means by which ideologically charged texts could be distributed through the governing class, or various interest-groups within that class,

⁴ See especially pp. 89-90 and 109-14.

without their coming to the knowledge of the governed" (177). Thus, Love's work implicitly builds upon Wilson's study by suggesting that the Wits' circle should be examined as a whole in order to advance our knowledge of the group's political and social ideologies.

My study follows in the footsteps of Wilson's and Love's efforts by combining the former's thesis that the Wits "can be seen best as individuals if they are seen first as a cohesive group" (*Court Wits* v) with the latter's interest in ideological criticism. For example, this dissertation explores the ideological meanings attached to five of the Court Wits' collective representations of libertine figures in their plays during the 1670s. These five authors are Buckingham, Wycherly, Etherege, Sedley, and Rochester, the only members of the group to compose plays. In doing so, my study augments Wilson's survey of the Wits' dramas by going beyond his summaries of the plays' plots, receptions, and aesthetic merits to analyze the ways in which they develop common themes about the nature of libertinism in aristocratic society. Likewise, my work furthers Love's effort by analyzing the historical causes and effects of the Wits' nourishing a shared set of values and assuming that these values have been transferred into, and therefore can be extrapolated from, the Wits' literary works by studying their formal characteristics. As Raymond Williams explains in his essay "Literature and Society,"

the most penetrating analysis would always be of forms, specifically literary forms, where changes of viewpoint, changes of known and knowable relationships, changes of possible and actual resolutions, could be directly demonstrated, as forms of literary organization, and then, just because they involved more than individual solutions, could be reasonably related to a real social history, itself considered analytically in terms of basic relationships and failures and limits of relationship. (*Problems* 26)

Using the Wits' representations of libertines as a reference point, this study traces such changes in this coterie's views, relationships, and resolutions in order to argue that these representations were a means for the Wits to participate in the continuing reformulation of an aristocratic hegemony in the years between the Restoration of Charles II and the Exclusion Crisis of the late 1670s.

This chapter introduces the basic concepts and historical contexts necessary for a study of the dramas written by members of the Wits' fraternity during the 1670s. First, I describe the group's composition, focusing primarily on the ways in which the playwrights in this clique shared a common ideology by the beginning of the 1670s. Among the major tenets of this ideology was a rhetoric of libertinism that was only loosely defined by 1671, the year in which Buckingham's *The Rehearsal* premiered. Second, I survey two competing ideologies that flourished during the period of the Wits' association, which scholars have labeled "aristocratic" and "progressive" ideologies. Finally, I summarize the Wits' reactions to these ideologies in their plays of the 1670s, providing an overview of the organization and scope of the following chapters in this study.

Constructing the Wits' Fraternity

By the beginning of the 1670s, members of the Court Wits' fraternity shared a language of sexual rebelliousness, a refusal to accept moralistic limitations on erotic desire. This rhetoric of libertinism grew out of the Wits' common life experiences.⁵ At the circle's center, of course, was Charles II, since his favor brought the Wits' their prestige and his court brought these men together. As the son of James I's principal favorite, Buckingham

⁵ The Wits' circle consisted at various times of up to some fourteen members. Besides Buckingham, Rochester, Buckhurst, Sedley, Scroope, Etherege, and Wycherley, these included John Sheffield, Earl of Mulgrave; John Lord Vaughan, later Earl of Carbery; Henry Savile; Fleetwood Shepherd; Henry Bulkeley; Henry Killigrew; and Henry Guy. As John Harold Wilson points out, "From the Wits' own poems and letters we get the impression of a kind of loose fraternity of men of kindred tastes" (*Court Wits* 8). Members of the group were added or subtracted as their tastes changed.

grew up as Charles's playfellow. In fact, after his father's assassination, Villiers and his sisters were placed by their mother in the care of the royal family. In 1648 Buckingham fled to France, where he participated in Charles's intrigues designed to topple the Commonwealth and return the Stuarts to the throne. With the Restoration, politics became Buckingham's primary occupation, and in 1662 he was admitted to the king's Privy Council. With Buckingham's influence, the circle of Wits around the king quickly began to grow. In 1661, for example, James Butler, Duke of Ormonde, reported to Edward Hyde, Earl of 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 religion itself" (qtd. in Pinto 54).⁶ By this time, Sedley, Buckhurst, Shepherd, Savile, and Killigrew were already a part of this circle. By 1665 Rochester, Etherege, and perhaps Wycherley had also become members of the group.⁷

During the first half of the 1660s, the Court Wits began to earn their reputations as debauchees, wits, poets, and scoundrels. Because of his familiarity with the king, Buckingham immediately took his place as the fraternity's "leading spirit" (Pinto 55). For example, he initiated the group's interest in writing plays. In 1661, he rewrote the final two acts of *The Chances*, a popular play by John Fletcher.⁸ His adaptation received a positive review from Pepys when it was performed a few years later. Buckingham also collaborated on two other plays in this decade: *Sir Politick Would-Be* (1663-64) and *The*

⁶ Edward Hyde was created Lord Clarendon and appointed Lord Chancellor, which effectively made him Charles's chief minister, in 1660. James Butler was another of Charles's early advisors. See Jones's *Country and Court* for a summary of Clarendon's and Ormonde's careers.

⁷ The date of Wycherley's entrance into the circle is debatable. Wilson places it around 1671, while some biographers suggest that Wycherley's position within the court began during the 1660s. See McCarthy pp. 32-34 for a general discussion of Wycherley's probable association with the Wits during the 1660s.

⁸ As John Harold Wilson reports, Buckingham improved the play. Fletcher's version was "a rollicking, obscene comedy" full of "wild action and violent horseplay." "Buckingham tied up the loose strings in the plot, eliminated needless characters and scenes, and . . . [changed the play's] emphasis." See *The Court Wits* pp. 151-52.

Country Gentleman (1669). Furthermore, Villiers often led the group's mad pranks. For example, as St. Evrémond recounts, while exiled briefly from the court, Buckingham and Rochester rented an inn and set themselves up as hosts. Any man who could claim an attractive female relative was warmly welcomed and feasted for practically nothing (Burghclere 137). The two friends soon became interested in one of the local inhabitants, the wife of a Puritan who left his beloved in the care of his "crabbed old sister" whenever he left his house (Burghclere 137). Learning that the old lady liked to drink, Rochester dressed as a young woman, drugged the aunt with a bottle of spirits, and spirited the wife out of the house. When her husband, distraught over his loss, hanged himself, the noblemen decided to take the young lady to London and provide her with a dowry so that she could attract a new partner. Buckingham and Rochester so pleased the town with the story of their adventure that they were immediately restored to the king's good graces.⁹ Such stories established the Wits as cultural icons symbolizing moral laxity and sexual decadence.

Etherege and Sedley likewise began to make names for themselves during this period. Sedley, for instance, achieved notoriety throughout London for one particular incident of debauchery. Samuel Pepys reports that on June 16, 1663, Sedley, accompanied by 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

⁹ See Burghclere pp. 136-40 for a complete account of this adventure.

drank it off; and then took another and drank the King's health. (4.209)

Offended at such behavior, the passers-by in the street rushed the tavern's door, but when its locks prevented their entrance, Sedley and his friends pelted them with empty wine bottles. Eventually, the three gentlemen were brought safely inside, with only Sedley suffering any real repercussions: a few days later he was fined two thousand marks, was imprisoned for a week, and was bound over for good behavior for one to three years. Such pranks fueled perceptions of the Wits as transgressively sexual revellers who were always ready to scandalize the general populace.

Besides their interest in sexual hijinks, the Wits also shared a common literary interest. When they were not preoccupied with adventures, they sometimes wrote plays and poems. Etherege's reputation, for example, began with the debut of his first play, *The Comical Revenge, or, Love in a Tub*, which premiered in March 1664 at the Duke's Theater in Lincoln's Inn Fields. This play was also the means of introducing the playwright to the Wits' fraternity.¹⁰ While Pepys thought the play "merry, but only in gesture, not wit at all" (6.4), it was nevertheless successful, earning the company more than £1000 in a month's time (Holland 20). Etherege's second play, *She Would If She Could*, was performed at the Duke's Theater on February 6, 1668. He was subsequently made a gentleman of the Privy Chamber in ordinary and was sent to Turkey as a secretary for the new ambassador. Although *She Would If She Could* abandoned the complex plot structure of Etherege's previous work, focusing instead on the affairs of "two pairs of witty lovers" (Holland 28), it nevertheless failed to please its audience. Pepys described his reaction to the premiere:

I to the Duke of York's playhouse; . . . and though I was there by two o'clock,

¹⁰ The play consists of three plots. The high plot "idealizes and exaggerates in pure heroic style," consists of "neat couplets," and "follows the crossed loves of Lord Beaufort and Colonel Bruce for Graciana, and the unrequited love of Graciana's sister, Aurelia, for Bruce." The middle plot depicts Sir Frederick Frolick's pursuit of the Widow Rich, Graciana and Aurelia's aunt. The low plot tells the story of Nicholas Cully's swindling by a pair of rogues, Wheadle and Palmer. See Norman Holland's *The First Modern Comedies*, pp. 20-21, for a more complete summary of the play.

there was 1000 people put back that could not have room in the pit . . . Lord! how full was the house and how silly the play, there being nothing in the world good in it, and few people pleased in it. . . . I did hear [Etherege] mightily find fault with the Actors, that they were out of humour and had not their parts perfect, and that Harris did do nothing, nor could so much as sing a Ketch in it, and so was mightily concerned: while all the rest did through the whole pit blame the play as a silly, dull thing, though there was something very roguish and witty; but the design of the play, and end, mighty insipid. (9.53-54)

While scholars generally agree with Pepys's assessment, *She Would If She Could* has been given the distinction of being considered "the first fully developed comedy of manners within the Restoration" (Underwood 59). As Pepys's reaction to the play illustrates, the Wits' comedies in this decade were generally less focused and more derivative of pre-Restoration works than their plays in the 1670s. This lack of focus is particularly evident in the fact that, as Pepys's comment about the play containing "something very roguish and witty" suggests, the Wits' plays during the 1660s typically do not concentrate the audience's attention on a clearly defined libertine protagonist. These problems would be solved during the 1670s as these playwrights increasingly placed the libertine on center stage.

Etherege's second play was soon followed by the premiere of Sedley's first drama, a comedy titled *The Mulberry Garden*, on May 18, 1668 at the King's Theater on Drury Lane. Pepys's record of his own response to Sedley's first dramatic effort supports the idea that the Wits' comedies during this early period were less successful than their later ones. Set in the last year of the Commonwealth, Sedley's play depicts the adventures of the daughters of Sir Samuel Forecast, "a sober Puritan," and Sir John Everyoung, "a jolly

Cavalier" (Pinto 250).¹¹ Perhaps because the plot is conventionally resolved, the play itself disappointed such critics as Pepys and the king. Pepys records 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).¹² "Nevertheless," says Wilson, "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" (*Court Wits* 154).

Beyond their "eminence and courtly favor," those members of the Wits' fraternity who wrote plays also had several other common interests, most of which were typical of members of the aristocracy of their day. First, 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.¹³ Buckingham and Rochester also received money from the king as court appointees. Similarly, each of these playwrights was well-educated. Rochester and Sedley attended Wadham College, Oxford.¹⁴ Wycherley was educated in France, attended Queens College, Oxford, for a few months, and then enrolled

¹¹ In the play, Victoria and Olivia, Everyoung's two daughters, are courted by two vain coxcombs, Modish and Estridge. Their courtship is complicated when a third man, Jack Wildish, also falls in love with Olivia. Forecasts's daughters, Althea and Diana, are likewise plagued by crossed loves: their father wants to prevent them from marrying their Cavalier lovers and attempts to force Althea to marry a fellow roundhead.

¹² Pepys did, however, give the play a second chance. Two days later, he attended the play again and concluded that he "cannot be reconciled to it, but only do find here and there an independent sentence of wit, and that is all" (9.206).

¹³ In fact, Buckingham's income of twenty thousand pounds a year in 1660 was reported to be the largest in England. See O'Neill's "Villiers" p. 250 for a brief description of Buckingham's economic condition after the Restoration.

¹⁴ Sedley left without a degree in 1656. Rochester earned an M.A. in 1661.

as a student in the Inner Temple, though it is unlikely that he finished his legal training (Zimbardo, "Wycherley" 268-69). 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; beyond his blasphemy at the Cock Inn in 1663, 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, *Villiers* 19). By 1670, therefore, the Court Wits had established their reputations as hedonistic aristocrats who enjoyed "wine, women, and song" (Wilson, *Court Wits* 17).

Constructing the Wits' Early Libertinism

Because of their common interests and experiences, it is not surprising that the Wits also shared a common set of values, a worldview that has long been described by scholars as "libertinism." Although this group and the figures who populated their plays are often seen as the epitome of libertinism in England, the word itself was in use by 1563. As the *Oxford English Dictionary* relates, the word "libertine" initially referred to someone with free-thinking or antinomian opinions but soon attained a second meaning: someone with a disregard for moral restraint. For example, in 1593 Gabriel Harvey spoke of "the whole brood of venerous Libertines, that knowe no reason but appetite, no Lawe but Luste,"¹⁵ a description with obvious parallels to the Duke of Ormonde's criticism that these men "pre-served no reverence towards God or man, but laughed at all sober men, and even at

¹⁵ See the *O.E.D.*, "libertinism."

religion itself" (Pinto 54). However, studies of the Restoration era have been complicated by the fact that, as James G. Turner points out in his seminal essay "The Properties of Libertinism," "Scholarly usage [of this word] varies so widely that we begin to doubt whether there ever was a single libertine movement or attitude; anachronism, imprecision, and ambiguity further erode our confidence in the term" (75). He explains: "The libertine is sometimes interchangeable with, and sometimes distinguished from, the Priapean, the spark or ranter, the roaring blade, the jovial atheist, the cavalier, the sensualist, the rake, the murderous upper-class hooligan, the worldly fine gentleman, the debauchee, the beau, the man of pleasure, and even the 'man of sense'" (77-78). Because of this definitional ambiguity, says Turner, "No one criterion is sufficient to define 'libertinism,' and it is certainly not a simple synonym for illicit sexuality" (78).

Nevertheless, as Dale Underwood points out, defining the libertine as "merely a person of loose morals has had a commonplace application to Restoration comedy" (10). As a result, says Underwood, two problems have frequently plagued scholarship on the Court Wits: the ideas associated with this term have "become sufficiently commonplace to be formulated into clichés" and the reduction of libertinism to "loose morals" has often led scholars to make moral judgments about both the Court Wits themselves and the society in which they lived (11). Donald Bruce's *Topics of Restoration Comedy*, published in 1974, contains a prime example of both of these tendencies. In the first chapter of his book, Bruce pauses to make the argument that "Nothing illustrates the collapse of order and institutions in Restoration England better than the way in which Rochester was smilingly allowed to obscure and then obliterate his inherent glory" (21). Bruce complains:

Shameless, pushful, militant for an all-too-permitted freedom, without humility, maturity of judgement, experience of the world or any but the rawest and most imitative notions of conduct, Rochester designated himself a law unto himself in the London of 1665. He belonged to a fellowship aggressively, and perhaps luckily,

bent on the destruction of its members. Their sexuality was the cosy, accommodating sexuality, though a trifle smeared, of the pigsty and the monkeyhouse. A systematic disordering of all sentiments and all decencies took place, and as a physical by-product of that modish degeneration an epidemic of syphilis broke out. This Rochester caught. Unwiser than the unwise steward, Rochester used his talent to purchase Death. Sternly he exercised his inalienable right to debase himself and his abilities. (20-21)

As Jeremy Lamb's recent biography of Rochester demonstrates, the use of such phrases as "an all-too-permitted freedom," "the cosy, accommodating sexuality . . . of the pigsty and the monkeyhouse," and "modish degeneration" are too pat to describe adequately Rochester's motivations and lifestyle. As a result, such descriptions do little more than mimic the moralism of such eighteenth- and nineteenth-century writers as Thomas Davies, Thomas Macaulay, and Alexander Beljame.¹⁶

Beyond such clichés and moral judgments, most scholars agree that by the end of the 1660s the Court Wits' ideas on libertinism had 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" (25). For example, although all five of these playwrights married, their literary works argued that "no man [was] honest and no woman chaste" (Wilson, *Court Wits* 16). Buckingham and Rochester were particularly noted for neglecting their wives in favor of mistresses and prostitutes. Likewise, while their fraternity was centered around the court of Charles II, the Wits "considered human laws

¹⁶ Davies, for example, claimed in 1784 that "the king and his courtiers, in conjunction with the poets, were the pimps to debauch the morals of the people" (313). Macaulay and Beljame make similar statements. See Davies's *Dramatic Miscellanies*, Beljame's *Men of Letters and the English Public in the Eighteenth Century* pp. 53-54, and Macaulay's *Critical Essays* vol. 2 p. 422.

and institutions as mere customs varying with the variations of societies and characteristically at odds with Nature" (Underwood 14). In keeping with this attitude, Rochester was repeatedly exiled from court due to his often scathing satires on the king's sexual excesses.¹⁷ Buckingham too earned the king's wrath from time to time. And finally, all five of these writers were nominal members either of the Church of England or the Church of Rome but simultaneously rejected religious teachings against profligacy, idleness, and waste.

Scholars also concur that their mistrust was especially aimed at traditional notions of "Reason." The Wits believed that society used logic and rational thinking to justify its constraints on human beings' freedom to pursue their natural impulse toward pleasure. Because of this belief, the Wits were antirationalists, denying "the power of man through reason to conceive reality" (Underwood 13). Rochester's "Satyr against Reason and Mankind," often considered the definitive statement on the Court Wits' views and beliefs, offers a typical statement on their doubts in the efficacy of reason. As a formal verse satire, Rochester's poem presents a brief debate between a persona, often taken to represent Rochester himself, and an adversarius, in this case described as "some formal band and beard" (46) who speaks and then disappears from the poem. Rochester's persona would like to be "a dog, a monkey, or a bear, / Or anything but that vain animal, / Who is so proud of being rational" (5-7). According to this persona, humans believe that their senses are "too gross" (8). They therefore "contrive / A sixth, to contradict the other five, / And before certain instinct, will prefer / Reason, which fifty times for one does err" (8-11).

The persona goes on to argue that there are two kinds of reason, one right and one wrong. These two kinds "are distinguished by the nature of the evidence on which any

¹⁷ See, for example, "A Satyr on Charles II," "Impromptu on Charles II," and "Impromptu on the English Court."

proposition rests" (Wilcoxin 192). For Rochester and his companions, "the only admissible source of knowledge is the senses" (Wilcoxin 192):

Thus, whilst against false reasoning I inveigh,
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 vigor, not to kill. (98-103)

As Reba Wilcoxin points out, Rochester's definition of "right reason" inverts the traditional concept of reason passed down in Greek philosophy and in its Christian adaptations.

Whereas right reason in these traditions "denoted a conjunction of logically derived metaphysics and morality," Rochester's poem follows in the footsteps of seventeenth-century science and empirical philosophy (Wilcoxin 193): experience alone leads to knowledge.

Consequently, "A Satyr against Reason and Mankind" argues that the body is the true "light of nature" (13). This argument was influenced by the Wits's selective reading of Hobbes. For example, in chapter one of *Leviathan*, Hobbes asserts that "there is no conception in a mans mind, which hath not at first, totally, or by parts, been begotten upon the organs of Sense" (85). These organs are moved by the appearance of pleasure: the body moves toward and seeks out stimuli that give pleasure and avoids those that cause pain. As one scholar sums up, Hobbes saw the pleasure-giving passions as the source of life and regarded

pleasure as something positive, something which is the object of desire, and good because it is desired. The psychology which led up to this ethical valuation is therefore the reverse of the traditional. It recognizes desire as both natural and good. It refuses to distinguish between the lower and the higher types of desire, but regards all desire as fundamentally the striving of the organism after its

satisfaction. (qtd. in Birdsall 37)

Thus, for Hobbes the pursuit of pleasure is "creative, life-giving, vital" (Birdsall 37). Like Hobbes, the Wits saw desire as a constructive part of life and at least argued that they sought to cultivate their pleasures in order to make them last.

Thus, as Underwood sums up, "for the libertine the great watchwords became Nature and Reason" (14):

But Nature here, whatever else it signified, has as its supreme prerogatives and values "freedom" and "pleasure." And reason became a somewhat special kind of empirical common sense. Not only did it "distinguish by sense" but it was taken out of its metaphysically ratiocinative or intuitive role and limited to the immediate and practical world of human behavior and institutions. (14)

If reason came from experience and pleasure is the enjoyment of nature, say the Wits, then sensual pleasure is one of the primary goods in life. In fact, according to the Wits' circle, the pursuit of pleasure is a worthy activity in and of itself, since pleasure allows us to experience and experience gives one greater knowledge. This knowledge, in turn, provides us with accurate paradigms with which to interpret the world around us. Despite the fact that the Wits' thought about such ideas as "reason," "nature," and "sense," as Underwood points out, their libertinism was less "a systematic body of thought" than a loose group of "attitudes and modes of behavior" (12). "One might rather call it," says Underwood, a "way of life" (12).¹⁸

While such statements do provide a generally accurate description of the Court Wits' "attitudes and modes of behavior" during the 1660s and early 1670s, they do not fully explain this fraternity's continuing cultural and aesthetic significance. My dissertation

¹⁸ For further discussion of Restoration libertinism see Birdsall's *Wild Civility: The English Comic Spirit on the Restoration Stage* pp. 32-39; Chernaik's *Sexual Freedom in Restoration Literature* pp. 22-51; Griffin's *Satires Against Man: The Poems of Rochester* pp. 15-20; Turner's "The Properties of Libertinism" pp. 73-88; Underwood's *Etherege and the Seventeenth-Century Comedy of Manners* pp. 10-40; and Wilson's *The Court Wits of the Restoration: An Introduction* pp. 14-18.

seeks to demonstrate that this significance can be explained without painting the members of this coterie as the leaders of a London-wide orgy of decadence and debauchery or attributing the Wits' cultural success simply to the spectacularity of their antics within an already opulent court. I believe that the Wits' appeal for twentieth-century audiences lies in their ability to carve out a cultural space in which to explore possible attitudes and behaviors at the beginning of a period of political and ideological transition that initiated the forces that would help shape modern subjectivity. Accordingly, the Wits carved out a space for their literary works, and especially their plays, that set itself in opposition both to the dominant ideology of their fellow aristocrats and to the increasingly visible ideologies of prominent bourgeois cultural figures. This space allowed them both to enjoy the privileges of their rank in society and to cast themselves as oppositionary figures to that privilege. Moreover, the Wits created a unique position for themselves within Restoration society by exploring the increasingly tenuous boundaries of their culture's gender and sexual roles. Because of its position near the beginnings of these forces, the space that they created for themselves guarantees these writers a continuing significance in scholars' understanding of the resonances between elements of late seventeenth- and late twentieth-century identities, politics, genders, and sexualities. The remainder of this chapter sketches the general contours of my argument.

Rhetorics of Aristocratic and Progressive Ideology

By the end of the 1660s, the Wits' cynicism began to be focused on two key elements of British society: proponents of what are now called aristocratic and progressive ideologies. Indeed, the plays written by members of the Court Wits' circle during the 1670s indicate that they participated in a more general cultural contest over competing visions of aristocratic ideology, the "assumption that birth automatically dictates worth" (McKeon, "Historicizing" 303). Because of this assumption, proponents of traditional

views of the aristocracy argued that members of society are distinguished from one another based on their ancestry and lineage (McKeon, "Historicizing" 131). According to this view, "honor" and "virtue" were a direct result of bloodline and were independent of behavior or any other variable. During the late seventeenth century, this ideology was increasingly challenged and gradually subverted by the discourse of "progressive ideology," the belief that true nobility is derived from goodness of character.¹⁹ In part, these ideologies arose out of English responses to the particular circumstances of the Restoration of Charles II at the beginning of the decade. They also accompanied a larger cultural shift in political and sexual ideology that occurred throughout Europe during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. The Court Wits' depictions of libertinism during the 1670s stand as important markers in the transition from aristocratic ideology to progressive ideology as the dominant discourse of British culture during the Restoration and early eighteenth century.

The shift from a dominant rhetoric of innate aristocratic honor to one of earned goodness of character was initiated in England by the confused responses of many members of British society to the Restoration of the monarchy. As historians frequently note, "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" (Rosenheim, "Documenting" 591). Indeed, the England that he governed was politically and culturally different from that of his father and grandfather. While Charles brought with him an ideology of monarchical authority influenced by his years in absolutist France, a large number of his subjects "conceived the nature of the monarchy and the right of the monarch in a different way" (Backscheider 1). For example, 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

¹⁹ See McKeon's *Origins of the Novel* pp. 150-67 for a more complete discussion of this evolution.

pleasure to endorse or facilitate a sovereign's policies and plans" (Backscheider 1), as previous parliaments had traditionally done. In fact, Charles frequently acquiesced to the Convention House of Commons's executive actions, which included a rejection of the king's stated desire to prorogue Parliament in September, insisting instead for an adjournment (Jones 133).²⁰

Furthermore, many of England's citizens feared the restoration's effects on their nation. Ralph Josselin, a vicar in Essex, was one such person who feared the change. Writing on January 25, 1660, the eve of his own birthday, Josselin summed up his impressions 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. (qtd. in A. Hughes 125)

These "sad confusions" continued throughout the 1660s as the nation struggled to define the relative authority of the monarch and Parliament, a struggle that increasingly divided society along religious and status lines.

Many of these confusions centered around people's fears of popery and arbitrary government. For instance, 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 the various factors that had distanced

²⁰ See Jones pp. 132-33 for more details on the Convention Parliament's relationship with Charles.

the people from the court during the previous twelve years (Harris, *Politics* 54). These components included the court's pro-Catholic sympathies, the attempt to align England politically with Catholic France, perceived threats to Parliament's independence, and an apparent attempt by the king to rule through a standing army (Harris, *Politics* 54).²¹ The king's Declaration of Indulgence in 1662, in which Charles attempted to extend religious toleration to both Dissenters and Catholics, initiated these fears, but the disappointments of the second Dutch War of 1665-67 gave greater substance to them. When troops were hastily mustered to protect England from a Dutch coastal attack, "it was rumoured that the Duke of York had advised Charles to raise money without Parliament and to use the new army to keep order" (Harris, *Politics* 55). 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 pave the way for the advance of Catholicism.²² Similarly, some people alleged that the mismanagement of the war was a result of the court's Catholic sympathies since several members of the royal family and several of the king's advisors were known Catholics.

Because of its inability to ease these fears, the Restoration settlement "failed to satisfy for long the almost universal desire for a settled order and political stability, for government by legal, known and constitutional rather than arbitrary methods" (Jones 1). As a result of this failure, throughout much of the rest of the century the governing elites, including the king, members of Parliament, the aristocracy, and the increasingly powerful "monied interest" of bankers and financiers (Jones 73), struggled amongst themselves to shape a hegemonic order through which to govern the country.²³ As Paula Backscheider points out,

²¹ See pp. 54-55 in Tim Harris's *Politics Under the Later Stuarts* for a complete evaluation and discussion of Marvell's views.

²² See Harris p. 55, Lee pp. 17-18, 81 and 99, and Jones 100-2 for more information on this war and its political aftermath.

²³ In *Marxism and Literature*, Williams defines hegemony as "a more or less adequate organization and interconnection of otherwise separated and even disparate meanings, values, and practices, which it specifically incorporates in a significant culture and an effective social order" (115). However, hegemony

Charles himself participated in this struggle by using such "hegemonic apparatuses" as royal ceremonies, civic events, and public displays of the operation of government (2). For example, 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, the trials and executions of the regicides "became hideous but magnificent theater" (Backscheider 7) and the bodies of Cromwell, Bradshaw, and Ireton were exhumed, publically 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" (Backscheider 2). By the end of the 1660s, this construction of a national theater had become more literal as the king and his ministers increasingly commissioned the professional theater as an instrument of court ideology.

While the fragmentation of aristocratic society was in large measure due to specific political forces, including the Puritan revolution and government and the continuing anxieties concerning Charles II described above, the shift from a national discourse dominated by the voices of the aristocracy to one increasingly controlled by a rhetoric of progressive ideology was also affected by larger cultural changes. 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 the more recent additions (bankers, financiers, and merchants). Similar cultural changes throughout Europe during this period are theorized by Michel Foucault in *The History of Sexuality* 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 began to be retheorized and diminished as European monarchs were no longer invested with an absolute and

"does not passively exist as a form of dominance. It has continually to be renewed, recreated, defended, and modified. It is also continually resisted, limited, altered, challenged by pressures not at all its own" (112).

unconditional sway over their subjects' lives. This change was the result of an increasing accumulation of political power in European parliaments. In the resulting contest between monarchs and parliaments, rulers 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 execution of his father's regicides and exhumation of Cromwell's corpse. As Backscheider points out, "Charing Cross rather than Tyburn was chosen as the execution site for the regicides, and English people would be reminded not only of its destruction during the Commonwealth, allegedly at the final instigation of Hugh Peters, one of the men on trial, but of its ancient meaning" as the gateway to London (7). As a place where proclamations were often read and distributed, where royal forces defeated a group of rebels in 1554, and where Edward I had "erected the most elaborate of the twelve crosses for his queen, Eleanor of Castile," Charing Cross specifically symbolized royal authority on a personal level (Backscheider 7). In fact, Charles II later chose this spot for the equestrian statue of his father that "a brazier had bought, had pretended to melt down, but had kept hidden during the Commonwealth" (Backscheider 7). Likewise, Tyburn was selected as the site for the dismemberment and display of Cromwell's corpse. Here, at this "most ignominious, most public place, Tyburn," the spectacle of Cromwell's slowly rotting body "went beyond showing people their 'folly' to aiming at an ultimate discrediting" (Backscheider 7, 8).

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 (136). Foucault uses this new emphasis on the monarch's role as national physician to her people to argue that this change in discourse was

²⁴ Henry Bradshaw and Henry Ireton were also exhumed, dismembered, and displayed for public view at Tyburn.

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. (*History* 148)

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 began to be 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" (147). 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.

Just as Foucault saw early modern society shifting from a paradigm governed by aristocratic ideology to one dominated by bourgeois ideology, so Michael McKeon sees a similar shift occurring in England during the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries. In "Historicizing Patriarchy: The Emergence of Gender Difference in England, 1660-1760," he analyzes British "disenchantment with aristocratic ideology" (297) and argues that this

disenchantment had many effects throughout England.²⁵ First, attacks on aristocratic ideology successfully "argued that honor of birth has nothing to do with internal virtue and competence—hence the depravity, corruption, and incompetence of male aristocrats" (297). As a result, "the status assumption that birth automatically dictates worth was replaced by a class conviction that birth and worth are independent variables" (303). This conviction comprised the main tenet of progressive, or bourgeois, ideology.²⁶ Second, widespread outcry against abuses within the aristocratic family, which often led to the impoverishment and ruin of younger siblings and unhappy marriages for daughters, led to changes in the marriage laws that were designed to prevent the worst abuses by older children and mercenary husbands (297). Third, toward the end of the seventeenth century, these innovations in marriage laws were accompanied by a new emphasis on the idea that female bodies were not simply "aberrant versions of a unitary male body" but were "physically and naturally different" (301). Consequently, "England acquired the modern wisdom that there are not one but two sexes; that they are biologically distinct and therefore incommensurable; and that they are defined not by behavior, which is variable, but by nature, which is not" (301). This rhetorical shift supported the new system of female domesticity and set the stage for a move to the modern system of heterosexuality, "reciprocally inseparable from its dialectical antithesis, homosexuality" (307).

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" (*History* 149). One such overlapping in this transition from the aristocratic

²⁵ Here McKeon defines aristocratic ideology as "the set of related beliefs that birth makes worth, that the interests of the family are identified with those of its head, and that among the gentry, honor and property are to be transmitted patrimonially and primogeniturally, through the male line" (297).

²⁶ Throughout the rest of this dissertation I will use McKeon's label, "progressive ideology," rather than Foucault's "bourgeois ideology," since McKeon's term avoids the connotations that accompany the word "bourgeois."

body's symbolism of blood to the bourgeois body's sexuality, says Foucault, was libertinism. In particular, he examines the contemporaneity of the Marquis de Sade with this transition. 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" (148). 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. As he maintains in *The Order of Things*,

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. (209)

While the desires that Sade expressed included "the prestige of the blood" on a more literal level,²⁷ Foucault's description of the libertine as he who is driven to represent desire in discourse is applicable to the Court Wits and helps explain how they attempted to forge a cultural space in which to challenge both aristocratic and progressive ideologies. In particular, the Wits used London's playhouses to shape, redefine, and alter one set of aristocratic meanings, values, and practices, those attached to various depictions of the libertine figure. Many scholars of the period see the Wits as simply a fraternity of fun-loving rebels who jovially satirize the king and his court. The Court Wits' critiques of rhetorics of both aristocratic and progressive ideologies suggest that aristocratic ideology was itself a

²⁷ As he 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" (*History* 148-49).

diffuse, malleable entity that various factions attempted to shape for their own benefit. The Wits were among these factions. By populating their plays with libertine figures much like themselves (as constructed in and by the popular imagination), the Wits mobilized many of the available cultural resources to attempt to shape Restoration culture in their own image, one that emphasized aristocratic privilege and the freedom of the individual to pursue pleasure.

Rhetorics of Libertine Ideology

Libertine ideology was a set of values and beliefs that were shared by the Court Wits. While this fraternity's libertinism was initially characterized by its definitions of reason and nature, I believe that the plays written by members of the Wits' circle during the 1670s reveal that libertine ideology was eventually defined by its rejection of the major ideologies of their day. As a result, the Wits' libertinism during the 1670s was increasingly rhetorical, contingent on the discourses of aristocratic and progressive ideologies. Throughout their plays of the 1670s, the Wits reject progressive ideology's positing of a procreative, antiseptic body as desirable for men and women as well as aristocratic ideology's rhetoric of inherited honor and national duty. The first of these was the result of the Wits' attempt to resist their culture's general evolution toward a new system of gender and sexuality. The latter reflects this circle's dissatisfaction with Charles II's use of spectacular politics, including pageantry, Lords Mayors Shows, and heroic drama, to bolster his regime. Throughout this decade, the members of the Wits' circle used their dramatic representations of Restoration life, culture, and ideology to try out a wide range of responses to the cultural forces of their day.

In "Historicizing Patriarchy" McKeon contends that England's shift from a society based on aristocratic ideology and its notions of the body to one based on progressive ideology and its construction of the body was accompanied by the emergence of modern gen-

der roles. However, as several scholars have pointed out, this emergence was dependent on several contemporaneous factors. One of these factors was the division of labor based on biological sex. As McKeon explains, during the early modern period women's ability to find independent work outside the household was increasingly diminished. As a result, women were encouraged to marry at a younger age as a defense against unemployment (McKeon 299). Eventually, this trend toward early marriage and division of labor led to "the familiar, culturally ramified opposition between the domestic and the public realms" (McKeon 300). This division of labor was likewise accompanied by a separation of the sexes biologically. As scholars learned more about female reproductive anatomy, they came to believe that differences in the sexes were "natural" and empirical (McKeon 301). And finally, by the end of the seventeenth century, these differences between men and women led to the belief in innate gender roles for each sex. As Randolph Trumbach describes, "The modern gender role for men presumed that most men desired women exclusively and that all masculine behavior flowed from such desire" ("Sex" 187).

According to McKeon and Trumbach, a fourth factor that affected the emergence of modern gender roles was the appearance of homosexual subcultures as a visible part of British society around 1700. Before the turn of the century, sodomy was largely perceived by the general populace as a vice of the aristocracy, the excesses of a relatively small circle of bisexual libertines within the Court Wits' fraternity. 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.

("Birth" 130-31)

Such examples of debauchery as Sedley's performance at the Cock Tavern, lampoons of Buckingham, subtle hints in Etherege's *Man of Mode*, and celebrations of sodomy in Rochester's poetry and drama associated this bisexuality with members of the Court Wits' circle. As Trumbach points out, these bisexual libertines were part of "the old sexual culture" which preceded "the new way of conceptualizing the relationship of gender to sexuality in males" as a natural component of masculinity ("Sex" 189).

In contrast to the Wits' perceived bisexuality, sodomy was often associated with the molly and the molly house after 1700. As Trumbach explains, during the early eighteenth century a new kind of effeminate sodomite came to dominate the populace's conceptions of male-to-male sexual desire. Called "mollies," these men "took women's names, spent nearly all their time in women's clothes, and almost consistently were referred to as 'she' and 'her' by their male and female acquaintances" (Trumbach "Sex" 189). Often these men worked as prostitutes and gathered with their clients in brothels and taverns set up for that purpose. However, "the gender identity of these transvestite males was not entirely feminine . . . since they sometimes wore men's clothes and were prepared to take the active or inserter's role in sexual intercourse" (Trumbach "Sex" 189). According to Trumbach and McKeon, "it is only through the emergence of this new gender role [the one that combined male and female characteristics] that the two 'orthodox' genders simultaneously came into being as the normative choice of *difference* made intelligible by the alternative and negative choice of *sameness*" (McKeon, "Historicizing" 308).

Just as Foucault argues that the Marquis de Sade's novels marked a crucial point in the West's transition from its old order to a new one, I believe that the Court Wits' plays simi-

larly signal an important moment in English cultural history. With its emphasis on representation, the Wits' libertine ideology as found in the plays parallels the manner in which modern gender roles operate. Because of this parallel, the work of recent gender theorists offer us new insight into Wits' dramatic works. The work of Judith Butler is particularly helpful in this regard. In *Gender Trouble* Butler invites us to "[c]onsider gender . . . as a corporeal style, an 'act,' as it were, which is both intentional and performative, where 'performative' suggests a dramatic and contingent construction of meaning" (139). She contends that gender is not an innate essence; rather, it is a sign, an imitation, a performance that passes itself off as an essence. This apparent sense of essence is achieved, says Butler, by the repetition of signs, imitations, and performances: through repetition, what is familiar comes to feel natural. Just as Butler's notion of gender is performed as a "corporeal style," or "acts, gestures, and desire [which] produce the effect of an internal core or substance . . . on the surface of the body" (*Gender* 136), libertinism for the Court Wits was an ideological construct performed on and through the body. Just as Butler deconstructs contemporary notions of subjective essence, the Wits negate the "natural" gender and sexual identities posited by the growing middle class.

The Wits negate these identities by depicting libertinism as a kind of "corporeal style" that produces the effect of an internal identity. This production can be seen in their depictions of libertine figures in their plays written in the 1670s. During this decade, Buckingham finished composing his masterpiece, *The Rehearsal* (1671); Wycherley joined the Wits and produced four plays, *Love in a Wood* (1671), *The Gentleman Dancing-Master* (1672), *The Country Wife* (1675), and *The Plain Dealer* (1676); Etherege penned his last work, *The Man of Mode* (1676); Rochester wrote two plays, *The Farce of Sodom* (ca. 1676) and *Valentinian* (ca. 1676-77); and Sedley composed a tragedy, *Antony and Cleopatra* (1677). Throughout these works, the Wits drew upon their reputations as rakes in order to cast versions of themselves as the central figures in their plays. In fact, this

casting has often led audiences to speculate on whether such characters as Horner and Dorimant are exact likenesses of Rochester or Etherege or simply an amalgamation of two or more members of their circle. For example, Charles Gildon reports that, when Etherege's *The Man of Mode* premiered in March 1676, it "met with Extraordinary Success; all agreeing it to be true Comedy, and the Characters drawn to the Life" (qtd. in Summers *Playhouse* 311). Montague Summers points out that the latter part of Gildon's statement was meant literally: "Dorimant was generally recognized to be Rochester," and "It is disputed whether Sir Charles Sedley was Medley, and Etherege himself Young Bellair, or whether Etherege drew himself in Medley" (334). The similarities between these "real" and "fictional" figures blurred the line between definitions of natural and artificial identities.

This casting complicated the relationship between audience and playwright since the writer, and by extension the Wits' 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 *really* playing Etherege or Sedley. The Wits relied on this double performance of character and author to appeal to an often antagonistic audience. James Thompson contends that a hostile relationship existed between Restoration playwrights and their audiences. As he argues, "In such a rhetorical situation, no writer can proceed by direct audience appeal or obvious modes of persuasion such as compliment, but rather by indirection, confusion, and surprise, for this is an audience that can only be entrapped into approval" ("Ideology" 162-63). The Wits' first four comedies during the 1670s support this contention in as much as each one employs increasingly surprising and often confusing depictions of the elite, male, libertine body. These depictions portrayed the libertine in a state of emotional crisis that stand in marked contrast to each play's overall depictions of more and more sexually-aggressive and emotionally-ruthless rakes. By populating their plays with libertine figures that resembled

themselves, the Wits insured that the playhouses were full and thus maximized their potential ability to shape Restoration culture more broadly.

These representations, however, also had a second, unforeseen effect. Because these characters were in part drawn from the Wits' own reputations and therefore associated the characters with their authors, these representations also worked to create new libertine personae. In other words, the Wits' casting of versions of themselves in their plays served to create new visions of who they were in the popular imagination. Thus, like the new gender system that was beginning to form around them, the Wits' plays included a performative function. To borrow the words of Judith Butler, these characterizations of themselves produced "the effect of an internal core or substance" (*Gender* 136). This effect was reached via the acts and gestures that served as signs that these characters were in fact versions of the Wits. As Butler explains, "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" (*Gender* 136). Furthermore, as Butler points out, "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" (*Bodies* 2). The Wits' dramatic works during the 1670s were among the "reiterative and citational practices" through which libertine ideology was performed on and created by the libertine body.

Throughout *Love in a Wood*, *The Gentleman Dancing-Master*, and *The Country Wife* the signs of libertinism are often combined with a form of involuntary somatic confessions, instances in which the libertine's body threatens to betray his emotional state by means of blushing, laughter, or impotence followed by the rake's verbal confession of his state through an aside to the audience or a conversation with another character. These confessions reflect the Wits' belief that the cultivation of pleasure could be betrayed by one's own body. Etherege and Rochester, for example, each wrote poems on the

frustrations that accompany premature ejaculation and impotence. Consequently, while progressive ideology might define these confessions as signs of a natural self, the Court Wits' include these signs to reveal their characters' artificiality, an artificiality further conveyed by the fact that these acts are performed by professional actors. For example, Wycherley's *Love in a Wood*, first performed in the spring of 1671, presents but then obscures the rake's ability to blush and thereby establishes the possibility that the rake's body might betray his erotic intentions. As Mary Ann O'Farrell explains, "blushing is . . . an act of somatic confession that dazzles with its promise to establish unique identity by revealing the body's truth" (6). Just as this possibility is promised, however, the play rejects the blush: while the libertine suggests that he might redden, the moment is obscured by the cloak of night. This rejection highlights the fact that, in the performance of a play, any blush is necessarily conveyed to the audience through means other than the actor actually blushing.

Each of the other comedies written in this decade builds on this foundation. Wycherley's *The Gentleman Dancing-Master*, performed in March 1672, depicts its hero, Gerrard, in an uncontrollable fit of laughter as a father unwittingly aids in his daughter's (voluntary) abduction. Throughout this scene, Gerrard confesses his lack of control and its possible effect on his designs through asides to the audience. Likewise, *The Country Wife*, Wycherley's 1675 masterpiece, presents Horner, the libertine who, while pretending to be impotent, is actually rendered so (at least temporarily). Horner must then admit that he cannot perform as requested. In each of these plays, the libertine protagonist becomes increasingly hostile to the social world around him. This hostility culminates in Horner's choice at the end of *The Country Wife* to abandon his friends in order to maintain his ruse of impotency, which allows him to sleep with nearly every woman in the play. With Horner's choice, Wycherley depicts what he sees as the natural extension of the Wits'

celebration of wine, women, and song: to pursue sexual freedom, the libertine must abandon all other pursuits.

Throughout their plays in the 1670s, the Wits also reject Charles II's use of theatrical spectacle to enact his vision of political order. Whether these spectacles took the form of progresses, Lords Mayors Shows, or Dryden's heroic dramas, the Wits saw their rhetoric as empty posturing in support of an ineffective government. After waning in the late 1660s due to the first two wars with the Dutch and the Great Fire of 1666, many of these spectacles once again took center stage in Charles II's struggle to shape aristocratic hegemony during the early 1670s as Charles prepared for a third Dutch war and as England drew closer to what would become the Exclusion Crisis. As Tim Harris argues, "[a]lthough the terms Whig and Tory did not come in to common usage until the Exclusion Crisis, the issues which divided the two groups did not suddenly burst onto the scene with Titus Oates' revelations of a Popish plot in the summer of 1678" (*Politics* 52). These issues, says Harris, were threefold: "growing fears about 'popery' and 'arbitrary government' throughout the 1660s and 1670s," an expanding group of people who, beginning in 1674, wanted to exclude the Duke of York from succession to the throne due to his Catholicism, and an "increasing polarisation along political and religious lines both in Parliament and in society at large" (52).

By 1670, Charles II had resolved "to make the king independent of his subjects, and in particular to free him from having to rely on the cooperation of parliament" (Jones 164).²⁸ Consequently, he turned to France and Louis XIV for help. Shortly after the fall of Clarendon, who was impeached for mismanaging the second Dutch war, England joined an alliance against France with the Protestant nations of Sweden and the Netherlands. Charles

²⁸ As Maurice Lee explains, "Charles never forgot that Parliament had put an end not only to his father's attempt at absolutism but also to his life, and that, if sufficiently provoked, it might well try to do the same to him" (3). For this reason, "Parliament's power to do this, its power to influence policy, either positively or negatively, had to be broken if Charles was really to rule in England" (3).

soon took advantage of the competition among his primary advisors to break with this alliance and sign a treaty with Louis XIV. After Clarendon's fall, Charles relied on a group of five politicians, known as the Cabal, so-called after the initials of their names, Clifford, Arlington, Buckingham, Ashley, and Lauderdale, to head his government. While Buckingham served at the titular head of the group, Charles actually relied on Clifford and Arlington to enact his true aims. For example, Charles sent Buckingham to France in 1669 to negotiate a treaty with Louis XIV, which publicly committed England to join France in a war against the Dutch. Secretly, however, Charles entrusted Arlington to arrange a private clause in the treaty which promised that Charles would declare himself a Catholic in exchange for £150,000. Buckingham's frustrations with his lack of real power in the government were given voice in 1671 with the premiere of his masterpiece, *The Rehearsal*.

After the premiere of Buckingham's play, the Wits' critique of politics temporarily became a secondary concern in their drama. This critique once again became the primary focus of their work once the full effect of the treaty with France was felt, setting the stage for the Exclusion Crisis later in the decade. While the existence and terms of Charles's covert agreement with Louis XIV was kept secret even from the other members of the Cabal, the nature of the treaty became suspect when, on March 15, 1672, Charles issued a Declaration of Indulgence suspending all penal laws against Catholics and Dissenters. The raising of a standing army to fight the Dutch and defend England's coasts further alarmed members of Parliament, which attacked the king's right to grant religious indulgences when it reconvened in February 1673. Likewise, concern over the number of Catholics who were receiving commissions in the army led to the passage in March of the Test Act, which required all civil and military office holders to take the Anglican sacrament and declare their belief against the doctrine of transubstantiation. This latter effort not only

²⁹ The treaty also guaranteed Charles a war indemnity of up to £1,000,000 and a subsidy of £225,000 annually for the duration of the war. For more information on the Treaty of Dover, see Lee's *The Cabal* pp. 101-12 and Jones's *Country and Court*. pp. 169-73.

attempted to check the power of Charles, but brought the question of the succession to the throne into the foreground once Charles's heir and brother, James, the Duke of York, publicly declared himself a Catholic by failing to take the Anglican communion at Easter. In June, James resigned his office as head of the navy, citing the Test Act's provisions as his reason. Within the next year, the Cabal ministry fell apart.

The fall of the Cabal from power also affected the Court Wits' circle and initiated the group's slow disintegration. Buckingham's move from the court to the opposition country party in Parliament signaled his increasing isolation from the other members of his group. Etherege retired from writing for the stage and settled into married life sometime after 1676, though he still accompanied Rochester on his frolics from time to time.³⁰ After 1675, Wycherley wrote only one more play, *The Plain Dealer*. His literary career ended shortly thereafter when he fell sick with a brain fever that robbed him of his memory and his creative aspirations.³¹ Consequently, Rochester and Sedley were the only members of the group who composed dramas after 1676. This shift in authorship is likewise accompanied by a shift in genre. While Etherege's last play, *The Man of Mode*, is generally considered a comedy, Wycherley's *The Plain Dealer* is a caustic satire. In contrast, Rochester's first play, *Sodom, or The Quintessence of Debauchery*, is a closet farce, and he and Sedley finish the Wits' dramatic output in this decade with two tragedies, *Valentinian* and *Antony and Cleopatra*, respectively. This generic shift carries within it an ideological shift: the Wits move from an interrogation of such social norms as marriage that accompany comedy to an examination of the subversion and/or destruction of social and political norms through satire, farce, and tragedy.

In these plays, the Wits interrogate the efficacy of their libertine persona, asking more explicitly whether it can viably exist in British society. As a result of this interrogation,

³⁰ See Link's "George Etherege" pp. 108-9.

³¹ See Zimbardo's "William Wycherley" p. 286.

each of these later plays attempts to fabricate a new libertine identity. Etherege and Wycherley both propose that the libertine must be reincorporated into society's institutions. For example, Dorimant in Etherege's *The Man of Mode* is potentially domesticated by the love of a good woman, Harriet. Likewise, in Wycherley's *The Plain Dealer* Freeman solves his financial difficulties by marrying the Widow Blackacre and Manly must be educated to value social ties over extreme self-reliance. In contrast to Etherege's and Wycherley's last plays, Rochester's and Sedley's works maintain that the libertine should not surrender his quest for sexual freedom. Consequently, Bolloximian, the King of Sodom in Rochester's farce, joyously consigns himself to Hell's fire, brimstone, and clouds of smoke rather than give up his pleasures. Similarly, Rochester's adaptation of Fletcher's *Valentinian* ends with the Emperor's murder after he rapes the hero's wife and then refuses to give up his catamite. And finally, Sedley's *Antony and Cleopatra* ends with the libertines' violent but heroic deaths: Antony falls on his sword and Cleopatra ends her own life with the asp. This shift to violent imagery marks the Wits' turn away from their initial project of carving out a cultural space for themselves within court society as they conclude that the libertine cannot comfortably live within society's strictures and must therefore either martyr himself for his beliefs/pleasures or give them up entirely.

I will begin my discussion of the Court Wits' dramatic works during the 1670s by analyzing Buckingham's *The Rehearsal*. By employing a kind of gender parody as one of the primary tools in its deconstruction of the ideology of heroic drama, this farce sets the stage for the Wits' subsequent ideas about the performance of gender and sexual identities. Chapter 3 will examine these ideas of identity performance in Wycherley's comedies and will argue that each of his libertine protagonists is more complex than the previous one. This complexity culminates in the character of Horner, who abandons social ties in order to continue his quest for sexual gratification. Chapters 4 and 5 discuss the Wits' response to Horner's choice. Chapter 4 studies *The Man of Mode* and *The Plain Dealer* and argues that

both of these plays work to integrate the libertine into society's institutions, especially marriage. Chapter 5 maintains that Rochester and Sedley reject this integration by depicting libertine protagonists who celebrate extreme sexual license over political responsibility. My conclusion will then briefly summarize my major points and will survey the final disintegration of the Wits' fraternity by the end of the 1670s.

Chapter Two

Strutting Heroes and Solemn Fops:

Gender Parody as Libertine Ideology in Buckingham's *The Rehearsal*

The place of George Villiers, the second Duke of Buckingham, in literary history has rested mainly on the reputation of one play, *The Rehearsal*, a burlesque written collaboratively with Martin Clifford, Samuel Butler, and Thomas Sprat that premiered in London on December 7, 1671.¹ Immediately successful, Buckingham's farce remained one of London's most popular plays for much of the next century.² Using a play-within-a-play structure, *The Rehearsal* has commonly been seen as a burlesque of John Dryden's heroic drama. The inner play is an untitled heroic play "written" by the character Mr. Bayes.³ The outer play is a farce composed around the conversation of Mr. Bayes and two other characters, Mr. Smith and Mr. Johnson, two gentlemen whom he invites to observe the rehearsal of his new drama. The character of Bayes was instantly recognized as a parody of Dryden himself. Critics, however, soon began to question the basis for the play's popularity after the particulars of its satire had faded into history. For example, in his *Life of Johnson* James Boswell records that on March 31, 1772 his conversation with Samuel Johnson turned to Buckingham's play. As Boswell writes, Johnson proclaimed that "Bayes, in *The Rehearsal*, is a mighty silly character. If it was intended to be like a

¹ Scholars agree, however, that the contributions of Clifford, Sprat, and Butler were minimal and were largely confined to polishing individual passages satirizing heroic diction. See pp. xvii-xviii of Montague Summers's introduction for his comments on the play's authorship. Both Clifford and Butler served the duke as secretaries; Sprat was his chaplain.

² In his introduction to the 1914 facsimile edition of *The Rehearsal*, Montague Summers surveys the play's performance history from 1671 to 1819, arguing that "Buckingham's comedy at once took its place as a stock piece in the English Theatre among the masterpieces of the greatest dramatists" (xiv). See pp. xiv-xvi.

³ Bayes's drama depicts the political turmoil surrounding the reigns of the Two Kings of Brentford, two sovereigns who rule the same kingdom. These kings are humorously deposed by their Gentleman Usher and the court Physician when these latter men sit in the kings' chairs. Political chaos ensues, only to be resolved in the final act by miraculous intervention.

particular man, it could only be diverting while that man was remembered" (158-59).

Johnson therefore doubts that the character was modeled after Dryden, as tradition holds.

"I maintained," says Boswell, "that it had merit as a general satire on the self-importance of dramattick authors. But even in this light he held it very cheap" (159).

Some twentieth-century scholars concur with Johnson's view and complain that "modern anthologists continue to reprint it for the mystification of undergraduates" (Wilson, *Court Wits* 159). Buckingham's *The Rehearsal* nevertheless merits study. It is particularly useful in an analysis of the plays written by the Court Wits, since it contains many of the elements that would define the Wits' drama during the 1670s. In particular, *The Rehearsal* attacks the period's dominant vision of aristocratic ideology by calling into question the grounds and values of heroic ideology, an exaggeratedly elevated version of aristocratic ideals. This attack is executed through the use of gender parody, a form of epideictic rhetoric: through parody, hyperbole, and bitter mockery, Buckingham mocks heroic drama's depiction of masculinity as well as Dryden's status as poet laureate. In doing so, he also draws upon libertinism's fascination with representation, arguing that all discourse is self-referentially performative. Accordingly, says Buckingham, no one kind of discourse, no one ideology, is any less artificial than another. Ultimately, this attack seeks to undermine the very nature of divine right theories, blood alliances, and aristocratic privilege, the key elements of aristocratic ideology. By utilizing gender parody to mount this criticism of aristocratic ideology, Buckingham initiates the Wits' opposition to aristocratic notions of honor as well as their play with artificiality and the performance of identity.

"Such Monstrous, Hideous Things"

Buckingham's *The Rehearsal* is generally seen as a parody of heroic drama, one of the most popular artforms of the late 1660s and early 1670s. Its parody begins in the

prologue, originally spoken by John Lacy, the actor who first played Bayes. As the actor proclaims, Buckingham has written "this short Mock-play" (1) in order to correct the worst abuses of the Restoration stage. As he relates,

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 Tragædy,
 And with their Comedies they make us cry. (7-14)

According to Buckingham, heroic drama fails to use "Reason," "Nature," "Art," or "Wit" in its depictions of "insipid Blades" and "strutting Heroes." Of these terms, "Nature" is a key idea throughout Buckingham's play. Throughout this work, Buckingham rejects the notion that nature can be presented to the world unmediated by ideology, which is what heroic drama claims to do.

This claim is explicit in John Dryden's essay "Of Heroique Plays," which provides the fullest contemporary discussion of the genre.⁴ Seeing heroic drama as "the highest pattern of life," Dryden argues that the playwright must provide the proper heroic context for his epic characters, a context that includes "Spectres," "Magique," "Drums and Trumpets," and "representations of Battels" (11.13). As he explains, these elements are a vital part of his productions, since "these warlike Instruments, and, even the representations of fighting on the Stage, are no more than necessary to produce the effects of an Heroick Play" (11.13-14). According to Dryden, these effects are "to raise the imagination of the Audience, and to perswade them, for the time, that what they beheld on the Theater is really perform'd"

⁴ This essay was prefaced to the text of *The Conquest of Granada* in 1672.

(11.14). Thus, Dryden hoped that the spectacle of battles and heroic action would help his audiences suspend their disbelief. Beyond allowing his audience to enjoy the play as entertainment, this suspension of disbelief would also help spectators see the characters and action as examples for their own modes of conduct. As Richard Bevis explains, "'Heroic Drama' was to be 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" (40). These aspects of the plays allowed them to be entertaining. He goes on to write:

Drawing its sentiments from chivalric romance and the etiquette of the most refined courts, it was to lift serious English drama from the muck of blood and revenge into which it had fallen up to a level befitting a nation whose theatrical establishment had recently sojourned in the capitals of Europe. The 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. (40)

Under Dryden's direction, heroic drama as a genre moved away from the literal elements of pre-Restoration tragedy, "the muck of blood and revenge" of such plays as William Shakespeare's *Hamlet*, Cyril Tourneur's *The Revenger's Tragedy*, and Webster's *The Duchess of Malfi*. Instead, Dryden's plays ostensibly examined ideals of honor and love in order to provide his audiences with "patterns for imitation." To create these patterns for imitation, the plots of these plays would typically involve "the godlike hero in war, revolution, or palace intrigue, and set him against powerful antagonists and seemingly hopeless odds" (Wilson, *Preface* 69-70).⁵ By watching how this hero responded to these

⁵ See also Laura Brown's chapter on "Heroic Action" in her book *English Dramatic Form, 1660-1760*. She argues that "heroic action is shaped and governed by a system of precise epic, chivalric, or Platonic standards, which express the ideology of a self-consciously exclusive social class and which are justified aesthetically by neoclassical epic and dramatic theory" (3).

obstacles, says Dryden, members of the audience would learn how they too should act in life. According to Buckingham, however, what these plays actually did was to try to insulate the aristocracy from political and economic encroachment from the lower classes by creating an image of England's elite that, to paraphrase Dryden, befitted an aristocracy whose political establishment had recently sojourned in the capitals of Europe.

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, really just another form of theater, one used by unworthy courtiers to achieve power. Heroic drama is the focus of Buckingham's critique in large part because of its status as the most sophisticated tool in a larger deployment of court power and propaganda. After the restoration of Charles II, "the nation's social and political elite sought to re-establish their traditional unanimity and were determined to dominate political debate" (Montaño 32). Recognizing that Charles I's neglect of popular politics after 1640 had given his opponents the opportunity to subvert popular support for the monarchy, the restored government was committed to impressing upon the minds of the populace that monarchy brought with it national unity, social accord, and economic prosperity (Montaño 32). As Charles II's public execution of the regicides and desecration of Cromwell's corpse illustrate, the government quickly initiated a visual campaign to argue that the country had been deceived by Cromwell and his fellow conspirators, a deception from which the new government had delivered the people.

One of the strategies the new government used to re-establish public unity was the staging of carefully crafted public spectacles and pageants. Beginning with the king's progress through London the day before his coronation, the new government used popular drama as a means of inculcating commoners with the need for political and social consensus. As John Patrick Montaño explains, "public theater was crucial in expressing the values of the Court; it was one method of transmitting the message which required no

formal literacy, for pageantry by its very nature was the most socially and artistically inclusive form of discourse" (36). This use of pageantry continued in the Lord Mayor's Shows, "a procession past a series of arches displaying civic virtues" that occurred once a year to declare London's reaffirmation of its loyalty to the king (Montaño 37). Like the coronation progress, these mayoral pageants were didactic, emphasizing the importance of political and religious consensus, "which was authorized by tradition, Aristotelian moderation, the lessons of history, and the power of scripture" (Montaño 37). As the 1660s wore on, however, the use of public pageants soon ended as London faced the Plague, the Great Fire, and the destruction caused by the Dutch fleet's sailing up the Medway. When the Great Fire destroyed the pageants and figures used in the Shows, the celebrations were abandoned for six years (Montaño 39). The waning of the Lord Mayor's Day Shows was also effected as the spectacle of heroic drama began to eclipse their relatively primitive visual and verbal theater. Although heroic drama had a great deal in common with these events, also relying on historical, religious, and exotic settings in order to preach a propaganda of consensus and submission to the monarch, plays by Dryden and his fellow playwrights had the luxury of professional actors, complex scenic capabilities, and large budgets. In contrast, "given the close proximity of spectator and spectacle and the harsh light of day, the emblematic decorations of the pageant stages may well have seemed inadequate, crude, and naive" (Richards 68). Consequently, during the late 1660s Charles relied on the professional theater to convey his message of national accord.

In 1671 the government returned to "its interest in using all forms of culture—both elite and popular—to propagate the ideology of consensus" (Montaño 32). With the Treaty of Dover in 1670, in which Charles 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 were some sort of secret articles that promised Charles's conversion to

Catholicism (Montaño 40). The Duke of York's refusal to attend Anglican service complicated matters further, as did the Cabal ministry's lack of political unity: Clifford was a Catholic, Arlington was a faithful Royalist, Buckingham championed nonconformity, Ashley was a former Cromwellian, and Lauderdale's affiliation was unfixed (Montaño 40). Charles faced this crisis by once again turning toward the use of popular theater to preach domestic unity against a foreign threat. He did so by reviving civic pageantry.

Buckingham's play premiered in the same year in which the Lord Mayor's Day Shows were revived and in which Dryden's position as the poet laureate led to the renewed use of London's theaters via heroic drama to propagate the court's message. It was also a year in which Buckingham's marginal status within the Privy Council became undeniable: despite his apparently successful negotiation of the Treaty of Dover, Arlington continued to receive the king's greater favor.⁶ This favor was made even more odious to the duke since Arlington's machinations to minimize Buckingham's influence at court had become deadly. For example, in 1667 Arlington participated in a plot to convict the duke of treason, alleging that Buckingham had requested a horoscope of the king's nativity from a magician. As a capital offense, conviction on this charge would almost certainly have led to execution. While Arlington and several of the duke's other enemies vigorously pursued his arrest and prosecution, Buckingham went into hiding. He was eventually compelled to give himself up and he presented himself to the king. Buckingham eventually prevailed in proving that the evidence against him was false, largely by using his close ties to Charles to win the king's trust, but the episode created a rift among the Cabal ministers that was never repaired. Charles's reliance on Arlington made it abundantly clear that Buckingham's role

⁶ Unknown to Buckingham, Arlington had also been entrusted to negotiate the secret articles of the Treaty of Dover, in which Charles agreed to declare himself a Catholic in exchange for £150,000. The treaty also provided Charles with additional money for declaring war on the Dutch and for supporting the English monarch during the war.

in the government would continue to be minimal. Rather than attack his enemies directly, therefore, Buckingham does so through laughter and subtle irony.⁷

In *The Rehearsal*, Buckingham argues that attempts to cast Charles II's reign as a heroic drama are hollow and artificial. Such plays as Dryden's *The Conquest of Granada*, in which the chaos of an infidel nation is rectified by its submission to a Christian king, certainly seem to have had this end in mind. In fact, Queen Isabel explicitly casts Ferdinand's return to Granada in terms of a restoration:

Should bold Columbus in his search succeed,
And find those Beds in which bright Metals breed;

.....

Not all that shining Ore could give my heart
The joy, this Conquer'd Kingdom will impart;
Which, rescu'd from these Misbelievers hands;
Shall now, at once shake off its double bands:
At once to freedom and true faith restor'd:

Its old Religion, and its antient Lord. (11.106)

Such language as "restor[ing]" a "Conquer'd Kingdom" from "Misbelievers hands" and to "freedom and true faith" would undoubtedly recall to the audience's minds Charles II's own restoration to the English throne in 1660. According to Buckingham, this is the true lesson of Dryden's play: all people, whatever their station in life and individual merits, should joyfully submit to God's legitimate authority on earth, his Christian king. This lesson foreshadows Dryden's even more explicit defense of Charles II's reign in "Absalom and Achitophel" some ten years later.

⁷ Buckingham's explicit condemnation of one of Charles's ministers in 1669 had led to the suppression of his previous work, scenes in *The Country Gentleman*.

The play's prologue initiates its attack on heroic drama. The prologue ends by asserting that, if the play's depictions of this genre help the audience to "grow wise" and reject its "feats" (21) and the "reasons for 'em too" (22), "Then I'll cry out, swell'd with Poetique rage, / 'Tis I, John Lacy, have reform'd your Stage" (26-27). This proclamation initiates a theme that permeates the entire play. As Sheridan Baker postulates in the voice of Buckingham's audience,

Here is the real Lacy (whom we know) dressed to look like Dryden (whom we know), ready to step into that full comic personality, Mr. Bayes, yet thinking at the end of swelling with typical heroic rhetoric to declare that he, John Lacy, the mere actor, has reformed the stage, whereas, in actuality, the reformer will have been

Buckingham, the parodist and satirist who has created the role for him to act. (169)

While Baker sees this joke as another example of the play's theme of "theatrical illusion" (169), it also serves to establish the play's blurring of the line between art and reality. This prologue suggests that, in this play, no identity, whether it be of a character, an actor, or even the playwright, is "natural." In fact, one identity can be exchanged for another at any time. Thus, the actor can simultaneously insist that he is the character he plays and the playwright who created him. Likewise, no action in the mock play occurs according to "nature." Instead, Buckingham reveals that every event is effected through the mediation of ideology. The actions of Drawcansir, Bayes's fictional hero, are dictated by his playwright's conceptions of aristocratic honor and heroic love. Kings are deposed and restored in order to enhance the element of "surprise" (18). Battles are waged in order to conform to generic convention or to prove that a character is a hero according to those conventions. According to this play, heroic drama is comprised of "such hideous, monstrous things" (2) precisely because it attempts to pass its conventions off as a nostalgic reality.

Scholars have already examined the ways in which this play satirizes such contemporaries as Dryden and the Earl of Arlington, as well as its parody of playwrights in general.⁸ Recent developments in gender and performance theory, however, offer us a new approach for examining Buckingham's farce. Among these developments is Judith Butler's work on the performance of gender roles. According to Butler, gender is an identity that is performed through a series of actions, gestures, and rituals that have become so ingrained within us that we think they are innate, natural components of who we are (*Gender* 136). Her work analyzes ways in which these actions, gestures, and rituals are performed to construct an identity, as well as ways in which that identity is exposed as a performance rather than as a natural outgrowth of our biology. One such exposure occurs in what Butler calls gender parody, activities such as drag, cross-dressing, and stylized butch/femme identities, that mock hegemonic culture's claim to essentialist gender roles by exaggerating and thereby subverting normalized gender characteristics. For example, drag performers exaggerate the characteristics of femininity and thereby reveal that all forms of femininity, even those performed by women, are socially constructed rather than biologically innate. Such subversive performances, says Butler, parody the idea that there is an original, natural form of femininity and masculinity by placing the subject's physical body at odds with his or her performance of gender.⁹

The Rehearsal incorporates such gender parody into its attempt to undermine the rhetorical work of heroic drama. In the inner play, the one ostensibly written by Bayes,

⁸ Twentieth-century scholarship on the play can be divided into four representative groups. One group, which includes George McFadden's "Political Satire in *The Rehearsal*" and Margarita Stocker's "Political Allusion in *The Rehearsal*," studies the play's satire of Arlington and other political figures and controversies. A second group, which includes Sheridan Baker's "Buckingham's Permanent *Rehearsal*" and John H. O'Neill's essay and monograph on Buckingham, connect the play's literary qualities to transhistorical concerns about authorship. A third group, exemplified by Peter Lewis's "*The Rehearsal*: A Study of its Satirical Methods," explicates the play's satire of Dryden and heroic drama. Finally, G. Jack Gravitt's "*The Modernity of The Rehearsal*: Buckingham's Theatre of the Absurd" examines the play's anticipation of the characteristics of today's Theatre of the Absurd.

⁹ See *Gender Trouble* pp. 134-41 for Butler's discussion of gender parody.

Buckingham burlesques one of Dryden's most famous protagonists, Almanzor, by overstating his masculine characteristics. Much like a drag queen's exaggeration of feminine ideals, Buckingham amplifies the spectacle of Almanzor's masculine feats of war by recasting him as Drawcansir, whose actions are indistinguishable from those of a common bully. This amplification demonstrates that the rhetoric of heroic drama is not based on an original, natural form of aristocratic identity. Instead, it shows that aristocratic notions of honor serve a rhetorical purpose, one designed to support the reign of Charles II. In the outer play, which depicts the interaction between Bayes, Johnson, and Smith, Buckingham parodies Dryden himself by depicting the poet laureate as an obsequious fop. Here, the play highlights the performative nature of all identities and works to deconstruct gender stability.

Gender Parody in the Inner Play

The inner play of Buckingham's *The Rehearsal* burlesques one of Dryden's most famous protagonists, Almanzor, by exaggerating his masculine characteristics. The hero of Dryden's ten-act play *The Conquest of Granada*,¹⁰ Almanzor's masculinity is defined in terms of his "physical courage, prowess in arms, magnanimity, and fidelity to a code of personal honor" (Harbage 55). 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; and by 1671, England was

¹⁰ Part One, which consists of the first five acts, premiered in December 1670, and Part Two, the second five, debuted in January 1671. Taken together, these two parts dramatize the Spanish conquest of Granada between 1481 and 1492, a campaign that completed the reconquest of Spain and defeated once and for all the military power of the Islamic culture that had threatened European stability for centuries. Part One focuses on the internal political conflicts that plague the Moorish kingdom. Part Two presents the final victory of Spain over her Islamic foes.

preparing for a third such war. Even those gentlemen who had not yet performed military service were nevertheless "bred and trained for war" (Wilson, *Preface* 69). Many of the elite 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.

In keeping with this vision of admirable masculinity, Almanzor possesses incredible fighting skills. His bravery in a bullfight that occurs before the start of the play astonishes Boabdelin and he distinguishes himself in every battle, usually defeating enemy armies almost single-handedly.¹¹ 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. Likewise, playwrights catered to their audience's affinity for love plots by creating a conflict between the hero's romantic interests and his loyalty to a king or friend. The appropriately masculine hero loves a virtuous woman but always chooses duty over romance. In keeping with this trend, Almanzor's character is tested throughout both parts of Dryden's play by the conflict between his love for Boabdelin's wife and his desire to remain loyal to his political commitments.¹²

Drawing upon heroic drama's definition of masculinity, as it was embodied in figures like Almanzor, Buckingham attacks heroic ideals by exaggerating their qualities in order to point out their origin is in convention rather than nature. In the inner play, which is itself in

¹¹ See Part II Act 1 scene 1 lines 49-98. Boabdelin is the Islamic king of Granada.

¹² These commitments, however, change rapidly throughout the play. Almanzor's definition of loyalty is best summed up by his declaration that "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" (Brown 15) more consistent. 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 return Boabdelin to the throne.

the form of a heroic drama "written" by the poet Mr. Bayes, Buckingham lampoons the rhetoric of manly heroism contained in heroic ideology. If court ideology defined masculine honor, at least in part, as the ability to shed the blood of others, then Buckingham transforms heroic drama's depiction of bloodshed into a kind of hypermasculinity that resembles horrific senselessness. For example, Dryden's Almanzor becomes Bayes's 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).¹³ 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 heroic drama's elevated description of gentlemanly honor into the words of a common bully.

Buckingham furthers this transformation by exaggerating the physical courage usually associated with heroes like Almanzor. Where Dryden's protagonist defeats an entire army, Bayes's Drawcansir surpasses him by killing all of the soldiers in two battling armies. 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:

¹³ This chapter uses the 1672 edition of *The Rehearsal*. This edition is shorter than later editions—most scholars use the third quarto, published in 1675, since it contains the author's extensive amendments—but it is also the edition which most reflects the text for the play's initial performance. I have retained this edition's spelling even when it departs from modern convention.

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 merely uncontrolled "rage"—and does not distinguish between friend and foe. Consequently, Buckingham exposes the rhetoric of heroic drama as something perverse and harmful rather than 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). Such violence is made even more meaningless by the fact that it is often precipitated by petty causes. For example, when two kings give their soldiers ten Guineas to drink to their health, the gift causes havoc. As a soldier explains to the kings, "The Army, wrangling for the gold you gave, / First fell to words, and then to handy-blows" (46). Thus, in the world of this play, "courage" becomes little more than a euphemism for violence. This form of masculinity must constantly prove itself through violence, even when the excuse for fighting is miniscule.

Buckingham further parodies the masculine bravado of heroic drama by comically depicting masculine prowess in arms and magnanimity as hollow verbal posturing. For instance, 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:"

Gen. Stand: give the word.

Lieut. Gen. Bright Sword.

Gen. That may be thine,

But 'tis not mine.

Lieut. Gen. Give fire, give fire, at once give fire,

And let those recreant Troops perceive mine ire.

Gen. 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 the poetry. By undercutting heroic drama's language and style Buckingham suggests that the aristocratic definition of masculinity is similarly an empty performance of masculine ideals. 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 virtues put together, I gad" (35). Like Dryden, says Buckingham, Bayes's rhetoric of "moral virtues" is really just an excuse to portray 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.

Buckingham also uses gender parody in the inner play to mock heroic drama's discourse of heroic love. According to Buckingham, this discourse emasculates men by substituting meaningless ideals for natural sexuality, as illustrated in the characters of

Prince Prettyman and Prince Volscius, foils for Drawcansir's hypermasculinity. In Act 2 scene 3, Prince Prettyman bemoans his state in life. As he exclaims,

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)

In contrast to Drawcansir, Prince Prettyman is rendered incapable of masculine feats of war due to his having succumbed to the rhetoric of heroic love. Due to this rhetoric, Prince Prettyman searches for idealistic meanings to attach to his 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 immediately causes him to fall asleep. As Bayes 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, it causes him to slumber. This development obviously prevents the prince from conversing with his lady fair, leading her to bemoan her silent grief. Prince Volscius is likewise unmanned by heroic love: he is unable to finish dressing himself for battle because he cannot decide whether to fight or to stay with the woman he loves. 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). He, too, has been captured by the rhetoric of heroic love. Consequently, he comically exits the stage with one boot on and one boot off. By talking of masculinity, military prowess, and heroic love in such unheroic terms, Buckingham ridicules the rhetoric of heroic drama, transforming it to an exaggeratedly unnatural discourse that pretends to depict accurately "the highest pattern of life."

To make this critique of heroic drama's rhetoric, Buckingham burlesques this genre's rhetoric of "honor" by mocking the images of masculinity that support it. In *The Origins of the English Novel*, Michael McKeon describes the changing definition of "honor" during the seventeenth century. Aristocratic ideology defined honor as an innate quality dependent on birth, while the rival discourse of progressive ideology separated aristocratic rank from internal virtue, arguing that social ethics, not birth, leads to honor (155). For example, 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 virtues as well as names unto their posterity, I should willingly become the Advocate of such a Nobility" (qtd. in McKeon, *Origins* 155-56). Richard Allestree agreed, bemoaning that "A *man of Honour* is now understood only to be one that can start and maintain a Quarrel" and maintains that "he passes for a Phlegmatick fool, whose blood boils not at the first glimpse of an Affront" (qtd. in McKeon, *Origins* 155). To a large extent, Buckingham agrees with these observations, arguing that heroic drama contributes to this problem of increased senseless violence.¹⁴

Even so, the duke does not entirely reject aristocratic ideology itself. Honor was clearly an important characteristic for any nobleman in this period, and Buckingham vigorously defended his. For example, in July 1667 Buckingham came face to face with one of the Countess of Shrewsbury's former lovers, Harry Killigrew. Killigrew had not taken his dismissal well and had circulated "startling and indiscreet reminiscences of the Countess" (Burghclere 191). Taking offense at this behavior, Buckingham "did soundly beat [Harry Killigrew], and take away his sword and made a fool of [him], till the fellow prayed him to spare his life" (Pepys 8.348). This brawl made Buckingham's connection

¹⁴ Allestree made a similar argument concerning romance. He claimed that romance "introduced such a multitude of Punctilio's, that the next Age will be in danger of receiving the Fable of *Don Quixot* for Authentick History" (McKeon *Origins* 155).

with the countess public, evoking the challenge of her husband. Despite the king's prohibition, Buckingham accepted the challenge, which resulted in Lord Shrewsbury's death.¹⁵ What Buckingham rejects is the notion that members of the aristocracy had a natural right to rule the nation. He opposed heroic drama's rhetoric of masculine honor, since this rhetoric was used to support the opportunistic greed of obsequious courtiers. His attack is continued in the outer play.

Gender Parody in the Outer Play

While the inner play of Buckingham's *The Rehearsal* uses gender parody to mock the conventions of heroic drama, the outer play utilizes this mode to question the stability of gender roles and to undermine the ethos of the major writer of Restoration heroic dramas, John Dryden. It accomplishes both of these activities by representing Dryden as the incompetent fop Bayes. Buckingham uses this character both to undermine Dryden's character as a playwright and to continue his critique of heroic ideology's claim to verisimilitude. The play opens with a chance meeting between Johnson and Smith, two friends whose conversation immediately turns to "all the strange new things" that are occurring in London (1), a dialogue that establishes the play's point-of-view. Johnson is a typical libertine figure, as seen in his antipathy to "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). In contrast to these

¹⁵ Shrewsbury was seriously wounded when the duke's sword thrust through the right side of his chest, coming out through his shoulder. Even so, he did not die immediately. Rather, he remained alive for nearly two months. When he died on March 16, 1668, his body was examined by several distinguished physicians, who declared that his wound had been cured. One of Buckingham's seconds was also killed in the encounter. Rumors soon circulated around London concerning this incident. Many had Lady Shrewsbury participating in the action. According to Lord Peterborough, the countess disguised herself as a page in order to watch the duel. St. Evrémond claimed that the countess had concealed pistols on her person in order to shoot both herself and her husband should he win the duel. Buckingham received a dispensation from Charles II excusing him from all penalties that might otherwise have resulted from the incident. See Burghclere 191-97 for more details concerning this duel and its aftermath.

men, Johnson spends his time pleasing himself: as he explains, 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).¹⁶ Smith's character, on the other hand, is distinguished by honest sincerity. The first words of the play, in fact, are "Honest Frank!" (1), Johnson's exclamation upon seeing his friend. Smith's Christian name likewise indicates his love of frankness, or plain speaking, as does his position as a country gentleman. This initial dialogue establishes Smith as the plain-speaking inquisitor who questions everything, thus allowing Johnson to pronounce his opinions or (later) Bayes to make a ridiculous explanation of his play, dramatic theory, and practices.

When Johnson mentions that he sometimes sees a play, it allows the conversation to turn to an evaluation of the contemporary dramatic scene. According to Johnson, the state of Restoration theater is not good, since "there are such things (Frank) 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 that "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). It is precisely at this moment that Bayes appears, and the two men agree to accompany him to the rehearsal of his new play.

Throughout the play, Smith and Johnson refer to Bayes as "this Fop" (21), a label that is defined by Bayes's incorrectly fancying himself a lady's man and by his lack of manly

¹⁶ These statements parallel John Harold Wilson's contention that Wits' "were Epicureans . . . as that title has become confounded with hedonism; they were addicted to the unholy trinity: wine, women, and song" (*Court Wits* 17).

grace and strength. The *OED* defines a fop as "one who is foolishly attentive to and vain of his appearance, dress, or manners; a dandy, an exquisite." Susan Staves lists two additional characteristics. First, fops are rather squeamish: "As important as the fop's obsession with his appearance is what may be described as fop sensibility. Fops are delicate. Not for them the brutality of Restoration scowerers" (414). Second, says Staves, "though fops are in various ways effeminate, they are rarely portrayed as homosexual. On the contrary, they are asexuals who like to spend their time with the ladies" (414). Or, as Laurence Senelick puts it, "A nobleman or gentleman, the Restoration fop, while no doubt a false wit, is most definitely focused on women as sexual object as well as decorative possession. His interest in them is so strong that it is projected onto women's appurtenances, such as fine lace and the mysteries of toilette" (35).

Buckingham associates each of these characteristics with Bayes. For example, Bayes brags about his having written the part of Amarillis for his mistress, a woman he casts in the part because her looks complement the costume. As he explains to Johnson and Smith, she is "a pretty little rogue" whose face will "set off Armor extreamly" (6). Bayes's introduction of his mistress to Johnson and Smith is an attempt to impress them with his sophistication and knowledge of the ways of the world. The attempt fails. Bayes is also rather delicate. In fact, despite the bravado of Drawcansir, Bayes decides to avoid the indelicacy of staging a full-scale battle on stage. As he asks his companions, "Can you think it a decent thing, in a battel before Ladies, to have men run their Swords through one another, and all that?" (47). As with most Restoration fops, Bayes tries to avoid anything crude or impolite.

Bayes, like other late seventeenth-century fops, also lacks physical coordination. For example, in Act 2 scene 5, Bayes's play contains "some fighting" (18). After the soldiers have killed one another in this 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. Bayes's accident highlights his physical ineptitude, which stands in marked contrast to the physical prowess of the typical gentleman.

Bayes's foppish ineptitude is further demonstrated when he cannot control his actors. Previously, the actors had refused to perform one of his plays. As Bayes relates to Johnson and Smith, "I have written . . . a whole cart-load of things, every whit as good as this, and yet, I vow to gad, these insolent Raskals have turn'd 'em all back upon my hands again" (15). Likewise, at the end of this play, Smith and Johnson abandon the rehearsal since they can no longer take Bayes's nonsense. While Bayes is chasing after them, the players decide to quit the rehearsal in order to go to dinner. Their insolence drives Bayes from the stage altogether; he declares that he will sell his play to the rival theater, allowing the actors to choose a different drama from their repertoire to perform instead. Bayes's incompetence is made more comical by Bayes's obliviousness to his own shortcomings, a lack of self-awareness that is typical of fops. Although the players and his two audience members find his new play humorless and plotless, Bayes insists that his new work is "better than my last" (3). In fact, says Bayes, "it shall read, and write, and act, and plot, and shew, ay, and pit, box and gallery, I gad, with any play in Europe" (3).

Buckingham's playwright is confident of his work's success because of its originality. As

he exclaims, "I'll do nothing here that ever was done before" (11). His "stile," says Bayes, "'twas never yet upon the Stage" (14). While the audience, aided by the conversation of Johnson and Smith, quickly realizes that this style consists of little more than nonsense, Bayes ends the play convinced of his future literary success: he vows to write a lampoon that will ruin Johnson's and Smith's reputations. The disparity between his own self image and how the audience perceives him is in keeping with the Restoration fop's usual comic vanity.

Portraying Bayes as a fop accomplishes much more than simply making Buckingham's audience laugh. Indeed, casting a fop as one of the main characters of his play immediately calls into question any notion of gender stability within *The Rehearsal*. Because fops combine characteristics generally associated with men with those typically associated with women, Bayes's presence in the play challenges the notion that masculine and feminine traits are related directly to one's biological sex. Whereas Dryden's plays depict epic heroes whose masculine virtues are clearly recognizable by their conformity to the conventions of aristocratic honor, Bayes's foppishness calls into question heroic drama's assumption that this honor is naturally passed on through one's bloodline by demonstrating that all identities are affectation.

Buckingham foregrounds the comparison between Bayes and Drawcansir by having his fictional playwright foppishly comment on Drawcansir's heroic qualities. For example, when Drawcansir first enters the stage in Act 4 scene 1, he declares that "he would rather die than not drink, yet he would fain drink for all that too" (37-38). This declaration sets the stage for a scene that shifts back and forth between the characters of the inner play (Drawcansir, the King Usher, and King Physician) and comments from those of the outer play (Bayes, Johnson, and Smith).

King Usher. Sir, if you please, we should be glad to know
How long you here will stay, how soon you'll go.

Bayes. Is not that now like a well-bred person, I gad? So modest, so gent!

Smith. O, very like!

Drawcansir. You shall not know how long I here will stay;

But you shall know I'll take my Boles away. [Snatches the Boles out of the Kings hands, and drinks 'em off.]

Smith. But, Mr. Bayes, is that (too) modest and gent?

Bayes. No, I gad, but it's great. (38)

Drawcansir's hypermasculinity, characterized by his declaration that he will "drink," "strut," "look big and stare" as much as he likes (38), is contrasted throughout the play with Bayes's love for all things "modest and gent." The fop's definition of these qualities, however, is inaccurate. The King Usher's desire to know how long Drawcansir will be "stay" and how soon he will "go," is in fact rude, not gentlemanly, behavior, since it violates codes of decorum and hospitality. Bayes mistakenly accepts Smith's sarcastic statement that Drawcansir is "very like" modesty and gentlemanliness as concurrence with his opinion, since he unquestioningly admires his hero's behavior, calling it "great." In scenes like this one, Buckingham juxtaposes the dialogue of the inner rehearsal with the conversation of Bayes, Johnson, and Smith. In doing so, he makes a dramatic comparison between Drawcansir's aggressive manliness and Bayes's delicate foppishness. This juxtaposition of extremes suggests that gender identities are not biologically determined. Neither of these extremes can be said to be "natural"—both are affectations. As a result, this scene underscores the idea that gender identity is performed rather than natural.

Buckingham's depiction of Bayes as a fop also incorporates several specific references to the poet laureate, John Dryden. As contemporaries noted, the characterization of Bayes immediately associated him with Dryden. Tradition has it that Buckingham personally coached John Lacy, the actor who originated the role of Bayes, to imitate Dryden's mannerisms and speech patterns. As Edward Malone reports,

Much of the [the play's] success, doubtless, was owing to the mimicry employed. Dryden's dress and manner, and unusual expressions, were all minutely copied, and the Duke of Buckingham took incredible pains in teaching Lacy, the original performer of Bayes, to speak some passages of that part: in these he probably imitated our author's [Dryden's] mode of recitation, which was by no means excellent. (qtd. in Lewis 97)

Among the expressions that Buckingham repeats is Bayes's frequent exclamations of "I gad!" This burlesque of Dryden's behavior also incorporated other aspects of his reputation, such as his fondness for stewed prunes and his "hesitating and tedious delivery" (Lewis 98). Another dimension of the parody was achieved by having the part of an actress who is Bayes's mistress played by Dryden's own lover.¹⁷ The Duke also alludes to accusations that Dryden plagiarized many of his works from earlier sources by having Bayes describe his method of invention, which consists of copying down whatever he hears or reads and then incorporating it into his plays.¹⁸ Thus, the character of Bayes constantly breaks down any separation between the stage and real life by enacting the personality of Dryden. This enactment suggests that identity is a performance by representing a contemporary figure on the stage.

The outer play's frequent interruption of the inner play's action also emphasizes the idea that all identities are performed. These interruptions blur the line between theater and reality, since the outer play's representation of reality is itself only a performance. To highlight the blurring of this line, specific references to Bayes's play as a play are sprinkled throughout *The Rehearsal*. For example, before the actual rehearsal begins, Bayes seeks his visitors' advice concerning the play's prologue. Bayes proposes to "come out in a long

¹⁷ See pp. 162-63 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 pp. 120-21 of his essay for more information concerning this debate.

¹⁸ See pp. 4-5 of the play for Bayes's description of his methods of invention.

black Veil, and a great huge Hang-man behind me, with a Firr'd cap, and his Sword drawn" (7). He will then tell his audience "plainly, That if, out of good nature, they will not like my Play, why I gad, I'l e'en kneel down, and he shall cut my head off" (7). Such a prologue would eliminate any distinction between reality and performance, since the "playwright" would be entering the stage as himself while enacting a scripted entertainment. Furthermore, Bayes plans to prompt his friends before the performance of his play to clap so that his life will be spared. Thus, he is unable to distinguish this theatrical performance from reality—he fears the possibility that the executioner might behead him, a fear that fails to see this prologue as merely theatrical convention. At other moments, the conversation between Bayes, Johnson, and Smith interrupts the action and dialogue of Bayes's players. For instance, when the Gentleman Usher and Court Physician whisper their plans to one another in Act 2 scene 1, Bayes frequently disturbs their performance with such statements as "Pray mark that Allegory. Is not that good?", "Now they whisper," and "Now t'other whispers" (12). At other points in the scene Johnson and Smith disrupt the action in order to ask Bayes questions about the plot. These interruptions lessen the distinction between "reality" and "performance" by transforming the identity of the playwright into a fictional character.

In the prologue to *The Rehearsal*, Buckingham claims that heroic drama fails to depict its action according to nature. This failure is illustrated in the second of Bayes's possible prologues. As Bayes explains to Johnson and Smith, he has written a "delicate, daintie Simile" to accompany this prologue, a conversation between lightning and thunder (9). This simile is about two pigs:

So Boar and Sow, when any storm is nigh,
 Snuff up, and smell it gath'ring in the Skie:
 Boar beckons Sow to trot in Chestnut Groves,
 And there consummate their unfinish'd Loves.

Pensive in mud they wallow all alone,
 And snort, and gruntle to each others moan. (9)

This "allusion to love" (9) deflates the high rhetoric of heroic love by casting the lovers as swine breeding in the mud. Although they wallow "pensive[ly]" in the mud, the boar and sow are nevertheless the antithesis of heroic lovers, who generally discuss their love rather than act upon it. As Buckingham's fondness for mistresses suggests, he finds heroic drama's discursive lovemaking to be unnatural. He sees "love" as a natural erotic desire comparable to such biological urges as eating, drinking, and sleeping. For Buckingham, "nature" consists solely of such urges. Importantly, Bayes does not know what to do with this simile. As he admits, he does not know "how to applie it" to his prologue (9). According to Buckingham, heroic drama cannot imitate this form of nature because this ideology tries to redefine nature according to aristocratic honor.

Buckingham presents Dryden as a fop in order to undermine the rhetoric of heroic ideology. Portraying the poet laureate as a fop works to confuse gender categories by giving him both "masculine" and "feminine" characteristics. When placed beside Drawcansir's exaggerated masculinity, this confusion subverts heroic ideology's claim that honor is a natural extension of aristocratic manhood by undermining any claim of natural identity. Depicting Dryden as a fop also undercuts his reputation as a playwright, since Buckingham presents him as an incompetent fool unable to reason or to see the world accurately. Finally, this depiction underscores Buckingham's assertion that seeking sensual pleasure is the definition of following nature by exposing Dryden's personal and literary affectations as having no basis in nature.

""Tis a Plotting Age"

In using gender parody in the both the inner and outer plays, *The Rehearsal* aims not only to reform the theatrical stage but the political one as well. Buckingham uses gender

parody to argue that "honor" in his day was really just politics, ministerial plotting for advancement at court. 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 Margarita 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" (20).

Such plotting, at least from Buckingham's vantage point, certainly occurred. His own schemes to topple Clarendon's ministry in 1666 and replace him as Charles's primary minister were partially successful, while his plots to command a battleship and participate in the councils of war were not: the Duke initially asked to command a ship, but his request was denied by the Duke of York, "who never missed an occasion of mortifying Buckingham" (Burghclere 142). When James refused to allow the Duke to participate in the councils of war, Buckingham returned to Whitehall to protest to the king. When the king also denied his request, Buckingham returned to his post as a volunteer aboard the *Earl of Sandwich*.¹⁹ After the war, Buckingham organized a political faction among the Yorkshire M.P.s (Lee 171). It was this faction in Parliament that deserved much of the credit for bringing down Clarendon's ministry. The Duke followed this victory with an effort to help the dissenters and was widely seen as the primary influence behind the king's wish to dispense with the Act of Uniformity. As Viscount Conway wrote in February 1668, "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

¹⁹ See Burghclere pp. 142-46 for an account of Buckingham's naval service.

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" (qtd. in Lee 176). But appearances were deceiving. The House of Commons was not swayed to brush aside the law, and Buckingham was already an inconsequential figure in Charles's government. 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 from old Albemarle for an enormous sum. He was excluded from the secret diplomacy of 1668-70, and only two of his clients were given offices in these years, the positions being comparatively minor" (259). Thus, in 1671 his position at court was entirely owed to Charles's personal attachment to him.²⁰ Arlington's machinations to minimize his rival's influence at court were similar examples of the way politics worked in the period.

Perhaps because Buckingham had failed to receive the preferment that he had constantly hoped to achieve, the play's epilogue calls for a change in the political system:

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.
 Wherefore, for ours, and for the Kingdom's peace,
 May this prodigious way of writing cease.
 Let's have, at least, once in our lives, a time
 When we may hear some Reason, not all Rhyme:
 We have these ten years felt its Influence;
 Pray let this prove a year of Prose and Sence. (11-20)

²⁰ As Maurice Lee, Jr. points out, "Buckingham was such a wonderfully entertaining companion that Charles, in spite of the duke's frequently outrageous behavior, could never bring himself to cut the last ties between himself and his childhood playmate" (21).

Again, 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" (16). It also points to "a climate of anxiety" created by various "plots, rumours of plots, and insurgences," some fabricated by the government itself, during the 1660s (16). These included White's Plot and Venner's Rising in 1660, the Wildman Plot in 1661, the Tong Plot of 1662, the abandoned Northern Rebellion and the Dublin Plot of 1663, republican intrigues of 1665, alleged conspiracies behind the Fire in London and the Presbyterian uprising in Scotland in 1666, the Yorkshire skirmish of 1667, the Bawdy House Riots of 1668, and Nonconformist disturbance throughout 1670 (Stocker 17).²¹ The epilogue associates these instances of unrest with the generic characteristics of heroic drama and evokes drama's connection to political power. Just as "Monstrous" plays predict state disasters, Buckingham's play purports to have the potential to inaugurate an age of "peace," "Reason," and "Sence."

Buckingham's answer to this problem is for drama to return to right "Reason," the Court Wits' phrase for allowing one's senses to guide one's responses to the world around him. Throughout the play, this view has been espoused by Johnson and Smith. As they establish in the play's first scene, 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 his ministers. Although their representations of masculine honor claim to be natural, 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

²¹ For more information concerning these plots, see Max Beloff's *Public Order and Popular Disturbances, 1660-1714*.

contrast, Buckingham calls for men to follow their pleasures, to allow their senses to help them decide right from wrong. 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 Wits, was "right reason."

By associating Bayes with Dryden, Buckingham feminizes his rival playwright in order to undermine his legitimacy as a serious author. Buckingham represents Dryden as a fop and then contrasts him with a hypermasculine figure whose heroic virtues are really faults. His burlesque of Dryden deflates the grandeur of the latter's status as poet laureate and works to call into the question the grounds for heroic drama's depiction of masculinity. According to Buckingham's play, writers like Dryden rely on the rhetoric of masculine heroism in order to solicit court favor and public prestige. Using gender roles as the basis for his parody of heroic drama, Buckingham suggests that what was wrong with the spectacle of heroic drama was its claim that it imitated nature, that, in Dryden's words, this kind of theater depicted "the highest pattern of life," the king and his court, accurately. The king then used this rhetoric to bolster his troubled regime. Despite this claim to imitate nature, says Buckingham, no action in such works occurs according to real life. Thus, attempts to connect Charles II to a nostalgic past of manly heroes is doomed to failure because the king can never live up to the rhetoric of his courtiers. This rhetoric will always be hollow and empty, says Buckingham, because this nostalgic past never truly existed: like Butler's description of gender, heroism in the Restoration is simply an imitation of an ideal which had no original. If society, and its drama, would conform to his vision of aristocratic privilege, one characterized by wine, women, and song, says Buckingham, then England's problems would be solved. As appealing as that vision was for some, Buckingham's peers declined his invitation.

As Robert Hume points out, "*The Rehearsal* did nothing to diminish the popularity of rhymed plays—most of which are subsequent to it" (290-91). Likewise, while Lacy's parody of Dryden in the character of Bayes probably stung the playwright, Dryden's position at court and in the theaters of London remained unshaken.²² Even so, Buckingham's burlesque set up several of the issues that the duke's fellow Wits would explore in their dramas. In taking a view of nature and reason that emphasized sensual experience over abstract ideals, Buckingham initiates the Court Wits' dismantling of the use of drama as an instrument of the court. Throughout the rest of the decade, the Wits would cast their works as oppositional attacks on the rhetoric of aristocratic honor, maintaining that this rhetoric worked to limit the enjoyment of one's body. Likewise, Buckingham's views on nature and reason affect the Wits' later play with artificiality and representation. Throughout their works, the Wits argue that all social identities are performances enacted on the body rather than innate, biologically determined essences. Their plays, like Buckingham's, suggest that the Wits believed that nature leads us to pleasure. Everything else, they say, is a matter of social convention. Finally, Buckingham's play also makes the Wits' later plays possible by teaching the Wits 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 in their plays rather than simply mock someone else. This change of strategy enabled them to present positive alternatives to the discourses of aristocratic and progressive ideology. The following chapters map out these alternatives, which change over the course of the decade as the Wits debate with one another the nature of libertine ideology.

²² In fact, *The Rehearsal* was produced by Dryden's own theater company.

Chapter Three

Interrogating the Body's Truth:

Gender and Libertine Performances in Wycherley's Early Comedies

As I argued in chapter two, Buckingham's *The Rehearsal* deploys libertine ideology to respond to aristocratic ideology's rhetoric of national heroism, transforming heroic drama into farce through gender parody and thereby undermining its claim to verisimilitude.

William Wycherley's early comedies, *Love in a Wood* (1671), *The Gentleman Dancing-Master* (1672), and *The Country Wife* (1675), continue Buckingham's experimentation with artificiality and representation, but respond to a different socio-political context.¹

Buckingham's had not been the only response to the heroic rhetoric of aristocratic ideology: some members of England's ruling elite had begun to adopt an alternative system of socio-political thought, today referred to as progressive ideology. This alternative ideology sought to distribute a sense of order throughout society based on a belief in innate individual character: where aristocratic discourse claimed that honor was possessed through proper birth and expressed through national duty, progressive ideology argued that honor comes from work and "good" behavior. If Buckingham's masterpiece opposed the former, plays by Wycherley objected to the latter.

With few exceptions, scholarship on Wycherley's plays revolves around two core issues: on the level of form, scholars frequently ask whether these plays are comedies or satires; on the level of content, readers often postulate about these plays' major themes.

¹ I do not mean to suggest, however, that these plays were not politically engaged. To the contrary, these comedies often refer to the political debates of their day. For example, Wycherley's *The Gentleman Dancing-Master* includes a discussion of Englishmen's apparent hatred for the French, who were their ostensible allies in the war against the Netherlands, and admiration for the Dutch, "England's eternal enemy both by interest and inclination" as Henry Bennett, Earl of Arlington, once called them in a speech in Parliament. See Act 1 pp. 165-66 for Wycherley's treatment of English attitudes towards these nations and Lockyer's *Tudor and Stuart Britain* pp. 342-45 for a survey of responses, including Arlington's, to the third Dutch War.

For example, such scholars as Virginia Ogden Birdsall, Thomas Fujimura, and Norman Holland question whether these plays are comedies or satires, often asking whether they create humorous exemplars of or work to strip away the masks of pretension and hypocrisy in Restoration society.² Other scholars reply to attacks on Wycherley's works as "immensely enjoyable play[s] in which we take almost nothing seriously" (Hume, *Development* 104). Such scholars attempt to identify the specific themes and issues contained within these plays. James Thompson, Deborah C. Payne, David B. Morris, Robert Markley, and Alan Roper, for instance, argue that these plays' significance lies in their complex use of language. Other writers, including Helen M. Burke, Derek Cohen, Aspasia Velissariou, and Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, explore these works' comments on women and marriage. And finally, other scholars study themes of madness and libertinism in the plays.³

Rather than focusing on questions of genre or theme, this chapter studies Wycherley's first three comedies as works of rhetoric. Where Buckingham's farce worked to undermine the characteristics of heroic drama, the plays penned by Wycherley during the early 1670s serve as a kind of deliberative rhetoric, a use of art to explore the possibilities of libertine ideology to reshape aristocratic society at this time. In particular, Wycherley

² Birdsall, for example, argues that Wycherley's rake-heroes are exemplars of individual health and freedom and are therefore comedies, while Fujimura argues that these plays evoke "malicious laughter at fools" (87) and wittily expose "the unnatural and the affected" (119). Holland basically agrees with the latter, maintaining that these plays laugh at the absurdities of "substituting arbitrary formalism for the inner self" and of imposing an "unformalized inner self on others" (95). See also William Freedman's "Impotence and Self-Destruction in *The Country Wife*," Cynthia Matlack's "Parody and Burlesque of Heroic Ideals in Wycherley's Comedies: A Critical Reinterpretation of Contemporary Evidence," Wallace Jackson's "The Country Wife: The Premises of Love and Lust," Charles A. Hallett's "The Hobbesian Substructure of *The Country Wife*," Sam G. Terry's "The Comic Standard in Wycherley's *The Gentleman Dancing-Master*," Joseph Candido's "Theatricality and Satire in *The Country Wife*," Gorman Beauchamp's "The Amorous Machiavellism of *The Country Wife*," Richard Steiger's "'Wit in a Corner': Hypocrisy in *The Country Wife*," Robert D. Hume's "Concepts of the Hero in Comic Drama, 1660-1710," and Harold Weber's "Horner and his 'Women of Honour' The Dinner Party in *The Country Wife*."

³ See especially W. Gerald Marshall's "Wycherley's 'Great Stage of Fools': Madness and Theatricality in *The Country Wife*," Harold Weber's "The Rake-Hero in Wycherley and Congreve," and Maximilian E. Novak's "Margery Pinchwife's 'London Disease': Restoration Comedy and the Libertine Offensive of the 1670's."

employs libertine ideology throughout his early comedies in the form of a series of ideological rejections. First, these plays express the Court Wits' rejection of progressive ideology, which sought to regulate the body's sexual desires, one of the chief goods in the eyes of the members of the Wits' fraternity. They work toward this rejection by satirizing characters, such as Alderman Gripe, Don Diego, and Pinchwife, who uphold the rhetoric of progressive ideology and by offering an alternative ideology in their libertine characters. Second, Wycherley's early comedies reject progressive ideology's positing of a binary relationship between "nature" and "social performance" by casting characters much like the Court Wits as their protagonists. And finally, his later work ultimately questions the social efficacy of libertine ideology by making it increasingly difficult for the audience to approve of his increasingly complex libertine protagonists.

Wycherley and the Rise of Progressive Ideology

Wycherley's early plays enact a rejection of progressive ideology, which argued that true nobility is derived from goodness of character. The rhetoric of progressive ideology challenged an older discursive tradition, often called patriarchy, 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.⁴ While this traditional ideology "was entertained and acted upon as a tacit and unexamined article of belief" throughout English history (McKeon, "Historicizing" 296), 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

⁴ As a defense of divine right absolutism, patriarchy maintained that "the political order of Stuart England had evolved from the family; magistrates were therefore entitled to the same filial obedience that children owed to their fathers" (Schochet 1). As Sir Robert Filmer, the primary proponent of patriarchy, argued, this political situation was sanctioned by God and he traced "all legal authority back to the divinely ordained fatherly power of Adam" (Schochet 1). See Gordon J. Schochet's *Patriarchy in Political Thought* and Peter Laslett's introduction to Filmer's *Patriarcha* for more complete descriptions of this theory.

cannot be allowed within a family, it cannot be tolerated in the sovereign: "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?" (qtd. in McKeon, "Historicizing" 296). Increasingly, the elites of English society agreed. While some attempts to revive patriarchalism after the restoration were made, by the 1660s England by and large rejected the notion that the monarch possessed absolute sway over his people.⁵

As patriarchalism was discredited, progressive ideology gained greater adherence. Its rising cultural strength relied on several contemporaneous factors. The rejection of patriarchalism was accompanied by a trend, described in Michael McKeon's "Historicizing Patriarchy: The Emergence of Gender Difference in England, 1660-1760," toward dividing society along the lines of gender, class, and sexuality rather than by status. As McKeon explains, conceptions of gender shifted as the enclosure and consolidation of large estates forced families to rely on a new division of labor among family members: men increasingly worked outside of the home, while women increasingly assumed the duties of maintaining the household ("Historicizing" 299). Eventually, these differences came to be seen as "natural," connected to men's instincts toward conquest and responsibility and to women's instincts toward motherhood and domesticity.⁶ These instincts seemed to be reinforced by a shift in scientific ideology during the period, which now saw male and female bodies as fundamentally different rather than essentially the same.⁷ This differentiation, says

⁵ The attack on Filmer's ideas was led by John Locke and his *Two Treatises of Government*. See Schochet pp. 244-67 for a more detailed examination of Locke's critique of Filmer's work.

⁶ For more information on this division of labor, see McKeon, "Historicizing" pp. 298-300.

⁷ See McKeon, "Historicizing" p. 301 and Thomas Laqueur's *Making Sex: Body and Gender from the Greeks to Freud* pp. 5-6, 10-11, 124-25, 128, 135-36, 142, 148, 153-54 for more details concerning this shift in scientific ideology. See Michael Mason's review of Laqueur's book in *London Review of Books*, 12, no. 21 (November 8, 1990) and Stephen Jay Gould's review in *New York Review of Books*, 38, no. 11 (June 13, 1991) for evaluations of Laqueur's thesis. Ivan Illich's *Gender* (New York: Pantheon, 1982)

McKeon, accompanied a larger critique of one form of biological essentialism, especially the critique of that which argued that honor was inherited through one's blood line. As greater numbers of people accepted this argument, England became divided along class lines, defined by socio-economic identity rather than by ancestry.⁸ And finally, this emergence of class identity was made possible in part by a critique of aristocratic "vice," which entailed "unnatural" and "immoral" sexual acts, specifically sodomy and sexual license. Increasingly, such acts were seen to be committed by people whose "natures" led them to vice: sodomites, mollies, and perverts.⁹ Consequently, adherents of progressive ideology naturalized difference: men and women were biologically different, which led to their different roles within the family and society; as class became a defining concept for people's identity, individual worth became predicated on internal merit and personal goodness, defined as innate qualities cultivated by the individual rather than as inherited through blood; and sexual tastes were divided between "natural" and "unnatural" acts committed by good, moral people and bad, immoral people, respectively.

The rejection of patriarchalism was furthered by 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

and Sander Gilman's *Sexuality: An Illustrated History* (New York: John Wiley, 1989) offer differing accounts of the change in the formulation of gender from Laqueur's.

⁸ See McKeon "Historicizing Patriarchy" pp. 303-307 and *Origins of the English Novel* pp. 159-71 for complete discussions of the relationship between gender and class in this period.

⁹ See Alan Bray's *Homosexuality in Renaissance England*, Randolph Trumbach's "The Birth of the Queen: Sodomy and the Emergence of Gender Equality in Modern Culture, 1660-1750," Trumbach's "Sex, Gender, and Sexual Identity in Modern Culture: Male Sodomy and Female Prostitution in Enlightenment London," Trumbach's "Sodomitical Subcultures, Sodomitical Roles, and the Gender Revolution of the Eighteenth Century," and Cameron McFarlane's *The Sodomite in Fiction and Satire, 1660-1750*.

propriety, else he could not be himself. . . . For by natural birth all men are equally and alike born to like propriety, liberty and freedom" (qtd. in Stone 221). As a result of this belief in self propriety, the rhetoric of progressive ideology emphasized the need to regulate individual personality through introspection (Stone 223). Likewise, progressive ideology advocated "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" (223-24). This need for social cohesion became one of the driving forces behind the progressive attack on aristocratic ideology.

These basic tenets of progressive ideology are best illustrated by a brief examination of the diary of Samuel Pepys.¹⁰ On June 30, 1663 Pepys writes that "I do perceive more and more that my time of pleasure and idlenesse of any sort must be flung off, to attend to 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). The 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 idlenesse of any sort," activities which 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.¹¹ 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.¹² On May 3 of the same year, he discloses

¹⁰ As scholars frequently acknowledge, Pepys' 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* 2). Stone, for example, maintains that, thanks to his diary, "Pepys is someone we know better than any man who ever lived before him" (227).

¹¹ 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 of the dalliance I desired with her" (6.191).

¹² 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*. (See 9.54-55).

that he had pleased himself while fantasizing about a woman in church,¹³ and on May 6 records that he seduced a friend's daughter while walking through Crutched Friars.¹⁴ On February 20, 1665 he mentions his seduction of the wife of one of his clients.¹⁵ And in October 1668, his wife catches him embracing their maid with his hands under her clothing.¹⁶

Second, Pepys accepts progressive ideology's belief in the division of labor based on sex. He works outside the domestic sphere. His wife, Elizabeth, does not. A large part of his desire to maintain order in his family revolved around his belief that Elizabeth was "devishly taken off of her business" (4.183). Consequently, he frequently berates (and even hits) her for what he sees as her negligence in maintaining a clean house and cooking an adequate dinner.¹⁷ His hostility toward his wife is further fueled by his suspicion, referred to in his fears concerning his wife's liberty, 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

¹³ 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).

¹⁴ 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 vengas after migo, and so ella did seque me to Tower-hill to our back entry there that comes upon the degrees 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).

¹⁵ As he writes, "it being dark, did privately entrer en la maison de la femme de Bagwell, and there I had sa compagnie, 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).

¹⁶ See 9.337.

¹⁷ See, for example, 1.54, 1.284-85, 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).

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).

In order to regulate both his illicit sexual conduct and his jealousy, 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 that 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 endeavor 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. (4.6-7)

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, his time spent in idleness, his expenditures, his criticism of his wife, and his dalliances with other women.¹⁸ Pepys would write down his vows and rehearse them on Sundays, penalizing himself small sums of money, which he gave to the poor, when he broke them. Through this method, Pepys hoped to train himself to virtue by regulating the self.

Wycherley's early comedies reject such notions of innate virtue and the regulation of the self by satirizing characters who uphold the rhetoric of progressive ideology. This

¹⁸ See, for example, 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, 4.149-50, 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, 8.171-72, 8.175, 8.399, 8.527, 9.47, 9.545.

satire takes the form of exaggerating the rhetoric of progressive ideology until it seems ridiculous or even monstrous. The first of Wycherley's progressive characters, Alderman Gripe, described in the list of characters as a "seemingly precise, but a covetous, leacherous, old Usurer of the City" (72), appears in *Love in a Wood*. Throughout the play, Gripe is ridiculed as "a censorious rigid Fop" and "a prying Common-Wealths-man" (75) since his "punctilious insistence on virtue" (Fujimura 132) is merely pretense. What Gripe prizes most are his money and his reputation.¹⁹ In order to establish the latter, Gripe frequently proclaims his morality. He has locked up his daughter to keep her away from her suitor, Dapperwit, and repeatedly forces her to agree that Dapperwit is a threat to her.²⁰ He often uses moral platitudes, asserting that "I love privacy in opposition to the Wicked, who hate it" and that "Temperance is the Nurse of Chastity" (111). And finally, he vehemently rejects the pleasures of wickedness, proclaiming that "I abominate Entertainments" (111), that "I hate Modes and Forms" (112), and that "I am a modest Man" (112), even when it means possibly losing his chance to marry a pretty young woman named Lucy, who happens to be Dapperwit's mistress. When Mrs. Joyner attempts to get him to ease his matrimonial suit by giving Lucy a present, since liberality "is so great a Vertue, that it often excuses Youth, Beauty, Courage, Wit, or any thing" (112), Gripe refuses, maintaining that "'tis the vertue of Fools, every Fool can have it" (112). His stinginess nearly derails his suit. When he is left in a room alone with Lucy, she cries out that he has tried to assault her. To hush up the scandal, Gripe pays her family £500. By the end of the play, his daughter has married Dapperwit, his reputation is in ruins, and Lucy has his £500. Gripe decides that the best way to solve this problem is to marry Lucy in spite of her dishonesty:

¹⁹ 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.

²⁰ See, for example, Gripe's conversation with his daughter, Martha, and Mrs. Joyner in Act One, p. 77.

My Daughter, my Reputation, and my Money gone—but the last is dearest to me; yet at once may I retrieve that, and be reveng'd 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 then a Wench. (148).

All of these characteristics exaggerate the ideals of progressive ideology. Gripe's locking up his daughter overstates progressive ideology's insistence on husbands and fathers maintaining familial order. Accordingly, Wycherley argues that the discourse of "affective individualism" is merely another form of regulating and denying pleasure: this ideology infuses patriarchalism's belief in paternal authority with a new rhetoric of love and affection merely as a means of achieving a particular end. As Gripe's declaration at the end of the play makes clear, for Wycherley the rhetoric of progressive ideology was little more than empty posing in the quest for money.²¹

Wycherley's satire of characters who espouse progressive ideology continues in his second play, *The Gentleman Dancing-Master*. Here, Hippolita's father, Don Diego, is more stern 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 joyfully proclaims, "I am as grave, grum and jealous, as any Spaniard breathing" (173). Like Gripe, Don Diego has locked up his daughter, but goes further than his predecessor by believing that all women who are not "kept up," including his widowed sister, cannot be "honest" (173). As he asserts,

I will be a Spaniard in every thing still, and will not conform, not I, to their ill-favour'd 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

²¹ For other discussions of Gripe's character see Fujumura's *The Restoration Comedy of Wit* pp. 132-33, Birdsall's *Wild Civility* pp. 117-19, Zimbardo's *Wycherley's Drama* pp. 46-47, and Chadwick's *Four Plays of William Wycherley* pp. 33-35.

go a Maid to her Husbands Bed, let the English Custom be what 'twill: I wou'd
fain see any sinical cunning, insinuating Monsieur, of the age, debauch, or steal
away my Daughter. (173).

Wycherley's characterization of Don Diego exaggerates progressive ideology's rhetoric of familial order even further. Convinced that his daughter's chastity can only be maintained through paternal discipline, Don Diego decides that the way to insure this discipline is to enclose her in his house. Like Hippolita, the audience is to characterize this strategy as "barbarous" and "unnatural" (157).²² The primary joke of the play is that Don Diego's fears concerning his daughter's future is exactly what happens: Gerrard, the play's libertine protagonist, steals her away by insinuating himself into the household by pretending to be her dancing master. In the end, Don Diego is forced to accept his daughter's marriage to Gerrard at sword 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" (231). This claim is likewise derivative of Don Diego's need to control his household: he is unable to admit that Gerrard has duped him and must reassert his control over the situation, even if that assertion is little more than an empty declaration.

Wycherley's attack on progressive ideology reaches its zenith in his depiction of the character of Pinchwife in his third play, *The Country Wife*. A former "Whoremaster" (19), Pinchwife begins the play having just married a country wife, since "we are a little surer of the breed there, know what her keeping has been, whether soyl'd or unsound" (19). 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 her

²² Aspasia Velissariou's "Patriarchal Tactics of Control and Female Desire in Wycherley's *The Gentleman Dancing-Master* and *The Country Wife*" 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" (115-16).

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.²³ In each case, Pinchwife's obsession with the possibility that his wife will cuckold him shows her the path to doing so: he accidentally tells her that Horner is in love with her and unwittingly convinces her that London life is full of "Plays, Visits, fine Coaches, fine Cloaths, Fiddles, Balls, [and] Treats" (23). Likewise, his having her dress in the clothes of a boy gives Horner the opportunity to address her directly, convincing her that she is in love with the libertine and hates her husband.

Wycherley's critique of progressive ideology in the character of Pinchwife is ultimately an attack on this belief system's fears concerning aristocratic libertinism. As several scholars point out, Pinchwife's jealousy is ultimately a crisis of masculinity. The possibility of his wife's unfaithfulness fuels Pinchwife's 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, Margery leaves out such words as "nauseous" and "loath'd" (57). When Pinchwife discovers her failure to write exactly as he has commanded, he threatens her: "Once more write as I'd have you, and question it not, or I will spoil thy writing with this, I will stab out those eyes that cause my mischief" (57). 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. Noting that Pinchwife has already threatened to inscribe the word "whore" on Margery's face with his penknife, Norman Holland points out that this scene betrays Pinchwife's anxiety over his own masculinity in relation to Horner's:

²³ 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, The History of an Obsession* p. 30. An illustration depicting Margery Pinchwife is reproduced on p. 143.

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 fall into the typical self-defeating spiral of neurosis. (74)²⁴

This is precisely what happens through the rest of the play. When he leaves Margery alone briefly, 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 orchestrates his own cuckolding by showing his wife the way to her new lover.

Pinchwife's fears approximate many of the same concerns expressed by Pepys in his diary. Like Pepys, he is a jealous man, fearful that his wife is unfaithful. Like Pepys, he has a history of licentiousness. And finally, like Pepys, Pinchwife is equally obsessed with the deeds of men like Horner. Before the play's beginning, Pinchwife has modeled his behavior after the amorous affairs of Horner and his friends, but with little success. As he complains, "I cou'd never keep a Whore to my self" (20). Consequently, as Horner points out, he has "only marry'd to keep a Whore to [him] self" (20). Pepys, on the other hand, continues to sleep with other women after his marriage, but is nevertheless obsessed with the affairs of men like Buckingham, Sedley, Rochester, and the king. Throughout the *Diary*, Pepys chronicles the Wits' public violation of sexual mores. For example, when the duke of Buckingham disappears for a week, Pepys records court gossip that he "had been

²⁴ David M. Vieth also analyzes Pinchwife's "masculine shortcomings" in his essay "Wycherley's *The Country Wife*: An Anatomy of Masculinity." See pp. 338-39.

with his wenches all the time that he was absent, which was all the last week, nobody knowing where he was" (9.501). The diarist also recounts Buckingham's affair with Lady Shrewsbury, chronicling a story that the duke had brought his mistress home to live with him in spite of his wife's protests: when the duchess objected "that it is was not for her and the other to live together in a house," her husband allegedly responded, "Why, Madam, I did think so; and therefore have ordered your coach to be ready to carry you to your father's" (9.201). Pepys likewise catalogs the affairs of Sir Charles Sedley. On July 29, 1667, he sets down court gossip that Sedley had spirited away one of the Archbishop of Canterbury's "wenches" (8.364). When the Archbishop let Sedley know that the woman was his relation, Sedley reportedly replied, "A pox take his Grace! Pray tell his Grace that I believe he finds himself too old, and is afeared that I should outdo him among his girls and spoil his trade" (8.364). Similarly, after seeing *The Man's the Master*, a comedy by Sir William Davenant, Pepys goes back stage, where he "did kiss the pretty woman newly come, called Pegg, that was Sir Ch. Sidly's mistress—a mighty pretty woman, and seems, but is not, modest" (9.189). The Wits' liaisons were all the more scandalous, says Pepys, because they were public.

According to Pepys these affairs often got the Wits into trouble. At times, their scrapes led to humorous stories for the court's entertainment. As Pepys records on December 2, 1668, he went to speak with the duke of York "and here saw all the ladies 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). At other times, their adventures led to more serious trouble. 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" (9.27). Even so, says Pepys, if Shrewsbury were to die of his wounds, "that may make it much the worse for the Duke of Buckingham" (9.27).

As Pepys's accounts make clear, the King's favor was often all that stood between the Wits and the law. For instance, when Sedley and Lord Buckhurst were arrested, "beaten and clapped up all night by the constable" (9.338-39) for "running up and down the streets a little while since all night," the King is amused with their "story" (9.338) and imprisons the constable for his treatment of them. Likewise, when Rochester gave Thomas Killigrew "a box on the ear in the King's presence" (9.451) the court clamors for the earl's punishment for committing the offense before the king. Charles, however, will hear none of it: "the King hath not only passed by the thing and pardoned it to Rochester already, but this very morning the King did publicly walk up and down, and Rochester I saw with him, as free as ever" (9.451-52). Furthermore, even when the king is upset by the Wits's antics, he often does little about it. For example, in February 1668, Edward Kynaston, one of the best known actors of the period, was "exceedingly dry-beaten with sticks by two or three that assaulted him—so as he is mightily bruised, and forced to keep to his bed"—after he acted a role that was unflattering to Sedley (9.435). Pepys writes that "they say the King is very angry with Sir Ch. Sidly for his [Kynaston's] being beaten; but he [Sedley] doth deny it" (9.436). Despite this anger, the matter was dropped and Sedley received no punishment for this attack.

Such behavior, as well as the King's indulgence of the Wits' activities, horrified Pepys. When Buckingham fought his duel with Shrewsbury, Pepys lamented that "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). He went on to write that, if Buckingham were to be punished for this duel, "I shall not be much sorry for it, that we may have some soberer man come in his room to assist in the government" (9.28). When Rochester assaulted Thomas Killigrew in the king's presence, Pepys records that it "doth give much 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). When Sedley is arrested for pretending to enact postures of buggery, Pepys rejoices that "I do not to this day know what is the meaning of this sin, nor which is the agent nor which the patient" (4.210). His disgust at the Wits' behavior reached its zenith when Buckingham's lackeys assaulted Henry Killigrew. Pepys recounts the Duke of York's statement that Buckingham's actions "might perhaps cost him his life in the House of Lords—and I was mightily pleased with it—saying it was the most impudent thing, as well as foolish, that ever he knew man do in all his life" (9.558).

As the above statements make clear, Pepys's reactions to the Wits' behavior was inextricably connected to his belief that their influence hurt the king's ability to govern the country. However, Pepys not only expresses his animosity toward the king's indulgence of the Wits' displays of indecency, violence, and attempted murder but also reveals his conviction that Charles's own behavior is no better. For example, the king, like the Wits, flaunts his sexual liaisons. Throughout the *Diary* Pepys chronicles the king's public affair with Lady Castlemaine and records that Henry Killigrew junior was banished from court for conjecturing about her youthful masturbation. Likewise, the link between the Court Wits' behavior and the king's actions is again made explicit in Pepys's 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" (9.264-65).

Because of such 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).

However, Pepys's concern about the Wits' behavior goes beyond his belief that they prevented the king from ruling effectively. In fact, his diary suggests that he sees their activities as a threat to men like himself as well. On July 1, 1663, for example, Pepys recounts Sedley's trial for "debauchery" (4.209). Sedley had appeared naked on the balcony of a tavern, "acting all the postures of lust and buggery that could be imagined, and abusing of scripture" by "preaching a Mountebanke sermon from that pulpitt, saying that he hath to sell such a powder as should make all the cunts in town run after him" (4.209). He also washed his genitals in a glass of wine and then drank from it to the king's health. At his trial, records Pepys, "the Judges did all of them round give him a most high reproofe—my Lord Chief Justice saying that it was for him and such wicked wretches as he was that God's anger and judgments hung over us" (4.209). Sedley was, according to Pepys, forced to surrender 5000£ as a guarantee of his good behavior in the future (2.210).

This passage subtly betrays Pepys's anxieties concerning masculinity, anxieties that he shares not only with Pinchwife but with the larger discourse of progressive ideology as well. Although Pepys chronicles his own sexual urges and desires and often justifies his sexual curiosity based on the efficacy of knowledge throughout the diary, in this entry Pepys distances himself from any understanding of same-sex activities. For example, he defends his reading of *L'École des Filles* by arguing that it is "not amiss for a sober man once to read over [it] to inform himself in the villainy of the world" (9.58),²⁵ but reacts to

²⁵ *L'École des Filles*, translated as *The School of Venus, or the Lady's Delight* in England in the mid-eighteenth century, was originally published in France in 1655. It depicts the conversation between two women, Fanchon and her cousin Susanne. Susanne explains the pleasures of love to her kinswoman as part of her lover's attempts to seduce the innocent Fanchon. See David Foxon's *Libertine Literature in England, 1660-1745* pp. 30-37 for more information on this book.

Sedley's performance by claiming that "I do not to this day know what is the meaning of this sin, nor which is the agent nor which the patient" (4.210). Such language recalls Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick's description of Pinchwife's fear of cuckoldry in *Between Men: English Literature and Male Homosocial Desire*. In her discussion of *The Country Wife*, Sedgwick argues that "the men's heterosexual relationships in the play have as their *raison d'être* an ultimate bonding between men" (50), bonds which express power relations between these men that are similar to yet different from the bonds of homoeroticism:

The bond of cuckoldry differs from at least some social conformations of homosexuality in being *necessarily* hierarchical in structure, with an "active" participant who is clearly in the ascendancy over the "passive" one. Most characteristically, the difference of power occurs in the form of a difference of knowledge: the cuckold is not even supposed to know that he is in such a relationship. Thus, cuckoldry inscribes and institutionalizes what is only contingently a feature of male homosexual bonds—an impoverishment of horizontal or mutual ties in favor of an asymmetrical relation of cognitive transcendence. (50)

According to Sedgwick, Pinchwife's problem is that the "primacy of the male-homosocial category 'cuckold' determines every shred of [his] behavior as a husband—so much that his unworldly wife learns both to want to cuckold him and how to go about doing so, purely from his phantasmic and obsessional harping on the subject" (53).²⁶ Pinchwife's greatest fear is that Horner will make him the passive, feminized participant in Horner's aggressive, masculine manipulation of the play's symbolic system. At its root, this too is Pepys's fear.

²⁶ In his essay, "Wycherley's 'Great Stage of Fools': Madness and Theatricality in *The Country Wife*," W. Gerald Marshall has since built upon Sedgwick's essay by arguing that Pinchwife's obsessive jealousy "would be considered insane by important Restoration standards" (413). He therefore contends that Pinchwife's behavior and gender anxiety should be seen as a form of madness.

In denying that he knows "which is the agent nor which the patient" in acts of sodomy, Pepys attempts to reassert a kind of masculine control over the threat that the Court Wits' behavior poses. As his detailing of their sexual activities makes clear, the Wits' go about London seducing every woman that they desire. Sedley's drunken performance at the Cock Tavern now suggests that men too might be in danger of being confronted with their advances. Whether Pepys felt personally endangered, Sedley's performance does make visible the symbolic relations between such men as Sedley, Rochester, and Buckingham, and men like Pepys: the Wits' status as the king's favorites meant, at least to Pepys, that they may do as they please and that people like him had little recourse but to comply with their whims. The only alternatives, made clear in the fates of the constable and the parson's daughter, were arrest or death. One of the ways that men like Pepys responded to this anxiety was to deny any knowledge of "what is the meaning of this sin." Another was to begin the process of delineating clearly defined gender roles for men and women, roles predicated on the insistence that gender was a fixed, innate quality based on sexual desire: "men desired women exclusively and . . . all masculine behavior flowed from such desire" (Trumbach, "Sex" 187). This insistence is a second component of Wycherley's rejection of progressive ideology.

Libertine Identities

Throughout his early comedies, Wycherley uses his libertine characters to argue against progressive ideology's notion that gender is an expression of an innate self. In particular, Wycherley uses his early plays to experiment with the possibility that libertinism could stand as a possible alternative to progressive ideology's early formulation of rigid masculine and feminine gender roles. Initially, Wycherley depicts his libertine characters as versions of the Court Wits themselves. In *Love in a Wood*, for example, such characters as Ranger, Vincent, and Valentine approximate the Wits' reputations, as

characterized by such writers as Pepys. With Wycherley's subsequent plays, however, his libertine protagonists decreasingly reflect the Wits' reputations as Wycherley pushes his libertines into increasingly extreme sexual roles. Throughout this experimentation, Wycherley assumes that libertinism is defined by two basic qualities. First, he portrays libertinism as a kind of hyper-masculinity, the ability to manipulate the people around oneself through aggression. Second, he depicts libertinism as an ever-changing identity that shifts with one's rhetorical situation. None of his libertines is defined by one, innate characteristic. Instead, each acts his way through his play by adapting to whatever circumstances he finds himself in or creates. And finally, because of these two qualities, libertinism in these plays functions as a potential "third gender," in the sense used by Randolph Trumbach to describe effeminate homosexuality near the end of the seventeenth century. By the end of *The Country Wife*, the question for Wycherley and the Court Wits becomes whether this libertine "gender" is a viable alternative to the rhetoric of progressive ideology.

Wycherley portrays libertinism as a kind of hyper-masculinity, the ability to manipulate the people around oneself through aggression. However, this aggression becomes more pronounced in each of his subsequent plays. Standard readings of Wycherley's early comedies emphasize the ways in which his libertine characters grow progressively "flawed." According to such arguments, the increasing aggression of Wycherley's libertine protagonists reflects his progressively more pointed satire of the Restoration court and society.²⁷ Examining these plays within the context of the Court Wits' adherence to a libertine ideology, however, paints a different picture. According to this picture, Wycherley's rakish heroes violate the norms of Restoration society as part of the Court Wits' experimentation with libertinism as an alternative to the other dominant ideologies of

²⁷ See, for example, Anne Richter's "William Wycherley," Bonamy Dobrée's *Restoration Comedy, 1660-1720*, and Rose A. Zimbardo's *Wycherley's Drama: A Link in the Development of English Satire*.

their day. Hence, Wycherley's earliest protagonists, Ranger, Vincent, and Valentine, violate the norms of their society in order to satisfy their desires but do so within the generally accepted limits of comedy. The hero of Wycherley's second play, Gerrard, goes a step further in violating societal norms by participating in a plan to steal a man's daughter away from him. And finally, Wycherley's most aggressive libertine, Horner, rejects society's sexual mores altogether.

This increasing aggression is likewise connected to Wycherley's claim that libertinism is an ever-changing identity that shifts with the rake's rhetorical situation. In fact, each of his libertines acts his way through his play by adapting to whatever circumstances he finds himself in or creates. In *Love in a Wood*, Wycherley foregrounds the transitory nature of the libertine "identity" by changing the characteristics which define Vincent and Ranger as libertine figures over the course of the play. In *The Gentleman Dancing-Master*, Wycherley casts Gerrard in a sexual intrigue in which he poses as a dancing instructor in order to spirit his future lover out of her father's house, a pose that is undercut by Gerrard's inability to dance or play an instrument. And finally, in *The Country Wife*, Wycherley's ultimate libertine figure, Horner, poses as an impotent misogynist in order to fool husbands into allowing him private access to their wives and to protect his lovers' reputations. In each of these cases, the rake protagonist adapts to the situations around him rather than remain defined by a single characteristic. Consequently, each of these plays argues that "identity" is a performance dictated by the rhetorical situation in which a person finds him- or herself.

In *Love in a Wood*, the aggressive masculinity of Wycherley's libertine characters is reflected in their recreation of the antics of the Court Wits themselves. As a result, they are Wycherley's most life-like protagonists. For example, like Pepys, the fop Dapperwit proclaims that

your Court-Wit is a fashionable, insinuating, flattering, cringing, grimacing,

Fellow; and has wit enough to solicit a suit of Love; and if he fail, he has malice enough to ruin the woman with a dull Lampoon, but he rails still at the man that is absent, for you must know, all Wits rail; and his wit properly lies in combing Perruques, matching Ribbons, and being severe as they call it, upon other peoples cloaths. (93)

Furthermore, like Buckingham, Valentine has fought a duel over the love of a woman. His rival was seriously injured in the fight, forcing Valentine to flee the country to avoid being arrested for murder.²⁸ Vincent is overly fond of drinking. In Act 2, for example, he praises the new fashion of "midnight coursing" in St. James's Park (87), 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" (87) and is happy that this fashion allows a man to "carry a Bottle under his Arm, instead of his Hat" without anyone observing it (88). If Vincent goes to the park to drink, Ranger, as his name implies, goes to hunt for women. As he proclaims in Act 2, "Hang me if I am not pleas'd extreamly with this new fashion'd catterwouling, this midnight coursing in the Park" (87), since here a man "May bring his bashful Wench, and not have her put out of Countenance by the impudent honest women of the Town" (87). In sum, these characters are described as "contemnners of Matrons, Seducers, or Defamers of married Women, and Deflourers of helpless Virgins, even in the Streets, upon the very Bulks; Affronters of midnight Magistracy, and Breakers of Windows in a word" (104). Consequently, these characters create a typical image of libertine masculinity as composed of aristocratic drinking, fighting, and running after women.

Just as Wycherley creates an image of libertine masculinity in his first play, he also begins to experiment with this masculinity by depicting libertinism as an ever-changing

²⁸ Despite this threat, Valentine of course returns to England to reunite with Christina.

identity that shifts with the rake's rhetorical situation.²⁹ Throughout this play, Wycherley foregrounds the transitory nature of the libertine "identity" by changing the characteristics which define Vincent and Ranger as libertine figures over the course of the play.³⁰ For example, when Vincent is introduced to the audience, his defining characteristic seems to be his love of drinking. This identity is established throughout the first two acts, and he is first seen arguing with Dapperwit over the latter's appeal to Ranger, "let's have no drinking to night" (79). Vincent responds that he "hate[s Dapperwit's] impertinent Chat more then he [Dapperwit] does the honest Burgundy" (79). Vincent later reveals that as a child he had aspired to becoming a drawer (88), and when he quarrels with Dapperwit again, he asks Ranger, "Why do's he always rail against my friends then, and my best friend a Beer-glass" (88). This portrait of Vincent changes abruptly, however, later in Act 2. Once Valentine returns to England and appears on stage, Vincent becomes his trusted advisor and the play's clear-headed peacemaker. He maintains Christina's innocence in the face of Valentine's accusations of unfaithfulness and arranges the couple's reconciliation in Act 5, never referring to drink again in the play. This transformation suggests that the surrounding environment, and not an internal essence, dictates the libertine's persona. When he is among friends who drink and carouse, he is a drunken profligate. When he is around friends who exchange these activities for a less libertine lifestyle, he is sober and dignified.

²⁹ Most scholars contend that *Love in a Wood* has no unifying theme. Virginia Ogden Birdsall, for example, argues that the play does not carry "out a single unified theme" (110). W. R. Chadwick maintains that the play's "patchwork quality" is the result of "inexperience" (31). See also Thomas Fujimura's *The Restoration Comedy of Wit* pp. 127-32, Robert D. Hume's *The Development of English Drama in the Late Seventeenth Century* p. 278, and Derek Cohen's "The Farce Pattern in *Love in a Wood*." Eric Rump responds to these critics in his "Theme and Structure in Wycherley's *Love in a Wood*," arguing that Wycherley exerts a tight control over the theme and structure of his first play.

³⁰ W. R. Chadwick maintains that Wycherley "violated the integrity of his characters," particularly Vincent and Ranger (27). Although Chadwick sees this as a drawback to the artistic success of Wycherley's play, I would like to suggest that this "violation" is an important ingredient in the Court Wits' ideological project. Valentine is left out of this project due to the fact that his time on stage is significantly less than Vincent and Ranger. Chadwick attributes this "violation" to Wycherley's attempt to combine the play's high, middle, and low plots.

This importance of context is also seen in Wycherley's characterization of Ranger, whose identity likewise shifts throughout the play. As his name implies, Ranger initially spends his time ranging after women. When the audience first meets him, he is attempting to avoid his mistress, Lydia. "Intending a Ramble to St. James Park to night, upon some probable hopes of some fresh Game" (81), Ranger convinces her, in his words, to "stay at home, with a promise to come to her within this hour, that she might not foil the scent and prevent my sport" (81). When Ranger discovers that his mistress has pursued him to the park, he attempts to follow her home. To prevent this, Lydia ducks into Christina's lodgings and convinces her to pretend that it was she whom Ranger had been following. Ranger is soon persuaded that Christina was the woman he saw in the park and concludes that "to tell her I follow'd her for another, were an affront, rather than an excuse" (97). Initially, Ranger attempts to cover his mistake by claiming that he knew it was Christina all along and that he followed and pursued her because he is in love with her:

Indeed, when I follow'd you first out of the Park, I was afraid you might have been a certain Relation of mine, for your Statures and Habits are the same; but when you enter'd here, I was with joy convinc'd: Besides I would not for the world have given her the troublesom love, so much encouragement, to have disturb'd my future addresses to you. (98)

As their conversation continues, Ranger, as any libertine would, falls in love with Christina and proclaims that he will call on her the next day. It later becomes clear that this "love" is no more than lust, his sexual desire for her.

His desire causes Ranger to undergo a series of identity crises throughout the rest of the play. First, he is a typical libertine, giving up his love for Lydia in order to pursue Christina. When Lydia tests his love by sending Ranger a forged letter purporting to be from Christina, it leads to another switch in identity. Following the letter's instructions, Ranger shows up at Vincent's house to meet with Christina, who swears that she did not

send the letter and refuses to accept his declarations of love. When she flees the house, Ranger proclaims that he is finished with his wild ways: "Lydia, triumph, I now am thine again; of Intrigues, honourable or dishonourable, and all sorts of rambling, I take my leave" (133). He is next seen wandering through the park calling out, "Lydia, Lydia—poor Lydia" (142). This reformation, however, is short-lived. While wandering in the park, Ranger stumbles across Christina. Their paths get crossed with Valentine and Lydia, leaving Christina with Valentine and Ranger with Lydia. Still thinking that the woman he is with is Christina, Ranger declares that he loves Lydia but will make one last attempt on Christina. He then tries to force himself upon her. When Lydia screams out, Ranger realizes his mistake and claims that he knew it was she all along. Again, what this back and forth romance reveals is that Ranger's identity is dependent on context, not nature. Initially, he hangs out with his friends and acts the part of a libertine rake, pursuing women and resisting Lydia's not-so-subtle hints at marriage. When his friends give up this lifestyle in favor of marriage, he too is the perfect lover, declaring his love for Lydia and reciting the play's final couplet, "The end of Marriage, now is liberty / And two are bound—to set each other free" (149). But in between this declaration and couplet, Ranger is once again left alone with Christina, giving him the opportunity to attempt to seduce her. When his words fail, he proceeds to use force. As this relapse suggests, his final identity as loving husband is little more than dramatic convention.

Taken together, Wycherley's development of a general sense of libertine masculinity and his creation of shifting libertine identities ultimately gives this play a feel of conventionality. His libertines never really violate society's strictures to an extent that the audience cannot enjoy the play, and they end the plot by apparently upholding one of society's most sacred institutions: marriage. As a result, *Love in a Wood* argues that it is possible for men who espouse libertine ideology to remain within the generally accepted norms of social behavior by adapting their antics to those norms. While drinking, fighting,

and running after women are acceptable aristocratic vices, says this play, this acceptability lies in society's ability to contain them via marriage and the rhetoric of romantic love. In his second play, Wycherley experiments with the limits of this containment.

In *The Gentleman Dancing-Master*, Wycherley streamlines the plot of his play, reducing its number of characters, eliminating the usual subplots, 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. He is first seen at a French House, drinking and dining with his friend Martin and Monsieur de Paris. When the two prostitutes Flounce and Flirt arrive 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 (168). Furthermore, when Gerrard chides them for "pressing" men into service, the women respond that he begins "to be something too old for us, we are for brisk Hoaza's of seventeen or eighteen" (168). Gerrard asserts that he is not too old for them, but simply tired of their acquaintance. "Besides," Gerrard goes on to explain, "you are come a little too early for me, for I am not drunk yet" (168). Gerrard then retires to prepare for his visit with Hippolita the next day. Gerrard's excusing himself from the company of these prostitutes initiates an interrogation of libertine masculinity that continues throughout this play. In *The Gentleman Dancing-Master*, Wycherley asks whether society's containment of the libertine-rake through marriage emasculates him. He concludes that it does.³¹

Generally, the fact that Gerrard effects his marriage with Hippolita by stealing her away from her father can be seen as a more aggressive and socially threatening action than the

³¹ My view of this play as a serious examination of the possibility of libertine ideology to serve as an alternative to progressive ideology stands in marked contrast to many scholars' previous statements concerning this play. Most scholars see it as an artistic and thematic failure. For example, Virginia Birdsall faults the play for a "lack of dramatic justification" (*Wild Civility* 121). Sam G. Terry maintains that Wycherley viewed Gerrard and Hippolita with "disgust" (3). And W. R. Chadwick contends that "it is possible to argue that *The Gentleman Dancing-Master* is no more than a farcical squib, and that its simplicity is due to the poverty of its conception and the vacancy of its purpose" (48).

antics of his predecessors. He not only drinks, fights and carrouses, but steals a daughter away from her father as well. This aggression culminates in the fact that Gerrard's marriage to Hippolita is achieved at sword point: he forces Don Diego to approve of his marriage to his daughter by having his friends dress up as fiddlers and then unmask themselves to threaten Don Diego with violence unless he gives the young couple his blessing. However, Gerrard's masculine assertion is undercut by his inability to dance or to play the violin. When Hippolita's father discovers his daughter in her chambers with a man early in Act Two, he threatens to kill Gerrard with his sword. To avoid bloodshed, Hippolita persuades her father that Gerrard is her dancing master. Since he cannot dance or play the violin, Gerrard is forced to play a role that he cannot successfully perform. Throughout the rest of the play, he goes to extreme lengths to cover up his inabilities—he and Hippolita insist that they be left alone to practice, he breaks the violin's strings in order to avoid having to play it, and he takes dancing lessons himself in between his visits to Hippolita's house.

Gerrard's inept, though successful, performance as a dancing master creates a tension within his character.³² On the one hand, Gerrard is a typical, aristocratic libertine who drinks, chases women, and is ready to defend himself with his sword at a moment's notice. On the other hand, he is often little more than a fool, dependent on Hippolita to bail him out of embarrassing situations: she convinces her father that he is her dancing master in order to justify his presence in her chamber, she feigns embarrassment and suggests that they be left alone to practice in order to cover Gerrard's inability to dance, and she instructs him to break the violin string in order to hide the fact that he is not a musician. This tension is the result of Wycherley's attempt to move his libertine character a step further towards violating society's norms but without risking the appeal of his play by making Gerrard

³² In fact, Sam G. Terry argues that Gerrard "is not to be viewed sympathetically [in this play]" (10). Rather, Terry contends that "Wycherley focuses attention upon his ridiculous nature; and in Gerrard he creates somewhat of an oddity for Restoration comedy: a gentleman who is an utter fool" (10).

unlikeable. As a result of this tension, the libertine is again subsumed into society's mores through marriage. Gerrard does succeed in winning the hand of Hippolita, and Don Diego gives them his approval. Likewise, his ability to use his sword effectively provides him with a masculine reputation that, while more aggressive than those of Ranger, Vincent, or Valentine, is nevertheless acceptable to the audience, which cheers his marriage to Hippolita. Consequently, "society" is once again left unchanged and the libertine's pleasures are successfully contained.

In contrast to Ranger, Vincent, Valentine, and Gerrard, Horner aggressively pursues his pleasures regardless of the costs: he ends *The Country Wife* friendless, committed to sexual conquest alone. Furthermore, Wycherley's most famous libertine is characterized by a social duplicity that goes beyond simple, good-natured pranks. Horner is no longer a jolly epicurean like Wycherley's previous libertines, who were simply overly prone to pursuing pleasures of one sort or another. Instead, he takes the use of pretense 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. Instead, his disguise is meant solely as a vehicle for pursuing his own pleasures. He has asked a quack physician to report throughout the town that he "is as bad as an Eunuch" (11). His goal here is to convince the "City Husbands" that he is impotent, tricking them into giving him unlimited and private access 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" (13). As Horner 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 would before not be acquainted with me out of jealousy" (14). The ruse works so well that Horner is able to seduce Lady Fidget, Mrs. Dainty Fidget, Mrs. Squeamish, and Margery Pinchwife while protecting their reputations from

any stain. As a result, Horner takes libertinism's belief in pleasure to its extreme. Where Wycherley's previous heroes had seduced women in order to marry them, Horner does so solely to enjoy them sexually.

Furthermore, Horner uses his ruse to point out that honor is a facade used by people to mask their desires.³³ As he 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 wou'd avoid, not Men" (14). In other words, Horner argues that in the world of this play honor is based solely on reputation. 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. For example, Horner discovers that the women of honor often engage in bawdy talk and drunken behavior in private. As he relates to Quack, when these women are amongst friends, "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" (59). This works for Horner as well. When asked whether he will be able, upon some future falling out, to maim the reputations of the women he sleeps with under the guise of a eunuch, Horner reminds Lady Fidget that no one would believe him if he attempted to ruin her: "the reputation of impotency is as hardly recover'd again in the World, as that of cowardice, dear Madam" (34). Once he has gained

³³ William Freedman takes this argument further by suggesting that Horner's reputed impotency serves as "the center of the play's criticism of [Restoration] society" (422). He sees it as "a serious comment on the self-destructive impotence, neglectfulness, and ineptitude of the Restoration male whose representative sign is the eunuch" (431). For other analyses of Horner's character see Virginia Ogden Birdsall's *Wild Civility*, W. R. Chadwick's *Four Plays of William Wycherley*, James Thompson's *Language in Wycherley's Plays*, Robert Markley's *Two-Edged Weapons: Style and Ideology in the Comedies of Etherege, Wycherley, and Congreve*, Deborah C. Payne's "Reading the Signs in *The Country Wife*," Cynthia Matlack's "Parody and Burlesque of Heroic Ideals in Wycherley's Comedies: A Critical Reinterpretation of Contemporary Evidence," Harold Weber's "Horner and His 'Women of Honour': The Dinner Party in *The Country Wife*," Joseph Candido's "Theatricality and Satire in *The Country Wife*," Helen M. Burke's "Wycherley's 'Tendentious Joke': The Discourse of Alterity in *The Country Wife*," Derek Cohen's "The Revenger's Tragedy: A Reading of *The Country Wife*," Richard Steiger's "'Wit in a Corner': Hypocrisy in *The Country Wife*," Gorman Beauchamp's "The Amorous Machiavellism of *The Country Wife*," David R. Morris's "Language and Honor in *The Country Wife*," Charles A. Hallett's "The Hobbesian Substructure of *The Country Wife*," and Wallace Jackson's "The Country Wife: The Premises of Love and Lust."

the reputation of sexual incapacity, says Horner, then for all intents and purposes he is impotent in the eyes of other men. What Horner reveals through this ruse is that society will go to great lengths to mask natural desires. He declares: "A Pox on 'em, and all that force Nature, and wou'd be still what she forbids 'em; Affectation is her greatest Monster" (16). Throughout the play, Horner contends that nature, the physical body, forbids the suppression of sexual desire, which is precisely what "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. This use of rhetoric to deny the physical as a good in and of itself is what he finds monstrous.

This attack on honor combined with Horner's seduction of "honorable" women strikes at the foundation of Restoration society. As scholars often note, Horner reinforces his ruse of impotency by denigrating women and asserting the efficacy of masculine friendship. As he proclaims to his friends Harcourt and Dorilant in Act 1, "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" (15). Even so, by the end of the play, Horner has abandoned his friends in order to continue his ruse. As he proclaims in the play's final lines:

Vain Fopps, 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. (87).

As this short poem demonstrates, Horner has come a long way from the comic intrigues of Ranger, Vincent, Valentine, and Gerrard. With each play, Wycherley creates versions of libertinism that more aggressively enact society's images of libertine behavior, as seen in Pepys's worried accounts. These increasingly aggressive representations offer a vision of aristocratic masculinity markedly at odds with progressive ideology's attempt to define

masculine behavior as the ability to regulate the self effectively. Horner manipulates everyone around him, just as Pepys feared that the Court Wits would, and does so without guilt or regret. In fact, he is even willing to falsely accuse Alithea, his friend Harcourt's love interest, of being his mistress. While he notes to the audience that he is doing this, he also asserts that it is necessary in order to save Margery Pinchwife's reputation. Saving her reputation is, of course, necessary in order to preserve his own reputation as a eunuch. As a result, Wycherley suggests that libertine ideology may only work as an alternative to progressive ideology's rhetoric of introspective self-regulation by completely rejecting the institutions and values of Restoration society.

This rejection is further strengthened by Wycherley's dismissal of progressive ideology's belief in innate gender roles. In his early plays, libertinism functions as an alternative to normalized femininity and masculinity by combining characteristics of both. The work of Judith Butler sheds light on Wycherley's strategies here. Just as Butler contends that gender identity is an "enacted fantasy or incorporation," Wycherley constructs libertinism as a series of "acts, gestures, and desire[s]" that produce the effect of an internal, gendered identity (*Gender* 136).³⁴ In other words, his libertine figures's masculinity initially appears to emanate, as progressive ideology argues that it does emanate, from some sort of internal selfhood. This appearance apparently gains credence by the fact that, as Butler argues, this internal selfhood is produced "on the surface of the body, through the play of signifying absences that suggest, but never reveal, the organizing principle of identity as a cause" (*Gender* 136). As his experimentation with libertine

³⁴ Progressive ideology contended that identity flowed from an innate essence, a soul. Butler's notion that identity is a fantasy parallels the Court Wits' reading of Hobbes's philosophy. Hobbes writes that "the Soule of man [is] . . . of the same substance, with that which appeareth in a Dream, to one that sleepeth; or in a Looking-glasse, to one that is awake; which, men not knowing that such apparitions are nothing else but creatures of the Fancy, think to be reall, and externall Substances" (*Leviathan* 170-71). Consequently, the soul, for Hobbes, is a phantom, a creature of the fancy, rather than the basis for personal identity.

personae demonstrates, Wycherley denies that libertinism reveals the body's inner truth and in doing so suggests libertinism as an alternative to the rhetoric of progressive ideology.

For example, in *Love in a Wood*, Wycherley frequently evokes the theme of the libertine's body betraying his shame or embarrassment. When the paths of Christina, Lydia, Valentine, and Ranger get crossed in the darkness of St. James's Park, Christina scolds the man she thinks is Ranger (but who is really Valentine) for his behavior towards her. As she begins to weep, he reveals to the audience that "My joy, and pity makes me as mute, as my shame; yet I must discover my self" (144). While Valentine here simply means that he must reveal that he is not Ranger, this statement also evokes a motif that runs throughout Wycherley's play: his characters repeatedly draw attention to the fact that they are blushing or are in danger of blushing. These previous references, all of which are expressions of embarrassment and the revelation of a character's motives, make it clear that Valentine's "shame" and self-discovery imply the potential for him to blush. For example, in Act 1 Mrs. Joyner claims that Alderman Gripe will "put me to the blush" with his hyperbolic praises (76) and Dapperwit advises Vincent not to tell Ranger about the former's criticism of his character since "I hate to put a Man to the blush" (81). In the former case, Joyner's evocation of a blush that never occurs is part of her manipulation of Alderman Gripe: throughout this scene she feigns innocence and inferiority to his attentions. Her blush would prove these characteristics. In the latter case, revealing Ranger's cowardice would damage his reputation and put him to shame. Furthermore, Ranger asserts that he is in love with Christina because his body reveals it: "I am in love I see, for I blush, and have not a word to say for my self" (99). This blush arises when Christina, who has not left her house since Valentine left the country, tricks Ranger into saying that he saw her within the last week. His being caught in the lie embarrasses him and leaves him speechless. When another character is asked to tell Dapperwit what she has heard about him, she replies that "I blush to speak 'em" (109), since the stories she has heard are not to his credit (or hers).

And finally, when Vincent admonishes Valentine to desist in believing that Christina has been unfaithful to him, Valentine exclaims that he would "rather, indeed, blush for my self, then her" (141). His declaration is meant to serve as a kind of masculine valor: he would rather be ashamed of his own behavior than for her to be ashamed of hers. Taken together, these incidents support Wycherley's theme, as expressed by Alderman Gripe in Act 1, that "Blushes are badges of Imperfection. Saints have no shame" (76).

In each of these cases, the character's blush, or potential blush, is a revelation of shame and embarrassment that is compelled by the circumstances in which the character finds him- or herself. These revelations would seem to suggest that Wycherley, like progressive ideology, posits a natural self, an internal core that is revealed through the body. This suggestion seems to be in keeping with the idea that "blushing is . . . an act of somatic confession that dazzles with its promise to establish unique identity by revealing the body's truth" (O'Farrell 6). A closer look, however, reveals that Wycherley rejects the notion of unique identity in this play. Within a play, a blush is always only linguistic: the actor "blushes" by declaring it in dialogue and through his gestures of embarrassment. Within the context of the play's preoccupation with blushing, it is reasonable to conclude that Valentine's declaration of his speechless shame, like Ranger's earlier in the play, is meant to evoke the possibility that he is blushing. Even so, while the blush is implied, it is hidden by the darkness of the park—even if Valentine "blushes" as he confesses his shame to the audience, none of the other characters can perceive it due to the setting's darkness. It is further elided by his own turning of the conversation away from his "offence" (144)—when he reveals his "identity" to Christina, he does so by exclaiming that he accepts her explanation of events and once again believes in her faithfulness. Thus, Valentine evokes but then dismisses the possibility of the body's truth, of some sort of natural essence that is performed on the surface of the body. Instead, the "body's truth"

remains nothing more than a Hobbesian naturalism, the body's natural impulses toward pleasure.³⁵ This argument is further developed in Wycherley's subsequent plays.

Wycherley also explores the body's relationship to libertine identity in *The Gentleman Dancing-Master*. In this case, Gerrard's seduction of Hippolita is threatened when he cannot stop laughing at Don Diego's obtuseness. For example, 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 pleas'd to be merry, Sir, ha, ha, ha—I cannot but laugh at that question" (192). 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" (192). 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 that "My laughing may give him suspicions, yet I cannot hold" (192). 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" (192). Again, this scene seems to suggest the possibility that the body can betray the libertine's true identity: Gerrard's laughter threatens to reveal that he is a rake who is attempting to seduce a young woman from her father's household. However, this threat is again averted: Don Diego never catches on to Gerrard's laughter, which stops when Hippolita reenters the scene.

³⁵ Hobbes argued that "Man's nature is the sum of his natural faculties and powers, as the faculties of nutrition, motion, generation, sense, reason, etc." (*English Works* 4.2). According to Hobbes, humans are motivated by their senses: if a stimulus gives a man pleasure, he comes to desire that stimulus and will seek it out; if, on the other hand, a stimulus causes pain, a man will try to avoid it in the future. It is the complex interaction between the sense and external objects and not an innate soul or natural self, says Hobbes, that eventually leads to humans' rational abilities, scientific knowledge, and religious beliefs. See *Leviathan* ch. 6.

Consequently, no "truth" is revealed, and this moment of somatic confession becomes little more than a method of creating dramatic suspense.³⁶

Horner's body also threatens to reveal his true self in Act 4 of *The Country Wife*. Near the end of the famous "china" scene, Horner is put in an embarrassing position when Lady Fidget and Mrs. Squeamish compete for his sexual attention. With Sir Jasper Fidget present in Horner's lodgings, Lady Fidget disappears into Horner's bedroom looking for some "china" (61), a euphemism for Horner's erectile capabilities. When she locks the door behind herself, Horner is "forced" to "come into [her] the back way" (62) and, with her husband on the other side of the door, Lady Fidget and Horner consummate their affair. While they are at it, Mrs. Squeamish comes in, vowing to disturb them. Lady Fidget and Horner soon rejoin the group, with Lady Fidget explaining to her husband that "I have been toying and moyling, for the pretty'st piece of China" (63). Squeamish then proclaims that she wants some too: "I'll have some China too, good Mr. Horner, don't think to give other people China, and me none, come in with me too" (63). However, as Horner is forced to admit, he has no more "china" to give her at the moment and promises to have "a Rol-waggon for [her] too, another time" (63). This scene's comic effect relies on the irony of several "honorable" women who secretly have healthy sexual appetites trying to solicit more sex from a man who is pretending to be impotent and who is actually rendered temporarily so after fulfilling one lady's desire. This impotence promises to reveal the "truth" of the libertine's identity. However, this "truth" is elided as Horner is

³⁶ Besides Gerrard's comic performance, Wycherley emphasizes that identities are affected in two additional ways. First, although both Monsieur de Paris and Don Diego were born and bred in England, each has rejected his "Englishness" and assumed a new persona based on his international travels. After a tour in France, Paris has reinvented himself as a French fop who hates all English manners and tastes. Similarly, Don Diego, whose real name is Sir James Formal, has abandoned English manners in favor of those of Spain. Wycherley further makes this point by highlighting the play's status as a play. Not only does he include references to the actors who originate the roles of Paris and Don Diego, but he also has Hippolita imagine herself the heroine in a comedy. These moments of self-reference break down the play's illusion of realism and highlight its theme of performance by blurring the line between acting and identity. Like Buckingham's *The Rehearsal*, these moments recall Shakespeare's admonition that "All the world's a stage."

able to maintain his ruse, satisfying the women's desires in the future. By the end of the play, all of the women are aware of Horner's promiscuity but work to perpetuate his ruse by forcing Margery Pinchwife into "confessing" that she did not sleep with Horner because of his impotence.

Because Wycherley casts libertinism as a kind of ever-changing performance of hyper-masculinity, his version of libertinism functions much like a third gender by the time he creates his masterpiece, *Horner*. Horner's identity is aggressively masculine, manipulating those around him for his own sexual pleasure and entertainment. Likewise, this manipulation is effected by means of an assumed identity, a performance of libertinism that parallels the ways in which gender would come to operate by the end of the eighteenth century. Furthermore, as Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick points out, Horner's ruse relies on his assuming the role of a eunuch, a figure somewhere between the genders of masculine or feminine. As she notes,

Horner embodies the counterposed homosocial/heterosexual forces in women's erotic fates, but because he is a man and therefore an active subject of male homosocial desire—and because he alone realizes that men's homosocial and heterosexual desires need not be opposites but may be entirely complicit—he is able to use the apparent contradictions to his advantage against both men and women.

(57)

In other words, by the end of Wycherley's third play, Horner's libertinism has assimilated characteristics usually associated with masculinity and femininity. Like the women of the play, he is the object of men's desire: husbands solicit his company for their wives because he is reported to be unable to have sex with them. At the same time, Horner is using this ruse to do just that: cuckold his new male friends. Consequently, says Sedgwick, if Horner "gives up the friendship and admiration of other men, it is only in order to come

into a more intimate and secret relation to them—a relation over which his cognitive mastery is so complete that they will not even know that such a bond exists" (56).

Wycherley's use of somatic confessions parallels his depiction of increasingly aggressive libertines and serves the same function of rejecting progressive ideology. In the final scene of *The Country Wife*, Wycherley dramatizes what he sees as the Court Wits' choice between sexual license and social mores. James Thompson points out that 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" (*Language* 89). As Thompson argues,

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 his 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. ("Ideology" 168).

Even so, at the end of this scene, Horner succeeds in maintaining his disguise of impotency, his body has not confessed its "truth," and Margery Pinchwife is silenced into compliance as well. Rather than marry his new mistress, Horner will continue his conquests into the future, rejecting society's institutions of marriage and masculine friendship. Thus, by the end of this early experiment with libertine ideology Wycherley has presented himself, the Wits, and the audience with the argument that they must all

choose between two alternatives to the traditional aristocratic rhetoric of birth and honor: progressive ideology and the Court Wits' libertine ideology. If this latter ideology is to succeed, says Wycherley, the Wits must not only engage in the pleasures of aristocratic drinking, fighting, and whoring, but must reject society's institutions altogether. Like Horner, they must either reveal the truth of their own performances or must cut themselves off from benefits of their positions in society.

Although Wycherley presents the need to choose between these alternatives in this play, he does not explicitly choose one or the other at this time. Horner's future is left to the audience's imagination. Wycherley's own choice, like that of his fellow Court Wits, 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 choice. My next chapter will examine the conclusions made by Wycherley and Etherege in *The Plain Dealer* and *The Man of Mode*, respectively. Chapter Five will analyze the responses of Sir Charles Sedley and John Wilmot, the Earl of Rochester, to this dilemma.

Chapter Four

The Limits of Libertinism: Etherege and Wycherley

As I discussed in Chapter 3, Horner's choice to maintain his ruse of impotency at the end of 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. James Thompson is correct to point out that "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" ("Ideology" 168), but Horner's choice has ramifications beyond the play's audience. Also among those forced to "choose sides" were the playwright and his friends, the Court Wits themselves. In fact, *The Country Wife* takes the Wits' libertine ideology to its logical extreme: the libertine rejects the rhetoric of aristocratic honor and duty as well as the arguments against sexual license put forward by members of the middling sort in order to embrace a philosophy that saw sexual consummation as the chief good in life. By going to this extreme, *The Country Wife* presented the Court Wits with a view of libertine ideology in which the rake rejected society's institutions altogether, one that called on them to reject the privileges of the court, the constraints of marriage, and the acclaim of reputation, in order to live a life of sexual indulgence. Wycherley's masterpiece then confronts them with the choice between this ideology and that of aristocratic or progressive ideologies. The remainder of the plays written by members of the Wits' circle during the 1670s map out their individual solutions to this dilemma.

This chapter analyzes the ways in which Sir George Etherege's *The Man of Mode* and William Wycherley's *The Plain Dealer* reflect their playwrights' responses to 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" (87). "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—in 1676" (87). Where Wycherley's *The Plain Dealer* was immediately considered "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" (Bevis 86, 87). Much of this argument revolves around the issue of categorizing these plays. Derek Hughes and Edward Burns, for example, classify both of these plays as comedies, while Laura Brown labels each a satire.¹ Other scholars, most notably Robert Hume, split the difference, arguing that *The Man of Mode* is a "wit comedy" while *The Plain Dealer* is an "indistinct" mix of "'domestic' social satire and 'foreign' intrigue" with a dash of romantic tragicomedy (*Development* 304). I believe that this emphasis on genre has obscured these plays' place within the Court Wits' dramas by distracting scholars from their rhetorical functions within Etherege's and Wycherley's canons. Rather than examining these works through the lenses of comedy or satire, we should see them as works of forensic rhetoric, the proving of a case or position. In both of these plays, the authors respond to Horner's choice by arguing that the libertine must participate in society's institutions rather than reject them. Etherege's last dramatic work attempts to domesticate libertine ideology by giving the male libertine a worthy female counterpart. Wycherley's final work rejects the ideology of his previous play, arguing that the libertine must find a pragmatic foothold in society.

In both *The Man of Mode* and *The Plain Dealer*, the playwrights argue that the economic realities of London life in the late seventeenth century necessitated the libertine's incorporation into society's institutions, most notably marriage. Throughout the late seventeenth century, large numbers of England's upper classes increasingly found

¹ See Hughes's *English Drama: 1660-1700* pp. 150-55 and 190-96, Burns's *Restoration Comedy* pp. 41-46 and 58-62, and Brown's *English Dramatic Form* pp. 28-59.

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" (*Emergence* 49). 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" (Rosenheim, *Emergence* 49). 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 had to pay for "'life-style' costs," which would include servants' wages, servants' liveries, stables, furniture and interior decoration, and tailored goods (Rosenheim, *Townshends* 76).² Members of the Court Wits' circle also added wine, prostitutes, and gambling to these expenses. As a result of these economic realities, men like Etherege and Wycherley often depended on marriages to rich, landed women to pay their debts. Such necessity permeates *The Man of Mode* and *The Plain Dealer* and explains Etherege's and Wycherley's contention that the libertine cannot function outside of society's institutions.

Toward Domesticated Libertinism in Etherege's *The Man of Mode*

That Dorimant is a libertine in Etherege's *The Man of Mode* is so unambiguous that it does not need to be proven here. Where scholars disagree is in deciding what to make of Etherege's depiction of Dorimant's libertinism. As Hume notes, the quarrel goes back as far as John Dennis and Sir Richard Steele. Steele argued in *Spectator* 65 that the play "is a

² For a fuller discussion of these expenses see James M. Rosenheim's *The Townshends of Raynham* pp. 73-79. In this section, Rosenheim studies the expenditures of Horatio Townshend, providing details of Townshend's expenses in London during the 1670s and 80s, which could exceed some £2800 a year, or one-half of his annual income (79).

perfect Contradiction to good Manners, good Sense, and common Honesty" (204) since "our Hero, in this Piece, is a direct Knave in his Designs, and a Clown in his language" (203). In response, Dennis maintained that Etherege meant "to expose Persons to our View, whose Views we may shun, and whose Follies we may despise; and by shewing us what is done upon the Comick Stage, to shew us what ought never to be done upon the Stage of the World" (245). Twentieth-century scholars generally follow in the footsteps of one or the other of these early critics.³ Placing this work within the context of Horner's decision to privilege his own sexual freedom over friendship and marriage provides us with a means of seeing Etherege's last play as both a celebration and a rejection of libertine ideology. Etherege rejects Horner's version of libertine ideology, choosing instead to advocate a vision of libertinism that is tempered by the possibility of domesticity. Etherege initially depicts Dorimant's libertinism as a continuation of Horner's aggressive, self-serving masculinity. By the play's end, however, he has moderated Dorimant's position by providing him with a worthy female companion, one who is rich, landed, beautiful, and able to curtail Dorimant's excesses.

In order to comprehend Etherege's reconstruction of the libertine identity in this play, we must first understand that he casts Dorimant's libertinism in the tradition of Wycherley's previous rake-heroes, Ranger, Vincent, Valentine, Gerrard, and Horner. He does this in three ways. First, Dorimant's libertinism is based on the reputations of the Court Wits themselves. Dennis reports that members of Etherege's audience saw similarities between Dorimant and the Court Wits. As he writes, "upon the first acting of this Comedy, it was generally believed to be an agreeable Representation of the Persons of

³ Fujimura, Weales, and Birdsall follow Steele in arguing against a vision of the play as a satire and see it as either an uncritical description of the behavior of contemporary aristocrats or a celebration of libertine immorality. Consequently, these critics view the play as inherently immoral. Charles O. McDonald and Ben Schneider look to Dennis in interpreting the play and emphasize the play's rejection of libertine behavior.

Condition of both Sexes, both in Court and Town," noting that people were particularly "charm'd with Dorimant" (248):

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 Falshood [sic], 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. (248)

Like Rochester and his fellow Wits, Dorimant is said to "tempt the Angels to a second fall" (48). Lady Woodvill sums up her understanding of his reputation when she asserts that Dorimant "is the Prince of all the Devils in the Town" and "Delights in nothing but in Rapes and Riots" (48). While Woodvill exaggerates his "delights," Dorimant does express his amorous intentions toward at least four women over the course of the play, including Loveit, Bellinda, Emilia, and Harriet, and does orchestrate much of the play's sexual intrigue. Dorimant's friend Medley is also said to be based on the reputation of the Wits: 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 Sir Charles Sedley or of Etherege himself.⁴

Second, Etherege also follows Wycherley's example in foregrounding Dorimant's self-conscious performance of his rakish identity. Just as Wycherley dismisses progressive ideology's belief in innate identity, Etherege depicts libertinism as a performed role rather than a natural, biologically predetermined one. As most scholars note, Dorimant is the

⁴ See Corman's "Interpreting and Misinterpreting *The Man of Mode*" p. 39, McKillop's *English Literature From Dryden to Burns* p. 76, and Summers' *The Playhouse of Pepys* p. 334 for more information on Medley's "true" identity. Montague Summers agrees that "Dorimant was generally recognized to be Rochester" and asserts that "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 Joseph Spence's *Observations, Anecdotes, and Characters of Books and Men Collected from Conversation*, ed. James M. Osborn, 2 vols. (Oxford, 1966): 1:281.

most sophisticated and self-conscious of the Wits' libertine figures. Throughout *The Man of Mode*, Dorimant operates as an 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" (7). To achieve this goal, he and his new mistress, Bellinda, have scripted a "Masque" to act in front of Loveit (8). As Dorimant explains, while visiting her dear friend Loveit, Bellinda "means insensibly to insinuate a Discourse of me, and artificially raise [Loveit's] Jealousie to such a height, that transported with the first motions of her passion, she shall fly upon me with all the Fury imaginable" (8). Dorimant will then "play [his] part" (8). 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" (8). Act 2 scene 2 contains the accomplishment 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 "play'd" and asks him "how could you act it?" (38). 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. With only one exception, all of his relationships in the play are predicated on social roles or sexual desire, not on "genuine" feeling and emotional commitment. This rejection of "genuine" feeling continues the Wits' previous rejection of progressive ideology's emphasis on innate identity and the soul. Thus, like Wycherley, Etherege foregrounds libertinism as a socially performed identity.

Dorimant continues to perform as an actor 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, so that he can pursue Harriet in her mother's presence. His play-acting culminates in Act 4 scene 1, in which Dorimant and Harriet court one another by enacting a courtship. They begin by critiquing one another's "curt'sy" and "grave bow" and proceed by discussing the ways in which society judges others based on appearances (58). Dorimant is able to throw off this disguise in Act 5, after his friends instead convince Lady Woodvill that his reputation as a heartless rake was unjust. As she exclaims, "Mr. Dorimant, every one has spoken so much in your behalf, that I can no longer doubt but that I was in the wrong" (94). Although these lines are spoken in the middle of Dorimant's cruelest treatment of Loveit, he escapes censure due to the fact that his friends cover up his behavior with their praise of his character. The juxtaposition of his behavior with their reports of his integrity is in keeping with the Wits' general contention that identity is based on reputation and what others think rather than on an innate essence.

And finally, also like Wycherley's early libertine characters, Dorimant's performance of libertinism rejects progressive ideology's belief in fixed gender roles prescribed by sexual difference. As in Wycherley's previous plays, libertinism in *The Man of Mode* functions as a potential third gender. Just as Wycherley had portrayed libertinism as a series of acts, gestures, and desires that produce the effect of an internal, gendered identity, Etherege depicts gaps in the libertine persona in the form of somatic confessions to suggest an innate gender identity.⁵ In Wycherley's comedies, these momentary lapses in bodily control are contained before other characters can glimpse the libertine's intentions. Unlike Wycherley, however, Etherege does not deny the possibility that the body might reveal the rake's motivations and desires. Dorimant's ability to manipulate the characters around him is challenged by his second mistress, Bellinda. In Act 5 scene 1, she catches Dorimant at

⁵ As in the previous chapter, I am borrowing Judith Butler's conception of gender performance to describe what Wycherley and Etherege are doing in their plays. See Butler's *Gender Trouble* p. 136 for her explanation of this performance.

Loveit's house after he had sworn to her that he would never see Loveit alone again. Bellinda's entrance into the room causes Dorimant to blanch. Because of his promise and the short span of time that has passed since the consummation of their liaison, Dorimant is visibly "surpriz'd," as the stage directions read, when she walks into the room (82). As Bellinda exclaims in an aside, "He starts! and looks pale, the sight of me has toucht his guilty Soul" (82). The shock of seeing her there upsets Dorimant, who confesses, presumably to the audience, that "I am confounded! and cannot guess how she came hither!" (82). He goes on to exclaim, "I never was at such a loss before" (83).⁶ Even so, Dorimant quickly recovers and Loveit does not discover his affair with her best friend. Bellinda does glimpse, however, Dorimant's duplicity. She comes to understand that in his pursuit of pleasure Dorimant disregards the feelings and desires of the women with whom he sleeps. Arming herself with this knowledge, she swears at play's end that she will never sleep with or visit Dorimant again.

Importantly, Etherege takes the potential for libertinism to serve as a kind of third gender a step further by suggesting a relationship between it and sodomy. Randolph Trumbach and other scholars have argued that the idea of effeminate homosexuality, a subject position that combines characteristics of masculinity and femininity but after 1700 stands in opposition to both, served as a third gender during the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries. The relationship between libertinism and sodomy is hinted at in interaction of Dorimant and Medley. When Etherege adopted Rochester's persona for his protagonist, he displaced the earl's reputation as a possible sodomite onto Medley. D. R. M. Wilkinson maintains that Medley plays an exceptional role in the plays,

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

⁶ Unlike the previous exclamation, this line is explicitly designated as an aside in the text.

pattern of witty conversation: he is not to be trusted and can even be a threat to Dorimant, and he is perfectly invulnerable. (507)

While Wilkinson is clearly right to see Medley's role in the play as "exceptional," he overstates his invulnerability, particularly if Medley is viewed in the light of homoeroticism. The evidence for this view is only partial at best but nevertheless seems plausible. As Terence Johnson argues, throughout the play Medley is focused only on Dorimant. In fact, his first words he speaks are 'Dorimant my Life, my Joy, my darling-Sin' (3). As Johnson points out, the phrase "darling-Sin" "does not point directly to a sodomitical relationship, but is suggestive coming as it does at the very beginning of the play" (133). Etherege's suggestiveness continues. 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" (3).⁷ Furthermore, argues Johnson, 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; and he is portrayed as effeminate, "one who is comfortable with women as companions not lovers and who shares their habits" (137).⁸ All of these characteristics are in keeping with traits associated with sodomites during this period.⁹

By evoking Rochester's reputation as a possible sodomite, Etherege not only gives his protagonist a greater sense of authenticity but also initiates a critique of what the Court Wits' libertinism had come to represent. 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

⁷ 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).

⁸ See Johnson pp. 133-38 for a more complete discussion of Medley's association with sodomy.

⁹ Cameron McFarlane provides an excellent catalogue of these traits in his *The Sodomite in Fiction and Satire, 1660-1750*. See in particular chapter two, "Sodomitical Practices," pp. 25-68.

Dorimant's kiss with Medley, Etherege too criticizes Dorimant's libertinism. He does this in two ways. First, he repeatedly associates him with Sir Fopling Flutter, the play's title character, in order to establish a critique of the libertine's affectation. From the play's opening scene, Dorimant and Sir Fopling are 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 Cloaths hang just," that he is wearing "a mighty pretty Suit," and that "No man in Town has a better fancy in His Cloaths than you have" (12). Initially, Dorimant attempts to distance himself from these praises. As he bemoans, "That a man's excellency should lie in Neatly tying of a Ribbond or a Crevat! how Careful's nature in furnishing the World With necessary Coxcombs" (12). When Dorimant insists that "You will make me have an opinion of my Genius" (12), the conversation turns to a discussion of Sir Fopling Flutter, who is introduced as "a great Critick . . . in these matters" who has just "arriv'd piping hot from Paris" (12). As Rose Zimbardo 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" ("Toward Zero" 58).

Dorimant, the "Pattern of modern Gallantry," and Sir Fopling, the "Pattern of modern Foppery," are often presented as mirror images of one another (12). Young Bellair, for example, recalls that Sir Fopling gave Mrs. Loveit "a Catalogue of his good Qualities, Under the Character of a Compleat Gentleman" (13). 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" (13). 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 Zimbardo reminds us, "Dorimant is not only the

double of Sir Fopling, but Sir Fopling *recognizes* him as a double" (58). 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 (41).¹⁰ 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, Suckt out of the remaining Lees of the last age" (65). 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" (379). 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" (45). Later, she characterizes him as "Affectedly grave, or ridiculously wild and apish" (86). Likewise, when Dorimant asserts to Harriet that "That demure curt'sy is not amiss in jest, But do not think in earnest that it becomes you," she responds: "Affectation is catching I find; from your grave bow I got it" (58). 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" (379). As she 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" (60). Throughout the play, what Harriet demands of Dorimant is a believable declaration of his love, one that both connects his conversation to his desire and that leads to marriage. In other words, she forces him to give up his rakish posturing in exchange for marital respectability and sexual honesty.

¹⁰ Several other scholars also compare Dorimant and Fopling. See, for example, Lisa Berglund's "The Language of the Libertines: Subversive Morality in *The Man of Mode*," Judith Fisher's "The Power of Performance: Sir George Etherege's *The Man of Mode*," Wandalie Henshaw's "Sir Fopling Flutter, or the Key to *The Man of Mode*," David Krause's "The Defaced Angel: A Concept of Satanic Grace in Etherege's *The Man of Mode*," and Robert Wess's "Utopian Rhetoric in *The Man of Mode*."

The second way in which Etherege subverts Dorimant's rakish ways is in his depiction of this libertine's cruelty toward his cast-off mistress, Mrs. Loveit. As Laura Brown notes, it is significant that Etherege chooses to depict at length Dorimant's coldly calculated cruelty towards Loveit and his quickly forgotten declarations of eternal love for Bellinda (45). 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" (45). Even though Susan Staves maintains that this assertion "lapse[s] into sentimental humanism" (124) and Hume notes that "by seventeenth-century standards the women deserve no sympathy" (*Development* 88), 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 undefac'd in him, which makes him so charming and agreeable, that I must love him be he never so wicked" (23). 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" (79) and proves this assertion by exposing his ruse against her: "Had I not with a dear experience bought the Knowledge of your falshood, you might have fool'd me yet. This is not the first Jealousie you have feign'd 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" (80). The audience knows from Dorimant's own admission in Act 1 that Loveit's accusation is justified. As a result, when he disingenuously declares that "I begin to think you never did love me" (80), "we are able to reverse the charge" (Brown 45).

If the idea that the audience sees the justice of Loveit's accusations against Dorimant is debatable, Etherege makes sure that they 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" (16). What power she does have lies in our sympathy for her self-deception. After her liaison with Dorimant, Bellinda extracted a promise from him to never again see Loveit, except "in Publick places, in the Park, at Court and Playes" (69). Dorimant readily agrees to this, assuring her that "'Tis not likely a man should be fond of seeing a damn'd old Play when there is a new one acted" (69). 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 Villanies" (83), 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 help'd to make him so? Was not her ruine enough to fright me from the danger? It should have been, but love can take no warning" (84). When Dorimant declares to Loveit that Harriet "is the Masque [that] has kept me from you" (92), Bellinda bemoans to the audience that "He's tender of my honour, though he's cruel to my Love" (92). Our sympathy for her is solidified by the fact that she has learned her "lesson:" when Dorimant attempts to make up with her, asserting that "We must meet again," she resists the temptation and swears "may I be as infamous as you are false" if she ever succumbs to his advances again (92).

As Etherege criticizes the libertinism of Wycherley's early protagonists, he replaces Horner's vision of libertine ideology with one that embraces the possibility of domesticity. The most prominent change that Etherege makes in libertine ideology lies in his creation of a suitable partner for his rake in the guise of Harriet Woodvill. As Michael Neill reminds us, "Dorimant's only effective rival on the battlefield is Harriet" (136). Her effectiveness is in part due to the fact that Harriet is cast throughout the play as a kind of (moderate) female libertine. Like Dorimant, she knows how to dissemble and to perform identities. 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 over-joy'd her in the Country, with a low Courtsy, And what you please, Madam, I shall always be obedient. . . . [T]his was . . . to get her up to London! Nothing else I assure thee" (32). Such acting continues 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" (34). 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 wandring like my passions, And cannot yet be ty'd to Rules of charming. (58-59)

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" (127).

Harriet's female "libertinism" can also be seen in her flaunting of social convention. 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 wou'd with her, and has a demureness in her looks that makes it so surprising" (5). As Medley's description suggests, Harriet's "wildness" is tempered; Etherege generally 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 passed off as a "freak" whim (44).

During her conversation with Bellair, Harriet also makes clear that her self-control will prevent her from doing anything rash:

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?
(46)

It is precisely at this moment when Dorimant enters the conversation and Harriet's "gaming" begins:

Dorimant. You were talking of Play, Madam. Pray what may be your stint?

Harriet. A little harmless discourse in publick walks, or at most an appointment in a Box barefac'd at the Play-House; you are for Masks, and Private meetings; where Women engage for all they are worth I hear.

Dorimant. I have been us'd to deep Play, but I can make one at small Game, when I like my Gamester well.

Harriet. And be so unconcern'd you'l have no pleasure in't. (46-47)

This last criticism of Dorimant demonstrates that Harriet also understands that, as Loveit later exclaims, he takes "more pleasure in the ruine of a Woman's reputation than in the indearments of her love" (81). 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" (89).

Harriet's power lies in her ability "to manipulate others into ludicrous breaches of stylistic propriety which Dorimant employs so effectively" (Neill 136). One such breach is made in Dorimant's own libertine pose. When Dorimant notices her embarrassment at his arrival and asks "What have we here, the picture of the celebrated Beauty, giving audience

in Publick to a declar'd lover?," she retorts, "Play the dying Fop, and make the piece compleat Sir" (87). By the end of this scene, she compels him to make such extravagant declarations of his love that he fulfills her command. As he declares, Horner-like, "I will renounce all the joys I have in friendship and in Wine, sacrifice to you all the interest I have in other Women" (88). As Michael Neill points out, at this point Dorimant has blundered into the discredited rhetoric of heroic love, "and Harriet springs her trap" (137):

"Hold—Though I wish you devout, I would not have you turn Fanatick—Could you neglect these a while and make a journey into the Country?" (88). Consequently, "By forcing him to this comic humiliation she has in fact compelled the only gesture of heroical sacrifice which her wit will allow her to accept" (Neill 137). As she asserted to Dorimant earlier in the play, "When your Love's grown strong enough to make you bear being laugh'd at, I'll give you leave to trouble me with it" (60). 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" (54) after his plot to make Loveit reject Sir Fopling in the mall 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 because he has already revealed 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're me and may revenge the Wrongs I have done her sex" (59-60). 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.

After establishing Dorimant as a libertine in the tradition of Wycherley's early plays and then critiquing Dorimant and that tradition, Etherege moves toward a domestication of libertine ideology. By providing Dorimant with a suitable mate in the form of Harriet, Etherege modulates libertinism's excesses. In particular, unlike Horner, Dorimant ends his play by embracing marriage over bachelorhood, country over city, 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. What e're 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 any thing I ever did before.

Harriet. When I hear you talk thus in Hampshire, I shall begin to think there may be some truth enlarg'd upon. (88)

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. Unlike Bellinda, Harriet is quite aware that Dorimant's promises last only until he satisfies his desires. What Harriet undertakes is the transformation of Dorimant's desires: she wants to wean him away from licentiousness and toward domesticity. For this reason, she postpones any declaration of her love for him until he has proven that what he truly desires is honorable marriage.

Finally, while Etherege domesticates his libertine—Dorimant does agree to follow Harriet into the countryside—this libertine 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 Ruines of my estate" and assures Bellinda that he will see her again (92).

"Hence," as Robert Wess notes, "Dorimant is not the rake reformed. But neither is he the rake triumphant" (151). 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" (94). Harriet takes this opportunity to disarm her rival:

Harriet. Mr Dorimant has been your God Almighty long enough, 'tis time to think of another—

Loveit. Jeer'd 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. (94)

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 has demonstrated 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 likely to be domesticated, whether he wants to be or not.

Pragmatic Libertinism in Wycherley's *The Plain Dealer*

As in the case of Etherege's *The Man of Mode*, scholars frequently debate the question of what kind of play *The Plain Dealer* is. Is it a satire, a romantic comedy, a wit comedy, a tragicomedy, a comedy of manners, an adaptation of Molière's *Le Misanthrope*, or something else? In most cases, the answer to this question is derived from the reader's opinion of Wycherley's protagonist, Manly. As Ian Donaldson asks, "Is Manly the romantic hero of the play, or its comic gull? Is he partly the object, or wholly the agent, of this bold, general, and useful satire?" (304-5). Early critics saw him as Wycherley's heroic

ideal. Macaulay, for example, associated Manly's "fierceness, misanthropy, and curious moral imbalance" (Donaldson 305) with Wycherley himself:

Wycherley does not seem to have been aware that he was not drawing the portrait of an eminently honest man. So depraved was his moral taste that, while he firmly believed that he was producing a picture of virtue too exalted for the commerce of this world, he was really delineating the greatest rascal that is to be found, even in his own writings (4.387).

A second group of scholars also identifies Manly with Wycherley but argues that the character's unrelenting view of the world's disease, rather than his immorality, is his greatest failure. Bonamy Dobrée, for instance, takes the play to task for Manly's "savage delight in finding things as bad as they are" (88). Finally, a third group comprised of Thomas Fujimura, Norman Holland, and Rose Zimbardo, distance Manly from his creator and argues that he is the object of the playwright's satire.

Seeing this play as a kind of forensic rhetoric allows us to approach this debate from a different angle. Like Etherege's *The Man of Mode*, Wycherley's *The Plain Dealer* rejects aspects of his previous depictions of the libertine figure. Although this play's protagonist, Manly, initially seems more vicious and brutal than Horner does, the fierceness of Wycherley's tone is primarily limited to the play's surface. As Laura Brown points out, *The Plain Dealer* "is populated with individual satiric butts who, by the diversity of their characters, professions, and sexes, and by their very numerousness, expand and generalize Wycherley's local criticism of society so that it seems to implicate all the world" (55). Even so, throughout this play Wycherley argues, contrary to Horner's choice at the end of *The Country Wife*, that the libertine must find a place for himself within this society. According to Wycherley, Horner's choice to remove himself from the institutions of society is the wrong one. To make this point, Wycherley casts more than one libertine in his play, punishing one and rewarding the others with friendship and marriage. Unlike

Etherege, however, Wycherley does not imbue his work with the rhetoric of domestic love; rather, he maintains a more cynical view, which holds that the libertine must be pragmatic and must play society's games however corrupt.

Wycherley's argument in this work is highlighted by a comparison with its "parent play" (Friedson 192), Molière's *Le Misanthrope*. It is particularly helpful to look at the differences between these two plays. Molière's protagonist, Alceste, becomes increasingly at odds with those around him due to his honesty. He ultimately rejects society altogether, including his mistress, Célimène, who refuses to leave with him. Manly, on the other hand, begins his play in isolation from the characters around him and is gradually reconciled to society through his acceptance of Fidelia's love and of Freeman's friendship. This difference suggests that Wycherley's purpose in writing is quite different from Molière's. Each playwright's attitude toward his protagonist can be further seen in his characterization of each man's fiancée. In Molière's play Célimène "is a coquette, and she is guilty of venial acts of hypocrisy" (Friedson 194). Olivia, on the other hand, is "vicious and villainous" (Friedson 194). These characterizations show that, where Alceste's rejection of Célimène in Molière's drama is an indication of his own extreme misanthropy, Wycherley brings his audience to believe that "Manly has been eminently fortunate in discovering and rejecting Olivia" (Friedson 194). *The Plain Dealer*, then, is the dramatization of this discovery and rejection.

As these examples suggest, Wycherley adapts Molière's play to his own ends. One of these ends is to distance the play from the characteristics of *The Country Wife*. This can most clearly be seen in his return to his previous strategy of using more than one libertine character in the same play. In this case, he portrays three libertines, Manly, Freeman, and Vernish, but none of these characters fully resemble Wycherley's previous libertine figures. Manly is the play's titular character and the center of the play's action. The list of characters describes him as "of an honest, surly, nice humour, suppos'd first, in the time

of the Dutch War, to have procur'd the Command of a Ship, out of Honour, not Interest, and choosing a Sea-life, only to avoid the World" (104). Like Horner, Manly attempts "to avoid the world" but does so out of a commitment to "honour" rather than to sexual pleasure. In fact, with the exceptions of one reference to sleeping with a previous mistress and of the sexual nature of his revenge on Olivia, Manly has a rather sexless existence in the play. Vernish, introduced as Manly's "Bosom, and onely friend," is one of the play's villains (104). He and Olivia attempt to rob Manly of his fortune. And finally, Freeman plays the more traditional libertine role and is described in the list of "persons" as "a Gentleman well Educated, but of a broken Fortune, a Complier with the Age" (104). In complying with the age, Freeman, like the libertines before him, spends much of his time seducing a woman. Consequently, Wycherley begins his play by distancing it from his previous dramas by dividing the attributes of libertinism among three characters rather than concentrating them in one.

Wycherley further distances *The Plain Dealer* from his previous work by relegating the most traditional of his three libertines, Freeman, to a supporting role in the play. Moreover, Freeman's seduction of the Widow Blackacre is more an economic imperative than a romantic or sexual one: because of his "broken fortune," Freeman must marry a wealthy wife in order to pay his debts and expenses. This transformation of the libertine's sexual intrigue into an economic contrivance parallels Wycherley's usual critique of progressive ideology—the Widow Blackacre is the subject of Wycherley's critique just as Alderman Gripe, Don Diego, and Pinchwife had previously been. But it also signals a major shift in Wycherley's depiction of libertine ideology. Where Ranger, Gerrard, and Horner had pursued women primarily for their physical and/or intellectual attractiveness, Freeman pursues the Widow, a "Litigious She-Petty-fogger, who is at Law and difference with all the world" (113), in a bald attempt to support himself and pay off his debts. As he exclaims when she first arrives on stage, "I wish I cou'd make her agree with me in the

Church; they say she has Fifteen hundred pounds a Year Jointure" (113). In spite of his frequent attempts to get the Widow to hear his "business" (116), Freeman is unable to convince her to marry him. 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 four hundred pounds a year and to pay off his debts (191). Thus, Freeman evades both marriage and separation from society. Unlike Valentine, Ranger, and Gerrard, 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" (138). Unlike his predecessors, his ruse will allow him to maintain his libertine lifestyle *and* to remain a part of society. Because Freeman is able to have his cake and eat it too, he serves as the model by which the audience is to judge the other characters in the play.

To guarantee that the audience takes Freeman's point of view, Wycherley satirizes the Widow Blackacre by mocking her use of legal rhetoric. Described as "a petulant, litigious Widow, alwayes in Law" (104), the Widow Blackacre is criticized throughout the play for her excessive love for lawsuits. For example, when Freeman admits to Manly that he wants to marry the Widow because she has a jointure worth £1500 a year, Manly retorts: "Her Lawyers, Attornies and Solicitors have Fifteen hundred pound a Year, whilst she is contented to be poor, to make other People so; for she is as vexatious as her Father was, the great Attorney, nay, as a dozen Norfolk Attorneys, and as implacable an Adversary, as a Wife suing for Alimony, or a Parson for his Tiths" (113-14). Although Robert F. Bode

has argued that the Widow is more than a comic butt of the play's satire, Wycherley's criticism of her goes beyond her excessive devotion to suing people.¹¹ As A. Velissariou has demonstrated in her essay "Gender and the Circulation of Money and Desire in Wycherley's *The Plain Dealer*," the Widow Blackacre is a grotesque figure who violates the gender norms of her day (28). In fact, the Widow herself declares that she is "no common Woman" (145). She proves this, says Velissariou, in two ways: she refuses to marry and she renounces Jerry as her legitimate son (28). By choosing the law over all other bonds, the Widow is depicted as a monstrous character. As Jerry himself declares, she is an "unnatural Mother" because of her refusal to give him his inheritance (164). This unnaturalness is compounded by her unwillingness to marry due to "the legal inferiority of the married woman" (Velissariou, "Gender" 30). In both cases, she privileges the law over affective relationships. As a result, Wycherley leads his audience to cheer Freeman's triumph over her: she gets her comeuppance and he gets part of her money.

Wycherley's distancing of his play from his previous depictions of libertinism reflects his rejection of Horner's ideology of absolute self-interest. Like Horner, Manly has cut himself off from society, though in his case it is through plain dealing rather than to effect a sexual ruse. Even so, Manly's posture is as extreme as Horner's had been, and both men practice an aggressive form of masculinity. Anthony Kaufman notes that "When we follow Captain Manly from the opening scene to his discovery of Fidelity as a young (and rich) girl in Act V, we are, I believe, left with one dominant impression: that of his anger" (119). As the play opens, Manly has withdrawn to his lodgings and posted two sailors at his front door to turn away all visitors. When the foppish Lord Plausible sneaks past the guards,

¹¹ See Bode's "'Try Me, At Least': The Dispensing of Justice in *The Plain Dealer*." Bode argues that it is "through the Widow's bringing of the operations of the law in the courts into the play that the pattern and nature of Manly's plain dealing can be seen" (3). According to Bode, Wycherley uses the Widow to show "the ease with which the law is abused in the courts and the general acceptance of its corrupt condition as a background for Manly's rejection of the law courts and society as means of receiving justice in the world" (9).

Manly rages at him for his use of social pretense and finally thrusts him 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":

1 Sailor. I never saw him pleas'd but in the Fight; and then he look'd 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 tug'd hard the old, leaky Long-boat, to save his life, when I welcom'd him ashore, he gave me a box on the ear, and called me fawning Water-dog? (108)

These men's conversation, combined with Manly's physical violence toward Plausible, casts Wycherley's title character as an excessively angry man whose hostility goes beyond outraged plain dealing to encompass a disdain for ordinary human relationships (Kaufman 121).

What we are to make of Manly's violence 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. (qtd. in McCarthy 98-99 and Donaldson 306)

Other contemporary writers validate Lansdowne's description.¹² 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 Manly is not the object of Wycherley's satire. Rather, we are to read Manly's progress through the play as Wycherley's advice to the audience. Wycherley altered his source play by having his protagonist accept a position in society rather than leave it altogether. By the end of the play, Manly has abandoned his philosophy of isolation in exchange for marriage with Fidelia.

At the beginning of the play, Manly imbues his plain dealing with a sense of heroism. As he explains to Lord Plausible, "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" (105). Consequently, he sees himself as the 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 wou'd say, or do ill to any, it shou'd be to their Faces: I wou'd juttle a proud, strutting, over-looking Coxcomb, at the head of his Sycophants, rather than put out my tongue at him, when he were past me; wou'd frown in the arrogant, big, dull face of an over-grown Knave of business, rather than vent my spleen, when his back were turn'd; wou'd give fauning Slaves the Lye, whilst they embrace or commend me; Cowards, whilst they brag; call a Rascal

¹² See McCarthy pp. 98-99 for more information on these descriptions of Wycherley.

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. (106)

This plain speaking, however, 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-drest, young Fellow (who ask'd it too) not to marry a Wench that he lov'd, and I had lay'n with" (152). As this admission makes clear, like Wycherley's previous libertines, Manly also engages in casual sex. But unlike his predecessors, he is willing to divulge his mistresses' secrets in the name of honesty. This willingness is a result of Manly's detachment from society—he holds no stake in society and therefore feels free to disregard its strictures, mores, and "pure good manners" (106). It is this detachment, and not his criticism of society's corruption, that is faulted in the play. What Manly must learn is how to deal with this corruption.

Wycherley depicts Manly's extreme contempt for society as a mistake. He makes this argument in a variety of ways. First, Wycherley criticizes the fact that his protagonist's idealism is based on an ignorance of the way in which society works. In Act I, for example, Freeman condemns Manly's impractical philosophy. As he asks,

Why, don't you know, good Captain, that telling truth is a quality as prejudicial to a man that wou'd thrive in the World, as square Play to a Cheat, or true Love to a whore! wou'd you have a man speak truth to his ruine? You are severer than the Law, which requires no man to swear against himself; you wou'd have me speak truth against my self, I warrant, and tell my promising Friend, the Courtier, he has a bad memory? (110)

Manly responds that the courtier, along with Freeman's subsequent examples, "shou'd love thee, for thy Plain-dealing" (111). 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" (111). 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" (110), Freeman responds that this is how one behaves in public: "What, you observ'd 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, cou'd you think I was a Friend to all those I hugg'd, kiss'd, flatter'd, bow'd to?" (110). Thus, Freeman believes that everyone plays a role designed to win favor with people who can either help or hurt you. Like the Wits' previous libertine characters, he maintains that all identities are inevitably and only such self-serving performances.

Manly, on the other hand, initially argues that virtue is an essential characteristic that is readily apparent, a quality innate to only two people (beside himself): Olivia and Vernish. As Manly 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 secrecie of the revengeful, and the constancy of Martyrs: one fit to advise, to keep a secret: to fight and dye 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 shew. (109)

Because of this philosophy of a direct correlation between inner worth and external behavior, Manly is unable to distinguish his friends from his enemies. The play also criticizes him for this mistake. On the one hand, Manly is unable to recognize his true friends, Freeman and Fidelity. He dismisses Freeman's friendship since, he says, Freeman professes friendship with everyone but then points out all of their flaws when their backs

are turned. Similarly, he rejects Fidelia's friendship as mere flattery. Dressed in men's clothing in order to impersonate a cabin boy, Fidelia has followed Manly to sea, where her fears of battle have caused her to seem cowardly. Because of this apparent cowardice, Manly interprets her affection for him as hypocrisy. As he proclaims to 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 turn'd away for saying the same things to the old Housekeeper for sweet-meats, as you did to your Lady; for thou flatterest every thing and every body alike" (112). 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.

On the other hand, Manly is also unable to recognize his true enemies. Because he believes Olivia's rhetoric of constancy, he leaves the remainder of 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 onely friend" (104). 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. As Olivia explains, his philosophy of isolation was his mistake: "he that distrusts most the World, trusts most to himself, and is but the more easily deceiv'd, because he thinks he can't be deceiv'd" (171). All that she and Vernish had to do to deceive him was to mimic his rhetoric. As she relates, "I knew he loved his own singular moroseness so well, as to dote upon any Copy of it; wherefore I feign'd an hatred to the World too, that he might love me in earnest" (171). 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" (56).

Because of his ignorance of society, Manly must be educated to conform to its manners, mores, and customs. This education is effected through Fidelia'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 Fidelia, 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. 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.¹³ If, as Eve Sedgwick has argued, cuckolding is "by definition a sexual act, performed on a man by another man" (49), then Manly has been feminized by his (effectual) cuckolding by Vernish. His "rape" of Olivia is his attempt to restore his masculine gender position, as is his hostility and anger toward the world. But, as Velissariou points out, this attempt is undermined by his use of Fidelia, a woman disguised as a man, to accomplish this revenge ("Gender" 33). His use of Fidelia demonstrates that his aggressive masculinity has blinded him to reality: he cannot tell a woman from a man.

Interestingly, it is Vernish who 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 two have slept together. Fidelia attempts to allay his suspicions, exclaiming, "I am a Woman, Sir, a very unfortunate Woman" (175). He tests the truthfulness of her declaration by "Pull[ing] off her Peruke, and feel[ing] her Breasts"

¹³ See especially Percy G. Adams's "What Happened in Olivia's Bedroom? or Ambiguity in *The Plain Dealer*."

(175). Unfortunately, her "pouting swelling breasts" (187) excite him, 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 unmask'd" (176). Although a servant interrupts Vernish and diverts him from this attempt, this attempted rape is just one more indignity that Fidelia has suffered 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, who blames her for her weakness in a naval battle. He even goes so far as to call her "a thing I hate" and orders her to "Be gone" immediately (113). 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" (143). Throughout the play Fidelia proclaims her love for Manly to the audience and suffers his brutality quietly. 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 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 long hair, Manly exclaims, "What means this long Womans hair! and face! now all of it appears too beautiful for a Man; which I still thought Womanish indeed! what, you have not deceiv'd me too, my little Volunteer? . . . Come, your blushes answer me sufficiently, and you have been my Volunteer in love" (194). 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 cou'd have alter'd but her self. (194)

Despite Fidelia's last assertion, it is she, and not Olivia, who alters Manly. 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, (tho' chiefly your own fault) gives me more pain now 'tis over, than you had, when you suffer'd it" (194). 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" (118) in his antipathy for society in Act 1, after his discovery of Fidelia's love he proclaims, "you deserve the Indian World; and I wou'd now go thither, out of covetousness for your sake only" (195). Unlike Molière's *Alceste*, Manly ends the play by accepting his place in society, by welcoming Fidelia's love and Freeman's friendship.

Thus, Wycherley rejects his previous vision of libertine ideology 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 domesticity or romantic love. Instead, it embraces a more pragmatic view. First, Manly avoids declarations of love similar to Dorimant's for Harriet. In contrast, his statements are characterized by the idea that Fidelia has earned his love through her sufferings. Giving her the cabinet that Olivia stole from him, Manly tells Fidelia, "Then take for ever my heart, and this with it; for 'twas given to you before [by Olivia], and my heart was before your due" (195). 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 Fidelia's revelation that she possess £2000 a year (195). What Wycherley emphasizes with this rhetoric of "value" (195) is the idea that marrying a wife with a fortune facilitates love. The other alternative is to get a living from a widow, as Freeman has done. In either case, it is

money that allows one to participate in society. This argument can be seen in the play's final conversation between Manly, Fidelia, and Freeman:

Manly. I was going to tell you, that for your sake only I wou'd quit the unknown pleasure of a retirement; and rather stay in this ill World of ours still, tho' 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 shou'd tell you now all this, and that your virtue (since greater than I thought any was in the World) had now reconcil'd me to't, my Friend here wou'd say, 'tis your Estate that has made me Friends with the World.

Freeman. I must confess, I shou'd; 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 wou'd do. (196)

Freeman's point of view is that of the play: once one has learned to enjoy the world, however corrupt it may be, one is able to live happily within it. According to Wycherley, this and not separation from society is the correct choice for the libertine.

In conclusion, both of these plays distance themselves from the aggressive masculinity and libertine isolation of *The Country Wife*. Etherege's Dorimant embraces domestic love and, although he seems to intend to continue his libertine dalliances with other women, will probably be kept at home by Harriet. Wycherley's Freeman and Manly each end their play integrated into society, though in different ways. Freeman remains single and able to play society's games, while Manly prepares to marry and to give up his previous libertinism. 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 period. As historians have shown, it became

more difficult for most landowners "to generate the necessary income to support the expenditures expected of persons of quality," expenditures which 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" (*Emergence* 51).

As members of the gentry, Etherege and Wycherley were particularly susceptible to these expenditures and economic fluctuations. As Etherege 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" (qtd. in Link 102). His pleasures led him into 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.¹⁴ 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 the countess, rather than being rich as Wycherley thought, was deeply in debt. Thus, each of these playwrights attempted to follow their own advice and combine marriage and economic betterment but were disappointed. If these men advocated integrating the libertine into society, Sir Charles Sedley and John Wilmot, Earl of Rochester, argue that the libertine must reject this integration, as I will demonstrate in my next chapter.

¹⁴ See Link p. 109 for more information on this gossip.

Chapter Five

Transgressing the Limits of Libertinism: Rochester and Sedley

If Sir George Etherege and William Wycherley argued in their last plays that the libertine must be integrated into society, contemporaneous plays by John Wilmot, Earl of Rochester, and Sir Charles Sedley contend that this integration is impossible. In *The Farce of Sodom*, *The Tragedy of Valentinian*, and *Antony and Cleopatra*, not only do Rochester and Sedley maintain that libertinism cannot be reconciled to society's mores and strictures, but they also ask why the Wits should even try to do so. Instead, they maintain that the pursuit of pleasure is a noble end unto itself, one that should not be curtailed by society's views of morality, religion, political duty, or social manners. In each of these plays, Rochester and Sedley repond to the rhetoric of heroic drama, a genre that valorized Restoration culture's visions of virtue, Christian faith, civic responsibility, and social order, by redefining the terms of heroism. Following the ethos established in the previous literary works by members of the Wits' circle, Rochester and Sedley maintain that the physical world is the only truly knowable aspect of life and the fulfillment of one's biological desires the only reasonable practice. For these playwrights, therefore, heroism lies in seeking the gratification of these desires in the face of the constraints imposed upon the individual by the rhetorics of religion, politics, and culture.

In comparison to the works written by the other members of the Court Wits' fraternity, these plays depict a kind of post-libertinism, a pursuit of sexual pleasure that rejects the limitations imposed upon Buckingham's, Etherege's, and Wycherley's characters. Unlike the depictions of genteel libertine figures in the Wits' earlier plays, Rochester's and Sedley's 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. Their protagonists are monarchs who are more obsessed with sexual pleasure than governing their nations. Their obsession

with satisfying their desires leads each of these monarchs to their deaths when each chooses physical gratification over monarchical responsibility: Bolloximian would rather burn in hell than abandon the practice of sodomy; Valentinian would rather die than repent of his sexual excesses; and Antony and Cleopatra would rather commit suicide than succumb to Octavius Caesar's demands that Antony return to Octavia's bed. However, their ends should not be read as a condemnation of these monarchs' sexual choices, since each of these plays praises its protagonists' pursuit of pleasure. Rochester's and Sedley's plays also differ from the group's previous depictions of libertinism in that their protagonists' sexual choices are not portrayed as part of a constructed identity that is performed on the body through a series of actions, gestures, and rituals. Instead, Rochester's and Sedley's plays during the 1670s depict their protagonists' quests for sexual enjoyment simply as a search for the fulfillment of their biological urges. Consequently, their quests are not part of a performed libertine identity but simply the expression of physical desire. Hence, in dramatizing these stories, Rochester and Sedley move well beyond the more moderate libertinism of the Wits' previous plays and, in doing so, suggest that the pursuit of sexual pleasure should never be hindered by society's mores and norms.

While these two playwrights share this common thesis, the particulars of their dramatizations differ. Just as Buckingham did in *The Rehearsal*, both writers respond to the values of heroic drama and construct their plays as examples of epideictic rhetoric, arguments of praise or blame. While Buckingham critiques the values of heroic drama by grossly exaggerating the qualities associated with the heroic protagonist, Sedley and Rochester transform rhetorics of blame into ones of praise. In *The Farce of Sodom*, a heroic comedy, and in *The Tragedy of Valentinian*, a political tragedy, Rochester depicts celebrations of various kinds of sexual excess, most notably his protagonists' obsessions with sodomy. In *Antony and Cleopatra* Sedley converts political criticism of sexual excess

into an adulation of what he sees as a kind of affective heroism. This chapter analyzes each playwright's argument. I will begin by discussing Rochester's *The Farce of Sodom* and *The Tragedy of Valentinian*. I will then analyze Sedley's *Antony and Cleopatra*. In each of these plays we will see that the playwright maintains that gratifying desire should not be proscribed by the dictates of social convention or of political responsibility. In fact, say these writers, it is the intermingling of pleasure and politics that is base and cowardly.

Libertines as Sodomites in Rochester's *Sodom* and *Valentinian*

Rochester's place as a Restoration dramatist has long been neglected by scholars and literary historians.¹ To date, only two essays, John Harold Wilson's "Satiric Elements in Rochester's *Valentinian*" (1937) and Larry Carver's "Rochester's *Valentinian*" (1989) have been published on the Earl's adaptation of Fletcher's tragedy, and studies of *Sodom* have focused almost exclusively on whether the "scandously infamous Play" should be "fathered upon the Earl . . . as the true author of it" (Wood 172).² Likewise, book-length studies of Rochester's life and works, including Dustin Griffith's *Satires Against Man: The Poems of Rochester* (1973), Marianne Thormählen's *Rochester: The Poems in Context* (1993), Jeremy Lamb's *So Idle a Rogue: The Life and Death of Lord Rochester* (1993), and Kirk Combe's *A Martyr for Sin: Rochester's Critique of Polity, Sexuality, and Society* (1998), as well as collections of essays, such as *Spirit of Wit: Reconsiderations of Rochester* (1982) and *Reading Rochester* (1993), avoid substantive discussion of his plays. Finally, literary histories of the period also omit Rochester's dramatic contributions: for instance, Wilson's *A Preface to Restoration Drama* (1965), Robert D. Hume's *The Development of*

¹ Three exceptions are Montague Summers's *The Playhouse of Pepys* (1935), John Harold Wilson's *The Court Wits of the Restoration: An Introduction* (1948), and Ros Ballaster's "John Wilmot, Earl of Rochester," an essay included in *The Cambridge Companion to English Literature, 1650-1740*, all of which include brief discussions of Rochester's plays.

² One exception is Raymond-Jean Frontain's "Bakhtinian Grotesque Realism and the Subversion of Biblical Authority in Rochester's *Sodom*." Two other critical essays have also been written about this play, but both of these studies deny Rochester's authorship.

English Drama in the Late Seventeenth Century (1976), Arthur H. Scouten's *Restoration and Eighteenth Century Drama* (1980), Richard Bevis's *English Drama: Restoration and Eighteenth Century, 1660-1789* (1988) and Derek Hughes's *English Drama: 1660-1700* (1996) all fail to mention Rochester as a dramatist.³

This neglect is particularly troublesome since Rochester often stands as the model for scholars' constructions of Restoration libertinism.⁴ When placed beside the works of his fellow Wits, however, Rochester's plays show us that his vision of libertinism is not only atypical of the period but also of the Wits' fraternity as well. Indeed, Rochester's depictions of libertine figures are so extreme that they can hardly be called libertines at all. His protagonists' extremity lies in their advocacy of total sexual abandon, a characteristic that grows out of the plays' insistence that, contrary to Etherege's and Wycherley's dramatizations, the libertine should never be integrated into society's institutions. To demonstrate this point, I will first analyze *The Farce of Sodom*, a pornographic closet drama probably written sometime around 1675 or 1676. I will then discuss Rochester's tragedy, *Valentinian*, an adaptation of a play by John Fletcher probably completed around 1676 but not performed until 1684, four years after the playwright's death. In both of these plays, Rochester maintains that the pursuit of pleasure should not be sacrificed to political/national responsibilities.

The Farce of Sodom

The Farce of Sodom, or The Qunitessence of Debauchery is a brief, sexually explicit closet drama probably written during the mid-1670s. Set in the Biblical kingdom of Sodom, the city-state destroyed by God in Genesis 19, Rochester's farce depicts the reign

³ Several of these histories do mention, however, Rochester's role as the model for such characters as Etherege's Dorimant and Nathaniel Lee's Rosidore and Nemours.

⁴ See, for example, Sarah Wintle's "Libertinism and Sexual Politics" from *Spirit of Wit: Reconsiderations of Rochester* pp. 133-65.

of Bolloximian, who legalizes sodomy as an officially sanctioned sexual practice for his subjects. Convinced of the superiority of male-male anal sex over vaginal sex, Bolloximian even adopts the practice for himself. While the men engage in sex with one another, the women pleasure themselves with ever larger dildoes and Bolloximian's daughter introduces her brother to the joys of heterosexual intercourse. Eventually, the kingdom is plagued by various sexual ills, which lead the court physician to demand that the king return to customary relations with his wife. When Bolloximian refuses, fire and brimstone rain down on his kingdom and he and his favorite catamite retire to an isolated cavern to continue their carnal delights. By relating this story in the form of a heroic comedy, Rochester works to change what the term "heroism" should mean. Rather than accepting the physician's point of view, this play celebrates Bolloximian's indulgence of sodomy and portrays his death as heroic. I will begin my discussion of this play by briefly surveying the debate on the play's attribution to Rochester and then explaining why I am concurring with those scholars who attribute the play to Rochester. I will then analyze the play as an alteration of heroic ideology.

Any discussion of *The Farce of Sodom* must begin with the question of authorship. Despite Montague Summers's declaration in 1935 that "there is no doubt that Rochester actually penned the piece" and that "the entirely conscientious editor of Rochester's Works . . . cannot but include *Sodom* in his text" (*Playhouse* 296, 297), scholars and readers have debated this play's attribution since the 1690s. In the twentieth century, this debate can be divided into three camps. One group, led by Larry Carver, J. W. Johnson, Warren Chernaik, and Raymond-Jean Frontain, continues to insist on Rochester's authorship since no incontrovertible proof of another author exists. A second group, comprised of Rodney M. Baine and more recently Harold Love, rejects this attribution and puts forward an alternative candidate, Christopher Fishbourne, a relatively minor poet known today mostly

for a 1683 ode for St. Celia's day.⁵ Finally, a third group, which includes A. S. G. Edwards, Richard Elias, Harold Weber, and Cameron McFarlane, argues that the evidence is too inconclusive to support either candidate over the other. Although I do not want to engage with all of the intricacies of the attribution debate here, I do want to explicate my position on this issue before moving on to discuss the play itself.

Whereas most scholars once denied Rochester's authorship of *Sodom*, today many writers accept this attribution. As Warren Chernaik sums up, "Evidence for the authorship of *Sodom*, attributed to Rochester in three of eight extant [manuscripts], is inconclusive, but the balance of probability favours Rochester's authorship" (231). Furthermore, as Paddy Lyons points out, "the first denial of Rochester's authorship of *Sodom* coincides closely with the first effort to sanitize the canon of his works" (314). Finally, while there "have been attempts to give the authorship of *Sodom* to some more shadowy candidates, . . . it has not proved possible to sustain alternative claims" (Lyons 314). J. W. Johnson puts forward the most exhaustive study of the evidence, concluding that

A re-examination of the four relevant bodies of evidence—the publication history of the play, the extant manuscripts, the testimony of Rochester's contemporaries, and internal evidence—demonstrates as fully as it is epistemologically possible that John Wilmot was the writer responsible for *Sodom* as it has come down to us. (119-20)

Although, as Chernaik notes, Johnson overstates his case "since he treats his evidence with insufficient scepticism," "it seems reasonable to conclude that Rochester is either sole author or principal author of *Sodom*" (231-32).⁶

⁵ Alan Bray also accepts the Fishbourne thesis in his *Homosexuality in Renaissance England*. Since he mentions the play only in passing and his monograph predates serious defences of Rochester's authorship, however, I have not included him as a major proponent of this thesis.

⁶ See A. S. G. Edwards's essay, "The Authorship of *Sodom*," for a discussion of the evidence for the play's possible multiple authorship. This evidence consists mainly of the fact that the play exists in two widely different versions. Likewise, Paddy Lyons maintains that the play's two prologues and two epilogues are

Before discussing the play itself, one further critical debate should be noted. Harold Love maintains that attributions of *Sodom* to Rochester are related to scholars' views on sexuality. He writes:

Sodom, naturally, has been of particular interest to those who would like to add Rochester to the pantheon of gay authors, lending an air of *parti pris* to much of the existing scholarship. For two reasons I think this aspiration is misguided. Firstly, there can be little doubt that Rochester was bisexual and that his homosexual activities took the form of anal intercourse with boys: one does not need *Sodom* to establish this. Secondly, and more importantly, there are severe difficulties in interpreting *Sodom* as a celebration of male homosexuality . . . [since] a large part of the action is taken up with heterosexual seductions, and . . . the thirteen sexual acts actually performed "on stage" are all either heterosexual or lesbian.

Homosexual buggery is talked about but never publicly committed. ("Sodom" 320-21)

Love is right to see the debate on attributing *Sodom* to Rochester essentially as a debate on queer studies but not in the way he argues. Contrary to Love's claim, none of the scholars who most vocally champion Rochester as the author of *Sodom* seem interested in constructing him as a "gay author." Larry Carver, for instance, focuses exclusively on textual issues and the problems of producing a standard edition of the play. Likewise, J. W. Johnson briefly discusses Rochester's "homosexual activity" (151) at the time of the play's composition to support his contention that Rochester penned the work, but he clearly concurs that "Rochester appears to have thought of sodomy in basic terms of pederasty" (153) and makes no effort to construct the Earl as a "gay author." Finally, Chernaik reads the play solely as a political satire of the reign of Charles II.⁷ Furthermore, those scholars

most likely "the work of the publishers' hacks and not from Rochester's hand" (315). For this reason, he includes these materials as part of his notes on the play but does not reprint them with the play itself.

⁷ See especially pp. 60-61 for Chernaik's discussion of the play.

most closely tied to work on gay and lesbian history, particularly Alan Bray and Cameron McFarlane, hesitate or refuse to attribute the play to Rochester.⁸ Consequently, Love's assertion seems based primarily on his own commitment, like David Vieth's before him, to distance Rochester's canon from any possible "celebration[s] of male homosexuality."⁹

Although I too am uninterested in constructing Rochester as a "gay author," *The Farce of Sodom* nevertheless celebrates male sodomy by casting its protagonist as an ardent sodomite. Written in heroic couplets, this "most debauched heroic piece" (319), as one of the prologues refers to it, depicts the reign of Bolloximian, the king of Sodom, whose pursuit of sexual gratification goes well beyond that of the Wits' previous protagonists. Like these libertines, Bolloximian has a mistress, Fuckadilla, and speaks throughout the play of numerous erotic conquests and sexual partners. Unlike these characters, however, the king's lust for women has grown cold. As he bemoans, "No longer I my cunts admire. / The drudgery has worn out my desire" (1.1.26-27). To make matters worse, the women of the court have taken to wearing merkins, or pubic wigs, which fall off "and often spoil the sport" (1.1.34). His advisors therefore suggest that he resort to "human arse" (1.1.28), an activity that he previously enjoyed. As Tooly, one of Bolloximian's counselors, reminds him, "When last, good sir, your pleasure did vouchsafe / To let poor Tooly's hand your pintle chafe, / You gently moved it to my arse—when lo! / Arse did the deed which light hand could not do" (1.1.46-49). Recalling how his "sperm did flow" (1.1.50), Bolloximian decides to take his counselors' advice and "bugger" each of his courtiers in turn. In fact, he decrees that sodomy will now be legal throughout his kingdom. As he declares, "Let conscience have its force of liberty. / I do proclaim, that

⁸ A notable exception to this hesitation is Raymond-Jean Frontain's "Bakhtinian Grotesque Realism and the Subversion of Biblical Authority in Rochester's *Sodom*," which argues that "*Sodom* anticipates . . . the modern attitude towards the open male body that has come to dominate contemporary gay discourse" (71). But this essay was published four years after Love's assertion.

⁹ For Vieth's comments on the subject see his introduction to *The Complete Poems of John Wilmot, Earl of Rochester* pp. xxii-xxiii.

buggery may be used / O'er all the land, so cunt be not abused" (1.1.68-70).¹⁰ In other words, with the exception of rape, the citizens of Sodom are now free to pursue their sexual desires as they see fit. Thus, the play's first scene establishes Bolloximian as a protagonist unlike any other from the Court Wits' previous plays. He gives up heterosexual intercourse in favor of sodomy with other males and liberates his subjects to follow his example.

Casting a sodomite as the protagonist in a heroic comedy serves two purposes for Rochester. First, Rochester's farce alters the conventional rhetoric of heroic drama by transforming the typical characteristics of heroic protagonists into the valorized traits of a monarch obsessed with sexual gratification. Like previous heroic characters, Bolloximian possesses all of the traits of an epic hero, but these traits are depicted as sexual feats and virtues rather than martial ones. Second, *Sodom* celebrates absolute sexual freedom, a freedom that includes the use of dildoes, incest, and male-to-male sodomy. Although at least one character in the play condemns this freedom as unnatural and diseased, Rochester frames this criticism in such a way as to undermine its credibility and casts the pursuit of this freedom in heroic terms. Through both of these aspects of his play, Rochester maintains that the pursuit of pleasure should transgress the limits typically imposed on it by political duty.

¹⁰ Scholars who offer a reading of this play generally contend that Bolloximian's opening declaration of sexual freedom sets the stage for a critique of Charles II. Richard Elias, for example, argues that the fictional king's statement on the liberty of conscience "picks up the phrasing of Charles's Declaration of 'liberty to tender consciences'" (433). This argument was first put forward by Elias in 1978 and has since been adopted by Frontain (72) and McFarlane (82-86). The problem with this argument is that the parallelism of these two statements is less clear than Elias and subsequent scholars have claimed. Though some of the words are indeed echoed in Bolloximian's statement, including "liberty" and "tender consciences," Charles's declaration seems quite different, not only in the great separation between these words but in its spirit and tone as well. Where Charles II's words are a warning to those who trespass the limits of his indulgence, Bolloximian's proclamation of liberty to conscience is the indulgence itself. Because of these differences, it seems more likely that Bolloximian's speech is meant more as a general parody of royal declarations than as a specific satire of this particular indulgence.

The play initiates its comic transformation of heroic drama by mimicking the opening lines of Dryden's *The Conquest of Granada* Part I. Dryden's play famously begins with a speech by the Islamic king Boabdelin:

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. (11.23)

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, Boabdelin is portrayed as an effective political leader.

In *Sodom*, Boabdelin's speech is paralleled in a similar declaration made by the libidinous Bolloximian:

Thus in the zenith of my lust I reign,
 I drink to swive, and swive to drink again.
 Let other monarchs who their sceptres bear,
 To keep their subjects less in love than fear,
 Be slaves to crowns—my nation shall be free.
 My pintle only shall my sceptre be.
 My laws shall act more pleasure than command,
 And with my prick I'll govern all the land. (1.1.1-5)

In contrast to Boabdelin's speech, Bolloximian emphasizes his rejection of political duty in favor of the pursuit of pleasure: while "other monarchs" are "slaves to crowns," he will "free" his nation to "drink" and "swive" just like himself. Furthermore, his "laws" and his

mode of governing his people will be based on his "pintle," or 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. Thus, Rochester transforms Dryden's rhetoric of the monarch's duty to his "state" into a celebration of royal pleasure seeking. Bolloximian will bring his subjects to love him rather than fear him by releasing them from all civic restraints on sexual enjoyment so that they too can be free to pursue their erotic pleasures.

Bolloximian's use of his "prick" to govern his kingdom farcically revises the values usually associated with heroic drama. As I discussed in Chapter 2, these values usually included physical courage, great feats of military arms, magnanimity, and a fidelity to a personal code of honor. In the character of Bolloximian Rochester eroticizes each of these values and thereby comically transforms what others consider vice into what he maintains is virtue. For example, heroic courage is transformed into Bolloximian's sexual audacity. Throughout the play, this monarch challenges the authority of the gods. As he discusses with his "Buggermaster-General" in Act 5,

Bolloximian. Which of the gods more than myself can do?

Borastus. Alas sir, they are pimps compared with you.

Bolloximian. I'll heaven invade, and bugger all the gods,

And drain the springs of their immortal cods.

I'll make them rub till prick and bollocks cry—

"You've frigged us out of immortality." (5.11-16)

Just as Dryden's Almanzor threatens Boabdelin's political authority and challenges him to face him in combat when the latter declares him a traitor, Bolloximian threatens the gods, claiming that he will sodomize them and then masturbate them until their seminal fluids are exhausted. With this exhaustion, says Bolloximian, he will have also robbed them of their immortality, bestowing it upon himself. By sodomizing the gods, Bolloximian will have

heroically achieved the human quest for immortality, becoming a god himself. Thus, Rochester recasts martial bravery as sexual bravado, a recasting that valorizes sodomy and masturbation.

Likewise, great feats of martial combat are transformed into the king's impressive sexual exploits. Where Almanzor single-handedly fought back the armies of Spain in *The Conquest of Granada*, Bolloximian claims to have gratified himself sexually with each of his subjects. As he boasts in Act 3, "A man's prick cannot stand / Within the limits of his own command, / And I have fucked and buggered all the land" (167-69). These exploits continue when the king is faced with the prospect of buggering forty striplings, a gift from his fellow monarch, the King of Gomorrah. Ordering his servants to "Grace every chamber with a handsome boy" (3.193), Bolloximian vows to enjoy each of the young men in turn. As a result, the usual military prowess of the typical heroic protagonist is replaced by the king's sexual potency. Where the hero of Dryden's play defeats entire armies, Bolloximian "ha[s] fucked and buggered" an entire kingdom.

Similarly, like Almanzor Bolloximian is also magnanimous. When a courtier tells him the pitiable story of a woman who has been forced out of "despair" (3.139) to masturbate herself with a dog's tail, the king decides to "encourage virtue" (3.150).¹¹ As he commands one of his servants,

Such women ought to live, pray find her out.
 She shall a pintle have, both stiff and stout,
 Bollocks shall hourly by her cunt be sucked,
 She shall be daily by all nations fucked.
 Industrious cunts should never pintle want—
 She shall be mistress to my elephant. (3.143-48)

¹¹ Her despair is caused by a horse's refusal to copulate with her.

Bolloximian's courtiers praise his benevolence towards this woman, declaring that his "honour's matchless" (3.149). Where Almanzor demonstrates generosity by allowing an enemy to live to fight another day, Bolloximian'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 presents, they want no woman's aid. / Each buggers with content his own comrade" (3.113-14). The soldiers have consequently quit visiting prostitutes and live instead "like man and wife" (3.118). Bolloximian's approval of this new situation demonstrates once again that Rochester alters what the word "honorable" means by changing militaristic activities and qualities into sexual ones.

Most importantly, however, like previous epic heroes Bolloximian maintains a fidelity to a code of personal "honor." Throughout the play, Rochester maintains that what is honorable is to do what is pleasurable. This is the code that Bolloximian follows. His proclamation that "My laws shall act more pleasure than command, / And with my prick I'll govern all the land" (1.1.7-8) becomes his credo by Act 3: "Pleasure should strive as much in time of peace / As power in time of battle to increase" (170-71). Bolloximian demonstrates his commitment to this creed in Act 5 when first Flux 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, the court physician, insists that the king change his ways:

To Love and Nature all their rights restore,
 Fuck no men, and let buggery be no more.
 It does the propagable end destroy,
 Which Nature gave with pleasure to enjoy.
 Please her, and she'll be kind; if you displease,

She turns into corruption and disease. (5.44-49)

Flux serves as the voice of political duty in this scene, arguing that Bolloximian 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, arguing 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 (5.25-30). When Bolloximian 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.

Bolloximian, and by extension the playwright himself, rejects Flux's claim, arguing that one dishonors oneself not by engaging in pleasure but by denying it. With Bolloximian's rejection of heteronormativity, the play embraces a celebration of sodomy. In Act 3, the king explains why he has turned exclusively to sex with other males:

Since I have buggered human arse I find

Pintle to cunt is not so much inclined.

* * * * *

By oft formenting, cunt so big doth swell,

That pintle works like clappers in a bell:

All vacuum. No grasping flesh doth guide

Or hug the brawny muscles of its side,

Tickling the nerves, the prepuce or glans,

Which all mankind with great delight entrance. (3.63-76)

According to Bolloximian, vaginal sex cannot compete with 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 on pleasure. If pleasure shows us what is natural, asks Bolloximian, then "What act does Love and Nature

contradict?" (5.36). In other words, 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. Believing sexual behavior to be of little serious consequence, the king curses "Fate" for "punish[ing] us for nought" (5.42) and then wonders "How can I leave my own beloved sin, / That has so long my dear companion been?" (5.50-51). When faced with the prospect of returning to his wife, Bolloximian refuses to repent and declares, "I'll reign and bugger still" (5.57). Even when fire, brimstone, and a cloud of smoke appear, the monarch continues to adhere to his sexual preferences. "Leering all the while on [his catamite] Pockenello," the king proclaims, "Let heaven descend, and set the world on fire— / We to some darker cavern will retire. / There on thy buggered arse I will expire" (5.83-85).

At first glance, Flux seems to make a convincing case against anal sex between men. As a result, his speech initially seems to undermine Bolloximian's celebration of sodomy. A closer look at the play, however, demonstrates that Rochester does not want his reader to accept Flux's position. First, the act begins with a youth sitting under a palm tree and singing "in a melancholy manner." His song bemoans the fact that his penis has "spit out blood as green as grass / And cankers has fifteen" (5.4-5)—he has caught a venereal disease by having sex with a young woman. This song undermines Flux's subsequent suggestion that heterosexual sex is more natural than sodomy by depicting the young man's liaison with the woman as unhealthy and diseased:

Under her hand it [his penis] panting lies
 And fain it would, but cannot rise.
 And when it's got betwixt her thighs,
 It grieves to feel such poxy pain,
 And it draws back again. (5.6-10)

Because of the venereal disease that he has contracted from her, the young man finds it difficult to achieve an erection and sexual contact with her causes his penis to burn with pain. Consequently, the scene immediately establishes what might be called an anti-hetero-normative point of view. The play frames Flux's insistence on the unnaturalness of sodomy with an account of painful disease contracted through heterosexual intercourse. Thus, the play presents the argument that nature's diseases are not distributed as a punishment for sex between males.

Because of this depiction of heterosexual disease, the act undermines Flux's contention that the kingdom's problems are the result of sodomy. Two additional aspects of this scene subvert his assertion. First, the physician's name refers to "an abnormally copious flowing of blood, excrement, etc. from the bowels or other organs" (Frontain 84). As Jean-Raymond Frontain points out, "In the sexually charged context of the play, Rochester's use of the word suggests a venereal discharge, implicating Flux in the universal contamination that he fulminates against" (84). Consequently, he is more "a self-righteous Malvolio" (Frontain 84) than a mouthpiece for the playwright's own point of view. Second, although Flux attributes the kingdom's problems to sodomy, his own evidence contradicts his thesis. He asserts that "The Queen is damned, Prince Prickett has a clap, / Raving and mad the Princess has become, With pains and ulcerations in her womb" (5.39-41). None of these characters has engaged in sodomy in the play. To the contrary, Cuntigratia dies as a result of her "frigging" with a dildo, and the prince acquires the clap from sleeping with his infested sister. In contrast, all of the men who have engaged in sodomy end the play in relative health.

Finally, the play signals that the reader is to take Bolloximian's point of view by including one last parallel to Dryden's *The Conquest of Granada*. After Bolloximian refuses Flux's advice, "The clouds break up and fiery demons appear in the air," as the stage directions read. These demons dance and sing:

Frig, swive, and dally,
 Kiss, rise up, and rally,
 Curse, blaspheme, and swear,
 Here are in the air
 Those will witness bear. (5.58-62)

Although the song ends with "'Tis too late to mend" (5.68), its general impression is to celebrate transgression. This sense of celebration is particularly felt when one sees this dance, combined with the act's opening song, as a duplication of the Zambra dance in *The Conquest of Granada* Part 1 Act 3.¹² As demons, these apparitions would be expected to revel in such "sins" as masturbation, illicit sex, and blasphemy. As a work of pornographic literature, the play too would be expected to revel in such activities. When placed beside the flawed rhetoric of the moralistic court physician, this celebratory dance suggests that Rochester shares his protagonist's creed that doing what is pleasurable is the only kind of honor that exists.

The Farce of Sodom alters the rhetoric of heroic ideology by transforming what are traditionally considered vices into what Rochester celebrates as virtues. He uses the language of heroic drama to voice this celebration. Rochester's short play effects this transformation in order to argue that political duty, rightly conceived, should advance rather than retard sexual pleasure. Bolloximian is forced to choose between his "beloved sin" (5.50) and his kingdom. He chooses sin and is consigned to hell's fire and brimstone as a result. But by undermining the claims of those forces who argue that Bolloximian's pleasure is unnatural and by employing the light-hearted tone of farce, Rochester signals that the reader is not to condemn Sodom's monarch for his choice. Instead, Bolloximian's fate demonstrates that society and religion will not allow the libertine both to abandon himself to sexual delight and to rule a country. Because of this opposition, *Sodom*

¹² Larry Carver first noted this connection in "The Texts and the Text of *Sodom*" p. 36.

maintains that the pursuer of sexual freedom should reject political society in favor of his own "beloved sin." This theme is continued in *The Tragedy of Valentinian*.

The Tragedy of Valentinian

Depicting the final days of the reign of the Roman emperor Valentinian, Rochester's last dramatic work, which was probably begun in 1675 or 1676 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. 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 kills the emperor.

As a tale of lust, murder, and revenge, *Valentinian* offers an important insight into Rochester's position on libertinism. As in *Sodom*, the protagonist of this play can hardly be called a libertine, since his pursuit of pleasure also goes beyond that of the Wits' typical characters. Indeed, Valentinian's obsession with sexual gratification even surpasses Bolloximian's, since his fixation includes not only sodomy but rape as well. Both of these activities reflect Valentinian's eroticizing of power: his sexual gratification depends upon his use of power to get what he wants. In depicting this figure, Rochester portrays the failure of libertinism, exploring what happens when the libertine's charm and attractiveness

are not sufficient to seduce the objects of his desire. But Valentinian's tragic end is not the direct result of his pursuit of pleasure. Rather, this play suggest that the emperor's downfall is caused by his failure to give up the political power that comes with being a monarch. As I argue in this section, Valentinian's demise is the direct result of his use of monarchical force to achieve his sexual gratification. I will first summarize the major work of criticism on this play. I will then analyze Valentinian as a failed libertine, arguing that the playwright faults his lead character not for his pursuit of sexual pleasure but for his attempt to use his political power to achieve those pleasures.

Like Bolloximian, Valentinian's libertinism transcends the characteristics of the Wits' previous libertine figures.¹³ Where the protagonists of Wycherley's and Etherege's comedies and satires pleasantly seduce attractive young women, Valentinian uses rape and the power of his throne to achieve his sexual satisfaction.¹⁴ As Aecius relates, the emperor is governed solely by his "Passions" and "Thirst of Love" and has therefore peopled his court with "Whores and Bawds and Traitors" (2). Because of his obsessive passion, Valentinian has made it clear that he hopes to seduce Maximus's wife, Lucina. Even Maximus is aware of the emperor's lust. As he bemoans,

Not less than thrice this Week has his Gay-Court,

With all its Splendor shin'd within my Walls:

¹³ As with *Sodom*, those scholars who have turned their attention to *Valentinian* usually see it as a satire on Charles II. John Harold Wilson initiated this reading of the play in his 1937 article "Satiric Elements in Rochester's *Valentinian*," arguing that Rochester impersonated himself in the character of Maximus and Charles II in *Valentinian*. Although Wilson's argument has stood as the primary reading of the play for some 60 years, seeing *Valentinian* as a reflection of Charles II can be faulted on several counts. Both the fictionalized Roman emperor and the historical English monarch were indeed "luxurious seekers after pleasure," but Valentinian's pleasures differ significantly from Charles II's. Furthermore, it seems unlikely that Charles would have allowed a play that depicted him as a rapist and a sodomite to be performed. And finally, while many of Rochester's poems satirize the king for his sexual weaknesses, none of his other works suggest that Charles raped women or buggered men. As a result, *Valentinian* should not be read simply as a political satire but as a political tragedy.

¹⁴ Even Wycherley's most hostile protagonist, Manly in *The Plain Dealer*, does not resort to outright rape to punish Olivia for her duplicity. At worst, his use of a ruse to sleep with her is depicted as the (albeit severe) punishment of a villainous character. For more on the Manly/Olivia "rape" issue see Percy G. Adams's "What Happened in Olivia's Bedroom? or Ambiguity in *The Plain Dealer*" and Robert F. Bode's "A Rape and No Rape: Olivia's Bedroom Revisited."

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. (1)

The truth of Maximus's statement soon becomes apparent when Valentinian attempts to convince Lucina that she should become his mistress. He maintains that he, as emperor, 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). 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. Thus, this passage establishes the emperor's libertinism, which is characterized by his desire for another man's wife, his willingness to "give his Empire up" in order to satisfy that desire, and his challenge to the gods if they fail to grant his sexual ambitions.

Valentinian's desire is made all the more extreme by his willingness to use force to achieve his desire: when Lucina refuses his advances, he rapes her. In fact, it is her virtuous refusal that attracts him to her. 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 because it gives him the opportunity to use violence. 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 listning 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 is effected offstage. Valentinian's pursuit of pleasure is likewise made more extreme than that of the Wits' other protagonists by his desire for other males. Initially, the emperor's reliance on eunuchs is merely a means of sexual release while he waits for Lucina to succumb to his advances. When, for example, Valentinian's desire is enflamed by thinking about Lucina in Act 2 scene 1, he proclaims that he will "play to night" (19). He accordingly orders Chylax to bring Lycias, "a sweet-fac'd Eunuch" to his closet (19). He continues to "use" Lycias throughout the play (27). Taken together, these activities not only surpass any initial resemblance to the amorous behavior of the Wit's other libertines but also make Valentinian, like Bolloximian, one of the most extreme of the Court Wits' erotic protagonists.

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 most clear in Act 5, which depicts the aftermath of Valentinian's rape of Lucina. As J. Douglas Canfield argues, the general Aecius represents loyalty (251), as exemplified in Aecius's declaration that "My Duty's my Religion" (59). 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 Sacriledge, / 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 two cowards away 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.¹⁵ Because of Aecius's loyalty to his emperor, Canfield concludes that Rochester's tragedy preaches "the theme of divinely sanctioned loyalty even to a thoroughly corrupt king" (251).

To see the play simply as a defense of political loyalty, however, minimizes its rejection of the political sphere. While the play does seem to advocate loyalty to God's chosen monarch, it also embraces the idea that the pursuit of pleasure should not be combined with political power, since this combination will lead to the abuse of individuals rather than to their freedom to satisfy their erotic interests. Rochester's criticism of the use of political power to achieve one's sexual pleasure can be seen in the way in which he portrays Valentinian's pursuit of sodomy. 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 it includes rape and sex with other males. 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

¹⁵ This is a change from Fletcher's play, in which Aecius poisons himself.

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 his catamite, proclaiming that "I'll do Heav'n's justice on thy base Assister" (76). As the emperor's catamite, Lycias can be said to be "base," but Aecius's main 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, 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, to gratify his sexual desire. It is the emperor's mixture of politics and pleasure, according to Rochester, that precipitates his downfall.

At first glance, however, the play seems 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 Caesars 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, portions of Rochester's adaptation of *Valentinian* read as a kind of homoerotic epideictic rhetoric, a celebration of sodomy. Furthermore, 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 primary purpose during sexual relations is to gratify their own desire. For this reason, they are not primarily concerned with gratifying their male partner. 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 celebration of sodomy is continued 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. (74-75)

The emperor declares that he will abandon himself completely to a new "religion," one dedicated to the memory of Lucina. 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. The end result of pursuing this new religion will be that Valentinian will "waste away," leaving his subjects to mourn his loss. Thus, the emperor claims that he will choose pleasure over politics, that he will give up political power in order to enjoy his sex with Lycias.

Valentinian fails to accomplish this rejection of political power and position. As his employment of the masquers reveals, he involves 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 Chylax and Balbus fail to convince Lucina to become his mistress, Valentinian questions how they "dare . . . be alive" when his lust 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 is also a form of monarchical abuse. All that Valentinian values is satisfying his "Wishes," even when this gratification involves the violation of his political 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 desire. As a result, Valentinian's sexuality and his effective governance of Rome are mutually exclusive of one another. The irreconcilability of these two acts is the key theme throughout Rochester's tragedy.

It is only at the end of the play, however, that Valentinian actually loses political power, and this only by force. Maximus kills the emperor to revenge the deaths of his wife and Aecius. When Aecius kills Lycias, Valentinian's celebration of sodomy 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)

While Valentinian has acknowledged that he found joy only in "Love" throughout the play, he also comes to the realization that "Empire" has caused him to be proud, greedily ambitious, and fearful of his subjects. As his first threat to Lucina that he will no longer worship the gods if they fail to persuade her to become his mistress makes clear, Valentinian frequently challenges the gods and proudly asserts that he will overthrow them. His political power has also fueled his hope of seducing Lucina, persuading him that as

emperor he has an absolute right over her that surpasses her husband's or her own. And finally, he has lived his life in anxiety, constantly fearing that his soldiers will rise up against him and overthrow his throne. In this awareness, Rochester explains the central problems with uniting political power with sexual desire. On the one hand, political power corrupts the libertine by giving him seemingly unlimited power to pursue his pleasures but then filling him with fear that his subjects will rebel in response to this pursuit. On the other hand, the responsible use of political power would cause the monarch to deny or curtail his sexual pleasure, violating the libertine's belief that the gratification of desire is the chief good in life. As a result, this play maintains that the libertine will not only fail when his desires are integrated into the political sphere but that those desires will inevitably cause national tragedy as well.

In *The Farce of Sodom* and in *The Tragedy of Valentinian* Rochester transforms attacks on libertine sexual excess into celebrations of sexual license in order to emphasize that when the pursuer of sexual freedom is also a wielder of political power he will inevitably be destroyed by society's rejection of excessive pleasures. Portraying a kind of libertinism that is far more extreme than any other in the period, his protagonists not only embody the usual characteristics of indulging in wine, women, and song but also pursue sex with other males. This extremity celebrates sodomy as a way of dramatizing the fissure between libertine pleasure and cultural mores. Rochester's defense of sexual abandon is in stark contrast to Etherege and Wycherley's contemporaneous attempts to integrate the libertine into society's institutions. In his pornographic closet drama *The Farce of Sodom*, Rochester uses comedy to support Bolloximian's rejection of the political sphere in favor of his "beloved sin." In *The Tragedy of Valentinian*, he depicts the failure of libertinism in the downfall of the Roman emperor, a ruin caused by Valentinian's attempt to unite political power and his erotic desires. Consequently, in both of these plays, Rochester maintains

that sexual gratification should be embraced while politics and the political sphere should be left to those without great sexual desire.

Heroic Libertinism in Sedley's *Antony and Cleopatra*

Time has not been kind to Sir Charles Sedley's *Antony and Cleopatra*. While the play briefly enjoyed some success immediately after its premiere in February 1677, it was soon upstaged by Dryden's *All for Love* the following December. The predominance 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 *Almanzor and Maximin*" (277). Subsequent scholars agree, describing the play as "puerile" and "chaotic" (Wilson, *Court Wits* 168), "execrable" and "awful" (Hume, *Development* 314), "unnecessarily complicated" and "diffuse" (H. Davies 222). 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" (lv).

It has been some twenty years since the cumulative work of such scholars as Pinto, John Harold Wilson, Caracciolo, Robert Hume, and H. Neville Davies effectively exiled Sedley's tragedy from the canon of Restoration drama. As a result, Sedley has become little more than a footnote in studies of the theater during this period. This banishment is unfortunate, since Sedley's *Antony and Cleopatra* presents scholars with a useful site for understanding transitions in Restoration libertinism. Unlike Buckingham's *The Rehearsal* or Rochester's *Sodom*, Sedley responds to the values of heroic drama by writing a serious work of heroic tragedy. His *Antony and Cleopatra* retells the story of the Egyptian seductress and her Roman lover, focusing, like Shakespeare, on the couple's last days

together. Like Rochester, Sedley portrays his protagonists as post-libertines. In this play, Antony and Cleopatra are grand, romantic hedonists who know the power of ruling great nations but choose romantic sexuality over political responsibility. By writing a heroic tragedy as the genre was increasingly coming under attack as an outdated mode, Sedley rejects the entire notion of aristocratic, heroic virtue by filtering it through the values espoused by the Court Wits. *Antony and Cleopatra* subverts the usual examination in heroic tragedies of the conflict between love and honor by recasting love as sex and jealousy and honor as politics. In particular, Sedley argues that romantic hedonism rather than military conquest is what defines true heroism. Accordingly, Sedley attempts to redefine aristocratic virtue as the triumph of sexual desire over political obligation and ambition.

In contrast to such figures as Bolloximian and Valentinian, however, Antony and Cleopatra's excesses seem rather tame. As Caesar sums up in Act 2 scene 2, their primary sin lies in Antony's abandonment of his wife, Octavia, and fathering of children with the Egyptian queen. According to Octavius, Antony's "present life does his past glory stain," since he "makes a 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 foreign race" (17). He is further offended by Antony and Cleopatra's public displays of opulence and lasciviousness. As he complains to his sister,

The names 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 displays are only part of Antony's decadence. According to Octavius, in private Antony is ruled entirely by pleasure and lives a life of nothing by "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 throng his loathed Court" (20). As Caesar sums up, Antony is "bloody," "unjust," controlled by his "Lust," "luxurious," and "loud [in] his ease" (20). Thus, all of Octavius's criticisms condemn Antony and Cleopatra for their neglect of social and public duty in favor of their dalliance with one another.

Two qualities make Antony and Cleopatra's pursuit of hedonistic pleasure different from the Wits' typical libertine protagonists. First, Sedley portrays their liaison as a romantic one. Throughout the play, Sedley's protagonists assert their genuine love for one another. For example, when Antony and Cleopatra resolve to meet the Roman forces again after their defeat at Actium, they use their love as a motivation for victory. As Antony relates,

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'll make my private end and dearer, You.
This Storm once past; in Peace and love we'll Raign,
Like the immortal Gods, the Giants slain. (10)

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. Thus,

Antony ends up fighting the Roman armies solely out of love for Cleopatra. Being with her is his "private end" rather than the hope of governing an empire.

The second characteristic that makes Antony and Cleopatra's story different from that of the Wits' other protagonists is that these lovers consistently choose each other over political power. As Antony's speech above demonstrates, he is more interested in loving Cleopatra than in ruling an empire. Their privileging of love over empire becomes most clear in each of their suicides at the end of the play. 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. As he exclaims, "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'll give the blow" (53). Cleopatra soon learns of Antony's suicide and decides to take her own life as well. As she brings the serpent to her breast, she makes clear 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. As she proclaims while kneeling over Antony's 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)

Each of their deaths are imbued with heroism by Sedley—Antony bravery falls on his sword in traditional Roman fashion and Cleopatra gives up any hope of reconciling with Octavius in order to follow her lover to the afterlife. Both of these lovers kill themselves as

part of a rejection of the kind of embracing of public duty that gives other heroic dramas a happy ending. Whereas men like Almanzor end their plays having honorably reconciled political duty with private desire, Cleopatra and her lover are unable to make this reconciliation.

Antony and Cleopatra's rejection of political responsibilities is for Sedley a positive choice, even though he gives voice to criticisms of these lovers' behavior. Importantly, Sedley presents a dialogic critique of his protagonists' liaison: the Romans blame Cleopatra for luring Antony away from his political duty, and the Egyptians blame Antony for distracting Cleopatra from her responsibilities as queen. Because of this dialogic quality to the play's criticism of Antony and Cleopatra, neither can be said to be Sedley's own viewpoint. The play begins just after the naval battle at Actium, in which Antony retreated in order to pursue the fleeing Cleopatra. The scene 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 others are Usurpers" (2), Caesar describes the extent of Antony's metaphorical drowning:

He thinks his life depends upon her 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 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. But most importantly, Antony's desire for her has 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.

Just as the Romans blame Cleopatra for Antony's rejection of Octavia and his opposition to Octavius, the Egyptians blame Antony for Cleopatra's failure to bring peace to her people. As Memnon, one of her advisers, contends, Antony should have kept the "Scene / Of War and Rapine further from the Queen" (3). If he had, says Memnon, Egypt would not have lost the battle at Actium. Because of Antony's influence, the Egyptian counselors believe that the only answer to their country's problems is the Roman's 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, these men decide to stir up rebellion: "Let's silent wait the opportunity, / And by main force expel their tyranny" (4). Vowing to lay down their arms as soon as they "free [Cleopatra] from Antonius pow'r" (4), Memnon and Chilax swear to devise a plot to end Antony's life. 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.

These critiques of Antony and Cleopatra, however, are not those of the playwright himself. Instead, Sedley transforms the values typically associated with heroic drama to valorize Antony and Cleopatra's love. As I noted in Chapter 2, heroic dramas in the 1670s

were typically defined by three characteristics: the heroic couplet, the conflict between love and valour, and what Hume calls "the titanic protagonist," a hero who energetically pursues "some ideal which stretches human capacities to the utmost" (*Development* 193). By mid-decade the genre was in crisis as playwrights, including Dryden himself, increasingly distanced themselves from these characteristics and moved toward sentimental tragedy instead. Dryden's *Aureng-Zebe*, for example, is often praised by scholars for its move away from the genre's stifling rules. Premiering in November 1675, *Aureng-Zebe* tells the story of the royal family of India: when the Emperor falls in love with Imoinda, his son's fiancée, the family disintegrates into a civil war. While Dryden admits to violating some of the genre's conventions in this play, most notably its requirement for heroic couplets and his placing of all fight scenes off-stage, he nevertheless maintains his overall allegiance to the format. As Richard W. Bevis points out, "Imperial wars still impend, 'vast' and 'great' are still favourite adjectives, and some emotional tropes are absurd" (48). 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 Imoinda to his notions of honor and loyalty to the Emperor.

As Alfred Harbage notes, this "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" (55). *Antony and Cleopatra* transforms this epic vision of the aristocracy by combining the traditional military traits of the heroic protagonist with Antony and Cleopatra's hedonism. In many respects, Sedley's Antony shares many of the heroic traits of such characters as 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" (6). Likewise, he adheres to a code of honor. When Cleopatra decides to execute the son of a traitor as an example to future offenders, Antony begs for his life. As he exclaims,

He must not die, nor is it true revenge,
When the offenders suffer by exchange.

* * * * *

'Twere cruelty to kill the Innocent
For Crimes they neither knew, nor cou'd prevent. (8-9)

Also like Aureng-Zebe, Antony proves his physical courage and prowess in arms. Not only does he beat back Caesar in hand to hand combat, but Antony 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 the fact that Antony is as "heroic" as such figures as Dryden's Almanzor and Aureng-Zebe, but he undermines the traditional definition of heroism by depicting Antony and Cleopatra's hedonism in a positive light.

Not only does Sedley represent Antony and Cleopatra's love in a positive light, but he also undermines the points of view of their critics. He subverts the idea that Caesar and his Romans are "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). 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 has also spelled 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 exceptions of the women who kill themselves with their queen, each of her Egyptian counselors considers betraying their queen to save their country. These betrayals are portrayed as base and cowardly throughout the play.

While modern scholars have largely ignored both Sedley's play and its ideological function, its rejection of traditional aristocratic values and elevation of Antony and Cleopatra to heroic status did not go unnoticed by at least one contemporary observer, the poet laureate John Dryden.¹⁶ In the preface to *All for Love*, Dryden admits that the one of the reasons he has written his own version of the Antony and Cleopatra story is to counteract Sedley's ideological choices. As he writes, "the chief persons represented [in the play] were famous patterns of unlawful love" because "the crimes of love which they

¹⁶Marcie Frank also notes Dryden's response to what he saw as the immorality of Sedley's version of the story. See her essay "Fighting Women and Loving Men: Dryden's Representation of Shakespeare in *All for Love*" pp. 318-19.

both committed, were not occasion'd by any necessity, or fatal ignorance, but were wholly voluntary; since our passions are, or ought to be, within our power" (13.10). According to Dryden, Antony and Cleopatra's downfall is caused by their "crimes of love," their commitment to passion over political and social decorum. Where Dryden faults his protagonists for not keeping their desires within the bounds of propriety, Sedley rejects this reigning in of passion. Like Rochester's *The Farce of Sodom* and *The Tragedy of Valentinian*, *Antony and Cleopatra* suggests that, to be truly happy, one must abandon the public sphere of politics and national duty in order to pursue one's private pleasure.

Just as Bolloximian and Valentinian place their desires above their duties as monarchs and rulers, Antony and Cleopatra choose erotic love over all other considerations. Consequently, Sedley's lone tragedy, like Rochester's dramatic works, stands neither as a failed attempt to rewrite an earlier play nor as a precursor to someone else's better effort but as a presentation of some of the Wits' increasing dissatisfaction with the public sphere. This dissatisfaction was based on the fact that sexual freedom could not be reconciled to society's mores and political obligations. By the mid-1670s, therefore, the members of the Wits' circle were divided: Buckingham temporarily abandoned literary pursuits in order to seek political power in Parliament; Etherege and Wycherley sought to temper their notions of libertinism in order to achieve greater financial security; and Rochester and Sedley argued that the libertine must distance himself from politics in order to pursue his pleasures. This division would ultimately lead to the group's final disintegration within the next few years.

Chapter Six

Conclusion: The Court Wits' Legacy

The spectacularity of the Court Wits' debaucheries has long dominated scholars' estimations of their contributions to Restoration literature. As John Harold Wilson reminds us, "Even in their own day there were outcries from respectable people, who wondered why Heaven withheld its fire" (*Court Wits* 36). From Sedley's drunken performance on the balcony of the Cock Tavern in 1663 to Rochester's masquerade as a physician while exiled from court in the mid-1670s, the Wits' exploits have become the stuff of legends. Unfortunately, the legend surrounding their hedonistic lives has distracted scholars from studying the rhetorical work of their poems and plays. The Wits' debaucheries were spectacular, but they were also part of the group's more general opposition to the customs and mores of aristocratic society during the first twenty years of the Restoration.

Throughout their literary works, the Wits attack the discourses of aristocratic and progressive ideologies. After the return of the monarchy in 1660, England's elites competed to reshape their country's political landscape. One portion of these elites worked to maintain the aristocracy's traditional monopoly on power by disseminating a rhetoric of natural privilege. According to these members with traditional, landed-wealth, some members of society were naturally destined to rule, a destiny shaped by lineage and family ties. Increasingly, a second segment of society's elites, those who were more recently elevated to power through mercantilism and economic clout, sought to increase their own place in the cultural and political hegemony by arguing that merit is based on ability and goodness rather than birth. The Wits found reasons to disagree with both points of view. While the Wits generally accepted aristocratic ideology's rhetoric of privilege based on status, they rejected the biological determinism and notions of national duty that underpinned its arguments. Similarly, the Wits concurred with progressive ideology's

discourse of individual merit but rejected its insistence on virtue and moral purity. Because of these disagreements, the Wits composed their literary works in opposition to each of these ideologies.

The first chapter of this study summarizes the basic tenets of these ideologies and describes the Wits' overall responses to them. With the ascension of Charles II to the throne in 1660, the theaters were reopened and were imbued with a renewed political purpose; his nation divided along political, religious, geographical, and class lines, Charles utilized both the public and professional theater to disseminate a rhetoric of national order and duty. This rhetoric was most sensationally dispersed through the genre of heroic drama. Depicting great heroes who bring Christian rule and stability to their nations, these plays worked to provide models for the aristocracy's behavior: they too should accept their duty to their king and support him in renewing the nation's proper harmony. According to the Wits, these models were ridiculous exaggerations of real human beings, ones that denied humans' natural desires in order to guarantee political stability. Furthermore, these plays were dangerous, say the Wits, because they allowed scheming politicians without merit or capability to gain power by excluding those with real ability.

In contrast to the court's control of the theaters, proponents of progressive ideology exercised their growing power economically. Many of these members of the rising mercantile class were already members of the gentry or aristocracy, as younger sons of wealthy families or as the descendants of impoverished but noble families. They combined their status with their increasing ability to influence the culture around them through financial patronage of politicians and artists who agreed with their points of view. Other members of this group worked within the government's bureaucracy. Such men, like Samuel Pepys, possessed little direct political power and were usually dependent on the patronage of a wealthy or powerful aristocrat, but they helped shape England's political landscape through their running of the government's daily business. In particular,

members of this rising class often espoused a rhetoric that emphasized virtue and the cultivation of a procreative, anti-septic body. The Wits opposed this rhetoric, since it limited sexual desire and freedom, the main tenet of the Wits' way of life.

The historical significance of this coterie's literary works, however, goes well beyond their opposition to the cultural positions of aristocratic and progressive ideologies. These ideologies' emphasis on the correlation between identity and nature parallels a more general change in constructions of the body. As English society increasingly accepted the rhetoric of progressive ideology, it also solidified its notion of gender identities. With this solidification, more and more members of English society accepted the idea that gender behavior was an expression of one's biological sex: men exhibit masculine characteristics and women display feminine ones. In conjunction with this notion of innate gender identity, there began to arise a similar conception of sexual identity. Masculinity is expressed in men's desire for women, while femininity is expressed in women's desire for men. This ordering of gender and sexual identities also began to account for those members of society who did not follow this pattern. Men who desired other men were increasingly viewed as possessing feminine gender characteristics. Libertines such as the Court Wits 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. By combining masculinity with transgressive sexuality, the Wits' circle stands at a crucial point in the history of modern gender. Throughout their plays in the 1670s, the Wits merge their opposition to the discourses of aristocratic and progressive ideologies with their depictions of libertine eroticism.

My second chapter analyzes the first of the Wits' plays of the 1670s, the Duke of Buckingham's *The Rehearsal*. Composed as a critique of heroic ideology, this farce also goes beyond the Wits' previous dramatic works, including *The Comical Revenge*, *She*

Would If She Could, and *The Mulberry Garden*, by claiming that all identities are social performances rather than biologically determined essences. A work of epideictic rhetoric that transforms heroic drama's celebration of masculine heroism into a discourse of horrific bloodshed, *The Rehearsal* uses gender parody to undermine aristocratic ideology's claims of natural superiority. In the inner play, Buckingham rearticulates the rhetoric of masculine heroism as the language of a common bully. In the outer play, he portrays Dryden as an incompetent fop who is unable to deal with erotic desire. Both halves of the play allow Buckingham to argue that aristocratic ideology's claim to natural masculinity is really just the machinations of unworthy courtiers trying to gain the king's favor. In making this argument, Buckingham initiates the Wits' oppositional stance to aristocratic ideology. He also maintains that all social identities are performances enacted on the body through systems of conventional behavior—one is a libertine because one acts like a libertine; one is a fop because one acts like a fop. His fellow Wits learned these lessons and incorporated them into the plays that they composed throughout the rest of the decade.

The Wits' ideas on the performance of identities are given their fullest treatment in William Wycherley's first three plays, *Love in a Wood*, *The Gentleman Dancing-Master*, and *The Country Wife*, which I discuss in the third chapter. Each of these plays is a kind of deliberative rhetoric, an examination of possible libertine positions in response to progressive ideology. Whereas Buckingham responded to aristocratic ideology alone, Wycherley also opposes the discourse of progressive ideology in these plays. Wycherley explicitly rejects this discourse by satirizing characters like Alderman Gripe, Don Diego, and Pinchwife, men who espouse this ideology. He also rejects progressive ideology's positing of a binary between "nature" and "social performance" by casting characters much like the Wits themselves as his protagonists. In doing so, he depicts libertinism as a form of gender identity, one that is enacted through a system of signs, actions, and behaviors. With each succeeding play, however, Wycherley makes this gender identity more extreme.

Where Ranger, Vincent, Valentine, and Gerrard are able to function well within society's norms, Horner ultimately rejects society's institutions in order to guarantee his future erotic conquests. The rest of the plays written by the Wits in this decade respond to Horner's choice.

The fourth and fifth chapters of this study analyze this response. Chapter Four studies two satires, Etherege's *The Man of Mode* and Wycherley's *The Plain Dealer*. In both of these plays, the authors argue that Horner's rejection of society's institutions is too extreme by reincorporating their protagonists into society. They each, therefore, work as a kind of forensic rhetoric, arguments that prove a particular position. Etherege's Dorimant ends his play separated from his mistresses and following Harriet to the country in an effort to convince her to marry him. Thus, the play argues that the right kind of marriage, one between equals, is a possible alternative to Horner's isolation. *The Plain Dealer* returns to Wycherley's earlier strategy of portraying more than one libertine. Manly is educated to value social ties and ends his play engaged to Fidelia. Freeman successfully wins a living from the Widow Blackacre and is able to continue his pursuit of pleasure. This play therefore maintains that the libertine must be pragmatic in his criticism of society and join its institutions rather than isolate himself from them. Thus, both of these plays distance themselves from the aggressive masculinity and libertine isolation of *The Country Wife*.

Chapter Five examines two plays by Rochester, *The Farce of Sodom* and *The Tragedy of Valentinian*, and one by Sedley, *Antony and Cleopatra*. Each of these plays embraces Horner's rejection of society's mores and norms by casting true heroism as the gratification of sexual desire regardless of society's opposition. Through this recasting, these plays become works of epideictic rhetoric, celebrating sexual freedom over political duty. In *Sodom* and *Valentinian*, Rochester celebrates various kinds of sexual excesses, most importantly his protagonists' obsessions with sodomy. Bolloximian revels in his love of sodomy, even when the fire and brimstone of hell destroy his kingdom. Rochester

valorizes this decision. Valentinian, in contrast, rapes a woman and takes a eunuch as his catamite. While Rochester does not condemn this emperor for his indulgence of his sexual desire, he does suggest that Valentinian's use of political power to enslave his subjects to his desires, rather than free them to pursue their own as Bolloximian had done, is the cause of his downfall. In *Antony and Cleopatra*, Sedley transforms political critiques of sexual immoderation into a celebration of affective heroism. Antony and Cleopatra refuse to abandon their love for one another to save their political power. They kill themselves rather than surrender to Octavius Caesar's demands that they end their libertine behavior. Thus, these plays argue that, to be truly happy, the libertine must abandon the public sphere of politics in order to pursue their pleasures in private life.

In making these arguments about libertinism, the Court Wits combine elements of modern notions of gender identity, which argue that such identities are performances enacted on the body, with those of an older tradition, which did not directly connect gender roles with erotic desire and sexual behavior. As a result, they stand as transitional figures in England's move toward a greater emphasis on the biological linkage between gender and sexuality. The Wits' depictions of libertinism, however, were heteroglossic, with each member of the group contributing his own ideas to the fraternity's more general conceptions of libertine gender and sexuality. These contributions were often at odds with one another, leading to the coterie's disintegration by 1680. Differences in their visions of libertine ideology were accompanied by differences in political and social change. Whereas Buckingham, Rochester, and Sedley supported the Whig opposition in Parliament, Wycherley and Etherege remained Stuart royalists. The circle's demise also accompanied the Wits' realization that libertine ideology could not replace the systems with which it competed. At best, all it could do was offer alternative rhetorics of sexual freedom.

This demise was complete by 1680. Although *The Rehearsal* was not Buckingham's last play, politics soon took the Duke away from the Wits' circle and his subsequent

attempts at drama in the 1680s were unsuccessful. After the Country party's defeat in the Exclusion Crisis, he retired once again to Castle Helmsley, his Yorkshire estate. On April 14, 1687, the duke's horse fell dead during a fox hunting, 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 a tenant's house nearby and put to bed. He died two days later, on April 16, 1687. In contrast, the other members of the group continued their debaucheries throughout most of the 1670s, but they too were soon parted. Rochester once admitted that he had remained drunk for much of the mid-1670s, a lifestyle that soon caught up with him. He died on July 26, 1680 after a protracted illness probably caused by syphilis. Sedley experienced a different kind of transition in 1680: after a roof collapsed on him, causing a skull injury, Sedley found religion and dedicated himself to politics. During the 1680s, he supported the Whig cause against Charles and his successor James and celebrated the ascension of William of Orange to the throne 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. He died in 1701. 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 court of James II. He died three years later. Finally, 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 of William and Mary to the throne 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.

Although libertine ideology failed to become the dominant discourse of English culture, the contest between it and aristocratic and progressive ideologies nevertheless continues

today. Because of this continued cultural debate, the Wits' literary works remain among the most studied of Restoration literature. Many scholars agree that recent interest in their poems and plays reflects our culture's sympathy with many of the components of libertine ideology. In a society marked by debates on feminism, homosexuality, and pornography, it is not surprising that the Wits' discussions of identity, 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" (7), is equally true of his friends. Buckingham's use of gender parody, Etherege and Wycherley's examination of modern marriage relations, and Sedley's celebration of erotic love make their plays of continuing importance today. As a coterie, these writers anticipate postmodern constructions of gender and sexual identities, an anticipation that contributed to their culture's emerging notions of the modern subject.

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Vita

Jeremy Wade Webster was born in Indianapolis, Indiana on June 26, 1970. He attended schools in the Indianapolis, Oklahoma City, Nederland (Texas), and Bryan (Texas) school systems and graduated from Bryan High School in May 1988. He attended Texas A&M University with a Lechner Fellowship and graduated summa cum laude in May 1992 with a Bachelor of Arts in History. In August 1992, he entered the graduate program in English at Texas A&M University, earning a Master of Arts in August 1994. That same month, he entered the doctoral program in English at the University of Tennessee at Knoxville, where he taught courses in Composition, British Literature, and Drama. The focus of his scholarly work during these years was Restoration and Eighteenth Century literature and rhetoric. As a graduate student at UT, he served as the Assistant Director of Composition for one year and collaborated on a freshman composition textbook, *Literary Culture: Reading and Writing Literary Arguments* (Simon & Schuster, 1999), with Susan Gieseeman North. During the course of his graduate studies he was also awarded the Norman Sanders Dissertation Fellowship, the John C. Hodges Excellence in Scholarship Award, and the Chancellor's Citation for Extraordinary Professional Promise. In August 1999, he was awarded the Doctor of Philosophy in English degree. Beginning in September 1999, he will be an Assistant Professor of English Literature at Ohio University in Athens, Ohio.